

# Wat Tham Krabok Hmong and the Libertarian Moment

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## Abstract

This paper discusses how one group that James Scott might consider “Zomians,” now enclosed by the state, retains anarchistic tendencies even in recent years. From the early 1990s until 2004, Wat Tham Krabok Temple (WTK) in Saraburi Province, Thailand was settled by thousands of undocumented Lao Hmong refugees. This movement was enabled by a combination of local historical contingencies, with the extra-legal machinations of high-level state factions connected to the temple’s abbot, that likely went unseen by the majority of WTK’s Hmong inhabitants. After being deterritorialized from their Lao homeland, many of these Hmong were seeking out spaces for an autonomous livelihood, political legitimacy, and cultural reterritorialization. The pseudo-legal documentation, political patronage, and safe space provided to WTK Hmong through the abbot’s prestige and state-level connections allowed this group of immigrants to briefly enter a fold in Thai state space that sheltered them from harassment by local state agents as they pursued livelihood, cultural, and spatial autonomy. However, within WTK space the Hmong were hierarchically subordinated to Thai monks and laity in their respective access to land, resources, and cultural legitimacy. As such, WTK Hmong subverted the temple’s power structures by manipulating cultural hybridized symbols and placing them in spaces of reterritorialization.

## Introduction

James Scott’s (2009) recent work has brought unprecedented attention to the field of upland Southeast Asian studies and has drawn its own critiques (Jonsson 2012, 2010; Dove et al. 2011; Lieberman 2010; Formoso 2010; Tapp 2010). *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Southeast Asia* (hereafter *The Art*) is a daring work that draws on histories and ethnographic studies from across mountainous areas of mainland Southeast Asia and beyond, to construct a history of Southeast Asian upland minorities as anarchistic communities that have made the political decision to live in the uplands in order to escape the state. These uplanders, whom Scott—adapting an idea by Geographer Willem van Schendel (2002)—calls “Zomians,” use various forms of state escape. Scott describes escape agriculture, acephalous social structures, orality, and messianism as key methods of Zomian state evasion. Among these, the primary Zomian strategy for state evasion seems to be escape agriculture, or the use of shifting cultivation and other forms of livelihood to make Zomians less amenable to state appropriation and taxation. Scott admits, however, that this anarchistic construction of upland livelihood practices has been diminishing since 1950, due to the development of “distance-demolishing

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technologies”<sup>2</sup> (2009: 11). Acknowledging that the Lao Hmong who came to Wat Tham Krabok Buddhist Temple (hereafter WTK) in central Thailand fit much of Scott’s criteria for Zomian anarchists, this paper presents a version of the WTK Hmong story as a case study of change and continuity in anarchistic subjectivities since about 1945.

Admittedly, this group of Hmong people, like most others, does not perfectly fit Scott’s Zomian anarchist category. Having abandoned anything resembling escape agriculture or mountain spaces of refuge, the group occupies state territory and seeks citizenship over anarchy. However, Scott’s version of Zomian political subjectivity is an apt frame of reference for discussing this group even in the 21st century. In their everyday pursuit of an autonomous livelihood, these Hmong people circumvented requirements for Thai citizenship in their interactions with functionaries of local state interfaces (most importantly, the police). Their escape from this state infringement was facilitated by their patron Acharn Chamroon Parnchand and came, ironically, through appeals to authority elsewhere in the state. Reflecting on Abrams’s (1988) critique of the state as a reified or monolithic actor I hope to show that WTK and the WTK Hmong occupy a type of state space that is more complex than the ‘state space-nonstate space’ binary conception allows. In his 1977 article, Philip Abrams argues that “The state is not the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice. It is itself the mask which prevents our seeing political practice as it is.” In other words, the state is not a unified agent that homogenously fills the category we call state. Rather, what fills this space is a mesh of individual actors with differing and conflicting interests. I argue further that although the WTK Hmong have become generally entangled in state relations, they remain somewhat anarchistic in attitude, as evidenced by their attempts to gain autonomy from particular state relations and reterritorialize some space of their own on the grounds of WTK.

In making this argument, I reconstruct the history WTK’s group of Lao Hmong from the mid-20th century to the mid-2000s in order to show that WTK Hmong have some facets of libertarian attitude in their negotiations with state interfaces. I argue that during their refugee camp experience, many Hmong gained a stronger realization of the implications of their deterritorialization from Laos on their livelihood. In addition to state-level political reasons the migration of many Hmong to Wat Tham Krabok was also influenced by a tendency to seek out a space of reterritorialization that allowed for a return of male autonomous livelihood. This subjectivity is seen clearly in the tendency of these Hmong to inhabit *grey spaces*, or spaces where they perceived that the state infringed less directly on their livelihood pursuits. Through a combination of the political network of WTK’s abbot and other historical developments, Wat Tham Krabok Temple occupied a fold in Thai state space that Hmong people accessed, reterritorialized, and used to scratch out more autonomous livelihoods. This shows not only an ability to negotiate political and cultural difference and networks of power, but indicates that

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<sup>2</sup> Speaking of the enclosing of Zomia, Scott notes, “This truly imperial project, made possible only by distance-demolishing technologies (all-weather roads, bridges, railroads, airplanes, modern weapons, telegraph, telephone, and now modern information technologies including global positioning systems, is so novel and its dynamics so different that my analysis here makes no further sense in Southeast Asia for the period after, say, 1950.” (2009: 11)

aspects of libertarian subjectivity (a somewhat oxymoronic term) remain with this group of Lao Hmong political exiles.

## Research Background and Methodology

This article is based on a portion of ethnographic field research I did in Thailand over the summer of 2012, during which I conducted oral interviews in Thai and Hmong with current and former Hmong residents of Wat Tham Krabok in Saraburi, Phetchabun, Tak, and Chiang Rai provinces. I also spent one month at Wat Tham Krabok conducting interviews with monks and temple residents. My focus on monk and insurgent experiences admittedly privileges the voices of men. However, it should be noted that women figured prominently as both seekers and users of reterritorialized livelihood and religious space and had a key role in the story told here.

