

The Centrality of Ethnic Community and the Military Service Master Frame in Hmong Americans' Protest Events and Cycles of Protest, 1980-2010

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Abstract

Protest is one political strategy by which marginalized groups can try to effect social change in society. As an ethnic group with a unique historical relationship with the United States government, Hmong former refugees have regularly engaged in protests in response to perceived political threats, political opportunities, or both. Using cataloged English-language newspapers, this study examines the characteristics, forms and collective action frames of 84 Hmong American-led protest events in the United States between 1980 and 2010. The evidence indicates that Hmong American protests emerged in the 1990s, coinciding with their formation of socioeconomically mobile ethnic communities, and continued to increase in frequency throughout the 2000s particularly in places with substantial concentrations of Hmong. Although most Hmong protest events involved demonstrations, these events varied greatly in terms of their targets and issues. During the past 30-35 years, Hmong American cycles of protest have produced three master frames: the refugee protection frame, the military service frame, and the civil rights frame. I argue that the military service frame represents one of the most enduring and, to date, most potent collective action frames in Hmong Americans' modern repertoire of contention. Immigrant groups' increasingly developed communities and their strategic use of collective action frames could have significant implications for their political incorporation in the United States.

Keywords: Protest, community formation, framing, immigrant political incorporation, Hmong Americans, Southeast Asian refugees

The Centrality of Ethnic Community and the Military Service Master Frame in Hmong Americans' Protest Events and Cycles of Protest, 1980-2010¹

In response to historical disenfranchisement, racial discrimination and other forms of exclusion and oppression in the United States, Asian immigrants and their descendants have engaged in domestic and non-domestic politics since their immigration to the U.S. in the 1800s but especially after World War II (Takaki 1989; Chan 1991). A growing body of research has examined Asian Americans' movements for civil rights throughout the 1960s, 70s and 80s (Chan 1991; Espiritu 1992; Wei 1993) and their participation in dynamic domestic and transnational politics since that era (Espiritu 1992; Lowe 1996; Ng 1998a; Saito 1998; Bonus 2000; Lien 2001; Nakanishi and Lai 2003; V \tilde{o} 2004; Aoki and Takeda 2008; Collet and Lien 2009; H.M. Lai 2010; Valverde 2012). These important works not only document Asian Americans' long history of engaging in collective political mobilization but also counter dominant narratives which portray Asian Americans as apolitical and apathetic communities.

However, more in-depth sociological research on contemporary Asian American groups and their politics is warranted. Because of the immense heterogeneity within the "Asian" racial category, it is important to pay attention to the unique histories and experiences of groups within this category. With few exceptions (of which more are described below), most past research has focused on the collective political actions of Asian Americans from Eastern Asia or Southern Asia rather than those from the war-torn countries of Southeast Asia. This is a serious and unfortunate omission for a number of reasons. First, Southeast Asians' experiences as displaced political refugees distinguish them from other Asian immigrants (Rumbaut 1989; Hein 1993; Zhou and Bankston 1998; Hein 2006). Second, given Southeast Asian refugees' unique political and historical relationships with the U.S. government and their embeddedness in a unique constellation of broad political contexts, shifts in political contexts over time may impact Southeast Asians refugees' collective interests and actions in unique and interesting, albeit understudied ways (Xiong 2013b). Third, the socioeconomic contexts into which Southeast Asian refugees were resettled during the mid-1970s, 1980s and 1990s differ significantly from those contexts into which other Asian immigrants were received in the mid-1960s and early-1970s (Bach and Carroll-Seguin 1986). Given Southeast Asians' unique pre-migration experiences and contexts of reception and given their embeddedness in unique broad political contexts, Southeast Asians' collective resources, interests, political narratives and political actions could look very different from those of other Asian groups. Moreover, understanding Southeast Asians' politics could shed light on not only Asian American politics but also the politics of immigrants in the U.S.

Since their arrival in the 1970s, the population of Southeast Asians in the U.S. has grown tremendously. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, by 2010, Vietnamese Americans comprised 10 percent of the total Asian American population. Although Cambodians, Hmong, and Laotians each made up less than two percent of the total Asian American population, they made up over three-quarters of a million people (768,870) combined. By 2010, Cambodians, Hmong, Laotians and Vietnamese comprised 14.5 percent of all Asians in the United States (U.S.

¹ I am grateful to the three anonymous reviewers of the *Hmong Studies Journal* for their insightful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

Census Bureau 2010). Given Southeast Asians' 40 years of history in the U.S., and given their rapidly growing and dynamic communities, it is surprising that Southeast Asian American politics remains an understudied subject.

Nevertheless, the lack of research on Southeast Asian Americans' politics does not mean they have been apolitical. As research has shown, Southeast Asian refugees have been engaged in politics since their international migration in the mid-1970s. For instance, scholars have documented the domestic as well as transnational politics of the Vietnamese American population since the 1970s (Kiang and Kaplan 1994; Espiritu and Tran 2002; Ong and Meyer 2004; Collet 2005; Dang 2005; Dang, Espiritu, and Thu-Huong 2005; Furuya 2006; Collet 2008). Similarly, Hmong Americans have engaged in domestic and transnational politics since the 1980s (Hein 2006; Doherty 2007; Lor 2009; C.Y. Vang 2009; N. Vang 2011; Xiong 2013b; Hein 2014; Hein and Vang 2015). Much less research attention has been paid to Laotian Americans' or Cambodian Americans' politics (Hein (2006) and Um (2006) are exceptions). The existing research suggests that protest is a significant political activity among many Southeast Asian groups. However, besides the study by Ong and Meyer (2004) of Vietnamese Americans' protest events, I know of no other work that has systematically examined protests events as social phenomena among other Southeast Asian groups.

My study contributes to the literature on immigrant politics in general and Asian American politics in particular by analyzing the contents of 84 Hmong American-led protest events in the United States between 1980 and 2010. Specifically, my study examines the characteristics of Hmong American protest events in order to (1) identify some patterns and changes in select characteristics over time in order to provide an understanding about Hmong Americans' cycles of protest, and (2) identify the major collective action frames that have appeared during these cycles of protest. I argue specifically that Hmong's increasingly developed communities, coupled with their experience using protest as a repertoire of contention influence the location of Hmong protests. Additionally, during the past 30-35 years, Hmong American cycles of protest have produced three master frames: the refugee protection frame; the military service frame; and the civil rights frame. The military service frame represents one of the most enduring and, to date, most potent collective action frames in Hmong Americans' modern repertoire of contention.

In the sections that follow, I begin by discussing what protests are and how they are related to social change and master frames. Next, I briefly discuss Hmong's historical experiences with protest. Then I describe the method and data I used to study Hmong American protest events. Using the data on Hmong American protest events, I examine several characteristics of protest events such as the forms of protest, frequency and location of protests, types of protest targets and kinds of protest issues. Then I discuss some regular patterns and changes in Hmong Americans' cycles of protest. Finally, I discuss the master frames that have emerged during these cycles of protest and consider the implications of these master frames for Hmong American's future protest movements.

Protest Events, Cycles of Protest and Master Frames

To better understand the significance of protest as a form of collective action, let us address a two-part question: What is a "protest" and what is its relationship to social change and

master frames? Della Porta and Diani (2006:165) define protest as the “*nonroutinized* ways of affecting political, social, and cultural processes” (emphasis in original). Similarly, Taylor and van Dyke (2004) define protest as “the collective use of unconventional methods of political participation to try to persuade or coerce authorities to support a challenging group’s aims” (p. 263). Taylor and van Dyke point out that although institutionalized political actors as well as social movement actors use protest as a means of political expression, protest “is perhaps the fundamental feature that distinguishes social movements from routine political actors” (2004:263). For “[if] there is a single element that distinguishes social movements from other political actors...it is the strategic use of novel, dramatic, unorthodox, and noninstitutionalized forms of political expression to try to shape public opinion and put pressure on those in positions of authority” (Taylor and van Dyke 2004:263). Indeed, definitions of social movements seem to draw directly on definitions of protest. In a classic work on social movements, John Wilson (1973:8) defines social movement as “a conscious, collective, organized attempt to bring about or resist large-scale change in the social order by noninstitutionalized means.”

But why has protest become a commonly used tactic among certain peoples or social movement actors wishing to achieve their desired goals? Although the poor and the subordinated are not the only ones who utilize protests (Meyer and Tarrow 1998), protest is one common tactic through which they can try to effect social change. Ong and Meyer (2004) contend that “protest has also become more common because it is harder for any group, much less a minority group with limited political resources, to get what it wants through conventional political activity” (p. 2). Why has it been more difficult for groups to get what they want? Ong and Meyer point out that “[i]ncreased political polarization in American politics, coupled with a long-established system of separation of powers, means that such difficulties are widespread; [hence], frequently groups on both sides of an issue resort to protest as part of their political strategy, even as they cultivate allies within mainstream politics” (2004:2). Groups who lack political and material resources usually must rely on other more influential social actors, such as state allies and the mass media, for help in bringing attention to and legitimating the social problems they have defined (McCarthy, Smith, and Zald 1996:291; Della Porta and Diani 2006). As Michael Lipsky (1968) points out, the success of protests depends on social movement actors’ ability to activate “reference publics” of protest targets to enter into the political arena. These reference publics, in turn react to protests in ways that compel target groups to respond favorably to protestors.

