

“Minnesota is Open to Everything”

QUEER HMONG AND THE POLITICS OF COMMUNITY FORMATION IN THE DIASPORA



Kong Pheng Pha

TOU BEE, A 25-YEAR-OLD gay Hmong man, left his hometown of Clovis, California, in 2016 to pursue studies in a prestigious graduate program at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. Although Clovis is close to Fresno, where there is a sizable Hmong population, Tou Bee chose to come to Minneapolis not only because of the large Hmong community in the Twin Cities but because that community was more visibly *queer* and Hmong.¹ In an oral history interview conducted the same year he moved to the northland, Tou Bee compared the Twin Cities to New York or San Francisco: a “gay mecca,” a place with prominent queer nonprofit organizations, booming nightlife, and ample opportunities to pursue romance.²

This article uses a variety of sources to convey a history of queer Hmong in Minnesota that has rarely been told: oral history interviews that the author conducted in 2016 with 17 Hmong lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer (LGBTQ) young adults between the ages of 18 and 30; the author’s ethnographic observations at rallies and events in the aftermath of the 2012 presidential election; and newspaper and magazine articles found in various archives to describe the process of queer Hmong community formation and demonstrate how larger histories of Hmong migration and queer politics in Minnesota affected

the experiences of queer Hmong young adults. The interviews, limited as they are in scale, are not meant to be generalized as the universal experience of all queer Hmong but can be read as history telling in their own right.

BY THE TIME TOU BEE arrived in Minneapolis in 2016, the Hmong had been living in Minnesota for more than 40 years, crafting a visible and vibrant community. The Hmong originally migrated to Southeast Asia from southern China in the early nineteenth century to escape the historical oppressions of the Chinese. By allying with the US Central Intelligence Agency in its clandestine Secret War in Laos from 1961 to 1975, the Hmong became entangled with US geopolitics. The withdrawal of US soldiers from Southeast Asia in 1975 and the subsequent communist takeover of Laos were intertwined events that prompted the forced migration of Hmong to refugee camps in Thailand in the mid-1970s. The Hmong were eventually resettled to countries all over the world, including France, Germany, Canada, Australia, French Guiana, and the United States.³

Refugee resettlement in the United States was fraught for many of the Hmong who arrived in the mid-1970s to early 1980s. Hmong refugees had no say in their initial

placements. Furthermore, the US government dispersed Hmong and other Southeast Asian refugees all over the country in order to accelerate their assimilation into American society. This policy, while intended to alleviate a perceived “refugee problem” that would otherwise burden any one receiving community, did more harm than good when refugees became lonely and isolated from one another. Some refugees found themselves to be the only Hmong families in their towns.

Minnesota, however, was different. State and federal policies enabled the North Star State to foster the growth of Hmong communities. The Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975 and the US Refugee Act of 1980 worked to include Hmong in refugee resettlement programs and established various offices to assist in their resettlement, including the Minnesota Refugee Program Office. Hmong were also originally resettled in the Twin Cities because of the large number of church sponsors and nonprofit organizations, including the well-known International Institute of Minnesota. Thus, while Hmong did not choose their resettlement sites, structural conditions in Minnesota enabled Hmong to be resettled there more readily than in other states.⁴

Secondary migration—where Hmong refugees moved from the sites of their original settlement to other locations with Hmong ethnic enclaves in midsize cities like St. Paul, especially in the 1980s and 1990s—allowed Hmong refugees to reunite with families and pursue economic opportunities. Hmong refugees chose the Twin Cities because of the area’s historically progressive attitude of welcoming newcomers, high standard of living and thriving economy, first-rate placements in student standardized testing, and overall reputation for economic and educational opportunities. As Hmong were resettled in and relocated to the Twin Cities, they continued to advocate for Hmong still living in Southeast Asia. This activism and lobbying to the state and federal governments by Hmong led the State Department to once again open the door to another round of Hmong refugee resettlement in 2003.⁵ In 2004, nearly 15,000 Hmong who had been sheltered at the Thai Buddhist monastery Wat Tham Krabok were resettled in the US, with approximately 5,000 of those Hmong refugees being resettled in St. Paul.⁶