## State Space

In *The Art*, Scott pits *nonstate space* against *areas of state control*.<sup>3</sup> Because I will make use of similar terms, I should give some clarification and theoretical background regarding how I use words like *folds in state space*, *grey state space*, or *weak state space*. In her critique of James Scott's *Seeing like a State*, Tania Li (2005: 384) argues that, "There is [...] no spatial beyond that of the state, and there are no subjects outside power." Li, along with Timothy Mitchell,<sup>4</sup> sees the state as something not wholly separate from society. The implicit assumption in this view is that state is not 'a thing' and is not separate from society; rather, if a state exists, it is a relation or an effect (Mitchell 1991) between actors. Contrary to the Weberian version of power, this more Foucauldian idea and its subsequent idea of states<sup>5</sup> as diffuse relations of power not separate from society (existing everywhere and nowhere) would indicate that although some people see themselves as outside state control, as Scott's Zomians might have done, they have actually come into some engagement with the state and are inevitably within some sort of state relation, especially if there is a state explicitly in their midst. However, this does not rule out the possibility that subjects experience variable degrees of state

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<sup>3</sup> This can be seen for example in his explanation of enclosure, in which he notes "[...] has meant not so much shifting people from *stateless zones* to *areas of state control* but rather colonizing the periphery itself and transforming it into a fully governed, fiscally fertile zone. [emphasis added] (Scott 2009: 11)

<sup>4</sup> Mitchell notes, "The distinction [between state and society] must be taken not as the boundary between two discrete entities but as a line drawn internally within the network of institutional mechanisms through which a social and political order is maintained" (Mitchell 1991: 78).

<sup>5</sup> Foucault's idea of *statification* is that "the state is not universal nor in itself an autonomous source of power. The state is nothing else but the effect, the profile, the mobile shape of a perpetual statification (etatisation) or statifications, in the sense of incessant transactions which modify, or move, or drastically change, or insidiously shift sources of finance, modes of investment, decision-making centers, forms and types of control, relationships between local powers, the central authority, and so on. In short, the state has no heart, as we well know, but not just in the sense that it has no feelings, either good or bad, but it has no heart in the sense that it has no interior. The state is nothing else but the mobile effect of a regime of multiple governmentalities." (Foucault 2008: 77)

entanglement with different portions of the state's apparatus, ranging from subjects embedded deeply in a multiplicity of state-constructing relations to those who are only aware that 'the state' exists somewhere far off and are minimally affected by it. So, although I agree that it is now difficult to find subjects who are completely outside power and state space, there are those who position themselves against the power of the state or stand in spaces of counterpower and sometimes in systems of dual power (Graeber 2004: 24). As a group, the Hmong I discuss here are certainly not free of state relations;<sup>6</sup> however, in their search for an autonomous livelihood, they flee one portion of 'the state' through appeals to other portions of the state.

### **Constructing WTK Hmong as Zomian Anarchists**

I begin by telling a bit about the WTK Hmong. The people I discuss in this paper are in the large group (by some estimates more than 40,000 but at least 13,000) that made its home at Wat Tham Krabok Temple in the 1990s (Lor 2009: 8), before Thai authorities sent most of them to third countries after 2004. Though I am still over-essentializing an enormous, diverse group, I should say that aside from the obvious point that this group was primarily composed of Hmong from northern Laos that ended up at WTK,<sup>7</sup> the group of WTK Hmong was varied—consisting of former military and civilians, along with their families, both Chao Fa and Neo Hom, both Green and White Hmong, followers of 'traditional' Animist Hmong religions, those who followed newer forms (particularly Shong Lue Yangism), and some Christians. Nevertheless, these Hmong were categorically 'minorities.' Most in the group had no Thai citizenship, and were ethnically foreign to the Thai mainstream, often speaking little Thai—a position in some ways similar to the one they held in Laos in relation to the Lao majority ethnicity. Most important here, I believe, is to note that many of the Hmong who came to WTK had experienced a similar set of conditions from the 1960s onward. I argue that they gained an increasingly strong sense of Hmong ethnic identity at the same time that they were experiencing tremendous cultural and social change and deterritorialization.<sup>8</sup> All of this occurred within one generation after the commencement of the Second Indochina War.

In this paper I argue that this group of Lao Hmong came from a heritage of counterpower, but this is not necessarily what defined their political subjectivity. Rather, this group comes from a line of ancestors that experienced deterritorialization and exile over hundreds of years that is similar to their own war experience, giving rise to a cultural intertwinement of Chinese persecution narratives that retain some relevance today. However, this is not to say that the Hmong challenge to heteronomous authority is an expression of some timeless ethnic characteristic, as the "Hmong means free" idea might suggest. Rather, taking a decentered approach to analyzing this attitude reveals

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<sup>6</sup> Some might argue however that the Hmong 'tribal' segmentary social system inhibits autochthonous state formation, giving way to the acephalous social systems and traditions of counterpower noted by Graeber (2004), following Pierre Clastres.

<sup>7</sup> These Hmong were primarily from Xieng Khouang, Houaphan, Xanyabouli, and Vientiane provinces.

<sup>8</sup> *Deterritorialization* is a term coined by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1972). I use it here in the sense that anthropologists commonly use it to mean the separation of a people from a location and localized cultural practices. I also use *reterritorialization* to describe the act connected to a desire to reconnect cultural practice with location.

that the anarchist tendencies often attributed to “the Hmong” are socially constructed in real time and could be reversible amid differing sets of historic contingencies (though they are internalized elements of Hmong culture and collective memory).

After fleeing military suppression in China at the hands of the Chinese state military during the great Miao rebellion in Guizhou 1855–1872, many of their ancestors crossed from northern Vietnam into northern Laos throughout the 19th century (Tapp 1989: 18). Most of these Hmong lived in the mountainous regions of Laos near the border with Vietnam. As shifting cultivators, they were dispersed across the mountains in small settlements of only a few families (usually much smaller than in lowland villages) (Grandstaff 1976; Cooper 1984). As such, along the lines of Scott’s escape agriculture thesis, they were difficult to bring into ‘state space’ because their livelihood strategies were shifting and more illegible than was true for sedentary paddy rice cultivators. During the early years of their passage into Laos, state interaction was limited. However, by the early 1900s, the French colonial administration reached into Hmong villages asking for rent and *corvée*. The ethnic Dai (Tai) middlemen sent by colonial authorities became the victims of the Madman’s War (1918–1922), led by Hmong messianic prophet Pa Chai Vue (Paj Cai Vwj) (Stuart-Fox 1997: 39–40). Following this and other related episodes, the French colonial administration made efforts to improve relations with the Hmong in the Xieng Khouang area and began appointing prominent Hmong men as government officials. Though many Hmong began moving to lowland areas after the selection of Touby Lyfoung (the period’s most prominent Hmong leader) as deputy governor of Xieng Khouang Province in 1947, a majority of Hmong continued to live in the mountains, away from heavier Lao state intervention (Yang 1993: 90), until the commencement of the Indochina Wars.

