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# The Effects of Historical Trauma and Gender on National Identity within the Hmong Diaspora

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**The Effects of Historical Trauma and Gender on National Identity  
within the Hmong Diaspora**

AN ALL COLLEGE THESIS

College of St. Benedict/St. John's University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for Distinction

in the Department of Political Science

by

Kalia Vang

May, 2017

## **ABSTRACT**

Since 1975 the Hmong have settled in the West as a diasporic group. Their involvement in the Vietnam and Secret Wars with the United States in Southeast Asia had forced the group to flee their homes in the mountain tops of Laos. This political migration has since forced Hmong leaders to reframe Hmong national identity in the diaspora, specifically in the United States. With this, certain aspects and perspective from Hmong women on the Secret War were marginalized. Thus, this research asks the following question: why is national identity interpreted differently within the Hmong diaspora? This research project is broken into two small parts. The first study uses a historical analysis method to investigate how Hmong leaders and elites shaped Hmong national identity in Laos through historical trauma during three specific timeframes: the French Indochina period, the Secret War, and the Hmong diaspora in the west. Furthermore, in the second study, using a survey instrument, this project explores how Hmong national identity is currently being interpreted in the diaspora through historical trauma, ethnic identity and gender.

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## INTRODUCTION

From the mountain tops of Laos to the tinted roofs of refugee camps in Thailand, the Hmong made their journey to the West settling in the countries of France, Germany, Australia, and the United States. The Hmong flight to the West began after the end of the Vietnam War when the U.S.'s Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) ended its covert operations known as the Secret War in Laos. The war in Laos is a memory held close to the hearts of many Hmong in the Western diaspora, specifically to the older Hmong generation. Thus, this memory has been the main narrative calling for a return to the "homeland" of Laos. This narrative has captured a nationalist identity and an "imagine community" for the Hmong (Lee, 2009, p. 11). Recognized leaders such as General Vang Pao have committed their political life in leading the Hmong towards independence and self-determination. However, history has turned its back against the Hmong diaspora and proven that the journey towards independence and self-governance is a long and bloody endeavor.

For 40 years, the Hmong have resided in the United States as a diasporic community. From narratives told by the diasporic Hmong community, Hmong men and Hmong elites have always dominated the dialogue and emphasized their role in the Secret War, while Hmong women have been depicted as concerned mothers and wives of Hmong soldiers. Some scholars and the wider Hmong community in the diaspora have helped perpetuate this patriarchal discourse by privileging Hmong male accounts of the war as the more accurate historical experience (Vang, 2016). As University of California-Merced Professor Ma Vang puts it, "[It's not] to presume that Hmong women have not been speaking or talking. Instead, we have not been listening" (Vang, 2016, pg.30). The Hmong women's experience has been marginalized in both academia and oral historical realms. Perhaps this is due to stigmatization from Hmong patriarchal attitudes.



Regardless, it should not be assumed that Hmong women have stayed silent about their experience. Rather, narratives of the Secret War and the experiences of the Hmong produces a masculine identity, rather than a shared identity between Hmong men and women. This research project explores the complicated relationship between national identity, gender, and trauma within the Hmong diaspora. Thus, my research question is: why is national identity interpreted differently within the Hmong diaspora?

### **JUSTIFICATION**

The purpose of this project is to create a platform for dialogue and scholarship on the Hmong diaspora in the United States. My research specifically aims to assess the effects of historical trauma and gender on national identity and nationalist sentiment within the diasporic community. The basis of this research builds on my previous scholarship on elite Hmong nationalism in the Spring of 2016. I decided to further my research into this area by incorporating historical trauma and gender into an investigation of the perceptions of national identity held by Hmong men and women in the United States. Although scholars have studied the Hmong diaspora in regards to historical trauma and national identity, the literature in that field is small and almost nonexistent. It is imperative to note that there is no existing literature or research on how historical trauma influences the Hmong diaspora's national identity, let alone any analysis of the subject through a gendered perspective. My research may be the first of its kind to fully conceptualize these relationships. Furthermore, as a daughter of Hmong immigrants, I witnessed the memories of the Secret War carried by my parents while growing up. Their memories of the war were not always equally shared. My father would talk philosophically of his war days, while my mother remained silent. This is my attempt to highlight the narratives of Hmong women and deconstruct

the masculinized and patriarchal concept of Hmong historical trauma and national identity perpetuated by Hmong male elites.

This project is broken into two smaller studies. First, I provide a brief historical background on the Hmong and their role in Laos as non-state actors with the French and the United States. This background is needed to understand the complexity and importance of the Hmong's role with state actors. Along with that, I define what constitutes a person as a Hmong elite and what part of the global Hmong community is considered the "diaspora" in my research. Furthermore, my research will provide an analysis of nationalism from both top-down and bottom-up perspectives.

Building from the literature on national identity and historical trauma, the first study consists of a historical analysis of Hmong leaders from the French Indochina period, the Secret War, and the Hmong diaspora in the west. The purpose of this study is to analyze how the political climate affected the decisions and actions of the Hmong leaders to establish a national identity in Laos. In the first study, I assess the literature on nationalism and ethnicity that addresses what nationalism is and how a group, specifically ethnic groups like the Hmong, creates a nationalist identity. Furthermore, I incorporate the literature on historical trauma to connect the relationship between nationalism and historical memory. From this theoretical assessment, I derive my first hypothesis. To measure the first hypothesis, using historical analysis, I explore the ways in which the Hmong political leaders, such as Vang Pao, incorporated themes of historical trauma within their masculinized nationalist narrative to produce a collective identity with a shared memory.

As the first study focuses on Hmong leaders and the historical context of Hmong national identity and historical trauma in Laos, the second study assess Hmong national identity in the diaspora. The purpose is to explore the effects of gender and ethnic identification on historical trauma and national identity in the Hmong diaspora. The second study will follow the same

structure as the former. The second study is conducted with two hypotheses derived from the literature on acculturation, ethnic identity, and gender influencing national identity. To measure the two hypotheses in the second study, I incorporate both quantitative and qualitative methods. A historical analysis of ethnic identity and gender cannot be implemented to analyze the two subject in the diaspora as gender and ethnic identity within the Hmong in the U.S is a contemporary issue. Thus, a survey research was carried out to measure the results in historical loss, nationalism and ethnic identification with 139 participants from the Hmong community in Minnesota. Lastly, I conclude my research with a discussion of the findings and limitations in both the studies.

## **BACKGROUND**

During late 18th century, as an agrarian ethnic minority, the Hmong migrated from China and settled in the mountains of Southeast Asia. For nearly a hundred years, the Hmong shielded themselves from political and national life. The Hmong in Laos were seen as barbarians and primitive. They were marginalized by lowlanders (Lao) and other ethnic groups. Tinted with a violent history, the Hmong had always been forced to fight for their legitimacy (Quincy, 2000, p.1-3). Before they settled in the high grounds of Laos, they called central and southern parts of China home until they were persecuted by dynastical China for their unwillingness to pay tribute to the Celestial Kingdom (Lee, 2015, p.19).

The Hmong are a nationless ethnic minority group. However, in Laos, some Hmong elites in the past century steadily aligned themselves with the French, while other Hmong elites, known as Messianic leaders resisted French colonial and imperial rule in Laos (Lee, 2015). Hmong elites are intellectuals who dominate politics. To have been considered as a Hmong elite, one must possess literacy, linguistic skills other than the Hmong tongue, and wealth. All three of these factors made social status inaccessible to Hmong women, only Hmong men could be among the

elite. As a result, Hmong men opened infinite doors of opportunity to consolidate their power within the Hmong community in Laos. After the French decolonized Laos at the end of World War II, the United Nations and the Security Council deemed the Kingdom of Laos as a neutral state in accordance to the Geneva Convention, but the threat of communism in Southeast Asia was far too risky for U.S interest in the region. The CIA's clandestine relationship with the mountainous Hmong leaders in the 1960s and 1970s created a covert military army of Hmong men led by the charismatic Hmong military general, Vang Pao. The CIA recruited General Vang Pao from the Royal Lao military and gave him financial support as well as weapons to control and operate guerrilla forces in Laos to combat communist aggression. With the full support of the CIA, General Vang Pao and his Hmong army (ranging from 10,000 to 30,000 personnel by 1975) had the man power to cause havoc across communist lines, especially dismantling parts of the Ho Chi Minh Trail (Leary, 1995). The American war in Laos lived in the shadows of its bigger brother, the Vietnam War. As a result, the conflict in Laos became the lesser known war, often referred to as the Secret War by scholars due to its clandestine status. The war in Laos was kept as a top secret operation as the involvement of the United States in Laos went against the Geneva convention.

After Laos fell to the communist forces in 1975, the Hmong in Laos fled to refugee camps in neighboring Thailand before immigrating to the United States, Australia, France and other Western countries. From the mid 1970's to the 1980's, the United States oversaw the first wave of Hmong immigrants. The second wave of Hmong immigrants came in the 1990's. The final wave of Hmong immigrants made their way into the United States in the early 2000's (Vang, 2010). The Hmong diaspora represents the general Hmong population throughout the world, living in different countries with a different nationality or citizenship. For example, the Hmong in Australia and France are as much a part of the diaspora as myself or the Hmong who live throughout Southeast

Asia. However, this project focuses on the Hmong diaspora residing in the United States, as the United States is home to the largest Hmong diaspora in the Western world (Vang, 2010). Although the United States has been home to the Hmong for over 4 decades, the dreams of returning to the homeland of Laos and obtaining an influential Hmong leader may still resonate within parts of the Hmong diaspora. For example, in March of 2016 Seng Xiong, a Hmong American man was arrested for wire and mail fraud by the FBI. Xiong had scammed hundreds of Hmong elders into investing \$3,000 - \$5,000 in his plan to establish a “Hmong Country.” In return, the investors would receive 10 acres of land and government benefits in the new Hmong country in Laos that Xiong claimed he was initiating with the approval of the White House and United Nations (Department of Justice U. S Attorney’s Office: District of Minnesota, 2016). The idea of returning to Laos and the establishment of a Hmong homeland is very much prevalent in the minds of the older Hmong generation. From the dynastical era of China to the French occupation of Laos, the failed military relationship with the United States and the loss of the War in Southeast Asia, the Hmong have endured centuries of forced political migration. Their newfound home in the West as a diaspora community speaks volumes to their journey for a sense of belonging.

## **STUDY I LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***An Imagined Nationhood:***

The history of the Hmong can be described as a theme of longing for self-independence and self-rule by a recognized Hmong leader. However, this nationalist idea contradicts modern day political theories in nationalist aspirations. Prominent nationalism scholar Anthony Smith defines nationalism as both an ideology and a movement that aspires to ‘nationhood’ for a chosen group (Smith, 1976). Within the context of nationhood, the three principles for a nation must include: autonomy, self-government for the group (but not always in a sovereign state), and

solidarity and fraternity within the group in a recognized territory or home where the group shares a distinctive culture and history (Smith, 1976, p.2). There are also three critical criteria needed to achieve strong nationalist aspiration: bureaucratic authority, the myth of a common history, and the rise of local intelligentsias.

Smith argues that a nationalist quest can be obtained by any group whether it be natives of a country fighting against their colonizers or even ethnic groups who dream of a homeland to govern themselves in accordance to their interest. Nonetheless, Smith (1976) argues that an ethnic group within a nation has always faced a drawback in obtaining nationalism; he coins it as “ethno-nationalist quest.” The lack of a “homeland” creates an obstacle for ethnic groups to consolidate a movement against other political actors (Smith, 1981, p.63). However, this does not discourage ethnic groups from forming nationalist movements. Smith argues that for a nationalist movement to gain adherents, leaders must be able to point to common cultural or ethnic heritage, which the ethnic group believes in. Furthermore, political leaders must compose shared political grievances with their people to rally the people together for a national identity. In a later study, Smith (1996, p.446) argues that ethnicity and nationalism are mutually inclusive as both are a part of the macro-analysis of national formation. However, from a micro-analysis standpoint, ethno-nationalist quest portrays the role of culture and ethnicity utilized by leaders in power struggles to establish and influence state systems. In all, Smith states that premodern ethnic relationships with modern nationalism is the foundation of modern national and international politics. Smith’s formula for creating ethnic nationalism is analytically convincing. However, what about the physical acquisition of territory by an ethno-nationalist movement within a larger nation? Smith supplements this gap by suggesting that the collective memory helps forge nationalist sentiment and an idea of place. Physical territories are needed to boost nationalism of all sorts. Thus, Smith

(1996) states that the claiming of a historical homeland (whether it exists currently or not) is initiated by leaders to strengthen nationalism.

As Smith focuses on the political and physical dimensions of nationalism, Benedict Anderson (1983) describes nation and nationalism as modern concepts, and that a nation is an imagined political community with limitations and sovereignty. Nations are an imagination to the minds of the people because the members of that nation, “even the smallest one will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 1983, p. 6). This “imagined community” concept is socially constructed. Political actors construct nation and nationalism in the way that the people within it imagine it to be. However, the nation (with the idea that it is imagined) requires the establishment of shared linguistic, historical, and cultural roots. Beyond that limitation is yet another imagined community of a different identity.

Anderson argues that the nation became of necessary importance when traditional identities such as languages, religion, scripts, and monarchs began to lose their influences over their people. The invention of industrial technology, such as the printing press and the economic reforms of capitalism, changed the way people identified with their community. Industrial technology, such as the printing press allowed certain individuals to express and distribute their own ideas in creating a nation. This allowed literate individuals to establish a blue print of what a nation should look like in the sense that a group should have a shared culture, history and language (Anderson, 1983). However, Anderson disregards the illiterate population. History has always suggested any illiterate individual is part of the lowest social economic demographic in the society. Nonetheless, industrial inventions, such as the printing press serve the illiterate and the poor little purpose in shaping their decision to creating their desired political community. This suggests that the illiterate

and the poor can be heavily influence by the rich or the elites of the imagined community to form a nationalist identity. Anderson disregards the political importance of the illiterate and what the illiterate population has done historically with the political ideas they received.

Compared to the work on elite-led nationalism by Smith and Anderson, Whitemeyer (2002) uses a “bottom-up” approach in describing nationalist movements. Joseph Whitemeyer’s *Elites and Popular Nationalism* challenges the perspective that elites are the sole producer of nationalism. Unlike Benedict and Smith, who argued that nationalism is formed from a “top-down” or elite imagined nationalist rhetoric, Whitemeyer proposed that nationalism is formed by the common people and supplemented by the elites. Whitemeyer does not argue that elites are not the creator for nationalist identity, nor does he argue that elites are not important. Rather, Whitemyere explores several case studies in which he shows that elites cannot build nationalism without compromising with external forces. The attempts of the elites to build nationalism allow non-elites to pick up the pieces and produce a formula for a nationalist identity (Whitemeyer, 2002). Whitemeyer refers to this formation of non-elite nationalism as popular nationalism. He references Anderson’s concept of imagined community and agrees with Anderson that only elites can control the media and society to form an ideal nationalist movement. Elites have this control because of their position in the intelligentsia. However, Whitemeyer proposed that elites could strengthen nationalism or break it, depending on the greater outcome one of the option will produce for the elites. For example, Whitemeyer (2002) states that elites can manipulate ethnic symbols or culture to shape an ideal ethnic nationalism within the people, in hopes that it will best serve in their interest.

Whitemeyer contemplated the idea that other elites from external forces will attempt to form nationalism within ethnic groups by encouraging ethnic communities to take up arms and



break the shackles of oppression. Unfortunately, this type of campaign failed to produce an ethnic nationalism movement because the external elites failed to recognize the needs of the ethnic group. It is important to note that Whitemeyer also assess another type of campaign by elites to control ethnic nationalist movements. Elites from external forces will create proxy ethnic elites to control ethnic communities. When ethnic communities fail to assimilate to the changes prescribed by the external elites, they are suppressed and any attempt to create a nationalist identity (popular nationalism) is quickly destroyed by the external forces through proxy ethnic elites.

Much of the literature suggests that nationalism is a concept of modern political theory. Hence, nationalism is a modern assumption coming out of the West (Duara, 1995). Building from Anderson's work, Presenjit Duara (1995) restates that to be modern is to have a nation state, controlled by a group of people with a shared ethnic identity and historical memory. Along with this, Duara's work explores the creation of an "imagined community" in China. Like Anderson and Smith, he argues that the "imagined community" is envisioned by the political elites and intelligentsia. However, unlike previous scholars of nationalism, Duara emphasized that this envisioning of a nationalist identity can be "imagined and voiced by different self-group for a different nation-view" (Duara, 1995, p. 161). In other words, Duara is suggesting that within a group, different factions can arise and voice different values and ideas in attaining nationalism. The different factions and ideas will do more harm than good for a group as it can stall the process of attaining and implementing a nationalist movement. (Duara, 1995).