Soon, the Twin Cities region became known as the “Hmong capital of the world.” Indeed, over the last 40 years the Minneapolis–St. Paul metropolitan area developed the largest Hmong ethnic enclave in the United States. The Hmong population in Minnesota was 17,764 in 1990, 45,443 in 2000, and 66,181 in 2010, representing a 273 percent increase within that 20-year period. Secondary migration meant that Hmong were able to

intentionally reassemble communities that had been fragmented through war and the refugee resettlement process. Furthermore, secondary migration allowed Hmong to determine their own destinies by relocating to areas of the United States where they then established Hmong ethnic communities. Thus, the cold northern state of Minnesota became an unlikely location for Hmong to establish and grow their communities and, ultimately, a place where queer Hmong identities developed and thrived.⁷

ENTANGLED HISTORIES: QUEER HMONG COMMUNITY FORMATIONS

ZOUA, A 28-YEAR-OLD Hmong woman who identifies as lesbian, moved from Fresno, California, to Charlotte, North Carolina, before eventually relocating to the Twin Cities in 2013. Her intention was to live with her family. She soon realized that the Twin Cities’ large Hmong population meant she was also able to meet a lot of queer Hmong young adults like herself. Zoua recalls the experiences of being among Hmong and queer people in the Twin Cities, compared with her experiences elsewhere: “When I came to Minnesota, [people] were more open to [LGBTQ people]. They’re not so reserved. That’s why Minnesota is kind of more open to everything. When I was in [Fresno], I didn’t see much LGBTQ people down there; everybody is so scared to come out.”⁸

Zoua perceived that the Twin Cities were more accepting of queer people. Digging deeper into the histories of how Minnesota’s economies, politics, and culture came to foster a progressive attitude toward sexuality is crucial for understanding Zoua’s place as a Hmong lesbian living in the Twin Cities. Histories of queer communities in Minnesota have documented a host of diverse stories, including the existence of indigenous berdaches; the burgeoning timber, grain, and iron ore industries as sites of homosexual identity development; accounts of Rice Park in St. Paul and Loring Park in Minneapolis as cruising grounds for gay sex; and the evolution of bars openly serving gay patrons from the early twentieth century to the 1960s.⁹

A more explicitly queer political development began to emerge in Minnesota beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s. For example, Minnesota’s first gay rights organization FREE (Fight Repression of Erotic Expression) was founded by a group of young people in Minneapolis’s West Bank neighborhood in May 1969, weeks before the landmark Stonewall uprising. Minnesota also saw the first same-sex couple who, after exchanging legal vows, attempted to apply for a marriage license in May 1970. Jack Baker and Michael McConnell—who were members of FREE—took their case all the way to the US Supreme Court

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Held from 2004 to 2016, SOY New Year was SOY's best-known event.



Young Hmong queer, trans, and allies advocating for legalizing same-sex marriage at the Minnesota state capitol, May 2012.

Midwest Solidarity Movement co-founders speaking at United For Our Future rally, organized by Outfront Minnesota, Minnesotans United for All Families, and Project 515 at the Minnesota state capitol, November 7, 2012.



Midwest Solidarity Movement contingent at 2013 Pride parade.



in 1971; the nation's highest court ruled in *Baker v. Nelson* that limiting marriage to opposite-sex couples did not violate the US constitution. Minnesota state senator Allan Spear became one of the first openly gay elected officials in US history and worked for nearly 20 years to amend the Minnesota Human Rights Act to prohibit discrimination based on actual or perceived sexual orientation for LGBT individuals. This legislation made Minnesota just the eighth state to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation while being the first to extend the same rights to transgender people. Zoua's understanding of Minnesota as a state that is accepting of queer people can partly be attributed to a long history of queer social life and political activity around equal rights and legislative activism.¹⁰

Perhaps the biggest catalyst to Zoua perceiving the Twin Cities to be a welcoming place for queer Hmong individuals was the existence of the queer Hmong support group and nonprofit organization Shades of Yellow (SOY). SOY was founded in 2003 by two gay Hmong men, Phia Xiong and Xeng Lor, as an informal support group consisting primarily of gay Hmong men in the Twin Cities. In a 2006 article that appeared in the national magazine *The Advocate*, SOY was featured as a "group to watch" and contained Phia's story of being disowned by his family for being gay. This ostracization led him to establish SOY as a gathering space for queer Hmong to meet and talk about their identities in safe, welcoming, and affirming ways. Chong Lor, a 21-year-old college student and member of SOY, remarked that the individuals in SOY, who numbered about 40, were his "family away from my family." SOY held informal picnics, potluck dinners, and volleyball games for its members and eventually became more diverse, including women, lesbians, and transgender individuals among its number.¹¹