Precisely because the success of social movements depends on sustained concerted efforts of resource mobilization, strategic framing, and intelligent responses to political contingencies, social movement actors usually deploy protest not simply as one-time tactics but rather as strategies that develop and change over a period of time. One of Snow and Benford’s (1988) main theoretical concerns is clarifying the relationship between cycles of protest and master frames. Following the lead of Tarrow (1983), Snow and Benford (1988:211) define “cycles of protest” as “general movement activity within which specific movements are frequently embedded.” Consistent with Turner’s (1969:392) argument that during a major historical era, there are usually “one or two movements that colour the preoccupations and social change effected during the era,” Snow and Benford (1988:211-2) propose that cycles of protest generate collective meanings which, in turn, condition the collective action frames—meaning-making claims used by social actors to mobilize collective consensus and motivate action on

social problems—of future protest movements. According to Snow and Benford (1988:212),

First, the point at which a movement emerges within a cycle of protest affects the substance and latitude of its framing efforts. Second, movements that surface early in a cycle of protest are likely to function as progenitors of master frames that provide the ideational or interpretive anchoring for subsequent movements within the cycle. And third, movements that emerge later in the cycle will typically find their framing efforts constrained by the previously elaborated master frame. Such movements may add to and embellish that master frame, but rarely in ways that are inconsistent with its core elements, unless events have discredited it and undermined its mobilizing potency.

In sum, Snow and Benford (1988: 212) suggest that by examining cycles of protest over time, we can identify the emergence of certain master frames. Studying Hmong Americans' cycles of protest could enable us to identify the master frames which Hmong social actors have deployed. Identifying the master frames in Hmong Americans' cycles of protest may help us to better understand not only how Hmong frame specific claims during particular protest events but also how Hmong's political narratives and framing strategies have developed and changed over time as Hmong respond to new social problems in their dynamic political contexts. Moreover, an analysis of master frames could shed light on not only the discursive patterns of Hmong Americans' cycles of protest but also the potential trajectories of future Hmong protests as they encounter new contingencies brought about by local, national and broader political contexts.

Hmong's Past Experiences with Contentious Politics

All Southeast Asian refugees had, in one way or another, been directly or indirectly involved in and impacted by the civil wars in their former homelands of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. For instance, in the decades that preceded Southeast Asian refugees' mass exodus to western countries, they have had to take up arms against powerful military and paramilitary forces inside Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia (Moyar 206; Gunn 1988; Chandler 1991; Castle 1993). Many resistance activities could be grouped under the broad category of unconventional, non-institutionalized forms of protest. However, armed resistance is qualitatively different from ordinary protests in that they are often a part of routine everyday life. Significantly, armed resistance involves not just individuals but entire extended families, villages and large segments of the population within a country. Moreover, displaced peoples' participation in armed resistance is often carried out under extreme duress and the risks and costs associated with participation are vastly greater than those of ordinary protests. Nevertheless, as a result of these tragic experiences, many Southeast Asian refugees are quite familiar with various forms and consequences of contentious politics, including nationalist revolutions, resistance movements, and protests.

After 1975 when the Royal Lao government of Laos was replaced by the communist Pathet Lao government, Hmong refugees who made it into Thailand have been engaged in protests against the persecution of Hmong by the newly formed state, Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), from time to time. Beginning in the mid-1980s and lasting through to 2011, Hmong former refugees in Thailand frequently protested the Thai government's repatriation of Hmong refugees to Lao PDR (Hafner 1985; Currie 2008; N. Vang 2011; J. Vang 2014). Protestors in these non-violent protests against the Thai government used a variety of

tactics such as demonstrations, rallies and hunger strikes.² During the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, some segments of the Hmong refugee population were also engaged in underground armed resistance movements (Gunn 1990; Lee 2008; Tapp 2015). These resistance movements entailed attempts or missions to rescue relatives left behind or to defend against and engage with the Lao PDR forces who encroached upon lands where Hmong freedom fighters and their families were living. In short, years before they became refugees in the United States, many Hmong refugees have heard, seen or participated in protests and armed resistance. Through a combination of luck and opportunities that were never meant for Hmong, the first major group of Hmong political refugees made it to the United States in the spring of 1976. They were admitted under an expanded parole authority granted by the U.S. Attorney General upon the recommendation of the U.S. Department of State, which, in 1976, was responding to protests from well-positioned domestic actors as well as pressures from external political exigencies. Successive waves of Hmong refugees arrived between 1977 and 1995.³ During the past thirty years, Hmong Americans have formed numerous communities and their socioeconomic status has improved substantially. By 2010, 81 percent of all Hmong Americans were concentrated in three states: California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.⁴ It is within this context that we examine Hmong Americans' protest events and cycles of protest.

Data and Method

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

Because the aim of this paper was to describe the nature and characteristics of protest events rather than examine the motivations or characteristics of individuals, my unit of analysis is protest events. To compile a sample of Hmong American protest events within the United States, I used the online catalog of Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe. In March 2011, I searched using the Lexis-Nexis: Easy Search (Covering 1980 to today) feature, by "All News" as a search type.⁵ As my focus was on Hmong, the search word I used initially was: "Hmong." This search yielded at least 1,000 articles. I then narrowed the sources by searching for "demonstration, protest, petition, rally(ies), or strike" within articles. The narrowed search resulted in 616 articles. From these 616 articles, I classified each article into either a protest event or a non-

² Bangkok Post, "Protesters Gather for Mass Rally: Thousands Set to Converge on City," *Bangkok Post*, June 23, 1998. ; Agence France Presse, "Hmong Refugees on Hunger Strike in Thailand," *Agence France Presse -- English*, August 17, 2007.

³ The immigration of Hmong refugees to the U.S. virtually stopped by 1995. It was not until 2004 that the last group of Hmong refugees from Laos, who were living in Thamkrabok, Thailand, gained admittance to the United States.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2008-2010

⁵ Using the "Easy Search" as opposed to the Power Search feature of Lexis-Nexis Academic has the added benefit of filtering out hundreds (possibly thousands) of duplicate news articles. The presence of these duplicate articles resulted in over 3,000 sources when using the search word, "Hmong."

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

To be included in the sample, a protest event also needed to have taken place in the United States and have at least some Hmong participants, either as supporters or opponents, in the protest.⁶ Through this process of coding, I initially tabulated 82 protest events. Aware that at least two other protest events were missing from this list, I performed another search limited to two California news sources, the *Fresno Bee* and the *Sacramento Bee*. Upon inspection and another round of coding, this yielded two more protest events, bringing the total number of analyzable protest events to 84. The dates of these 84 Hmong American protest events ranged from February 3, 1990 to October 15, 2010. Then I extracted the relevant information from each protest event and coded them. As mentioned above, I coded protest activities using the same categories employed by Ong and Meyer (2004), but added the following extra categories: state allies; state actors or targets (non-allies); organizations (allies and non-allies); slogans and/or symbols used; the number of news sources covering the same event (same protest time & location); and whether Hmong/Laotian veterans participated or were used as protestors. The coding of protest activities was completed over a one-month period.

Given that this list of protest events includes only those protest events reported by the mainstream news media, it leaves out other unreported protest events or events reported in non-cataloged, non-English or "ethnic" newspapers.⁷ Furthermore, as Ong and Meyer (2004:6-7) point out, "Coverage of ethnic groups in mainstream media is generally biased toward food, crime, and festivals. As a result, political activities within the [ethnic] community may be underreported because they do not fit the stereotypical editorial framework."

Nevertheless, the use of events data using a single source (e.g., Lexis-Nexis Academic) could enable data reanalysis or verification. Furthermore, events data enable analyses that

⁶ In some instances, the same protest event (same time and location) was covered by multiple news sources. In these instances, I regarded the protest as a single case.

⁷ The *Hmong Times* (L & W Communications based in St. Paul, Minnesota; URL: <http://www.hmongtimes.com/>) is one of the most established Hmong American news sources and publishes both paper and online news content in English and Hmong languages and provides coverage of U.S. events as well as events around the world. A recent search in the *Hmong Times* under "all sections" of its Advanced Search feature using the keywords "protest," "demonstrations," "rally," and "petition" for the period from January 1, 2003 (the earliest that the search engine permitted) to June 1, 2011 yielded 62, 39, 41, and 29 articles, respectively. Many of these articles reported on protests carried out by other social groups instead of by Hmong Americans. The articles that reported on protests carried out by Hmong Americans generally report similar information found in mainstream newspapers.

compare events and changes in their participants and activities over time within a relatively bounded space. In other words, this kind of data also enable us to observe cycles of protest over time. The data on protest events over several decades rather than just several years afford us a view of the changing social and political contexts and changing political opportunities under which Hmong American collective action operated. Second, from events data, we can infer how Hmong's position within these historically-conditioned contexts has changed. Understanding Hmong's protest activities in particular political contexts may help us make sense of their mobilization strategies, including their framing activities, and their capacity to effect social change.

Analysis of Protest Events

Sources of News

Between February 3, 1990 and October 15, 2010, 22 unique newspapers provided coverage for 84 Hmong American protest events. Five newspapers accounted for 71 percent of the overall coverage: The *Fresno Bee* provided 18 articles (21 percent); the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press* provided 14 articles (17 percent); the *Star Tribune* provided 11 articles (13 percent); the *Associated Press* provided 9 articles (11 percent); and the *Sacramento Bee* provided 8 articles (10 percent). When the news sources are grouped by state of origin, three states provided about 76 percent of the coverage: California (37 percent), Minnesota (30 percent), Wisconsin (9 percent), and all other sources (24 percent). That these three states provided the bulk of the coverage on Hmong American protests is not surprising. U.S. Census decennial data show that during 1990, 2000, and 2010, these three states comprised 89, 83, and 80 percent, respectively, of all Hmong Americans in the U.S. Most Hmong American protest events also occurred in these three states. We turn to this next.

Frequency and Location of Protests

Between 1980 and 1989, no protest event was reported by the mainstream news media.⁸ The first reported protest event occurred on February 3, 1990 in Los Angeles, in which about 100 Hmong from Santa Ana, California demonstrated in front of then-Republican Senator Pete Wilson's office at the Los Angeles federal building.⁹ On this same day, three other reported protests also occurred in three different locations: St. Paul, Minnesota at the Capitol; Milwaukee, Wisconsin at Ziedler Park; and San Francisco outside of Senator Alan Cranston's office. According to one article, similar protests were also scheduled to occur on that same day in "Denver, Milwaukee, Minnesota, Sacramento, San Diego and Washington, D.C."¹⁰ Among just the reported protests, over 2,000 Hmong individuals, including many Lao Hmong veterans, were in attendance to (1) protest Vietnam¹¹ for backing "attacks on [Hmong] villages opposed to

⁸ It is worth repeating that lack of reporting does not mean that no Hmong protest occurred during this period.

