

Reshaping the Identification of Subjectivity: Manifestation of Transversal Politics and Negotiation with the Structures of Violence in *Among the White Moon Faces: An Asian-American Memoir of Homeland*

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Abstract

The disquisitive purport of this paper tends to elucidate how an Asian-American female protagonist vanquishes perturbation arising from uncertain identity and inferior status by spiritually and physically motivating the empowerment of agency through migration. *Among the White Moon Faces: An Asian-American Memoir of Homeland*, written in the first person to delineate the female writer Shirley Lim's reminiscence, unequivocally elucidates the tensility of female empowerment due to migration—the process not only reshaping one's identification of subjectivity but unfolding one's multiple territories with regard to gender, race and class. Lim's migrating experiences accompanied by inward percipience expatiates on how an individual with femininity copes with struggling caused by dislocation of female self domestically, racially and nationally. Correspondingly, the protagonist's subjectivity reconstruction will be explained in the light of Gayatri Spivak's theory of negotiating the structures of violence and Yuval-Davis' declaration of transversal politics.

Keywords: Transversal Politics, Asian-American Memoir, Migration, Female Empowerment, Subjectivity

1. Introduction

In the Asian-American autobiographical novel, *Among the White Moon Faces*, the development of cultural ideas, social realities and politics in different space invariably influenced Shirley Lim's philosophy concerning how to racially and culturally dispel the confusion of personal identity. In Lim's reminiscence, over and above confirming a female's self-position, identity reconstructing had been a significant part for her to ponder on for her being compelled to be detached from the Malaysian society filled with political forces causing drastic changes all the time. Before studying abroad, she employed eminent academic presentation as measures to prove her status in such racist society, yet she failed, as she remarked, "Worse, it became clear to me that merit was not the main criterion for professional status. In Malaysia, I would always be of the wrong gender and the wrong race" (AW 133). In Malaysia, social identity and hierarchy system were bound with history, race and religion that tremendously affected and controlled stereotype of political awareness. Consequently, redefining attribution of one's identity in such sock-steady hierarchical society was thorny, complicated or even impossible. In U.S., in contrast, Lim perceived that people could "create community where none existed before, thus contribution to the continuous fresh construction of civic identities" (AW 177). With regard to the feasibility of seeking one's subjectivity, it might be perilous to conclude that American

society was more tolerant of different folks or ethnic minorities than Malaysian society whereas such perspective might incur criticism that commenting on these two territories with binary opposition criteria (tolerance/intolerance) is not intelligent enough in such multi-culture epoch. Nevertheless, Lim boldly depicted that there was no surplus space to negotiate with or care about others in Malacca society: "Caring was not a concept that signified. Necessity, the relations between and among many and diverse people, composed the bonds of Malaccan society. Caring denoted a field of choice, of individual voluntary action, that was foreign to family, the place of compulsory relations" (AW 64). Here, Lim had made a statement regarding how she separately treated the relationship with her mother country, (which brought her into desolation where there was no voluntary subjectivity choices) and mother/family, (whose interaction with her was based on compulsoriness).

2. Migrating Motivation and Globalized Mediascape

Before probing discrepancy between Malaysia and America's cultural and societal circumstances in the protagonist's recognition, we might start with discussing the implication of "space" in her migration. Rather than a purely substantial fixed region, "space" exists with people's space-time experience and intercourses (Lan 220). Therefore, an identical geographical space for different people might possess dissimilar meanings or functions. Before being empowered with femininity (which means that a female has overcome a quandary about her uncertain identity and female status), Lim's migration, moving from one space (Malaysia) to the other (America) had motivated her to cogitated how she should make herself gendered and spaced in dilemmas triggered by the relationship between countries and self; society and self; race and self. To Lim, the view of space was not limited in certain perception of physical space (an emptiness, almost as an open receptacle within which material objects are located) but "national space" relating to variants of cultures, subjectivity location, power, being constituted through social relations and practices (Niranjana 34-6).