The Hmong American Partnership (HAP), the largest Hmong nonprofit organization in the United States (its annual budget was over \$1 million), began serving as SOY's fiscal agent in 2006. After SOY received a substantial three-year grant totaling close to a quarter million dollars from the Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy Fund in 2009, it incorporated as a nonprofit organization. That year SOY also hired its first executive director, Kevin Xiong. Kevin had been living in Charlotte, North Carolina, when he first googled "queer Hmong" and stumbled upon SOY. Like Tou Bee and Zoua, Kevin moved to the Twin Cities to learn more about SOY and to participate in its events; he ultimately rose to lead it. Subsequent grant money in 2015 from philanthropic agencies such as PFund, the Saint Paul Foundation, Youthrise, the Knight Foundation, and Headwaters Foundation for Justice allowed SOY to implement programs like the Racial Equity

Shades of Yellow (SOY) was founded in 2003 as an informal support group consisting primarily of gay Hmong men in the Twin Cities.

Advancing Leaders Training Program to empower Hmong youth. Thus, existing infrastructures of Hmong and queer philanthropic and nonprofit funding agencies allowed SOY to become the only queer Hmong nonprofit organization in the world. These support systems also enabled SOY shortly after its founding to implement youth training, racial justice, arts programming, community workshops, and group counseling.¹²

The event SOY became most known for was the annual SOY New Year celebration, first held in 2004 in members' garages and basements. SOY's New Year celebration took place in the spring after the end of the Hmong New Year, which occurs in the fall, hosting queer Hmong, their allies, and their families. The event opened to the general public for the first time on January 21, 2006, at the Queen Asia Restaurant in St. Paul. In a *Hmong Today* article, SOY cofounder Phia pointed to the significance of the event becoming public: "It's the only place where GLBT identified Hmong can comfortably be gay and Hmong at the same time, helping to link all the communities together—Hmong and non-Hmong, gay and non-gay." Other activities at the 2006 SOY New Year included traditional Hmong folk singing *kwv txhiaj*, traditional and contemporary dances, poetry readings, a fashion show, and coming-out speeches. Cofounder Xeng said in his coming-out speech: "Everything is at risk when you do come out. However, when you don't come out, you continue to create that shame and we won't be able to prove that we exist." The SOY New Year introduced a pageant contest in 2007. Chyna Lacosta Xiong was crowned the first ever "Miss SOY." Subsequent winners included Malia Li in 2008, Lee Xiong in 2009, and Micah "Linda" Hawj, winning the pageant as "Mr. SOY" in 2010.¹³ The following year, a transgender woman, Summer Thao, was named "SOY Ambassador." The evolution of the feminine, masculine, and gender-neutral pronouns used to address the pageant winners represented SOY's move towards a more inclusive consciousness around gender issues even among queer Hmong communities.

The emergence of SOY in 2003 coincided with internal Hmong community conversations about queer topics, mostly taking place in the pages of the ethnic newspapers

Hmong Today and *Hmong Times*. First was a 2004 *Hmong Today* article in which Xeng Lor told his coming-out story and argued for the acceptance of queer Hmong youth. Though Xeng's article did not attract much attention, more articles followed.¹⁴ Following the first SOY New Year in 2006, an article appeared in the *Hmong Times* that called the event a "Hmong Coming Out Party." In the same issue, May Lee, who emceed the event, wrote an article asking poignantly, "So, is the Hmong community ready to accept the GLBT community?" Readers reacted to May Lee's article with both antagonism and support. One respondent wrote: "I have mixed feelings. I respect them, I welcome them into the community, and I have no problem with them living their lives as everyone else. But it just doesn't click with me." Another wrote: "I'm having a hard time with this. I have gay friends, I accept them, but somehow I can't accept it, if it's one of my child or a family member." Lastly, one respondent wrote: "Finally! It's about time that the Hmong people know about GLBT and have the support that we never had in the past." Following the 2008 SOY New Year, a reader wrote to the *Hmong Times*: "I can understand and appreciate that Hmong have lesbian and gay, but I don't understand why they have to separate themselves and organized their own New Year. Is this Hmong New Year or is this Hmong gay and lesbian New Year? This is crazy and pathetic."¹⁵