⁹ Thanhha Lai, "Laotians Take War Concerns to Wilson: They Seek U.S. Help to Stop Communists from Bombing Villages," *The Orange County Register*, February 3, 1990.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Since July 2, 1976, Vietnam's official name is the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. From 1954 to 1976, North Vietnam was known as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. In 1976, with the unification of North and South Vietnam, the country became the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Source: U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Vietnam," Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Retrieved March 3, 2010 from: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/4130.htm>

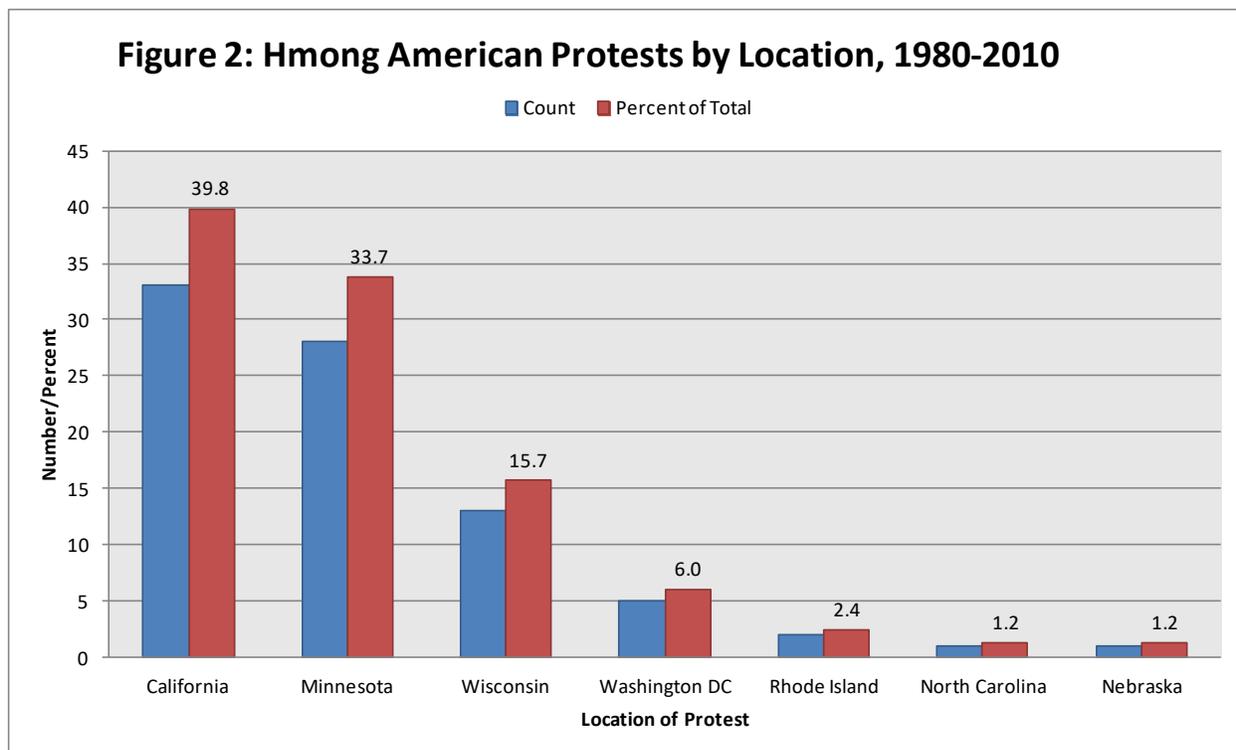
communist domination in Laos”; and (2) call “for international condemnation of the attacks and urge the United States to withhold funds from the Laotian government designated for anti-drug work and searchers for U.S. soldiers missing in action.”¹² Many more similarly organized protests against violence and human rights violations in the Lao PDR occurred throughout the 1990s and 2000s.

As Figure 1 shows, the number of Hmong American protest events steadily increased between 1990 and 2007. Specifically, whereas during 1990, there were only four reported protest events, by 2007, there were 15 protest events. The alternating peaks and troughs over time constitute stages in the cycles of protest.



The locations of Hmong American protest events reflect roughly Hmong’s population distribution in the United States. As Figure 2 shows, 33 (40 percent) of the 84 protest events took place in California. This is followed by Minnesota (34 percent) and Wisconsin (16 percent). Together, California, Minnesota and Wisconsin accounted for nearly 90 percent of all reported protest events. The other 10 percent of protests occurred in just four locations: Washington, D.C., Rhode Island, North Carolina and Nebraska. For instance, at least five protests occurred in Washington, D.C.; when demonstrations occurred there, they were often held outside of the Lao Embassy and the U.S. State Department. Between 1990 and 2010, an average of 1.57 protests occurred in California each year; 1.33 protests occurred in Minnesota each year; and 0.62 protests occurred in Wisconsin each year (not shown).

¹² Jodie DeJonge, "Southeast Asians Decry Torture, Killings in Laos, Seek U.S. Help," *Associated Press*, February 3, 1990.



Types of Protest Activity

Following Ong and Meyer's (2004) lead, I classify protest activities into four categories: demonstrations, symbolic or educational actions, institutionally-oriented actions, and transgressive actions. Some protest events clearly involved two to three protest actions. As such, these actions were counted as separate instances; consequently, the total number of activities exceed the total number of protest events. Demonstrations, including rallies and marches, comprised most (70 percent) of the activities. This is followed by symbolic and/or educational actions (14 percent), which ranged from making public statements about an issue to attending public meetings to show support for an issue. These tactics were aimed largely at educating others about an issue or showing support for one position or another. Institutionally-oriented actions made up 6 percent of the actions and ranged from petition signing or submission to making testimonies at public hearings, usually in support of a resolution.

Transgressive activities are actions that transgressed laws or contained violence. Transgressive actions include the action of about 200 Hmong men who stopped attending required English language classes in Fresno and Clovis, during their 1994 protest of the GAIN (Greater Avenues for Independence) program, an employment program for public assistance recipients. During other 1994 protests against the GAIN program, Hmong protestors trapped workers inside of Fresno County's welfare headquarters for about five hours and blocked public streets that surrounded private businesses.¹³ It also includes the actions of thousands of Hmong public school students who missed school in order to join the 2007 and 2008 protests against the arrest of General Vang Pao and nine other men at the Sacramento federal courthouse.

¹³ Alex Pulaski, "Frustrations Boil Over," *Fresno Bee*, May 4, 1994b.

Transgressive actions also include Hmong protestors' intentional occupying and blocking of the main entrances to and the hallways of the hearing rooms of Minnesota's House Health and Human Services Committee.¹⁴ With the exception of one protest event, no arrest or physical violence was reported in any of the 83 protest events. During one event, an arrest occurred after a melee broke out between a few Hmong protestors and Lao counter-protestors during a Hmong-organized protest against the U.S. government's establishing of normal trade relations with Laos.¹⁵ The demonstration itself was non-violent.

Table 1: Hmong American Protests by Type of Protest Activity, 1980 to 2010

Type of Protest Activity*	Count	Percent of Total
Demonstrations	70	71.4
Symbolic/Educational	14	14.3
Transgressive	8	8.2
Institutional	6	6.1
Total	98	100.0

*Some protests involve 2 to 3 protest activities. These activities were counted as separate instances; consequently, the total number of activities exceed the total number of protests.

Types of Protest Targets

Much of the grievances of Hmong American protests were directed at the governments of the countries from which Hmong former refugees migrated: Laos and Thailand (See Table 2). However, in at least a few instances, Hmong Americans organized or joined protests against the governments of Vietnam and Cambodia. That these Southeast Asian countries have often been the long-standing targets of their protests is not surprising given Hmong's experiences with the Second Indochina War. In that war, all of these governments and their military forces were active participants on one side or the other of a complex struggle between several world super powers, namely the United States, France, China, and the former U.S.S.R.

Hmong Americans still maintain mutually, interdependent relationships with their ethnic compatriots who "fell or were left behind" (*poob rau tom qab*) in Laos and Thailand. Specifically, these relationships are relationships among members of clans, lineages, and extended families. Since the early 1980s, a wide variety of material things, commodities, gifts, and ideas are regularly exchanged through these relationships. Whereas during the 1980s and early 90s, letters and audio cassettes were the primary media of Hmong's mutual

¹⁴ Linda Fullerton, "Is Minnesota Too Nice?: Many Would Like to Change Minnesota's Reputation as a Welfare Haven. But Can the State Afford the Solutions?: the Policy," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, January 29, 1995. ; Jean Hopfensperger and Chris Graves, "Hmong Group Leads Welfare Reform Protest at House Panel Hearing," *Star Tribune*, January 19, 1995.

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

communication, during the 2000s and thereafter, telephones and social media have become the normal means of communication. These exchanges have sustained the meaningful social ties between Hmong individuals or families. Hmong's protests in the United States against foreign governments or against U.S. foreign policies reflect their concerns for the wellbeing of other Hmong abroad and for their ongoing mutually, interdependent relationships with them.

Hmong protests were not limited to those held against foreign governments, however. As Table 2 shows, 27 percent of protests were targeted against federal departments or agencies of the U.S. government while 30 percent were targeted at U.S. state-funded entities. These state-funded entities included county departments of health and human services, governors' welfare programs, police departments, and public schools. The rest of the protests accounted for about eight percent of all targets and were aimed at private organizations, a Hmong-initiated formal organization, a non-Hmong individual, a Hmong individual, and the broad category of Hmong men.