Duara explores Asia's colonial past and argued that Eastern countries such as China's struggle from Western exploitation was a sign of nationalism. Duara emphasized that ideas on nationalism has always maintained a Western perspective. Thus, through his literature, Duara describes nationalist movements from the view of the East. The fight against exploitation in the

East, or the “Orient”, was an effort to break the shackles of colonial and tyrannical rule from foreign forces. Duara expressed that China is one of the many prime examples of this formula (Duara, 1995). In the process of breaking this shackle, natives form a nationalist rhetoric which in turn creates a national identity, calling for a nation state or rebuilding the nation state such as the Han Chinese and their dreams for China’s sovereignty. The exploitations of China were perpetrated not only by Western forces but by other groups of non-western origins. The Manchu or Qing dynasty rulers of China played a part in the Han Chinese’ struggle to reclaim their Han glory.

A century of humiliation for the Han Chinese began with occupation by the non-Chinese Manchus during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), followed by exploitative practices, notably unequal treaties that greatly disadvantaged China, carried out by the French, British, and later the Japanese. Duara raised the idea that China became a part of the modern movement through the decolonization process of the country. Revolutionary leader and father Sun Yat-sen may have dismantled and overthrew the Manchu – Qing dynasty in China (Duara, 1995). However, according to Duara, China could not fully grasp nationalism – yet. This was not solely based on the historical facts that Western countries divided China into different colonial territories after the downfall of the Manchu. Rather, Duara articulated that early twentieth-century Chinese nationalist elites established the idea of modern nation and nation state system through “linguistic mechanisms.” These mechanisms included divisive language of Social Darwinism and social class hierarchy, which marginalized peasants and poor farmers in China (Duara, 1995, pg. 165-166).

According to Duara, the most successful Chinese nationalist that was able to fully unite China and construct a cohesive nationalist rhetoric was Mao Zedong and his Communist peasantry movement. Mao’s Communist movement united the proletariat and peasantry and created a

nationalist rhetoric using language that depicted structural class struggles, giving the Chinese a significant meaning of the nation. Duara analyzed Mao's nationalist language and proclaimed that the Chairman's Cultural Revolution purged class structure and pushed the nation towards a cohesive goal. That goal was to shape the nation by inciting that all Chinese, regardless of gender and ethnicity had a part in making the nation a greater nation in fighting off the oppressive Western states who once stripped China of its glory (Duara, 1995).

Although Mao's nationalist rhetoric emphasized gender equality, Duara points out that the idea of the nation has always remained historically gendered. Duara explained that the body of Chinese women has historically been defined as the purity of Han Chinese. When foreign invaders raped Chinese women, it polluted China and the nation (Duara, 1995, pg.167). Both Sun Yat-Sen and Mao's nationalist rhetoric displayed a gender bias as the languages encouraged able-body men to fight for the land. In other words, the land, although often refer to as the "motherland," only belonged to the men as "men's territory" for they had sacrifice their manly blood for the land. Women had no part in this rhetoric, as their role was often confined to the domestic sphere. Nonetheless, the woman and the nation ("motherland") all belonged to the patriarchy (Duara, 1995).

### ***Linking Historical Trauma to National Identity:***

The theoretical frameworks of nationalism and national identity have proposed three important criteria for the establishment of nationalism: first, nationalism is a modern conception; second, nationalism is a shared identity within a certain group; and third, the political elite and intelligentsia are the producers and owners of nationalist rhetoric. However, the frameworks on nationalism have yet to describe what influences nationalism or where does nationalism and national identity derived from. Scholars such as Zheng Wang have suggested that historical trauma

and historical memory are factors that influence the formation of nationalist movements. Nonetheless, historical trauma is the fourth element for nationalist obtainment.

According to Zheng Wang's *Never Forget National Humiliation*, collective memory (historical memory) unites a group under a shared ethnic history. Wang reiterates Smith's (1976) model that ethnic, national, and religious identities are constructed from historical myths that define who belongs to the group, what it means to be in the group and, ultimately, who are the enemies of the group (Wang, 2012). These historical myths are often based on true events yet exaggerated when presented to strengthen the binds of the group's identity. The identity of the group is shaped from certain experienced endeavors. These experiences are chosen traumas and glories.

Wang adopts Norwegian scholar, Johan Galtung's Chosenness-Myths-Trauma (CMT) complex to analyze historical memory within the Chinese. Wang defines "Chosenness" as "the belief in being selected by some transpersonal force such as God, Allah, or History". Myths are shared historical events that help create a stronger community among the chosen group. Traumas, on the other hand, are humiliating events experienced by the group. This does not necessarily mean that traumatic events are hidden from history books and lessons. Rather, Wang stresses that the trauma creates the discourse on "never forgetting national humiliation" to strengthen a shared nationalist identity within modern day China (Wang, 2012). The modern day Communist Party of China has resorted to this type of nationalist rhetoric to remind the Chinese of the national humiliation it faced during its colonial and Manchu imperial rule. Thus, the Chinese government has prevented restoration of ancient imperial palaces that were looted and destroyed by British and other foreign forces. The destroyed palaces that once signified the strength of the Celestial

Kingdom has since become a national monument “for never forgetting China’s national humiliation” (Wang, 2012).

Wang concludes that chosen traumas and glories of a group are passed down to generations by parents, teachers, and other agents. Thus, later generations of the chosen group share the same suffering experienced by the previous generation, although they did not take part in it. Chosen glories are also exaggerated to portray the importance of the group’s identity, that it becomes mythologized over time (Wang, 2012). The concept of the CMT complex can strengthen the historical memories of the chosen group, which, in turn, creates a stronger national identity. It is important to note that Wang’s literature does not portray whether historical memory and trauma can be experienced or interpreted differently by individuals within the chosen group. When assessing China’s CMT complex, Wang did not disclose whether smaller ethnic groups, took part in the same interpretations of China’s chosen traumas and glories. With that said, one man’s trauma can be another man’s glory. Nonetheless, it is essential that groups, big or small in population, must consider his or her own cultural and political limitations before acting as the hegemon for a shared historical memory.

Wang’s work introduced the idea of the role of historical trauma in nationalism and national identity. As Wang had determined, historical trauma can forge the identity of an individual and that individual, given the right circumstances and privilege (as an elite) can and will proclaim a nationalist rhetoric. They will receive the attention of their people and form a united and shared historical memory to strengthen their national identity. Furthermore, elites can control the historical trauma language and nationalist sentiment simply because they have fathered the discourse (Wang, 2012). Zarrow’s (2004) work on the Anti-Manchu discourse in late Qing – Manchu rule of the Han Chinese proposes the idea of filial piety’s affiliation to historical trauma.

In other words, Zarrow proclaimed that although one generation may have not witness nor were they directly persecuted by their oppressors, the trauma experienced by their ancestors affects them just the same. Thus, as descendants of those killed and humiliated by the oppressor, it is the duty of the later generation to seek for sovereignty and revenge, for they have inherited the historical trauma from the previous generation. Zarrow uses the Han Chinese discourse on Manchu rule during the later period of the Qing dynasty as his case study to conceptualize his claim.

Zarrow analyzed that during the 1890's of the Qing rule of China, Han Chinese scholar elites provided literature to attract followers to rebel against the Manchus and to gain support for a "nationalist manifesto" (Zarrow, 2004). The Han Chinese elites strategically created a new way of reading the literature. Zarrow argues that the elites portrayed the Manchus as barbarian invaders. By doing this, it separated the purity of the Han Chinese from the Manchu. The Han Chinese considered themselves the decedents of the mythical Yellow King, the founder of Chinese civilization. Zarrow expressed that Han Chinese played into the idea that the Hans were the true rulers and prescribers of Chinese civilization because of their link to the Yellow King (Zarrow, 2004). Thus, Zarrow points out that by rendering the Manchus as barbarians and foreigners, the Han Chinese elites were able to capture the beginnings of a Han Chinese nationalist discourse.

One example of the early construction of Han Chinese nationalist pride was the early writings and testimonies of survivors from Qing massacres. These writings may have not directly impacted later generations of readers, but Zarrow suggested that later generations of Hans continued to feel emotional and empathetic towards victims of the massacres through what Zarrow calls a "transferential relationship" between the later generations and the victims. The rape and murder of earlier generations of Hans by the Qing was seen as the rape and murder of the entire Han nation. Nonetheless, later Han scholars and their followers cited that the massacres were

crimes against “my ancestors, my nation, my self” (Zarrow, 2004, p.77). The trauma of earlier Hans was then passed down to contemporary Hans through writings of victims of early Manchu oppression and Han scholars. By creating a direct relationship to earlier killings and rapes of Hans, the Han scholars and elites in contemporary time were able to inscribe the massacres onto the minds of late Han readers. This creation of a direct relationship between the early Han generation and later Han generation emphasized the utilization of trauma shared within the Hans. This trauma helped kept Han nationalism alive.

Zarrow continues his argument by adding that the affiliation of “myself” to the ancestors as the nation, encouraged filial piety. The duty of filial piety invoked the support for a nationalist rhetoric within the Han Chinese. This is due to the Confucian idea that the patriarchy of a society must be uphold along with the identity of that society. Nonetheless, Han Chinese must rebel against the Manchu Qing and invoke a nationalist identity base on filial piety to set free the Han Chinses civilization from the oppressive rule of the barbarian Manchus (Zarrow, 2004). The memories of actual victims and survivors of Qing violence help maintained this idea through oral and written stories. These stories are then transferred and ingrained into the minds of contemporary Hans in the later Qing period. This encouraged the identity and trauma shared between a Han with their ancestors of early Qing rule, which in turn, created the transfer of trauma from the ancestors into the contemporary Han’s own experience.

## **HYPOTHESIS 1**

Derived from the literature above, it can be concluded that national identity is produced through the historical trauma experienced by the group. Wang has defined historical trauma as the loss of the homeland or displacement and abuse by a foreign power. These experiences are considered as humiliating events by the victimized group. In the case of the Hmong, their version of trauma is not fully captured by Wang's definition. Hence, another perspective on trauma must be considered. This study adopts Native American scholar Brave Heart & DeBruyn's (1998) definition of historical trauma as a destructive collective memory produced and experienced over time and across generations by a group of people with a shared identity. This historical trauma becomes a shared collective memory that is fostered from one generation to another, thus producing one shared national identity. As the literature points out, those who have "imagined" the community as a national identity derived from the elites of that said community. Elites, both political leaders and scholars have conjured traumatic events experienced by their group to arouse and establish a patriotic sentiment to re-claim their home from the oppressors and invaders. These sentiments produced a nationalist discourse for a nationalist movement within the group. Nonetheless, a nationalist quest is born.

Thus, I derive the following hypothesis:

*H1: Historical trauma shapes Hmong national identity/nationalism.*



## **Study I: The Role of Hmong Elites in Shaping National Identity**

The Hmong diaspora have been studied by numerous scholars within the past 40 years since their escape from Laos. However, the narratives have continuously made the Secret War a priority, in which it disregards the full historical context of the Hmong before modern conventional warfare. This approach expresses a Western and Hmong patriarchal obsession over war. It is as if the Hmong only came into existent in human history when they partook in America's war effort in Southeast Asia. Although the Secret War resulted in the politically forced migration of the Hmong into the Western hemisphere, it must be remembered that Hmong history has experienced its own complexity before the war. One of the many complex factors to the history of the Hmong is their journey in obtaining a sense of statehood and the utilization of the group's historical trauma in establishing a form of nationalist identity. To investigate the Hmong's journey towards political sovereignty and the establishment of a nationalist movement, a historical analysis of the Hmong experience before the Secret War is needed.

### **METHODOLOGY**

To better understand the relationship between Hmong historical trauma and nationalism, I employ a historical analysis of the decisions, actions and the environment that the Hmong elites from the French Indochina era, Secret War era, and present day faced when constructing Hmong nationalism. Paying close attention to the influence of historical trauma, I will identify the Hmong leaders and elites who had authority to create a nationalist discourse and platform for the Hmong in Laos. I will analyze the historical context provided by scholars and the Hmong community and examine how historical trauma is defined and how it shapes nationalism.

Wang (2012) notes how the Han Chinese saw themselves as a "chosen" group to build their kingdom and to reclaim their sovereignty during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. I adopt this concept of

“chosenness” to show how the Hmong saw themselves as a group worthy of sovereignty through mythical folklores. Taking a microlevel approach, the following section assesses the actions, decisions, and uses of mythical folklore of specific Hmong elites whose leadership was vital for the development of a Hmong nationalist discourse.

### ***The Hmong Elites of French Indochina 1900-1945: Lo Bliá Yao and Clansmen***

During the French Indochina era, Hmong elites enjoyed the protection and support of the French as they aligned themselves to gain comfortable noble status with the French occupiers. Thus, two factions of Hmong leadership were established through the occupation of French colonialism. The first group of leadership were political brokers. This group represented the Hmong in Laos by negotiating and participating in political decisions, which they cooperated and allied with their colonial French ruler. This elite group is defined as a Hmong man with credible knowledge, literacy, charisma and oratorical skills. These characteristics proved him as a qualified leader to his Hmong clansmen, and state occupier. However, Hmong secular elites needed a higher force to legitimize their leadership. These secular political elites often obtained the support of their colonial ruler or military partner to become the hegemon of the Hmong in Laos. Thus, a political secular Hmong leader is appointed by what scholar Mai Na Lee refers to as a “mandate by proxy” from the state and its colonial ruler (Lee, 2015, p. 25). Nonetheless, due to his recognition from the state, he can become the supreme chief of the Hmong. According to Mai Na Lee, this group of Hmong elites amplify their power beyond the Hmong community in Laos through the French and Lao colonial authorities rather than through the mythical belief that a Hmong King will rise from heaven to consolidate all the Hmong clans. The idea of a Mythical Hmong Kingdom is important to consider as a tool to create Hmong national identity and historical trauma. The Mythical Hmong Kingdom was a famous folklore told from one generation to another. The

folklore detailed about a Hmong Kingdom in China where a Hmong King ruled all the Hmong. However, this Kingdom was lost when the Hmong King was killed by the Chinese. Hence, the migration of the Hmong into modern day Southeast Asia. The Hmong during French Indochina regarded this folklore as an accurate account of their roots. Any justification of the rise of a Hmong King and the creation of a Hmong Kingdom through the “Mandate of Heaven” would galvanize the hope of a Hmong nation. Since Hmong elites moved away from this idea of legitimacy, they were dubbed by scholars as secular political leaders (Lee, 2015). Furthermore, the French chose a Hmong leader in hopes that he would serve as a “proxy” in their interest to control the behaviors of the highland Hmong. However, within the group of “proxy” secular political leaders, constant power struggles and clan disputes occurred to win the hearts of French and Lao rulers. This power struggle deviated from the idea of unity among the Hmong and the attainment of the Mandate of Heaven for a Hmong Kingdom which in mythical belief, will consolidate all the Hmong clans and form a cohesive nationalistic identity for the Hmong.

Lo Bliá Yao was perhaps the first prominent secular Hmong leader since the group’s migration from China. Due to his oratorical skills, charisma and his depth of knowledge in traditional Hmong rituals, Bliá Yao received respect from the Hmong above other clan leaders, which made him the likely “chosen” one to lead the Hmong (Lee, 2015). However, it was through the French that Bliá Yao became the Supreme Chief of the Hmong in Laos. Bliá Yao had all the credentials and power to create a nationalist Hmong movement and fulfill the mythical quest to obtain a Hmong Kingdom. However, the Hmong hegemon was too loyal to his French rulers to rebel against them. Bliá Yao’s role as an instrument of the French, and his involvement in internal power struggles within the secular Hmong elites influenced the Supreme Chief to dismiss the interest in the revival of a Hmong Kingdom. Though other scholars have painted Bliá Yao as a

Supreme Chief who guided his Hmong people through colonialism, the secular Hmong elite should also be consider as a puppet of French colonialism.

In the colonial climate that Blia Yao was in, the secular leader aligned himself with the French to gain power and climb up the political social hierarchy, which was impossible for the Hmong due to marginalization. Blia Yao helped the French's construction of a major road called Colonial Route 7, which connected the French headquarters in Vietnam to the royal Lao capital of Luang Prabang (Lee, 2015). Blia Yao convinced Hmong families to work on the construction of the road in poor conditions with little pay. In fact, when the French increased the wages for working Hmong men, Blia Yao kept the wages and paid the working Hmong men the same wages as before (Quincy, 1995). Blia Yao held a powerful position as a Hmong man during his time, however, he failed to lift his people out of the hands of colonial rule. Rather, Blia Yao chose to build his own wealth. His greed had taken him apart from the sympathy that a "chosen" Hmong leader should have to help their people and create a nationalist movement. As a puppet, Blia Yao helped enforce the French's high tax laws on the Hmong. Blia Yao took advantage of his authority and assisted the French in capturing and imprisoning poor Hmong families and individuals for their failure to pay the high taxes (Lee, 2015). According to Smith's formula (1981), this is not the characteristics of a recognized leader that is destined to revive nationalist sentiments. Blia Yao ignored to gather political and social grievances within the Hmong to create a common cause against the French. The opportunity for an established ethno-nationalist rhetoric was lost through Blia Yao, despite the many reasons to conjure an ethno-nationalist movement within the Hmong. Rather, Blia Yao's decisions and actions against his own people prove him a successful puppet of the French to instill colonial fear and oppression on the Hmong. Blia Yao's inaction in lifting his people into wealth and prosperity reinforced his proxy and puppet position by the French. The

French had the authority to manipulate Blia Yao, consequently, the French could also manipulate the Hmong as third class citizens and render them as the “other” for the Hmong were without agency.

