

“Negative Difference” and Its Role in Writing: Shirley Geok-lin Lim’s *Among the White Moon Faces*

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Abstract

This essay addresses Shirley Geok-lin Lim’s *Among the White Moon Faces: An Asian American Memoir of Homelands* (1996) to argue the significance of the diasporic vision in the American literary imagination. I show that through a politics of return and re-engagement with the Malaysian context of the mid-twentieth century via her memoir, Lim presents history from the perspective of the oppressed and colonised. She also performs the important function of preserving and transmitting memory in diaspora. In addition to the benefits for the Malaysian American, this helps individualise the immigrant as an entity with historical dimensions for more mainstream audiences. The essay introduces the notion of “negative difference” as well, showing how Lim periodically felt herself marked as the devilish or unassimilable other in both Malaysia and the United States. Yet she uses the memoir as a reflective tool to evaluate the impact of such marking and often mobilises her writing as weapon or counter-act against such othering. In this regard, the essay argues for the beneficial effects of adversity on writing as conveyed in this particular work by Lim.

Keywords

Diasporic vision, return and re-engagement, transmitting of memory, historical dimension of the Asian American immigrant, negative difference, writing as counter-act

Towards the end of his essay on Shirley Geok-lin Lim’s 2001 novel *Joss and Gold*, Jeffrey F.L. Partridge claims that the book offers “a critique of American nationalism and of ethnic nationalist rhetoric within Asian-American literary studies when it is read not simply as a diasporic, cosmopolitan, or global text, but as an Asian-American diasporic text” (147). Yet earlier in his essay, as he

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situates Lim’s previous non-fictional work within debates of “diaspora” and “claiming America” in Asian American scholarship, he criticises her for a “staunch antinationalist stance” and notes that she favours “a universal, exilic, or transnational aesthetic” over an “American identity” (136). In the same section of his work, he goes on to comment that “Lim holds to a tenuous middle position between birthplace and the ‘intaking state’” (136). In this essay, I question Partridge’s phrase “tenuous middle position” and posit that Lim, in her book *Among the White Moon Faces: An Asian-American Memoir of Homelands*, reiteratively straddles two spaces, and there is nothing tentative or shaken about the simultaneity of this positioning. Reminiscent of Edward Said’s use of the music-related concept a “contrapuntal” consciousness to characterise the doubleness that inevitably marks the exilic predicament, Lim holds in balance the diasporic and the immigrant sensibilities, with no indication that her choice of the United States as her current residence is an unqualified success story or has in any way blunted her perception of Malaysia as home.² In fact, this essay largely addresses selected sections of *Among the White Moon Faces* in which Lim recounts her experiences in Malaysia. Thus, it is not just *Joss and Gold* which is Lim’s offering of an “Asian-American diasporic text” to her reading audience. Parallel to her own critical position in Asian American literary scholarship, Lim’s 1996/1997 memoir also gave us an American text in which major sections are situated in a different country. Through such works, Lim exemplifies her sustained commitment to the diasporic vision, showing its unquestionable significance in the American literary imagination.

Further, this essay focuses on Lim’s perceptions of being the undesirable other both as a native Malaysian and an immigrant American and argues that her internalisation of this negative marking charges the writing of her memoir with a force and intensity that demonstrate the beneficial effects of adversity on composing. Continuing with this line of thought, I show how Lim’s incorporation of generational narratives of the terrors and poverty resulting from the Japanese Occupation of Malaya does the same, imbuing the text with a contemplative richness that would not be possible if detailing a comparatively safe life of ease.

In his essay “Claiming Diaspora in Shirley Geok-lin Lim’s *Joss and Gold*,” Jeffrey F.L. Partridge notes that the “‘revisionist critique’ of claiming America differs from multiculturalism in its de-emphasis of U.S. national identity” (134). Partridge refers to David Leiwei Li’s book *Imagining the Nation: Asian American Literature and Cultural Consent*: “‘The concept of the Asian diaspora... was

² See Edward Said’s essay “Reflections on Exile.” S. Bilge Mutluay Cetintas makes an observation similar yet somewhat different from mine when she notes that “The United States never fully feels like home for Lim, and she remains in an ‘in-between’ liminal position, neither fully accepting her citizenship nor completely considering herself an outsider. She is in a state of chronic dislocation and, in her own words, ‘voluntarily displaced’” (214).