The growing community of queer Hmong in the Twin Cities created a conversation that did not exist prior to SOY's formation and the emergence of queer Hmong voices in the early years of the millennium. This internal community dialogue was significant to many queer Hmong, who now could educate, nurture, and find acceptance within their own families and communities.¹⁶

QUEER POLITICS AND THE BATTLES TO LEGALIZE SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

Queer politics in the United States since the 1970s has emphasized the legalization of same-sex marriage as a central goal of social and political equality. The importance of same-sex marriage in mainstream queer organizing and activism culminated in a series of legal battles in various states to defeat constitutional amendments that would either limit the definition of marriage or outlaw same-sex marriage outright. These battles began in the early 2000s and eventually led to the legalization of same-sex marriage in the United States in 2015. Minnesota was one of the states where a ballot initiative, in this case called Amendment 1, sought to establish the definition of marriage as being between one man and one woman. The organization Minnesotans United for All Families was formed to fight

Queer Hmong advocates drew on the political moment of the same-sex marriage debate to expand conversations already occurring in their own communities in ways that were empowering and transformative.

and defeat Amendment 1, which was introduced in 2012. On the other side, Minnesota for Marriage was the organization fighting to pass Amendment 1.

Media stories about the legalization of same-sex marriage in Minnesota during 2012 have not included Hmong narratives, although queer Hmong activists and advocates did participate in the efforts to defeat Amendment 1. For example, SOY was active on the social media platform Tumblr, where it collected testimonies from queer and allied Hmong and Asian Americans about their support for the legalization of same-sex marriage and opposition to Amendment 1. SOY members Bruce Thao and Nhia Vang talked about the significance of their Tumblr page in an interview on the radio show *Reflections of New Minnesotans* on AM950. "It creates a sense of connection with each other," Nhia said, "because we know there is a sense of commonality when you start reading these stories, you see common themes. It also just allows us to have these conversations, with social media, with outsiders, as we carry on these conversations."¹⁷

In 2011, a group called MidWest Solidarity Movement (MWSM) was founded as a collective of Asian American LGBTQ community organizers "building power through reclaiming narratives and redefining identities and organizing for cultural change and racial justice." MWSM was specifically devoted to defeating Amendment 1 by engaging all Southeast Asian communities; its advocacy compounded that of SOY. MWSM cofounders Linda Her, Chong Vang, and Dee Lee also worked with Minnesotans United for All Families to engage Hmong communities in defeating Amendment 1 in 2012. For example, Chong detailed how he was able to strategically employ intersectional tactics, such as speaking to individuals about both Hmong and queer issues during Minnesotans United for All Families phone bank sessions, to sway Hmong voters against Amendment 1: "Basically on Sunday, we would have all Hmong American people run it. And we would have Hmong American people call Hmong American people all day."¹⁸

On Election Day, November 6, 2012, Minnesotans voted to defeat Amendment 1. A victory event was hosted by Minnesotans United at the state capitol in St. Paul on November 8, 2012, featuring Linda and Chong as speakers. “Working with Minnesotans United for All Families has allowed me to take that personal narrative and turn it into radical action,” declaimed Chong. “With the tools of community organizing, I was able to work in my Hmong community to mobilize them to take action against this hurtful amendment, which was led by Hmong LGBTQ leaders at the forefront of this Hmong political landscape.”¹⁹

The Democratic-Farmer-Labor majority in the Minnesota senate and house then introduced two legislative bills to legalize same-sex marriage. Senator Scott Dibble and Representative Karen Clark, both gay legislators from Minneapolis, championed the bills in their respective chambers. The legislation was passed by the Minnesota legislature in May 2013. The vote included a historic affirmative from Hmong state senator Fong Hawj of St. Paul.²⁰