An Ethno-nationalist quest was ignored and deferred by Hmong secular elites such as Lo Blia Yao and his counterparts because of vital factors that summed up the political climate of their time. First, the political and power comfort they received from their alliance with the French allowed Hmong elites like Blia Yao to climb up the social political hierarchy and be crowned as the Supreme Chief of the Hmong. Blia Yao’s role as a puppet of the French encouraged other Hmong leaders from different clans to compete with the Supreme Chief for authority in the Hmong community. Hmong scholars have failed to acknowledge that the Hmong leaders during this time were more interested in aligning themselves with the French, rather than constructing a Hmong ethno-nationalist movement. For example, Blia Yao’s most fierce competitor and later son-in-law, Ly Fong diligently worked under him and the French to gain political influence and support from both the French and Hmong clan leaders to overtake Blia Yao’s position (Quincy, 1995). The status of being a Supreme Chief of the Hmong did not just elevate one’s social political hierarchy but a mass fortune of wealth was included. This is not to say that Hmong elites were only interested in money and fame. Being the Supreme Chief of the Hmong alluded to the idea of replacing the Mythical Hmong King with a Chief legitimized by the state rather than from the Mandate of Heaven. The Hmong elites never referred to themselves as the King of the Hmong but as the hegemon of their clan, and eventually to the rest of the Hmong in Laos, created the idea that a Hmong man of wealth and power can rise to the occasion and become a leader of his people without the heaven’s approval. The consolidation of political power and social hierarchy by any Hmong elite also reinforced the power and authority of the individual’s clan.

Scholars such as Smith and Anderson had emphasized that nationalism and a nationalist rhetoric is created by elites of a group. Within any established society where elites exist, a nationalist discourse has a producer that enforces nationalist rhetoric. This producer is a leader among all the people, chosen and recognized by the people. The Hmong elites of French Indochina could not recreate this matrix because in an accordance to filial piety tradition, clan lineage was what Hmong men (always men) were most loyal to (Trueba, Jacobs, Kirton, 1990). In other words, one's clan or kinship and clan hegemony was what Hmong elites identify with rather than the inclusive idea of being a member of the whole Hmong community. Nonetheless, elites from different clans were in constant power struggles to consolidate power. Lo Bli Yao's confidants were from his own clan. Bli Yao also appointed men from his own clan to village or provincial leadership positions, a privilege bestowed onto him by the French (Lee, 2015). This marginalized and disenfranchised other clans within the Hmong community in Laos. It created a barrier that prevented other Hmong clan from ever achieving leadership positions and political success with the French. Thus, clan hegemony became a race between Lo Bli Yao's clan and other Hmong clans. This is a pattern that is seen throughout Hmong history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When Hmong elites prioritized their clan's political position and privilege, they deviated from producing a cohesive Hmong nationalist identity. This resulted in Hmong elites expressing historical trauma shared by their own clan rather than a monolithic trauma shared by the wider Hmong community.

It is Hmong custom for clansmen to only support one another if they felt that they've never been wronged by the other clan. Hence, alliances between clans was essential in obtaining political power as clans will support one another in village council meetings and courts. Clan alliances and conflicts between clansmen have long existed before the Hmong's contact with the West. Hence, during French colonialism, clan conflicts exacerbated the struggle for power. Clan conflicts did

not only derive from politics but also from marriages as well. Marriage alliances between clans was common within the Hmong (it's taboo in the Hmong culture to marry within the clan and other clans of the same last name) (Lee, 2015). A historical example of this is the marriage between Blia Yao's favorite daughter, and his political rival Lyfoung. Polygamy was socially accepted by the Hmong as it signifies the Hmong man's wealth. Hence, Hmong secular elites openly practice polygamy to gain access into prominent clans and to build alliances to legitimize their leadership and power. Lyfoung married Mai Lo, Lo Blia Yao's daughter as a second wife. Although Mai Lo was the daughter of the Hmong hegemon, Lyfoung treated Mai Lo poorly because of her father's reluctance to allow him to be a part of Blia Yao's inner circle. Mai Lo committed suicide after years of mistreatment from her husband (Lee, 2015). Mai Lo's death created a traumatic division among the Lo and Ly clan. The Lo clan interpreted Mai Lo's death as an insult to Blia Yao's status. If the Ly clan did not respect the kin of the revered Blia Yao, then they do not also recognize the authority of Blia Yao's leadership. The Ly clan on the other hand, interpreted Blia Yao as a tyrannical leader for his unwillingness to accept other clan members into his council. Hmong leaders established marriage alliances through Hmong women to strengthen the powers of Hmong leaders. However, abuse of marriage alliances destroyed and created division among clans. This becomes traumatic as clans held grudges towards one another and prohibited marriages to occur between rival clans. This is a form of internal trauma, where grievances are perpetrated within the Hmong clans rather than towards an external entity such as their colonial French rulers. Thus, conflicts between clans created a division between Hmong political secular elites, which in turn, helped produced the deferment of a Hmong nationalist identity and discourse.

The fight for clan power and hegemony overshadowed the idea of a Hmong nationalist identity. The possibility of a cohesive identity for the Hmong created by Hmong secular elites and

clansmen would shake up the political climate under French colonialism. This political shake up was avoided for reasons that will destroy the political comfort Hmong elites received from the French. This was influential for Hmong elites because having a relationship with the French had given the Hmong elites more leverage to be a part of the geo-politics in colonial Laos and to a certain extent, their ties with the French bolstered their social place in Laos rather than being cast as primitive, a status that the Hmong were already too familiar with. Regardless, the Hmong elites during French Indochina have proved that simply being elites was not enough to create a nationalist rhetoric. Their reality was to stay loyal to their colonizer to maintain a hegemon status above their political and clan rivals.

Through clan lineage, the assurance of acceptance and legitimacy a Hmong man received from his own clan created a safety net for their own political ambitions. Clan rivalry created internal conflicts within Hmong elites, which provided more slippage for a Hmong nationalist movement. Within the internal conflicts between Hmong elites, internal trauma full of betrayal, deceit and jealousy outgrew what should have been a shared trauma experienced by the Hmong community. Wang (2012) and Zarrow (2004) both emphasized the significant role of historical trauma held for the Han Chinese in their efforts to call for a nationalist movement and identity. The producers of historical trauma rhetoric were Han elites and scholars who had the platform to voice the trauma. The Hmong secular elites of Laos did the opposite of their Han counterparts. The mythical stories and violent political migration of the Hmong from China to Southeast Asia was not reiterated nor used as a tool to incite a shared trauma within the Hmong against their two state occupiers, the Lao and the French. Even on an individual level, Hmong elites such as Lo Bliá Yao deferred from using historical trauma, specifically the loss of the mythical Hmong Kingdom in China to construct an ethno-nationalist movement. As a rational actor, Bliá Yao recognized that



the myths of the Hmong Kingdom would not benefit his hegemon status. Lo Blia Yao may have been a recognized leader but his power as Supreme Chief came from the authority of the French as Blia Yao sympathized with his colonial French ruler. Blia Yao's power and leadership was also legitimized as it was sustained through other Hmong elites who embraced Blia Yao's political companionship. As the political secular elites continued their power struggles to be the "chosen" Supreme Chief of the Hmong, they in turned deviated from the traditional belief to recapture the Mandate of Heaven for a Hmong Kingdom. Thus, the rise of Hmong Messianic leaders during the 1920's threatened the political stability of the Hmong secular leaders and French colonialism.

### ***The Hmong Messiah of French Indochina 1900-1925: Vue Pa Chay***

The lack of a recognized, respected and shared leader within the Hmong community in Laos provided a power vacuum for Hmong secular elites. The immergence of Messianic Hmong leaders was the result of internal fighting between secular Hmong leaders. The Messianic leaders were a second faction of Hmong elites who worked for their legitimacy by claiming the Mandate of Heaven. In accordance to Hmong legend, the self-proclaimed Messiah is considered to be the Hmong King of the mythical Hmong Kingdom from ancient China. This Messiah holds magical powers to heal others and to shield him and his army from harm during battles and rebellions (Quincy, 2000). It is believed that the Messiah is an untouchable prophet sent from heaven to lift the Hmong from the oppressive French colonizers and Lao rulers and to finalize the establishment of the mythical sovereign Hmong Kingdom (Lee, 2015). It was essential for Messianic leaders to utilize the mythical Hmong Kingdom as a legitimate claim to power. As Wang and Smith stated earlier, this religious and mythical realm of belief amplify the idea of Hmong choseness for self-rule. Messianic rebellions kept the hope for a Hmong Kingdom alive but consequentially, it

helped conspire the violent division and betrayal between Hmong secular leaders like Lo Blia Yao against Messianic leaders such as Pa Chay during French colonialism.

Unlike the secular political elites, Pa Chay was the first leader to construct a nationalist rhetoric within the Hmong in Vietnam and Laos. Pa Chay claimed the Mandate of Heaven and proclaimed that the Hmong must dismantle French colonialism. The Messianic leader called for a Hmong Kingdom comprised of a sovereign land that stretched between northern Vietnam and into Xieng Khouang of Laos, the region where Blia Yao and a majority of the Hmong population resided (Quincy, 1995). Pa Chay legitimized his power through the Mandate of Heaven and by performing religious miracles as well as claimed to have envisioned the mythical Hmong Kingdom through a divine intervention (Lee, 2015). Such claimed magical powers led many Hmong to believe that Pa Chay was the reincarnated mythical King who once ruled all Hmong in China. The rise of Pa Chay and his messianic movement created successful rebellions against the French in both Laos and Vietnam. To those who are unfamiliar with Hmong folklores and myths, Pa Chay's claim of the Mythical Kingdom and his self-proclaimed magical powers may seem ludicrous, especially since it was Pa Chay's strategy to challenge the authority of the secular Hmong leaders. The Hmong during Pa Chay's time believed in the mystical powers and legends of these folklores as they were considered as factual oral histories of the Hmong. After all, the Hmong had lacked a writing system that could record their historical past. Therefore, elders would recount historical events and stories through oral lessons. Thus, to some degree, secular Hmong leaders such as Lo Blia Yao felt threaten by Pa Chay's Messianic movement. However, strategically, Pa Chay's Mythical Kingdom failed to produced enough momentum to permanently destroy the authority of the French and secular Hmong leaders. The Hmong may have believed in these folklores and myths but to the French, Pa Chay was just another rebel creating noise. Pa Chay and his followers were

only able to temporarily destabilize the French and secular Hmong leaders as the French supported secular Hmong leaders to establish an army of their own to bring down Pa Chay's movement.

Pa Chay's messianic movement succeeded in banding large pockets of Hmong in Laos and Vietnam together. Unlike his secular political Hmong counterparts, the messianic leader utilized a bottom up approach to gain support within Hmong communities. When consolidating support for his movement, Pa Chay ignored the power leverage of the political Hmong elites as well as the French colonizer. Rather, the Messianic leader conjured the support from Hmong villagers. This was done through Pa Chay's claim of the Mythical Hmong Kingdom. Pa Chay resurrected the idea that Hmong must continue to search for the Hmong Kingdom. The messianic leader stressed that this could not be done if the Hmong remained in the exploitation of the French as the iron fist of the French would prevent the Hmong from furthering their independence. Pa Chay also recognized that social and political grievances against the French and the secular Hmong leaders was needed to help push his Mythical Kingdom agenda. Recognizing that the Hmong secular elites taxed Hmong villages, Pa Chay took the opportunity to convince pockets of Hmong villages in Vietnam and Laos to refuse to pay their share of taxes (Quincy, 1995). According to Hmong historians, the Hmong were vital producers of opium, which was controlled by the French. Opium was vital to French colonialism in Indochina as it had pushed the French colonial economy up against their historic rival, the British's production of opium in India. The French had implemented harsh and heavy taxes on Hmong produced opium in order to prevent the Hmong from selling their opium harvest to merchants coming in from China. Hence, Bliia Yao and other Hmong elites were worthy tax collectors for the French (Lee, 2015). As such, Pa Chay had a reliable argument against French oppression and the secular Hmong elites. The heavy taxes served as social grievances against the French and Hmong elites. These political grievances were a product of oppressive French rule and

the betrayal of power hungry secular Hmong elites, which in turn, exemplified a deviation from obtaining a Hmong sovereign state from the Mythical Kingdom. However, by dismantling the taxing system, the French and secular Hmong leaders banded together and conspired against Pa Chay's movement. Pa Chay's rebellions and war lasted only two years before it died out (Lee, 2015). With the help of the secular Hmong leader Lo Bli Yao, the French army successfully destroyed Pa Chay and his movement for a Hmong Kingdom. The destruction of Pa Chay's movement was a repeat of the destruction of the Hmong Kingdom in China by the Chinese centuries ago. Once again, the Mandate of Heaven and the hope for a Hmong sovereignty was lost.

Pa Chay's movement proved unsuccessful in fully obtaining a Hmong Kingdom simply because the Messianic leader relied too much on his religious and mythical magical powers to win wars. According to Lee (2015), Pa Chay lost the Mandate of Heaven because of the lewd behaviors of his army men. During a battle in a village, Pa Chay's soldiers murder, rape and dissected Hmong and Lao women. The sins and shameful act had offended Heaven and Earth, thus, the mandate had been taken away as punishment. Although this explanation provides a sense of Pa Chay's messianic attitude and beliefs, it is perhaps more empirically convincing to argue that the loss of Pa Chay's movement was the consequences of the Messianic leader's lack of constructing rhetoric that will discredit his secular opponents. Pa Chay may have established a shared ethnic identity and historical trauma by reviving the Hmong's idea of a Hmong Kingdom, but the leader could not unite all Hmong in Laos and Vietnam, including Secular political Hmong elites such as Bli Yao to fight against the French with Pa Chay. Rather, the Hmong were divided by factions of the political elites and the messianic believers. Pa Chay's dream for a Hmong Kingdom is the quintessential example of Anderson's idea of an imagined community. It is unclear if the ancient

Hmong Kingdom in China really existed. Hmong scholars have gone back and forth as to where in China and when this Kingdom existed.

Pa Chay conceived his dream for a Kingdom from legendary folklores and myths, thus, Pa Chay's Hmong Kingdom could have been a figment of his imagination which he created by witnessing the injustice of French colonialism. Regardless, Pa Chay fathered the Hmong ethno-nationalist movement by implementing various historical trauma and political grievances shared by the Hmong against the French. Pa Chay's vision for a Hmong sovereignty may have been destroyed but it did not fall on deaf ears. His dreams for a Hmong Kingdom and the loss of the movement became a historical trauma that would set precedent for future secular Hmong leaders like Touby Lyfoung and General Vang Pao to attempt the creation of a sovereign Hmong territory in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### ***The Hmong Political Broker 1946-1960: Touby Lyfoung***

As the grandson of Lo Blia Yao and the son of Blia Yao's political rival, Touby Lyfoung carried an unusual yet heavy weight of political advantage. Touby Lyfoung's father, Lyfoung was the son-in-law and political rival of Blia Yao. The dynamic family history that led to this crossroad is a chaotic one. Although Touby's father and his maternal grandfather, Blia Yao had a hateful relationship, Touby was loyal to his father (in the tradition of Hmong paternal lineage), but like Blia Yao, Touby maintained relationships with the French until Laos became an independent country after World War II (Lee, 2015). When Laos gain its independence, through the support of the French, Touby Lyfoung became the most influential Hmong man in Lao politics as a political broker between his Hmong people and the Royal Lao government.

According to Mai Na Lee (2015), Touby Lyfoung was the only Hmong political broker who came close to being crowned as the "King of the Hmong" (p.275). His oratorical skills,

charisma and character elevated his legitimacy as a leader. Touby was recognized not only by his fellow Hmong and by the French, but even the Lao counterparts saw him as a competent politician, a rare welcome by the low-landers (Lao) towards the highland (Hmong) community. The recognition that Touby received from the Hmong, French and Lao was crucial for the leader's dream for Hmong autonomy (Gunn, 1988). By maintaining a mutual relationship with the French as they decolonized Laos, the French would serve as a liaison in helping Touby reach the royal Lao capitol and be a part of the Lao political leadership as a Hmong man. When this is accomplished, building a cohesive relationship with the Lao would guarantee Hmong status as actual first-class citizens rather than primitive highlanders.

As a political broker, Touby fought for the integration of Hmong into Lao politics as well as the establishment of schools in the Xieng Khouang region of Lao where a majority of the Hmong population resided (Lee,2015). The political broker also worked and negotiated for Hmong representation in the Royal Lao government council. In Touby's optimism, this would set up a path in which an autonomous region for the Hmong would be establish in Xieng Khouang. This accomplishment would grant the Hmong political autonomy as well as end exploitation towards the Hmong from the Lao (Quincy, 1995, p. 140-141). Touby's ambition to become an agent for the Hmong within the national Lao political sphere was a historical turning point for the Hmong. Touby was perhaps the first Hmong member of the intelligentsia and political leader who attempted to establish a more modern idea of self-determination for his fellow Hmong. Moving away from the idea of a Mythical Hmong Kingdom, Touby's vision for self-determination was not full sovereignty for the Hmong as Pa Chay had fought for. Rather, the establishment of schools and incorporating the Hmong into both the educational and political body of Laos was the model

for Hmong self-determination. This was more ideal for Touby due to the long marginalization of Hmong in literacy and political statelessness.