introduced [in Asian American Studies] to argue against a single national identity with one destiny in favor of a shared history that recognizes different origins and multiple transformations” (134). Partridge describes Shirley Lim as “a sharp critic of the [original] claiming American stance” in Asian American Studies (134). This stance, different from the revisionist position which recognises the significance of diaspora in Asian American writing, situates the Asian American presence as indisputably important in US history and culture. It focuses primarily on one national identity (American) and one destiny. In a discussion of her 1997 essay “Immigration and Diaspora,” Partridge points out that Lim interrogates the centrality of America and the “nationalist cause” in Maxine Hong Kingston’s writings for instance (Partridge 135). Further on, he makes the observation on Lim’s “tenuous middle position between birthplace and the ‘intaking state,’” drawing on her statement from “Immigration and Diaspora”: “‘The discourse of diaspora is that of disarticulation of identity from natal and national resources and includes the exilic imagination but is not restricted to it’” (Partridge 136).

Mohammad A. Quayum, in his essay “Nation, Gender, Identity: Shirley Geok-lin Lim’s *Joss and Gold*,” situates Lim in a different kind of “middle position,” a more definitive one, and notes:

In an attempt to create a new world culture, and predicated on the principles of syncreticity, and creative negotiations and transactions between peoples and cultures, Lim’s narrative seeks to dismantle all vertical hierarchies in the dominant discourses of nation.... Lim asserts that her work is ‘deterritorialized’ and that she has no ‘home turf,’ but quickly, and somewhat paradoxically, adds, ‘This is not to say I have no home turf or two. Imagination is a tricky power; it refuses to stay in one or even two places.’ In fact, she is Whitman’s ‘patient spider’ who stands ‘isolated’ and ‘explores the vast vacant surrounding’... spinning imaginary filaments into gossamer that eventually connect her from one side to her country of origin, Malaysia, and from another, her adopted country, America. (17)

Yet, although I concur with Quayum on this evident juxtaposition in Lim’s work, this essay addresses how in the first half of Lim’s memoir, the diasporic sensibility prevails, clearly presenting a gaze turned towards Malaysia.

How does the term “diasporic” operate here? Lim herself defines and re-defines the term in more than one interview, indicating her preference for “the notion of transnationality” over “diaspora” because the former connotes “a sense of continuing relationships with the location of origin” while the latter which almost always signifies separation “was appropriate at a time in human history when if populations left a location of origin, it was difficult for them to return” (Cheong, Kwa and Lim 25). Yet, despite her preference for “transnationality” and even as she is presently empowered to travel back and

forth between Malaysia and the United States, Lim remains imbued with the sense of the impossibility of a permanent return to the original country and her texts are thus marked by separateness from her country of origin. As she constructs what we may call her two lives in the first chapter of *Among the White Moon Faces*, the American reality emerges as a secondary presence. Instead, it is the contrariness of the fixed (point of origin) as “situated in the quicksand of memory” (Lim 9) and the perception of the unmovable as paradoxically also fleeing that summon the agency of the writer, to repeatedly place the diasporic against an immigrant American reality.

Sensual impressions are clearly a powerful aspect of this diasporic reality and inextricably linked with the imprint of “home” as Lim presents it in this section of her memoir. This narrative feature is evident as she details the dreams about her Grandfather’s house in Malacca, claiming that “[t]he images trigger a strong visceral sensation of identity” (Lim 18). A photograph of her Grandfather’s funeral, with a coffin-loaded lorry at the centre and the extended family “fanning outwards,” etches on Lim’s consciousness “the sense of Malacca as my home, a sense I have never been able to recover anywhere else in the world. To have felt the familiar once is always to feel its absence after. The town through whose streets I mourned publicly, dressed in black, sack, and straw, weeping with kinfolk, united under one common portrait, is what my nerves understand as home” (20). In the *Women’s Review of Books* interview, Lim addresses her continuing need to revisit the space of origin and her consciousness of it as trace: “I constantly wanted to go back to where I was, to the origin, the pain of the rupture, the loss of origin” (Cheong, Kwa and Lim 25).