Studying hard for acquiring a better occupation was the consentient procedure for averting from necessitous life in the society of Shirley Lim, scared to be the bottom of the hierarchical economical system in Malaysia, as she delivered while coping with the train of impending examinations in her school life and worrying about her classmates' academic indolence, "I could not understand their failure. My own necessity—to move out of the range of the grinding millstone of poverty—was like a miniaturized engine implanted in my body, that I was fearless in the face of exams. What I feared was poverty" (AW 84)¹. Lim's philosophy toward life in high school time had foreshadowed her leaving Malaysia for America, where she could possibly convert her impecunious status into an improved one. In global migration, fantasy toward ideal foreign landscape usually coaxes migrants into choosing to be absent from his/her mother country and constructing preferable life in alien space. Lim's studying abroad specifically verified the conception of "globalized mediascape," a phenomenon resulting from colonial history and globalization that countries in First World had become the desirable and metropolitan spheres for Third World human beings to make pilgrimages for living a superior life due to the affection of media propaganda (Appadurai 40). Comparing to stereotyped and conservative atmosphere in Malaysia, imagination toward overseas America provided Lim with an opportunity to taste a totally untried life although we've realized that as a solitary student in U.S.A., to the wandering protagonist, "there is no pain as the pain of isolation" and even in Thanksgiving Day, she "had nothing to do with shifting, shabby life" (146, 150). Howbeit, the yearning for comfortable and respected life away from Malaysia aroused by "globalized mediascape" constantly supported Lim's volition in migrating for life emplacement:

Moving myself from Malacca, a small town two degrees north of the equator, to New England, then to Brooklyn and to the rich New York suburb of Westchester County, and now to Southern California, I have attempted to move myself as far away from destitution as an ordinary human creature can. In the move from hunger to plenty, poverty to comfort, I have become transformed, and yet have remained a renegade. The unmovable self situated in the quicksand of memory. (AW 9)

Supposing herself as a "transformed renegade," the molted relationship between herself and her birthplace had brought her discomposure.

3. Haunting Simulacrum of Parents

Owing to Lim's compulsory kinship with her parents, lacking for parental love made her spiritually ostracized with disquietude all the while. Parents provided her sense of fragmentation rather than belongingness, an essential element to construct one's self subjectivity. Referring to contradictory passion toward her parents, at the threshold of this novel Lim asserted, "I know no other childhood than mine, and that I had left secret as something both treasured, the one talent that my parents unwittingly have provided me and shameful, how these same parents have as unwittingly mutilated me" (AW 9). Mentioning parents' mutilating her, it seemed that there was no place for her to fit—even embracing no location for herself to survive in familial space. Parental images incompatibly represented "pleasure/freedom and pain/control" (Neu 54). Intimacy with Father in childhood delighted her but his deuterogamy with Peng irritated her. A daughter's repugnant feeling toward her father happened again when she recognized he was just about beyond cure: "I told no one. Food stuck in my throat whenever I thought of Father. The thought was like a fishbone, sharp and nagging. I couldn't speak of him" (AW162).

Individuals experience the feeling of detachment for many times, including birth, attending schools, getting married, and death. In the continuous experiences regarding separation, birth is the first event which makes individuals anxious about feeling solitary. Similar to birth, "the same psychological experience occurs, in greater or lesser degree, when the child is weaned,

when it goes off to school, when the adult separates from his or her single state in favor of marriage, and at all steps in personality development until ultimate separation in death” (Rank 149).

Similarly, Lim’s conflicting passion toward Mother let her live like a wanderer keeping on searching for maternal love during girlhood. Recollecting how Mother’s parting from home indeed grieved her— “‘Mother,’ I said loud, for the first time since she had left, ‘Mother.’ If Mother were with me, I thought, I would not be so angry and sad. The darkness hid my hatred of Peng, and it promised solace and love from my missing mother [. . .] that I would find my mother some day” (AW 101-3). The message of determining to find her mother someday implied that as a female, she would ascertain where her identity was located through her life. Mother-daughter relationship is intertwined with a daughter’s searching for her identity. Recalling her contradictory passion with Mother, there was something inherently “feminine” or “maternal” about the image of Mother. Studying abroad, at the toilsome midnight, Lim tried to glance at her own countenance in the mirror, yet “Mother image” had unexpectedly replaced “the daughter’s image.” Mother had imperceptibly invaded Lim’s self-awareness:

I looked into the small mirror in my bedroom and saw my mother’s face. It was pale, pudgy, deeply unhappy. My hair hung long and limp like dead moss. With a fury of revulsion, I found a pair of paper scissors and cut it from waist-length to just below the shoulders. But my mother’s face continued to stare at me out of the mirror. To come so far, and to find myself swallowed by my mother (149).

