
Perpetuating Fixity: An Analysis of Osage Representation and the Settlers in *Killers of the Flower Moon* (2023)

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Abstract

At the Los Angeles premiere of *Killers of the Flower Moon* on October 17th, 2023, Christopher Cote, an Osage consultant who worked on the film, expressed reservations about the depiction of the Osage and how their roles are attributed in the story. Because of Hollywood's misrepresentation history, this comment echoed with issues that are deeply rooted in the manner in which American films are envisioned, even when they stand for the oppressed and denounce the oppressors. This paper seeks to analyse the position held by the Osage in the movie by focusing on their power relationships with the white American characters, with the aim of revealing how the picture conceals a colonial narrative. Postcolonial theory serves as the theoretical base upon which the study is conducted. The characters are analysed through Homi Bhabha's concept of fixity of the "Other" as well as Elise Marubbio's identified stereotypes of Native Americans in the cinema of the USA. This paper highlights how Osage voices are confined to the background, while the narrative is dominated by the settlers' colonialist perspectives.

Keywords: Colonialism, Fixity, Hollywood, Osage, Representation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The history of the United States of America is inextricably linked with that of the Native American tribes, starting from the early days of the independence of the Thirteen Colonies (1776) until the events of the Indian Removal Act (1830). The latter displaced the Native civilisations as sovereign tribes within their territory and confined them in reservations. But, the role the ‘Indian’ played in the history of American cinema was crucial, predominantly in the American Western that emerged in the USA as directors sought to bring stories and myths of the Wild West to the screen, ‘Comanche’ and ‘Chayenne’ being among the most significant figures in the American Western lexicon. The representation of indigenous peoples has not escaped the problems faced by other minorities in an industry dominated by Caucasian narratives and perspectives, *The Bloodthirsty Warrior*, *the Indian Maiden*, *the Manny* and *the Dragon Lady*. These are all on the shelf of Hollywood stereotypes that have propagated misconceptions about the ethnic groups to which they relate. However, the case of Native Americans is distinctive as contrary to other groups, they were subjected to not only segregation and discrimination, but also colonial violence and occupation. The European settler colonialism that they faced, fought, and lost resulted in irreparable damage to Native culture. This prompts an analysis of their depictions through lenses optimised for coloniser-colonised power relationships rather than a mere dominant group-minority dichotomy within a society.

The indigenous civilisations that existed in the American territories dated back at least a millennium before the first European settlers arrived on the continent (Burns 3). Among the numerous Great Plains tribes is the Osage tribe, which goes by the original name of Ni-U-Kon-Ska, meaning “children of the calm waters” in the Siouan Osage language. The dominant tribe that established itself as a regional power in the eighteenth

century, was eventually defeated as part of the general Indian Removal and subsequently confined to the Osage Nation. However, with the territory being abundant in minerals and rocks in the finest quality (Burns 46), they amassed a considerable wealth that allowed them to combat the erasure of their culture. The discovery of oil within their territory enabled them to retain a certain degree of sovereignty over their resources. This was a significant factor in their ability to amass considerable wealth, which contributed to their status as the people with the most wealth in the country (Burns 450).

The U.S. Congress passed a law in 1921 that required certain Osage people, deemed 'incompetent', to have an appointed guardian that would manage their wealth. It stipulated that in the case of the death of an Osage family, head rights would be passed on to their guardian who would inherit the mineral rights of the land, and by extension their wealth. A certain William King Hale who settled in Indian Territory around 1900 built a reputation, and most importantly trust, from the Osage people living there, having learned their language and their customs. However, starting from 1921 until 1926, and with the assistance of his nephews Ernest and Byron Burkhart, he orchestrated the killing of dozens of Osage in an elaborate scheme to inherit their wealth. These traumatizing events in Osage history are known as 'The Reign of Terror'. Martin Scorsese's *Killers of the Flower Moon* (2023), adapted from David Gram's 2017 nonfiction book by the same name, recounts the events of the Osage murders.