Scholars have glossed over why Touby was so keen on educating the Hmong. Touby was Western educated and unlike the majority of his Hmong peers, Touby was privilege enough to familiarize and surround himself with Western ideology and values. Thus, in the perspective of the paramount leader, Touby saw that self-determination required a literate population. The marginalization and disenfranchisement from the politics of the majority as well as the obtainment of a formal education that the Hmong had faced, was the historical trauma that Touby emphasized with when constructing Hmong self-determination. Nonetheless, to strive for self-determination, the Hmong must become educated through the eyes of Touby Lyfoung.

The Hmong have always been a stateless ethnic group since before their migration to Laos from ancient China (Gunn,1988). In the environments that the Hmong found themselves in, whether in dynastical China to colonial French rule or a new age of neocolonialism, the Hmong faced marginalization because of their ethnic status and agrarian lifestyle. In China, before migration, the Hmong were challenged under the Han Chinese to integrate with the Celestial Kingdom or face persecution. In French Indochina, Lao majority casted the Hmong off as hill tribes and finally, under the French where the Hmong (Hmong elites to be exact) had some authority in local politics, they were still suppressed. As Smith and other scholars have noted, members of the intelligentsia are needed to establish a nationalist discourse. The Hmong lacked literacy as well as a writing system within both their native and Lao language. Hence, educating the Hmong was the most important approach towards modernity in eyes of Touby. In respect, self-determination for sovereignty, specifically for an autonomous zone would follow.

A Hmong autonomous region was never conceived. Although the opportunity given by the Royal Lao Monarch was privileged to Touby to lead a Hmong autonomous region, the Hmong leader declined the offer by citing that the lack of education, literacy and Hmong intelligentsias was too prevalent among the Hmong. As Lee (2015, p. 279) quoted the brother of Touby:

Uncle By [Touby] turned to assessing those who could read and write Lao. There were only eight. Would you have accepted? [Touby] said, “we do not want this” – said it to the [Lao and the French]. Only eight familiar with written Lao, but only three were really literate. As for the rest, it’s like what the Hmong often say [sarcastically], the letter would have to be the size of a water buffalo in order for them to be able to read it, you know? The size of a water buffalo!

The lack of Hmong scholars and formally educated political Hmong leaders prevented Touby from establishing and maintaining such an important political change for the Hmong in Laos. The second-best option for Touby to utilize was to accept the Lao Monarch’s offer of making Touby the *Chaomoung* or the “Paramount Chief” of the Hmong (Lee, 2015).

Though, many may argue and criticize Touby’s decision to reject territorial autonomy and opted for the royal appointment as a Paramount Chief was a conflict of interest as it bolstered the leader’s own political ambitions. The political climate of Laos during this timeframe must be considered. Laos was in political chaos as it struggled to reconstruct itself from colonial rule. The Lao monarchy was slowly losing influence within their own political capital. During the decolonization of Laos in 1946, there were movements to free Laos from post-colonial control by the French and later the United States. The Lao Issara government (Free Lao Movement) was a non-communist and anti-colonialism faction established by a Lao Prince to guide Laos into self-determination and modernity without Western influence. On the other hand, another Lao Prince (often dubbed as the “Red Prince”) established the Pathet Lao party, inspired by the Viet Minh in Vietnam (Gunn, 1988). The Pathet Lao faction had the support from Touby’s political rival and maternal uncle, Fa Dang. Fa Dang was the son of Lo Bliia Yao. He was tossed aside by the French



as they had favored Touby as the Hmong chief, hence, Fa Dang had sworn to do “everything opposite of Touby” (Quincy, 2000).

With this historical context, Touby’s decision to accept the “Paramount Chief” status was strategic as it maintained Hmong autonomy by representation. The Hmong finally had an agent who would work for the Hmong cause and interest. Touby’s presence in the royal Lao capital of Luang Prabong was more than enough for the Hmong in Laos. As often stated, the Hmong have always been a stateless group, thus, they moved freely across Southeast Asia. Territorial claim may have not been in the mindset of the Hmong or Touby at the time due to “the idea that geographical boarders emerged after decolonization in Southeast Asia” and in many parts of colonized regions in the world (Lee, 2015). Furthermore, if Touby accepted the offer of an autonomous zone for the Hmong, regardless of the lack of Hmong intelligentsias and experience is politics, Touby would have found himself as well as his fellow Hmong, alone in a political and bloody warzone against the Pathet Lao and the pro-communist Hmong factions. The idea of losing more Hmong bodies (from both pro-royal Lao and Pro-communist factions) was not worth the effort for Touby (Lee, 2015). It was better for the Hmong at the time to be represented by a shared leader recognized by both the Hmong community and Lao monarchy.

The political turmoil in Southeast Asia had prevented the Hmong leader to fully established Hmong sovereignty, yet, it should also be noted that Touby served as a loyal subject to the Royal Lao government. The Hmong leader was both a Lao subject and a Hmong leader. Balancing the two and satisfying both sides was impossible. Although Touby was the first Hmong intellectual and leader to insert himself into the national and international politics in Laos, he was still an elite. Touby grew up disconnected from the rest of the Hmong who still flourished in poverty and marginalization. Thus, Touby’s influential reign on the Hmong did not last. By the 1960’s,

Touby's control of the Hmong and his leadership among the Hmong would slip off to a young and ambitious military officer, his protégé, Vang Pao.

### ***The Father of Hmong Modernity 1960-Present: General Vang Pao***

Of all the Hmong leaders before him, Vang Pao was perhaps the most influential in rallying the Hmong behind him. Vang Pao has been a controversial figure since the Secret War. Vang Pao has been called a war hero, a leader, a father of the orphaned Hmong, and by his critics and adversaries, a warlord, a traitor and a collaborator of the West. In all, love him or hate him, Vang Pao was the Hmong leader that led hundreds of thousands of Hmong into the Western Hemisphere. In other words, Vang Pao was the father of Hmong modernity and Hmong self-determination. As the protégé of Touby Lyfoung, Touby supported Vang Pao through his military education (Lee, 2015). Unlike his mentor, Vang Pao was more eager to fight head-on with rivals and was more of an aggressive battler than Touby, hence McCoy (1991) referred to Touby as the leader who was “always the politician” rather than a fighter. As the United States saw their interest in Southeast Asia at risk, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) moved into Laos in 1960. The CIA found that Touby was not in favor of participating in a warfare with the Viet Minh. To the CIA, Touby had gone soft compared to his war-like attitude with the French in World War II. Thus, the Americans found the young army officer, Vang Pao, as the ideal military man to help push for a Western agenda in Southeast Asia. Unlike past Hmong leaders, Vang Pao came from a less powerful clan. His clan status would not complicate the already chaotic clan conflict among the Hmong. Not only that, but the CIA saw Vang Pao as a true military leader with fierce ambitions (Kurlantzick, 2017). The CIA had no need for politics and diplomacy, just an insurgent war in Laos.

Without the presence of Touby in the highlands of Laos, Vang Pao emerged as the undisputed leader among the Hmong. Touby had immersed himself into Lao national politics, thus

his control of the Hmong slowly slipped from him (Lee, 2015). With the backing of the American CIA, Vang Pao rose to power. Before Vang Pao had agreed to work with the Americans, the military officer was hesitant and feared that history will repeat itself. When the French were in control of Southeast Asia, the French had trained and armed the Hmong. However, this backfired as the Messianic movement led by Pa Chay utilized the training they received from the French and used it against their colonizer. As such, the French forced the Hmong into disarmament. Fearing this, Vang Pao challenged his CIA counterparts, “You aren’t going to do what the French did are you?” (Hillmer, 2010, p.84). Ultimately, Vang Pao came to the decision to work with the CIA against Communist forces. In return, the American government had promised Vang Pao complete political and territorial sovereignty for the Hmong with Vang Pao as the hegemon leader (McCoy, 1991). The ambitions for a Hmong nationalist discourse and sentiment was born once again.

Vang Pao worked diligently to make Hmong sovereignty a reality. To do this, Vang Pao re-wrote history with Western forces to ensure that the relationship the Hmong had with the French would not repeat itself with the Americans. Through this, Vang Pao had the CIA deliver food and clothing aid for the Hmong or else “Hmong men would not want to leave their farm fields to fight in the war effort” (P.L Vang, personal communication, February 10, 2017). The Hmong were farmers in Laos. Farming and tending the field sustained life for the Hmong. Thus, the CIA parachuted the supplies to villages each time a request was made by Vang Pao. When the Hmong saw food and clothing fall from the sky, they knew that it was Vang Pao who had “negotiated with the foreigners” to send the supplies. As such, Vang Pao would drop a canteen with a message, telling villagers to make clearings for the delivery (Hamilton-Merritt, 1993). Per Pao Lee Vang, (P.L Vang, personal communication, February 10, 2017) who was 16 years old during the arrival of the Americans:

Vang Pao did something no other Hmong leader could ever do. He forced the Americans to feed and clothe the Hmong. No other Hmong leader, especially the most educated one [Touby] could push for such a thing. Hmong leaders have always kowtowed to the others [Lao and French] before saving their own Hmong people. In the end, it was Vang Pao! A Military officer! That is why the Hmong honors him. He [Vang Pao] led us through war and to the U.S. He secured our place in America. Why do you think you're here? It's because of his [Vang Pao] sacrifices and Hmong soldiers like your father. You should be thankful. Don't forget the sacrifices we made for you.

Pao Lee Vang's supportive passage suggests that rather than pleasing his Lao and American counterparts first, Vang Pao used a bottom-up approach to win his legitimacy with his Hmong people and thus, Vang Pao fed his people through the Americans, which in the eyes of the Hmong was an extortionary act of a compassionate yet determine leader. It was through clever acts like this that continued to pave the way for Vang Pao's legitimacy among the Hmong. The French's exploitation of the Hmong had created a trauma where the Hmong had become distrustful and afraid of Western presence. This was a fear Vang Pao could not allow to happen or else Hmong villages would welcome the Pathet Lao and Viet Minh, as their campaign spoke out against Western control. Thus, Vang Pao utilized his relationship with the Americans in exchange for vital supplies that he needed to build a Hmong army and to convince Hmong villages to warm up to an American alliance. The Hmong saw that Vang Pao took the interest of the Hmong before the interest of the Lao or the Americans. Unlike his predecessors, the Hmong were convinced that Vang Pao had flexed his muscles for the Hmong soul. The Hmong had witness too many of their past leaders, such as Lo Bliia Yao and Touby Lyfoung fall to the knees to please the interest of the Lao and the French. To the Hmong, Vang Pao was fighting in the spirit of Hmong freedom not just through words but through physical actions such as Vang Pao's call to war against the Communist.

As expressed by Vang Pao supporter, Jane Hamilton-Merritt, author of *Tragic Mountains*, Vang Pao has been revered as a man of the people, a warrior of the Hmong and a hero. However, this is just one side to the story. To many of his critics and to some scholars, Vang Pao was a despotic warlord as described by Keith Quincy (2000). As such, despite the bleak international politics of the Cold War, and America's lack of commitment in Laos, Vang Pao forced the Hmong into a modern conventional warfare and risked the lives of thousands of Hmong men and young boys to a losing war. Furthermore, McCoy (1991) and other scholars wrote that Vang Pao funneled money to build his army by participating in a Southeast Asian drug ring with the CIA during the war. To protect his power and legitimacy, Vang Pao took out any person and group who went against him. An example of this was the death of the new Messianic leader, Yang Shong Lue as known as "The Mother of Writing". Scholars such as Paul Hillmer (2010) noted that Shong Lue created the Hmong's first writing scripture and like Pa Chay, Shong Lue claimed the Mandate of Heaven to establish Hmong freedom but through writing. Both the Pathet Lao and Vang Pao was disturbed by this. However, Vang Pao protected the Messianic leader until he was assassinated. Conspiracy theories claimed that Vang Pao ordered the assassination, meanwhile others argued that it was the Pathet Lao that killed the Messianic leader (Lee, 2015). Like all the leaders before him, Lee (2015) noted that Vang Pao was also involved with the typical clan disputes and conflicts that had divided Hmong elites before Vang Pao's time. Vang Pao's accused the Ly clan of Touby Lyfoung for an assassination attempt on him. Vang Pao's growing distrust of other clans led the military leader to appoint men from his own clan to leadership positions. Perhaps history did repeat itself as Vang Pao continued to polarize his clan politics and inner circle just as his predecessors did before him.

Although Vang Pao was loyal to the Lao King and fought to free Laos from Communist hold, Vang Pao was also ambitious to lead the Hmong in their new sovereign territory as promised by the CIA (Hillmer, 2010). Any political leader would assume that such promise was too good to be true given the political chaos in Laos. However, Vang Pao was not a leader disciplined in diplomacy and politics. Vang Pao was a military leader, found by the CIA in the military camps of the Royal Lao Army. This ambition for power and sovereignty led Vang Pao to fight for his legitimacy to rule the Hmong through clan disputes, marriage alliances and assassinations. In all, Vang Pao's aggressive campaign for a free Laos and attempt to obtain Hmong sovereignty was tainted with blood. Many of Vang Pao's followers, specifically the Hmong in the Western hemisphere, still consider Vang Pao as warrior worthy of King status, despite what history portrayed. Although Vang Pao never referred himself as such, he eluded to the King status through his establishment of Long Cheng.

During the Secret War from 1960 to 1975, Vang Pao constructed the city of Long Cheng as his military headquarters in fighting against Communist forces inside Laos and disrupting the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Initially built to act as a military headquarters for Vang Pao and his Hmong army, the military base was surrounded by mountains with a short airstrip. However, as the Communist forces drew in close from the east, Hmong villagers flooded the military base, causing it to expand into a Hmong city. The Hmong were the main ethnicity to populate the lavish city. Long Cheng became the most populated city in Laos and thus the Hmong saw it as the long-lost capital of the Hmong Kingdom (Lee, 2016). Scholars have argued that the establishment of Long Cheng was intended to be Vang Pao's capitol once a sovereign Hmong state was secure after the United States victory in the war in Vietnam. Nonetheless, Long Cheng was the tangible result of a community that became a modernized ethno-national sentiment for the Hmong. The city of Long

Chang represented a sense of modernity for the Hmong as it hosted all Hmong from different clans and villages. The airstrip that divided the city in the middle represented the Hmong's part in the war effort. The airstrip was a sign of modernity as Hmong men became "modern day" soldiers and pilots fighting with metal weapons and flying "metal birds" when metal was mostly used to make farming tools for the Hmong. The idea that Hmong blood was lost to secure Laos from the Communists and achieve Hmong sovereignty bolstered the significance of Long Cheng's existence. Vang Pao came to almost accomplishing the dreams of a Hmong sovereignty with his capital. Nevertheless, as fate would have it, in 1975, Vang Pao and the Hmong were forced to leave the city as communist forces moved in. The destruction and the desertion of Long Cheng has since been historically remembered as a traumatic image to the Hmong and their pride in claiming it as Hmong capital. Contemporary Hmong music and traditional Hmong poems still refer to Long Cheng as the "Home of the Hmong" and Vang Pao as the father and leader. Even today, Hmong traditional songs would sing about returning to the homeland, and when the Hmong return to Laos, the first place the Hmong will make home again is Long Cheng.

After the CIA and Vang Pao left Laos, he encouraged his remaining men to continue the fight against the Pathet Lao (Hillmer, 2010). In 1989 and 1990, the Washington Post and the New York Times published articles on Vang Pao's manipulation of his followers to finance his war and "rebel" troops in Laos. According to the articles, Vang Pao founded the United Lao National Liberation Front in the 1980s and "extorted" money from welfare dependent Hmong families in the United States by promising that the Hmong will take back Laos from the Pathet regime (Hammond, 1989). This was partially true, Vang Pao was still very connected to politics in Southeast Asia as he maintained close ties with the Thai military and government. Not, only that, but the General still had high ranking Hmong officers in Laos and Thailand leading various Hmong

rebel groups. One of the most well-known rebel group was the Chao Fa. In exile, Vang Pao continuously called for the Hmong in the Western hemisphere, specifically in the U.S to participate in trans-nationalist activities to liberate Laos and free the remaining Hmong from oppression (Vang, 2011). Lee (2015) noted that Vang Pao even garnered the support from conservative American lawmakers, including American millionaires who wanted “first dibs” in exploring Laos’ natural resources. Vang Pao’s king like status and his actions that pushed the Hmong towards modernity has made the leader a war hero among many of his followers and supporters. However, one cannot exclude the idea that the military leader should also be exemplified as the embodiment of an aggressive, inherent to patriarchal norms Nationalist, who fought with blood to evoke change in Laos.