Being ostracized overseas, ocean, a portion of Mother Nature, prompted Lim to think of absent maternal love, a segment missing in her life, like “self-position” she had quested all the time. The sea deemed as her mother was always “a visual shock” to her; while catching the sight of sea that reminded her of maternal abandonment, resembling the mother country’s renouncing her (AW 30, 110). When being a student suffering privations abroad, in Lim’s dream, Mother’s image accompanied by “the Strait of Malacca” in which she had “rocked as a child” and murmured, “The sea is my mother, the sea is my mother,” haunted her repeatedly (AW 145). In her reminiscence, especially at the moment of plight, we’ve detected that the following elements are interweaved together: the mother country, the sea, the female self (the daughter) and the mother.

4. Language and Ethnicity

Language not only represents an individual’s identity but symbolizes where one is rooted. In chapter one, “Splendor and Squalor,” Lim had expounded how her mother’s identity attribution intertwined the language she spoke, “*baba* Malay—the Malay spoken by assimilated Chinese—the idiomatic turns of her ethnic identity” (12).

Language has been involved in the dichotomy principle under Malaysian habitant because of government’s subjective policy. Colonized by White sovereign and oppressed by Malaysia government, Lim had comprehended Chinese descendants could hardly evade racism in the country where she was growing up. She rethought about the replacement of her language and identity:

Chinese-speaking Malaysians called me a ‘Kelangkia-kwei,’—or a Malay devil—because I could not or would not speak Hokkien. Instead I spoke Malay, my mother’s language. My *peranakan* mother had nursed me in Malay, the language of assimilated Chinese who had live in the peninsula, jutting southeast of Asia, since the first Chinese contact with Malacca Sultanate in the fifteenth century. And once I was six and in a British school, I would speak chiefly English, in which I became “fluent,” like a drop of rain returning to a river, or a fish thrown back into a sea. (11)

Defining herself as an assimilated Chinese in Malaysia by refusing speaking Hokkien described her strategy to confirm her identity in accordance with Malaysia instead of Mainland China, as she expressed, “Hokkien had never been a language of familiarity, affection, and home for me. Like the South Seas Chinese paternal house I was born in, Hokkien laid out a foreign territory, for I was of the South Seas Chinese but not one of them” (11). However, in the quoted passage above, Lim “who spoke chiefly English and felt like a drop returning to a river, or a fish throwing back into a sea” had prophesied to readers that American identity might be her final answer with regard to her sense of belonging. Nevertheless, Lim’s skirmish with English instructors in English literature courses made her struggled against western imperialists who stresses English was there language borrowed by Malaysians. Lim criticized,

This British superiority had always grated on me. I wondered why they were teaching us what they believed we who were not English could never possibly appreciate. Besides, I didn’t believe them. The physical sensation of expansion in the chest, even in the head, as I read a profoundly beautiful of mindful poem was conclusively and possessively subjective. The literature may have been of Britain, but my love of literature was outside the empire. (120)

These English professors resembled executives of British colonial administration, for maintaining their colonial power, advancing “stereotype about the colonized and their inferior status” for reinforcing prejudice and discrimination against the colonized whose language, culture and contribution to the society were devalued (Glea 189).

As Lancan proposes, “the operations of language are the operations of history” (49), resulting from superiority complex, colonizers sustain their predominant history consistent with advantageous position by preaching the ascendancy of English in Lim’s literature class. Reaching as far as the “supra-individual reality of the subject,” language is not merely limited in tone system itself (Coad 442). The social structure in Malaysia with multiple language choices Lim dwelled in was presented with disguised appearance. Lim revealed her grievance against the country policy about language, “We had grown up in compulsory language system, but, as if to strip us of all language, we were constantly reminded that this language did not belong to us,” and

against British racists in her campus, “Depriving us of Chinese or Malay or Hindi, British teachers reminded us nonetheless that English was only on loan, a borrowed tongue which we could only garble” (AW 121). Although the protagonist’s passion toward literature has helped her leap over language boundary built by colonial hegemony, inadequate policy made the protagonist alienated and feel expelled out of Malaysia.

In a country, language policy, containing elements of power and identity, usually oscillates with the holder of the reign of the government. Teaching in U.S. for few years, it was more suitable for Lim to speak English instead of Malay. At the moment of considering where to obtain her next occupation, Malaysian government’s stipulating Malay as official language became the factor why she “had chosen not to return to Malaysia, because, among many other reasons, a new government had implemented a Malay monolingual constitution” (AW 183). However, the authentic situation under “Malay monolingual constitution” after “the May 13 riots” was that the ethnical policies comprising “race-based quotas, communalist politics, and separatist race-essentialized cultures” had proved the Malaysian government’s unfriendly and intolerant attitude against non-Malay speakers or whose employment had connection with non-Malay culture. Ethnicity, the criterion to judge if one could get permitted subjectivity, has secluded Lim from being a female English department teacher in Malaysia. Therefore, taking up her new residence by migrating to another space free from racial ideology became an accessible practice for reconstructing her own status in human society, as she stressed, “It seemed easy then to walk away from a violated dream of a national future which included people like me—people not tied to race-based ideology, who were looking to form a brave new nation” (AW 136).