Table 2: Hmong American Protests by Type of Target, 1980 to 2010

Target of Protest	Count	Percent of Total	Range in Years
Protest against Lao PDR Government (NTR and Human Rights violations)	18	21.4	1990 - 2010
Protest against United States Federal Government Departments/Agencies	23	27.4	1996 - 2010
Protest against Thai Government (Forced repatriation & Grave Desecration)	5	6.0	1991 - 2006
Protest against Vietnamese Government & Prime Minister Phan Van Khai	5	6.0	1990 - 2005
Protest against Cambodian Government (Violence in Cambodia)	1	1.2	1997
Within States of the U.S.			
<i>Protest against State-Funded Entities or Agencies:</i>	25	29.8	1994-2009
<i>Protest against Private Organizations (AAA, Rabobank, KQRS):</i>	3	3.6	1997-2007
<i>Protest against a Hmong organization (Hmong American Partnership):</i>	1	1.2	2007
<i>Protest against a non-Hmong individual (Professor Alfred McCoy):</i>	1	1.2	2002
<i>Protest against a Hmong individual (Trae Yang):</i>	1	1.2	2000
<i>Other non-formal categories (Hmong men)</i>	1	1.2	1999
Total	84	100.0	---

Protest Issues

The various issues and targets with which Hmong American protestors have been engaged in the past 20 to 30 years represent Hmong's organized responses to perceived political opportunities or political threats brought about by conditions or shifts in local, national and/or broader political contexts. As Table 3 shows, the top 10 kinds of protest issues comprised 82 percent of all protest issues during the past 30 years. This observation is significant in at least two ways. First, these top-tier issues help to clarify the major social problems that Hmong Americans have defined and to which they have given highest priority. These social problems entailed those that deal directly with governments', institutions', and corporations' abuse, exploitation, or exclusion and marginalization of Hmong.

Second, many of these protest issues are recurring. Their frequent recurrence in different contexts indicates to Hmong Americans that the processes of subordination, exploitation, exclusion and marginalization are historically continuous processes, come in many complex

forms, and operate at many intertwined levels. Most importantly, these processes have occurred and continue to occur across multiple nation-states. These multi-site, historically-continuous processes operate to deny Hmong of legal protection—the condition that is synonymous with Hmong's statelessness. For many Hmong adult men and women, leaders as well as laypersons, the processes of abuse, exploitation, exclusion and marginalization constitute the contemporary consequences of Hmong's *statelessness*. Put differently, Hmong understand quite well that their *lack of protection* from abuse, exploitation, exclusion and marginalization is intricately linked to the state's definition and treatment of them as simultaneously an ethnic/racial minority, a dislocated, disenfranchised minority, and an ethnic minority that has neither a powerful nation-state of their own nor a politically effective relationship to one. Next, I elaborate on how Hmong Americans' protests issues help identify some of the main consequences of their statelessness.

Table 3: Hmong American Protests by Protest Issue and Frequency, 1980 to 2010

Protest Issue	Frequency	Percent
Human Rights Violation (Laos and Cambodia)	15	17.9
Unjust Arrest and Prosecution of Gen. Vang Pao (U.S.)	14	16.7
Normal Trade Relations (U.S. & Lao PDR)	11	13.1
State Welfare Programs (U.S.)	8	9.5
Racial Prejudice or Discrimination Against Hmong (U.S.)	6	7.1
Federal Welfare Reform & Patriot Act (U.S.)	5	6.0
Police Brutality or Killing of Hmong Individuals (U.S.)	4	4.8
Forced Repatriation (Thailand)	3	3.6
Grave Desecration (Thailand)	2	2.4
U.S.-Vietnamese Relations (U.S. and Vietnam)	1	1.2
Accusation of Child Abuse (U.S.)	1	1.2
Deportation of Cambodians (U.S.)	1	1.2
Domestic Violence Against Hmong Women (U.S.)	1	1.2
Firing or Hiring Decisions in Organizations (U.S.)	1	1.2
Lack of Financial Loans, Rabobank (U.S.)	1	1.2
Non-Voluntary Medical Treatment in Local Hospital (U.S.)	1	1.2
Proposed Federal Legislation, Naturalization (U.S.)	1	1.2
Proposed State Legislation, CA AB78 (U.S.)	1	1.2
Non-Voluntary Residential Dislocation (U.S.)	1	1.2
Written History about Hmong (U.S.)	1	1.2
Other Issues* (U.S.)	5	6.0
Total	84	100.0

*These other issues included 5 protests that involved the following: protest of a governor's state budget plans for a Hmong cultural center; protest of the transfer of a police officer off a gang unit; protest of Senator Mee Moua's grave desecration team; students' non-attendance/boycott of a high school after a fight; and protest against a young Hmong man after his girlfriend died from a suspected suicide.

Being defined as stateless has meant that Hmong have had to face frequent human rights violations against themselves, their families, their extended families, or their ethnic compatriots. Additionally, the burden of statelessness on Hmong Americans has been a heavy one; they have had to fight for rights, resources and representation across multiple nation-states, but especially the United States, the Lao PDR, and Thailand. As Table 3 shows, about 32 percent of Hmong American protests were directed at the United States government or federal agencies. About 17 percent of protests were directed at the governments of Vietnam and the Lao PDR for human rights violations against Hmong in Laos. Hmong Americans' protests against the U.S. and Lao PDR for their mutual establishment of normal trade relations (NTR) can be seen as an extension of Hmong's protests against human rights violations in Laos. Moreover, six percent of protests were directed at the Thai government for its sanctioning of forced repatriations and grave desecrations against Hmong former refugees.

Human rights violations or forms of persecution against displaced Hmong people and dislocated Hmong refugees have been the longest-lasting type of protest issue occupying Hmong American protests since the early 1990s (refer to table 2 above). In addition, human rights violations have taken many forms during the last two to three decades. In Laos, they have included the discrimination, imprisonment, torturing, military assaults and killing of internally displaced Hmong (and other Laotians) who fought or were believed to have fought on the side of the Royal Lao Army or the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. In Thailand, forced repatriation against Hmong refugees (forcing Hmong to return to Laos), has been a long-standing protest issue since about 1991 (see also table 2).

The consequences of statelessness and minority status do not end with human rights violations. Economic deprivation through policy changes and specifically through legalized exclusion has also been a persistent, non-coincidental dimension of the Hmong American experience and of the working-poor people's experience more generally. Prior to the federal Welfare Reform of 1996, Hmong and others were already protesting in several states, including California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, against these states' welfare rules and reforms.¹⁶ When the U.S. Congress decided to pass the U.S. Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA)¹⁷ of 1996 and President Clinton signed it into law, this Act excluded legal permanent residents, including Hmong non-citizens from receiving assistance such as Supplemental Security Income and Food Stamps. The PRWORA is but one recent display of the perpetually recurring myths of colorblind practices, equal freedom of opportunity, and the pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps model of individual success. This Act assumes that work opportunities are fairly distributed and locates the source of poverty in individual irresponsibility, rather than in America's political and economic institutions. Yet, these institutions, through racial, class and gender stratification, have been responsible for the creation and reproduction of poverty and other non-economic disadvantages. Welfare Reform's exclusion and marginalization of Hmong immigrants (and other immigrants) does violence to individuals and families' physical health and wellbeing,¹⁸ material conditions, and life chances.

¹⁶ See for example Star Tribune, "Hmong Group Leads Welfare Reform Protest at House Panel Hearing."

¹⁷ "Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996," Public Law 104-193, August 22, 1996 (110 Stat. 2105).

¹⁸ Deborah Hastings, "Hmong Woman's Suicide Puts Spotlight on Welfare Problems," *Los Angeles Times*, February 22, 1998.

But material deprivation is not the only consequence of statelessness and minority status. Their consequence has also entailed the perpetration of both interpersonal¹⁹ and institutionalized racism against Hmong Americans. In the mid-1980s, Hmong former refugees who resettled in Pennsylvania encountered racially motivated beatings, robberies and harassment.²⁰ In December 1996, the California State Automobile Association (a western-US branch of the American Automobile Association or AAA), published an article in its *Motorland* magazine. As a *Fresno Bee* writer reports,

In it, [Bill] Barich [the author of the essay] confused the Hmong with Cambodians. He referred to a woman as a "toothless crone" and repeated complaints from "some people in Fresno" that the Hmong "grow poppies in their back yards for personal-use opium," deal in child brides, drive badly and eat dogs.²¹

Such text not only displays nativist sentiments and racial hate (Hmong and Cambodians alike became Asian targets), but also it demonstrates major corporations' role in perpetrating and perpetuating discrimination against racial minorities. This kind of violence does irreversible harm to entire communities' sense of security and belonging.

Similar public racial prejudice against Hmong Americans occurred from time, sometimes from the same perpetrators. For instance, in June 1998, Tom Barnard of the *KQRS Morning Show* made derisive remarks about Hmong and told them to "assimilate or hit the goddamn road."²² It took a coalition of ethnic communities along with business support (in the form of withdrawing of ads from KQRS), to eventually obtain an apology from KQRS.²³ In May of 2004, Barnard of *KQRS* once again expressed racial hate toward Hmong by calling them primitive and cave dwellers.²⁴ In some cases, Hmong Americans have been compelled to respond to these racist acts with organized protest.²⁵ And, in cases where Hmong Americans and their supporters have publicly responded or demonstrated against hate speech and racial prejudice, they have often been met with denial, excuses or further prejudices. For example, in 2004, when Hmong American confronted the KQRS radio station about its derisive remarks against Hmong, the host and management of KQRS responded with the over-used, over-abused excuse that words have been "taken out of context and misquoted."²⁶

¹⁹ Noel Holston and Staff Writer, "Hmong Groups to Protest Alleged Racist Remarks by KQRS Crew," *Star Tribune (Minneapolis, MN)*, August 21, 1998. ; The Associated Press, "Bumper Sticker Advocates Anti-Hmong Violence," *Associated Press*, December 14, 2004.

²⁰ The Associated Press, "Federal Agents to Deal with Attacks on Laotian Immigrants," *Associated Press*, September 8, 1984. ; Lee Linder, "Attacks against Asians Prompt Federal Investigation," *ibid.* September 17, ; William Robbins, "Violence Forces Hmong to Leave Philadelphia," *New York Times*, September 17, 1984.