SOY and MWSM members were among the hundreds of same-sex marriage proponents present at the state capitol to cheer the legislation. Opponents of same-sex marriage were also present to protest the decisions, including members of the Saint Paul Hmong Alliance Church, the largest Hmong evangelical church in the Twin Cities. Although they held opposite viewpoints, the political waves surrounding the efforts to legalize same-sex marriage in Minnesota attracted both queer Hmong and Hmong elders from the Saint Paul Hmong Alliance Church to congregate at the state capitol, where they were able to mutually debate the shifting meanings of queer sexuality in Hmong communities.²¹

Governor Mark Dayton signed the bill into law, effective August 1, 2013, making Minnesota the twelfth US state to legalize same-sex marriage before it was legalized nationally by the US Supreme Court in June 2015. Hmong advocates participated alongside other advocates to shape the current state of queer politics in Minnesota through their deliberate grassroots efforts on social media and through phone banking. Also, queer Hmong advocates drew on the political moment of the same-sex marriage debate to expand conversations already occurring in their own communities in ways that were empowering and transformative.²²

MWSM continued its activities after the legalization of same-sex marriage without funding or institutional support from any larger organizations. The collective began the Queer Hmong and Asian American and Pacific Islander Narratives project, which detailed stories from members of these groups about coming out, family, community, and identity. MWSM also created promotional

videos and participated in rallies at the 2015 Twin Cities Pride along with the national social movement Black Lives Matter and Asian Pacific Islanders (API) 4 Black Lives.²³

By 2017, SOY had been in operation for close to a decade and a half. The organization held its twelfth, and what turned out to be final, SOY New Year with the theme “Reflections” on April 2, 2016. A year later, in April 2017, SOY released a public statement indicating that it was dissolving, due to shifts in leadership, funding restraints, difficulty fitting into traditional nonprofit models, and the changing needs of queer Hmong communities. “SOY struggled to fit into the traditional nonprofit mode and system. This had a major impact on our decision to close,” the statement said, revealing the irony that although funding from larger philanthropic organizations was instrumental to SOY’s success, it also worked as a barrier to SOY’s flourishing.

The organization’s statement, furthermore, revealed that it suffered from being seen as “the only” voice for queer Hmong communities. Dissolving became a way for SOY to rebuff the urge to speak for all of queer Hmong communities by giving space for other spaces to emerge. Lastly, SOY cited internal trauma from individuals as another reason to dissolve. Social justice nonprofit organizations are not always perfect. This was surely the case for SOY. “We recognize that individuals often brought trauma into the work of SOY and this trauma often led to hurt throughout the organization. We recognize that SOY has not always been a safe place for all. We recognize that we as an organization have hurt others, and that others have hurt us as well. We hope that our closing will allow for space to be opened up for deeper connection and healing.”²⁴

A farewell event took place at Lake Monster Brewing in St. Paul on June 17, 2017, to officially commemorate the dissolution of SOY and celebrate a new era of movement builders. The entanglements and intersections of Hmong, queer Hmong, and queer political histories have provided a complicated—though incomplete—portrait of how Hmong individuals have struggled and fought for visibility and social justice within their own ethnic communities in the years from 2003 to 2017. The dissolution of SOY also coincided with the waning of MWSM, two of whose cofounders, Linda Her and Chong Vang, transitioned to employment with a nonprofit organization devoted to voting and civic participation, while Dee Lee relocated to Sacramento to start another queer Hmong collective called Hmong Queer Suab.²⁵ SOY’s dissolution and MWSM’s decline in activities amalgamated with the uncertain future of queer politics in the post-same-sex marriage era, may open up new possibilities for different queer Hmong communities and politics to emerge.

