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HMoob Eldership as Pedagogy: Reclaiming HMoob Knowledge as HMoob Education

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Abstract

For centuries non-HMoob people and scholars have sought to label and define who HMoob people are, but this paper reclaims and repositions HMoob people as agentic and reinforces our people's power to define themselves as we have for centuries. This paper also addresses problematic discourse about HMoob people and HMoob education, such as “peb HMoob tsis muaj kev kawm”¹ or “peb tsis muaj kev txawj hab kev ntse le lwm paab lwm pawg.”² Departing from such deficit discourse, this paper explores *HMoob eldership as pedagogy* as one way that HMoob people have valid knowledge systems. *HMoob eldership as pedagogy* examines who is considered an educator and how education is implemented within our community. I propose *HMoob eldership as pedagogy* as a form of knowledge from our community's multiple pedagogies and education methodologies, one that roots HMoob epistemologies in eldership. Eldership, in this sense, traces the ways HMoob knowledge is passed down from the older generations to the younger generations through everyday teaching and learning. Ultimately, this work aims to nuance HMoob people's understanding of HMoob epistemologies and cosmologies.

Thaum yug tseem yau, yug saib moog rua qhov twg los muaj cov laug nyob rua qhov hov lug koj peb, qhuab qha peb, hab hlub peb. Ua caag lug moog txug rua nub nua, yug saib moog rua txuj kaab txuj ke twg los tsis pum ib tug laug nyob rua qhov twg le lawm? Lub sib hawm thaud moog rua qhov twg lawm? Cov laug tsawg zuj zug, leej twg yuav lug sawv puab qhov chaw? Zag nuav, yuav yog koj hab yuav yog kuv. Peb yuav tau dlhau moog ua cov laug lawm. Thaum ti teg ti taw, tsis muaj tug lug qhuab lug qha, peb yuav ncu txug tej laug. Yog vim le nuav, koj hab kuv, peb suav dlawg yuav tsum kawm hab paub txug tej laug tej kev qhuab kev qha. Peb yuav tau xyum hab ncu txug peb HMoob kev qhuab kev qha.³ (Collective Teaching, n.d.)



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This quote is a paraphrase of the frequent teachings that occur at my family gatherings. This quote is also a reminder for my generation that we are soon-to-be elders. There are specific times and moments when older HMoob adults realize they have become elders to the current and future generations of HMoob youth. However, this transitory process of becoming an elder has become less defined for HMoob people as we face different social and economic constraints in the United States. One of the major constraints is that U.S. education mainly focuses on individualism and upholds Eurocentric values. Eurocentric U.S. education positions Western white norms and ideologies at the top of the hierarchy of knowledge production and worldview (Dei et al., 2022). HMoob youth educated through the U.S. system is often removed from our community's understanding of the transitory process to become a HMoob elder. We become isolated from our people, our responsibilities, our past, and our shared futures. Thus, this quote reminds me that I am tied to this transitory eldership process. I will have responsibilities to learn and keep the knowledge of my elders because I am becoming one.

My perception of the HMoob community and my experience within our community is influenced by how my identities intersect. In Crenshaw's (1991) seminal work on identity and intersectionality, she argues that race and gender are among many critical identities overlooked and underexamined in law and research that further marginalizes people. As a HMoob cisgender male scholar who does research within my own community, my intersectionality grants me access to certain aspects while excluding me from other community knowledge and experiences, such as those shared among HMoob women. Moreover, as a son, an able-bodied person, and being HMoob leeg,⁴ these identities also intersect and influence how I understand, interact with, and analyze my understanding of HMoob teaching and learning. My identities as the eldest son and my relationship with my community as *ib tug tub*, *ib tug kwj tij los sis nug*⁵ and how they intersect allow me to better understand and situate the transitory process towards becoming an elder. Although I am in my early 30s, I had already begun my transition into an elder when I became *ib tug txiv ntxawm hab ib tug laug*⁶ to my cousin's children. This process changed once more when I became *ib leej yawm*⁷ for future generations within my clan. I am also *ib tug txiv tsev hab ib leej txiv*⁸ to my partner and three children. Being the eldest son is critical for my understanding of HMoob knowledge and identity, and this understanding has strengthened as I became a father.

