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EXPANSION OF MODERN DIASPORA THEORY: EMOTIONAL DIASPORA PRESENT IN MADAM BUTTERFLY

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Expansion of Modern Diaspora Theory: Emotional Diaspora Present in Madame Butterfly

Synopsis:

This study explores "emotional diaspora" present in Madame Butterfly by John Luther Long. As discourse on diaspora is widening, new categories of diaspora such as emotional diaspora which deals with emotional displacement one feels not necessarily in relation to one's geographical displacement. Cho-Cho San shows such emotional diaspora in the particular place which is her home. The ways, possible reasons for diaspora and how it can widen the discourse of modern diaspora will be discussed.

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Emotional Diaspora Present in *Madame Butterfly*

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A Caucasian man and an Asian woman fall in love, the man leaves the woman, who waits for the man who will never return. It is a familiar story to the point of a cliché, just like how Pinkerton protests that he has heard Sayre's story of the Pink Geisha which foreshadows the story of *Madame Butterfly* "a thousand times." (29) Such is the main plot of novella *Madame Butterfly* by John Luther Long. The female protagonist, Cho-Cho San is a young Japanese girl who is waiting for her American husband Lieutenant Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton who told her he will return. Although the tragic story of the mythicized relationship of Caucasian and Asian is what makes *Madame Butterfly* famous, the emotional diaspora experienced by Cho-Cho San is another interesting feature worth examining.

A person in diaspora by definition originally referred to Jews who are out of Israel, but now has expanded to accustom all people out of their homeland - either voluntarily or involuntarily- living in a foreign soil. People in diaspora usually showed signs of the following; a sense of displacement, memories/yearning for the homeland, wishes to assimilate into the host land, communally shared experience so on. This is especially visible in the diasporic experience of the Chinese immigrants in America where they have created Chinatown in their need for a sense of the homeland and share communal experiences. However, the multitude of diasporic studies have widened due to increase in international relocations, travelling and the improvement of transportation. For instance, as Berns-McGown says, "to be in the diaspora is to perceive oneself as linked to multiple places and to hold a complex identity that balances one's understanding of those places and the way one fits

into each of them.” (Berns-McGown, 8) The notion of diaspora has moved from the original, strict form of definition into a more linear definition that can encompass more variety of “conditions” (Brubaker, 4) and more toward the experience and feelings of an individual “that exceeds any causal link to travel, movement, or displacement” which is “a defining component of contemporary diaspora scholarship.” (Campt *et al*, 2)

With these widened definitions, diaspora can be inclined so far as a person might not necessarily be in a geographically displaced situation but rather feel an emotional displacement so strong that it is a diaspora in itself. It can be termed as “emotional diaspora” which focuses on the emotional aspects of a person feeling diaspora. This is different from simple displacement in the aspect that displacement majorly deals with a person feeling alienated from one’s society. Emotional diaspora, on the other hand refers to people who feel as if they are dislocated in a foreign land, rather than total alienation to whichever society.

Madame Butterfly is a novel that captures such diasporic experience of not Pinkerton, but Cho-Cho San. Following the traditional terminology of diaspora, it should be Pinkerton who feels diaspora in the foreign land of Japan, without friends or adequate assimilation to Japanese culture. However, he cannot be more comfortable in Japan to the point he is arrogant. The way he thinks of Japan is evident in his treatment of the other characters. “He could not understand how important this concession was to her. It must be confessed that he did not try to understand.” (32) Also Pinkerton disdains upon his wife by calling her “an American refinement of a Japanese product, an American improvement on a Japanese invention.” (36) She is just a product of entertainment for him, just as their marriage was.

Perhaps the reason why he is not under diaspora could be due to the fact that usually people in diaspora are in some sort of minority group. Not only in terms of numbers but in social class, financial status and acceptance from the society. However, Pinkerton is a Western male who is a lieutenant and with obvious wealth –enough to buy the house he will only stay temporarily and renovate it to his wishes- and this differentiates him from the other diasporic people. He is in every way superior than the people in Japanese culture, especially Cho-Cho San who experiences diaspora initiated by him.