### **War and Enacting Deterritorialization**

The war was the first step toward WTK Hmong deterritorialization. Hmong livelihood patterns changed drastically during the Second Indochina War (1961–1975) and then changed again during the post-war insurgency, which has continued from 1975 to the present (though it is now reduced to a handful of fighters). Hmong people moved from the lands they had lived on for a century and were alienated from livelihood practices and corresponding cultural constructions they had formed there. In this historical moment just prior to the war, most Hmong people in northern Laos tended to engage in more subsistence-oriented livelihoods that consisted of shifting fields of dry rice and corn, vegetable gardens, hunting, forest gathering, and pastoralism.<sup>9</sup> Although Hmong men and women usually conducted agricultural activities together, this system of livelihood was otherwise divided along gender lines; with men clearing swiddens, building houses, hunting, and tending large livestock (oxen and some buffalo), and women tending gardens and small livestock, weeding, making clothes, and doing other forms of reproductive labor (Yang 1993, Lee 2005). Yang notes that after 1947, some Hmong began moving to the lowlands and became more engaged in market economies,

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Cooper has argued that the growth of opium in northern Thailand as a commercial crop led to an increasing sedentarization of Hmong settlement, an increase in the population density of Hmong settlements, and an increase in the authority base of Hmong men over women (1984: 60, 146).

but the key change for our purposes seemed to come when the war began and Hmong people in northern Laos were concentrated to the south of the Plain of Jars around towns like Long Cheng and Sam Thong (Yang 1993: 93). Here, their access to agricultural and grazing land became more restricted, though not completely precluded. Former livelihood practices persisted to some degree but were replaced with the advent of a wartime economy in which the families of Hmong soldiers in the Royal Lao Army (RLA) increasingly depended on wage payments to purchase supplies that were airdropped from outside the immediate area.<sup>10</sup>

In terms of gendered livelihood practices, the wartime economy did not seem to challenge 'traditional' Hmong gender hierarchies. A portion of subsistence livelihood remained, but the Hmong were increasingly involved in military conflict, changing the normative acts of male livelihood duty from agrarian tasks or hunting to military employment. Though duties were altered, the male Hmong position as primary breadwinner continued, maintaining him as "the roots" (Symonds 2004: 9, 31) of Hmong society. Although many Hmong involved in the war had moved from their upland locations and its constellations of livelihood practice, this deterritorialization did not destabilize the male position in family and societal hierarchies. However, after the official defeat in 1975, this group of Hmong fled Laos to take up residence in refugee camps in Thailand where gender hierarchies faced legitimate challenges.

### **Refugee Camp Life and Realizing Deterritorialization**

The weight of cultural deterritorialization was increasingly realized by many Hmong while living in refugee camps in Thailand from around 1978 to 1994. At the camps, some Hmong men continued military activities in the form of insurgency that played out across the border. Such activities, now without official backing, provided neither the prestige nor the pay of past military employment. Hmong refugees were supplied with food and necessities by aid organizations. However, this often proved insufficient to make ends meet comfortably. In refugee camps there was no land for the practice of subsistence agriculture. Also, camp occupants were restricted from leaving and finding work elsewhere when they were in their latter years of camp residence. This led to a new prominence for the 'traditional' duties of women. Hmong women supplemented family income and diets through gardening and embroidery. Some men even began to embroider. It goes without saying, Hmong men's awkward participation in a traditionally feminized task signaled a quaking legitimacy of Hmong gender hierarchies. If they had not already, it was at this moment that many in this group of Hmong, especially men, would have felt the pangs of deterritorialization from pre-war life in Laos and pined for livelihood practices that met cultural expectations.

### **Acknowledging Cultural Subjectivities**

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Hmong refugees were coming to a stronger realization of their ethnic identity just as they grasped the cultural significance of their deterritorialization from their Lao homeland. Both realizations came largely through war

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<sup>10</sup> Also, Alfred McCoy (2003) argues that opium production gained prominence, especially at this time.

and refugee camp experiences. Hjørleifur Jonsson (2009) charted the ontogeny of stronger ethnic identity among the Lu Mien. For him, the ethnic identity of Lu Mien rightists solidified as they were collectively associated with the authority of military leaders and the corresponding agendas of militarized life. Though this argument might easily be extended to cover Hmong wartime ethnic ontogeny under General Vang Pao, I argue that the collective association and geographic proximity of Hmong, one with another, was already enough to strengthen a collective ethnic identity. During the war, Hmong settlement changed from a broad dispersion across the hills to a tight concentration in the military towns. At Long Cheng and Sam Thong, they were organized and socialized with their coethnics and a variety of others, including Khmu, Lu Mien and Americans. This gathering continued after exile when Hmong continued to live, observe, and interact with one another in closed quarters. Here, a new flowering of Hmong culture took place as Hmong created new cultural forms and institutions, precipitating what Tapp has called a “reformation of culture” (1989: 180–193).

One strong example of this flowering of Hmong ethnic identity came in the form of the religious innovations created by the *Koom Haum Hmoob* or *Koom Haum Haum Xeeb* organization at the Ban Vinai Refugee camp. Many among this religious group had previous ties to Shong Lue Yang’s restorationist religious movement (see Smalley 1990). At the official Ban Vinai refugee camp in Loei Province, the movement sought to restore and disseminate the true version of Hmong culture and practices. In so doing, the group cast Hmong identity against the backdrop of other ethnic identities. Bits and pieces of Thai-Buddhist, American, Christian and Chinese iconography, religious practice and dress were appropriated and hybridized with Hmong elements. It appears the *Koom Haum Haum Xeeb* members referenced what they found in other groups to come to a stronger realization of their own identity (Anderson 1998). In so doing, they readjusted Hmong religious life to make the Hmong one great ethnicity among the others with which they were hybridized. I was assured by one of the group’s founders that this ‘new way’ (*kev cai tshiab* in Hmong) was conceived of and practiced in order to help the Hmong live with and love all other ethnicities and peoples. In this fluorescence of Hmong culture, we see not only a reaffirming of Hmong group identity but a noticeable readjustment to new circumstances. Implicit to this readjustment are the changes that these Hmong people experienced in the course of their rapid deterritorialization from pre-war life in Laos. Against this backdrop, the Hmong were looking for an alternative space of reterritorialization. Wat Tham Krabok temple (WTK) in Saraburi Thailand was such a space.

