ON A HMONG POETICS OF ECOCIDE

Pacharee Sudhinaraset

Abstract. This article explores chemical warfare through Hmong American poet Mai Der Vang's book *Yellow Rain.* A scientific, political, and cultural incident, "yellow rain," according to countless Hmong survivors, is the name for the yellow sticky chemical substance that fell from the sky across Southeast Asia in the aftermath of the US war in Vietnam. While initial investigations found that yellow rain was a chemical weapon, scientists later dismissed Hmong testimonies to assert that it was, instead, a result of local bee feces. I approach Vang's text as a formulation of an ecocidal poetics that exposes the relationship between local, place based Indigenous knowledge in the context of neocolonial warfare. Dwelling deeply within the ecocidal discourse of US state archival erasure and documentary practices, *Yellow Rain* materializes Hmong epistemologies of their local ecological system as a form of historical reckoning. Vang's work offers a distinct contribution to critical refugee studies' critiques of US empire.

> When the psychohistory of a people is marked by ongoing loss,
> when entire histories are denied, hidden, erased,
> documentation can become an obsession.
>
> –bell hooks, *Art on My Mind*, 59.

Mai Der Vang's 2021 collection of poetry *Yellow Rain* opens with the haunting line: "I have been following the rains, hunting them in my dreams."[1] The "rains" allude to the Cold War mystery that eponymously serves as the title for Vang's

book. A scientific, political, and cultural incident, "yellow rain," according to countless Hmong survivors, names the sticky chemical substance that fell from the sky across Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia in the aftermath of the US war in Vietnam throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Indigenous Hmong hill-tribe people and refugees on the other side of the Mekong River in Thai camps reported how powders and liquids of various colors rained down upon villages and people, resulting in burning skin, vomiting blood, blurred vision, headaches, dizziness, chest pain, breathing issues, and diarrhea, among many other symptoms. The mystery of yellow rain is nestled within a broad US military campaign of air warfare across Southeast Asia that is inseparable from the extension of US global power and its persisting vestiges of violence.[2] Yellow rain was a highly documented event: international investigative officials collected samples of blood, urine, and tissue from Hmong hill-tribe people.[3] While initial investigations found that yellow rain was a chemical weapon composed of a fungal toxin (T-2 mycotoxin) with a high pollen content, later investigations dismissed Hmong testimonies as "backward" and debunked the claim that yellow rain was a chemical weapon. It was, scientists concluded, a result of local bee feces. This latter finding currently stands as the "official" US account of yellow rain, even as the division between allegations of chemical warfare and the bee-feces hypothesis remains.[4]

Mai Der Vang, the daughter of Hmong refugees who escaped Laos and resettled in Fresno, California, was born in 1981 and first encountered the controversy of yellow rain as an undergraduate at the University of California, Berkeley. Vang's *Yellow Rain* combines and juxtaposes documentary poetry, investigative inquiry, and visual, textual, and compositional pieces, while drawing from and reinventing official state archival materials, toxicology reports, declassified documents, public culture, academic and state scientific discourse, and Hmong testimony—from the living and the dead. Calling for new modes of investigation into the aftermath of Cold War devastation, Vang tracks what Hmong scholar Ma Vang has termed a "history on the run," an epistemological practice of Hmong fugitivity that evades conventional forms of archival practice.[5] Vang's collection of poetry, as Zhou Xiaojing claims, deploys poetic language, lyricism, and form to "contest how normative knowledge and unknowing are produced," revealing the racialized violence of imperial warfare embedded within "authoritative scientific claims."[6] *Yellow Rain* does not present a singular or definitive account, but is a textual collage that pieces together and reassembles multiple accounts of ecological violence, warfare, and Indigenous and refugee continuance. Dwelling deeply within the ecological violence enacted by the US state, *Yellow Rain* materializes Hmong epistemologies of chemical warfare and escape through what I am calling an ecocidal poetics.

This article focuses first on how yellow rain destroyed Southeast Asian ecological systems under a US Cold War scientific episteme of forgetting, state secrecy, counterinsurgency, and misinformation. The specificity of the very term "ecocide" emerges from the US war in Vietnam, when it was first coined in 1970 to depict the massive destruction of ecosystems by chemical defoliants and the widespread use of chemical herbicides intentionally targeting the environment in a time of war.[7] The word derives from a combination of the Greek word "oikos," meaning "home," and "cide," from the Latin word "caedere," meaning "to kill." Vang's ecocidal poetics demonstrates the relationship between warfare, the destruction of the landscape, the loss of one's home, and the systemic forms of institutional denial and public forgetting. I explore how Vang's poetry names the limits and violence of Cold War scientific and archival modes of containing Hmong experience. Vang's ecocidal poetics, I then argue, surfaces a Hmong epistemology grounded in an Indigenous relationship to the highlands and terrains over which yellow rain fell. Such an approach to Hmong epistemology shifts the linear temporality of official nationalist archival knowledge and establishes a connection between land, water, and the weather system to trace alternative geographic maps of, in Evyn Lê Espiritu Gandhi's terms, "an archipelago of US empire."[8]

Vang's ecocidal investigation is grounded in poetry in ways that rupture anew the coherency of US nationalist refugee narratives of linear escape and resettlement, which has been a central preoccupation of critical refugee and diasporic studies. Vang's pursuit of a perpetually evasive and elusive thing—"the rains"— reveals the acts of following and hunting as nonlinear approaches to grasping a history of chemical warfare and environmental manipulation that has been denied, hidden, and erased by US state bureaucratic and scientific knowledge. In my account, poetry offers a distinct insight into refugee time and placemaking that names the historical continuity of state power and the rupture of "nonhistory" that, according to Édouard Glissant in his discussion of the fractured time of the transatlantic slave trade, marks that which is indecipherable within the framework of Western historical time.[9] Vang's fragmented, heterogeneous, and collage poetics offer non-teleological versions of yellow rain and articulates a "refugee temporality," as Eric Tang might call it, that refuses tidy moments of transition from displacement, crossings, and resettlement.[10] This approach to understanding Vang's poetry moves backward and forward, pauses, and ruptures; it conceptualizes an understanding of the refugee, as Yến Lê Espiritu has called for, not as a marker of crisis or an object of suffering, not as an "object of investigation, a problem to be solved, or an expedient response to the model minority myth" that serves to conceal and justify state militarism,

but rather as a "paradigm" and a "new model of politics" that places yellow rain within a wider field of war, colonization, and displacement.[11]

The frameworks of Asian American studies, critical refugee studies, Indigenous and Pacific Islander Studies have importantly shaped contemporary conversations at the intersection of ecopoetics, US militarism and empire, and herbicidal warfare. Recent scholarship has emphasized nonlinear modes of understanding the environment and kinship, as well as "multi-species, trans- and intranational, ancestral and intergenerational, polytemporal, and post/colonial" analytics that demonstrate "how solidarities might be configured not merely around an allegiance to a species, identity, or nation, but also through shared and often vexed histories of extraction, access, movement, suppression, scarcity, privilege, abundance, and erasure."[12] In stressing the violence of erasure, scholars also emphasize the study of what remains. Scholars such as Natalia Duong underscore the importance of naming how the "supposedly invisible effects of chemical warfare" continue to "linger," while Keva X. Bui argues that the "lingering" "legacies of contamination" across Southeast Asia define its racial politics of reproduction and disability. The "racializing technology" of herbicidal warfare, for Bui, structures the ecological system of human and plant life under a system of agricultural capitalism.[13] Building upon these insights, I study how *Yellow Rain*'s collage form marks the inseparability of ecological devastation, practices of documentation, and the erasure and resurgence of Hmong lifeworlds. Vang's ecocidal poetics reckons with the way US Cold War state archives may function as a weapon of environmental destruction and at the same time operate as a contested discursive space to remake and rearticulate Hmong knowledge, ecologies, and stories, which broaden onto a field of kinship that extends to the dead and the living, with bees, the clouds, and the rain.

