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A Postcolonial Reading of David Grann's *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI* (2017)

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Submitted by

Ms. Amira Mammasse

Ms. Manel Loulou

Supervised by

Mrs. Naima Tighzer-Arab

Members of the Jury

Chair: Dr. Abida BENKHODJA

Supervisor: Mrs. Naima Tighzer-Arab

Examiner: Dr. Sihem SAIBI

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my beloved parents, who believed in me and supported me from the very beginning. Without their love, prayers, and encouragement, I would not be where I am today.

To my brother and sister, thank you for your constant support and motivation throughout this journey.

To my friend, Akram, who stood by my side and helped me in countless ways during this work.

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Finally, to all the dearest people to my heart, this achievement is also yours.

Amira Mammasse

Dedication

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Declaration

We declare that this dissertation is the result of our own original work and has not been submitted before for any degree or diploma at any university or institution.

All sources and references used in this research have been properly acknowledged.

This work reflects our understanding, interpretation, and analysis of the topic as part of the requirements for our Master's degree.

Names: Mammasse Amira

Loulou Manel

Abstract

David Grann's *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI* (2017) revisits a significant yet an overlooked episode in American history: the systematic murders and exploitation of the Osage Nation during the 1920s, when they were the wealthiest people per capita in the world. This dissertation explores how the book reveals the deep impact of colonialism through the themes of otherness, silence, and resistance. Based on postcolonial theory, particularly the works of Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, this research examines how the trustee system established by the U.S. government acted as a tool of control, silencing the exploitation of Indigenous peoples, rooted in colonial history and racial discrimination. Through this perspective, the research examines the long-lasting effects of settler colonialism and its function in transforming success into tragedy for the Osage.

Key words: Osage Nation, trustee system, subaltern, postcolonial studies.

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General introduction

General Introduction

Native American history is marked by deep suffering, cultural loss, and displacement. Native American people were the original inhabitants of the land, with deep spiritual and social roots and a rich heritage. However, the arrival of European settlers and the establishment of the United States brought centuries of exploitation, violence, and forced relocation. Among the primary policies was the Indian Removal Act of 1830. This law forced the removal of the Native tribes from their ancestral lands. They were required to resettle on new, much harsher lands. In our dissertation, we focus on the book *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI*¹ (2017) by American journalist and writer David Grann, who is widely praised for writing groundbreaking pieces of journalistic nonfiction. The work of historical investigative journalism uncovers the hidden history of the Osage Nation, a Native American people that became wealthy in the 1920s due to oil found beneath their land in Oklahoma. Their success, however, resulted in a sequence of brutal murders and systematic exploitation, exposing the ongoing influence of colonialism and racism on Native lives in the 20th century.

Problem Statement

While *Killers of the Flower Moon* provides a detailed account of the Osage murders, there has been limited scholarly examination of how postcolonial theory can be applied to understand the power dynamics, silencing, and exploitation revealed in the book. This research addresses this gap by offering a postcolonial reading of the Osage tragedy with a specific focus on how the U.S. government's trustee system functioned as a tool of colonial control, mirroring historical patterns of dispossession and Native voice silencing. By drawing on the theories of Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, this study will examine how the narrative construct's themes of silence, otherness, and resistance offer a deeper understanding of Osage

¹ Note: For clarity and brevity, this dissertation will refer to *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI* as *Killers of the Flower Moon*.

identity and agency.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to analyze the Osage experience during the Reign of Terror from a postcolonial lens, revealing how colonial power, subalternity, and racialized rule are represented by the trustee system and other institutional narratives. Through an analysis of the interconnected themes of otherness, silence, and resistance in *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI*, this study aims to demonstrate how this investigative nonfiction work critiques colonial ideologies and reveals the ongoing marginalization of Indigenous voices in American history and literature.

The Significance of the Study

This study is significant for uncovering the hidden history of the Osage Reign of Terror and the U.S. government's role in the racial violence against the Osage Nation. A postcolonial analysis of silence, otherness, and resistance in *Killers of the Flower Moon* reveals colonial power dynamics and the different ways Indigenous people resisted, contributing to a broader understanding of the enduring legacies of settler colonialism and its ongoing impact on Indigenous communities.