In recent years, the image of Native Americans in American films moved from stereotypes and certain Eurocentric perspectives and narratives that dominated the representation of what they referred to as 'Indians', owing to extensive criticism and reassessment from scholars as well as reinvention by

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American filmmakers and screenwriters to form more truthful images. Yet, it remains a delicate matter to accurately portray groups of people as many artistic choices may shape derogatory conceptions in audiences' minds, especially when it is at the hands of directors not coming from that cultural/ethnic group. That portrayal encompasses the transcription of culture in its veritable form, from the language to the customs, clothing, cuisine, architecture and so forth. However, a primordial aspect of representation that precedes this transcription, namely the gaze, frames them. Cultures exist within the context of their relationship with neighbouring cultures or institutions. From this relationship, a further relationship emerges, which may be described as a coloniser/colonised relationship. This research seeks answer the question: how does *Killers of the Flower Moon*'s representation of the Osage Nation perpetuate colonial narratives? It investigates the portrayal of the Osage and the position they hold within the film in an effort to reflect on the historical struggle the underwent.

The film, despite its declared noble intentions (Scorsese, Martin Scorsese on Making "Killers of the Flower Moon"), boldly chooses the perspectives of William Hale and Ernest Burkhart, played by Robert De Niro and Leonardo DiCaprio respectively, to narrate its events. Lily Gladstone, an Osage actress, played the lead role of Mollie, the Osage woman who marries Ernest who plots the assassination of his wife's family under his uncle's orders. However, many spectators were left perplexed by Mollie's position in the narrative, as not only Gladstone's screentime is oddly short, but the very position that her character occupies is merely that of a subject to violence, leaving her character defined by the colonial violence that was exerted on her. This a colonial narrative that emerged from colonialist and orientalist perspectives that framed colonised people as helpless passive victims whose history is encapsulated

in the crimes and massacres inflicted on them by colonising powers.

In the context of dominant Eurocentric narratives, the analysis of representation is important as it can reveal issues that may not be immediately apparent. Postcolonial theory has allowed the deconstruction of numerous narratives by contrasting the different discourses of the coloniser. The research identifies and analyses the presence of such issues in the film. It is first necessary to analyse the Osage characters as a tribal group with a further analysis of two characters: Anna Brown and Mollie Kyle, each one are compared to specific stereotypes in order to discern in what way they relate to them. This is followed by the dissection of the white characters, namely William K. Hale and Ernest Burkhart, as key figures guiding the narrative of the film.

While the film's release is too recent for various literature to have been written about it, a few papers already commenced the debate. In his paper *We the Killers: The Law of Settler Violence and Native Persistence Beyond 'Flower Moon'* (2024), Evan D. Bernick offers an insightful analysis that focuses on U.S. laws against Native Americans. He argues that the film (and the book it adapts) only presents the physical violence inflicted on the Osage and ignores the anti-indigenous violence enacted by laws in the United States, one of them being 'the structural violence inflicted by settler colonialism, understood as a project of Native removal, dispossession, and elimination (...) The law of the United States follows and facilitates settler colonialism through dispossession and political domination that is predicated upon Native inferiority.' (Bernick 1-2). The film's choice of centralising the story around William Hale and Ernest Burkhart is presented as the director's disregard of Osage efforts to hold the federal government legally accountable for the laws against

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them. Furthermore, the paper fails to consider the film's creative decisions, such as the narrative choices made by Scorsese in restraining the Osage people's emotions throughout the film and using them as mere devices to advance the plot.

All Eyes on Lily Gladstone (2023) delves into the interpretation of Mollie Kyle. It draws from actress Lily Gladstone's own life story and heritage to discuss how the quality of her performance which is deemed excellent (Willmore). The paper emphasises the importance of choosing the Osage to represent themselves for the benefits of the film. It examines actress-director relationship drawing from interviews of the cast. While it highlights important insight on the making of the film, its attention is directed towards the actress and hence neglects reflecting on her acting as it may relate to the stereotype problematic leaving a gap to be explored in this study.

