



The Tragedy Of Racial Exclusion In Both Malaysia And The United States In Shirley Geok-Lin Lim's *Crossing The Peninsula & Other Poems* (1980) And *No Man's Grove* (1985)

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Objectives of the paper:

This paper tries to document the immigrants' suffering from racial exclusion and marginalization. It also reveals that segregation and racial exclusion may occur between the Orientals themselves as well as between the Orientals and the occidentals. Shirley Geok-lin Lim's case of suffering from racial exclusion in both Malaysia, her motherland and in the United States, her host country, assures the suffering of the immigrants to find a real home.

Shirley Geok-lin Lim (1944-) is one of the most prominent Asian American poets. She is known for her prolific writings including poetry, novels, short stories, memoir, and critical essays. Lim is the first woman and the first Asian to win the Commonwealth Poetry Prize for her work *Crossing the Peninsula & Other Poems* (1980). She is one of the most influential diasporic poets.

Lim's poetry unveils her dramatic suffering from marginalization and alienation. It comes under the confessional poetry. The poems in both *Crossing the Peninsula & Other Poems* (1980) and *No Man's Grove* (1885) explore Lim's keen search for identity, her immigration to the United States, and her contact with western civilization.

Lim tries to reveal the suffering of the immigrants and their keen search for equality in a real home. As a Chinese immigrant in Malaysia and an immigrant in the United States, she suffered from segregation and racial exclusion. According to Nancy A. Denton, the term exclusion "fundamentally reduces the opportunities available to the excluded group; it changes the opportunity structure within which they live their lives . . . it is about the opportunities that are available to some people and not to others" (xix).

This paper adopts the postcolonial approach through reading the poetry of Shirley Lim to investigate her suffering from racial exclusion in both Malaysia

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and the United States. It deals with Said's definition of exile and his notion of the 'intellectual exile'. Lim's position in Malaysia after the riots is identical to Edward Said's definition of exile as, "the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted" ("Reflections on Exile" 137).

1-Lim's Suffering of Racial Discrimination in her Motherland

Many Chinese immigrants were poor laborers who came to Malaya to earn their living, but with the passage of time they became successful businessmen. The growing economic influence of the Chinese immigrants was considered as a threat to the native Malays. The Chinese were regarded as invaders of the Malayan natural sources.

There are many poems within *Crossing the Peninsula & Other Poems* and *No Man's Grove* that revolve around the clash between the native Malaysians and the Chinese-Malaysians and the infamous May Thirteenth Riots, the main reason behind Lim's migration. Lim refers to the riots and its effect on her identity in the following poems among others: "Crossing the Peninsula", "Christmas in Exile", "National Poem", "Adam's Grief", "Fear", and "I Would Like" from *Crossing the Peninsula & Other Poems*; and "Lament", "Sugar Cane", "The Chinese Painter" from *No Man's Grove*.

Lim represented the status of the Chinese-Malaysians in Malaysia in a three evocative lines from her poem "I Would Like":

I would like to be happy as a servant:
Serve on committees, serve the community,
Serve the people, a government servant. (1-3)

Lim and her fellow Chinese-Malaysians wished to be real members in the Malaysian community. But unfortunately, they were regarded as second-rate citizens because of their Chinese origin. The persona in the above-mentioned lines is so enthusiastic to help in the progress of her motherland. But she was disappointed by the bigoted decisions of the Malayan government. The title of the poem "I would like" is evocative. It conveys the poet's keen efforts to be a helpful citizen. Lim plays on alliteration between the words "serve" and "servant" to show her deep sadness not being able to offer any help to her nation.

In his MA thesis "Negotiating Malaysian Chinese Ethnic and Nation Identity Across Borders", Ling said:

While the Malays were fearful of Chinese economic dominance,
the Chinese were wary of Malay political dominance that would

threaten their position in Malaya as well as their cultural heritage.
This tension remains even today, but reached its height in the
race riots of 1969. (30)

Lim represents the bloody scenes of the May Thirteenth Riots in more than one poem. She gives a detailed description of the Malaysian soldiers' aggressive attack on the Chinese citizens. She says in her narrative poem "Sugar-Cane":

Once we are told, the massacres came:
Women, children, seized by hair, slaughtered,
Running everywhere into blood and death, the same
Dark men with metal arms killing, killing, the dead
Like rags too beggared for burying..... (1-5)

