

## **HER VANG**

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### **ABSTRACT**

“Peacemakers or Peace-wreckers: the Lao Hmong Diaspora in Homeland Conflict”

For many involved, the Vietnam War is over. For the Hmong, however, the war is far from over. The Lao PDR government has continued to wage a low-level war against remnants of the Hmong secret army that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) recruited and organized to fight Communist forces in Laos during the so-called Secret War in remote areas of the Lao jungle. Meanwhile, from exile, the Hmong diaspora has also continued to aid and encourage the Hmong to fight for a variety of political objectives in Laos, including greater human rights protection, democracy, and ethnic autonomy. This paper explores the roles of the Hmong diaspora in the ongoing conflict in Laos. Specifically, it analyzes whether they are peacemakers or peace-wreckers. One objective of this paper is to chart the Hmong diaspora’s intervention in the conflict and see if any cautious generalizations may be made about diaspora interventions in homeland conflicts. Another objective is to use the case of the Hmong to find ways to encourage peaceful resolution to conflicts through the active and positive intervention of diasporas and to discourage intervention that fuels conflicts. Here I argue that “political opportunity structures” provide both constraints and opportunities that shape what the Hmong diaspora can and cannot do in each stage of the conflict cycle. Simultaneously, whether they are peacemakers or peace-wreckers is also determined by their beliefs and perceptions about who they are and their homeland as well as by the internal dynamics within the Hmong diasporic community.