### **WTK as an Alternative State Space**

First, it should be understood that WTK was not an official refugee camp. The Hmong that came to live there were not Thai citizens and had no ostensible legal right to live and work in Thailand, but they had some underlying support. As the Chatchai Choonhavan government moved toward rapprochement with the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Thailand found it necessary to end its support of Hmong and other rightist insurgents based at refugee camps along the Thai-Lao border (Long 1992; Hillmer 2009: 278; Baird 2012). So, although Thailand’s government once supported and aided these efforts, it began substantively turning its back on them by the late 1980s, a change

concurrent with refugee camp closure. By 1992, Hmong left the camps in large numbers and many made their way to third countries (including the United States, France, Canada and Australia), and others were repatriated to Laos. A third contingent remained in Thailand in need of a new place to settle. Although some recall being encouraged by Thai authorities to blend in with Hmong populations in northern Thailand, many in this group lacked family or a means of settlement in the north. Instead, thousands of them made their way to WTK, begging the question of how a concentrated community of thousands of undocumented Lao Hmong refugees was allowed to make a home in central Thailand for more than a decade. After all, WTK is in the center of Thailand's central plain (a little over an hour from Bangkok), an area where Hmong people and other highlanders had not lived, especially in such large numbers.

I will explain in the next section that this seemingly unexpected move was facilitated by a complex set of conditions that opened up a grey area in Thai State space for WTK's unorthodox functioning and made WTK a place Hmong people could settle in large numbers in the 1990s. As an institution, WTK appeared in some ways to act counter to any ostensible requirements of 'the' state. Actually, WTK seemed to be using its connections with important state-level actors to gain autonomy through its interfaces with 'the' local Thai state. This arrangement was facilitated by a combination of WTK's political connections with superior actors in the state—including leaders in Thailand's Internal Security Operations Command, military, police and royal family (see Baird 2013 for a full explanation)—and a complex set of contextual features—legal, social, historical and cultural—at the local level. WTK's network of connections thus allowed it to inhabit a gap in Thai state space that was consequently open for WTK Hmong to fill, thus affording this large group of undocumented Lao Hmong some livelihood autonomy in Thailand.

There were several important features in this arrangement. First, WTK has had connections with Hmong people since around the time the temple was founded. Second, because Chamroon Parnchand, WTK's leader for three decades (1970–1999), was politically connected and held international prestige, he was able to use his prestige and connections to hold off local Thai police and government intervention in 'his' space. Third, WTK, as an unorthodox Buddhist institution, is less connected with and influenced by its immediate geographic community. Fourth, due to a unique turn of historical events and legal conditions, it appears that WTK's land tenure is both precarious (in *de jure* terms) and firm (in *de facto* terms<sup>11</sup>), allowing WTK to settle Hmong there with less interference from local state organizations than would be expected otherwise.

During the first few years following the founding of WTK as a Buddhist institution it began a drug rehabilitation program. According Chamroon, who led WTK after his Aunt Mian Parnchand died in 1970, the first few patients (ethnic Thais) willfully requested WTK assistance to quit opium after the Sarit Thanarat government ended the legal opium monopoly in 1959 (Baird 2013: 127, Pasuk and Baker 1995: 279). This initiated a steady stream of patients entering WTK, both voluntarily and by force, for a tough course of drug

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<sup>11</sup> Because WTK has not yet attained official "temple" status in the eyes of the Sangha National Council, it is not officially allowed to take land donations. However, due to the unofficial donations of several faithful disciples of WTK leaders, the temple has amassed significant land holdings. Such unofficial donations remain in the donor's name but have been given over to WTK for use.



rehabilitation, which the temple continues to offer at no cost today. Among the varied ethnicities of patients at the temple, some Hmong began coming in the early 1960s. It remains unclear how this connection was initiated,<sup>12</sup> but a significant number of Hmong from northern Thailand came to the temple, strengthening the Hmong connection to WTK. From this early period, a special bond between the leader and founder of WTK, Mian Parnchand (known generally in Thai as ‘Luang Por Yai’), and the Hmong became apparent. By 1968, two years before her death, Luang Por Yai prophesied that a large number of Hmong would come to live on WTK’s grounds (Baird 2013: 133). This prophecy is widely remembered among the monks at WTK. Surely, for WTK monks, the difficult task of taking on thousands of Hmong refugees became more bearable because of the respect that they had for the memory of Luang Por Yai.

The Hmong relocation did not, however, hinge simply on the monks of the temple accepting their guests. Broader geopolitical conditions could open or close the temple doors to the Hmong. The temple’s second leader, Chamroon, had important political connections and prestige that made Hmong settlement at WTK possible. To the enhancement of his broad political reputation, Chamroon was the winner of Asia’s Ramon Magsaysay award in 1975. This award, which he won for his opium rehabilitation efforts, gave him a moral prestige roughly equivalent to the prestige a Nobel Peace Prize recipient. However, it was Chamroon’s less public connections that were probably more politically effective, namely his association with former Police Commander Phao Siyanon and membership in Thailand’s secret police (*Santiban* in Thai). Chamroon worked for Phao in the 1950s, prior to the 1957 coup led by Phao’s political rival, Sarit Thanarat, which took Phibun Songkhram out of power, dislodged Phao, and sent him into exile (Baird 2013). These awards and affiliations provided Chamroon the respect of local and national authorities including police and military.

As Phao’s associate, Chamroon was a member of the police commander’s select Atsawin Waen Phet group<sup>13</sup> (Thanakon n.d.: 3). This connection led him to foster powerful friends and powerful enemies, but sometimes these became one and the same. Interestingly, Sarit Thanarat, Thailand’s Prime Minister (1958–1963) and nemesis of Chamroon’s former boss Phao Siyanon<sup>14</sup> (Baker and Pasuk 2009: 148) became a supporter of Chamroon’s drug rehabilitation efforts, to which he donated large amounts of money through Air Marshall Thawi Chunlasap (Thanakon n.d.: 20) to buy land and build facilities at WTK. During the 1970s, Chamroon was connected with Internal

<sup>12</sup> Several stories have been circulated among the Hmong in Thailand that the founding abbot called the Hmong “her people” and that she shared many special connections with the Hmong, including possibly promising them help in a past life or being herself a Hmong in a past life. Thai monks at the temple tell different stories, some of which discount the supernatural connections between Luang Por Yai and the Hmong and others that confirm them (for a fuller explanation, see Baird 2013 and Chambers 2013).