In the previous lines, Lim describes the tragic riots and the miserable status of the Chinese women and children in a symbolic way. She chooses an ironical title for the poem. The first generation of the Chinese immigrants to Malaysia worked in the fields of sugar cane in pursuit of wealth. Satirically, they were killed at the very same place where they grew life. Her message is well-conveyed by her use of informal and everyday language. She uses many significant words like; "women / children / seized / slaughtered / blood / death / dark men / metal arms / rags / beggared" that add depth to the meaning. The repetition of the word "killing" helps to impart the poem's message. The poem's imagery depicts the sight of a real massacre. Lim uses the metaphor "running everywhere into blood and death" as she compares the streets to the running sea that is full of blood. She also uses simile to liken the dead corps of the Chinese-Malaysians to the torn cloth; "Like rags too beggared for burying". Here, the poet manages to display some sort of a scary film that arouses both pity and fear in the readers' minds. She continues to narrate her gloomy memories during such tragic event in the same poem:

And the men,
Those who had not run into blood and death, hid
In fields under roots of padi, the muddy water
Of life shaking, shaking, to be rooted out then
By the same dark men shearing alike the plant
And flesh.... (5-10)

Lim describes the desperate attempts of the Chinese-Malaysian survivors to hide from the savage attacks. She uses many expressive words to represent the inhuman aggression against the Chinese-Malaysians and their deep horror during the infamous riots; "hid / shaking/ rooted out / dark men". The repetition of "shaking" and "dark men" emphasizes the speaker's horror. Literary devices are clear in the poem; "to be rooted out" a metaphor as the poet compares life to a plant that is rooted out, and metonymy in "shearing alike the plant and flesh" which implies the brutal savagery of the native-Malaysians who did not make

any difference between 'the plant and flesh' as the Chinese were forced to hide into the fields 'under roots of padi'. They thought that they could find shelter and nourishment in the sugar cane fields. They "crouched in gold and yellow shadows, where sight / Of darkness is thrown for a moment" (13-14). Synecdoche by which "something is referred to indirectly" (Baldick 254) is clear in the word yellow as for Kuo "the yellow shadows of the sugar canes reflects [*sic*] not only the gold afterglow after the sunset, but also the yellowness of their [the Chinese-Malaysians] skin that signifies a hope for wealth in the past but dyed now as a stigma in the Malay's mind's eyes" (11).

Lim continues her description of the bloody May Thirteenth Riots in "National Poem":

Junta:
Phantom panther:
Black shadow
Rustling in the
Background. Sound
Of spiked boots
Tearing
A green field.
Green: colour
Of jungle drums
Drumming
So loud
We cannot hear. (1-15)

In the previous lines, Lim reflects the hyper-tensioned-status in Malaysia at that time. She described the conditions during the riots; junta is a direct reference to the National Operation Council that was established after the May Thirteenth Riots to restore law and order in the country. The diction helps Lim to convey her message easily. Evocative words like: "phantom / panther / rustling / tearing/ drums" reflect the scary mood of the poem. The poet metaphorically compares the Malay soldiers to phantoms whose shadows frightened the Chinese-Malaysians. She also alludes to the violation of nature by the Malaysian soldiers in "tearing a green field," which is a metaphor that compares the green field to a cloth torn by the reckless soldiers. They destroyed and demolished the fruitful green fields. By repeating the word "drum," she is emphasizing the notion of war against the Chinese-Malaysians who are horrified by the Malaysian soldiers.

"Christmas in Exile" is another poem that delineates the cruelty of the native Malaysians against the Chinese. Lim narrates the melancholic moments during the fateful riots:

O silent, holy night, we sing, beneath

The clear hot equatorial sky.
Where, as everywhere, even to the hour of birth,
Soldiers keep watch. Frivolity
Is circumscribed by birth, by death. (7-10)

In the previous lines the poet laments the sacred 'holy night' of the Christmas in which she and her fellow Chinese-Malaysians were still besieged. The poem's title represents the poet's alien status in her homeland. For her it becomes an exile after the deliberate discrimination against the Chinese. Figures of speech create a dramatic image in the reader's mind. The poet uses personification in "O silent, holy night" where she laments the sad, holy Christmas Eve as the bloody soldiers did not respect such holy night and continued their mischievous offence against the Chinese. There is also a clear contrast that emphasizes the poem's message between 'by birth' and 'by death'; although it was the hour of the Christ's birth, the Chinese-Malaysians were killed at the same hour. The music that stems from the alliteration and consonance in "silent" and "sing" and from the alternative rhyme scheme assures the poet's sadness and lamentation.