As global politics began to change from the 20<sup>th</sup> century into the 21<sup>st</sup>, Vang Pao saw his bridge to Laos began to fade. Thailand opened trade with the communist government of Laos, and Thailand began to close Hmong refugee camps within the country. The attacks by terrorist groups around the world and especially the aftermath of 9/11 allowed Laos to reverse the “bandit” attacks on government installations into “terrorist” attacks made by the Hmong Chao Fa resistance group (Lee, 2000). By doing this, Laos would pick up U.S support and normalized trade relations with the United States. In the end, Vang Pao’s nationalist attitude to overthrow the Communist government in Laos and reclaim a Hmong statehood withered. The Hmong leader’s death in 2011 marked the end of an era, an era of a dream for a Hmong Kingdom and a nationalist quest preconceived as the last recognized Hmong leader of the “old world and life.” Regardless, the Hmong, if not all but most in the Western diaspora will continue to carry on Vang Pao’s name as the father of “Hmoob txoj kev vam meej” or Hmong prosperity and modernity. After all, it was Vang Pao who paved the way for Hmong “vam meej” through his actions of war.



## DISCUSSION

The Mythical Kingdom is the central factor behind the Hmong's historical trauma of statelessness. From Lo Bliá Yao, Pa Chay to Touby Lyfoung, the Mythical Kingdom stood as only a myth of Hmong folklore told from one generation to the other. As the political climate changed, the actions and decisions of both the secular and messianic leaders adjusted. Their decision to fight for a Hmong nationalist movement or to uphold colonial rule was based on politics and the political force of their time. Each leader allied with what was rational or with what they believed that will benefit the Hmong. Secular leaders such as Lo Bia Yao collaborated with his French colonizer to maintain power. Meanwhile, Touby Lyfoung saw that the Hmong were subjects of the royal Lao monarch and that representation of the Hmong in Lao politics was needed to give the Hmong a place in the country. The messianic leader Pa Chay exacerbated the idea of statelessness through his message of the Mythical Kingdom. By exerting the idea that the Hmong once held glory as a sovereign nation gave the Hmong a reason to rebuild the Hmong Kingdom so that they may live in peace and be governed by their own Hmong King. However, the loss of this Kingdom was perpetrated by foreign forces. Thus, it was only right for the Hmong in Laos during the French Indochina era to fight against the French and colonial sympathizers such as Lo Bliá Yao. It was through this model created by Pa Chay that the Mythical Hmong Kingdom became the central factor of Hmong historical trauma.

The Mythical Kingdom was pursued by various Hmong leaders up to Vang Pao. When Vang Pao became a part of the political stage, the Kingdom was promised by the United States CIA then it was taken away when the US failed to win the war in Vietnam. Vang Pao's risk to join another Western power in war had produced the international diaspora of the Hmong, dispersing the group far away from the motherland of Laos. The Hmong were displaced, families died, and

the Hmong's crossing of the Mekong River signifies the displacement and the loss of the dream for a Hmong Kingdom in Laos.

To further explore the multiple dimensions of Hmong national identity, the next study investigates the experiences of the Hmong diasporic community in the United States, with special attention given to effects of gender, acculturation, and ethnic identity on perceptions of historical trauma. This second study is important because it utilizes a bottom-up approach to explore the potential changes, if any, in Hmong national identity and historical trauma in the diaspora. Furthermore, the adaptation of gender, acculturation, and ethnic identity as measurement components goes beyond the traditional research of historical trauma and national identity in the Hmong diaspora.

## **STUDY II LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Identity Through Acculturation:***

It is impossible to study the Hmong diaspora in the United States and Hmong identity without investigating the group's experiences in acculturating into their American culture and values. Acculturation is a concept that is often used when studying "immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, who are assumed to be permanently settled in their new home-land" (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, Szapocznik, 2013, p. 2). Acculturation has been broadly referred to in the past as an individual's behavioral change and adoption of the host country's culture and values (Phinney, 1990). Other scholars have defined the concept in a more monolithic way. For example, Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936, p.149) presented: "acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or

both groups”. However, modern day scholars have countered this approach by suggesting that acculturation only effects one specific group. These groups are usually immigrant communities (Berry, 1997).

Conceptions of acculturation have developed over time as the movement of immigration and migration became more prominent in the United States. John Berry, a pioneer scholar in acculturation has categorized groups prone to acculturation as the acculturating group (Berry, 1990). The acculturating group has always been traditionally immigrants and migrants from diverse cultural backgrounds in a host country where they are the non-dominant group (Berry, 1997). Berry conceptualized an acculturation model to identify the process and decision to acculturate by individuals within non-dominant groups. First, Berry recognizes that there are two underlying issues individuals of non-dominant groups must deal with during acculturation. The first issue is “cultural maintenance,” the degree in which one’s cultural identity is considered important to them and their efforts in preserving it. The second issue is “contact and participation,” the degree in which they should interact with unfamiliar cultural groups (Berry, 1997). With the two issues considered, Berry’s acculturation model (See Figure 1) proposes four-dimensional acculturation strategies. The two issues act like the x-axis and y-axis line on the model as both are measured by positive or negative (yes or no) answers. When individuals of non-dominant groups answer either yes or no to the issues mentioned above, they are placed in four of the listing categories: Integration, Assimilation, Separation/Segregation and Marginalization (see Figure 1). Integration refers to the individual’s decision to maintain some aspect of cultural identity, meanwhile participating in a larger society with other cultural groups. Assimilation refers to the individual’s decision to leave their own cultural identity for a connection and complete merge of another culture. Separation/Segregation refers to the individual’s decision to homogenize

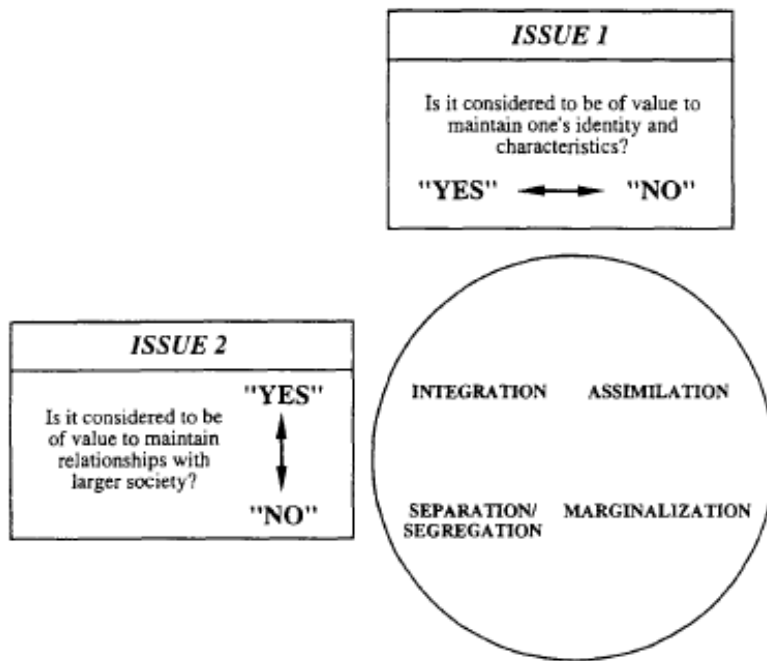


Fig. 1: Acculturation Strategies.

Reprinted from "Immigration, Acculturation and Adaptation," by J.W Berry, 1997, *Applied Psychology: An International Review* 46(1), p. 10. Copyright 1997 by International Association of Applied Psychology.

Berry specifies that the four acculturation model strategies above can also be used to assess dominant groups as well. However, the model was implemented and established for the study of non-dominant groups with the idea that they have the "freedom to choose how they want to acculturate" (Berry, 1997, p. 10). On the other hand, this is not always the case. Dominant groups have historically controlled certain ideas of acculturation and stratified the decision and choices to acculturate for non-dominant groups. Berry emphasized that one of the biggest fallacies about non-dominant groups acculturation process is their refusal to integrate. Rather, dominant groups have forced segregation and assimilation on non-dominant groups (Berry, 1997). It is important to emphasize that Berry's model portrays the idea that through integration, individuals from non-dominant groups can maintain their cultural identity while being acculturated. Although this is a hopeful and optimistic conception, a limitation to this literature is the lack of explanation in how

themselves with their own cultural group and identity while avoiding other groups. Lastly, marginalization refers to the forced loss of cultural identity through the enforcement of others and the discrimination of the individual's identity (Berry, 1997).

these factors are possible. In other words, if non-dominant groups can acculturate to their host country, would this be at the expense of cultural and or ethnic identity? Along with this notion, Berry refrained from elaborating the impact acculturation has on generations of non-dominant groups. Would one specific generation of non-dominant groups be more acculturated than the previous? If so, what were the stratification that held the older generation back from acculturating? Lastly, Berry's literature suggested that acculturation is an individual choice and decision. However, the impact of these decision was not specific nor did Berry imply any social stratification that can prevent individuals and non-dominant groups to acculturate.

Overtime, literature on acculturation has become static in the approach of acculturation model strategies as suggested by Berry and other scholars. Current approaches to acculturation maintains a "one size fits all" concept that has distorted and marginalized the experiences of certain immigration groups (Schwartz et al. 2013). For example, cultural identity is used to measure the degree of one's process and decision to acculturate as suggested by literature. Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga and Szapocznik (2013) argue that culture has become too broad of a subject for scholars to measure acculturation. Their literature explains that culture and ethnicity, two imperative terms in the subject of acculturation have been loosely used by existing literature to measure acculturation. First, the authors emphasized that culture is neither static nor monolithic. A group's culture changes over time, whether or not that group has migrated to a different location. Second, culture is not always identical with nations or national boundaries. In any nation, different cultures thrive within it (Schwartz et al. 2013). Schwartz and his associates reiterates with other published literature that when ethnic minority integrate with their host country's culture, they still identify with their ethnic background.

Due to the differences of cultural backgrounds and ethnic identity among immigrant groups, the literature also emphasized that acculturation models lack the inclusion of social stratifications and cultural/ethnic characteristics of immigrants and migrants. These characteristics are essential to understand their acculturation experiences. Nonetheless, Schwartz and his associates dismantle the concept of acculturation by redefining and affirming the roles of immigrant/migrant type, ethnicity and cultural similarities. Schwartz et al. (2013) argue that immigrant/migrant type is crucial and must be considered when studying acculturation. By reiterating the works of other scholars such as John Berry, immigrant/migrant types were categorized under: Voluntary immigrants – individuals who chose to leave their country in search of economic opportunities, marriages, employment, or to join family members who have immigrated before them. Refugees – those who are forced to leave their country and are displaced by war, political/religious/ethnic persecution, or natural disasters. Asylum seekers – those who fear of persecution and violence and chose to seek sanctuary in a different country. And lastly, Sojourners – individuals who chose to temporarily relocate to a new country with intentions of going back to their homelands. An example of this includes international students, seasonal workers, and business professionals (Schwartz et al. 2013).

This literature stresses the fact that the identity of the immigrant/migrant as well as their skills affects their experience with acculturation. Migrants who hold professional degrees and careers such as doctors, engineers, and scholars are more likely to be welcomed with open hands by the host country. Meanwhile, refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, and those who are undocumented from lower socioeconomic status are shunned and faces discrimination, racism and social stratifications such as wealth, health and educational disparities (Schwartz et al. 2013). These stratifications impose barriers to the life and acculturation process of the groups above.

When faced with rejection and discrimination by the host society; refugees, immigrants/migrants have more trouble in integrating into the practices, values and identity of the receiving culture. Furthermore, the literature also points out that the trauma experienced by refugees and asylum seekers dramatically impacts their ability to acculturate and adapt to their new country. The discrimination against first generation immigrants is transmitted into the next generation as well. As Schwartz et al. (2013) explain, “Even the children of ethnic minority migrants may not be accepted as full member of the receiving society, which suggest that acculturative stressors and discrimination may remain salient beyond the first generation” (p.6). Like an inheritance from the first generation to the next, regardless of transgenerational differences and experiences, where discrimination is present, the process of acculturation may remain difficult for the next generation.

***Ethnic Identity:***

It is all too often that ethnic identity is merged into the concept of acculturation. It is imperative to separate the two subjects respectively. Acculturation focuses on the behavioral changes and practices that are adopted by an individual from their “host -country,” whereas, ethnic identity involves a sense of belonging and attachment (Cheryan, Tsai, 2007). As conceptualized by Phinney (1990), ethnic identity involves the individual’s exploration of their ethnic group and what it means to him or her. Along with this, the individual must feel a collective attachment and maintain values from their ethnic group. An individual’s ethnic identity must be explored and affirmed by their own right. When one has affirmed their allegiance to their ethnic identity, positive psychosocial outcomes follow. One study indicated that individuals have an increase of self-esteem and subjective wellbeing when ethnic identity is affirmed (Umaña-Taylor, Gonzales-Backen, & Guimond, 2009).

Phinney and Ong (2007) explained in detail that exploration of one's ethnic identity is defined as learning and "seeking information and experiences relevant to one's ethnicity" (pg. number). Affirmation is the commitment and attachment one feels towards their ethnic identity. The sense of peoplehood found within a collective group is important for an individual's quest towards ethnic affirmation. Exploration and affirmation is often confused with behavior. Although behaviors can be expressed through identity, Phinney and Ong (2007) reiterate that ethnic identity is an internal composition that is relevant and exists without the accommodations of behavior as behavior has been exclusive with the study of acculturation. Nonetheless, behavior and acculturation must be separated from ethnic identity.

As stated above, the concepts of ethnic identity and acculturation are distinctive from one another. However, literature has suggested that both acculturation and ethnic identity are relative to one another as both theoretical frameworks have been practiced by immigrants, especially first generation immigrants; children/decedents whose parents immigrated to the host country. Phinney (1990) argues that members of immigrant minority groups can have either strong or weak identifications with their ethnic background and the mainstream culture. This does not suggest that they have a weak relationship with the "dominant culture" or with their own heritage. However, other scholars have countered this by suggesting that generational differences impact one's relationship with ethnic identity and acculturation. In other words, in later generations of immigrants, there is a decline of ethnic identity and an increase in acculturation. Phinney (1990) is quick to point out that literature on this has not been definitive as other literature suggested the same ideas but found that within certain groups, regardless of generational differences, individuals continued to maintained their ethnic identity.



In order to fully understand the mutually inclusive relationship between acculturation and ethnic identity, Cheryan and Tsai (2007) narrowed their case study to Asian Americans. Building off of Phinney and works of other scholars, Cheryan and Tsai (2007) state that within Asian Americans, Asian ethnicity is a degree in which individuals view themselves as members of a specific Asian group. In their study, they found that Asian Americans who have moderate to strong affirmation of their ethnic identity have an increase in positive mental health as well as self-esteem. However, foreign born Asians in America found it difficult to maintain connection with their Asian heritage as they are adjusting to their new cultural environment. The literature suggests that Asian ethnic identities stands as a protection for foreign-born Asians in comparison to their U.S-born Asian counterparts. This does not mean that Asian Americans resists their own Asian ethnic identity and heritage, rather, the authors concluded that American born Asian can be more acculturated to both their own Asian identity as well as their American identity. U.S-born Asians balances their two identities as Asians and Americans simultaneously. Asian Americans are acculturated with their American identity by integrating with American culture, meanwhile holdings onto their ethnic identity. This is a desirable trait for Asian Americans to maintain (Cheryan & Tsai, 2007).

Another study revealed that the relationship between acculturation and ethnic identity on emotional well-being were negatively correlated to Asian Americans. The findings from this study suggest that, to a low to moderate degree, the level of ethnic identity decreased while acculturation increased (Yasuda & Duan, 2002, p.14-15). This is not to say that acculturation causes the loss of ethnic identity. The low to moderate level of relationship between acculturation and ethnic identity indicates that the process of acculturation did not produce an equal level of ethnic identity loss (Yasuda, Duan, 2002). The literature suggests that it is possible to maintain the two identities.

When an Asian American affirms with their Asian ethnic identity, it does not preclude them from having a strong American identity or in vice versa. Both acculturation and ethnic identity can be developed inclusively but, a certain degree of ethnic loss is possible and is expected to occur.

Literature on ethnic identity and the relationship with acculturation has concluded that both frameworks are mutually inclusive. Both frameworks can be developed at the same time by immigrant minorities base on generational differences. The literature from both Cheryan and Tsai (2007) and Yasuda and Duan (2002) narrowed their study to the acculturation and ethnic identity development of Asian Americans. Although this is leap from classic ethnic and acculturation studies, to group Asian Americans as one monolithic conception is not representative. All Asian Americans do not have a shared ethnic identity nor do they share a common history. The authors failed to suggest that different Asian ethnic groups have been in the United States much longer compared to other Asian groups. For example, East Asians, such as the Japanese, Chinese and Koreans have historically been immigrants to the United States well before World War II. Meanwhile, Southeast Asian groups such as the Cambodians, Vietnamese, Lao, and Hmong immigrated later to the United States during post-Vietnam War. Furthermore, diaspora groups were not categorized nor were they mentioned within the literature.