THE FACTS OF THE MATTER, OR KEEP YOUR DYING TO YOURSELF

While *Yellow Rain* is a direct response to the phenomenon of yellow rain and the scientific and public investigations that followed the incidents, the text is also a rejoinder to the misinformation by various historical actors—namely, the US government, academics, scientists, and US public culture. While various modes of investigation focus on getting to the truth of the matter and setting the record straight, Vang illuminates a systematic refusal and failure to take Hmong people at their word across an array of political domains of inquiry. The poem "The Fact of the Matter Is the Consequence of Ugly Deaths" appears early in

Yellow Rain and opens with an epigraph from an infamous NPR *Radiolab* interview titled "The Fact of the Matter." Released on September 24, 2012, *Radiolab*'s interviewers, Robert Krulwich and Jad Abumrad, sought to get to the "facts" of yellow rain by speaking to Eng Yang, a documenter of the Hmong experience during the US war in Vietnam, and his niece and translator, renowned Hmong writer Kao Kalia Yang. Vang's epigraph quotes Krulwich:

> It's not fair . . . to not consider . . . other stories . . . other frames of the story . . . . Ronald Reagan used this story to order the manufacture of chemical weapons . . . first time in twenty years. If the United States were to manufacture chemical weapons again . . . use them because the Russians supposedly had . . . people would *have died ugly deaths in the consequence*.
>
> –Robert Krulwich, *Radiolab*, WNYC, September 23, 2012[14]

This interview is notable for many reasons, but primarily because of the way, according to Kao Kalia Yang, "the questions took a turn. The interview became an interrogation."[15] Eng Yang's response to the bee-feces theory was excluded from the official version of the podcast and he was dismissed as "the Hmong guy" in the discussion of the interview. The interviewers asked if Eng Yang saw something that would contradict the bee-feces theory, with Krulwich attempting to clarify, "but [Eng Yang] himself is not clear whether it was the bee stuff or other stuff because there was so much stuff coming down from the sky."[16] Eng Yang shared with the interviewers that he had traveled back to the sites of the attacks, and saw and recorded what was happening to the Hmong: the "yellow that could eat through leaves, grass, yellow that could kill people—the likes of which bee poop has never done."[17] That Hmong were knowledgeable about bees in the mountains, that Hmong for centuries harvested honey, that the strategic chemical attacks happened where there were dense populations of Hmong was vital information left out of the podcast's airing. Frustrated, Kao Kalia Yang emphasized through tears that this was not a case of "hearsay," as Krulwich charged, and that they came on the podcast because they wanted their stories heard. Kao Kalia Yang decisively ended the interview, after which Krulwich accused her crying as "monopoliz[ing]" the interview, stating that it was not "fair to ask" the interviewers to not focus on the "truth" of yellow rain that led to Reagan's manufacturing of chemical weapons—the very thing that was "hugely important."[18] Krulwich asserted that President Ronald Reagan used the allegation that yellow rain was a chemical weapon supplied by the Soviet Union to justify the production of US chemical weapons such as the Big Guy and thousands of chemical bombs.

Vang's integration of this interview as an epigraph sets the stage for the poem by introducing a conversation and a subject to which the poem will respond, opening up the finality of the NPR episode to an extended and unfinished dialogue. As such, Vang asks readers to dwell on Krulwich's use of language in centering the US state rather than Hmong life and death in yellow rain explanations. Krulwich's critique and indictment of the United States' participation in chemical warfare elides explanations provided by Hmong people and fixates on US political life and the lives of those who "would have died," as though Hmong deaths do not matter. Interestingly, Krulwich deploys the modal verb "would have" as a past conditional, in a backward glance from his present moment. This is a grammatical temporal maneuver that stands in contrast to the simple past tense that clearly states what happened. Instead, his use of this conditional past tense points to what "would have" happened—something that did not definitively happen, but possibly or likely could happen, expressing a mood of fear and dread of the US state's capability to kill people.

Krulwich's use of past unreal conditional is complex and obscures the definitive death of Hmong people. According to Eng and Kao Kalia Yang, the interviewers were too caught up in semantics and were missing the larger point that chemical weapons were in fact used on fleeing Hmong. Responding to the interviewers, Eng Yang and Kao Kalia Yang insisted that "you know that there were chemicals being used against the Hmong in the mountains of Laos, whether it was the chemicals from the bomb, or yellow rain, chemicals were being used. It feels to [Eng Yang] like this is a semantic debate and it feels like there's a sad lack of justice that . . . the word of a man who survived this thing must be pitted against a professor from Harvard who read these accounts."[19] These interviewers could not, as critical refugee studies (CRS) scholars have argued for, take "refugees *at their word*."[20] Employing a CRS methodology of taking refugees at their word does not mean that the Yangs' account is a singular and factual answer. Mai Der Vang's *Yellow Rain* speaks back against Krulwich's accusation that to focus on the Hmong perspective is too narrow. Indeed, while one could argue that this event should be "monopolized" by the people who experienced the attacks, Vang's poetry also shows the limits of refugee testimony as a guarantor of truth. That is, Vang is pointing out how any attempt to mobilize Hmong testimony to certify a truthful narrative operates within a militarized public culture and state-sanctioned forms of knowing that dismantle their credibility through misinformation and secrecy.

Mai Der Vang shared in an interview that throughout her research process she was not sure what "shape" or "form" the answer to yellow rain might take. She found, in the end, that the book itself served as part of her answer. She had "the stark realization that the privilege of a definitive answer and of knowing,

or the privilege to inflict uncertainty on someone or a community, is a privilege that continues to elude the Hmong people. To control, withhold, and obscure truths and answers—this is the work of empire."[21] Mai Der Vang in many ways relinquishes any hold on a singular truth, and does not lay claim to the power of empire because the work of empire is to sanction official ways of knowing by speaking fiction as truth. State power's ability to adjudicate "truth" is constituted through the credibility of an investigate process undertaken by "experts" who undermine the Hmong people's authority based on their disparate epistemologies of time and place.