²¹ Karla Bruner, "Hmong Take on Automobile Insurer over Publication," *Fresno Bee*, June 26, 1997.

²² Ann Baker, "KQRS Protest at Center of Rally; Community Group Says Station Losing Ads over Controversial Remarks," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, September 27, 1998.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Chue Moua, "KQRS Anti-Hmong Remarks Air Unchecked on Twin Cities Radio," *Hmong Tribune*, May 5, 2004.

²⁵ Jim Steinberg, "Rallying Support for Hmong in Fresno; Community Protests Image as Burden; We Did Not Come Here for Welfare, Speaker Tells City Hall Conference," *Fresno Bee*, July 2, 1996. See also Pat Burson, "KQRS, Activists Cancel Talks on Race Comments; Argument Follows Disputed Broadcast," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, September 2, 1998b.

²⁶ Pat Burson, "Group Says Radio Show Disparaged Minorities; but KQRS Says Banter About Hmong, Others Has Been Misconstrued," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, August 21, 1998a.

Social actors within corporations and the media have not been the only perpetrators of racial prejudice against Hmong. Sometimes individuals in positions of power who operate from within state-funded institutions relatively immune to official scrutiny have also perpetrated racial prejudice against them.²⁷ In 2007, when Hmong American law students confronted a law professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison regarding his untrue and disparaging remarks about all Hmong men during a class lecture, the professor responded with further abusive remarks such as, "sometimes you do harm to people's sensitivity by speaking the truth."²⁸

As if racial prejudice and hate crimes²⁹ against Hmong were not enough, being stateless and minority also has meant that Hmong became subjects to police brutalities, killings, and other direct acts of physical violence against human lives and the destruction of entire families' lives.³⁰ Like countless other white and non-white individuals, including innocent individuals who lost their lives as a direct result of police's use of force, Hmong Americans have had their share of the casualties from direct police violence. Especially in cases involving *reported* police shooting, brutality or arbitrary violence against civilians, it is clear that the abusers of power are not limited to white men or to individuals acting alone. Rather, it is a complex set of actors and institutions that, through their actions, express their desire to maintain the status quo. These actors and institutions include police officers, their superiors, their departments and legal representatives of police departments; state review boards and individuals whose official position is to investigate and prosecute police wrongdoing; municipal judges, superior justices and the courts in general; jurors and the institutional practices of selecting jurors; conservative media, and so on. Identifying these actors as the sources of social problems is something that victims and victimized groups are capable of. However, requesting that these actors acknowledge themselves as sources of *any* social problem has been an extremely difficult and a never-ending struggle. Staging public protests has often been the only way for Hmong (and other victimized groups) to voice their anger and name their perpetrators.

Just as individual perpetrators of racial prejudice against Hmong display a tendency to use excuses or further prejudice to try to neutralize protestors' demands, state-funded institutions, especially the police, display a strong tendency to use political co-optation to achieve the same outcome. Following a reported police brutality, shooting or harassment against innocent individuals or families, the police department, if it is found guilty of wrongdoing, often announces that it will look into hiring more "ethnic" policemen onto its force.

²⁷ Fresno Bee, "Rallying Support for Hmong in Fresno; Community Protests Image as Burden; We Did Not Come Here for Welfare, Speaker Tells City Hall Conference."

²⁸ This was one of Leonard Kaplan's reported statement in response to Hmong law students' decrying of Kaplan's disparaging remarks against Hmong immigrants and Hmong men in particular. See Anita Weier, "Uw Law Professor Who Irked Hmong Speaks Up," *The Capital Times*, December 6, 2007.

²⁹ In May 2001, three Hmong men in Chico, California, upon return to their home, were confronted at their home and severely attacked up by a 22-year old white male, Chad Wilson Keichler. Before the attack, Keichler cursed at the three Hmong men for "fishing [his] fishes" in the Sacramento River. Chad was later convicted of felony civil rights violation and ordered to pay for the three men's medical bills. See Lodi News, "Hate Crime Convict Must Pay for Ceremony," *Lodi News-Sentinel* June 9, 2005. In January 2007, 29-year old James Nichols shot and stabbed Cha Vang, 30, in a hunting forest of northeastern Wisconsin. Nichols' boss later testified in court that Nichols had told him two months prior to the shooting that he "hated" Hmong and "wished he would have killed" one of them. Quoted in Robert Imrie, "Boss: Hunter Spoke of Hatred for Hmong," *Washington Post*, October 4, 2007.

³⁰ "Hundreds Protest Shooting by Police," *Wisconsin State Journal (Madison, Wisconsin)*, February 18, 2005.

Public welfare institutions and the police are not the only state-sponsored institutions that objectify and subordinate Hmong Americans. Medical establishments and other extensions of the state's enforcement agency have also, from time to time, been the perpetrators of state-sanctioned acts against Hmong. For instance, in October 1994, Hmong college students at California State University, Fresno organized over 200 Hmong adults to protest both Fresno's Valley Children's Hospital and its offices of Child Protective Services (CPS), including Ernie Velasquez who heads the CPS. The Hmong protestors were protesting the forced removal of a Hmong young girl from her parents' custody after the parents, who noted serious side effects following their daughter's cancer surgery, refused to take their daughter in for a follow-up chemotherapy treatment.³¹ While those in positions of power defined the situation as a medical "resistance" and non-compliance, the protestors, especially the Hmong family of the 15-year old girl, defined the actions of the authorities as unjustified and unjust medical mutilation.³²

Moreover, the policies of foreign governments have ensured that even the dead among Hmong cannot be safe from forced dislocation and humiliation. In 2005, hundreds of Hmong graves in Wat Tham Krabok of Saraburi Province, Thailand were exhumed and some bodily remains were mutilated.³³ This took place after about 15,000 Hmong refugees at Wat Tham Krabok had been accepted by the U.S. for resettlement. The grave desecration was considered justified by Thai officials, because according to them, the graves were "contaminating the local water supply."³⁴ To Hmong of Thailand and Hmong of the U.S., however, these acts of desecration and ethnic persecution were extensions of the Thai government's policies of forced repatriation against Hmong refugees which began in the mid-1980s. For instance, during the mid-1980s, the Thailand government used force and the threat of force to compel hundreds of Hmong refugees to return to Laos.³⁵ Forced repatriation of the Hmong refugees in Thailand has continued up through the present.³⁶ Then during the late 1990s, the Hmong refugees who remained in Thailand were accused of deforestation by local Thai farmers and the Thai government (Delang 2002).³⁷ As a direct result of these accusations, the Thai government forced Hmong to relocate to government designated areas (Eudey 1989).³⁸ Thailand allowed the grave desecrations to continue even against Hmong Americans' organized protests and the protest of

³¹ Alex Pulaski, "Hmong Protest Girl Forced into Treatment," *Fresno Bee*, October 18, 1994a.

³² According to Pulaski (Ibid.), the Fresno Bee writer, the mother of the young girl, "Yia Her said through an interpreter that she would do anything to help her daughter feel better. [Yia] Her also said she was confused about her daughter's medical needs and history, which include an appendectomy and removal of an ovary and fallopian tube three weeks ago."

³³ The Nation, "Hmong Graves Still Being Dug Up," *The Nation (Thailand)*, November 14, 2005. ; Pat Kessler, "Hmong Protest Grave Desecrations in Thailand," *WCCO News*, April 26, 2006.

³⁴ WCCO News, "Hmong Protest Grave Desecrations in Thailand."

³⁵ Peter Eng, "Thailand Denies Allegations It Forcibly Repatriated Refugees," *Associated Press (International News)*, March 19, 1987. ; The New York Times, "Thai Officials Deny Violating the Rights of Laos Tribesmen," *New York Times*, March 20, 1987. A, Column 1; Louis Galvan, "Hmong Rally in Fresno for U.S. Intervention," *Fresno Bee*, April 27, 1994.

³⁶ "Thailand, Laos Meet on Fate of 8,000 Ethnic Hmong," *Agence France Presse -- English*, September 3, 2007. ; Trend Daily News, "Thailand Starts to Deport Lao-Hmong," *Trend Daily News (Azerbaijan)*, December 28, 2009.

³⁷ Bangkok Post, "Protesters Gather for Mass Rally: Thousands Set to Converge on City."

³⁸ Agence France Presse, "5,000 Villagers Protest against Hilltribe Farmers," *Agence France Presse*, April 28, 1998. ; Bangkok Post, "Protesters Gather for Mass Rally: Thousands Set to Converge on City."

their state allies.³⁹ These acts violate Hmong's dignity as human beings—human beings who have not even finished mourning their dead from the American-Vietnam War. This vicious cycle of forced dislocation, displacement and internal colonialism does nothing to alleviate Hmong's lack of legal protection—the condition that is synonymous with Hmong's statelessness.

Finally, in recent years, Hmong Americans found themselves having to confront unfair treatment as terrorists, arbitrary arrests and prosecution. As I discussed elsewhere (Xiong 2013), the passage of the U.S. PATRIOT Act of 2001 and the REAL ID Act of 2005⁴⁰ led to the treatment of groups such as Hmong former refugees, among other groups,⁴¹ as terrorists for having purportedly provided “material support to terrorists or terrorist organizations.”⁴² The immediate consequence of being classified as terrorist was that Hmong refugees were denied immigration to the U.S. and those Hmong refugees who were recent arrivals were denied U.S. permanent resident alien status.⁴³ It took the organized efforts and protests of Hmong Americans to get the U.S. Congress to listen and take appropriate action on this issue.⁴⁴ On December 26, 2007, Congress passed the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2008, which provided “automatic relief for Hmong and other groups that do not pose a threat to the United States” from the category of “terrorist organization.”⁴⁵

In June of 2007, two and a half years after the U.S. established normal trade relations (NTR was signed into law in December of 2004) with the government of the Lao PDR, federal agents arrested former-general Vang Pao along with nine other men. Among the nine other men was Harrison Ulrich Jack, a retired lieutenant colonel from the California National Guard in California. As a result of these men's alleged conspiracy with an undercover agent of the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, they were indicted for purportedly plotting to commit acts of terrorism against the Lao PDR.⁴⁶ The federal charges against each of them carried serious felony charges including the possibility of life imprisonment.⁴⁷

Throughout the court trials of these men, which lasted nearly four years, U.S. federal prosecutors reiterated over and over again a phrase that suggests the U.S. government's shifting

³⁹ Saint Paul Pioneer Press, "200 Protest Excavation of Hmong Graves," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, April 25, 2006. See also Senator Mee Moua, "Legislature Passes Resolution Denouncing Hmong Grave Desecrations," *Minnesota State Legislature News*, April 25, 2006. (April 25, 2006).