The Chinese people in Malaysia were indirectly considered as outsiders after the political turmoil. In "Reflections on Exile," Edward Said notes that, "exile originated in the age-old practice of banishment. Once banished, the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with stigma of being outsider" (144). The riots smashed up the Chinese dream of equality and of complete national future of the nation. Some of them attempted to blend into the Malaysian community, but their biological features prevented them from the complete assimilation as the community rejected them only because of their race. The riots became a watershed in the inter-ethnic relations in Malaysia. It was some sort of genocide of the Chinese ethnicity.

Lim commented on her past in her poem "Fear":

I am afraid to study
Any more the past,
Breathing slowly along
The nervous edge of crying.
All things bring me back
To this small place
Of pity and terror
Which so circles me
I cannot run. Seeing
There is no place,
It is best perhaps,
Entirely to disappear. (1-12)

These lines depict to what extent Lim's painful past affects her whole life. Her feelings towards her homeland contain pity and fear. She uses symbolism to reveal her hatred towards the bad memories of her country. She compares her gloomy past that still haunts her to the trap that she cannot get rid of. The poet also makes the best use of the diction. Words like "pity and terror" could evoke the main reason behind writing poems about her past which is to stir pity and fear in her readers.

"The Chinese Painter" is another poem that best represents her melancholic past that disturbs her life:

Of a backward ancient country
I dream....
.....
Rising, I paint the scene
Swirling palely; leave
Transparent paper showing in
That is, spontaneous sight!
Such chill sorrowing ghosts
Move among us in the night. (1-14)

The previous lines indicate in a gloomy tone that Lim cannot eradicate her miserable past from her memory. Although the painter in the poem left "the backward ancient country," "ghosts" of the past still haunt her. The poet achieves a great effect by her word choice; "white reflections" of the persona's eyes of the "sorrowing ghosts" ignites a "chill" among the readers. She also makes the best use of alliteration in; "spontaneous / sight" and "such / sorrowing" that creates music.

There was a wide chasm between the Chinese and the native Malays after the May Thirteenth Riots. Many Chinese-Malaysians were forced to leave their motherland. They began their diasporic journey, but none of them had forgotten the brutal event according to what Lim wrote in "Sugar-Cane":

Still here today,
We have not forgotten these casual stalks, slender
Saviours on which we have fattened. And the dark men
In their bloody work, who will come yet if we stay,
Or if we run and are running everywhere. (16-20)

In the previous lines, Lim is a spokesperson of the segregated Chinese-Malaysians. She declares that they will not forget the Malays atrocities against them. She uses evocative expressions to recite their suffering during the riots; "casual stalks / saviours / dark men / bloody work / running everywhere". They did not find any food but the "casual stalks" that is a synecdoche of the sugar

cane. According to Chris Baldick, synecdoche is, "a common figure of speech by which something is referred to indirectly, either by naming only some part or constituent of it . . . or by naming some more comprehensive entity of which it is a part" (Baldick 254). Lim refers to the "casual stalks" which the Chinese-Malaysians were forced to eat for survival calling them; "saviours". By repeating the word "run," she emphasizes the runaway's worries and her use of alliteration in; "stalks / slender" reinforces her message. According to Pen-Chia Feng, "the racial riots constitute a traumatic memory to which Lim has to return in her writings in order to reconfigure her Malaysian identity" (qtd. in Powell 34).

As a member of the Chinese community, Lim's feeling of degradation reached its peak. She was a second rate citizen. One of her Malaysian colleagues Miriam, a daughter of a Malay aristocrat said to her, "we Malays would rather return Malaysia to the jungle than to live with Chinese domination" (*Among the White Moon Faces* 135). Miriam was asked how Malaysia would succeed without Chinese industry and labor, she replied, "we do not need the Chinese, we will be happy to sit on the floor if that's what it means to do without Chinese!" (*Among the White Moon Faces* 135). Miriam represented the strong racial antipathy towards the Chinese in Malaysia. This attitude was increased after the May Thirteenth Riots. The riots meant a lot to Lim, it provided her with a clear vision of the real position of her race in Malaysia, her land of origin. According to Edward Said "beyond the frontier between 'us' and the 'outsiders' is the perilous territory of not-belonging: this is where in a primitive time peoples were banished, and where in the modern era immense aggregates of humanity loiter as refugees and displaced persons" ("Reflections on Exile" 140).

In "Crossing the Peninsula" Lim reveals her helplessness in leaving her homeland:

.....It is monsoon
Climate, the migrant season
When nets and boats come home to shelter. (11-13)

The poet chooses a symbolic title that represents her decision after the riots. The best solution for her is to cross the Malaysian peninsula. In the previous lines, the poet symbolically compares the unstable position in Malaysia to the monsoon climate in which the furious nature forces the fishermen to come home to shelter. She also compares herself to an emigrating bird that migrates to find a shelter to protect itself from the monsoon climate. As Yu-te Tom Kuo clarifies, for Lim, "crossing the peninsula is much easier than crossing the ethno-political demarcation" (11).