As such, a turn to ecocidal poetics is not merely about finding a way to validate Hmong testimony but also to call attention to the ways the Cold War produced a logic of the environment that makes such claims to certainty impossible. Vang's *Yellow Rain* was triggered by *Radiolab*'s controversial episode, and Vang's ensuing study of yellow rain. Vang reframes the *Radiolab* episode to explore the broader consequences of war, empire, and political intervention in Southeast Asia. Immediately following the epigraph to "The Fact of the Matter Is the Consequence of Ugly Deaths," Vang begins the poem by stating that "Out here, it's parlors of jungle // Sometimes flashbacks / Of disfigured interrogations," summoning a jungle space that places the speaker, the *Radiolab* interviewers, and the readers of the poem in a battlefield, though what "here" alludes to exactly is ambiguous (10). War is imagined through the embattled jungle, the scene of the interview, and the archive in such a way that expands the spaces in which Hmong people may live, hide, and escape. This poem brings war into the metaphorical, intimate spaces of "parlors," filled with disparate memories of war that must be sifted through. "Out here" in these "parlors" is transformed into temporal containers of "flashbacks," marred "interrogations," and "fleeing" handprints. The ambiguity that conjoins images of far-off jungles, rooms, and the body cultivates a poetics that opens onto a feminist refugee epistemological practice to emphasize the intimacy of war, underscoring, in Yến Lê Espiritu's words, "the everydayness and ongoing-ness of war and displacement" in the "domain of the intimate."[22] Seemingly civilized spaces of waiting and containment, the "parlors of jungle," are nevertheless dense, tangled, and overgrown with competing elements. The space of war extends geographically across the interviews, archives, and memory in the United States that are seemingly distant, but are directly proximate, to the war in Southeast Asia.

Vang produces a collective account of death by connecting intimate spaces of escape and interrogation, naming it "our monsoon" moving its way toward "Delusional truth" (10). Typically, monsoons mark a wind and temperature change that usher in extreme dry or rainy seasons that create the conditions from which people seek refuge or shelter. The status of the monsoon here—as

in need of sheltering—creates an alignment between the Hmong and weather patterns, where the monsoon is cast as "our version of mortality" in need of refuge (10). A Hmong poetics in this case is tasked with keeping their own accounts of death safe from harm, as it is enfolded in imagery and metaphors of parlors and monsoons, emphasizing how even in their death Hmong people need poetic modes of safekeeping. "Our version," according to the speaker, does not follow a straight line to a truth claim, but rather an oxymoronic "Delusional truth," with a capital *D*.

Putting together the contradictory terms "delusion" and "truth" in debates over Hmong "mortality," Vang resituates state truth claims and puts pressure on what counts as fact and what is dismissed as false belief. Just as the joint US State and Defense Department Chemical and Biological Weapons (CBW) team found that the Hmong were unreliable reporters of their experiences and the war, and may even have been pressured by Hmong activists, Australian sociologist Grant Evans also determined that the Hmong were susceptible to "rumor and confabulation and were heavily influenced by magic and superstition. Some of their stories were clearly based on folklore."[23] According to some western researchers, the Hmong people had too many accounts that conflicted their own because "the Hmong culture does not compartmentalize units of time as tightly as we who have broken our lives into seconds, minutes, hours and days. Their time blocks are by seasons and as a result any effort to confirm a specific date of a given incident is usually frustrated."[24] Embedded within western scientific logic is the dismissal of a Hmong knowledge system because their temporality operates outside a western conception of time—it is located in their own logics of the natural world, the seasons, and storytelling. Their accounts are deemed "inaccurate" precisely because US, and other western, investigators cannot comprehend Hmong seasonal temporalities and alternative notions of time and memory, which in this poem is expressed through the past conditional and atmospheric changes.

In "The Fact of the Matter," Vang combines public discourse from the *Radiolab* interview with a US state declassified document to intertwine the various stratums of yellow rain. Vang overlays the poem onto a declassified cable she found in Chemical Biological Weapons (CBW) Box 1 from the National Security Archive. By appropriating the image of a cable that now consists entirely of redactions, Vang transforms the document into a watermark graphic for the poem. The date, routing, and subject heading of the cable are all unknown, and this combined with the redacted materials means that the cable exists as a transparent ghostly entity haunting Vang's text. At the same time, stamping this poem with the declassified cable as a watermark—a mark of supposed protection that also designates the document's importance—turns the poem itself into a

valid and legal document, which are "the highest form of social objects" that should not be easily co-opted and reproduced.[25] Vang's counterpoetics decidedly edits this document and emphasizes how state documentary practices no longer only belong to the state. The interplay and overlay of Krulwich's words (from 2012), Vang's lyricism (2021), and the visuality of the watermark (from the mid- or late twentieth century) creates a multi-temporal text. Vang's lyrics summon the archive, state documentation, Hmong memory, and the *Radiolab* interview to stretch the controversy of yellow rain across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as periods in time that cannot be understood apart from each other. These time periods remain entangled and these moments exist in tension; they mark different ways of understanding the consequences and histories of yellow rain.

Vang's poetry illuminates how ecological violence and its effects on Hmong people are rendered disposable under state narratives of erasure. Death in the last section of the poem is a reclamation, and Hmong life is made present and consequential through the acknowledgment of their death and their afterlives. Addressing a multiplicity of "yous"—the producers and interviewers at *Radiolab*, scientists, and statesmen—the speaker names an "official" collective refusal of dead Hmong and of Hmong life:

> You refuse our dead,
> As though
> We were never alive (11).

The use of enjambment throughout the poem creates a syntactically knotty narrative that does not conclude with each line but carries over to the next, in an ever-unfinished story. The construction of a particular flow and energy to the poem through enjambment, the watermark from the declassified document, the epigraph, the poetic text, and white space creates an engaged reading experience that invites a constant engagement with new understandings of yellow rain.

According to Diné poet Orlando White, white space creates a purposeful visual aesthetic that is just as important as a poem's text.[26] The breaks and caesuras throughout this poem and within the stanza creates a blankness and lack of sound, indicating a visual life outside of what is written down or being spoken. Hmong life, in other words, exists in what is unspoken and unseen, and this poem provides rhythmic moments that reset and reject the "refusal" of Hmong death. It is a refusal for Hmong to "Keep / Your dying / To yourself" (11). While resolution is generally often delivered in the second or third line of a poem, there remains no resolution in this poem. Rather, this poem must be read within the milieu of the other poems and visuals of Vang's *Yellow Rain*, which contextualizes the incident of yellow rain within a wider US strategy of

warfare. Placing the "mystery" of yellow rain within a broader operation of chemical warfare furthers critical refugee studies' investigations of state power, militarism, Indigenous knowledge, and notions of refugee survival grounded in kinship with other-than-human worlds.

"EVEN THE RAIN THEY THINK THEY OWN": AT THE LIMITS OF TOXIC EMPIRE

Yellow Rain is not just a protracted meditation on the US nation-state and its archival logics of secrecy and opacity; it is also about revealing the long-standing vitality of Hmong people and the persistence of their knowledge system in the face of total warfare. Hmong epistemologies of placemaking and ecology exist in a dialectical relationship with Hmong poetic forms to remake Hmong lifeworlds. Vang's ecocidal poetics enfolds US governmental archives into a Hmong poetic universe in order to demonstrate how the archive can be used both as a counterinsurgent field of control and erasure and as an insurgent discursive space to change the terms of survivance.