Moving from the discussion of intersectionality to the broader context of the HMoob communities, it is important to acknowledge the impact of historical oppression and deficit discourses on our community's self-perception and internalized beliefs. HMoob people have faced oppression for many centuries that led to discourses that characterized HMoob as premodern people (Lee, 2015; Vang, 2021). The characterization of HMoob people as premodern often implies that we must relinquish our culture and language in order to navigate the modern world. This narrative that the HMoob culture and community need "fixing" to conform to modern standards is a troubling implicit message challenged by Mouavangsou (2020) in her exploration of the impact of U.S. education on her understanding of the HMoob community and her own family. Such deficit discourses enter our consciousness, resulting in ideologies such as "*peb HMoob tsis muaj kev kawm*" or "*peb tsis muaj kev txawj hab kev ntse le lwmm paab lwmm pawg.*" While there is a recent rise in efforts to sustain HMoob culture and language in schools (Ngo, 2015; Spycher et al., 2020) and community-based organizations (Ngo & Chandara, 2021), we must consider the continual gaps within HMoob scholarship and curricula. For instance, Yang (2012) wrote:

Publications on Hmong and Hmong Americans, many of which are intended as teaching materials for Kindergarten to the Twelfth Grade, have grown substantially. But this body of literature also has inadvertently included information about Hmong culture, identity, history and religion that can be misleading. In my view, if steps are not taken to assess and correct this information, there is a potential for a mass mis-education of American children about the lives and background of the Hmong. (p. 2)

As seen in Yang, information about HMoob people becomes legitimized through U.S. schools; however, he noted that such teachings, despite being labeled as “H[Moob],” are inaccurate representations of the HMoob American community. Moreover, Mouavangsou (2018, 2020) suggested that implicit messages provided in schools miseducate HMoob students about who their people are and their cultural practices. Yang (2012) and Mouavangsou (2018, 2020) touch on aspects of the miseducation of HMoob Americans. Yet, Mouavangsou (2020) goes further by highlighting the complex dynamic of miseducation perpetuated by HMoob Americans and calling for critical self-reflection to disrupt the narratives of miseducation. Together these studies highlight how education misrepresents and flattens narratives of HMoob people, which influences how HMoob youth understand their community and negotiate “between the Hmong and American world” (Mouavangsou, 2018, p. 9).

As my parents became grandparents, I realized I was aging with them and had gained new responsibilities. This moment of transition also means that I have responsibilities as a father to young children and a HMoob scholar to the future generations of HMoob youth to ensure that they have access to their community’s knowledge and it is made available to them. Borrowing from Indigenous scholar Chris Pexa (2019), I write this paper as my love letter to HMoob descendants “to ensure that [our] children’s children would someday be able to receive those letters and make themselves stronger through the reading of them” (p. 9). This letter adds to the ongoing growth of HMoob communities and benefits our future generations so they can continue to learn through our knowledge systems.

In this paper, I argue that HMoob people have *kev kawm hab kev txawj ntse le lwmm paab lwmm pawg*⁹ through our elders’ everyday teaching and learning. I began by briefly sharing my journey and motivation in learning about HMoob knowledge systems. By engaging with literature written by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) scholars, I gained a deeper understanding of the significance of HMoob knowledge. Next, I offer a theoretical conceptualization of HMoob knowledge systems through HMoob elders as a form of HMoob epistemology. Then, I unpack how HMoob elders are knowledge keepers and how that eldership knowledge is kept within our HMoob community. I reflect on the teachings of *kuv puj*¹⁰ to explore how I understood *HMoob eldership as pedagogy*. In positioning HMoob elders and eldership as pivotal to HMoob education, this conceptual paper brings attention to the words of the collective teaching cited above. These words are a love letter, reminding us that as time passes, we will assume the role of elders.

Revealing HMoob Education

Growing up in the 1990s, I was captivated by the conversations and narratives shared by my elders, recounting their experiences of migrating across Southeast Asia and the United States.

These moments of listening and observing HMoob elders became integral to my early learning process. Unfortunately, I realized that informal education and the wisdom of racialized elders were not adequately valued or integrated within the U.S. school system. Despite this, I was fortunate to be immersed in HMoob teachings taught by my family and extended relatives in our language. HMoob teachings, deeply rooted in our cultural fabric, extend beyond the confines of traditional classroom settings. The teachings permeate our everyday lives, unfolding within the intimate spaces of our living rooms and backyards, during sacred rituals and ceremonies, and within the vibrant community spaces of HMoob markets and community-based organizations. HMoob teaching and learning go beyond traditional classroom instruction, expanding knowledge exchange beyond the conventional “teacher-student” dynamic, where an adult in a classroom assumes the role of knowledge instructor and the youth as the recipient of knowledge (Lozenski, 2017; Milner, 2015; Tillett & Cushing-Leubnmer, 2021). In the HMoob community, learning is deeply intertwined with our community, embedded within our shared activities and experiences. Moreover, it is important to recognize that similar dynamics exist in other Indigenous communities, such as Black/African communities, where elders play a significant role in transmitting cultural knowledge to younger generations (Dei et al., 2022). This dynamic highlights the importance of elders as custodians of cultural wisdom, traditions, and values, who impart their knowledge to younger members of their communities.