⁴⁰ The U.S. Patriot Act (Public Law 107-56 (115 Stat. 272)) became law on October 26, 2001. The full name of the USA PATRIOT Act is “Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001.” The U.S. REAL ID Act of 2005 (Public Law 109-13 (119 Stat. 231) at Division B), became law on May 11, 2005.

⁴¹ These other groups were the “Karen National Union/Karen Liberation Army, the Chin National Front/Chin National Army, the Chin National League for Democracy, the Kayan New Land Party, the Arakan Liberation Party, the Mustangs, the Alzados, the Karenni National Progressive Party, and groups affiliated with the Montagnards” (“Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2008,” Public Law 110-161, December 26, 2007 (121 Stat. 1844) at Section 691 (b)).

⁴² USA PATRIOT Act of 2001, Public Law 107-56, October 26, 2001 (115 Stat. 272) at Sections 805 and 810.

⁴³ Amanda Perez, "Patriot Act Classifies Hmong as Terrorists," *KFSN-TV News*, February 18, 2007. ; Mai Der Vang, "Hmong Labeled Terrorists, Denied Green Cards," *New American Media*, September 12, 2007.

⁴⁴ Stephen Magagnini, "Hmong Say Law Maligns Them," *Sacramento Bee*, December 16, 2007.

⁴⁵ “Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2008,” Public Law 110-161, December 26, 2007 (121 Stat. 1844) at Section 691 (b).

⁴⁶ Stephen Magagnini and Denny Walsh Bee Staff Writers, "Hmong Rally for 'the General'; Crowds at Courthouse, State Capitol Protest as Those Accused of a Laos Plot Plead Not Guilty," *Sacramento Bee*, June 19, 2007.

⁴⁷ Tim Weiner, "Gen. Vang Pao's Last War," *New York Times*, May 11, 2008.

market and political relationships around the world and, in particular, with the Lao PDR. In language highly reminiscent of outdated legal jargon from the early 1900s (U.S. Supreme Court 1908:3565-6) and early 1800s,⁴⁸ the formal complaint alleged that the men were “taking part in a military expedition or enterprise to be carried on *against the territory and dominion of the foreign and sovereign nation of Laos, with which the United States is at peace*” (emphasis added).⁴⁹ That the federal government used outdated language may not be surprising given that the Neutrality Act traces its origin to 1794, the year in which this statute was first enacted. However, what is surprising is that, especially “since World War I,” the Justice Department of the United States has been selectively “unwilling to enforce the Neutrality Act” when it comes to known specific “paramilitary groups,” such as the Cuban and Nicaraguan exiles, whose military operations the United States had a vested interest in protecting (Lobel 1983:1-5).

The long ordeal that unfolded against General Vang Pao and the tragedy that resulted from it were succinctly described by one online reader, who wrote in response to the media's announcement of the general's death in January 2011, as follows:

The media reported Thursday that General Vang Pao, considered the George Washington of the Hmong hill tribe, died of pneumonia after several days in the hospital in Clovis, Calif. / The General is dead, but the rest is a lie. / The real truth is the United States Government murdered General Vang Pao. / It wasn't a typical murder. It was a slow, calculated death that began three and a half years ago on June 4, 2007. Before dawn that day, federal agents crashed through the doors of his Westminster, Calif. home and arrested him for conspiring to overthrow the Government of Laos. The Department of Justice even called the operation Tarnished Eagle to embarrass, disgrace, and dishonor the General - a man who fought for America in its secret war in Laos for 15 years. Nine others were arrested that morning in California and also faced charges that were punishable by two life sentences in federal prison. / The trumped up charges against Vang Pao were all dropped September 18, 2009, but not before he suffered 39 days in jail, 837 days under house arrest with an ankle bracelet, and two years, three months and 14 days as an accused man facing two life sentences. This is the same General Vang Pao that former CIA Chief William Colby once referred to as "the biggest hero of the Vietnam War" because of the 15 years he spent leading a CIA-sponsored guerrilla army fighting against a communist takeover over of the Southeast Asian peninsula. General Vang Pao did not die of pneumonia. He died of a broken heart.⁵⁰

In 1964, the United States fabricated an attack on one of its navy ships in order to force the North Vietnamese into an undeclared war with it and conducted secret American military operations in Laos which violated the neutrality of Laos (Hallin 1986; Wells 1994). With unsurprising irony, in 2007, the United States government fabricated⁵¹ a conspiracy in order to indict former

⁴⁸ *The Exchange v. McFaddon*, 11 U.S. 7 Cranch 116 (1812).

⁴⁹ Complaint at 4-5, *United States of America v. Harrison Jack, General Vang Pao, Lo Cha Thao, Lo Thao, Youa True Vang, Hue Vang, Chong Yang Thao, Seng Vue, and Chue Lo*, No. 207-MJ-0178 (United States District Court, Eastern District of California, June 3, 2007).

⁵⁰ This comment appeared in the comments section beneath an *Associated Press* article that the *CBS News* online website reposted on January 7, 2011. The forward slash indicates paragraph breaks. See The Associated Press, "Gen. Vang Pao, Revered Hmong Leader, Dies at 81," *Associated Press*, January 7, 2011.

⁵¹ According to the *Sacramento Bee*, John Kecker, the key defense attorney who represented General Vang Pao *pro bono* and successfully got all of the charges against Vang dropped in 2009, told U.S. District Judge Frank C.

Laotian-Hmong military leaders who fought alongside them during America's Secret War in Laos for allegedly violating the U.S. Neutrality Act.⁵²

As the above discussion shows, Hmong Americans have been preoccupied with abuses, exploitation, exclusion and marginalization processes that affect their entire ethnic group. This, however, does not mean that Hmong have not also been concerned with processes that resemble these to varying degrees *within their ethnic group*. For instance, on May 23, 1999, about 100 Hmong women and men participated in a two-hour walk in St. Paul, Minnesota to protest against domestic violence in the Hmong community. The walk was organized by three organizations, Hmoob Thaj Yeeb (Hmong Peace), the Women's Association of Hmong and Lao, Inc., and Asian Women United.⁵³ The *Star Tribune* reported that, according to "NouKou S. Thao, the development director of the women's association," the walk was held in response to "recent incidents including a Hmong mother who killed her six children; a 13-year-old girl who was raped and killed in Brooklyn Park, and a St. Paul woman who has been missing since last fall and whose husband died of a self-inflicted wound."⁵⁴ The general target of the protest, however, appeared to be Hmong men. The protestors attributed some the causes of domestic violence to the "lack of education," to the "different statuses of men and women," and to the unfair treatment of Hmong women.⁵⁵

Second, Hmong organizations have become sites of conflict and organized protests. On April 10, 2007, about 200 Hmong community members staged a protest outside of the Hmong American Partnership (HAP), a non-profit organization in St. Paul, Minnesota. They were protesting what they regarded as the unfair termination of William Yang from his previous position as director of HAP. According to the *Star Tribune*, the target of the protestors' anger was Keo Chang, who held HAP's position of board chairwoman at the time of the protest.⁵⁶ The protestors voiced outrage against HAP's board members, in part, because they saw William Yang as a community leader and, in part, because "they [HAP] have refused to give us any reasons why they did this to William Yang after he built this organization from the ground up."⁵⁷

Hmong American organizations have not merely been sites of protests. Rather, they have also been vehicles of organized protests. In June of 2003, the Mong Federation, a non-profit organization, organized a protest at the California State Capitol to voice their opposition to a California education bill: Assembly Bill 78. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, "about 200 uniformed Hmong veterans festooned with medals looked on to support [the protest]" while

Damrell Jr., "In 38 years of practicing law, I've never seen so many lies by prosecutors and agents in support of a case." Quoted in Denny Walsh, "Laotian Plot Alleged; Lawyer: Feds' Case Full of Lies," *Sacramento Bee*, February 24, 2009.

⁵² Complaint at 1, *United States of America v. Harrison Jack, General Vang Pao, et al.* The complaint charged that Vang Pao et al. were involved in "conspiracy to violate the Neutrality Act, 18 USC 960."

⁵³ Lucy Y. Her, "Urging Education, 100 Protest Violence against Hmong Women; Walk for Peace Draws 100, Some of Them Young," *Star Tribune*, May 23, 1999.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Curt Brown, "Rally Protests the Ouster of Hmong Nonprofit Leader; About 200 Community Members Challenged the Firing of William Yang from the Hmong American Partnership," *Star Tribune (Minneapolis, MN)*, April 10, 2007.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Paoze Thao, president of the Mong Federation, "testified against the bill at a Senate hearing."⁵⁸ The targets of the Mong Federation's protest appeared to be both the author of the bill, Assemblywoman Sarah Reyes of Fresno, California and her Hmong supporters. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, "a small group of Mong Leng... voiced concerns about the Assembly bill," and "have come forward to demand that they be recognized separately in the bill, as a way to reverse what they say is long-standing subordination to the more dominant Hmong Der, or White Hmong."⁵⁹ The actions and social interactions that preceded and followed this protest event became the center of Hmong Americans' national attention and controversy for several months. The social movement that this protest generated is ongoing. It may well be one of the most distinctive, most controversial social movements in contemporary Hmong American society.