Halfway through *Yellow Rain*, a series of bee poems extends the boundaries of Hmong life and death. "Allied with the Bees" references the bee-feces theory put forward by US scientists that dismissed Hmong testimonies about yellow rain, but does so in a way that centers a Hmong epistemological relationship with bees and the mountains. This poem is grounded in an Indigenous relationship with their occupied and defiled homeland and sets up a model of ecological relationality. The poem gestures toward the allied forces in the war through the use of "allied" in the title. At the same time, the word "allied" signals a reciprocal coalition between Hmong people and bees, and is reminiscent of Eng Yang's claims that the Hmong know a great deal about bees and would know the difference between chemical dropping from the sky and honey-bee feces.

While the epigraph for "The Fact of the Matter Is the Consequence of Ugly Deaths" draws on the dismissal of Hmong testimony, "Allied with the Bees" includes a letter that Mai Der Vang found in the National Security Archive, sent by a Hmong person named S. Yang to an unknown newspaper in Long Beach, California, dated April 6, 1984: "*These people have been living in these areas for all their life but they have never heard or experienced something like this before. Bees and honey are part of their life; they and their ancestors have traded honey for salt, clothes, and other goods for hundreds of years*" (130). This description of Hmong interrelationship with bees and honey, and the long community practices of trade structured around the lives of bees in the mountains, is part of an

Indigenous relationality and it centers a Hmong voice. S. Yang's voice carries into the body of the poem, where a Hmong speaker, most likely an elder like S. Yang, addresses their descendant, imploring them from the beginning of the poem to "Tell them child" (130).

Through lush imagery and descriptive language the speaker paints a vivid picture: barefoot people walking along the curves of the hill for so long that they have memorized the bends, hunting "alongside" bees (130). The sound of the bees vibrates as they slumber inside the trees; they are described gently, as living beings who dream. This poem is a reminder of the lifeworld of bees. This relational description of bees stands in stark contrast to the way bees are cast in the controversy over yellow rain, where they are depicted as defecating insects who bring harm to those living in the mountains. The speaker in the poem lovingly describes bees as laborers, and honey as a gift from their hard work: "We have been crowned with / Syrup of their toils so that our / Syntax might awaken to know" (130). Bees crucially interact with Hmong syntax—a logic of ordering the subjects, verbs, and objects of a sentence—that influence how language informs knowledge production. While Vang's poetry is predominantly written in English, she infuses the English language with Hmong syntax, and in doing so, imbues it with Hmong knowledge of the bees.

Craig Santos Perez notes that "beyond subject matter, eco-poetics also examines eco-poetry for how formal elements might embody ecological concepts, transformations, or aesthetics. All cultures have a tradition of eco-poetry since one of humanity's primal experiences is our dynamic and changing relationship to the world around us and to ourselves as nature."[27] In this way there is, drawing on Donna Haraway's ideas, an interspecies *sympoiesis* between bees and humans.[28] Moving beyond simple metaphors of bees, there is, in Kate Rigby's terms, an operating apian *poeisis* that "extends beyond what they *make* (hives and honey) to what they *say*, and the artistry of how they do so" in ways that create new places of dwelling.[29] Hmong people's relationship with bees is so intimate that it constructs, or "awakens," their language and their understanding of the ordering of the natural world. Language guides them as their directional "North." It is compared to a wandering butterfly, which connects their logic of language to a state of constant movement, transformation, and ephemerality, and thus is never fixed.

The poem's speaker calls upon their daughter again, urging her, in an appeal to the senses, to describe how Hmong people witnessed bees carefully burying their queen bee, gently wrapping her in her wings before flocking around her before taking flight. The Hmong heard how "the forest keened" a lullaby for many days, grieving for the queen; the speaker enters the semiosphere of bees. The lines describing the death and mourning of the queen bee overflow, propelling

the reader forward and engulfing them in the lifeworld of the bees. Hmong are rendered inseparable. In carefully listening to the sound of the bees, the Hmong come to understand their own abandoned position as "collateral beings" of war. Addressing the child again, but in different words, "Me ntxhais," "Hmong girl," the speaker urges her to "tell them" again that the Hmong know what happened to them and that "what happened // To the bees also happened to us" (131). Here, Vang touches on a "creaturely poetics," to borrow from Anat Pick, of life's "fragility and finitude," and "as material and temporal."[30] The Hmong are not victims harmed by bees, but are intimately connected to the intergenerational life and death of the bees and the jungles of Laos. Like the Hmong, the bees are also vulnerable to the lethal experimentation and weapons of war.

Vang's poetics underscores a politics of Indigeneity as a fixed location to diasporic notions of homeland as well as memories of home, the destruction of the home, and forced migration. Altogether, this understanding creates the very conditions that make it possible for refugees to speak in new ways about ecological destruction, war, home, and displacement. As Craig Santos Perez has illuminated, Native American and Pacific Islander studies scholars assert how the "earth is an ancestor, all life is interconnected and sacred, and human beings should act according to the values of reciprocity, sustainability, and mutual care." Knowledge of land and stories of place are central to this work.[31] Hmong Indigeneity posits a relationality with other-than-human worlds that links refugees, warfare, state power, and ecology. Critical refugee studies call for a renegotiation of the juridical understanding of what it means to be a refugee, as specified by the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in the wake of World War II. Moreover, the 1951 convention was informed by the "nation-state framework that aligns rights with citizenship and national borders," thus reproduced the power and ideal of the sovereign state as protector; this framework also increased border control and anti-immigrant measures.[32] As the Critical Refugee Collective has stated, we must "make the case that refugees and the issue of displacement must be front and center in the ways we talk about the deleterious effects of climate change, global epidemics, and perpetual war."[33]

In the poem "Agent Orange Commando Lava," Vang directly situates Hmong experience within the militarized violence of ecocide. With the title of the poem Vang conjoins three US military operations—Agent Orange, Commando Lava, and Operation Popeye—and portrays them as part of a continuous genealogy of war crimes: "One that leads to: another leads to: another: leads to: war crime" (85). The first line is both separated and connected through a series of colons, emphasizing the list of different war crimes that are linked to a longer chain of events. Following this chain are the images of roots being pulled up, through which "Children" must "dig" and "ignite their earnest way through"; this

intertwines the uprooted war-torn landscape with Hmong descendants who are tasked with making sense of living in the wake of ecocidal warfare and official accounts that erase Hmong experience and testimony.