In a less uniform approach, Kula and Paik (2016) analyzed the post-war acculturation and education process of Southeast Asian refugee communities. Using historical analysis as their method, the scholars linked the acculturation and ethnic identity process of Vietnamese, Laotian/Hmong, and Cambodians to their education achievements. The main framework implemented by this study consists of four keys: a) government policy – policies that affects the wellbeing of groups, b) social reception – the prejudice level against a group, c) co-ethnic communities – the “strong” levels of professionals and highly educated individuals of a group, and

d) barriers and opportunities – types of barriers or opportunities granted to a group (Kula & Paik, 2016). The study hypothesized that the more positive the historical context of a group's background and arrival to the United States will reveal a greater chance of positive affirmation of acculturation and ethnic identity, which will affect positive results in educational outcomes. On the other hand, the more negative the historical context of the group, the more barriers to acculturation and adaptation will result in lower educational outcomes.

The literature found that the historical experiences of the Vietnamese, Cambodian and Hmong have created stratifications for them to acculturate into American society. The Vietnamese were the first group of the three to immigrate to the U.S during and after the Vietnam War. Of the three groups, the Vietnamese had the advantage of their early arrival with “enough refugees with professional, business, and entrepreneurial experience to create a strong co-ethnic community to assist later waves of Vietnamese immigrants” (Kuala & Paik, 2016, p.18). Nonetheless, the acculturation and adaptation as well as the ethnic identity affirmation process presented a positive mark for the Vietnamese. The Hmong and the Cambodians on the other hand, are not as fortunate. The authors suggested that the trauma experienced by the Cambodians during the Pol Pot regime had created negative marks on their ability to acculturate and adapt. The Hmong on the other hand suffered great loss and trauma from their alliance with the American government during the Vietnam War and Secret War. Along with that, the Hmong were “by far the least experienced with modern society,” thus making cultural adaptation difficult (Kuala & Paik, 2016, p.17).

All three groups suffered from the “model minority” stereotype which professed the idea that Asians were well off financially, economically, educationally and socially. With the “model minority concept, Asians were merged together, which distorted the historical context and the inequality experienced by Southeast Asians in comparison to their East Asian counterparts. An

example of this was presented through the educational system where teachers categorized Hmong students as either delinquents or perfect subjects of the model minority that did not require their help (Kuala & Paik, 2016). The historical context of these three groups provided an important and rare perspective on acculturation and ethnic affirmation within immigrant minority groups. The literature presented by Kuala and Paik signifies the importance of historical analysis in conducting acculturation and identity research that does not merge or cloak ethnic and cultural groups together as a massive population.

In measuring acculturation within the Hmong in the United States, Lee and Green (2011) studied three generations of Hmong. The three different generations included: Generation 1, those who came to the U.S when they were older than 12 years of age, Generation 1.5, those who came to the U.S between 3 and 11 years of age and Generation 2, those who came to the U.S at the age of 2 and lower or were born here. Using Berry's (year) East Asian Acculturation Measure (EAAM) model, this study found that generation 1.5 were more likely to hold onto traditional values and culture, whereas, generation 2 can easily adjust to the different cultural norms within both the Hmong and American culture. Generation 1, on the other hand had experienced more difficulties in acculturating to American culture. However, regardless of the generational differences, the Hmong have adapted gradually well in the United States (Lee & Green, 2011). The samples of Hmong individuals were categorized into three separate groups of acculturation levels. The most integrated groups were younger Hmong individuals who had lived in the United States longer, had higher levels of formal education and the ability to speak, read and write fluently in English. This literature concludes that as the Hmong population in the United States experienced greater levels of acculturation overtime, members of the Hmong diaspora in the U.S will gradually lose the ability to understand their own culture, history and language (Lee & Green, 2011). In other words,

the affirmation of ethnic identity within the Hmong will become bleak. Although this is a well implemented assessment, the authors did not measure ethnic identity affirmation in their study.

All the literature on ethnic identity has proposed that through acculturation, it is expected to lose a small portion of ethnic identity. However, these literatures lacked the inclusion of historical analysis and the concept of historical trauma of immigrants, especially diasporic communities. The historical context as presented by Kuala and Paik (2016) was a step to understanding the internal context of groups but historical trauma was excluded, thus, making the measurement of both the simultaneous development of acculturation and ethnic identity one sided towards the perspective of researchers and academics. In other words, the voices and the stories of participants were left out and replaced by numbers.

## **HYPOTHESIS 2**

From Berry to Phinney and many other scholars, acculturation has been an applied model measured by individual and group experiences in the host country and culture. Acculturation has been explained as a behavioral conception of immigrants' adaptation to their new home and way of life. The literature has merged both acculturation and ethnic identity into one static measurement but as time progressed, the two subjects were separated yet, the measurements of ethnic identity and acculturation were deemed mutually inclusive from one another. However, it has been introduced that as experts narrow down the specific groups and population used to measure ethnic identity and acculturation, the two subjects can co-exist and be practiced at the same time by generations of immigrants. Through this concept, it was expressed that the practice of acculturation would result in a loss of ethnic identity. The literature on acculturation and ethnic identity have portrayed the outcomes and consequences acculturation has on ethnic identity affirmation. However, the literature has created a gap in which historical trauma and the context of groups were

not considered. As a result, this second study will explore the relationship between historical trauma and ethnic identity in the Hmong diaspora.

Furthermore, I derived the following hypothesis:

*H2: High levels of ethnic identification is correlated with high levels of historical trauma within the Hmong diaspora.*

### ***Nationalism and Historical Trauma Through the Lens of Gender:***

As mentioned earlier, historical narratives of the Hmong and their involvement in the Secret War hold patriarchal and masculine perspectives that overlook the role of Hmong women. In fact, the voices of Hmong women and their struggles with their collective memory of the war have been marginalized and, in some cases, ignored. Because of this, Hmong national identity must also be viewed through the lens of gender. In fact, the field of international relations (IR) and global politics have lacked the perspective of feminist theory which provides a gender lens that can help reconstruct policies and bring forth the experiences of certain marginalized groups (specifically women) who do not fit into the traditional audience of international relations and global politics. As Cynthia Enloe (2010) emphasized, international relations and global politics need to make “feminist sense.” Tickner and Sjoberg (2011) added that by making “feminist sense,” IR feminist theory has aimed to place women and gender in global politics and reveal research that has marginalized the role of gender and women within global politics and IR discipline.

Only a small number of studies have applied a gender lens to the study of nationalism and ethno-nationalist movements. For example, by analyzing case studies from colonial and post-colonial periods, foundational work by Enloe (1989) has shown that women serve as the symbol of the nation. The domestication of women’s role as mothers and producers of the future generation, allowed men to portray women as victims that needed protection from the oppressor.

Enloe (1989) describes the portrayal of women in Nationalist movements to end colonialism as “...a symbol of the nation violated, the nation suffering, the nation reproducing itself, the nation at its purest” (p.87). Thus, men could fight for the motherland to protect their women and the wellbeing of the nation, while women stayed behind to maintain the purity of the nation. When the purity of women is polluted through violence from the oppressor, the nation becomes contaminated and the masculinity behind nationalism and nationalist rhetoric is also violated (Enloe, 1989).

According to Enloe, under colonial rule, native women of a certain group have had to navigate between the identities of “loyalist” or “traitors”. These identities were conceived from the nationalist narratives of men. For example, Enloe described the dilemma that Korean women had faced during Japan’s occupation of Korea. Some urban Korean women deviated from their traditional assigned gender roles by becoming the “modern New Women” (Enloe, 1989). This was achieved through their travels and study in Japan, the colonial ruler of Korea. This trend was not favored by nationalist Korean leaders and Korean men as they saw this as a deviation and a blow to the ideals of Korean traditional feminine purity. The Korean New Women were an insult to the Korean nationalist rhetoric and national identity for their participation in the oppressor’s view in the role of women in the nation. Nonetheless, the Korean New Women were labeled as “traitors” by Korean nationalist, meanwhile Korean women who represented the traditional ideals of femininity were seen as Japanese “loyalist” to the Korean national identity (Enloe,1989).

Nationalist movements have historically taken a patriarchal undertone when defining nationalist rhetoric and unity. Gender roles and gender ideals were components that altered national identity and nationalism (Enloe, 1989). Enloe argues that the early movements of nationalist groups encouraged equality between men and women, prescribing that both genders have an impact in the national movement towards freedom and sovereignty from their colonial

oppressor. However, patriarchal ideals began to dominate nationalist movements in order to stay unified. The Communist Vietnamese nationalist movement during the early days of its struggle against the French would follow this method to unite the country. Vietnamese women were encouraged to become educated by their male nationalist leaders. In doing so, Vietnamese women became another component to the struggle against the French. A shared idea between men and women would strengthen the nationalist movement. However, women saw early on that the relationship between men and women was deeply divisive. In a Communist Conference, Vietnamese Nationalist leaders ordered women activists to omit reports of spousal problems from national reports. Releasing “private” issues between husbands and wives into the public sphere would shatter unity and the deviation from “common memories of oppression” would disrupt nationalism (Enloe, 1989). This message from male leaders provided that women were not only victims of the oppressive colonizer but also victims to the dominating male figures within the domestic and public spheres.

Gender expectations between men and women within the nation became a tool to marginalize individuals “without agents”, most prominently, women. Ignoring the experiences of women in nationalist movements upholds “masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope” (Enloe, 1989, p.94) and it became the essential and fundamental ideals of nationalist rhetoric and leadership. In essence, Enloe’s work provides a perspective that scholars on nationalism seldom explore. Nonetheless, adding a gender component provides a different perspective that is essential to the discipline of International Relations.

In continuation of the theoretical literature on nationalism and its correlation to historical trauma, Hyunah Yang’s work *Re-membling the Korean Military Comfort Women: Nationalism, Sexuality and Silencing*, conceptualized that the *Chongsindae* (Korean Comfort Women) issue



have always been a debate controlled by patriarchal rhetoric rather than a unity of healing for the women who served as comfort women for the Japanese army during World War II (Yang, 1999, p. 124). Yang articulated, that South Korea's silence culture allowed the attention on the Chongsindae issue to become an ordeal within Korean and Japanese patriarchy. The intersection of gender, sexuality and nationality continued to stigmatize the Chongsindae issue as it becomes a masculinized debate, meanwhile the voices of the Korean Comfort women are marginalized.

Yang argued that South Korean's view the Chongsindae issue as a shared historical trauma among South Korean society. Although it is considered a shared trauma, it is not interpreted with the same unity that creates a cohesive national identity among South Koreans. Korean Comfort Women were silenced by the stigmatization of the subject as it was a hard hit to the masculinity of Korean men. Korean men saw the Korean Comfort Women issue as the remnants of their Japanese colonizer's "dirty sperm bucket" (Yang, 1999, p.130). Korean men felt as if Japanese men took away their masculinity by raping their Korean women. This disrupted the idea of women being the holder of the domestic sphere while men go off to war to fight for the nation. When the domestic sphere is pillaged, the nation becomes broken and contaminated.

This notion that Japan had infested Korea with their Japanese heritage through Korean Comfort Women portrays a gendered nationalist identity. The rhetoric of this idea implies that the voices of Korean Comfort Women no longer applies to the Chongsindae issue, although they were the direct victims. Rather, the Chongsindae issue exemplifies "man talk" (Yang, 1999, p.130-131). Yang suggested that the male dominance of the Chongsindae issue creates a dichotomy within South Korea. The grievances toward Japan's army's abuse of Korean Comfort Women during World War II is not a united voice of a shared trauma as a whole but a gendered nationalist identity debate shared only between Korean men and Japanese men, while the Korean Comfort Women

survivors are silenced in the middle. Nonetheless, the national identity of the Chongsindae issue becomes gendered.

As Yang continues in her literature, when sexuality is included into the already gendered nationalistic rhetoric of the Chongsindae, the sexuality of Korean women no longer belongs to her, it belongs to the nation. When the Japanese took the sexuality of Korean Comfort Women, they also took away Korean national heritage and identity (Yang, 1999). With this, the “man talk” between Korean nationalism and Japanese nationalism becomes polarized with a masculinized identity. Enloe continued this argument by pressing that the Comfort Women issue portrayed Korean men as their inability to “protect” their Korean women from the enemies. The Chongsindae issue is a constant reminder to Korean men about their humiliation of not being able to protect their women as their masculinity was taken away by the Japanese (Enloe, 1989, p.93). Thus, the Chongsindae issue is a matter of Korean patriarchal and patrilineal loss, not a matter of rape and violation of Korean Comfort Women.

In the case of the Hmong, the actors and movers for a Hmong ethno-nationalist quest during French Indochina to post-Secret War have always been depicted as Hmong elites, specifically Hmong men who dominated political and military roles in modern Hmong history. Hmong women were cast aside as property of their fathers and future husbands. Hmong women were homemakers in the traditional Hmong patrilineal sense. Hmong women were considered without agency but under the protection of the Hmong men in their lives. The literature on Hmong male elites and their ambitions for independence is in an abundance. On the other hand, the role that Hmong women played in helping these Hmong male elites in obtaining power and pushing for a nationalist quest has been lost through the male and Western dominated narrative of Hmong history.

Mai Na Lee (2016) is perhaps the first Hmong woman scholar to explore the role of Hmong women as indirect political and economic influencers that empowered Hmong leaders from French Indochina and into the Secret War. Lee (2016) argued that the function of Hmong women as one of the essential providers of legitimacy to Hmong leaders was overshadowed by the “top-down” approach of Western historians on the Hmong and the Secret War. Lee stated that the approaches of Western historians monopolized the Hmong and the war as the only evident existence of the Hmong. Thus, reinforcing U.S imperialism and patriarchy due to the U.S’ role in Southeast Asia during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Lee, 2016, p.88). Lee used a bottom-up approach to analyze the rise of Hmong leaders such as Vang Pao. In her literature, Lee conceptualized Hmong women as important “political structurers”. Hmong marriage alliances gave ways for Hmong women to play an important role within the political frameworks of clan alliances. Hmong leaders married multiple wives from different clans to consolidate power within the Hmong in Laos. As such, Hmong women from powerful clans became the distributors of power for they had the internal role to provide their ambitious husbands support from their maiden clan as well as shape political agenda through obtaining rewards, title and honor for their husbands (Lee, 2016). This is not to be mistaken that Hmong women were purely assets. Though traditional Hmong culture hold patriarchal attitudes, the Hmong also believed and affirmed with the following notion: “*Niam tshuab ntuag, txiv qaiiv (khaiv) ntxaiv, Niam mloog txiv qhuab, txiv mloog niam hais.*” The wife is the loom, the husband hangs the thread; The wife listens to the husband’s lessons, the husband listens to the wife’s opinions (P. Lor, Personal Communication, March 10, 2017). In conclusion, the role of Hmong women in the domestic sphere has always been an important aspect to the political structure of Hmong men. However, due to the patriarchal norms of Hmong elites and their

consolidation of power, the significance of Hmong women has been overlooked and made less important.

In a more structural stratification of Hmong women and their experience of war, the narratives of gender-based violence experienced by Hmong women have been excluded from literature focused on the Hmong and the Secret War. In an unpublished dissertation, Xiong's study concluded that the lack of discourse and acknowledgement of the violence perpetrated against Hmong women is due to identity structures within the Hmong culture (Xiong, 2015). Hmong culture and tradition is passed through a paternal lineage. Xiong argues that the discourse on the Secret War glorifies the pride of Hmong men rather than portraying the violence that Hmong women faced. The Secret War narratives disregarded the violence because the kidnapping, rape, and mutilation of women and men, emasculated the Hmong's paternal culture. Thus, the silence of Hmong women and their experience with gender-based violence was due to humiliation, the fear of losing face and social pressure to romanticize Hmong women's experience in the war.

Like the many cases of gender-based violence during war, Hmong women faced the threat of losing their husband and son to military conscription and death. When the husband within a Hmong household dies from combat, it was expected for the oldest son to take his place in the battle field (Xiong, 2015). If both the husband and son die, the woman becomes victim to the patriarchal identities of Hmong culture. Xiong coins the two types of gender-based violence that Hmong women experiences during war, as physical and non-physical violence. The death of a Hmong woman's husband creates the opportunity for the woman and her remaining children to become ostracized by the husband's clan and thus they become vulnerable to the physical and non-physical aspects of gender-based violence (Xiong, 2015). Xiong identifies physical violence as abuse, rape and mutilation of Hmong women and men. The non-physical violence is social

pressure, discrimination, and marginalization against Hmong women who lost their spouse in the War.

Xiong's study is one the very few existing literatures that have consolidated historical and cultural trauma to identify the violence that Hmong women faced during the Secret War. Although Xiong acknowledges that patriarchy plays a major role in creating the lack of discourse on gender-based violence experienced by Hmong women, Xiong disregarded to stress the fact that there has always been a heavy male dominated discourse and view on the literature of the Hmong's involvement in the Secret War. Thus, it creates a bias in the topic which allows the opportunity to exclude the voice of Hmong women.