In general, the types of protest issues have broadened and diversified over time. During the early to mid-1990s, the two issues that preoccupied protests were human rights violations in Laos and state or local welfare programs. The period between the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s saw the most diverse kinds of protest issues. These issues included, in part, protests against housing demolition; against racial prejudice from heads of local welfare offices; against cuts in SSI and Food Stamps; against racial prejudice from corporations; against violence in Cambodia; against normal trade relations with Laos; against university fee increases; against the job transfer of a police officer; against the forced kidnapping of Hmong abroad; against the ambassadors to Laos; against an academic historian; against unfair imprisonment in Laos; against the deportation of Cambodians; etc. Between about 2003 to about 2010, Hmong Americans' protest issues continued to diversify but also clustered around the issues of normal trade relations between U.S.-Lao PDR and the unjust arrest of Hmong-leader, General Vang Pao.

Discussion: Hmong's Cycles of Protest and Master Frames

What might the finding that Hmong American protests did not emerge until about 1990 tell us about Hmong communities? Put differently, what might account for the fact that Hmong protests emerged in the early 1990s but not earlier? Making a comparison to other refugee communities may help clarify why Hmong's protests emerged in the 1990s and not sooner. In their study of Vietnamese American protests, Ong and Meyer (2004) report that, "Vietnamese protest episodically, relatively infrequently *until the late 1980s*, then increasing to a peak in 1994 during the debate about normalizing relations with Vietnam" (p. 9, emphasis added). Furthermore, they point out that between 1975 and 2001, about 135 or "[m]ore than half of the [209] protests" that they examined occurred "in Orange County, mostly in Westminster or Garden Grove, the home of Little Saigon" (2004:10). The emergence of Vietnamese American protests in the late 1980s and of Hmong American protests in the early 1990s indicates that neither group participated in visible organized protests until 10 years or longer after their arrival to the United States.

Many studies have documented Southeast Asian refugees' severe economic hardships upon their arrival in the mid-1970s and how these hardships persisted for years after their arrival (Hur 1990; Kibria 1994; Ng 1998b; Zhou and Bankston 1998; Lo 2000). We also know that

⁵⁸ Lee Romney, "What's in a Name? For Hmong Disappointed by Bill, Everything," *Los Angeles Times*, July 5, 2003b.

⁵⁹ Lee Romney, "Bill Spurs Bitter Debate over Hmong Identity," *Los Angeles Times*, May 24, 2003a.

Southeast Asian refugees, including Vietnamese and Hmong were dispersed across multiple states and cities of the United States as part of the U.S. government's resettlement policy (Desbarats 1985; Miyares 1994). This policy of dispersal was intended to avoid overwhelming individual cities' social support systems and to assimilate refugees as quickly as possible (Fass 1985). However, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Southeast Asian refugees engaged in secondary, inter-state migrations in order to be reunited with their families and co-ethnics in states such as California and Texas (Miyares 1998). With these two pieces of information in mind, I think that at least three processes may help account, in part, for how Vietnamese and Hmong protests emerged during the periods that they did and not sooner.

First, because the vast majority of Southeast Asian refugees were preoccupied with meeting basic survival needs during their initial years of resettlement, they had little time or discretionary resources to participate in organized political activities. Over time, Southeast Asian refugees' socioeconomic status (SES) gradually improved (Xiong 2013a, 2016). The improvements in families' and ethnic groups' SES could translate into an increase in individuals' and interest groups' access to discretionary resources such as time and money. Having discretionary resources is crucial for one's ability to engage in collective action (McCarthy and Zald 1977).

Second, while both Vietnamese and Hmong refugees have had experiences with many forms of protest in their home countries, many members of both groups probably arrived with relatively little knowledge of conventional American protest activities. As Vietnamese's and Hmong's length of residency increased but especially as they came into increased contact with U.S. political institutions and racialized groups, they probably became more aware of how the state treats its racial and ethnic minorities and how racial and ethnic minorities use protest tactics such as marches, rallies and petitions to try to effect social change. Put differently, refugees' gradual familiarity with conventional protest tactics could help account for their gradual participation in protests.

Third, the emergence of Vietnamese American protests in Southern California during the late 1980s and Hmong American protests in Central Valley California during the early 1990s suggests that one other crucial community-level factor may also be at work: the concentration of co-ethnic immigrants in particular cities or metropolitan areas over time. It is these coethnic concentrations that could potentially give rise to effective ethnic enclaves—that is, ethnic communities that exhibit a high level of institutional completeness and are comprised of a significant middle-class ethnic population along with coethnic members who come from a diversity of national origin and social class backgrounds (Zhou 2009:9-13). Inasmuch as externally, the ethnic enclave facilitates ethnic visibility; and, internally, it facilitates strong social networks of interpersonal relations (Zhou and Bankston 1998; Zhou 2009:11), ethnic enclaves could facilitate collective action.

In the case of Hmong Americans, their significant concentration in cities such as Fresno, California and St. Paul, Minneapolis has some benefits for collective action. Hmong's numerical size gives them some level of visibility among local communities, the media, local officials and state representatives. Moreover, Hmong's social structure provides an important infrastructure upon which solidarity can be achieved and communication networks can be built. Hmong's social structure is characterized by a relatively high degree of segmentation; that is, it is a

structure comprised of clans made up of sub-clans, sub-clans made up of lineages, and lineages made up of families. Hmong individuals at any of these levels may form into relatively cohesive interest groups. Equally important, this social structure serves as a fairly efficient communication network, enabling information to be shared quickly between leaders and followers and among people within the ethnic community. Besides discretionary resources, communication networks comprise social movement actors' organizational capacity. As social movement scholars have pointed out, organizational capacity is crucial for social actors' ability to aggregate resources and engage in collective action (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Gamson and Schmeidler 1984). Next, I discuss a unique but powerful symbol of protest that has emerged during Hmong's cycles of protest before I discuss three master frames and consider their implications for Hmong Americans' political incorporation.

Since the late 1990s, Hmong American protests have tended to rely on certain symbols more so than others throughout the cycles of protest. One of these symbols is the uniformed Hmong veteran figure which is one of the most visible and most powerful symbols of Hmong American identity. Whenever an issue calls for it, Hmong organizers of protests have relied on the existing communication networks within the ethnic community to coordinate and bring to protest events Hmong men and women in army fatigue. For example, uniformed Hmong veterans have participated in protests against the U.S. Ambassadors to the Lao PDR;⁶⁰ against a U.S. senator for proposing eleventh-hour bill;⁶¹ against U.S.-Lao PDR normal trade relations;⁶² against what Hmong protestors consider fabrications of their history by an academic historian;⁶³ and even against Hmong-initiated education legislation.⁶⁴ Outside of protest events, uniformed Hmong veterans have regularly participated in Hmong New Year celebrations across the nation; other celebratory community occasions; U.S. congressional recognition events; and, most recently, in the funeral ceremony to honor their revered leader, General Vang Pao. By their presence alone, Hmong veterans serve as visible reminders to observers, including the media, about Hmong's turbulent history and about Hmong refugees' reason for being in the United States. By their presence, Hmong veterans serve to legitimate and make salient certain issues of significance that might otherwise be dismissed as trivial, illegitimate, or myth.

But there is a more general reason for why uniformed Hmong veterans have been a recurring symbol in so many seemingly disparate protest events within Hmong American society. Years before Hmong even became refugees and before the first Hmong arrived onto U.S. soil, Hmong's identity has been powerfully circumscribed by their unique relationship with the United States government. This unique relationship was Hmong's military service to the United States Central Intelligence Agency during the Second Indochina War. Uniformed Hmong veterans embody and help sustain one of the most powerful collective action frames in

⁶⁰ Brian Bonner, "Envoy to Laos Stands Ground against Critics," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, July 3, 1998. ; Curt Brown, "Ambassador to Laos Draws Protesters; Doug Hartwick, in St. Paul to Promote Normal Trade Relations, Was Met by Demonstrators Who Want the Southeast Asian Nation to Address Human-Rights Issues," *Star Tribune*, May 7, 2003.

⁶¹ David Hanners, "Hmong Put Pressure on Grams; Veterans, Their Supporters Urge Senator to Back Wellston-Vento Citizenship Bill," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, May 9, 2000.

⁶² Curt Brown, "Hmong Oppose U.S. Trade with Laos; About 400 People Protested Rep. Betty Mccollum's Support for Normalization," *Star Tribune*, April 15, 2004.

⁶³ Pat Schneider, "Hmong Vets March in Support of Vang Pao; Retraction of Uw Prof's Allegations Sought," *Capital Times (Madison, WI)*, April 19, 2002.

⁶⁴ Los Angeles Times, "What's in a Name? For Hmong Disappointed by Bill, Everything."

Hmong Americans' tactical repertoires of protest. This frame is the military service frame. I turn to this and other master frames next.

Framing Refugee Protection, Military Service, and Civil Rights

According to Snow and Benford (1992:136), framing is a process that does the work of signifying meanings and “denotes an active, process-derived phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction. We refer to the products of this framing activity as collective action frames.” Snow and Benford define a frame as “an interpretive schemata that signifies and condenses the ‘world out there’ by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of action in one’s present or past environment” (1992:137). As M.W. Steinberg (1998:845) clarifies, scholars have “focus[ed] on framing as the process of deliberate and focused persuasive communication essential for the mobilization of consensus prior to collective action and as the cognitive process necessary for orienting and sustaining collective action.” Referring specifically to Snow and Benford’s (1988:199-201) three core “framing tasks”—i.e., “diagnostic framing, prognostic framing, and motivational framing”—Steinberg explains that “[by] constructing a compelling sense of injustice and collective identities for the protagonists and their targets, frames provide a diagnosis and prognosis of a problem and a call to action to resolve it” (1998:845). Finally, all of these framing tasks, but especially the last component (the call to action), rely crucially on the framing of cultural and political opportunities without which further action cannot be taken (Gamson and Meyer 1996:285).