Reclaiming Representations & Interrupting the Cycle of Bias Against Native American (2018), authored by Arianne E. Eason, Laura M. Brady and Stephanie A. Fryberg, identifies the presence of multiple narrow and outdated stereotypes of Natives in contemporary American media, "Individuals responsible for creating new media representations, such as casting agents or directors, often reify the invisibility of contemporary Native peoples by passing over Native actors for roles that are "unrealistic" based on stereo-types about Native American" (Arianne E. Eason 75) and it illustrates how such representation harms the aspirations of Native tribes, it is reinforced by solid evidence of discrimination in institutions and education that create significant challenges for efforts to create positive images and achieve equity. It also supports projects that offer contemporary representation. However, it does not situate those issues in a broader context of colonial occupation and its devastating effects on not just the indigenous cultures, but also how they are perceived in the occupation's media, ultimately it

fails to address the colonial past of the United States and its aftermath.

To fill the gap identified in the existing literature, key concepts from postcolonial theory are used to examine the characters and the relationship between them. A proper understanding of the dynamics under colonialism and caused by policies of displacement and extortion along with discrimination based on ethnicity allows a thorough analysis of the issues of representation in the film.

It is not so much about who makes this art about colonised people as much as how the eye that creates the art perceives them. This goes beyond conscious or unconscious intentions because it is about a proper understanding of all parameters under colonial violence. For this reason, the concept of 'colonial gaze' is essential. Colin Columpar, a researcher in cinema studies and postcolonial studies, presents the concept as follow,

The influence of postcolonial studies on film theory, however, has allowed for the creation of a series of theoretical concepts that foreground issues of racial and national difference and acknowledge the role that race and ethnicity play in looking relations. More specifically, postcolonial critics have posited the existence of an ethno-graphic gaze and a colonial gaze' (Columpar 26).

The existence of this perception renders many western films superficial representations of the very people they intended to defend as they depict them in the form of stereotypes. Columpar argues that the colonial gaze and the ethnographic gaze are generated by imperialism and anthropology, respectively (Columpar 31). The stereotypes that result from that white-centred gaze can be classified according to different eras of American cinema. Their mutation throughout the ages

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maintained their presence in Hollywood films despite progressive efforts. Elise Marubbio elaborates specific stereotypes such as the “Sexualized Maiden” and the “Celluloid Princess.”

The concept of the “other” in fiction set in colonial contexts is defined as the role of the colonised, whereas the “self” as that of the coloniser (Bhabha 18). In this paper, the “other” locates and positions the Osage within the narrative depicting how the “self,” represented by William Hale and Ernest, dominates it. In colonial discourse, Homi Bhabha explained the notion of fixity in the construction of the “other” resulting in complex stereotypes that operate beyond representation and are part of movements of representation that serve the colonial power (Bhabha 18). Fixity strips the “other” of the complexity afforded to the “self”, serving as a powerful tool in colonial discourse to establish the boundary of difference between the colonised and the coloniser.

2. Othering the Osage Women; Decentralising the Narrative:

The film starts with an Osage burial ritual of a pipe that the elders perform to mourn the loss of their ancestral land. The first figures the audience sees are natives which suggests that they occupy the central position in the narrative. This is supplemented by two distinct shots that hold significant meaning in terms of *mise-en-scène*; two Osage children are seen peeping inside the tent (Scorsese 00:02:10) invoking the image of the Voyeur.

The concept of Voyeurism has been explored in cinema by different filmmakers, most notably Alfred Hitchcock in *Rear Window* and David Lynch in *Blue Velvet*. It intrigued directors because it forms a metanarrative with the audience acting as Voyeurs. It invites them to observe with the Voyeur and to see their perspective. Martin Scorsese employed this concept in *Goodfellas* to signal to the audience that the story would be told

through the protagonist's perspective. However, in *Killers of the Flower Moon*, despite the shots mentioned earlier, the narrative does not closely follow those characters or the Osage people as a whole. The perspective quickly shifts to that of Ernest, leaving that suggestion unfulfilled and the shots to be for an aesthetic pleasure void of narrative value, which further adds to the fetishism that is characteristic of Bhabha's fixity (Bhabha 24).