A number of factors fed Lim's distrust in the war-torn Malaysia. For instance, the rise of nationalism after the May riots was a very sound reason for her departure from her natal land. Lim summarizes her dilemma in Malaysia in her essay "Tongue and Root: Language In Exile" (1988). She writes; "when one group finds it is difficult to stand up and say its name; when to say one's identity is already to mark one as lesser than, that is where the boundaries of exile begin" (168). To speak or to write in English was some sort of treachery. It meant to come back to the colonial traditions. The mainstream was very disappointing to her. First of all, she was about to fulfill her master's degree in English literature and her ultimate goal was to work at the university of Malaya. But during such aversion to English language and literature her dream was too difficult to be achieved. One of the reasons Lim's poetry being barred from national recognition in Malaysia is that it is written in English.

Lim's poem "Lament" is a clear lamentation for her deep shock in her racial linguistic community:

I have been faithful
To you, my language,
Language of my dreams,
My sex, my laughter, my curses,
How often have I
Stumbled, catching you
Short when you should be
Free, snagging on curves,
Till fools have called me
Fool. How often have you
Betrayed me, faithless!
Disowned me – a woman
You could never marry,
Whom you have tired
Of long ago. (1-15)

The poem's title; "Lament" represents the whole message of the poem. For Chris Baldick, lament is "any poem expressing profound grief or mournful regret for the loss of some person or former state, or for some other misfortune" (136). Lim laments her misfortune as she was banned from writing in English in Malaysia. The previous lines indicate her sincere affection towards English; the language that she feels most at home. It is the language of her dreams since her early days. Artistically, Lim personifies the relationship between the persona and the language where the persona is an illegitimate mistress to the language. She compares herself to a mistress that cannot have a formal marriage with the one she is deeply in love. She also uses many words that implies her fear of

losing her lover; "stumbled / catch you / snagging / curves" but she is repaid by his heartless betrayal. The poet continues her declaration of sincerity and loyalty towards her beloved language:

I have been faithful
Only to you,
my language. I choose you,
Before country,
Before what eyes see,
mouth, full-hearted, taste. (16-21)

The poet begins the second stanza with the same lines which begin the first stanza; "I have been faithful / To you, my language" to emphasize her deep-rooted love to English language for which she sacrificed her Malaysian citizenship. For her the choice of language is a choice of identity. She is only faithful to it even before her motherland and her surroundings in Malaysia. The poet goes on in the same poem to assure her great love of English:

I choose you before
Lover and husband,
Yes, if need be,
Before child in arms,
Before history and all
It makes, belonging,
Rest in the soil. (27-33)

The persona constantly pledges her absolute allegiance to her loving language in a challenging tone. She is ready to sacrifice her lover or even her husband if it is needed. She may leave her child in order to speak her preferable language. She chooses it before the history and the soil of her land of origin. The poet uses repetition of the word "before" to emphasize the language's priority over anything else. She belonged to the English language more than her motherland, although it is not her mother tongue. As she confessed later in the same poem:

Although everyone knows
You are not mine.
They wink knowingly
At my stupidity-
I, stranger, foreigner,
Claiming rights to
What I have no right-
Sacrifice, tongue
Broken by fear. (34 - 41)

The persona assures her deep affection towards her loving language regardless of people's scorn and deride. Lim uses synecdoche in "sacrifice, tongue / Broken by fear" as tongue refers to her country's official language, Bahasa Malaya.

Since the country had banned writing in English, people like Lim would be tongue cut. Consequently, she chose to leave her "heartbroken, tongue broken place" (Li 33) and immigrate to the United States. Eddie Tay reads Lim's poetry as a national allegory, for him "when read as a national allegory, the text reveals the experience of the individual as a function of the cultural and political exigencies within a society" (295). Technically, this poem is written in free verse that follows no set structure. She uses enjambment that is; "the running over of the sense and grammatical structure from one verse line or couplet to the next without a punctuated pause. In an enjambed line (also called a 'run-on line'), the completion of a phrase, clause, or sentence is held over to the following line so that the line ending is not emphasized" (Baldick 79).