Research Questions

This research paper seeks to explore how *Killers of the Flower Moon* portrays the effects of colonialism on Osage identity through the interconnected themes of silence, otherness, and resistance. It also aims to examine how the U.S. government's trustee system, as depicted in *Killers of the Flower Moon*, functions as a tool of colonial control and how this racial system transforms the wealthiest people per capita into victims of widespread exploitation and murder. Finally, the study questions whether David Grann, as a white outsider, authentically represents the pain, voice, and lived experiences of the Osage people.

Organization of the Thesis

This research is divided into three principal chapters. The first chapter, entitled “Literature Review and Historical Background,” presents an overview of Native American literary history, the contribution of Osage authors to American literature, and the critical reception of David Grann’s book *Killers of the Flower Moon*. It then provides a brief biography of David Grann and his major works, along with a summary of the book *Killers of the Flower Moon*, to provide readers with a clear background. After that, the chapter discusses the Osage origins, specifically in the early 20th century, when the discovery of oil riches brought with it both wealth and genocidal violence aimed at their nation.

Chapter Two focuses on the theoretical framework. It begins by introducing postcolonial literature, its definition, origins, and major authors. Then, it explains postcolonial theory, including its development, key concepts, and debates around its use. Finally, it highlights two major postcolonial theorists: Edward Said, with his theory of Orientalism, and Gayatri Spivak with her concepts of the subaltern.

In Chapter Three, the postcolonial theories introduced in Chapter Two are applied to analyze David Grann’s *Killers of the Flower Moon*. This chapter examines three important themes in the book: otherness, silence, and resistance, as reflected in the lives of Mollie Burkhart, Anna Brown, Tom White, and William Hale.

Chapter One: Literature Review and Historical Background

Chapter One: Literature Review and Historical Background

Introduction

Literature has been defined in many ways, and scholars have debated what makes a text “literary”. Some define literature as any written work, while others believe it must include creativity, such as storytelling and poetry. Another view is that literature is important because it helps preserve history and traditions. Within American literature, one rich and powerful area includes works written about Native American peoples, their history, culture, and identity, which often challenge dominant Western narratives and serve more than just entertainment. This review explores how such literature helps preserve history, shape identity, and give Indigenous people a voice, while also analyzing how Native authors contribute to American literary traditions.

This literature review discusses how American literature engages with Native American cultures, and in particular, focuses on the Osage Nation. It begins by looking at Osage writers who write from inside their culture, illustrating how their literature preserves Indigenous traditions, voices identity, and responds to colonial issues. Then the chapter turns to a critical analysis of *Killers of the Flower Moon*, a contemporary nonfiction book that has brought renewed attention to Osage history. It analyzes how the book was received by critics and scholars, particularly on issues of representation, colonial violence, and Indigenous agency. In addition, this chapter includes a biographical overview of David Grann and a summary of *Killers of the Flower Moon*, both of which serve to contextualize the critical interpretations and historical analysis that follow.

Finally, to ground this literary and critical analysis within its historical framework, this chapter also includes an overview of the Osage Nation’s cultural, political, and economic background. This addition is necessary not only to understand the stakes of Osage literature but also to clarify the historical realities that inform David Grann’s *Killers*

of the Flower Moon. By tracing the Osage people's displacement, the discovery of oil, and the implementation of federal control systems, the review establishes the essential backdrop against which both literary expression and critical reception must be understood.

1.Origins of Native American Literature

Native American literature is an excellent example that serves both cultural and historical purposes. Unlike Western literature, which is mostly written and follows a clear format, Native American literature comes from oral storytelling, where words are considered sacred and powerful. As Galen Buller explains, "Native American literature is characterized by reverence of words, a deep sense of place, ritual and ceremony, affirmation of community, and a distinct indigenous worldview" (167). These characteristics show that Native American literature is not just about telling stories; it is also about healing, identity, and survival. It serves as a way for indigenous people to preserve their culture, pass down traditions, and stay connected to their identity.

However, Native American literature has often been misunderstood or excluded from Western literary studies. As Arnold Krupat points out, indigenous literature was historically ignored because it was oral rather than written, leading scholars to dismiss it as not real literature (145). This attitude has changed over time, but natives still struggle against being analyzed through Western frameworks that fail to consider their culture and spiritual elements.

Before discussing the origins of Native American literature, it is important to first define what it is. Michael Dorris, in his study on native literature, argues that it cannot be categorized as a single literary tradition because it comes from hundreds of different indigenous cultures, languages, and oral traditions. He explains, "More than three hundred cultures, each differentiated to a greater or lesser degree by language, costume, history, and lifeway, were resident north of the Rio Grande" (147). This means that native American literature is not one unified body of work but rather a collection of diverse traditions, each with its unique stories,

myths, and histories.