### **HYPOTHESIS 3**

The study of nationalism and historical trauma have always disregarded a gender lens as a proponent to explore the experiences of women in nation building. In fact, the male dominated narrative on nationalism and historical trauma help perpetuated the role of women in nation building as a domestic role. This attitude allowed the voices and experiences of women to be silenced by patriarchal narratives and discourses. As suggested by Feminist IR Theory, interpretations of nationalism and historical trauma are deeply gendered. Recognizing this, I propose the following hypothesis:

*H3: Gender influences the interpretation of historical trauma within the Hmong diaspora.*

## **Study II: Viewing Nationalism and Historical Trauma Through a Gender Lens**

Investigating Hmong nationalism and historical trauma through a gender lens emphasizes a new approach to deconstruct the identity and collective memories of the group from a less androcentric viewpoint. I encountered this male dominated rhetoric of war and nationalist identity during the process of collecting data. When launching a survey for this study via social media, I was given suggestions to modify my study by a Hmong man and a British man. The British man worked closely with the Hmong population in northern Vietnam. The Hmong in Vietnam do not share the same historical trauma or history of the Secret War with the Hmong in the Western Diaspora. Despite this basic geographic knowledge, this man continued, “Which nation are Hmong people expected to identify? As an outsider, I witness a very strong sense of identity to ethnicity. The why [“why” Hmong may lack nationalist identity] is surely obvious. Having a national identity involves an alignment with national culture. Surely, the Hmong do not have that.” This judgement from this non-Hmong man sparked a debate with another man of Hmong descent. The Hmong male proceeded to educate the British man on Hmong history and identity, meanwhile suggesting me to exclude and include certain topics about the Hmong into the study. I believe this was done in good faith but for the wrong reasons. As Enloe and Yang argued in their literature, the masculinity of this Hmong man may have felt the need to protect his fellow Hmong sister (myself) from the remarks of a male outsider who knew little of the historical context of the Hmong diaspora in the West. I was forced out of the conversation as these two men exchanged their machismo opinions. This anecdotal example is one of many that highlight the value of exploring Hmong nationalism and historical trauma through a gender lens, a perspective that brings the views and experiences of Hmong women to the center.

## METHODOLOGY

### **Participants and Procedures:**

This study utilized an online survey to gather data. The survey was distributed to Hmong students from universities and colleges in Minnesota (e.g., Hmong clubs at CSB/SJU, SCSU, and the University of Minnesota). Hmong community members from the Twin Cities area associated with Hmong organizations and a Hmong higher education social media group (i.e., MAIV PAC, ManForward, and Hmong College Student and Faculty Educational Networking) were invited through email and social media to complete the survey. Participants were encouraged to forward the survey to other Hmong individuals. Participants were informed that their answers and information will be kept confidential and anonymous before proceeding. The survey was written in English and was made available on the CSB/SJU Forms Manager. The survey instrument was open to participants for a duration of two weeks.

Before the study was implemented, the study protocol was reviewed and approved by the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University (CSB/SCJU) Institutional Review Board. Prior to launching the survey, 4 Hmong students (2 females, 2 male) from CSB/SJU were invited to participate in a focus group that evaluated the clarity of the survey content. The focus group was provided a paper version of the survey and was asked to answer the follow questions:

- 1) Are there any words in the questionnaire that you don't understand? If yes, please explain.
- 2) Are there any questions that you found offensive or inappropriate? If yes, please explain.
- 3) Are there any questions that you feel need further clarification? If yes, please explain.
- 4) Would you invite your friends and family to take this survey once it is polished and ready to distribute?

The feedback provided from the focus group was used to make any necessary modifications to the survey instrument before launching the survey. The modifications made to the survey as suggested by the focus group were minimal.

### **Measurements:**

The survey instrument consisted of three measurements adapted from the literature: Cultural Nationalism, Ethnic Identity, and Historical Loss. For each measurement, certain scale items were slightly modified to accommodate Hmong participants. The survey instrument ended with two open-ended questions and standard demographic questions (e.g., gender, year born, etc.) of the participant.

#### *Cultural Nationalism Scale:*

This scale was adopted from Karasawa (2002) and measures the level of national cultural identity of each participant. This scale has no center or neutral point as participants were encouraged to read each item carefully and indicate an answer. Response options ranged from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (4), all scores were summed, and higher scores on this 9-item scale ( $\alpha = .702$ ) indicated greater levels of cultural nationalism.

#### *Ethnic Identity Scale:*

This scale was adopted from Roberts, Phinney, Masse, Chen and Romero (1999) and measures level of ethnic identification. Like the previous measurement, this scale does not have a center or neutral point. Each participant was asked to read each item carefully and indicate how strongly they agree or disagree to each item. Response options ranged from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (4), all scores were summed, and higher scores on this 12-item scale ( $\alpha = .844$ ) indicated greater levels of ethnic identity.



*Historical Loss Scale:*

This scale was adopted from Whitebeck, Adams, Hoyt, and Chen (2004) and measures the level of historical trauma or historical loss experienced by the participant. The historical loss scale contains 10 statement items. Participants were asked to sincerely rate each item base on how often they think about the statement. Response options ranged from Never (1) to Several times a day (6), all scores were summed, and higher scores on this 10-item scale ( $\alpha = .909$ ) indicated greater levels of historical trauma. See Table 1 for overview of study measures and sample items.

Table 1. Study 2 Measurements (with Sample Items and Alphas)

	<b>Nationalism</b>	<b>Ethnic Identity</b>	<b>Historical Trauma</b>
<b>Alpha</b>	$\alpha = .702$	$\alpha = .844$	$\alpha = .909$
<b>Sample Item 1</b>	Affection towards Hmong history and its accomplishment is one of the most important aspect of being Hmong.	I feel strong attachment towards my own Hmong community.	Loss of homeland.
<b>Sample Item 2</b>	To be considered as a good Hmong person of the Hmong community, no one should criticize Hmong tradition.	I have spent time trying to find out more about my Hmong heritage, such as Hmong history, traditions, and customs.	Loss of family due to resettlement.
<b>Sample Item 3</b>	Every Hmong person should know about important Hmong leaders and their sacrifices for the Hmong people.	To learn more about my Hmong background, I have often talked to other people about my Hmong group.	Loss of a familiar leader(s).

*Open-ended Questions:*

The open-ended questions provided a chance for respondents to express their own experience and opinion on the effects of the Secret War, as well as the emotions they or their family members feel when talking about the war. The 2 open-ended questions asked the following:

- 1) In your opinion, has the Secret War affected the Hmong community in the United States?
- 2) Do you or your parents/grandparents often talk about the war? If yes, briefly describe the emotions you feel when talking about the Secret War with your family.

The questions were coded as *Yes* = 1; *No* = 2, if the respondents indicated that the war had an impact and if their family mentioned the war. Themes were identified through a discourse analysis of answers given by respondents.

## **RESULTS**

Overall, a total of 139 self-identifying Hmong Americans (M age = 27; female = 73%; male = 26%; other = 1%) across Minnesota responded to the survey. The fact that the survey was distributed to college/university students and other groups of Hmong via email and social media, respondents' education levels were recorded. Level of education ranged from high school (22%), some college experiences (34%), Bachelors of Art or Science (33%), and Graduate (12%). When asked about participants' birth country, a majority (80%) of respondents were born in the United States. Meanwhile the remaining respondents (20%) indicated that they were born outside of the U.S (mostly in Laos and Thailand). With this, language was take into consideration when reviewing respondent's results. More than half (86%) of the respondents indicated that they speak English and Hmong, roughly (8%) said they speak only English and a minority (7%) indicated that Hmong is the only language spoken at home. See Table 2 for overview of sample demographics.

Table 2: Demographic of Sample

(N=139)	N	%
<b>Gender:</b>		
Female	102	73%
Male	36	26%
Other	1	1%
<b>Age M (SD)</b>	27 (8.248)	---
<b>Education:</b>		
High School	30	22%
Some College (Current or AA)	47	34%
College (BA/BS)	46	33%
Graduate (or higher)	16	12%
<b>Country of Birth:</b>		
U.S	111	80%
Outside U.S (Laos, Thailand)	28	20%
<b>Language:</b>		
English and Hmong	119	86%
Hmong	9	7%
English	11	8%

**The Relationship between Historical Trauma with Nationalism in the Hmong Diaspora:**

As the first study concluded, historical trauma and nationalism are interdependent with one another. Thus, Hmong nationalism derives from the collective memories and historical trauma that the group has experienced over time. When exploring the different levels of historical trauma among the participants (n=139), a t-test was used to compare participants that were high on historical trauma versus participants who were low on historical trauma (DV). First, the participants were split into two categories: high levels of nationalism and low levels of nationalism (IV). With this, participants’ nationalism averages were compared on historical trauma levels. It was found that there was a significant effect for nationalism on historical trauma. Those who ranked lower on nationalism had lower levels of historical trauma in comparison to those that ranked higher on nationalism had stronger levels of historical trauma  $t(115.504) = -4.263; p \leq .001$ .

### **The Effects of Ethnic Identity on Nationalism and Historical Trauma in the Hmong Diaspora:**

When exploring the different levels of nationalism and historical trauma among the participants (n=139), a T-test was used to analyze participant's that showed higher levels on nationalism and historical trauma (DV). This analysis was used to test *H2: High levels of ethnic identification is correlated with high levels of historical trauma within the Hmong diaspora.* Participants were split into two categories: high affirmation of ethnic identity and low affirmation of ethnic identity (IV). With this, participant's ethnic identity affirmation was compared on nationalism and historical trauma levels. It was found that there was a significant effect for ethnic identity affirmation on nationalism and historical trauma. Those with lower affirmation of ethnic identity had lower feelings of nationalism and historical trauma. Meanwhile, those with higher affirmation of ethnic identity had stronger feelings of nationalism:  $t(128.146)=-6.987;p\leq.001$ , and historical trauma:  $t(126.428)=-2.074;p=.040$ .

### **The Effects of Gender on Nationalism, Historical Trauma, and Ethnic Identity in the Hmong Diaspora:**

When comparing the different levels of ethnic identity, nationalism, and historical trauma among a gender split category (female = 73%; male = 26%; other = 1%), a T-Test was used to analyze and compare the averages of the factors above. This analysis was used to test *H3: Gender influences the interpretation of historical trauma within the Hmong diaspora.* It was found that there was no significance or difference in the levels of ethnic identity, nationalism, and historical trauma among the different genders. According to the statistics taken from the test, the levels of ethnic identity affirmation, nationalism, and historical trauma was monolithic among the different genders identified by participants. Nonetheless, the statistical analysis of this test prescribes that gender did not influence a higher level of historical trauma or nationalism among the sample (n=139). However, it is imperative to note that the data was collected from an extremely small

sample of Hmong participants. Of the hundreds of thousands of Hmong who resides in Minnesota, only 139 samples were taken. Furthermore, the data collected is also skewed towards young and highly educated individuals as the survey was distributed in a way that cannot be access by the majority Hmong population. Thus, the open-ended questions from the survey was examined through qualitative means to find any gender differences.

### **Analysis of Open-Ended Questions:**

When exploring a gender split response to the open-ended portion of the survey, it was found that each participant's response to both the first and second questions alluded to different types of themes. Each question set had different themes. The first open-ended question set had a total of 5 themes: *Displacement*, *Loss of Family*, *Loss of Culture*, *Sense of Betrayal*, and *Loss of History*. The second open-ended question set had a total of 4 themes: *Emotional Response*, *Gender Narrative*, *Family Experience*, and *Questioning Identity*. Unlike the scale measurements above, the open-ended questions will be measured through a qualitative analysis. To measure the quantity of each time a theme was mentioned in the response, participants were first categorized based on gender. In question 1, there were 13 indications of *Displacement* from male participants and 38 indications from female participants. There were 6 indications of *Loss of Family* from male participants and 20 indications from females. There were 8 indications of *Loss of Culture* from male participants and 21 indications from females. There were 8 indications of *Loss of History* from male participants and 10 indications from females. Lastly, there was only 1 indication of *Sense of Betrayal* from a male participant, meanwhile there were 10 indications from female participants. The themes from question 2 followed a similar pattern. There were 17 indications of *Emotional Response* from male participants and 61 indications from females. There were 3 indications of *Gender Narratives* from male participants and 5 indications from females. There

were 10 indications of *Family experience* from male participants and 25 from females. Finally, there were 2 indications of *Questioning Identity* from male participants, while 0 females indicated the theme.

## DISCUSSION

### **Analyzing Nationalism, Ethnic Identity and Historical Trauma:**

Literature on nationalism and historical trauma suggests that nationalism effects the levels of historical trauma within a certain group. A strong affirmation of one's nationalist sentiment upholds strong levels of historical trauma. This portion of the study assessed the Hmong in the diaspora and their relationship with ethnic identity affirmation and nationalism levels with historical trauma. As expected, in the first test, the sample provide that Hmong individuals who showed higher levels of nationalism also showed higher levels of historical trauma. This finding reinforces the notion of the first hypothesis: (*H1: Historical Trauma shapes Hmong national identity/nationalism*) introduced earlier in the study. The results of the first test exemplify that nationalism and historical trauma within the Hmong diaspora are interdependent of one another. As Duara (1995) and Wang (2012) argued, nationalism derived from the collective traumas of the people. When leaders continuously reinforce the traumas to gain nationalist sentiment, the historical traumas experienced by the group galvanizes the nationalist pride of that said group. This argument is prescribed towards the Hmong immigrants in the diaspora who lived through the war and witnessed leaders such as Vang Pao weaponize the historical trauma of Hmong statelessness for a nationalist campaign.

Despite what the literature on acculturation and ethnic identity entailed, this study proved that ethnic identity effects the historical trauma of the Hmong in the diaspora. The second test

revealed that higher affirmation of ethnic identity within the sample portrayed stronger feelings of nationalism and historical trauma. This finding reinforces the notion of the second hypothesis (*H2: High levels of ethnic identification is correlated with high levels of historical trauma within the Hmong diaspora*) introduced earlier in the study. One may ask, how the young and more acculturated sample of this study portrayed such high levels of ethnic identity, nationalism and historical trauma when they did not directly experience the war and political migration. For this, Zarrow's argument of transferential relationship becomes essential. Despite the direct experience of war and trauma experienced by the previous Hmong generation, the younger generation in the diaspora maintained the traumas experienced by their parents and grandparents indirectly. The stories of war, displacement and loss of family told by the older generation as expressed by the responses from participants created a relationship where the traumas were transferred from parent to child through oral history and storytelling. With this, the connection of "my ancestors, my nation, myself" as Zarrow presented in the literature pushed for the emotions of empathy and guilt carried by the younger generation in the diaspora as "my nation destroyed, my ancestors destroyed but I, myself am able to thrive because of my people's sacrifice." This sense of guilt, appreciation and gratefulness described by the younger generation in the diaspora has perhaps become the new calling for a strong ethnic identity or ethno-nationalist pride.

### **Analyzing Nationalism, Ethnic Identity and Historical Trauma Through Gender:**

The statistical assessment on the gender split averages of ethnic identity, nationalism, and historical trauma indicated that there were no differences in the levels of the stated factors above among male and female samples. Thus, the statistical analysis of this test did not reinforce the validity of the third hypothesis (*H3: Gender influences the interpretation of historical trauma within the Hmong diaspora*). As such, the opened-ended questions were analyzed qualitatively to

find a difference in historical trauma among the different genders. Of the 9 themes (5 from question 1, 4 from question 2) compiled from the two opened-ended questions, one theme stood out from the rest as a unique perspective on historical trauma. The theme *Sense of Betrayal* provided a different component to analyzing the historical trauma of the Hmong diaspora (See table 3 for participant responses). As indicated in the results section, there were more female indications of the theme than male indications.

When analyzing the responses that portrayed betrayal, a pattern revealed anger and a sense of “great disrespect” as one respondent put it. This sense of betrayal portrayed by respondents emphasized America’s lack of knowledge in their own government’s role in Laos in the 1960’s as well as academic’s marginalization of Hmong involvement with the CIA in the Vietnam and Secret Wars. This academic marginalization has left the Hmong out of history textbooks. One Hmong female respondent criticized, “I feel angry that Americans don't even know this important piece of history that's left out of textbooks. It's as if my people [Hmong] risked their lives and died for nothing.” Academic’s marginalization of the Hmong’s role in the war serves a double standard. That is, the literature or books published on the Hmong and the Secret War by white male authors often make it as if the Hmong only came into human existence because of the war in Southeast Asia. Yet the Hmong are not mention in America’s history textbooks. The marginalization of the Hmong’s involvement in the war goes beyond academics. In fact, this marginalization has spilled over into U.S policies. Although, the U.S citizen naturalization process for Hmong Veterans and their families was made flexible, courtesy to Minnesota Senator Bruce Vento’s authorship and the bipartisanship of the 106<sup>th</sup> Congress (Hmong Veterans’ Naturalization Act of 2000). Still, Hmong veterans and their families do not enjoy U.S veteran status benefits like Filipino soldiers in World War II.