While U.S. schools provided few opportunities to learn HMoob knowledge, I found outlets to sustain HMoob knowledge systems through school clubs, community spaces, and at home. For as long as I can remember, my elders have encouraged me to attend school and do well because it will allow me to succeed in the United States. While this perception may be accurate because the United States has a global influence, I became more aware of how U.S. schools are Eurocentric. Dei et al. (2022) explain that Eurocentric education is rooted in white colonial history that alienates BIPOC youth “from their homelands, languages, histories, and cultures” (p. 63). Implicitly, Eurocentric schooling is a tool of erasure that minimizes other ways of thinking and being (e.g., Mouavangsou, 2020). Eurocentric U.S. education continues to be underexamined and colonial pedagogies have become normalized in education (Dei et al., 2022). English-only education is a prime example of how U.S. education upholds colonial pedagogy, molding English as the center of knowledge production within schools. Macedo (1991) alluded to how English-only education in the classroom “denies [multilingual speakers] the fundamental tools for reflection, critical thinking, and social interaction” (p. 19). A U.S. education pressures students, especially BIPOC students, to speak English to legitimize their thoughts and intellectual thinking, even when speaking in their native languages offers the same or higher level of critical thinking and reflection.

In my community, I have witnessed the long-term impact of English-only practices, and its influence on my HMoob friends’ sense of belonging. It was clear that the education I received in formal schooling failed to acknowledge the value of my HMoob community as a rich and diverse community with knowledge systems and complex understandings of the world. One of the reasons I could hold onto my HMoob culture and language in spaces like student clubs, community spaces, and home is because of the educational practices in these spaces. The educational practices in these spaces embrace my heritage and include educators and peers who share the common goal of sustaining our culture and language. Consequently, U.S. education failed to provide me with the education our community deserves.

As a HMoob education scholar researching within my HMoob community, I benefit from scholarships written by BIPOC scholars who challenge racist and Eurocentric education. In doing so, their work shows me that there are multiple truths and realities in which people can and do

ground themselves. With their gifts, BIPOC education scholars move the field of education with Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (Gay, 2000), Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2014), Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (Paris, 2012), and Culturally Sustaining/Revitalizing Pedagogy (McCarty & Lee, 2014). They highlight the importance of including students' ethnic and racial identities, along with youth culture, as part of the learning in schools. Specifically, I found McCarthy and Lee's (2014) study on Indigenous youth's linguistic knowledge use within and outside of school most relevant in conceptualizing HMoob education. Since HMoob communities are multiple displaced people, we have continued to struggle for recognition of our language, culture, and self-determination. Culturally Sustaining/Revitalizing Pedagogy demands that we hold colonialism accountable for the continual erasures of BIPOC knowledge and histories. This Culturally Sustaining/Revitalizing Pedagogy principle recognizes the need to scrutinize the Eurocentric U.S. education system thoroughly. Their work supported me in seeing HMoob language and culture as vital for HMoob youth identity development in the United States and how it is interwoven within systems of power.

Furthermore, I draw inspiration from Lozenski's (2017) work within the Black community to recognize that within my own community, HMoob elders serve as intergenerational contacts, offering valuable insights into the experiences of HMoob people in terms of racialization, life, and discrimination, both within and outside the United States. As Milner (2015) and Lozenski (2017) note, education for minoritized communities does not have to exist only in classrooms and schools. In fact, Hermes and colleagues (2021) have demonstrated that Indigenous elders play a crucial role in supporting youth to understand the connection between their language, life, and the land through activities such as forest walks. The studies mentioned in this section inform this article by shedding light on the significance of BIPOC elders and scholars in fostering intergenerational critical-thinking young people. Similarly, this article disrupts Eurocentric schooling by recentring HMoob elders in knowledge creation and reimagining education for our community to challenge the Eurocentric foundations that have historically marginalized and devalued other ways of knowing. Such an approach contributes to this body of literature by showcasing the value and complexity of HMoob elders' knowledge, thus enriching the ongoing scholarly discourse surrounding BIPOC education.