<sup>13</sup> In his influential work *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, historian Alfred McCoy explains that before the closing of Thailand’s opium monopoly, Phao Siyanon and his rival Sarit Thanarat were heavily involved in the opium trade. Phao and Sarit made efforts to conceal this by cracking down on opium in central Thailand while they continued to engage in the trade in the north via KMT-brokered opium grown by Hmong and other hill groups. Furthermore, McCoy calls the Atsawin Waen Phet Phao’s personal hit men. If accurate, such a categorization adumbrates Chamroon’s possible connections with the Hmong even prior to the founding of WTK.

<sup>14</sup> It was possibly the Sarit coup that drove Chamroon to take sanctuary in the monkhood in 1957 (Baird 2013: 125)

Security Operations Command (ISOC) leader Special Colonel Sutsai Hatsadin, who assisted in securing the movements of Hmong insurgents from refugee camps to WTK before they headed to combat or training (see Baird 2013: 137). Reflecting Tyrell Haberkorn's (2011) chapter, this history conforms with ISOC's history of going beyond legal and judicial boundaries to accomplish its purposes. Also, the King of Thailand's older sister, Princess Galyani Vaddhana, visited Chamroon to ask him to dedicate his efforts to getting at the root of the upland opium problem, requesting that he help stop upland minority opium production by targeting the Hmong for rehabilitation (Baird 2013: 136). Several prominent rightist figures had strong ties with the temple.<sup>15</sup> Most notably, Somkhuan Harikul—founder of the Village Scouts—was a member of the Wat Tham Krabok Foundation and made multiple visits to the temple (Baird 2013: 131).

Understanding Chamroon's connections with Thailand's Ministry of Interior (*Krasuang Mahatthai* in Thai) is also particularly important to understanding his assistance with Lao Hmong livelihood pursuits and political autonomy. Early in the days of Hmong settlement at WTK, Chamroon was able to issue cards to new arrivals that noted their status as WTK residents. These had only WTK's seal stamped on them and could claim no other authority. I was told by several informants that these cards protected their bearers, for a time, from police harassment, allowing them to travel in the area and look for work. Although they were all ostensibly there for drug rehabilitation, the reality was much more complicated. In the late 1990s, however, it became necessary for Chamroon to commission one monk named Luang Ta Ert to create new identification cards for WTK's Hmong residents. These cards sported the Phraphutthabat's district insignia and noted that they were issued by the Ministry of Interior's Department of Provincial Administration (*krom kanpokkhrong* in Thai). One WTK monk and several Hmong informants called these "yellow cards." The monk further stated that Luang Ta Ert had high-level bureaucratic connections and was possibly brought on as a WTK monk for the sole purpose of helping the Hmong resettle in more permanent locations in the North (particularly Tak Province). After examining one such card presented to me by a former Lao Hmong resident of WTK, I realized that rather than listing Xieng Khouang in Laos, the card erroneously listed Thailand's Tak Province as the card holder's place of birth (or *Phumi lamnao* in Thai). This was a convenient mistake, and likely not the only one of its kind, particularly since the monk informant mentioned earlier believed Luang Ta Ert had encouraged many Hmong to leave WTK in the late 1990s and early 2000s and resettle in Tak to blend in with the Hmong population there. In this way, some Lao Hmong gained Thai citizenship.

These connections and prestige were also very important to the prospects for safety and an autonomous livelihood for Hmong looking for work in the area surrounding WTK. According to one retired Army general who oversaw intelligence gathering in the Saraburi area, WTK under Chamroon's watch was "a land unto itself," with very little encroachment from local authorities such as police and military. Because the Hmong lived under the constant specter of forced repatriation to Laos and the uncertainty of a life that would follow such a fate, they were deeply grateful for the protection that Chamroon's connections and prestige allowed them in the WTK space. However, the power of those connections did not end at the temple border. The aforementioned

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<sup>15</sup> Baird (2013) gives a longer list that includes rightists such as the Buddhist monk Phra Kittivuddho.

documentation<sup>16</sup>—in the form of house registration and identification cards—allowed WTK Hmong to travel in Thailand outside of the temple looking for work and reducing their fear of being arrested, forcibly repatriated to Laos, or extorted for cash. Compared to Hmong life in refugee camps like Ban Vinai, where Hmong were restricted from leaving for work, Hmong at WTK had relative freedom to leave and find work. Furthermore, WTK’s documentation, though legally invalid or somewhat specious, had the power to protect the Hmong from police harassment while outside temple grounds.

And, although WTK likely had the support of powerful actors at the national government level, the temple is isolated from the surrounding local community, which includes two small Thai villages—Sap Cha-om and Thai Phatthana—bordering WTK (in the Khao Prong Prap valley where both the villages and the temple are located) and Phra Phutthabat township five kilometers away, outside of the valley. Although Thai temples are commonly also community centers, WTK was not as beholden to the will of the surrounding community had the villagers been averse to Hmong settlement in their midst.

This isolation had a lot to do with WTK as an unorthodox Buddhist institution. As mentioned, WTK was founded by three members of the Parnchand family: Mian, Chamroon, and Charoen. Interestingly, Mian Parnchand, more commonly known as Luang Por Yai, Aunt of Chamroon and Charoen, was the first leader of the group. In Thailand, orthodox interpretations of Theravada doctrine do not allow for the ordination of women to monk or bhikku status. But Aunt Mian Parnchand led the temple from 1957 until her death in 1970, acting as a self-ordained bhikku and establishing herself as a manifestation of “Lokkutara” (a genderless being that had manifested itself before as some of the great religious leaders of the world and had taught the Buddha in his past lives). WTK bases its doctrine and practices on the teachings of Luang Por Yai, some of which include the utilization of different prayer books (or *bot suat* in Thai), abstinence from vehicular conveyance of any kind (automobiles, bicycles, etc.), eating only one meal daily, engaging in agriculture, and going on yearly *thudong* or long walks. Initially, WTK monks made connections with the community through daily alms gathering; however, when the successful drug-rehabilitation program pushed the number of monks at WTK past one hundred, their daily alms gathering became a burden on surrounding villages. Because WTK monks abstain from riding in wheeled vehicles and are generally busy with agricultural and construction projects, it would have taken too long for them to make daily walks to Phra Phutthabat Township to collect alms. As a result, WTK leadership decided to build a kitchen and cafeteria and feed their monks on donations made by a few wealthy donors who brought in food, rather than going out to collect it. This internalization of food provision effectively ended daily contact between monks and outside community members. Even if the surrounding community would have accepted WTK’s unorthodox Buddhism, the two groups thus shared little mutual influence or connection due to geography and the constraints of foot travel. The limited influence of the immediate community might have given WTK wider license to settle Hmong on their land.