Mai Der Vang makes clear that investigation entails a confrontation with the obfuscation of official state records. Using italics, Vang interweaves excerpts of a declassified document from January 13, 1967 into her poem. It is a memorandum written from Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Kohler to Secretary of State Rusk, with the subject heading "Weather modification in North Vietnam and Laos (Project Popeye)." Vang repurposes the "top secret" memorandum and sets it in verse. Lines from the memorandum describing the more than fifty cloud seeding experiments of Operation Popeye in North Vietnam and southern Laos that sought to induce rainfall precede Vang's own writing: "Even the rain they think they own / Even the rain as casualty collateral / Price of their self-worth" (85). This poem deploys an ecocidal poetics that dwells in forms of counterhegemonic documentary poetics, which serve as "a kind of counter-intelligence," as Michael Leong might describe the poem. As such, it re-centers and repurposes a set of bureaucratic papers and documents that have produced "individual and collective identities," which have shaped our cultural memories and traumas. By "reordering" them, Vang enacts a documentary poetics that rhetorically returns these bureaucratic documents to the public sphere as radically transformed, in ways that disassemble and reassemble the story of chemical warfare so as not to, in Astrid Lorange's words, "reproduce established relationships between the state and its subjects, and between suffering and its representations in official accounts of national history."[34]

For this project, Vang sifted through thousands of documents, and admits that she was at first daunted by all of the boxes, wondering how she was going to get through all of the contents. Moving through them, "page by page . . . [she] . . . began to notice patterns in the documents, whether it was in the language or the graphics, and then themes began to emerge." She ended up bringing home more than two thousand pages, and realized that she had to allow the documents to lead her, that she had to stay open to what she might discover.[35] Employing a documentary poetics that reads against the US state archive, Vang does not begin her process with an empty page, but with research and previous documents that have been deemed "top secret," "official," "classified," and now "declassified." A poetics of the document is "concerned with the conditions under which these struggles occur."[36]

Folding fragments of the memorandum from Kohler to Secretary of State Rusk into her own writing, Vang embeds her poetry in the bureaucratic language of the US state while, at the same time, she reframes the memorandum as evidence for Hmong claims of chemical warfare and ecological destruction in

order to write against the state archive. Perhaps not yellow rain specifically, but something akin to it has happened, and "the poem becomes a site of the investigation" of state failure."[37] In "Agent Orange Commando Lava," Vang resurfaces Operation Popeye, an experiment sponsored by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) that sought to modify weather patterns from 1967 to 1972. Seeding the clouds with silver iodide deployed by aircraft, this operation aimed to extend the monsoon season in order to slow traffic on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Complicated, shifting, and winding, the Ho Chi Minh Trail was composed of bridges and roadways over a thousand kilometers that crossed mountain peaks, jungles, and plains, and that served as the main artery through which communist-affiliated forces and supplies were moved to Southern Vietnam. The bureaucratic content of the memorandum stands in stark contrast to the poetic form Vang sets for this document of war. The excerpts appear to serve as evidence for chemical testing in North Vietnam and Laos, and point to how weather played a decisive role in the ability to travel through the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Truck traffic on the trail is linked to the space of the sky above, which justifies cloud-seeding techniques. The fall monsoon season was a time of stockpiling and preparation, and during the dry season, there was an urgency to move through the roadways. Because the United States fought an aerial war, lack of access to fighting on the ground below put them at an insurmountable disadvantage, so that its technologies could not prevail in the end.

In the United States' effort to contain communism abroad, Laos in particular became a "testing ground for counterinsurgency and national building programs that came of age in Vietnam," driving the secret war in neutral Laos.[38] Approximately 60 percent of Hmong men were secretly recruited by the CIA to move supplies southward across the Ho Chi Minh Trail, to rescue US soldiers, and to combat the Communist North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao. In the aftermath of the war, Indigenous Hmong tribespeople were abandoned by the United States and were punished, killed, incarcerated, and detained in labor camps. Hmong forces continued to fight against the Vietnamese Army and the Lao People's Liberation Army, which sought revenge for the Hmong army's service to the US military via a systematic "pacification" operation, including the use of chemical weapons supplied by Soviets that targeted and eliminated rebel enclaves of Hmong living in remote mountains of northern Laos.

Laced throughout the memorandum is the language of US state secrecy that also demanded secrecy from Hmong people. Secrecy, according to scholar Ma Vang, "structures 'official' knowledge formation and refugee knowledge-making." Within this structuring of official knowledge, the refugee becomes "an artifact of U.S. liberal militarized empire and state governance . . . [and] . . . is also a subject of secrecy whose absence in the archives demonstrates

record-keeping as one such form of violence."[39] US militarized experiments that sought to induce rainfall were, as the poem includes from the US state memorandum, "*non-publicized*," and "*more than fifty cloud seeing experiments*" were "*conducted without consultation with lao authorities*" (85). Vang's repurposing of the memorandum challenges the perceived notion that bureaucratic documents are simply stating empirical facts and are devoid of aesthetic, style, and affect. The strategic exploitation of the clouds, the weather, and the environment to create a perpetual monsoon season ultimately failed to win the war and devastated the landscape and its inhabitants—Hmong and bees alike. Vang eschews state violence and directly transforms it through figurative language—a language that necessarily asks readers to work through and with opacity and deferral. Directly following the first memorandum excerpts, Vang shifts the perspective: "Even the rain they think they own / Even the rain as casualty collateral" (85). The repetition of "even" emphasizes the audacity of the absurd proprietary claims to manipulate "even the rain." Nothing is sacred to or safe from the US military complex if "even the rain" can be turned into casualty collateral, a term of warfare typically used to describe injury to or the deaths of civilians. In contrast to the cut-and-dry language of the memorandum, which does not account for the consequences of chemical warfare and sees the rain as an object to manipulate, Vang's poetic interjection creates different relationships among the state's operations and its discourse, nature, the Hmong people, and refugee politics. Vang uses a simile, "Rain as refugee," and at the same time broadens the conceptualization of "refugee" to create an affinity between the Hmong and the rain. Through the political language of refugee recognition, Vang grants rain the juridico-political significance as refugee and intervenes in the perception of refugees as being only humans. Refugee status is given to the rain and the rain is perceived as a living entity that can be used as a weapon like the Hmong were used, and therefore must and can escape US state militarized violence. Here, being a refugee exists beyond the human form and beyond the idea that one must escape war or a natural disaster. Just as the monsoon of Hmong life stories need sheltering in the poem earlier, here, Hmong are not sheltering from the rain but are in alignment with the demands placed upon the ecological landscape. "Mother Nature" is cast as an active force laboring on the "behalf" of the United States' desire to manipulate the climate for warfare. A piece of the memorandum follows these lines, acknowledging how these acts would alter weather patterns, the life cycle of plants and animals, fungi, bacteria, and could lead to serious flooding (86).

Similar to the Hmong who were set to fight on "behalf" of the CIA, the term "Mother Nature" is deployed against the Communist North Vietnamese. Describing the operation as such—"the earth dismantled" (86)— demonstrates

the United States' operational weaponization of the earth, in which nature is treated merely as an object for advancement. The agent of action here—the US government and scientists—is fully eliminated from the poem. In response to the telegram's description of chemical chelation in the production of mud, the speaker underscores nature's constancy. Later, Vang draws attention to certain words: for example, "mutilating" claims its own line; the capitalization and alliteration of "Militarize Mother Nature" emphasize the work of turning nature into a militarized campaign. There is a profound irony in the way "Mother Nature" becomes a colonial construct that is weaponized, and is not a nurturing concept, as "she" is predominantly represented. The climate's "constant demise" is linked to the memorandum's text, which acknowledges the drastic change of weather patterns and its effect on plants and animals, fungi, bacteria, and flooding. If the purpose is to turn the area into a terrain perpetually flooded by monsoons, ecocide seems to be the end goal, with its long-term repercussions barely an afterthought to the ambitions of defeating Vietnamese Communists. In the second section of the poem, Vang repeats Eng Yang's and Kao Kalia Yang's sentiments from their *Radiolab* conversation with Krulwich and Axelrod: if the use of chemical weapons are well known and acknowledged, then why does yellow rain being a chemical weapon seem so implausible. Vang ends this second section of the poem with a series of questions asking "if" chemical warfare has been documented and happened, "then why / Not yellow rain" (86). Vang uses the conjunction "if" repeatedly to ask, "if" the US government attempted to change the weather patterns along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, therefore affecting the life cycles of plants an animals, why then would they not use yellow rain. There are no question marks, or any punctuation marks for that matter, in Vang's poetic sequence, which creates ambiguity and multiple possible interpretations. Omitting the question marks emphasizes that, given evidence of other chemical warfare, this question should not even be a question. Visually, unlike the stanzas before, this one begins and drifts to the right, creating more white space on the left side of the final three lines. Creating a trailing blankness and a caesura in the implied sound of the poem, the blank space leaves room for thought and reflection and leads into the following third section of the poem, about yet another attempt to interdict passage on the Ho Chi Minh Trail through scientific technology.