HMoob Knowledge Systems

HMoob knowledge is multifaceted, expanding as HMoob people are socialized in different societies (Vue & Mouavangsou, 2021). Vue and Mouavangsou (2021) imply that there is no single source of HMoob knowledge, nor is one particular source better. Thus, HMoob youth raised by their parents and elders, including distant relatives, already access a specific form of HMoob knowledge production. As such, there are differences in HMoob ways of being and knowing, and as a community, we are allowed to embrace these differences. For example, HMoob knowledge is also granted to individuals based on their gender identification and/or experience. HMoob knowledge production and sustainment of our knowledge for the last century have been viewed as a patriarchal knowledge system. I am afforded access to this patriarchal knowledge system as a cisgender HMoob man. However, I urge us to examine HMoob knowledge from a place of multiplicity that decenters patriarchal knowledge. Specifically, I recognize that the sustainment and practices of HMoob knowledge are not exclusive to only men, but HMoob knowledge has

been sustained and cultivated by women and children (Vang, 2023). Thus, the survival of HMoob knowledge must also include these narratives.

I have realized in observing HMoob elders over time that HMoob people possess the necessary tools for self-determination and shaping our futures. As demonstrated in Harjo (2019), Indigenous community knowledge and rationality are tools of futurity that bind together past, present, and future. Thus, HMoob relationality is rooted in how our elders hold knowledge and maintain relationships that connect us to the present and our past. Through us, we connect our elders to the future, holding together the reality of HMoob space and time - the fabric that binds us to our ancestors, the places they lived, and our shared futures. Like how Harjo (2019) shares about relationality and community knowledge, tuning in to our HMoob knowledge systems is how we can “find [our] way back to practices of relationality and kinship making and operationalize these practices into autonomy and self-determination” (p. 45). Within HMoob knowledge systems, our elders resist the ongoing erasure of our community’s knowledge. Simultaneously, they embed these knowledge systems into our everyday lives, our songs, their acts of care, in their breath, and in every movement they make.

Who are Knowledge Keepers?

This conceptual article contributes scholarship on HMoob elders by moving beyond their categorization as simply aged members of society and toward a deeper understanding of them as knowledge keepers. In many BIPOC communities, elders are well respected and play critical roles in the daily lives of BIPOC communities (Dei et al., 2022). Elders embody ancestral teachings and profoundly understand how the world functions through their community’s lens (Sandoval et al., 2016). HMoob elders’ knowledge aligns with what Solórzano and Yosso (2001) articulate as counterstories that challenge discourse taught in schools about BIPOC. The narratives shared by elders serve as valuable sources of knowledge, and their lived experiences and presence embody a curriculum that sustains HMoob-centric teachings (Lee, personal communication, March, 2020; Thao, 2002). Similar to the formation of Indigenous knowledge systems over time, as explored by Brayboy and Maughan (2009), the HMoob knowledge systems are culminations of the lived experiences of our elders and ancestors. HMoob elders are indispensable to HMoob communities worldwide as they serve as living archives and a collective repository of culture, language, spirituality, and customs that have endured displacement spanning several centuries (Lee, 1998; Thao, 2002).

Who is an Elder?

HMoob people’s conceptualization of “who is an elder” is complex. In a conversation with kuv yawm¹¹, he stated: “ua qoob ua loo lug npaaj tshaib, tu tub tu kiv lug npaaj laug... Mej cov miv nyuas yuav lug ua nam ua txiv rua peb cov laug...” (Yang, personal communication, February 18, 2021). Through his paaj lug¹², it is evident that he understood his role as an elder. He emphasizes the interconnectedness of caring for young children and elderly parents as they age. His statement reflects teachings on generational care and reciprocity, where HMoob youth become elders as their own elders reach old age and return to the ancestral land to be reborn in future generations (Her, 2018). According to HMoob beliefs, our children are our ancestors, reflecting our profound understanding of the life cycle as described in Synmond’s (2004) book, in which she detailed HMoob’s cosmology, spirits, and spirituality. It is important to note that age does not determine

one's elder status; however, this discussion on age and eldership is beyond the scope of this article. Therefore, the elders that I focus on are my parents, grandparents, and ancestors. *HMoob eldership as pedagogy* comes from this understanding that teaching and learning are passed from the older generation to the younger generation.

What is HMoob Eldership as Pedagogy?