Lim links the study of English language and literature with her personal future. The uncertainty of her current and possible future status in the Malaysian academia under the shadows of the strong nationalism might be the main reason that bushes her to search for another welcoming place, where she could fulfill her dream of teaching in the academia. She knew that the University of Malaya preferred a male and a Muslim over a Chinese woman. As a result, she was certain that in Malaysia she was "of the wrong gender and of the wrong race" (*Among the White Moon Faces* 204). We may add of the wrong language that is English. Suddenly, she realized that her keen efforts to be one of the elite through passing major examinations and to earn herself a place in the upper class could be "overthrown violently in just a second due to the racial discrimination" (Huang 51).

What Said notes about the intellectual exile in *Representations of the Intellectual: the 1993 Reith Lectures* is identical to Lim's status:

[M]y diagnosis of the intellectual in exile derives from the social and political history of dislocation and migration Even intellectuals who are lifelong members of a society can, in a manner of speaking, be divided into insiders and outsiders: those on the one hand who belong fully to the society as it is, who flourish in it without an overwhelming sense of dissonance or dissent, those who can be called yeasayers; and on the other hand, the nay-sayers, the individuals at odds with their society and therefore outsiders and exiles so far as privileges, power, and honors are concerned. (52-53)

According to Said's words, Lim is one of the "nay-sayers" in the Malaysian society. As a Chinese-Malaysian, She did not adjust with the nationalist laws in Malaysia. The separatist policies led to her departure. Lim preferred to escape from her miserable life in Malaysia. She said, "It seemed easy then to walk

away from a violated dream of a national future which includes people like me – people not tied to race-based ideology, who were looking to form a brave new nation" (*Among the White Moon Faces* 136). She tried hard to forget her gloomy memories in Malaysia. She was self-determinant in her decision of immigration to the United States. Lim can be referred to as an intellectual exile who felt dislocated in her motherland.

Lim begins her first volume *Crossing the Peninsula & Other Poems* by "Adam's Grief," a poem that reflects her grief and sorrow upon crossing the Malaysian peninsula and heading for another place:

Grieving, no matter at how large a loss
Is not enough. It is easy to cry
Since one first stood, dump with rage and crossed
With grief, and wondered at water from his eyes.
It is where to go from there.... (1 - 5)

Lim chooses a significant title for her poem. She parallels her immigration from Malaysia to the United States to Adam's departure from heaven. She also compares her grief and sorrow when she left Malaysia to Adam's grief when he left heaven. In the previous lines, Lim describes her feelings when she was about to leave her land of origin in a somber tone. She was "dump with rage" and crossed her motherland with grief over her damaged hope to be a recognized citizen in Malaysia. She has become homeless; whose motherland disowned her and a vagabond who does not know where to go. Lim asks a rhetorical question; "where to go from there" to assert her homelessness. The poem's message is skillfully conveyed by the direct and simple language the poet uses.

2-Lim's Journey to the New World

Lim's feeling of alienation in her own country was one of the main reasons behind her decision of emigration. She said, "after the May 13, thousands of Malaysians like myself withdrew into mass depression" (*Among the White Moon Faces* 13). As a result, she searched for a new place where she might find a solace for her pains. She represents Said's description in "Reflections of Exile" of exiles after being cut off their homelands, they "feel an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a resorted people" (140 – 141). For her, America is "a symbol of hope, fun and escape from the dullness, arrogance and idiosyncrasy of Malaysia" (Chang 153). After her arrival in the United States, Lim started a new era in her life. Although she went to the United States as a seeker for advanced knowledge and the highest academic degrees, her ultimate goal was to find home, where she could live peacefully. Unfortunately, she was shocked by the Legal segregation towards the Asians in general. She entered the United States

through the gates of a Fulbright scholarship in 1969. She went there to get her PhD at Brandies University. However, she did not only learn American literature but also learned an important lesson of race, class, and identity. In the United States, "She embarks her diasporic journey" (Huang 53).

Lim was completely unfamiliar with the new life in the United States. She wondered "Manhattan, how shall I love thee?" (*Among the White Moon Faces* 182). In her poems, she recalls her feelings of alienation in the United States, and recounts her uneasy relationship with her host country and its people. Among these poems are: "Evenings", "The Mind of the Beholder", "Credo:1", "Bat", "Apartment B", "Images of Love Rejected", "On Reading Coleridge's Poem", "Dulang-Washer", "On Water", and "House-hunting" from *Crossing the Peninsula and Other Poems*; and "Portrait of A Film Maker" from *No Man's Grove*. Her status is identical to Said's description of the exile for the intellectual. For her exile is "restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others. [She] cannot go back to some earlier and perhaps more stable condition of being at home; and, alas, [she] can never fully arrive, be at one with [her] new home or situation" (*Representations of the Intellectual* 53). Lim felt her difference in the United States. Many of her poems in these two volumes carry a touch of loneliness and solitude.