There are two telegrams in the middle section of the poem where the language of science and politics contrasts with the speaker's engagement with natural and denaturalized images of dirt, mud, and the sky; this emphasizes the escalation of toxic scientific production. One of the telegrams is dated May 29, 1967—four months after the memorandum—from an embassy in Laos, and is addressed to the secretary of state in Washington, DC. Its subject heading, found

in the notes section of *Yellow Rain*, is "Operation Commando Lava," referencing the experiment that dropped a chemical compound of powder from the sky to create "*impassable mud*" (86). When mixed with rain, this powder will result in "*chelation*," or the bonding of molecules and ions to metal ions, and the dispersion of soil, so that mud "*loses all consistency and becomes incapable of / supporting vehicles or any other substantial weight*" (87). Vang disrupts the memorandum with poetry: "They don't realize the sky / Never left the sky // Foothill still rises in the east // They can wash the blood from / Their sheets." The memorandum disrupts Vang's writing with the US Embassy's memo: "*I would like to make mud on several routes in Laos*" (87). The speaker responds that "They cannot wash the dead / From their mind" (87).

The vague use of "they" gestures to an ambiguous cadre of politicians and scientists who are alluded to, but do not emerge as totalizing figures. What "they" do not realize is that while they can attempt to alter the landscape and natural surroundings, there are just some things that they cannot change. The images of an immovable sky and steadfast foothills offers reassurance against the onslaught of war. Given the lack of punctuation, the "who" in the two lines is ambiguous: "Who will forfeit themselves to the earth / Who of their own will pay the soil's tax" (87). On the one hand, if referring to the dead, it is a statement telling us of people who have willingly sacrificed their lives to the earth. On the other hand, the lines could be read as questions, asking for someone to give themselves up, perhaps the unnamed "they." Imbued with an agential quality, the dirt can and will collect. The soil is contrasted to images and discourse of washing as part of the US state's destabilizing agenda. Blood can be cleaned up, but the dead cannot be forgotten. The language of cleanliness carries on into the fourth section that cites a memorandum dated just one month after the telegram, from George A. Carver, Jr., the Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs, to William C. Hamilton, the Laos Country Director at the US Department of State. In this section, Carver, Jr.'s telegram states that the company Proctor & Gamble is testing a new detergent, "Gain," which turns out to be key to the Commando Lava mix.

The poem reports how Proctor & Gamble's claims that Commando Lava "detergent" has been sanctioned by the FDA, and is therefore safe, is used to justify the dropping of the chemical compound in South Vietnam. This will exacerbate the effects of the monsoon on the trail, creating even more muddy conditions. The powdered chemical compound is claimed to be safe enough for daily use for laundry in US homes, when, in fact, it is a mixture of trisodium nitrilotriacedic acid and sodium tripolyphosphate created by the Dow Chemical Corporation and the US army. Following the information from the telegram, Vang inserts: "That laundry should have / Everything to do with war and soil //

What is there to benefit / But an imitation of clean" (87–88). Thus, Vang's use of the cleaning compound ties the intimate spaces of US homes to sites of warfare in such a way that reveals how safe domestic spaces are produced through the very materials that wage war abroad. The imagery of laundry that ends this section serves as coded language for chemical weapons; cleanliness, soap, and detergent appear to be harmless substances that promise to be helpful in the household, but in the end this is a simulation of hygiene that masks US violence across Southeast Asia.

Vang stresses the absurdity of passing chemical weapons on as a cleaning product—"soap"— in ways that conceal the US government's deployment of chemical weapons. Ordinary household products, the poem reveals, are rooted in US militarized experimentation and environmental devastation. The United States and President Ngô Đình Diệm of South Vietnam dropped seven million liters of Agent Orange—a mixture of herbicides, including tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin (TCDD), a human carcinogen categorized as one of the most toxic dioxins by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)—to defoliate the jungle, which provided coverage for Communist fighters. Thousands of square kilometers of crops and mangroves in South Vietnam, and upland in Vietnam, along the borders of Laos and Cambodia, were destroyed to clear military perimeters, decrease guerilla food supply, and eradicate the Viet Cong. It is estimated that four million Vietnamese citizens were exposed to Agent Orange, with millions developing leukemia, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, Hodgkin's lymphoma, many other cancers, and birth defects. Totally upending the jungle's ecological equilibrium, chemical defoliants eroded tree coverage, made seedling forest regeneration nearly impossible, and reduced animal species diversity.

The final section of this long poem jumps to the 1980s, fifteen years after the previous telegram and memorandum, to reclaim what has been excluded from official accounts. Vang integrates a declassified cable, dated July 9, 1982, from the US Mission of the United Nations in New York to the secretary of state in Washington, DC reporting Vietnamese charges against the US for chemical warfare and the use of Agent Orange and toxic gases in violation of the Geneva Protocol (88). Placing this cable next to the memorandum and telegram explicitly discussing the use of chemical weapons from the 1960s highlights a retrospective glance at the use of chemical warfare.[40] Further excerpts from the cable are included in the poem, listing the effects of toxic gases: ocular lesions, asthenia, congenital anomalies, chromosomic alterations, the death of 3,500 Vietnamese "outright."

The speaker notes that the US government knew of these effects: "There is no way they didn't know of these effects / They knew but did it anyway" (88), which highlights the pivotal role the US empire plays in ecocidal practices,

where the militarization of science turns nature and biology "against itself." What remains crucial in the cable is clear: the protection of the US state against charges of ecocide by calling for the "*strictest secrecy / vulnerability to communist charges of / US manipulation of weather*" (88–89). Ultimately, the secret cannot be kept, as

> The dead do tell
> Then yellow rain then yellow rain. (89)

Vang's reframing of documents tells the stories of the dead, who do not always appear explicitly, but haunt government telegrams, cables, and memorandums. Significantly, the dead emerge through Vang's book of poetry not for the purpose of memorialization, but as a continuation of ecological violence that has yet to be fully comprehended.