5. The Inferior Other/ De-Territorialization and Re-Territorialization

For various economic, political and ethnical purposes, transnational migration takes place all the way in human society. In migrating activities, borders among countries or geographical territories are fractured but new boundaries might reappear in the alien nation. For “de-territorialization,” transnational moving supplies migrants opportunities to practice their requirements and freeing themselves from any possibly inequitable events; however, once moving to the another foreign sphere, “re-territorialization” could happen due to any possible repulsion against the non-native (Lan 319).

“The competition for dominance between Chinese and Malay elites” and Chinese and Malays’ being equitably dogged by negative stereotypes from the colonizer with contemptuous superiority, both caused Lim’s disappointment with racism and stereotype in Malaysia. For pinpointing her social position in chaos, Lim foraged for a way out of “the fixedness of race identity,” called “a romance of minoritism” that made her feel comfortable with those outsiders, such as Eurasians and Indians (122). For escaping the oppressiveness from her family and country, Lim placed her hope on a new land where racial hybridity possibly came off for retrieving self-empowerment which was significant for her to sustain her life in the future. Entering America, Lim could hardly catch “the core culture of the land” that made her filled with isolation and uneasiness at the outset of alien life—looking to the past with nostalgia, and to the present with uncertainty, and to the future with anxiety. Due to the unaccommodated life, the situation of “re-territorialization” happened on her, as she uttered, “A non-American, I could only hope to fill the interstices, foreign to all and mutable, like a small helpful glue” (AW169). With uncertainty, her imagined borders drew lines between herself and others. Conceiving herself as the inferior other in her preliminary foreign life, she did an emotional shuttle run between Asia and the United States, voluntarily displaced” for over a decade (169). As a result of locals’ incorrect imagination immigrants, political and societal exclusion often happens on them. Taking Lim for instance, being an immigrant mother, in her interaction with other White mothers, she realized that there were many ways telling her she didn’t belong—The White mothers’ eyes that slid around to find another behind her, and their smiles that appeared only after she had almost passed them, intended for someone else (AW 199). Nevertheless, Lim still praised America’s tolerant attitude toward divers races because in Malaysia “racial coalition” was even inconceivable. As a mother, Lim felt relieved to bear her son in U.S. where he could definitely confirm his own identity.

In Malaysia, Lim had to bring ID card with her all the time due to political upheaval, as she exclaimed, “Our identity cards became as much a part of our persons as our eyes or hands. We did not venture from home without it, for to be caught by the police without an identity card was already evidence of breaking the law” (AW 40). As a female, Lim’s individual liberty was double deprived in Malaysia. Based on conservative notion, in a family, women were expected to execute “cooking, keeping house for her parents, and waiting for a husband to declare himself” (AW 36), not only being treated an unpaid labor but also being disempowered by patriarchal society possessing discourses of power that always claim reasons for their own (Huggan and Watson 5). As Glea points out, being sequestered in their domestic space, women of color who have to choose between “maintaining family values and sustaining their lives” are seriously restricted in certain jobs and this phenomenon explains why more and more third world women have to leave their home to live in “metropolitan areas” (198). Lim had made this idea into practice by making up her mind to be a metropolitan for getting away from the limited destiny of a woman in Malaysia. Furthermore, as a citizen, it was satirical that Lim “was still carrying the blue identity card” wherever she went, “still fearful of being stopped by a police check” (AW 41). Racial animosity against Chinese Malaysians never ceased and such antipathy even denied economic success of Chinese Malaysians. That was the reason why Lim could not wait to finished her relationship with her mother country. Lim claims,

At the same time, I couldn’t wait to say good-bye to everything my life had held—my father, stepmother, brothers and stepbrother, the shabby house more crowded each year, the teachers with their arbitrary tyranny, the town whose streets I knew by heart and which yielded only boredom, the small circle of friends whose same-same jokes wearied me. (105)

Besides, exploring how the protagonist made herself empowered in female identity, we also catch the opportunity to read Malaysia's history with regard to racism. Yet, it is not objective to call Lim a "victim" according to what she had been confronted with. As what Aihwa Ong has stressed, Malaysian women in the third world cannot subjectively be constructed as "pure victims," and their circumstances should be analyzed with following reference conditions: first, how they are "determined in part by economic and ideological assumptions on an international scale," second, how the social space is constructed for them with the link of colonial history and third, their subjectivity and resistance in "the context of deep material and structural transformations in their lives" (qtd. In Mohanty 29).