Lim's life in the United States did not differ much from hers in Malaysia. Her entry into a new country was full of many challenges. It was full of rejection, distancing, denial, mistreatment, and exclusion. Her dream of equality was soon damaged. She was shocked by the racially dogmatic outlook of the Americans to the Asians in general. Her experience there further complicated her sense of home and exile. Though she intended to fit in, she soon found that the Americans "regard those who are visibly different from white Europeans, including the original inhabitants of the continent, as strangers and outsiders" (Sawatsky 177- 178). She continues her sense of marginality as they refused to interact with her.

In "Dulang-Washer", Lim depicts her struggle in search for a fixed home. She portrays a female dulang-washer teased by the shining sun:

The dulang-washer, squinting like a witch
Squats with rag-wrapped head and begging-bowl.
The sun mocks her with false gold.
Still she bows her head acquiescently. (1-4)

"Dulang-washer" is an old Malaysian term that describes the women who searched for the gold in the tin sediments at the water's edge. It refers to Lim in her desperate search for a peaceful home. The first stanza identifies the dulang-

washer who wishes to improve her economic status by emigrating from one place to another. In this stanza, the poet gives a detailed description of the dulang washer's dilemma. She uses an effective simile as she directly compares her to a witch who squats with "rag-wrapped head" and "begging bowl". But the sun fools her that tins may be gold and she obediently follows the sun. The poet continues her description of the dulang-washer:

How will she die? In memory of movement,
The monotonous rhythm of search
And discarding. Changeless streams and gravel
Will dim her sight, exchanging gold-dust
For rocks in the head. No glamour of departure
Enshrines her travel, the shift
From landscape to landscape a meager drift. (5-11)

In the previous stanza, after "the monotonous rhythm" of picking and discarding of tins, the dulang-washer realizes that all that glitter is not gold. She finds "no glamour of departure", because the drift is no more than a meager trip from landscape to landscape. By repeating the word "landscape", Lim emphasizes the similarity between her desperate status in Malaysia and in the United States. In other words, it is a wandering that never ends. However, "it is pessimistic of Lim to figure out the barrenness of such travel. Fortune never comes so easy" (Kuo 8). The contrast between the "changeless" scene and the lively "exchange" of materials adds more emphasis and clarity to the poem. It implies how quickly life may change.

"The Mind of the Beholder" is another poem where Lim criticizes the fakeness of the American dream of equality:

I see briefly, emblem American dream,
Blanketing little white towns and houses
Shingled with golden leaves.
.....
New smoke carries the white bitter scent of country,
Reminding of lavender, herbs, elm-tree,
Wondrous details towns people think
We should want. (8-16)

The ironic title Lim chooses for her poem refers to her state of mind as she contemplates on the American society. The poet uses contrast to clarify and highlight the dual reality of the American dream which she compares to beautiful autumn scenery only for those towns' people who live in little white towns and houses. But for those ethnic minorities of color, the American dream

that the white majority claim to exist is no more than a 'bitter scent of Lavender, herbs, and elm-tree '.

After leaving Malaysia, Lim was dreaming of "the social disorganizing that offered individual rights" (*Among the White Moon Faces* 175). What pushed her to immigrate to the United States was the unequal treatment and the supremacy of the native Malaysians over the other races. Upon her arrival in America, she sought for an egalitarian society where all humans despite their color, race, or religion are treated equally. But unfortunately there was no egalitarian society neither in her motherland nor in her adopted land. She failed to find the home she sought for. Her concept of home is not just a place to stay in, rather it is a location in which the self can rest.

Lim expresses her great sadness after her short residency in the United States through her description of the American society in many narrative descriptive poems like "Evenings:"

Other evenings have been this
lengthy lowering into night,
a narrow coffin let down
into its clayey ground, or blight
scarring slowly. The blue sky whitens
in a fist closed tight. (1-6)

The poet uses a reflective title that shows her lonely lengthy nights in the United States. In the previous lines, Lim uses symbolism comparing the night to a coffin that covers the universe to create a vivid image in the readers' minds. For her the night is unbearable because of her great loneliness and isolation. She also compares the lengthy night to the blight that left a scar on her. Lim uses metonymy, which is, "a figure of speech that replaces the name of one thing with the name of something else closely associated to it" (Baldick 154). The persona sees the blue sky in a fist closed tight is a metonym for her suffocation of the isolation and dislocation in the United States. She attempts to escape from her gloomy and melancholic hours by sleeping. She continued in the same poem:

Other evenings have been hard
When I could not love myself or
Live alone. I filled hours
to sleep when all lovers' doors
shut with tales. (7-12)

She led a very hard life that was full of isolation. Moreover, she was in a bad need to the human interaction. Suggestive words like, "could not love myself /

or live alone / filled hours to sleep," convey the poet's emotions, alienation and solitude. She uses enjambment or run-on line to avoid the monotonous rhythm.