By the end of the book there is no definitive answer, and it seems like the hunt for an explanation will never be over. The book ends with a poem about waiting, "And Yet Still More." Every line in this poem begins with the word "That" and several lines contain some form of the verb and noun "wait." The notion of waiting is rewritten over and over again in contradictory terms: "That wait is the refugee / That a refugee is waiting / That waiting must go on / That there is yet more waiting / . . . That wait is the refugee (180–81). In the onslaught of subordinate clauses there are no periods, with only line breaks and the capitalization of "That" at the beginning of each line separating each clause. Typically, a subordinate clause cannot exist on its own and usually supports a main clause that can stand on its own. Yet the subordinate clause subsists on its own over and over again, and in each iteration Vang plays with the language of "waiting" and "refugees." The "wait" shifts from verb to noun, from the subject of stay or delay, in anticipation of something to come or some place to be, and the reader is left to consider the spatiotemporal condition of refugees and war. As the Critical Refugee Collective assert, taking refugees as an analytic moves against conventional figurations of refugees in "distress and need" by US and international law; it unsettles essentialist notions of refugees in a liberal humanitarian paradigm and goes against popular culture. As an analytic, not an object of study, the term "refugee" names a critique of structures of power that must resist incorporation into controlled, dominant narratives.[41]

Vang is part of a generation of Southeast Asian writers—including Kao Kalia Yang, Diana Khoi Nguyen, Anthony Veasna So, Bao Phi, Thi Bui, Hai-Dang Phan, and Sokunthary Svay, to name a few—who came of age in the aftermath of the US war in Vietnam and the Cold War, all of whom, in many ways, represent the kind of writers that I have been waiting for most of my life. Their works are part of a literary culture that upends and suspends conventional figurations of

refugees and typical notions of refugee testimony and visibility. *Yellow Rain* deals with the extended ecological fallout of the Cold War and its logic of archive and state-sanctioned knowledge systems; the book illuminates the violence of that logic as ongoing.

The US war in Vietnam is not a faraway or long-ago event, but continues in the archives, neighborhoods, and communities of the United States. The assault against Vietnam and its inhabitants did not end on April 30, 1975 but it lingers in the air, the soil, the clouds, the plants, and the human and animal bodies across Southeast Asia and the United States. Vang's Hmong Indigenous refugee poetics provides an epistemology of waiting that forever puts off a temporal or spatial point of arrival. In the final poem, and in the book as a whole, Indigeneity and refugee survivance are found in wait as an interval, a pause, much like the visual gaps and spaces that echo the caesuras of the archive throughout *Yellow Rain*. Vang ultimately dwells in the ecocidal language of the archive for a waiting that ushers in a temporality of remaining, of stay, of delay, of patience, of lasting, of anticipation, and of endurance. Vang presents an active investigative process that dwells in different poetic temporalities of waiting, language, and counter histories. Within that process, a Hmong poetics signals the ability to persist in place and to escape, but also signals the inevitability of the postponement of knowledge, of the archive, of an arrival through ever-shifting and non-national modes of Indigeneity and search for refuge. Indeed, to write a book such as *Yellow Rain* requires a constant practice of assembling and reassembling of documentation to the point of obsession, where the hunt for what has been disavowed must continue even in one's dreams.

NOTES

1. Mai Der Vang, *Yellow Rain: Poems* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2021), 5. All further citations to this work will be given parenthetically.
2. Davorn Sisavath, "Cluster Bombs and War Metals: Reforming U.S. Cold War Debris in Laos," *Amerasia Journal* 47, no 2 (2021): 235.
3. In the 1980s, the UN Group of Experts—Australia, Britain, Canada, China, Denmark, France, Thailand, Israel, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, West Germany, and an unidentified Latin American country—investigated yellow rain. Canada, Britain, and France publicly endorsed initial US charges by US Secretary of State Alexander Haig against the Soviet Union of toxic warfare. Australian investigators were skeptical, while other countries remained silent. See Thomas Whiteside, "Annals of the Cold War: The Yellow Rain Complex-I," *New Yorker*, February 11, 1991, 38–67; Jonathan Tucker, "The 'Yellow Rain' Controversy: Lessons for Arms Control Compliance," *The Nonproliferation Review*, 8(1): 31.

4. On September 13, 1981, US Secretary of State Alexander Haig alleged during a speech to the Berlin Press Association that the Soviet Union supplied mycotoxins, a synthesized poisonous compound of fungi, to Vietnamese and Laotian Communist allies (C. J. Mirocha and J. D. Rosen at the University of Minnesota conducted early studies on yellow rain and collected samples of blood, urine, and tissue from thirty-three people; they purportedly found high levels of trichothecenes). The Soviet Union, in turn, denied their use of chemical toxins and charged that the trichothecene mycotoxins were present in Southeast Asia as a result of the US Air Force's use of herbicides and napalm. In 1985, Matthew S. Meselson, a professor of biochemistry at Harvard and an expert on chemical warfare, conducted his own study of the samples. In consultation with Harvard botanist Peter M. S. Ashton and Yale entomologist Thomas D. Seeley, Meselson concluded that yellow rain was in actuality honeybee pollen-rich feces released across the landscape en masse by Southeast Asian honeybees, *Apis dorsata*. Supporters of the honeybee-feces hypothesis disavowed Hmong reports of yellow rain, and claimed that the Hmong were subject to "mass suggestion" by US officials and Hmong activists (Tucker, "The 'Yellow Rain' Controversy, 33). A joint US State and Defense Department Chemical and Biological Weapons (CBW) team opened up a reinvestigation of yellow rain, returning to Laos between 1983 and 1985 to validate the reliability of Hmong accounts. The CBW team officially concluded in a series of telegrams that "The question is not whether Hmong refugees lie but whether Hmong refugees are accurate reporters of reality. Generally, we have not found them to be so and believe that their stories must be supported by external and, if possible, objective means" (Telegram 27244, US Embassy Bangkok to Defense Intelligence Agency Washington, May 30, 1984, subject, "CBW Samples TH-840523-1DS Through 7DS" cited in Matthew S. Meselson and Robinson, Julian Perry. "Chapter Four. The Yellow Rain Affair: Lessons from a Discredited Allegation" In *Terrorism, War, or Disease?: Unraveling the Use of Biological Weapons* edited by Anne Clunan, Peter R. Lavoy and Susan B. Martin (Redwood City: Stanford University Press 2008).

5. Ma Vang, *History on the Run: Secrecy, Fugitivity, and Hmong Refugee Epistemology: Secrecy, Fugitivity, and Hmong Refugee Epistemologies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 4.

6. Zhou Xiaojing, "'Imperial Debris': The Vietnam War and Mai Der Vang's *Yellow Rain*," in *The Routledge Companion to Ecopoetics*, ed. Julia Fiedorczuk, Mary Newell, Bernard Quetchenback, and Orchid Tierney (New York: Routledge, 2023), 228, 233.

7. "Ecocide" was coined in 1970 by US biologist and bioethicist Professor Arthur W. Galston, at the Conference on War and National Responsibility in Washington, DC, where he advised the international banning of ecocidal practices. Pamela McElwee, "The Origins of Ecocide: Revisiting the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the Vietnam War," *Arcadia* 20 (Spring 2020). https://www.environmentandsociety.org/arcadia/origins-ecocide-revisiting-ho-chi-minh-trail-vietnam-war.

