

## **Title: Hmong American Identity and Contemporary Cultural Practices**

### **Abstract (Panel Proposal)**

The racialization of the Hmong in the U.S., including the social construction of an imagined Hmong American community, often seems to suggest that there is a singular experience. This panel seeks to deconstruct this false universal imagery of Hmong America, which has been constructed in part by academia and in part by popular media. Specifically, panelists present multigenerational case studies that contain diverse perspectives on what it means to be a Hmong American. First, Hui Wilcox will present the case of Hmong farmers in the Midwest; Wilcox will be exploring and comparing the meaning of practicing agriculture between first and second generation Hmong. Second, Pao Lee will present the cases of Hmong male import racers and hip hop artists; Lee will be discussing how race and gender has structured the second generation experience. Third, Kari Smalkoski will present on the case of the recently arrived Hmong male youth from Wat Tham Krabok; Smalkoski's study will highlight the youth cultural practices that impact and shape the lives of all Hmong male youth growing up in the U.S. Lastly, Pao Lee and Khou Vue will present the case of Hmong females in nightclubs; Lee and Vue will further elucidate the gendered experience of growing up Hmong American but also show how Hmong females manage and construct identity in relation to their understanding of culture and religion – including both traditional and westernized forms. Altogether, the case studies discussed in the panel provide a brief but rich synopsis of what it means to be Hmong American today. The panel hopes to demonstrate that Hmong American identity is highly nuanced and multifaceted with many diverse perspectives. Yet, despite the differences between the case studies, they also reveal a process reflective of the distinctive Hmong Diaspora to the U.S. and the aggregate history of race relations unique to that of the U.S.

### **Note to Conference Organizers**

We are open to adding presenters to the panel. However, we would like to keep them focused on Hmong experiential accounts (i.e., they should be presenting on qualitative research). Presentations need not be about the U.S. In fact, we would welcome the addition of a case study in Zomia and other Diasporas – so long as the analytical lens is about race relations (i.e., minority and majority relations). Presentation proposals from panelists will also be submitted simultaneously to provide more information about the case studies and in case this proposed panel is rejected (feel free to move us around). Please note that Kari Smalkoski's case study of the Wat Tham Krabok boys and Pao Lee's case studies of import racers and hip hop artists are proposed as one presentation, since Smalkoski and Lee will be talking about Hmong American masculinity in general. Pao Lee and Khou Vue are also hoping to co-present on the case of Hmong females in nightclubs (this proposal is included in the same e-mail). Hui Wilcox will be submitting her own individual presentation proposal. If this panel proposal is accepted, it should include the aforementioned presentations.

### **Suggested Panelists**

Pao Lee, Assistant Professor of Sociology, University of Wisconsin-River Falls  
Kari Smalkoski, Hmong Studies Graduate Fellow, University of Minnesota  
Hui Niu Wilcox, Associate Professor of Sociology, St. Catherine University  
Khou Vue, Alumnus, University of Wisconsin-River Falls