Notably then, Lim uses a different kind of pain, the pain of being marked as an unassimilable other, to recover and map, in many cases, her memories of that space of origin. What is often singular about Lim’s reminiscences is her sense of exclusion and non-belonging even in Malaysia and over an extended period of time in her childhood. She charts the feeling of being other, and moreover other to the self, on at least two registers: the linguistic and the political. In both cases, she feels and knows herself marked not just as other, but also as devilish and evil.

Long prior to her move to the United States, Lim’s identity was affected and shaped by histories of migration, diasporic communities, exposure to multiple languages and dialects, impact of British colonisation and radical movements for autonomy and representation within Malaya. It is within this complex network of heterogeneous forces that Lim repeatedly finds herself marked as the undesirable other.

Yet invariably the question arises: this digging deep into the past, this excavating and vocalising a “devilish” difference – is this a parallel yet consequential narrative of what Lim experiences in the US? No doubt the

linguistic, political and racial hegemonies that engender such negative feelings of difference are discrete. But the overarching narrative seems to be one of non-belonging in which the narrating subject is unhappy about or tormented by some part of the self.

Such perceptions of being othered by numerous forces both in Malaysia and the US give to Lim's memoir a sharpness and vividness that would not be possible without identity classified as "negative difference."³ Furthermore, while one way of approaching *Among the White Moon Faces* is to read it as Lim positioning such narratives of difference, in the two countries, as parallel and independent of each other, another is to claim that experiences of being marked as other in the US propel Lim to return to and recover similar yet different and multiple experiences of "negative difference" in the land of her birth. Thus, although Lim's memoir is structurally chronological, that is, we read first about her predicament of being othered in many ways in Malaysia, the act of writing itself follows what Lim experiences as an immigrant of colour in the US. In this sense, her charting of experiences of being marked as the devilish other in the country of origin is fuelled and sharpened by an internalisation of being marked similarly in certain contexts in the country of migration.

In sum, the recovering and presenting of a sense of "negative difference" – moreover, an otherness that is not just marked as negative, but negative in many ways, sometimes devilish, sometimes politically terrifying, experienced in multiple geographical locations, caused by outside agents but also by a denigrating view of self by self – endow *Among the White Moon Faces* with a brilliance and acuity that I argue are achieved only because Lim at those narrative moments was situated outside of any politically or socially empowered group. In other words, in each case that Lim details, the very discomfort of not being part of the empowered or normative leads to an exploring and vocalising of being othered that is deeply moving.

The first memory of exclusion or being devilishly different in the memoir is situated on a linguistic register. Just as her mother is an "outsider" in her paternal grandfather's house, where Lim was born and spent her infancy, so Lim feels an outsider to Hokkien, spoken in that house, "a version of Southern Xiamen, the Min dialect from the Fujien province... the harsh voluble dialect of the Nanyang, the South Seas Chinese" (11). "As a child of a Hokkien community," Lim writes, "I should have felt that propulsive abrasive dialect in my genes" (11). Yet, resistance is a mode she appears to have adopted early as she speaks Malay as a child, the language in which her *peranakan* mother, a part of the assimilated Chinese in Malaya, had nursed her. "Chinese-speaking Malaysians called me a 'Kelangia-Kwei,' – or a Malay devil – because I could not

³ This is my phrase.

or would not speak Hokkien” (Lim 11).⁴ In “Diasporic Desires: Narrating Sexuality in the Memoirs of Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Li-Young Lee,” Kenneth Chan observes, “While the Malay majority in Malaya... politically and socially marginalized the Chinese minority, the Chinese community, in turn, considered the Peranakans as culturally tainted and tolerated them as cultural inferiors in their midst” (143). Lim’s rejection of the “harsh,” “scolding” Hokkien, which feels alien to her, begins a pattern of being marked as other that becomes less innocuous and less a consequence of her choices as the memoir unfolds.

At a later point in her memoir, Lim notes how Chinese-ness itself became something to be hated and feared. Following the Japanese Army’s withdrawal from Malaya in 1945 and the return of the British colonisers, the Malayan People’s Anti-Japanese Army became the Malayan Communist Party and called for “political representation and independence” (Lim 39).