8. Evyn Lê Espiritu Gandhi, *Archipelago of Resettlement: Vietnamese Refugee Settlers and Decolonization across Guam and Israel-Palestine* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022), 6.

9. Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 61–62.

10. Eric Tang, *Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the NYC Hyperghetto* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015), 21, 51.
11. Yến Lê Espiritu, "Introduction: Critical Refugee Studies and Asian American Studies," *Amerasia Journal* 47, no.1 (2021): 4.
12. Simi Kang and Lisa Sun-Hee Park, "Introduction," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 26, no. 3 (2023): 304.
13. Natalia Duong, "Homing Toxicity: The Domestication of Herbicidal Warfare," *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* 9, no. 1: 1–24, 3. Angela Hume and Sami Rahimtoola, "Introduction: Queering Ecopoetics," *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 25, no. 1 (2019): 134–49. My approach to *Yellow Rain* is in line with Hume and Rahimtoola's queer ecopoetics, which moves away from a linear, sentimental, and domestic struggle for the future, and is organized around a "rallying cry to 'save our children'" from environmental threat.
14. Mai Der Vang, *Yellow Rain*, 10. The date provided here is Vang's citation, which does not match the date of *Radiolab's* publication of the episode.
15. Kao Kalia Yang, "The Science of Racism: *Radiolab*'s Treatment of Hmong Experience," *Hyphen: Asian America Unabridged* (October 22, 2012). https://hyphenmagazine.com/blog/2012/10/22/science-racism-radiolabs-treatment-hmong-experience.
16. *Radiolab*, "The Fact of the Matter," NPR, September 24, 2012. https://radiolab.org/podcast/239470-the-fact-of-the-matter.
17. Yang, "The Science of Racism."
18. *Radiolab*, "The Fact of the Matter," NPR, September 24, 2012. In the interview's aftermath there was a backlash at the hosts' dismissive treatment of Eng Yang and Kao Kalia Yang. They have since amended and reframed their episode, but ignored Eng Yang and Kao Kalia Yang's request to publish their responses to the interview; Robert Krulwich apologized for his tone but did not acknowledge Hmong knowledge of the terrain and bees.
19. *Radiolab*, "The Fact of the Matter," NPR, September 24, 2012.
20. Yến Lê Espiritu et al., *Departures: An Introduction to Critical Refugee Studies* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022), 110.
21. Interview with Kao Kalia Yang, "A Public Reckoning with the Truth about Yellow Rain and the Secret War," *Electric Literature*, September 21, 2021. https://electricliterature.com/mai-der-vang-yellow-rain-poems-book-secret-war-hmong/.
22. Yến Lê Espiritu, "Introduction: Critical Refugee Studies and Asian American Studies," 4.
23. Tucker, "The 'Yellow Rain' Controversy," 33.
24. Telegram 21367, US Embassy Bangkok to Secretary of State, April 25, 1984, subject: "CBW Sample Report from Ban Vinai Interview Follow-Up." Cited in Matthew S. Meselson and Robinson, Julian Perry. "Chapter Four. The Yellow Rain Affair: Lessons from a Discredited Allegation" In *Terrorism, War, or Disease?: Unraveling the Use of Biological Weapons* edited by Anne Clunan, Peter R. Lavoy and Susan B. Martin (Redwood City: Stanford University Press 2008).

25. Maurizio Ferraris, *Documentality: Why It Is Necessary to Leave Traces*, trans. Richard Davies (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 1.
26. Orlando White, "Functional White: Crafting Space & Silence," *Poetry Foundation*, November 3, 2015. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/featured-blogger/73860/functional-white-crafting-space-silence
27. Craig Santos Perez, "Poetics," in *Big Energy Poets: Ecopoetry Thinks Climate Change*, ed. Heidi Lynn Staples and Amy King (Buffalo: BlazeVOX, 2017), 167.
28. Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 61.
29. Kate Rigby, *Reclaiming Romanticism: Towards an Ecopoetics of Decolonization* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 90.
30. Anat Pick, *Creaturely Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 3–4.
31. Craig Santos Perez, "Native Chamorro Ecopoetry in the Work of Cecilia C. T. Perez," in *Ecopoetics and the Global Landscape: Critical Essays*, ed. Isabel Sobral Campos (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018), 61. Perez helpfully cites Donelle N. Dreese, *Ecocriticism: Creating Self and Place in Environmental and American Indian Literatures* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002); John Elder and Hertha D. Wong, eds., *Family of Earth & Sky: Indigenous Tales of Nature from around the World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996); hoʻomanawanui, kuʻualoha, "'This Land Is Your Land, This Land Was My Land': Kanaka Maoli versus Settler Representations of Aina in Contemporary Literature of Hawaiʻi," in *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawaiʻi*, ed. Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Y. Okamura (Honolulu: University of Hawaiʻi Press, 2008), 116–54; Hsinya Huang, "Toward Transpacific Ecopoetics: Three Indigenous Texts," *Comparative Literature Studies* 50, no. 1 (2013): 120–47; Dennis Kawaharada, *Storied Landscapes: Hawaiian Literature and Place* (Honolulu: Kalamaku Press, 1999); J. McLaren, *New Pacific Literatures: Culture and Environment in the European Pacific* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993); Robert Nelson, *Place and Vision: The Function of Landscape in Native American Fiction* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993); Lee Schweninger, *Listen to the Land: Native American Literary Responses to the Landscape* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008); Norma Wilson, *The Nature of Native American Poetry* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001); Rob Wilson, "Oceania as Peril and Promise: Towards Theorizing a Worlded Vision of Trans-Pacific Ecopoetics," paper presented at the Oceanic Archives and Transnational American Studies Conference, Hong Kong University (June 4–6, 2012).
32. Yến Lê Espiritu et al., *Departures*, 32–33, 39.
33. Yến Lê Espiritu et al., *Departures*, 5.
34. Michael Leong, *Contested Records: The Turn to Documents in Contemporary North American Poetry* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2020), 2–4. See also "From History to Poetry: Mai Der Vang Explores the Archival Record in Her Celebrated Volume 'Yellow Rain,'" National Security Archive, June 27, 2022, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/vietnam/2022-06-27/history-poetry-mai-der-vang-explores-archival-record-her; Astrid Lorange, "Reading History against the State Secret: Carlos Soto Román's 'Chile Project: [Re-Classified],' the Remediated Archive, and the Poetics of Redaction," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 27, no. 2 (2022): 18.

35. "From History to Poetry."
36. Lorange, "Reading History," 19.
37. Lorange, "Reading History," 18.
38. Seth Jacobs quoted in Davorn Sisavath, "Metallic Violence in the Aftermath of the US Secret War in Laos (1964–73)," *Critical Ethnic Studies* 6, no. 2 (2020): 4. See Sisavath's discussion on how the 1962 Geneva Accords barred Laos from military operations, which led to a covert intervention by the Kennedy administration, backing of Pathet Lao against North Vietnamese forces, 4.
39. Ma Vang, *History on the Run*, 7.
40. The Geneva Protocol prohibits the use of asphyxiation, poison, gas, bacteriological methods, and chemical and biological weapons in international conflicts.
41. Yến Lê Espiritu et al., *Departures*, 6, 12.