MOVING FORWARD: ENVISIONING FUTURE QUEER Hmong HISTORIES

The creation of SOY, the implementation of public events like the SOY New Year, and the emergence of MWSM during the height of the battle to legalize same-sex marriage in Minnesota presented queer Hmong with a stature that they did not have prior to 2003. SOY events were featured in major magazines like *The Advocate* and the Minnesota queer magazine *Lavender*. The organizational and activist spaces and the subsequent visibility of the queer Hmong community that was generated from 2003 to 2017 was not without peril, however. Some queer Hmong did not necessarily find these spaces to be affirmative of their identities.²⁶

Individuals who were not involved in organizing or activism found themselves questioning the inclusivity of these spaces and the overall notion of “community” among queer Hmong. Pakou, a 28-year-old bisexual woman, stated: “My biggest issue in the sense of belonging in the gay community is having to try to prove to other people [other LGBTQ people] that I am gay. When we talk about a sense of belonging in the community, that’s the one thing I struggle with the most.” Another individual, Ping Pong, a 24-year-old pansexual woman, commented: “For me and one of my good friends, we don’t like hanging out with certain people. We don’t like hanging out with strong activists. They come off pushy. They say, ‘You should go out there and tell people how you feel.’ But you should only be in the spotlight if you want to be. And I’m the type of person who definitely does not want to be.”²⁷

Individuals such as Pakou and Ping Pong were never heavily involved in queer Hmong activism or organizing because they did not perceive such spaces to be affirming. Thus, the nearly 15 years of queer Hmong community formation and organizing had its limitations when it came to envisioning community. For SOY cofounder Xeng, visibility meant liberation, while for others like Ping Pong, visibility did not. SOY cited the changing needs of queer Hmong communities as one reason for its dissolution. The needs of queer Hmong individuals surely are diverse and encompass both a longing to be part of the larger community and a desire to be more individualistic. Pakou’s and Ping Pong’s experiences, like those of other queer Hmong documented here, demonstrate at the very least, the diverse needs of queer individuals as well as the imperative to consider notions of community formation that do not fully fall within organizational or activist spaces.²⁸

Many individuals wonder what the post-2015 same-sex marriage era of queer life in the United States will look like. Coincidentally, the same questions can be asked about the next chapter of queer Hmong community formation in Minnesota after SOY’s dissolution in 2017. These limited stories presented from incomplete archives suggest that queer and Hmong communities will only grow and develop new politics as time progresses—and their stories will expand as new historical sources surface. Weaving together Hmong refugee migration histories and mainstream queer histories reveals a complicated picture of how these disparate yet interrelated developments have created the conditions for queer Hmong communities to emerge and thrive against a host of difficulties facing both Hmong and queer communities in the United States. □

Notes

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1. This article uses “queer Hmong” rather than “LGBT Hmong” or “Hmong LGBT” to demonstrate a more inclusive understanding of individuals who do not fall under the rubric of “LGBT” identities. The word *queer* is used in academic and popular conversations to refer to the umbrella of identities outside of heterosexuality or even homosexuality. This article uses “queer” as a way to make non-heterosexual identities political. “LGBTQ” is used only when spoken in quotes by queer Hmong themselves. Additionally, this article uses “Hmong” as a broad identity term to include all individuals who identify as both “Hmong” and/or “Hmong American.” Interviewees’ surnames are not used in this narrative. First and last names of public individuals are

stated initially, but subsequently only their first names are used to avoid confusion with common Hmong surnames.

2. Tou Bee, interview with author, Dec. 5, 2016. The author contacted individuals whom he personally knew while posting interview requests on social media and through word-of-mouth snowball sampling within his networks. Interviews were done in the participants’ homes, the author’s home, or coffee shops. The transcribed interviews are currently in the possession of the author.

3. Keith Quincy, *Hmong: History of a People* (Cheney: Eastern Washington University Press, 1995), 58–64; Jean Michaud, “From Southeast China into Upper Indochina: An Overview of Hmong (Miao) Migrations,” *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 38, no. 2 (1997): 119–30; Chia Youyee Vang, *Hmong in Minnesota* (St. Paul: Minnesota Histori-

cal Society Press, 2008), 1; Hmong Timeline, Minnesota Historical Society, <https://www.mnhs.org/hmong/hmong-timeline>.

4. Vang, *Hmong in Minnesota*, 10.

5. Mai Na M. Lee, “Hmong and Hmong Americans in Minnesota,” *MNopedia*, <http://www.mnopedia.org/hmong-and-hmong-americans-minnesota>; Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America: A History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015), 342–43; Chia Youyee Vang, “Hmong Anti-Communism at Home and Abroad,” in *Anti-Communist Minorities in the U.S.: Political Activism of Ethnic Refugees*, ed. Ieva Zake (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 225–226; Nengher N. Vang, “Unlawful or Not? Reassessing the Value and Impact of Hmong American Transnational Politics,” *Amerasia Journal* 44, no. 2 (2018), 55–56.