These guerrillas threatened British colonial government and economy, and quickly became identified with the ‘Red Scare,’ Communists allegedly armed by the People’s Republic of China and the Soviet Union. And thus Chinese immigrants and Straits-born Chinese, associated through race with disorders and terrorism, also had their ‘Chineseness’ marked as evil. (Lim 39)

Lim focuses on 1948 when the British declared a state of Emergency in the Federation of Malaya. The narrative moves through the years until 1951, when she was six, to illustrate how much of the native population was “othered” to itself both through suppressive political acts and media coverage and representation. Although in 1948, the Chinese were the majority in the population, the Emergency caused “mass dislocations... military-patrolled resettlement of Chinese Malaysians, [and]... complete suspension of civil liberties” (Lim 39). By 1951, as a child in elementary school, Lim was used to local newspapers, such as *The Straits Times*, publishing stories of Chinese insurrectionists and assassins, and British newsreels shown prior to feature films portrayed Malaya as a “primitive” land where the local population was being saved by the British from the Communists (39).⁵

⁴ In this regard, see Brian Bernard’s “Beyond Diaspora and Multiculturalism: Recuperating Creolization in Postcolonial Sinophone Malaysian literature” for an interesting point: “Although Western colonial regimes in Southeast Asia tended to racially identify Sinophone communities singularly as ‘Chinese,’ their members spoke many different Sinitic languages native to southeastern China (such as Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew and Hakka) and tended to organize around language, regional or clan-based associations rather than their colonially-ascribed ‘race’” (313).

⁵ See Bernard’s, “... the British also perceived the nationalist and communist activities that many Chinese Malaysians engaged in – particularly if such activities were locally-oriented and articulated *vis-à-vis* British rule – as threats to the maintenance of the colonial system” (314).

This section of the memoir carves open a kind of retrospective self-analysis that is difficult to imagine in a writerly sensibility that has not been subjected to the peculiar otherising that is frequently a result of colonisation and cultural domination. Whereas in her rejection of Hokkien and choice of Malay Lim is categorised as “devilish” by Chinese Malaysians, here, it is the British colonisers’ representation of the Chinese Communists as terrifying and the land as jungle country that mobilises the sense of another form of othering within Lim. It is interesting then to note that by age six, because of where she is situated – first in a multi-lingual residential context but also a geo-political context impacted by colonisation and radical movements for autonomy – Lim internalises many ways in which she is othered. This layered perception of “negative difference” is what she returns to, to confront and analyse, and clearly, it gives the memoir a complexity and depth that are remarkable.

Frantz Fanon, speaking of the “colonial world,” says, “It is not enough for the settler to delimit physically, that is to say with the help of the army and the police force, the place of the native. As if to show the totalitarian character of colonial exploitation the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil” (41). What Lim shows in the section of *Among the White Moon Faces* in which she addresses the Emergency is the child’s unquestioning internalisation of the coloniser’s perception and portrayal of natives. On a subliminal level, this internalisation also breeds hatred and fear of her kin and that part of her ancestry that is Chinese because of issues related to physiognomy and language.

I learned to hate Chinese Communists, men with faces like my father’s or my uncles’ whose pictures the *Straits Times* frequently published, with their despised Chinese names in large captions.... I could not distinguish among ordinary Chinese Malaysians, the Kuomintang members – Chinese who considered themselves citizens of China – and the Communists – Chinese Malaysians who claimed to be struggling for national sovereignty.... I grew up afraid of Chinese speakers, having been taught by the British that they were unpatriotic, brutal, and murderous. (Lim 40)⁶

In a sense, Lim as a child replicates the coloniser’s historical tendency to homogenise the native population and often see it as an indistinguishable mass with scattered pockets of possible insurgence. But she uses the memoir as a reflective space to chart and expose this mimetic process within herself even as she shows the innately harmful effects of colonisation on society. The writing of the memoir, in sections such as those on the Emergency, becomes a counter-act against colonisation’s assault on the child’s psyche. Even though Lim does this retrospectively, it shows the long-term effects of “negative difference” and

⁶ Lim experiences Chinese-ness as “negative difference” more personally during and after the May 13th race riots in Malaysia in 1969.

ultimately demonstrates how this sort of stigmatising by more “empowered” agents facilitates and deepens writing.