The narrative value of the scene has been drained; it is left with its anthropological value: a documentation of a culture. The historical collusion between visuality, anthropology and colonialism has been traced by film scholars by discussing the ethnographic and colonial gaze as the tools by which the nonwhite subject continues to be fixed in his/her otherness (Columpar 34). This anthropological approach creates a fixed, primitive portrayal of the native, placing them in a space of difference where the disruptive influence of the anthropologist—here, the director—is deliberately concealed. This is what Columpar refers to as ethnographic cinema when she writes, “as ethnographic cinema denies the anthropological subject historical agency, individual voice, and psychological complexity, it reduces him/her to a racial “type” and constructs him/her as “ethnographiable,” as one existing outside of or, more accurately, prior to history” (Columpar 36). The absence of Osage motives and emotions, particularly Mollie's, and the centralisation of the narrative around the white voices renders the Natives as ‘ethnographiable’, those who exist in the primitive past. The burial ceremony, a traditional act, operates as the portrayal of Native culture and the shots above, that usually announce the lenses from which the narrative will be constructed, make the Osage eyes void of individual voice and psychological complexity.

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Only minutes later, several Natives are murdered. It is quick and sudden, there is no romanticisation of violence. The choice of realism here invokes the cruel and cold nature of murders that had nothing to do with passion, and everything to do with colonial greed and exploitation. The murderers, unknown at that moment, appear to be senseless and determined in their acts, this demarche does not give any charm of evil or cruelty to them, they are merely murderers. Whereas many films choose to construct oppressor violence as an aesthetic that falls within fetishist definitions, Scorsese opts for realism by making the executions sudden with no ostentation. Moreover, there is an illustration of colonial hypocrisy as the first murder comes directly after William Hale tells his nephew: ‘Osage are the finest and most beautiful people on God’s earth’ (Scorsese 00:12:50).

How the murdered Osage are filmed, however, perpetuates the fixity of their representation. John Whitehair, Bill Stepson, Anna Sanford, Rose Lewis and Sara Butler, these Osage people who were murdered are shown as subjects to crimes. Glimpses of their lives, where they are seen smiling and playful, that act as flashbacks do not establish them as principal figures with their voices and emotions in the narrative. It confines them to the role of passive, background figures and mere victims of colonial greed, leaving their personal histories—rich with human experiences, emotions, thoughts, and relationships—hidden in the shadows of history. This lack of individual voices undermines the film’s pursuit of redemption and justice, ultimately pulling it back into the familiar stereotypes of defeated ‘Indians’ and the supremacy of the white man, which the film had aimed to avoid.

When the number of victims increases, specifically after Reta is murdered along with her husband, the tribe, led by Mollie, decides to go to Washington D.C. to report the problem and ask for an investigation from the federal government. First, Reta’s

graphic imagery illustrating her death stands out. Her house is bombed and when Ernest goes to find out the source of the explosion, he finds her corpse in the ground and as a fellow Osage attempts to lift her to see if she is alive, an image of the shattered back of her skull with an exposition of brain tissue and blood is shown. Second, Mollie asks the authorities for help "There's murder in Osage, and the police does nothing (..) so many Osage are killed for oil money. Please." (Scorsese 01:57:30). These two scenes, while highlighting both the settlers' cruelty and indifference, reinforce the Osage's position as victims. In a story that is rightfully theirs, the audience is shown their mutilated bodies and members of the tribe pleading for help from the colonial system.