6. Subjectivity Reconstruction Elucidated with Spivak's Theory

Lim's empowered procedure concerning how she retrieved female subjectivity can be interpreted in the light of Spivak's methodologies in transnational feminists cultural studies. For deconstructing patriarchal power, the so-called "recuperative ideologies," Spivak proposes methodologies of "negotiating the structures of violence" and "sustained interrogation of value" (Kaplan and Grewal 356). "Negotiation the structure of violence" stresses on articulating the relationship between the subject and the world without falling into conventional binary oppositions between positive and negative analysis. For negotiating with the structure, an individual should recognize one's location "constituted through links among thoroughly unequal social forces". Combining Marxism with deconstruction, "sustained interrogation of value" help females read surplus value as "differance"—"the understanding of social injustice through interrogation" (356).

For existing with certainty of human life, Lim moved her body by taking "the first step to entering the United States" where she "alone held the key" to live in her single room earned through her work (155). To her, that was the American way—"simply define themselves, name themselves, and have input into what happens to them without ridicule" (Glea 181). Accordingly, Lim defined her own value with the potentiality of being a contributive woman or not and reminded herself to "be of service! To be necessary to others!" and to "be useful to someone else other than myself" for making herself grappling the feeling of being at home but not a wanderer (155). In familial relationship, through the experience of treating her son with corporal punishment, she manifestly apprehended that "a feminist consciousness" emerged out of a female's ability to discontinue violence occurring everywhere, as Lim professed, "The consciousness of family as love and violence all in one, and the power to stop the violence, whether practiced by men or women, is, for, me, a feminist consciousness" (203). In Lim's perspective, "feminism" was equal to "struggle" (the ground for her to move out of her parents' house) instead of "comfort" (that might reject feminism's lesson).

For defining a public sense of a female self, Lim penetrated injustice of the patriarchal society by "interrogating values" with regard to how the society treated women. On account of winning literature prize in poetry, Lim was interviewed in Singapore. Female value was not confirmed with her specialized field in creative writing regarded as surplus, because new items that journalists proposed were relating to wife, mother, and breast-feeding issues, as Lim claims, "It was an uneasy period for me. For all my early struggles and professional visibility, once back in Singapore I was inevitable, inextricably women. Wife, mother, and breast—I was continuously addressed as such" (203).

For clarifying "the position of self" apparently, she deliberated the relationship between herself and the family, the society and the country. Lim delineated, "the self is paltry, phantasmagoric; it leaks and slips away. It is the family, parents, sibling, cousins, that signify the meaning of the self, and beyond the family, the extended community" (AW 64). Exerting herself to pay heed to observe her connection with surroundings, Lim became aware of that blood relationship had entangled her with the family: "This the meaning of blood—to give, because you cannot eat unless the family is also eating. For years, I woke up nights, heart beating widely. Oh Asia, that nets its children in ties of blood so binding" (164). Further, resembling molting with agitation, becoming a female by comprehending herself as a woman made Lim "unravel the repetition of fear and rage." In her growing with femininity, she was a girl-child seizing autonomy rather than suffering damage, but damaged still by that premature forced growth, a young woman fearing independence but fearing dependency more" (203). Assaying the relationship between her subject and Malaysian and American society without partiality or bias, Lim specified that autonomy/independence she pined for in Malaysia, was the crux that brought her solitariness in America:

What had preserved me in Malaysia, the struggle for an individual self against the cannibalism of familial, ethnic, and communal law, was exactly what was picking me in isolation in the United States. In the United States I was only a private person. Without family and community, I had no social presence; I was among the unloving. (155)

Unlike Anglo-American individuals' subject position's being constructed by "means of the exclusion of others," or with binary opposition, Lim concluded that for constructing one's subject, affirmative value of self was the essential element (Kaplan and Grewal 357).