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<sup>16</sup> Manop “Piak” Parnchand, a relative of Chamroon, was in charge of creating house registrations for the WTK registry. Luang Ta Ert, who apparently had high-level connections, worked to issue the identification cards from the Ministry of the Interior.

Of course, Hmong settlement at WTK could not have happened without the underlying allowance of high-level state actors and state involvement (as adumbrated in the discussion of Chamroon's prestige and connections). A discussion of WTK *territoriality*<sup>17</sup> is also helpful, however, for understanding how a large group of Lao Hmong people lacking Thai citizenship status were ostensibly allowed to evade local state attention and settle for more than a decade only an hour away from the Thai Capital. The territoriality explanation for Hmong settlement at WTK helps us to understand some mechanisms, aside from and possibly derivative of Chamroon's political connections, which legitimated local—ecclesiastical and secular—state agents' benign neglect to enforce citizenship rules against this enormous group of Hmong. WTK's peculiar territoriality has to do with the temple's official legal status. Colloquially, Wat Tham Krabok is called a "wat" (Thai for "temple") and fulfills many of the same functions of a temple. However, in the books of the *Therasamakhom*<sup>18</sup> (the ecclesiastical arm of Thailand's government known in English as the *Sangha National Council*), WTK is listed one tier below temple status as a temporary monk's residence (or *Samnak Song* in Thai) and allotted corresponding legal rights and privileges. In an effort to solidify his leadership authority through his official backing of the *Therasamakhom*, WTK's current abbot Boonsong Tanajaro has renewed efforts to gain official temple status, thereby staving off challenges to his authority in WTK space by rival factions. However, the reluctance of local government and religious leaders<sup>19</sup> to approve this unorthodox institution as an official temple has made WTK's transition to temple status a protracted process. As of July 2012, WTK's petition awaited final approval, so the abbot's policy was still not subject to the close and direct *Therasamakhom* enforcement and influence that might have prevented Hmong settlement.

However, during the period of the first three abbots, from 1957 to 2008, the temple's lack of legal support and legitimacy did not stop this 'monk's residence' from acting like a 'temple' that controls its own land. Accordingly, from 1957 to the present, WTK leaders, particularly Chamroon, have worked to increase the span of land they control, from a tiny area at the foot of Tham Krabok Mountain to a swath of 300 rai or 48 hectares that stretches out along the foot of the mountains encircling Khao Prong Prap Valley. Although WTK leaders have de facto control of this space, they do not officially own the land. As a monk's residence, WTK cannot take legal title over donated land in the name of the Sangha, as law compels official temples to do. As such, any land donated to WTK stays in the name of the private donor but is unofficially handed over to WTK to be used as the monk's residence sees fit. Because the donors, as wealthy religious students of prominent WTK monks, have no intention of retracting their informal land donations, WTK has gained de facto control of 48 hectares of land without direct legal ownership or the backing of the Sangha. Though unintentional, this diffusion of official ownership

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<sup>17</sup> According to Robert Sack, *territoriality* is the socially constructed control that someone has over an area of territory. Sack notes that territoriality usually involves three key features: some sort of boundary, which is made clear through signals and symbols, a set of rules for governing those boundaries, and the enforcement by consequence at the breaching of those set boundaries (Sack 1985: 33).

<sup>18</sup> The Sangha National Council is a government institution that is responsible for regulating Buddhist institutions in Thailand.

<sup>19</sup> This includes Sangha and secular leaders at the level of the province and district.

rights to several donors rather than a single temple authority directly overseen by Therasamakhom authorities seems to have opened a legal grey area, which may have kept the issue of Therasamakhom control of WTK land out of the purview of local authorities and allowed for the process of Hmong settlement. Arguments about government interference aside, this donation strategy allowed WTK to get control of enough land to offer thousands of Hmong refugees a place to settle.

In the previous section, I provided a historical context for the articulation of the Hmong in WTK space, noting the cultural and historical luggage they brought with them on their journey to WTK. I have also shown some aspects the configuration of WTK as an institution in relation to some state structures, and how this made a space for the Hmong to enter. In the following section I demonstrate how this relationship between the Hmong and WTK authorities played out once the Hmong came to WTK. This particular instantiation shows how historical context and libertarian subjectivity have influenced Hmong resistance to WTK authority.

### **Hmong Subordination at WTK**

The preceding section highlighted some aspects of WTK's particular configuration in relation to the Thai state and the Lao Hmong people who came to live at the temple. I now shift to discuss specifically how the Lao Hmong articulated themselves on the landscape of WTK and how this articulation was in subordination to WTK authority.

Though several Lao Hmong families (including Chao Fa leaders) had been living at WTK since the late 1970s, thousands of Hmong leaving with the closure of refugee camps in northern Thailand hesitated to go to a third country and began moving to WTK around 1992. This movement was likely facilitated by state factions and Chamroon's rehabilitation program, which had already taken many Thai Hmong, providing a tenuously credible cover for Lao Hmong settlers. However, that some interviewees had been encouraged by Thai officials to stay in the north and blend in with Hmong there (as many did at that time and have done since) indicates the Hmong had some choice as to whether they would stay at WTK or go elsewhere. In contrast to the refugee camps, WTK documentation allowed Hmong to come and go much more freely, making it possible to exit once they arrived, but they continued to come and stay by the thousands, to build houses, and to find work in and around the temple. Many interviewees continue to relish their memory of this plentiful season in the mid-1990s, recalling WTK's auspicious geomantic positioning and their hope for continued prosperity there (see Chambers 2013).