The emphasised difference between the native characters as victims of crimes, incapable of managing wealth and falling in endless consumerism and the Caucasian Americans as perpetrators of violence, managers of wealth and smart investors form the main argument for the underlying colonial discourse within the film,

On the other, however, it effectively displays the 'separation', makes it more visible. It is the visibility of this separation which, in denying the colonised the capacities of self-government, independence, western modes of civility, lends authority to the official version and mission of colonial power (Bhabha 34).

In this instance, the official stance of the colonial power (the U.S. federal government) acknowledged the crimes, conducted an investigation, and prosecuted some of the perpetrators. However, all of this takes place within the framework of occupation, as the film does not question or address the broader mission of colonization. By centering the narrative on the white settlers, Scorsese preserves the authority

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of the colonizers and denies the native population the capacity for autonomy and independence.

One specific sequence stands out as an exception to the otherwise lacking colonial narrative. Following Anna Brown's murder, the Osage Nation gathers to address the severity of the situation and shed light on the mysterious killings. Paul Red Eagle, a leader of the Osage, expresses his outrage and delivers a powerful speech to those present. The language used in this scene is direct and denunciative of occupation 'We were here before them. This is our homeland we came to', colonial plunder 'They wanna pick us body clean, leave nothing', ethnic massacre 'It didn't want you when we were coming from genocides', and finally resistance 'No one takes us off this earth until God calls us home (...) we need to be like fire on the earth and get rid of all that stops or gets in front of us' (Scorsese 00:53:45). It is clear that this is the language of a colonised group resisting a colonial power, in this scene the Osage are not fixed as passives victims but rather, they seize the stand and speak of defiance of subjugation.

3. Reproducing Stereotypes of the Indian Maiden

Anna Kyle Brown is Mollie's sister and a member of the Osage community. On May 21st 1921, the age of 35, she was murdered by Kelsie Morrison. She was one of the first Osages to be murdered by orders of William Hale. At several moments of the screentime the character is offered, she is depicted as a source of warmth and affection for her mother, who expresses her love for her daughter by returning her affection and affirming that she is her favourite child (Scorsese 00:50:30). Anna shares a similar affection with her sister Mollie. Her nature and her relationship to her family make her a significant presence that acts as a light and offers moments of softness, humour and relief in the midst of violence and murder.

A particular part of her depiction is that she is an alcoholic in the film. In many instances, she abuses the

consumption of alcohol which leads her to erratic behaviour and sexual promiscuity. In a scene, she confronts Byron Burkhart and she strikes him when he insults her. While this scene is shown as an act of justice against a provoker, the other scenes in which her irrational side takes over invoke two of the earliest stereotypes of the Native in American cinema: the drunken Indian and the sexualized Maiden.

A recurring problem in American cinema is that people of color are typically portrayed either as deviant threats to white dominance or as fetishized symbols of exotic beauty, serving as objects for a racist, voyeuristic gaze and scopophilia (Bernardi 5). Anna's case is a typical example of such representation, she appears as a sensual woman whose clothing and physical movements accentuate her erotic image (Marubbio 128). The sexual demeanour and zeal that are assigned to her character confine her within the oldest stereotypical borders of the Sexualized Maiden. At the time of her death, she had been manipulated by the murderers through the use of alcohol, but the emphasis on her consumption of liquor in most of her appearances makes it central to her entire personality in a film utilizing the savage image that includes themes of vengeance, drunkenness and attacks on whites. (Marubbio 28). Elise Marubbio's analysis of a similar character from another film identifies the same patterns,

She never develops into a "real" person. Instead, the characters who remember and describe her for the viewer envision her only in simplistic and racially stereotypical terms: as a rodeo Princess, as a drunken "squaw," as a sexually aggressive Indian woman (Marubbio 161).

Similarly, Anna never develops into a real person, the place she holds in the narrative is more caricatural than truthful. Byron provokes her by insinuating that she 'opens her legs to

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any man', and she responds with violence (Scorsese 00:47:33). While the scene intends to reveal the extent of the cruelty and contempt settlers executed on Natives, it ignores the kind of image it leaves for Anna in the audiences' minds, an image that has roots in colonial discourse and stereotypical modes of representation.