7. Female Empowerment in Politics of Location

The concept of "politics of location" concerning "spatial theories of subjectivity" helps readers realize the situation of how transnational feminists stress on the model of coalition (Kaplan 138). "Politics of location" comprises characteristics as follows: Enabling women in different spaces to share their experiences in various voices; in multiple locations, making the margins embraced beyond boundaries; approving and celebrating the essence of coalition with respecting diversities (139-143). Correspondingly, Shirley Lim's transnational experience with empowerment in female subjectivity makes her a transnational feminist who also proffered relevant perspective relating to "politics of location." Lim asserted that women with diverse

backgrounds enfold different voices which would bring coalition forth to resisting injustice or inequality. Besides, she comprehended that such word “sisterhood” might fall into the risk of essentialism in feminism although she stated clearly that there was no more befitting word for her to use for describing women’s coalition, as Lim declared,

It’s true that women are divided by unequal privileges of race, class, age, nation, and so forth, but across these divisions, of white middle-class women and myself, for example, or young Chicanas and myself now, a rare yet common ground is visible [. . .] we can talk about common ground without presuming to talk only about ourselves or only about the other. Although some feminist theorists have bracketed the concept of “sisterhood” as an anachronistic embarrassment, it is the only term I can find to suggest not only the necessity for coalition and the work of solidarity but also the sensibility of support that grows when social gender is recognized as a shared experience. (156-7)

In the matter of reconstructing self-position, as a female in U.S., Lim conceived that her “position was earned on the backs of black, brown, and working-class activists” (170). Thanks to diverse ethnic minorities’ contribution in revolution against racism, she could subsist well in the settlement. Moreover, for eliminating from improper cultural burden’s oppressing her, imitating and absorbing western experience became her strategy to help her shape a better self:

Defining herself as a part of mimic people also with the power of the subjects, “born to cultures that push us, shape us, and pummel us,” Lim had seen herself not so much sucking at the teat of British colonial culture as actively appropriating those aspects of it that I needed to escape that other familial/gender/native culture that violently hammered out only one shape for self. (AW 65).

Here, I would like to borrow Yuval-Davis’ “transversal politics” to explain what Lim had done to improve her female subjectivity by adopting Westerners’ experiences. “Transversal politics” refers to political activities and organizations existing in different locations: people in different locations holding diverse standpoints and experiences required to be respected and tolerated, and reality and authenticity can be revealed only through dialogues which still have boundaries owing to the differentiation of positioning, identity and values. “Transversal politics” doesn’t approve that all conflicts can be dealt with in harmony, but compatible values of speakers are the main elements to cross the boundaries. Besides, the two fundamental procedures can be applied to explain Lim’s empowerment retrieving: first, “rooting”—individuals examine themselves with introspection while having dialogues with organizations or activities (Yuval-Davis 282). As to Lim, migrating to U.S., facing school, racial, gender, societal, cultural issues, she constantly introspected her own circumstances and tried to find out what she identified with. Second, “shifting”—exerting oneself in dialogues with others who possess different backgrounds or situation, for being empowered through cooperation. Once Lim had recognized what she had identified with in American society, she started to “mimic people also with the power of the subjects” for retrieving self-empowerment (65).

8. Conclusion

Lim’s autobiographic narration resembles the process of storytelling which helped her reorder the sense of self-position by moving in space. In reminiscence, “there is a sense of having something important to say but of not being heard” (Cowley 23). Writing supplied functions for Lim, as she mentioned, “I wrote to know I was still there, somewhere among the accumulating details of numbing reality. Writing offered a nostalgia beyond comfort, the only way to keep alive” (214). For proving the existence of self-subject, she recorded her life reminiscence in texts, as to the characteristic and function of texts stressed by Edward Said, “Texts are worldly, to some degree they are events, and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted” (4). After telling her own tales, Lim became not destitute and homeless because “home is the place where our stories are told;” “Listening, and telling my own stories, I am moving home” (232). Applying language as the medium to telling stories about American and Malaysia, the author’s spirit was comforted. Lilian R. Furst paraphrases,

Language represents the medium for healing, that is, for retrieving unconscious ideas back into consciousness as a means of confronting and defusing them. Each of the patients is helped, if not in every instance entirely cured, by putting the misery into words; the process of objectification involved in expressing feelings in speech creates a certain emotional distance which facilitates self-understanding. (75)

Lim’s life history with “self-invention which is traced to a determining set of biographical circumstances” provides more females opportunities to rethink women’s status in familial, societal, racial and national sphere as well (Eakin 182). After reading this novel, we could conclude that memoirs are “reality-based literature,” the genre which delineates a person’s significant history and also “represent the democratization of the written world” (Smith 31). As a female writer, Lim’s subjectivity had been constructed through writing that helped her explore and define the authentic significance of Asian-American immigrant life.

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Endnotes

¹ AW represents the abbreviation of Shirley Lim's *Among the White Moon Faces*.