6. Maykao Hang, Jim Anderson and Patricia Walker, Maoheu Thao, Mo Chang, and Laurie

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7. Chia Youyee Vang, *Hmong America: Reconstructing Community in Diaspora* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 59. The population statistics are compiled in a report by Hmong National Development, Inc.; see Mark E. Pfeifer and Kou Yang, "Hmong Population and Demographic Trends in the 2010 Census and 2010 American Community Survey," in *States of the Hmong American Community*, ed. Mark E. Pfeifer and Bruce K. Thao (Washington, DC: Hmong National Development, 2013), 8–20.

8. Zoua, interview with author, Dec. 10, 2016.

9. Ryan Patrick Murphy and Alex T. Urquhart, "Sexuality in the Headlines: Intimate Upheavals as Histories of the Twin Cities," in *Queer Twin Cities*, Twin Cities GLBT Oral History Project (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 42–72; Stewart Van Cleve, *Land of 10,000 Loves: A History of Queer Minnesota* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 13–82. Van Cleve's history of a queer Minnesota is not necessarily chronological but does reveal the existences of gay and lesbian people in Minnesota's hidden spaces since the early twentieth century.

10. Bruce Johansen, "Out of Silence: FREE, Minnesota's First Gay Rights Organization," *Minnesota History* 66, no. 5 (Spring 2019): 186; Michael McConnell with Jack Baker, *The Wedding Heard 'Round the World: America's First Gay Marriage* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016); Joshua Preston, "Senator Allan Spear and the Minnesota Human Rights Act," *Minnesota History* 65, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 84. For more histories of feminist and queer social movements and politics in Minnesota: A. Finne Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Georgina Hickey, "The Geography of Pornography: Neighborhood Feminism and the Battle Against 'Dirty Bookstores' in Minneapolis," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 32, no. 1 (2001): 125–51; Donald Alexander Downs, *The New Politics of Pornography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

11. Bao Ong, "Group to Watch: Shades of Yellow," *The Advocate*, Apr. 25, 2006, 30.

12. Tom Laventure, "Shades of Yellow: First Hmong LGBTQ Fundraiser," *Twin Cities Daily Planet*, Dec. 23, 2009; Katherine Glover, "Twin Cities-Based Shades of Yellow Promoting Visibility for Hmong Gay and Lesbian Community," *MinnPost*, Apr. 8, 2010; Frederick Melo, "St. Paul Non-Profit for Gay Hmong Wins \$10,000," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Dec. 7, 2010.

13. Kathy Mouacheupao, "GLBT Hmong Coming Out Party," *Hmong Today*, Feb. 3, 2006; Sao Sue Jurewitsch, "Hmong GLBT Community Celebrates SOY New Year 2007," *Hmong Times*, Feb. 1, 2006; Wameng Moua, "Growing Gay Community Celebrates in Style," *Hmong Today*, Mar. 1, 2007; Wameng Moua, "SOY New Year Celebrates the Growing GLBT Community," *Hmong Today*, Feb. 2008; Wameng Moua, "The GLBT Community Celebrates Another Year of Growth and

Together," *Hmong Today*, Mar. 2009; Diana Vang, "Shades of Yellow Celebrates New Year with Pageant," *Twin Cities Daily Planet*, Jan. 29, 2010; Diana Vang, "New GLBT Royalty Crowned: Linda Hawj Is 2010 'Mr. Soy,'" *Hmong Today*, Feb. 16, 2010.

14. Xeng Lor, "GLBT Hmong People," *Hmong Today*, Mar. 11, 2004.

15. Mouacheupao, "GLBT Hmong Coming Out Party"; May Lee, "Guest Editorial: GLBT Hmong People," *Hmong Today* (Febr. 3, 2006); Paul Vang, "RE: SOY New Year Celebrates the Growing GLBT Community," *Hmong Today*, Feb. 17, 2006; "Letters from the Readers," "RE: SOY New Year Celebrates the Growing GLBT Community," *Hmong Times*, Jan. 16, 2008.

