

**New Mountain, New River, New Home?  
The Tasmanian Hmong**

**by**

**Margaret Ursula Eldridge, A.M., B.A., Grad. Dip.  
Educational Studies (TESOL)**

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**School of History and Classics  
University of Tasmania  
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Margaret Eldridge

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## **Abstract.**

### **New Mountain, New River, New Home?. The Tasmanian Hmong.**

This study examines the first group of largely preliterate refugees resettled in Tasmania after the 1975 Communist takeover of Laos. Hill tribe people, the Tasmanian Hmong left Laos and spent years in Thai refugee camps. This thesis examines the possible reasons for their secondary migration to various locations in Queensland. Their departure from Tasmania raised questions about why this apparently well-settled community left the island. For example, many people assumed it was because of Tasmania's cool climate.

The thesis creates a context in which to examine the Hmong's motivation to leave the island state, with reference to theories of migration, diaspora and globalisation. Oral histories draw out the stories of individual Hmong, their involvement in the Secret War in Indo-China, the escape from Laos, life in Thai refugee camps, their resettlement in Tasmania and subsequent departure for Queensland. Hmong informants include those remaining in Tasmania, those who left for Queensland and those who later returned to Tasmania. These interviews are balanced with voices of professionals and volunteers involved in settlement of the Hmong. Participant observation and itinerant ethnography have been employed, making use of everyday opportunities to collect information from which to develop ideas and to explain the secondary migration of the Hmong. This 'history from below', places value on the stories of ordinary people as a valuable resource.

The research concludes that, in addition to the desire to create a mega-community of Hmong in Queensland — in an attempt to counter loss of tradition and culture, and build Hmong cohesiveness — secondary migration was influenced by a desire for family reunification and a strong economic motive. It demonstrates that secondary migration is typical of many refugee communities.

In particular, the secondary migrations observed in diasporic Hmong communities have parallels with migrations of Hmong from China and with traditional movements in Laos, where swidden agriculture requires establishment of new villages when depleted soil or sickness affects settlements.

The research is important because there has been little recorded about the Hmong community in Tasmania, nor about other Australian Hmong communities. Since the once vibrant Hobart community is now a remnant population, it is important to place on record its story as part of recent social history. In examining a refugee community such as the Hmong, this thesis offers an investigation of the circumstances of becoming refugees, an analysis of settlement experiences and an exploration into the context and reasons for secondary migration. In addition, it provides an entry into comparative research on other refugee communities, which has relevance for those who work with refugees and are interested in their demographics.

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