Native American literature is not just about storytelling; it is a way for indigenous people to preserve their culture, pass down traditions, and stay connected to their Identity. Unlike Western literature, which is mostly written and follows a clear structure, Native American literature comes from oral storytelling, where words are considered sacred and powerful. As discussed earlier, Buller highlighted several key characteristics of Native American literature, including its reverence for language, deep connection to place, emphasis on ritual and community, and distinct indigenous worldview (167). This means that native stories are not just for entertainment; they serve an important cultural and spiritual purpose, helping Indigenous people maintain their traditions and understand their place in the world.

Defining native literature is not always simple. Janette K. Murray points out that native American literature cannot be classified in the same way as Western literature because it comes from many different languages and countries (153). Like American or British literature, Native American literature is much more diverse and does not fit into a single category. Murray also explains that native storytelling was originally meant to be heard, not read, which creates challenges when analyzing it through written texts. She states that “oral literature was composed and intended to be heard by listeners who shared the Native language and culture” (Murray 155). She explains that when native stories are written down or translated into English, they often lose some of their original meaning (155).

Although native American literature was originally oral, some indigenous writers adapted to written forms in the 18th century. One of the earliest and most influential Native American writers in English was Samson Occom (1723–1792), a Mohegan minister and educator who used writing to advocate for indigenous rights and challenge colonial oppression. His writing was significant because he was one of the first indigenous people to write in English, making his work accessible to both native and non-native audiences. However, despite his

contributions, Occom was exploited by colonial leaders. He worked hard to raise money for native education, but his efforts were taken advantage of, and he never received the financial support he was promised. This reflects a common theme in native literature: betrayal and broken promises from colonizers.

Occam writing also reflects a complex relationship between Christianity and native identity, as Scott Richard Lyons points out that some native writers like Occom used Christianity as a way to advocate for native rights, while others rejected it and focused on traditional native spirituality (1). This tension between assimilation and resistance is a theme that appears again and again in native American literature and in our book under scrutiny.

2. Osage Authors and their Contributions

Having explored the foundation of Native American literature, it is helpful to see how it appears in the works of writers from the Osage Nation. The Osage Nation has produced several well-known writers whose works reflect their culture and history.

In exploring the rich literary landscape of the Osage Nation, it is essential to acknowledge the contributions of notable figures like John Joseph Mathews, Charles H. Red Corn, Elise Paschen, and Fred Grove.

John Joseph Mathews (1894–1979) was a well-educated man who embraced his Osage heritage. Mathews is renowned for his works such as *Wah'kon-tah: The Osage and The White Man's Road* (1932), *Sundown* (1934), *Talking to the Moon* (1945), and *The Osages: Children of the Middle Waters* (1961).

Wah'kon-tah: The Osage and The White Man's Road (1932) is considered an important work in Native American literature, noted for its unique writing style and content (Kaye 82). In this book, Mathews, of mixed Osage descent, provides an engaging history of Osage life on their northern Oklahoma reservation in the late 19th century (Wilson 124- 125). He successfully “captured the essence of life” (126) by drawing on the notes and diaries of Major Laban J.

Miles, a Quaker agent to the Osages. Terry P. Wilson notes that Mathews “dramatically presented a variety of the traits that combined to form the Osage tribal culture and its interactions with the people and government of Anglo-America” (126). The book highlights the Osage people’s humor, spirituality, and dignity as they adapted parts of the new ways for their own purposes throughout this time of cultural change.

In *The Osages: Children of the Middle Waters*, Mathews provides a personal portrait of the Osage people and relies on a “considerable quantity of oral information on a nation for which there is little early source material” (Miller 87). The author takes an insider point of view when writing the story due to his affiliation with the Osage, which gives depth and authenticity to the book. However, this approach presents both strengths and weaknesses. As Nyle H. Miller observes in his review, while the use of oral information is a significant strength, especially given the scarcity of early written sources on the Osage, the book’s lack of documentation poses challenges. Miller further notes that “the story-even the late section-is completely undocumented” and that “There is a bibliography, but no single citation of source of information” (87).