Despite these ostensible benefits, there were drawbacks to life at the temple for the Hmong who lived there. Although they were able to subvert some aspects of Thai state hierarchy based on the negotiated form of citizenship that WTK's documentation provided, WTK as an institution also subordinated the Hmong in its own space. Most notably, Hmong people were managed and controlled by WTK temple authorities in their access to space, land and resources. WTK Hmong residences were divided geographically into four groups, each with a leader who was to report to Chamroon daily. Through this hierarchy, Chamroon sent out orders, which included rules on the regulation of land use, labor agreements with outside contractors, and even ritual practices (i.e., restricting the slaughter of cattle for funerals), to WTK's burgeoning Hmong population. In some ways

this structure of power relations resembled a rational state (a mini-WTK state), adding to the idea that WTK occupied a fold in Thailand's state space. As I will explain in the next section, even in the position in which the Hmong found themselves, they found ways to resist unwanted regulation and gain access to land and resources. This resistance involved the appropriation and hybridization of WTK symbols and placing those symbols on previously restricted landscapes in order to gain access to them.

Hmong at WTK were spatially subordinated, occupying a spot below temple authorities and other Thais there. Although WTK's land holdings were large, Chamroon's territorial preference only allowed Hmong to settle WTK space in particular sections of land at particular times. From the abbot's point of view, this would have made settlement orderly and legible (Scott 1998). But in practice, the regulation created a crowded mass of slum-like bamboo dwellings on one section of land while other available sections of WTK land lay empty. It should be noted that Hmong people attach geomantic significance to the positioning of their homes and do not prefer crowding. Perhaps more significantly, WTK Hmong were sent spatial messages through the segregation of the Hmong village from other more strictly Thai or Buddhist spaces on WTK grounds. Within the bounds of space controlled by WTK, the sections of land on which the Hmong were allowed to settle were as far away from the inner WTK temple complex and the Thai village as possible. As the more distant parcels of land filled, it appears that necessity allowed Hmong settlement to inch closer to these Thai spaces. Still, WTK Hmong were not generally allowed to make their homes in the sturdy, comfortable homes built by the temple for Thai lay people in the temple's Thai village.

Furthermore, WTK Hmong were not allowed access to land for agriculture. As most WTK Hmong (especially members of the older generation) had practiced more subsistence-oriented forms of livelihood prior to the war, there appears to have been a strong desire among many of them to have land to produce their own living. Temple authorities initially prevented the Hmong from having access to agricultural land. This would have been especially frustrating to them since the temple controlled a fair amount of land on the floor of Khao Prong Prap Valley that, though somewhat rocky, was good agricultural land and was ringed by a horseshoe-shaped mountain range containing several small valleys which the Hmong could have amply utilized. According to notions and narratives that peg the Hmong as upland forest destroyers (Delang 2002:484), Chamroon set a rule for WTK Hmong that prohibited them from clearing any new land (in the mountains) for agriculture. They were allowed access only to mountain land that had already been cleared by Thais (who were apparently permitted such modifications). However, in around 1992, the only land that had been cleared was still in use by Thai farmers from the local area. As such, some interviewees who came to WTK in those early years recounted bitterly that they had no access to land unless local Thai farmers allowed it (though the situation later improved).

Similarly, in the years of Hmong life at WTK before Charoen Parnchand, who was Chamroon's younger brother and WTK's abbot from 1999 to 2008, built WTK's water system,<sup>20</sup> the Hmong had limited access to water. Because there is no natural body of

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<sup>20</sup> In the late 1990s, Charoen built a series of water towers that distributed water throughout the Hmong village. This must have made Hmong life at WTK drastically more convenient. However, because the Hmong began

water in the valley, inhabitants of the WTK area have depended on manmade wells and ponds to meet their water needs. WTK's 'large pond' (*bor yai* in Thai) provides water for temple use. For a time, the only source of water for the Hmong that did not require payment was the large pond, but the temple controlled this source. Hmong were made to wait their turn in a lengthy queue that stretched up the road and into the neighboring Thai village. Furthermore, if the temple did not want to allow access, it was their prerogative not to do so. Aside from the large pond, a number of Thais dug wells from which they pumped water for sale to Hmong customers until several Hmong families gained enough capital to drill their own wells. Apparently, these Thai-owned establishments also required lengthy wait times and charged a fee.

### **Hmong Resistance and Reterritorialization**

Having discussed some forms of Hmong subordination at WTK, I turn to and question the Hmong reaction. Though this section discusses Hmong resistance to subordination and reterritorialization, I should first note that it is wrong to assume that all, or even a majority, of the Hmong at WTK were driven toward resistance or active subversion. Such a sterile, mechanistic thesis (that the Hmong necessarily perceived their position of subordination and inevitably resisted) minimizes the variety of WTK Hmong perspectives, rigidifies fluctuating/varied social relations, places actors in neat ethnically marked containers, and fails to acknowledge the balancing act that many Hmong faced as they evaluated and interacted with their Thai Buddhist patrons. Nevertheless, many Hmong perceived that they were subordinated at WTK and sought ways to overcome this relationship. Though elements of this attitude might simply reflect the long line of generic cultural narratives that place the Hmong in subordination to majority lowland ethnic groups, several interviewees recounted the subordination they perceived the Hmong faced specifically at WTK. The majority of interviewees recalled oppression more obliquely. Their evaluation of WTK usually came as praise for Chamroon's benevolence, but at the same time, they made peripheral mention of the slights and hardships they faced at WTK.

This bipolarity hints that the Hmong were balancing their relationship with WTK authorities. Though some acknowledged inequity, direct resistance would have been difficult. WTK Hmong had to choose between remaining hierarchically disadvantaged—lacking secure and convenient access to some basic resources—on the one hand and biting the hand of the patron that allowed them to feed themselves on the other. As such, the Hmong attempted to answer this conundrum by soft-handedly negotiating for resource access by naming spaces and resources after Luang Por Yai and thus appealing to cultural meanings valued by the Hmong and Thai community at WTK. In perpetuating place and resource names after the revered teacher, the Hmong re-evoked her acknowledged affinity for their group and her institution's presumed commitment to Hmong welfare. It is doubtful that most WTK Hmong kept this specific instrumentality explicitly in mind; however, the habitual/mundane circulation of such place names among the Hmong and monk community continually reaffirmed the general authority of

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leaving WTK in 2004-2005, the system was used less than a decade before it was abandoned and it has now fallen into disuse.

the WTK monk hierarchy, while discursively subverting inequities between Thai and Hmong inhabitants of WTK. This manipulation of meaning attached to natural resource landscapes allowed the Hmong more secure access to these resources. The act simultaneously facilitated incremental reterritorializing of Hmong space against the dominance of Thai authority at WTK. So, although these Hmong were very clearly confined within a network of power, they were acting counter to it. Just as they had escaped the control of localized Thai state strictures on undocumented inhabitants of Thailand, in taking Luang Por Yai's name and symbols and placing them on the landscape of WTK, they were now making an effort to escape the strictures of WTK authorities, gain a more autonomous livelihood and claim points of reterritorialization of Hmong identity in their immediate environs.