So rather, it is Cho-Cho San who experience diaspora, more specifically “emotional diaspora.” Although she is in Japan which is her homeland, she seems to be emotionally displaced in a foreign land. This is visualized through her home with Pinkerton which is an interesting space that works to confine Cho-Cho San in an alienated world. The house is designed in a Japanese style but “with their own adaptations of American hardware, the openings cunningly lockable.” (31) It acts as a bridge between the West and the East but a closed bridge in the sense that only Pinkerton can “keep out those who are out, and in those who are in.” (31) The house is a visual reflection of Berns-McGown’s definition of diaspora as “best defined as a space of connections - connections in two dimensions.” (Berns-McGown, 8)

In the closed off house of Pinkerton, Cho-Cho San is alienated as she is disowned by her relatives. As an outcast, “nobody speaks to me [her] no more,” (35) and she “cannot go home at my [her] grandmother.” (42-43) Cho-Cho San’s apparent alienation combined with

her memories of homeland suffices the diaspora criteria –of course geographically not, but emotionally just as strong. Although she speaks English at home, her expressions are seemingly Japanese. She uses expressions such as “the Sun-Goddess sent him straight from the Bridge of Heaven” (38) which follow the typical Asian way of speaking aloof. Also the fact that even when she wanted to leave their home, the fact that she did not want to displease her ancestors show that her paradigm still contains Japanese culture.

Furthermore, Cho-Cho San’s wish to assimilate into the host land is a sign of a person in diaspora. The host land being United States of America, she insists that everybody speak “United States’ language” (38) in the house. She aspires that when Pinkerton comes back, they will all communicate in English and impressed Pinkerton will take them to America. With this fragile wish, the whole house is stuck in the state Pinkerton left. As Greenwald notes, “Butterfly's ties to the house are both inward and cultural.” (Greenwald, 247) “Cho-Cho-San, upon Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton's demands, adopts Christianity and English, in a sense preparing herself to be not only sexually but nationally absorbed by Americanism.” (Stanley, 258) As a result, Cho-Cho San is alienated from the locals to the point that they receive her differently;

“With the odious lack of ceremony her independent life with Pinkerton had bred. She was imperially different. The go-between pointed out how sad this was to as beautiful a woman as she.” (48)

However, although her wishes to assimilate in American culture are strong, it is not enough. Her effort and achievement tragically appears in a heap of broken language she

insists in using. Most of the dialogue-which is in fact most of the novella- is in broken, mispronounced sentences that visibly show Cho-Cho San's inability to assimilate fully into the host land while showing her determination and aspirations toward her dream.

Moreover, as people in diaspora often result in, Cho-Cho San conjures up false dreams about life in the host land. She wonders that when Pinkerton take them to America, they will be living in his castle and never leave again. However, in the reality of America, there is no such home, let alone a castle for them. In addition, Cho-Cho San thinks she is "Missus Ben-ja-meen Frang-a-leen Pikkerton." (46) As a matter of fact, she might as well as be that woman (noted by her funny pronunciation) because Mrs. Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton already exists. To endure the life of alienation, seclusion and neglect, she has created a false image of her life in the host land to keep the strength, just as diasporic population do.

It is seemingly ironic that a person who is in her native land shares the same experience as the Chinese in America or Jews out of Israel. However, the essence of diaspora is not the geographical or substantial conditions that differentiate an individual from the rest of the population but the emotional, sensational experience that differentiates one. *Madame Butterfly* in that sense depicts a Japanese geisha undergoing emotional diaspora in Japan. Further studies into emotional diaspora could open wider understanding of social phenomena which could develop into a whole new study. In that sense, it is worthwhile to look at literary evidences to trace in what situations and how individuals experience such emotional diaspora, as in with *Madame Butterfly*.

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