16. For more on family acceptance, see Bic Ngo, "The Importance of Family for a Gay Hmong American Man: Complicating Discourses of 'Coming Out,'" *Hmong Studies Journal* 13, no. 1 (2012): 1–27; Bic Ngo, "There Are No GLBT Hmong People: Hmong American Young Adults Navigating Culture and Sexuality," in *Hmong and American: From Refugees to Citizens*, eds. Vincent K. Her and Mary Louise Buley-Meissner (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2012), 113–32; J. B. Mayo Jr., "Hmong History and LGBTQ Lives: Immigrant Youth Perspectives on Being Queer and Hmong," *Journal of International Social Studies* 3, no. 1 (2013): 79–91; Bic Ngo and Melissa Kwon, "A Glimpse of Acceptance for Queer Hmong Youth," *Journal of LGBT Youth* 12 (2015): 212–31.

17. Hear the entire interview, entitled "Shades of Yellow Marriage Amendment," on Podomatic.com, https://www.podomatic.com/podcasts/newminnesotans/episodes/2012-10-29T09_32_34-07_00. For the Shades of Yellow Tumblr, see <https://soylgbtq-blog.tumblr.com>.

18. For more information on Midwest Solidarity Movement's activities, see <https://mwsmovement.com/>; Chong Vang, interview with author, Jan. 10, 2017.

19. From the author's personal records. The author was present at the victory rally hosted by Minnesotans United for All Families, where MWSM cofounders Linda Her and Chong Vang gave speeches.

20. Minnesota Legislature, *Journal of the Senate of the State of Minnesota*, 55th Day, May 13, 2013, 367 3584.

21. The author was also present during rallies in May 2013 in which opponents and proponents protested outside the Minnesota state capitol before the state legislature passed votes to legalize same-sex marriage. He participated alongside MWSM members holding signs to urge the legislature to affirm the legalization of same-sex marriage.

22. Beth Bibus, "Battleground State: Minnesota," in *Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Civil Rights: A Public Policy Agenda for Uniting a Divided America*, ed. Wallace Swan (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2015), 109; Monica Davey, "Minnesota Senate Clears Way for Same-Sex Marriage," *New York Times*, May 13, 2013.

23. See <https://mwsmovement.com/> for MWSM's collections of personal narratives, testimonies, and poetry written by Hmong, Asian, and LGBTQ individuals: Hmong LGBTQ Narratives, AAPI May Heritage Month Narratives, and LGBTQ June Pride Narratives.

24. Andy Birkey, "SOY Will Close After 14 Years of Serving LGBTQ Hmong Community," *The Column*, Apr. 6, 2017, <http://thecolu.mn/24892/soy-will-close-14-years-serving-lgbtq-hmong-community>. SOY's website no longer exists; the public statement announcing its dissolution can be read in Birkey's article.

25. At the time of publication, the website for Midwest Solidarity Movement still exists but is inactive. Hmong Queer Suab was founded by Dee Lee in Sacramento, California in 2015. While writing about Hmong Queer Suab is beyond the scope of this article, Hmong Queer Suab is the first queer Hmong organization in the state of California.

26. For the photographic archives of SOY in *Lavender Magazine*, see <https://www.lavendermagazine.com/category/event-photography/shades-of-yellow-soy>.

27. Pakou, interview with author, Jan. 16, 2017; Ping Pong, interview with author, Jan. 6, 2017. Ping Pong uses the word *pansexual* to describe her identity. A person who identifies as pansexual is attracted to people regardless of gender, sex, or sexuality.

28. For more on queer Hmong belonging that exists outside of organizational spaces, see Kong Pha, "Finding Queer Hmong America: Gender, Sexuality, Culture, and Happiness Among Hmong LGBTQ," in *Claiming Place: On the Agency of Hmong Women*, ed. Chia Youyee Vang, Faith Nibbs, and Ma Vang (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 303–25. Also in *Claiming Place*, Bruce Thao argues about examining a broader spectrum of queer identities beyond gay and lesbian in order to understand experiences that do not fall within binary categories: Bruce Thao, "Dangerous Questions: Queering Gender in the Hmong Diaspora," 280–302.

SOY New Year poster courtesy of author; photos on p. 258 courtesy of Chong Vang.



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