Mathews’s *Sundown* explores the tension between traditional Osage values and assimilation. Bowman’s analysis focuses on Chal Windzer, who struggles to reconcile his Osage heritage with the pressures of white society. Bowman notes that “with his newfound desire to imitate the white men at the university, Chal becomes progressively more frustrated not only with himself but also his Osage friends” (9). This reflects a deeper conflict, as Chal “struggles to smother his feelings of unity with the nonhuman world around him in favor of enacting his superiority at all times” (9). Through Chal’s experience, Mathews illustrates the psychological and cultural impact of colonialism on Indigenous identity, a theme Bowman emphasizes in his broader reading of the novel (1–3).

David Martínez, in his article, discusses Mathew’s book *Talking to the Moon* about the

concept of “intellectual sovereignty,” viewing it as a critical reflection on writing, self-determination, and Indigenous experiences. He highlights how Mathews’s writing connects deeply with both tradition and the struggle for freedom and identity in the context of Indigenous narratives: “Mathews is obsessed with self-critical reflection on what he was doing in his life of writing at the Blackjacks. He presents a vision of how the act of writing functions in the struggle for self-determination and is continuous with both tradition and survival” (Martínez 50). These three novels mirror the Osage tribe writers.

Charles H. Red Corn is another famous Osage figure who made his contribution to Native American literature by sharing his cultural heritage. Unlike Mathews, who focused heavily on history, Red Corn was involved in writing and politics. Red Corn played a major role in modern Osage politics. He was a member of the Osage Government Reform Commission and helped write the Osage Nation Constitution in 2006, which gained recognition from Harvard University. He also organized Indian Parent Education Committees and advocated for Native American students as the Director of the Oklahoma Indian Association. Red Corn’s novel *A Pipe for February* (2002) is an interesting book because it discusses a dark time in Osage history. The book is about the mass murders that happened in the 1920s when the Osage became rich from oil on their land. Robert L. Berner, in his article titled “Review of *A Pipe for February*, by Charles H. Red Corn.”, quotes “Their reservation happened to cover remarkably rich oil deposits; the Osages of Oklahoma were virtually unique” (151). He continued that this sudden wealth “enabled many of them to meet the modern world with full pockets” (151). The story follows John Grayeagle, the main character, whose journey illustrates how traditional tribal beliefs and the difficulties of modernity interact. Red Corn’s novel states, “The past was deep and meaningful.... In the future each Osage was wealthy and things moved faster than I thought possible” (151). Corn’s novel depicts the clash of the Osage’s cultural heritage with modern life. The story highlights the stresses that arose from their wealth, exposing the Osages

to “legal quackery, official complicity, and outright violence” (151), as many were left in vulnerable positions due to court-appointed guardians who exploited them.

Shifting our focus to more contemporary Osage voices, Elise Paschen is a poet whose work adds a new perspective to Osage literature. Paschen’s diverse ancestry, which includes an Osage father and a Scots-Irish mother, gives her a unique perspective on the literary world. Unlike Mathews and Red Corn, who mostly wrote prose, Paschen expresses herself through poetry, providing a unique perspective on Osage experiences. Paschen has written several poetry collections, including “Infidelities” (1996), “Houses: Coasts” (1985), and “Bestiary” (2009). Besides being a poet, Paschen is involved in teaching and promoting writing. She leads a writing workshop in Oklahoma and works with tribal leaders and residents (Museums for America 5). Paschen has won some big awards, such as the Lloyd McKim Garrison Medal and the Joan Grey Untermeyer Poetry Prize. She is an art organizer and was the project director and founder of Poetry in Motion” (Museums for America 5).

Another figure, Fred Grove, was a native American writer born in Hominy, Oklahoma. He contributed significantly to Osage literature through his Western and historical novels. Grove’s works, including *Flame of the Osage* (1998), *Comanche Captives* (1997), *The Years of Fear* (2002), and *Buffalo Runners* (1968), have earned him five awards in the Western genre. His novel *The Years of Fear* (2002) is particularly notable for its exploration of the violence against the Osage Indians in the early 1920s, combining true crime with historical fiction. Groves’ opening line, “For several days the dogs had been dying in Fairfax, Oklahoma” (Grove 1), immediately sets a serious tone that reflects the dark period in Osage history. His personal connection to the Osage community and his use of historical documents lend authenticity to his portrayal of the tragic events. In *The Years of Fear*, Grove, through his third-person narrator, raises questions concerning whether the crimes were the product of criminal activity or a sign of a larger evil plot. Through this approach, he delves into the complexities of societal greed

and the horrific facts of racial violence (The Years of Fear).