Lim's exilic condition is allegorically handled in "House-hunting". In the beginning of the poem the poet writes:

We were looking for something.

For a year we searched the house, (1-2)

The persona was searching for something for a year. She alludes to her hope to find a solution to her lifelong dilemma, to find a home. She relies on allegory to convey her message. Her desperate search of the house may be a metonym for her bad need to find a place where she could feel at home. At the end of the poem she declares:

Its high ceilings will out-wait us.

When we go, someone else will look for it. (24-25)

The previous lines assert the futility of the persona's desperate search. For an exile like Lim, there are many ethnic barriers that hinder her to feel at home in her newly adopted homeland. According to what Said states in *Representations of the Intellectual*, "exile for the intellectual . . . is restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled" (53).

Another poem that illuminates Lim's solitude in the United States is "Apartment B":

We hear the others moving

Night after night. One sneezes,

Another answers, a phone rings,

But we do not wish to know

How they live. Having them so close

Is painful enough (1- 6)

In the previous lines, the poet describes her melancholic life in America. The persona lives alone in her apartment with no interaction with her neighbors. She does not have any relations with them, only hears their voices in the night. Although she is in a bad need of human communication, she does not wish to be close to them. For her it is painful to be indulged in the American society. Lim is skillful in her choice of the word "painful" as the Americans tell her in many ways that she is an outsider, the thing that causes her more pains. She continues in the same poem:

... We do not want

To hear them speak: Only hear

Their inaudible voices,

Like their music and company,

Contained in boxes; hear only

Evening sounds of barks and sirens
To remind us we are human.
Any other speech may break
The bond which keeps us apart. (7-14)

In these lines Lim declares that she does not want to have any real interaction with her neighbors. For her, it is enough to hear the television or the "sounds of barks and sirens" in the evening to remind her that she is human. Lim reveals the suffering of the Asian immigrants in the United States, that the white Americans avoid any real communication with them that may break the bond that sets the Asians apart from the American society.

"Bat" is another poem that indicates Lim's deep alienation in the United States:

I wake in an instant,
Arms, legs, askew in bed
Like a bat, spread four-limbed
Outstretching, flattened to go. (1-4)

The poem's evocative title best describes the poet's status as an alien immigrant. The persona compares herself to the bat that lives alone in the gloomy dark places. She uses simile in "like a bat" which creates a dramatic effect in the readers' minds. The poet's uncomplicated and direct language portrays her suffering likening herself to a bat unable to fly.

Lim identifies her feelings in the United States in her memoir, *Among the White Moon Faces*. She said, "there are many ways in which America tells you you do not belong. The eyes that slide around to find another face behind you. The smiles that appear only after you have almost passed them, intended for someone else" (199). She felt herself intentionally segregated and rejected. In "Credo: 1", she shows such a mindset:

In walking our own sure space,
Eyes looking out at passers-by,
Gazing at fragile singularity,
see everywhere a mirage, distraction. (9-12)

Lamenting her homeless status, she compares herself to a Bedouin who lives in a desert where no humans are there to interact with. She searches everywhere for companionship but unfortunately she finds only a mirage. She uses evocative words like; "space / look out / passers-by / gazing / fragile / singularity / mirage/ distraction" to illustrate her suffering of having no home. The poet makes a good use of musical devices like alliteration in "our / own" and "sure / space" that direct the readers' attention to the message of the poem.

In America, Lim faced the same problems she fled from in Malaysia. She quickly discovered that America is not the Promised Land. She described her first student apartment in New England:

Behind spilling garbage cans and dirty snow hills, the sodden
apartment house that smelled like rotting layers of onion skin
offered no hospitality. Peeling shingles exposed the rickety
construction that gave the New England milltown its
disreputable appearance- warehouses and whorehouses for the
nineteenth-century working poor, today converted into
disintegrating rentals for scholarship students. (*Among the
White Moon Faces* 139-140)

She gives the unpleasant reality of a young Chinese-Malaysian woman. In "On Reading Coleridge's Poem," Lim describes her position in the United States:

"Alone, in a wide wide sea!" he wrote;
And we, reading this, wonder if he'd known
What it was all about. (1-3)