Table 3. Participant’s Response Base on “Sense of Betrayal” Theme

Respondent #	Gender:	Q1: In your opinion, has the Secret War affected the Hmong community in the United States?	Q2: Do you or your parents/grandparents often talk about the war? If yes, briefly describe the emotions you feel when talking about the Secret War with your family.
Respondent 103	Female	Yes, the Secret War has greatly affected the Hmong community in the United States. Many Americans don't even know the Hmong sacrifice, my family's sacrifice, fighting for America's war. It greatly pains me to see Hmong people treated as insignificant and just another Asian minority that settled in the U.S. They don't know so they give us great disrespect.	Yes, both my parents and my grandmother talk about the war. When they do, I feel so grateful. My grandmother was shot, my mother had almost died of starvation when she was only a few years old and my grandfather died fighting as a soldier. And when I hear these experiences, I'm forever grateful because without them, I wouldn't be here right now. I also feel pride that they've still endured through their struggles. I feel angry that Americans don't even know this important piece of history that's left out of textbooks. It's as if my people died for risked their lives and died for nothing.
Respondent 138	Male	The Secret War changed Hmong's lives forever. This space is not enough to describe the numerous significant ways in which the Secret War has affected Hmong lives. Hmong in the U.S. are, in many ways, still mourning their dead (tens of thousands died) from the Secret war. The saddest thing is that the U.S. government refuses to acknowledge Hmong veterans as "veterans," even though they now pay lip service to Hmong's ally ship during the secret war in Laos.	I talk to my dad about his experiences being a veteran of the secret war often. I feel sad and angry that Hmong soldiers were used and betrayed and left for dead by Americans, and then betrayed again and again after they became refugees.

It’s appalling to see that only the female participants in this study raised these concerns and anger of betrayal. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that Hmong women’s role and their story of the war has already been marginalized within both the Hmong community and academics. Not only that, but, much of the participants responded that their parents and grandparents, rarely speak of the war due to the trauma. If Hmong elders, regardless of gender rarely speak of the event, how can Hmong women speak of their own experience of the war? Even when they do, as Scholar Ma Vang emphasized, “[It’s not] to presume that Hmong women have not been speaking or talking. Instead, we have not been listening” (Vang, 2015, pg.30). Thus, empathy for the lack of acknowledgement of the Hmong’s role in the war was professed more by female participants as

their mother's and grandmother's story and existence in the war has gone unspoken within the Hmong community and unwritten in academia. The quantitative analysis of a gendered historical trauma, nationalist and ethnic identity within the Hmong diaspora does not do Hmong women justice nor does it even begin the scratch the surface of this untouched subject. Despite this, the literature of Enloe, Yang and Xiong and much more have shown that nationalism and historical trauma can be perceived differently base on gender. In the case of the Hmong diaspora, additional study on a gender interpretation of historical trauma is imperative. New studies must focus on the aging Hmong women who experienced the war (unfortunately this population was not represented in this study) first handed.

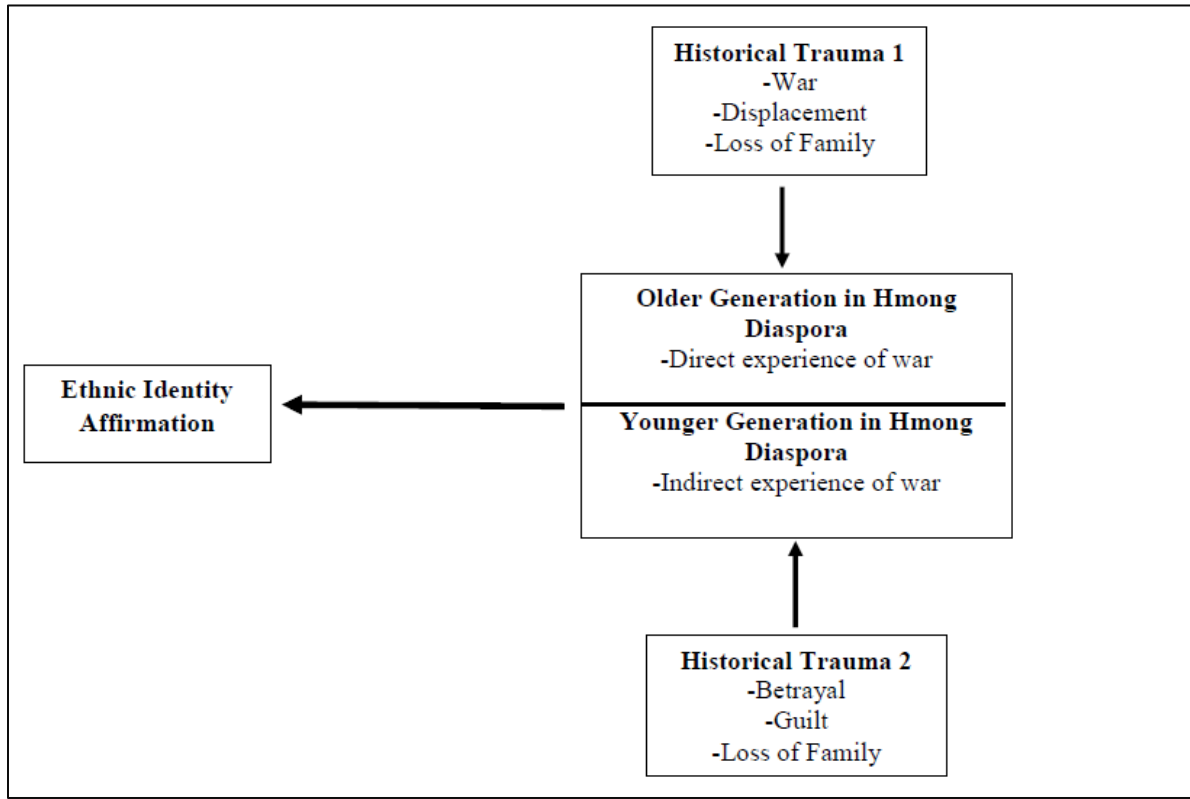
## **GENERAL DISCUSSION**

The first study implemented a top-down approach in which the elites and leaders of the Hmong were analyzed base on their actions and decisions to utilize historical trauma in a strategic way that will bolster Hmong nationalism and self-determination. The quest for Hmong nationalism has been a long and complex endeavor. The Hmong have witnessed the leadership of political secular elites like Lo Bliia Yao who stood as the de facto leader for the group under French colonialism. Meanwhile, Messianic leader Pa Chay demanded Hmong sovereignty by reviving the mythical belief and folklore of the Mythical Kingdom and the Hmong King. When both Bliia Yao and Pa Chay's reign came to an end, the charismatic Touby Lyfoung stood as the political broker between the Hmong, French and Lao. Touby believed that only education would liberate his people from oppression and poverty. The political broker found that obtaining territorial boundaries for the Hmong would be in vain as the Hmong lacked intelligentsias. Thus, Touby chose to occupy himself with national Lao politics, losing touch with his Hmong people in the mountains of Laos. The staunch military leader, General Vang Pao took his chance in taking a bite of the Mythical

Kingdom concept and pushed the Hmong towards modernity through war. His decision sent the Hmong in Laos into a diaspora community in the West.

The second study adopts a bottom-up approach to analyze nationalism, historical trauma and ethnic identity of the post-Secret War generation in the Hmong diaspora in the United States. It was found that those who score high in ethnic identity also score high on national identity and historical trauma. However, when measuring historical trauma from a gender split perspective, there was no significant difference. Thus, the open-ended questions were analyzed to find any gendered perspective on historical trauma. Utilizing a quantitative analysis, the data collected from the survey provide that despite the acculturation norms of what literature have suggested, the Hmong diaspora have relied on their historical trauma of war, displacement and loss of family to galvanize their ethnic identity and nationalist sentiment. This is expected in a diasporic community as the Hmong diasporic community is different. The diaspora of the Hmong and their political migration to the West represents the Hmong's displacement. With this, the displacement from their homeland of Laos is a historical trauma for the Hmong in the diaspora. The post-Secret War generation of Hmong individuals have continuously emphasized and witness their parent's and Hmong veteran's sacrifices in the war that it has created a new form of historical trauma. This form has moved beyond the Mythical Kingdom to betrayal, guilt and loss of family. With this new form of historical trauma, it has become the foundation used by the younger Hmong generation to affirm with their ethnic identity (See Figure 2). Although a gender differences of historical trauma was not revealed through this study, it is not to presumed that a gendered professed historical trauma of the war in Laos does not exist. As mentioned, this specific study needs more attention through qualitative means.

Fig. 2: Correlation of Ethnic Identity Affirmation with Historical Traumas Base on Generational Differences.



## CONCLUSION

### Limitations:

Despite the interesting and significant findings associated with nationalism, historical trauma, ethnic identity and gender within the Hmong diaspora, it is necessary to discuss potential limitations of this study. The historical context of the first study does not widely represent all Hmong communities in the world. It is important to note that the Hmong diaspora in the West have their own political and historical experiences that are different from the Hmong in China, Vietnam, and Thailand. The historical analysis within this study has excluded the pro-communist Hmong faction as their historical context is not widely known. Given the different use of methods from study I to study II, the data collected through the online survey is comprise of a small sample that does not represent the majority of the Hmong community in Minnesota and the United States.

Because the survey was administered online, most of the respondents were relatively young and educated individuals. Not only that, but, the survey excluded crucial members of the Hmong community. These individuals are older Hmong women and men who have witness the war in Laos and the political migration of the Hmong. The option to distribute a paper version of the survey was not considered due to the calculation of success rate in receiving completed survey forms. Another limitation is the uneven number of male participants to female participants for the second study. Female participants represented a great majority of the sample. Although the distribution of the survey was implemented in a way that did not bias any gender, the study collected less male participants.

### **Future Study:**

This research project is a pilot study implemented to explore and understand the relationship between the variables of historical trauma, national identity, ethnic identity, and gender. To further this study in the future, a second survey must include a more representative sample and in depth interviews with Hmong men and women in Southeast Asia as well as the United States. As mention earlier in this study, more study is needed to focus on the separate gender analysis and interpretation of historical trauma within the Hmong diaspora. It is critical that future studies emphasize the potential mental health and gender-based violence Hmong women experienced from the war and after the war. Academia's lack of attention to Hmong women voices in creating their own rhetoric and telling their own story have been devalued as a lesser perspective of war. Academia needs the incorporation of Hmong women in retelling the Secret War rather than following the patriarchal norms of male perspective. Academia can help open a path for the younger Hmong generation to understand their identity through different perspective. In all, studies on the Hmong beyond the Secret War is also needed.

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Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Exemption Letter



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 28, 2016  
Kalia Vang and Dr. John Friend

Dear Kalia and Dr. Friend,

This letter serves to formally acknowledge your request for exemption for the protocol titled *The Effects of Historical Trauma and Gender on National Identity within the Hmong Diaspora*. This project has been determined to meet the designated criterion for exemption from IRB review:

**Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior unless: (a) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; AND (b) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.**

This exemption expires in three years, on December 28, 2019. Please notify the committee if an extension is required beyond this time frame. If you wish to make changes to the research procedures that would affect the exempt status of the research, you must obtain IRB approval before initiating these changes.

Thank you for your proposal submission. We wish you success in your research.

Sincerely,

Robert Kachelski  
Associate Professor, Psychology Department  
Institutional Review Board Chair  
College of St. Benedict/St. John's University

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## COLLEGE OF ST. BENEDICT/ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

### National Identity in the Hmong Community

**INTRODUCTION:** Hello and welcome to this study on Hmong national identity. This study is being conducted by Kalia Vang, a student at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University, under the direction of Professor John Friend, her faculty research advisor. The purpose of this research project is to investigate perceptions and understandings of historical loss and national identity in the Hmong community. We are asking you to participate in this project because you identify as, or consider yourself to be, an individual of Hmong ancestry. We ask that you read this form before agreeing to be in the study.

**ACTIVITIES AND TIME COMMITMENT:** If you choose to participate, you will answer questions on this online survey. The survey should take you no more than 15 minutes to complete.

**BENEFITS AND RISKS:** There are no immediate, direct benefits to you in participating in this research project. But, the results will help researchers learn more about national identity in the Hmong community. We believe that there is little or no risk to you in participating in this project. If, however, you are uncomfortable or stressed by answering any of the survey questions, you may withdraw from the survey at any time without a penalty.

**PRIVACY:** During this project, your identity and your individual ratings will remain completely anonymous. We will keep data from the surveys in a secure location. Only we will have access to the data, although legally authorized agencies, including the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University, have the right to review research records. No one will link individual answers to one person. Instead, only group-level data like averages will be analyzed. If you would like a summary of the findings from our final report, please contact Kalia Vang at [msvang@csbsju.edu](mailto:msvang@csbsju.edu) or Professor John Friend at [jfriend@csbsju.edu](mailto:jfriend@csbsju.edu).

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:** Participation in this research project is voluntary. You can choose freely to participate or not to participate. In addition, at any point during this project, you can withdraw your permission without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the College of Saint Benedict or Saint John's University

**QUESTIONS:** If you have any questions, please contact Kalia Vang by email [msvang@csbsju.edu](mailto:msvang@csbsju.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the CSB/SJU Institutional Review Board chair, Bob Kachelski at [irb@csbsju.edu](mailto:irb@csbsju.edu). Please print or save this form for your records.

**STATEMENT OF CONSENT:** I attest that I am at least 18 years of age and have read the above information.

Please click to go to the next page if you consent to participate in this study. Thank you!

- Yes, I agree to take this survey
- No, I decline to take this survey

Appendix C: Survey Instrument

**Part 1A:** In this section, we would like to know how you feel about Hmong national culture. There are no right or wrong answers. We're just interested in learning more about your overall attitudes. Please click on the button that indicates how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
1. When I hear about the Secret War, I feel emotional.				
2. It bothers me when Hmong children cannot speak Hmong.				
3. To be considered as a good Hmong person of the Hmong community, no one should criticize Hmong tradition.				
4. Affection towards Hmong history and its accomplishment is one of the most important aspect of being Hmong.				
5. It is not important for a Hmong person to know their Hmong history and background.				
6. Every Hmong person should know about important Hmong leaders and their sacrifices for the Hmong people.				
7. I feel great affection towards Hmong, history, traditions and customs.				
8. When I attend the annual Hmong New Year and/or Hmong Freedom Festival, I feel pride in being Hmong.				
9. The uniqueness of Hmong culture is something I can take pride in.				

**Part 1B:** Please continue in this section by reading each statement and indicating how strongly you agree or disagree.

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
1. I have spent time trying to find out more about my Hmong heritage, such as Hmong history, traditions, and customs.				
2. I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own Hmong community.				
3. I have a clear sense of my Hmong background and what it means for me.				
4. I think a lot about how my life will be affected by being a member of my Hmong community.				
5. I am happy that I am a member of the Hmong community that I belong to.				
6. I have a strong sense of belonging to my own Hmong community.				
7. I understand pretty well what my membership in the Hmong community means.				
8. To learn more about my Hmong background, I have often talked to other people about my Hmong group.				
9. I have a lot of pride in my Hmong history and accomplishments.				
10. I participate in cultural practices of my own Hmong community, such as special food, music, or customs.				
11. I feel strong attachment towards my own Hmong community.				
12. I feel good about my Hmong background.				

**Part 1C:** As a Hmong American, please specify how often you think about the following statements below. It is very important for you to sincerely rate each statement. Of course, your answers are confidential.

	Never	Yearly or special time	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	Several times a day
1. Loss of homeland						
2. Loss of language						
3. Loss of family due to resettlement						
4. Loss of a familiar leader(s)						
5. Loss of self-respect						
6. Loss of way of life						
7. Loss of cultural practices						
8. Loss of traditional spiritual ways						
9. Loss of family ties because of war						
10. Loss of respect by younger generation for the elders						

**Part 2:** You're doing great! Please continue in this section by answering the following questions in the space provided.

- 1) **In your opinion, has the Secret War affected the Hmong community in the United States?**
  
- 2) **Do you or your parents/grandparents often talk about the war? If yes, briefly describe the emotions you feel when talking about the Secret War with your family.**

**Part 3. Finally, a few demographic questions for classification purposes only. Again, all answers are completely confidential. Thank you for your participation in this study.**

**Do you identify as Hmong?** Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

**What do you identify as?** Male\_\_\_\_ Female\_\_\_\_ Other\_\_\_\_

**Please tell us something about you:**

Year you were born\_\_\_\_\_

Language you speak at home\_\_\_\_\_

Country of birth \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years living in the United States\_\_\_\_\_

Highest grade level of formal education completed\_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you very much for your time and your input!**



## **FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS**

- 1) Are there any words in the questionnaire that you don't understand? If yes, please explain.
- 2) Are there any questions that you found offensive or inappropriate? If yes, please explain.
- 3) Are there any questions that you feel need further clarification? If yes, please explain.
- 4) Would you invite your friends and family to take this survey once it is polished and ready to distribute?

## Appendix E: Survey Invitation Letter

Hello,

My name is Kalia Vang and I am a political science major at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University. As part of my degree requirement, I am conducting an undergraduate research project. The purpose of my project is to investigate perceptions and understandings of historical loss and national identity in the Hmong community in the United States.

I am writing to you to request your assistance in distributing a brief survey to adult Hmong members and/or constituents of your organization. The survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete and all responses are confidential. By completing this survey, you and your members will be supporting important research on Hmong identity.

If you have any questions or concern about the content of this survey or my research project, please feel free to contact me by email: [msvang@csbsju.edu](mailto:msvang@csbsju.edu)

Thank you for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,

Kalia Vang