While in the mid-twentieth century, the British colonisers’ media representation of Chinese Communists in Malaya was categorically negative and their surveillance and marginalisation of Chinese Malaysians quite openly executed, Lim discusses more subtle though continuing forms of exclusion felt by the immigrant of colour in the US in the 1980s. In the section on the Malayan Emergency, the names of British administrators responsible for such acts are unmistakably masculine – Sir Edward Gent, Sir Gerald Templer. Yet, as Lim shifts focus to experiencing “negative difference” in America in a section of *Among the White Moon Faces* that is particularly powerful, the agents are anonymous females and in fact mothers. Her academic status as a college professor and the birth of her son as an American citizen amount to virtually nothing as these women, these other mothers, show her, implicitly of course, how the colour differential marks her perpetually as the unassimilable other.⁷

With their “eyes that slide around to find another face,” “smiles that appear only after you have almost passed them, intended for someone else,” the “stiffness in the body as you stand beside them,” “the relaxed smile when another white mother comes up to talk,” the “polite distance as you say something about the children at the swings and the chattiness when a white parent makes a comment” (Lim 199), these mothers embody a different kind of institutionalised social force that perpetuates relentlessly the act of othering. While the mothers’ namelessness underlines the extent of such acts – the fact that they have many sources and can occur in multiple unspecified American locations, the categorisation of these mothers as an anonymous mass is also an act of reversal on the part of the ethnic writer who has experienced forms of colonisation and cultural domination. Lim here overturns the dominant group’s tendency to characterise the subjugated or minorities as a homogeneous, undifferentiated mass, and she renders mothers from the majority group nameless and without distinction. Once again, the experiencing of “negative difference” adds valuable dimensions to Lim’s writing. Just as she uses the memoir as a reflective tool to expose the tendency of the colonised to mimic harmful stances of the coloniser, here her writing is mobilised almost as a weapon to indicate that this kind of anonymity and homogenisation can never be pleasant for the recipient.

In a country that professes liberal pluralism, namely the US, these women’s acts show an opposite impulse. However, their gender and maternity suggest something more. Unlike in mid-century Malaya, where male British administrators were responsible for “mass dislocations” and “resettlement of

⁷ Cetintas observes about Lim, “She realizes the effects of British colonialism but is equally critical about the American stratification of gender and race” (214-15).

Chinese Malaysans,” exclusionary acts faced by Lim in America are not limited to one gender or official capacities. Lim’s focus on women and mothers seems strategic here underscoring the ubiquitous nature of such practices and suggesting that the maternal, historically and normatively associated with nurture and compassion, is still limited by race-consciousness.

Another factor that is disturbing about these acts is their very implicitness. The insidiousness is intensified because “negative difference” is effectively conveyed without being vocalised. It is very likely that such non-verbalised forms of discrimination directed at people of colour propel writers such as Lim to give written expression to them. Moreover, as I argue earlier, the almost daily experiencing of such (implicit) acts of othering in the country of migration doubtlessly compels thinkers and writers to return mentally to previous though different experiences of being othered in the country of birth and chart them as well. At least for Lim’s memoir, this seems to be true, histories of occupation and colonisation in Malaya having subjected her and her ancestors to adversity and experiencing “negative difference.”

Khatharya Um, in “Exiled Memory: History, Identity, and Remembering in Southeast Asia and Southeast Asian Diaspora,” makes a similar point:

From our colonized past, we learn the critical importance of inserting ourselves in places and spaces of power; for when we don’t or can’t speak, when we are unable to write or be heard, we become the “outsider” in our own history, looking in as others reconstruct, interpret, and legitimate their own version – and vision – of that history. (847)

In this article, Um addresses specifically the Cambodian genocide under the Khmer Rouge; the discontinuities and gaps in Cambodian cultural history because of loss and trauma; but also the difficulty of preserving, articulating, and transmitting memory in diaspora, particularly in the US. Um notes, for instance, that in the US, “public memory continues to erase Cambodians and Laotians from the ‘Viet Nam War,’ and deny them their rightful place in US history” (845-46).

Um’s points here help me segue into the final section of my essay to argue the significance of Lim’s perspective of the Japanese Occupation of Malaya from 1941 to 1945. Her perspective offers of course the view of the oppressed in the local Malayan context but also helps in the process of individualising discrete diasporic histories within a global frame. Eventually, it is to be hoped that this leads to a fuller understanding of the American immigrant in America. Although markedly short, the section in *Among the White Moon Faces* which addresses the Occupation is charged with Lim’s clear perception of the resultant horrors and acute food shortages suffered, particularly by the Chinese Malaysans. As she recounts some of the “barbarity” and stories of “hunger and malnutrition,” she brings us her childhood memories – what seems like “a buzz

of historical static”; exclamations that erupted “like repressed trauma into a reconstructed normality” (Lim 37). For the period of Japanese Occupation, although at its worst when Lim was conceived and born in late 1944, was over soon after her birth.