For example, although the WTK Hmong were not allowed to clear land and were initially denied access to land cleared by Thais in the early post-1992 years, once the Thai mango farmer who had cleared some upland fields in the mountains surrounding WTK left his land to fallow, a significant number of Hmong began approaching the land and using it for gardening and agriculture. As one Thai monk told me proudly, the Hmong began calling this area "Luang Por Yai's Valley." In using this appellation, the Hmong affirmed that WTK authority remained generally ascendant, but simultaneously reminded the current temple leaders that WTK's revered spiritual leader promised to help the Hmong and probably would not mind their use of the land. Thus, according to both Thai monks and lay Hmong, by the mid-1990s it was commonplace and acceptable for the Hmong to spend time in the mountains surrounding WTK, accessing the mountain land for livelihood supplementation and exploration.

As discussed earlier, insecure and inconvenient water access pushed WTK Hmong to drill their own wells. As one would imagine, however, the drilling and maintenance of these wells was expensive and time consuming. A natural spring located halfway up the mountain trail to a mountain valley provided an alternative. However, WTK Hmong were initially denied access to the spring by a Thai claimant. Once old age forced this farmer to reduce his own visits, WTK Hmong increased their use of the spring, eventually dominating use of the source and forming long lines up the mountain to collect daily supplies of water. They dubbed the spring "Luang Por Yai's" water (*Dej Niam Loos Meb* in Hmong), thus solidifying their access to this natural resource in a similarly 'authority-affirming' manipulation of meaning like that used in accessing "Luang Por Yai's Valley."

A third example illustrates how WTK Hmong were able to reterritorialize Hmong identity even in spaces that held religious utility and meaning to WTK's Thai Buddhist authorities. In his zealous affinity for central Thai folk Buddhism, Charoen Parnchand had often led a group of monks to a large flat stone outcropping to recite prayers on the 15th day of the lunar month. According to a monk that had accompanied Charoen on such outings, Charoen believed the outcropping was a sacred place, containing several large footprints of Lokkutara<sup>21</sup> and the Buddha. After the Hmong settled in WTK, their houses surrounded this stone area (known as the *lan hin* in Thai). Though Hmong people are

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<sup>21</sup> As mentioned earlier, Aunt Mian taught that she was the manifestation of Lokkutara. As understood by monks at the temple, Lokkutara is a physical manifestation of the universe. This being has come in the form of important religious figures, including Jesus Christ. Most notably, Lokkutara was the teacher of Buddha during several of his incarnations.



traditionally animist and shamanist, the significance of the stone area and its supernatural artifacts were not lost on the Hmong. Although it has since been demolished and worn by weather, a group of Hmong prophetesses (*pog saub* in Hmong) built a temple on the site to honor Luang Por Yai, whom this group and most other WTK Hmong have declared was Hmong in a past life and is the sacred Hmong ancestor *Niam Nkauj Ntsuab* (companion to the Hmong man *Txiv Nraug Nab*). Using the bare stone as floor and foundation, these religionists constructed a four-walled shrine. At one end they burned incense and paid obeisance to a pair of cement statues—a Hmong woman and man in full traditional apparel (presumably *Niam Nkauj Ntsuab* and *Txiv Nraug Nab*)—that remain intact in the crumbled temple. An impressive pair of semi-supinely positioned cobras stretch out along the base of the wall and gaze back at the Hmong couple sitting at the meeting point of their serpentine tails. Though it had once been something of a Thai pilgrimage site, this space had become Hmong. One Hmong informant even recalls being sent away from the temple because she was not wearing traditional Hmong clothes, as required by the *pog saub* that ran the temple. Though the space had become their own, these Hmong prophetesses did not forget Luang Por Yai's mark on the land. A Hmong informant claimed that the prophetesses worshipped Luang Por Yai and believed that the water that settled in two prominent natural basins in the stone floor was Luang Por Yai's water. In a discussion of this site that I witnessed in 2012, one of the few remaining Hmong residents of WTK consoled a Thai monk who lamented the Hmong's enclosing of Luang Por Yai and the Buddha's footprints. Comparing the significance of the Buddha's footprint to Thai Buddhists with Hmong reverence for Luang Por Yai, the Hmong man assured the monk that the site was as sacred to the Hmong as it was to the Thais because it contained *Niam Loos Meb's* (Luang Por Yai in Hmong) footprints. Because many WTK Hmong have identified *Niam Loos Meb* as one of their ancestors (*Niam Nkauj Ntsuab*), this statement shows once again that Luang Por Yai's persona acted as a channel for Hmong spatial reterritorialization and subversion of presumed power relations.

## Conclusion

My argument is not that the Hmong described here are by some genetic make-up or inherent cultural value libertarian or anarchic people; rather, I contend that this subjectivity, where it is found, is influenced by a complex set of historical factors. The WTK Hmong came to flee and subvert power out of a sense of survival and culturally identified indignation. After being violently and involuntarily deterritorialized from what many Hmong now view as a choice and idyllic life in Laos, many WTK Hmong have sought to regain portions of that lifestyle. However, as undocumented residents living in political exile in Thailand, they were forced to make do with less. In this process, they came to a stronger conceptualization of their group's cultural identity and its deterritorialization from a homeland (especially in terms of livelihood practices). This moment of existential realization came to the Hmong, and they met it with intelligence and ability. After leaving a legally enforced subliminal stage of livelihood at the refugee camps, these Hmong sought out a liminal space of autonomy. The first moment of reterritorializing their autonomous livelihood came at WTK, where a complex of connections surrounding the temple allowed the Hmong to find a space of livelihood autonomy on and off temple grounds. Their prudently executed challenge to the WTK hierarchy allowed some WTK

Hmong a limited and momentary reterritorialization of livelihood and cultural space. Although abstracting an ahistorical snapshot from this trajectory presents the Hmong as inherently autonomous people, it could be that most groups would share a similar trait if they had passed through a similar historical experience.

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