4. Mollie Kyle as an Antithesis to the Celluloid Princess

Anna Kyle Brown is Mollie's sister and a member of the Osage community. On May 21st, 1921, the age of 35, she was murdered by Kelsie Morrison. She was one of the first Osages to be murdered by orders of William Hale. At several moments of the screentime the character is offered, she is depicted as a source of warmth and affection for her mother, who expresses her love for her daughter by returning her affection and affirming that she is her favourite child (Scorsese 00:50:30). Anna shares a similar affection with her sister Mollie. Her nature and her relationship to her family make her a significant presence that acts as a light and offers moments of softness, humour and relief in the midst of violence and murder.

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5. Mollie Kyle as an Antithesis to the Celluloid Princess

Mollie Kye is the Osage woman who acts as a lead in the film. She married Ernest Burkhart with whom she had three children. Her husband poisoned her for years by replacing her insulin with poison but she survived and divorced him in 1926. Played by Lily Gladstone, she is a firm, ingenious woman who is

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quick to discern people's genuine motives and who is deeply attached to her culture.

The first time she meets Ernest, she calls him a *Sho-Mee-Kah-See*, which is Osage for coyote. The *Canis Latrans*, also known as the American jackal, is a canine species that is native to North America. In Native American oral traditions, the Coyote is a mythological figure embodying the characteristics of the typical Trickster: greedy, vain, foolish, cunning, and at times exhibiting significant power (Cooper 184). Mollie therefore foresees her future husband's nature, later when he is invited to her house, she says 'Coyote wants money' (Scorsese 00:30:00) when he asks how come she does not have a husband. The scene illustrates her as a woman who knows that the man is a profiteer who seeks her head rights and her wealth, it breaks a stereotype of Native Indian women that are usually depicted as defenceless princesses to be rescued: the Celluloid Princess.

Portrayed in romantic tragedies as a young Native woman drawn to Western European culture or the white hero, the Celluloid Princess represents the potential blending of her own culture with that of American frontier culture, highlighting both the possibilities and the contrasts between the two (Marubbio 26). Mollie's attraction and marriage to Ernest situate her in a similar position between Osage culture and Western European culture, but she does not incarnate the helper/lover figure that Elise Marubbio defines as innocent, attached to an exotic culture and linked to ritual and the American landscape (Marubbio 29). This figure that fits within red man categories of generosity and gratitude to whites and interracial relationships, who yearns for the white hero (Marubbio 29) was recurrent in Progressive Era cinema during which it was typical to contrast between images of White civilisation and progress and Indian savagery. In an era when the only acceptable Indian was the one who broke from his roots, the Celluloid Princess was an example of assimilation, and

her death at the end of every film was seen as a sacrifice to preserve White purity.

Mollie synthesises an opposite figure, despite her relationship with a white man, Ernest, and her adoption of the coloniser's religion, Christianity. She is a resilient and perspicacious woman whose attachment to her culture is unwavering. Throughout the film, she struggles to uncover the mystery behind her family's murder and fights against the poisoning inflicted by her husband, despite the severity of her illness and the isolation brought on by the successive deaths of her sisters and other tribe members. Her tenacious nature also leaves room for tenderness as she is seen having complicity with her sisters and their murders leave her emotionally distressed and scarred.

The inner issue in Mollie's characterisation is the silence that is assigned to her character. As much as her strength is apparent, it is in the form of silently enduring blows and suffering rather than acts of resistance. It relocates her to her background in the narrative favouring of Ernest despite the story being hers, she acts as a means to the colonisers' ends rather than a threat to their schemes in the way she was in real life, her agency is therefore diminished. The stoicism she exhibits translates a feeling of exotism compared to the characters that surround her, which cements her perception as a foreign subject and denies her complexity of character. This characteristic is typical of the Noble Savage, the pure and innocent child of nature who is freed by civilisation and corruption, the Noble Savage befriends the white man and, in its filmic rendition, comes to represent the possibility of assimilation into white culture (Marubbio 3). Diving further into this figure and using Homi Bhabha's concept of the Other, Elise Marubbio argues for the Celluloid Princess as a male counterpart to the noble savage,

