

Anthropology Department Winter 2013 Colloquia

MA VANG
UC PRESIDENT'S POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW
DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE &
FOREIGN LANGUAGES
UC RIVERSIDE

*The Terrorist-Ally:
Hmong American History and the Case against General Vang Pao*

Between 1961 and 1975, the United States waged a “secret war” in Laos and conscripted Hmong as proxy soldiers to help win the war in Vietnam. These Hmong soldiers, under the command of leader General Vang Pao, fought the ground war and facilitated the U.S. bombing missions into North Vietnam and northeastern Laos. Due to this Hmong-U.S. alliance, the Hmong in Laos were displaced as war refugees after the U.S. defeat and withdrawal from Southeast Asia. Yet these Hmong histories have been kept systematically hidden due to the war’s secrecy and are rarely linked to the history of US imperialism and militarism during the Cold War.

This talk examines Hmong American historiography by analyzing the U.S. terrorism case in 2007 against General Vang Pao. It shows how ill-fitting groups such as the Hmong become the target of state violence in an age in which the enemy is considered to be everywhere. The talk argues that Hmong articulate the past through a process of dragging history that reveals how the U.S. strategies of liberal war relied on military violence and postwar rescue. Tracing the Hmong refugee figure as a U.S. ally who can also become a terrorist, therefore, positions the secrecy of the war within the circulation of knowledge about Cold War.

MA VANG is a University of California President’s Postdoctoral Fellow at UC Riverside in the Department of Comparative Literature and the Southeast Asian Studies Program. Her research focuses on Asian American Studies, gender and critical race theory, history, critical refugee studies and immigration, and US imperialism. She received her Ph.D. in Ethnic Studies from UC San Diego.

MONDAY, MAY 13TH
3:30 - 5:00PM
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