Generally, Mathews, Red Corn, Paschen, and Grove individually contributed in meaningful ways to the Osage literary tradition. Through Mathews' histories and Grove's fiction, these authors have played key roles in keeping Osage tradition and heritage alive. Their stories wrestle with identity, tradition, and change, affirming the long-lasting strength of Osage culture through the ages. Collectively, they provide a voice for Osages in Native American literature and offer essential analysis of historical and contemporary contexts. Their writings not only recount Osage's tale but also show how Osage's perspective continues to shape American literature.

3. Critical Reception of *Killers of the Flower Moon*

Whereas the previous section spoke of Osage authors writing from within the community, it is important to note that *Killers of the Flower Moon* was authored by a non-Native author. David Grann is not writing from an Indigenous perspective, but as a journalist, he brings attention to a silenced part of Native American history. It is not Native American literature, but a historical work which overlaps with some of the concerns of Native literature, such as identity, dispossession, and resistance. The following section explores how *Killers of the Flower Moon* was received by critics and academics.

David Grann's *Killers of the Flower Moon* explores a dark period in the Osage people's historical record, which is known as the Reign of Terror². Between 1918 and 1925, a series of murders was committed against the Osage to take over their valuable oil lands. The book has attracted significant attention and a range of reviews owing to its engaging account of these events. Scholars have critiqued the book from different perspectives, raising questions of

² The term "Reign of Terror" was originally used to describe a period of mass execution and political repression during the French Revolution (1793-1794). It came to be used more broadly to describe any era of organized violence and fear. Newspapers and members of the Osage Nation began using the term to refer to the wave of murders and systemic injustice they faced. David Grann himself did use the phrase, but he used it in his book to represent the extent of violence and injustice they suffered.

racism, Native resistance, and how colonial violence has shaped American history.

Erin A. Smith, in “Who Didn't Do It? Genre, Politics, and Reader Responses To *Killers of the Flower Moon*,” approached David Grann’s *Killers of the Flower Moon* from the perspective of genre and reader reception. She discussed that the book begins as a standard detective narrative, where Tom White is investigating the killings and ultimately arrests William Hale. This could provide the illusion of justice being served; however, in the last section, Grann takes his story in a different direction, illustrating how some individuals not only commit the crimes but are also part of a larger system of racism and corruption. A particular reader contextualizes this realization when he states, “About halfway through the book, it struck me that the problem wasn’t ‘who done it?’ but ‘who didn’t do it?’” (Smith 36). This realization conjures up feelings of shock and guilt in numerous readers, so much so that one confesses, “It makes me ashamed to be white” (Smith 35). A few readers have believed that the book places too great an emphasis on White people and the FBI, possibly to the detriment of the experiences and perspectives of the Osage people. Smith notes that although Grann does quote the Osage people, the narrative is nonetheless constructed around a white investigator. This was problematic for some readers, as it relegated the Osage people to secondary figures within their history. Still, Smith posits that Grann may have done this intentionally. By following a detective story structure, he makes the book more appealing to a broader audience; therefore, when he does ultimately expose the extent of racism and corruption, the impact is even stronger. Lastly, Smith argues that through manipulating and then undermining genre conventions, Grann forces readers to think about matters of justice, overlooked historical narratives, and the enduring legacy of racism in America (23).

Some other scholars complain that the book and the film do not fully recognize Native agency and legal resistance. Evan D. Bernick, in his essay “We the Killers”, for example, agrees that the details of the killings have been successfully recorded in Grann’s book and Scorsese’s

film, but according to him, they do not tell the entire story. He states, “But there is more to the story. More violence, more killers, more Native resistance” (Bernick 1). He explains that much of the violence, such as murders and acts of rebellion, was tied to legal systems. Bernick thus introduces the concept of structural and interpretive violence and explains that, besides the physical violence as seen in the murders, the Indigenous people were also harmed by laws designed to strip them of their rights. The author explains that “both Killers ignore Osage’s efforts to hold the federal government to legal account” (Bernick 2), which implies that the book fails to fully analyze the ways through which the Osage engaged in acts of resistance and insisted on justice. His reading compels the viewer to understand the Osage killings not only as a crime in history but as integral to a wider framework of settler colonialism.