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The more romantic component of the figure, the Celluloid Princess, like her male counterpart the noble savage, symbolizes the “best” of Native America and the possibility of assimilation of the racial Other into a predominantly western European cultural ideology. The key qualifiers constituting the Princess figure include her connection to nature and the American landscape, her innocence and purity, her link to nobility, her exotic culture and beauty, her attraction to the white hero, and her tragic death (Marubbio 6).

The absence of progression of Mollie’s feelings towards Ernest deprives their union of a story and draws it back to a matter of attraction to a white man, and the purity and stoic nobility that characterise her establish her as the Celluloid Princess in the film. Her death is not part of the story, but it is the succession of her suffering that acts as a tragedy here. The central presence of the story leaves the room to be put in a background role where she takes in the suffering and clings to survival while the majority of the screentime is dedicated to the feuds between the Ernest, his uncle and the agents of the FBI.

The film conceals the Osage voices by characterising them as ‘Othered’ despite the declared intention to present the narrative through their perspective, the focus here is much less on resistance than on the victimhood and the murders. Anna Brown’s portrayal reveals a problem of misrepresentation that has roots in century-old stereotypes that dehumanised Native Americans. While Mollie symbolises a deconstruction of such stereotypes, the reduction of her position in the story does not leave her room to express her emotions and her thoughts. It is in this regard that *Killers of the Flower Moon* perpetuates the notion of fixity.

6. Colonial Discourse in the Director’s Speech:

Years after the murders, a radio drama serves as the reveal of the aftermath. The actors performing it use humour and

mockery while music is played in the background. It is the triumph of the colonial narrative that is shown, the victors tell the history after erasing the natives' traces, they use their suffering to produce entertainment while any sense of justice seems to be lost. A sudden appearance breaks the comical atmosphere, it is Martin Scorsese himself who announces Mollie's fate with a neutral voice away from dramatization.

With this scene, the director forms a commentary on the appropriation of native suffering by Hollywood. The radio drama is illustrated in the form of the burlesque and the kitsch, the camp style is discernible in the actors' caricatural interpretations of the characters of the events and use of foley to produce the sound effects. This parody of the events acts as a metaphor for Hollywood's adaptations of Native American stories, it shows the way the colonising power, through its institutions, seizes the accounts of the violence and crimes it committed in order to produce entertainment out of them. This commentary is particularly relevant in today's reigning climate of social justice in which despite efforts to achieve truthful representation, the domination of the White perspective remains. Martin Scorsese's intervention acts as a separation from that form of representation to tell the grim story truthfully, not to entertain an audience but to bring forgotten crimes into light and confront the American white-dominated audience with the foundations upon which their nation was built.

In doing so, however, Scorsese exempts himself from falling into the same issues of representation and the production of entertainment. The serious tone he uses distinguishes him, and therefore his film, from the rest of the caricatural performance. The announcer he interprets occupies the role of a white saviour and messiah who is different from his counterparts, as he comes to bring justice for Mollie's memory. It signifies hope only in

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terms of the emergence of a righteous man among the settlers whose endeavour can save the memory of the ‘Other’, who will remain silenced. This what Trinh T. Minh-ha explains as the conversation of “us” about “them” when she writes, “a conversation of "us" with "us" about "them" is a conversation in which "them" is silenced” (Minh-ha 67). Here the director is the “Us” who accompanies and introduces the Osage in their quest for justice and recognition of the crimes their tribe was subject to.