Lim’s parents did not often talk about the Occupation. She experiences the atrocities of this period in Malayan history vicariously then, and that too as a child. Dependent on familial and societal memory-fragments⁸ about recently experienced torture, killings, rationing of essential foods and hunger, Lim reconstructs the early years of her parents’ marriage, the dire conditions surrounding two of her mother’s pregnancies, and the atmosphere of fear and dearth that must have pervaded her grandfather’s house where her parents then lived. Many of her thoughts are posed as questions in this section showing clearly the correlation between adversity (or hearing about adversity) and how it opens up the reflective process and enriches writing. Following her description of the corpse of an uncle murdered during the Occupation, Lim asks:

How did my grandfather protect the lives of his other sons? Where did he hide the men? How much did he pay to buy off the Japanese commandants...? Wives and daughters had been raped and their wombs ripped by bayonets.... After the Japanese Imperial Army withdrew from Malaya in late August 1945, what sorrows lay in the ill-lit and shadowy rooms of 99 Heeren Street, in the memories of the executed brilliant son, of the savings extorted for a few illicit *katties* of rice...? What was exchanged for those few precious tins of condensed milk on which my mother fed her babies? (38)

While it is true that writers hailing from environments of privilege devote innumerable pages to reflection as well, Lim’s connection, via fragmented narratives, to a recent history of intense suffering and hunger give a concreteness and vividness to the writing that draw easily. What also seems unique to me is that unlike in most materialist cultures where hunger or poverty is linked only to a sense of lack, in subsequent pages of her memoir, Lim deliberately associates hunger with the process of reflection. As she recaptures a moment of aloneness soon after her mother’s departure from the family, she says:

The entire scene was empty, like my body which hummed its hunger in an underkey, and like the room in which I stood for long minutes, without Mother and Father. I was beyond crying, and leaned idly against the window panels, curious about who I was in the world where everything had shut down except me. (50)

⁸ I use this word here as Lim observes that Japanese acts were less told than “exclaimed over” (37).

Generational narratives, although brief and fragmented, help Lim chart the sense of precariousness, poverty and sorrow resultant from the Japanese Occupation of Malaya. Written by someone who was not a witness to this historical period, these pages in *Among the White Moon Faces* yet carry a depth of emotion and force, clearly showing, as in the sections on “negative difference,” the impact of adversity on writing. But these heard narratives and giving them written expression perhaps teach Lim how to consciously link material lack to the processes of reflection and writing as well.

As Khatharya Um reminds us, it is crucial that we articulate our own histories so that this right is not usurped by another. In the sections on the Japanese Occupation and British colonisation in *Among the White Moon Faces*, Lim writes history from the perspective of the Malaysian. In this process, she also unpacks the impact of adversity on writing and how experiences of “negative difference” ultimately facilitate reflection, self-analysis and forms of reversal. Her return to the Malaysian context contests and challenges her comment from “Immigration and Diaspora” that Partridge references: the “discourse of diaspora” is one of “disarticulation of identity from natal... resources” (136). In fact, her gesture aligns her with David Lei-wei Li’s discussion of the Asian diaspora in *Asian American Studies*, that it “recognizes different origins and multiple transformations” (ctd. in Partridge 134).

Lim also performs through her memoir another important function Khatharya Um notes – that of preserving and transmitting memory in diaspora. In an earlier essay on Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, I discuss how in *Dictee*, Cha calls for the “individualization of the predicament of the Korean immigrant to the United States” (Mukherjee 206). She stands against “homogenization of immigrants” and “cultural leveling” (Mukherjee 207) and gives the Korean American woman writer the responsibility of working against the “continuing movement toward erasure and obliviousness” (Mukherjee 208). Similarly, Shirley Lim in *Among the White Moon Faces* shows us that the Malaysian American immigrant is not an entity without historical dimension. Through a politics of return and re-engagement effected through the writing of her memoir, Lim illustrates that the Malaysian American immigrant has already been marked by histories of occupation, colonisation and resistance, and these memories and realities have impacted and transformed her in significant ways prior to arrival in America.

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