If collective action frames do the work of mobilizing collective consensus *and* collective action at the level of individual social movements, then master frames do this work at a broader level: across cycles of protest. Master frames “provide the interpretive medium through which collective actors associated with different movements within a cycle assign blame for the problem they are attempting to ameliorate” (1992:139). Snow and Benford make a distinction between two types of master frames: “restricted master frames” and “elaborative master frame” (1992:139-40). One of the main distinctions between these two types is that whereas a restricted master frame “provide[s] a constricted range of definitions and allow[s] for little interpretive discretion,” an elaborative master frame “allows for numerous aggrieved groups to tap it and elaborate their grievances in terms of its basic problem-solving schema” (1992:140).

The data on Hmong Americans’ cycles of protest suggest that Hmong actors have relied on at least three master frames between 1990 and 2010. In rough order of their appearance, these master frames are: the refugee protection master frame; the military service master frame; and the civil rights master frame. I discuss each of these master frames in turn.

After 1975 when over 100,000 Hmong became stateless refugees in Thailand, Hmong had, on multiple occasions, called upon international bodies such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and powerful nation-states such as the United States, France, Canada and Australia to help intervene in their desperate situations in Thailand and Laos. At the center of Hmong refugees’ request was that the UNHCR and these nation-states provide direct or indirect legal protection for Hmong against political persecution, especially forms of state violence or threats of violence against displaced Hmong. Through letters and petitions to these international bodies, Hmong refugees discursively invoked the refugee protection frame.

This frame draws directly on the definitions of a refugee and the international standards of refugee treatment that were established through the 1951 United Nations Convention Related to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Refugee Protocol which expanded the scope of the original convention by removing geographical and time limits (Jastram and Achiron 2001:8-10). The 1951 UN Convention and 1967 Protocol standards, in short, agree that “protecting refugees is primarily the responsibility of States”—that is, at least those states or “[c]ountries that have ratified the Refugee Convention” (Jastram and Achiron 2001:5-11). These standards and the activities of the UNHCR, in turn, are based in part on the “1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the four *Geneva Conventions* on international humanitarian law” (Jastram and Achiron 2001:8). Within the United States, Hmong American protestors rely on the refugee protection master frame directly or draw on it to advance other injustice frames; direct reliance on the refugee protection frame occurs especially when the issues concern human rights violations against Hmong in Laos or the forced repatriation of Hmong refugees in Thailand.

The refugee protection master frame is related to but not the same as the military service frame. At least since the mid-1990s, in response to nativist sentiments, state welfare reforms and the 1996 federal Welfare Reform Act, Hmong Americans began publicly using a military service collective action frame. This military service frame entails the following set of inter-related claims: (1) Hmong veterans fought in the Second Indochina War for the United States and died in the tens of thousands protecting U.S. air and ground military forces; (2) the U.S. lost this undeclared war and pulled out; (3) many Hmong were left behind to be persecuted or killed by the communists; and the more “fortunate” ones became political refugees with few legal protections; (4) being left behind was an act of great betrayal by the U.S. government; (5) the U.S. promised Hmong that they would be taken care of should “we” (U.S. & Hmong) ever lose the war; (6) that promise has only partially been fulfilled when eligible Hmong refugees became admitted to the U.S.; (7) because of Hmong soldiers and their families’ great sacrifice through military service to the U.S., Hmong refugees deserve legal protection, especially refuge, from the U.S. and they and their U.S.-children deserve to receive the full benefits that its citizenry receive. This collective action frame has become a master frame in Hmong’s cycles of protest.

Since the last 35 years, Hmong Americans have had to frame most issues of national and international concern to them in terms of their military service to the United States. The use of the military service frame has never guaranteed a response from the state, but it has been one of the few frames that some representatives of the state feel morally (and perhaps also politically) compelled to listen to. As such, Hmong Americans have come to recognize this state tendency and they have used the military service frame under a number of seemingly disparate circumstances. They do so when they need to seek rights, resources, or representation from the state. That the military service frame has been influential under particular circumstances is demonstrated, in part, by the fact that since 1975, the only legislations that have ever been passed specifically for the Hmong at the federal or state level made use of the military service frame. These are the federal Hmong Veterans’ Naturalization Act of 2000⁶⁵ and California Assembly Bill 78.⁶⁶ Both of these legislations, in order to mobilize support and win final approval from policy makers, made explicit and strategic use of one or more claims of the military service frame.

⁶⁵ “Hmong Veterans’ Naturalization Act of 2000,” Public Law 106-207, May 26, 2000 (114 Stat. 316).

⁶⁶ Chapter 44, Statutes of 2003. Assembly Bill 78, an education-related bill, was signed into law on July 10, 2003.

Furthermore, most of the Hmong-initiated non-profit organizations or mutual assistance associations established during the 1980s and 1990s used, in one way or another, the military service frame in order to seek and secure funding from private and public funding sources. Whether organizations proposed to provide refugee services, job training services, mental health services, domestic violence education, or citizenship training, they drew on the military service master frame in order to legitimate their proposals for funds to provide support services specific to their organizational contexts. For instance, to increase the likelihood that they will secure some funding, Hmong formal organizations often must, among other things, specify Hmong as their target population, identify Hmong as an under-served, under-resourced community, and link this group's hardships to their unique status and circumstances as former refugees who provided military service for the United States government.

I contend that the military service collective action frame has become a master frame in the Hmong American context. This frame is embodied in and sustained by uniformed Hmong veterans. Like other groups, Hmong recognize that the state has a strong tendency to conveniently and collectively forget certain histories of certain groups of people. By using the veteran symbol, Hmong try to invoke their history and the United States' intervention in this history. Depending on who the observer is, the veteran symbol can *appear to be* overused—much like the 'race card,' according to privileged people, *appears* to be overused by racial minorities. In actuality, it is not that the veteran symbol has been overused. Rather, it is that the only time that the state listens seriously to Hmong issues is when Hmong invoke their military service to the United States government. It is not that Hmong simply choose to invoke their military service whenever it might benefit them; rather, it is because American institutions and their practices of forgetting, exclusion, subordination, etc. compel Hmong to do so in order to even be considered a part of American society. For too long, Hmong Americans, like so many other ethnic and racial minorities, have felt that they live in American society, but have never been accepted as part of American society. The power of the uniformed Hmong veteran symbol comes from its ability to remind the U.S. government of its involvement in the decades-long wars in Southeast Asia and of the United States' role in making Hmong political refugees in the 1970s and one of the most persecuted groups in modern-day Southeast Asia.

But the refugee protection and military service frames are not the only master frames that Hmong Americans have employed. Since the second half of the 1990s, Hmong American protests have increasingly drawn on the civil rights master frame in order to advance specific injustice frames. Civil rights collective action frames have been part of Hmong's protests against racial prejudices; protests against linguistic subordination; protests against arbitrary police brutality and shootings; and protests against unfair arrest and prosecution. The use of civil rights frames coincided with the broadening and diversification of protest issues in the cycles of protest, as discussed above.

The use of civil rights frames also reflects Hmong Americans' increased exposure to the range of civil rights-influenced protests and social movements in the United States. Civil rights frames are frequently part of the tactics of ethnic groups and racial or multi-racial coalitions who collectively voice grievances against a wide, complex range of social and economic inequities across a wide range of institutions. As Hmong Americans become more acculturated and structurally integrated, they, too, come to interact with these institutions. Over time, Hmong Americans also learn how institutions classify individuals, assign differential consequences to

these classifications, and justify these practices using whatever means or practices suitable for an institution. If and when social actors recognize an opportunity to challenge these existing arrangements and authorities, they may mobilize collective consensus and collective action around these problems.

Conclusion

Immigrant groups' increasingly developed communities and their strategic use of collective action frames could have significant implications for their political incorporation in the United States. Hmong Americans' organized protests emerged in the 1990s, coinciding with their formation of socioeconomically mobile ethnic communities. The concentration of a critical number of Hmong in a community gives the community visibility. At the same time, the social structure of a community serves as an infrastructure for solidarity and communication among its members. Visibility and communication networks increase the organizational capacity of the members of a community. Greater organizational capacity, in turn, could translate into social actors' greater ability to mobilize resources toward forms of collective action, including protest. But collective action, including collective political participation, is not simply a matter of social actors being able to mobilize discretionary resources.

The prospect for achieving collective consensus and collective action on any socially defined social problem also depends crucially on social actors' framing activities. Often constrained by cultural and political contexts, social movement actors must frame claims in ways that resonate with others, especially powerful actors who have a vested interest in maintaining power and privilege and who subscribe to or have an interest in perpetuating dominant ideologies. During the past 30-35 years, Hmong American cycles of protest have produced three master frames: the refugee protection frame, the military service frame, and the civil rights frame. Hmong social actors' strategic deployment of one frame or another during particular protests has resulted in limited success for certain protest movements.

The military service frame represents one of the most enduring and, to date, most potent collective action frames in Hmong American challengers' repertoire of contention. The military service frame has endured despite changes in national and broad political contexts. As I have discussed above and elsewhere (Xiong 2013b), since the late 1980s and early 1990s, there has been a significant shift in the U.S. government's market and political relationships around the world but especially in Southeast Asia. The changes in national and broad political contexts have resulted in Hmong Americans being treated sometimes as Asian immigrants, but other times as aliens ineligible for public benefits, as second class citizens, as perpetually unassimilable foreigners or as former terrorists and indicted terrorism plotters. Despite Hmong Americans' unequal and fluctuating relationship with the state, despite the state's pervasive practice of institutionalized forgetting of America's pivotal role in the secret war in Laos, Hmong's military service frame continues to serve as a powerful counter-discourse, perhaps because war and the threat of war continue to pervade broad political contexts. Students of immigrant political incorporation as well as students of social movements would do well to pay attention to how dynamic broad political contexts shape the state's treatment of immigrant groups and immigrant groups' responses to and interactions with the state.

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