The poem's title is a clear example of Lim's fascination by the romantic poets. She referred to Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), a leader of the Romantic Movement in England. Reading Coleridge's poem, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" reminds the persona of her status as a stranger in a new country where she is living at the meantime. The loneliness of the mariner evokes her feelings of isolation and solitude. Lim quotes Coleridge's most memorable line; "alone, in a wide wide sea" that best represents her life in the United States. She compares the adopted land to "a wide sea" that she cannot reach its bottom to be stable. Repetition of the word "wide" reveals her great confusion in the American society and creates music. Lim notes, "in the United States I was only a private person. Without family and community. I had no social presence; [she] was among the unliving" (*Among the White Moon Faces* 155). Even with a doctorate degree in English and the years of teaching in the United States, Lim's students saw her first as an Asian before a teacher. Since she "was not white, not black, not Jewish, not Puerto Rican" (*Among the White Moon Faces* 196), she exerted due efforts to persuade her students to take her seriously as a mentor and as a mind. Her eastern look is a stumbling block in her career progress. Her Puerto Rican neighbors also despised her and refused to interact with her. As a result she felt that she was invisible among them.

Lim's poem "Images of Love Rejected" reflects her suffering in the United States:

I have made myself in seven years
A carpenter, can knock nail and stick
Together, live in my own shelter.

Muscles have grown you cannot tell,
Where the calf is strong, and here,
With work, the arm and wrist thick. (8-13)

In her choice of the poem's title, "Images of Love Rejected", the poet plays on pun that is "an expression that achieves emphasis or humour by contriving an ambiguity, two distinct meanings being suggested either by the same words . . . or by two similar sounding words" (Baldick 209). At first glance it may be understood that the poet refers to a male / female relation, but it also may refer to the rejected love between the different races. In a defying tone, Lim describes how she increases her skills to be adaptable to the hardships she faced in the United States. Symbolically, she compares herself to a carpenter who works all the time. She also uses suggestive and evocative words that reveal her self-reliance. Words like; "knock / muscles / grown / calf / strong / arm / wrist / thick" convey the poet's pitiful state. Synecdoche is clear in "arm and wrist" that shows her hard labour. She lives in her own shelter alone and knows how to be self-dependent. Lim makes a good use of the sound devices like the alliteration in "made / myself", "with / work", and consonance in "knock and stick" that convey her message and add depth to the meaning.

"On Water" is a clear example of Lim's disappointment to find a different life in the United States:

All life, some said,
Is water. Yet Contained
It can be constant.
.....
All things are repeated
In themselves. No use
To deny thus
By thinking on water. (10- 22)

In the previous lines, Lim uses symbolism to indicate the similarity between her Malaysian and American life. She compares her constant life to the water's stillness. She uses simple and direct diction to impart her message. The unfair treatment she faced in Malaysia was repeated in the United States. Exclusion is her lifelong plight. She was "out of tune" (Li 5), invisible, and an 'other' in both countries, Malaysia and the United States. Lim decided to stay in the United States and defies all difficulties and troubles. Claiming in her essay, "Tongue and Root: the Language in Exile" that "as a free-floating individual, with my tongue still in act although my roots are cut. I can lament and record" (169). She refused to live in Malaysia and preferred to live in the United States. She would not have her tongue cut, since she speaks English as a native. Her tongue is still intact and can speak freely and record her own experience in both countries.

In "Portrait of A Film Maker" Lim reveals her incapacity to adjust in the American society:

I would like to have been born
Many years ago, to work with clowns
And acrobats. One needs constantly
To be ready to change direction. (2-5)

The poet wishes to have the skill of the constant change of the acrobat. She regrets being unable to adjust to her new life in the United States. Her use of evocative words like; "clowns and acrobat" reflects her wish to play on both wings, to be flexible and adoptable to her motherland and her adopted homeland. She needs to balance her two different worlds and move fluidly between them.

Conclusion

The poems selected from the two volumes; *Crossing the Peninsula & Other Poems* (1980) and *No Man's Grove* (1985) document Lim's condition of marginality in her motherland and her adopted homeland. They approve Said's definition of exile in *Representations of the Intellectual: the 1993 Reith Lectures* (1994) which "means that you are always going to be marginal" (62). Lim's images imply her sense of estrangement during her early life. They exemplify her feelings of deprivation, displacement, and instability. Her poems portray a vivid picture of segregation and racial discrimination and the effects they can have on the exile. The first two volumes of Lim's poetry depict her sense of homelessness in both Malaysia and the United States. They reflect her alienation from her motherland, her linguistic marginalization, her defense of her language, her decision to leave her homeland to the United States, and her struggle for equality in both countries. The poet employs her poems to manifest her double exclusion from Malaysia and America.

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