By centralising that monumental scene around his own figure, he perpetuates Hollywood’s deeply rooted issues when treating minorities. The argument advanced by many critics that it forms a metanarrative about the control over how history is told oversimplifies the problem and fails to consider that this choice prioritises the self-importance of the artist and his desire to create an aesthetic of filmmaking out of indigenous suffering over leaving the microphone to Osage voices. “Them” are effectively silenced, and the following brief scene in which they are seen performing a ritual does not free them from fixity. They remain colonised subjects in a colonial narrative.

Far from lamentation and fixity, the Osage have been making efforts to gain more sovereignty over their land. Following a series of reforms from 2004 to 2006, the Osage Nation proclaimed the Declaration of Sovereignty in which they stipulated that the jurisdiction of the Osage Nation shall extend over all persons and overall activities that occur within the territory of the Osage Nation and over all Osage citizens. The declaration expressly states that the Osage’s rights for sovereignty predate the Constitution of the United States. As stated by Jean Dennison in his book *Colonial Entanglement: Constituting a Twenty-First-Century*, these ideas of sovereignty conflicted with the assertions of the Federal State of Oklahoma (Dennison 131). Accordingly, the colonial institution is opposed by the constitution and it is therefore a form of resistance against colonialism. Since then, Osage Nation have continued their

efforts of resistance with the determination to achieve sovereignty “which works not as an abstract and comprehensive legal term but as a contested node of authority in lived realities” (Dennison 155).

4. CONCLUSION

This paper aimed to analyze the characters in *Killers of the Flower Moon* and expose the issues of misrepresentation and the presence of colonial discourse. The theoretical frameworks employed facilitated the identification of specific stereotypes arising from a colonialist perspective.

Killers of the Flower Moon sits somewhat at the margin in Hollywood by challenging the typical narrative constructions that appeal to the consumerism of art. The cast primarily features Osage individuals, and the resources utilized to emphasize Osage culture mark a departure from the typical portrayals of oppressed groups in American cinema. However, the emphasis on the settlers and, consequently, their narrative does not sufficiently distinguish the film as a representation of the Osage as active voices rather than as fixed ‘Others.’ The key example in this research was that of Mollie Kyle who resists valiantly but remains largely silent. The contrast between her silent presence and her husband’s occupation of the screentime and the narrative grants Ernest a complexity that Mollie and her family lack. Despite the instrumentalization of Christianity being shown in the film, the legal backgrounds that enabled the settlers to commit their crimes are only mentioned in the beginning. For such an endeavour, with all its noble intentions and collections of talented and confirmed artists, to still contain a colonial narrative, it means that the problem in Hollywood’s colonial gaze at Indigenous tribes is firmly entrenched in its mechanisms as an industry. Ultimately, the speech in the radio drama exposes the mechanisms of the entertainment industry; however, the

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claim that the film occupies a space of difference compared to others undermines the credibility of that commentary.

While this study revealed those problems, solutions could present alternatives to the Western modes of representation. Further studies could explore the solution elsewhere in world cinema, outside of the Western hemisphere. The perspective of people who shared similar experiences of occupation may have a better grasp of the Native American experience. Although there is no consensus on the exact meaning of the term, it remains an alternative way of thinking and making cinema away from Eurocentric perspectives and it leaves room for indigenous voices to express themselves without the obligation to fit into the agendas of major Western movie production companies, Ponzanesi says, “world cinema can be a useful umbrella term as long as it criticizes the implicit American way of looking at the world, according to which Hollywood is the centre and all other cinemas are the periphery” (Ponzanesi 10). In the global south, the struggles against colonialism and for freedom are part of the collective experiences, they could offer a better comprehension of the narratives of settler-colonialism and a closer perspective to that of Indigenous American tribes. At least it is what Osage chief Jim Gray thought, “That is what Nation-Building is all about. How can an American Indian watch the courage of the people protesting in the streets of Cairo and not feel deep down inside, a sense of kinship to their struggle for freedom?” as reported by Jean Dennison (Dennison 154).

In any case, this research has revealed the deficiencies in both the film’s portrayal of natives and its narrative, and it illustrated the Osage as active voices who continue to defend their right for sovereignty.

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