The learning process of how HMoob elders pass knowledge to future generations is a pedagogy rooted in HMoob epistemologies and cosmologies. I focus on elders' daily life and activities as acts of teaching and learning opportunities to conceptualize *HMoob eldership as pedagogy*. It focuses on knowledge production, identity, language, culture, and place as a pedagogy. *HMoob eldership as pedagogy* is situated within lived experiences, the everyday life of HMoob people, and the activities which bind and bond us.

HMoob eldership as pedagogy counter deficit discourses about HMoob education by moving away from a preservationist approach often found in Eurocentric U.S. education. Instead of portraying HMoob people as relics of the past and reducing our community as one homogenous group, I explore *HMoob eldership as pedagogy* to envision HMoob people beyond the imaginations of others (Her, 2018). Since we are a community with rich histories and futures, we deserve an education that reflects our values and practices. *HMoob eldership as pedagogy* is a teaching approach that calls out and challenges deficit narratives about our people. Through the conversations, stories, and everyday actions of HMoob elders, we engage in acts of teaching and learning, carrying forward the wisdom of our ancestors and resisting the oppression perpetuated by dominant societies.

As HMoob people have existed for centuries, HMoob knowledge is facilitated through our orality. Orality, as introduced by Mahuika (2019), is more than just spoken communication; instead, orality can be seen, heard, and felt. Orality encompasses performances, storytelling, and ceremonies infused with our people's lived experiences. *HMoob eldership as pedagogy* as part of an oral community is acquired through the teachings of elders and close relatives. HMoob children learn about our knowledge by being immersed in the presence of loved ones and community members. This transmission of knowledge occurs intentionally through apprenticeship or spontaneously in various social activities. Similar to how Indigenous children learn about their communities, as suggested by Mahuika (2019), HMoob youth are exposed to HMoob language and culture through play, interactions with other HMoob children, and listening to *lug nruag hab neej neeg*¹³ in our public spaces such as during community gatherings, in our homes¹⁴, through ceremonies, and in markets. In these public spaces are our elders and relatives, who may be considered uneducated and non-literate by U.S. society (Duffy, 2007); however, they hold immense significance because they are our first educators. Their teachings ensure youth understand their connections and relationships to others, things, and places.

Eldership within the Everyday

One of my first educators was kuv puj, who taught me about the world through her everyday teachings. I remember kuv puj would stare out the window, where she frequently whispered to the birds and the insects that came by. She would say, "Miv noog koj has rua [my aunt's name] tas kuv ncu ncu nwg. Caag nwg tsis tuaj le?" She asked the birds and insects to deliver messages to her children and grandchildren who lived in different cities, urging them to visit or questioning

why they had not come to see her. I did not fully understand it then, but upon reflection, I realized this was an example of *HMoob eldership as pedagogy*.

My everyday observations of how kuv puj interacted with the world helped me comprehend her teachings. Through her conversations with the birds and insects, I learned about our connection to nature, the significance of our loved ones, and the interconnectedness of the world. HMoob people have an intricate understanding of spirituality, one which considers all things having spirits. Her actions and teachings showed her yearning for the people she loves and demonstrated the agency of animals and insects. At times, the presence of our more-than-human relatives—the animals and insects—could be interpreted as messages from our departed or living loved ones. Kuv puj recognized the mobility of birds and insects and implored them to carry her messages to her daughter, encouraging her to visit. In observing kuv puj's final moments, it finally dawned on me that her teachings, her *HMoob eldership as pedagogy*, was a repository of knowledge developed over centuries through her lineage. It was not something kuv puj invented as she aged, but rather practices shared among HMoob elders of her generation and those before.

As shared in the introduction, my intersecting positionality informed my understanding of *HMoob eldership as pedagogy* as I was exposed to HMoob culture and cultural repertoires throughout my life. *HMoob eldership as pedagogy* encompasses knowledge accumulated over centuries and evolves according to our community's time and place. Grounded in HMoob ways of being and knowing, it requires a deep understanding of HMoob people, our spiritualities, and the places we call home. Although kuv puj has departed from the physical world, her teachings persist in her children's and grandchildren's memories and manifest in our behavior and everyday actions. As an adult, whenever a meal is prepared in our home that evokes memories of kuv puj, I call out to her and leave some food outside as an offering. Like the insects and birds, her presence visits and watches over us.

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that HMoob people have kev kawm hab kev txawj ntse le lwm paab lwm pawg by observing a HMoob knowledge system and how knowledge is passed from generation to generation. Despite being continuously displaced, HMoob elders have been instrumental in sustaining our knowledge over time. Drawing on Lozenski's (2017) conceptualization of Black elders as critical educators for Black youth researchers, my proposal of the concept *HMoob eldership as pedagogy* honors my elders' knowledge and teachings. Based on my observations of HMoob elders in my own life, I see their everyday teaching and learning as HMoob kev kawm hab kev txawj kev ntse¹⁵ that is deeply connected to our epistemologies and spiritualities. The concept of *HMoob eldership as pedagogy* contributes to Rogoff and colleagues' (2016) calling for further exploration of learning within and beyond formal education.

Further research that centers on HMoob knowledge can provide nuanced perspectives for research and practice, particularly in academic fields such as education studies, Asian American studies, Southeast Asian studies, Indigenous studies, and community organizations. By establishing a solid interdisciplinary foundation in critical HMoob studies, we could work to address the misrepresentations of HMoob people in books and education lessons (Yang, 2012) and move towards a more comprehensive understanding of our community (Mouavangsou, 2018; Vue & Mouavangsou, 2021).

The power of *HMoob eldership as pedagogy* is undeniable, as it highlights the crucial role played by our elders in sustaining our community's invaluable knowledge through their daily

teachings. Although it is not extensively covered in this article, development around HMoob dual-immersion programs and HMoob schools in the United States could benefit from this reminder that HMoob elders hold critical knowledge for HMoob communities. HMoob education professionals, along with our elders, could work together as a step forward to ensure that the HMoob school curricula reflect the values of their local HMoob community. Subsequently, having teacher educators and teacher education programs that are cognizant of how HMoob and other communities engage in education for their people brings the promise that prospective educators can embody the teachings of their community without fear of being judged. HMoob educators enacting their community's teachings in their educational practices honor our community's knowledge and elders.

Lastly, it is essential to acknowledge that, like me, HMoob youth are already on their way to becoming elders, as cited in the quote at the beginning of this article: "Zag nuav, yuav yog koj hab yuav yog kuv. Peb yuav tau dlhau moog ua cov laug lawm"¹⁶ (Collective teachings, n.d.). "Zag nuav, yuav yog koj hab yuav yog kuv" reminds me that my time is here and that I am an elder. Additionally, the message in the more extensive collective teaching quote reminds me of the responsibility left for me to ensure the future of my community's knowledge. To fulfill this commitment, I find solace in Harjo's (2019) message that our elders have entrusted us with the knowledge and teachings to carry on that commitment for future generations. Woven into this article is my love letter of the collective oral teachings of elders and my grandmother's gift for later generations. HMoob knowledge cannot be learned within a classroom or through a single classroom lesson; it will take a lifetime to uncover, know, and sustain our knowledge.

Notes

1. HMoob people do not have education.
2. We do not have forms of intelligence and brilliance like others.
3. When we were young, everywhere you look there were elders to lead us, teach us and love us. Today, as you look around, there are not many elders left. Where has the time gone? There are less elders in our community, who will come stand in their place? This time it is going to be you and me. We are going to become elders. When there isn't anyone to teach us, we are going to remember our elders' words. That is why we must learn and know about our teachings. We must learn and remember our HMoob teachings.
4. HMoob Leeg is a part of the HMoob language. Here it is being used as a language identity.
5. a son or a brother
6. an uncle
7. a grandfather or elder
8. father and husband
9. intelligence and brilliance like other people
10. Puj is in reference to my paternal grandmother.
11. Yawm is grandfather and it could be used in reference to paternal and maternal grandfather. In this passage, I was talking to my maternal grandfather.
12. proverbs and idioms
13. orphan stories and lived narratives

14. The home may be considered private spaces for many people, but the home could also become a public space and a place for community gatherings. For example, within my experience in the HMoob community, our homes become public spaces when we have community gatherings such as *zuv mo*, *ua tshoob*, *hu plig*, *hab rooj sab laaj*, to name a few.
15. HMoob intelligence and brilliance
16. This time it is going to be you and me. We are going to become elders.

About the Author



Thong Vang is a Ph.D. candidate in the Culture and Teaching program at the University of Minnesota—Twin Cities. His research work involves uncovering the teaching and learning practices within and identity development of diasporic communities. More specifically, he examines how teaching and learning occurs within HMoob American communities and ways they combat deficit models of academic identities. Thong is a recipient of the University of Minnesota’s 2023-2024 Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship and a Lub Zej Zog Critical and Indigenizing HMoob Educational Studies Writing Fellow. Currently, he is actively engaged as both a researcher and curriculum writer for the California H[Moob] Ethnic Studies project and undertakes the position of Social Impact Strategist for A Hopeful Encounter.

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