Bernick noted that this point is also highlighted by Native scholars like Matthew Fletcher and Robert Warrior. Fletcher criticizes *Killers of the Flower Moon* for focusing on the individual killers for instance how white men like William Hale, exploited and murdered Osage people to steal their wealth and also how the FBI’s role in solving the case, however it neglected to emphasize how the U.S. government permitted white guardians to exploit the Osage. The Osage did not just lose money because of the criminals, but they were forced into a system where white guardians controlled their wealth. He also argues that he makes the Reign of Terror feel like a terrible event from the past rather than part of a long history of Native communities being exploited, something that still happens today (Bernick 7). In his article “Failed Protectors: The Indian Trust and *Killers of the Flower Moon*,” Fletcher claims:

Grann’s focus on the Osage murder investigation as the “Birth of the FBI” is a sad joke. All along, it was the United States that held the threads of the lives of the Osage people. In a very real sense, it was the United States that was the criminal mastermind (Fletcher 1254).

Similarly, an Osage scholar Robert Warrior, argues that Scorsese’s film mostly shows

the Osage as helpless and naive victims, while overlooking their resistance and how the legal system helped keep them oppressed. He also points out that while the film effectively portrays Mollie's suffering through her relationship with Ernest, it does not fully explore the bigger picture, specifically how U.S. policies hurt the Osage and how they fought back. He also criticizes the film for telling the story from the perspective of the white criminals rather than the Osages, which makes history seem simpler than it really is (Bernick 7).

While Erin A. Smith looks at how *Killers of the Flower Moon* plays with the detective genre and Bernick, Fletcher, and Warrior argue that the book and film do not show enough Native resistance, Izabela Morska takes a different approach. In her article "Animality as an Excuse for Murder," Morska examines the book through the lens of colonial violence and racism, showing how these factors played a significant role in the Osage murders. Instead of just focusing on the crimes themselves, Morska looks at how white people justified the murders by seeing the Osage as less than human, often comparing them to animals or pests. This made it easier for settlers to steal their land and wealth without feeling guilty. Morska, quoting from David Grann's *Killers of the Flower Moon*, claims that a powerful moment in the book questions whether a white man killing an Osage is considered murder or just cruelty to animals (Grann, p. 215, qtd. in Morska 100). This shows how the Osage were dehumanized, making it easier for their suffering to be ignored. She also connects this idea to older colonial histories, like the 1652 suppression of the Irish rebellion, showing how language has been used to erase Indigenous groups throughout history. By doing this, Morska moves the conversation beyond just the murders, linking them to the long-lasting effects of settler colonialism on Native communities (Morska 97).

The different views of Smith, Bernick, Fletcher, Warrior, and Morska on *Killers of the Flower Moon* show how complicated it is to represent Native American history. Smith looks at how the book's structure affects the way readers understand the events. Bernick and Fletcher

point out that the book does not focus enough on bigger issues like systemic problems and Native resistance, making it harder to show the full picture of historical injustices. Warrior is concerned about how the film adaptation portrays the Osage agency, showing the ongoing problem of Native representation in media. Morska looks at how the language used in the book dehumanizes the Osage people and connects their murders to a larger history of colonial violence. Together, these views show that while *Killers of the Flower Moon* brings important attention to the Osage murders, it also highlights the challenges of telling Native stories from a non-Native perspective.

This review has explored the rich world of Native American literature, from its roots in oral storytelling to its modern forms. It also discussed Osage authors and their literary contributions. The response of the critics to *Killers of the Flower Moon* also helps us understand the ongoing challenge of accurately representing Native American experiences. Throughout this exploration, it is evident that Native American literature serves not only as a means of artistic expression but also as a powerful tool for cultural survival, identity formation, and social critique.

To fully grasp the depth of violence and systemic injustice depicted in *Killers of the Flower Moon*, one must move beyond literary and theoretical analysis and examine the historical foundations upon which the narrative rests. Understanding the political, economic, and cultural trajectory of the Osage Nation, from early tribal sovereignty through forced removals, to the oil wealth era of the 1920s, which is indispensable. The context of settler colonialism, U.S. federal policy, and imposed financial control structures such as the trustee and guardianship systems must be situated clearly before any postcolonial reading of Grann's work can be undertaken. The following section, therefore, provides a historically grounded examination of the Osage Nation, establishing the framework of a world of exploitation and resistance that the literary narrative seeks to expose.

4.The Author's Background and Book Summary

4.1 The Biography of David Grann

Our understanding of a literary work is informed by our understanding of the life of the writer. Gaining more knowledge about the writer's background, life experiences, and motivation creates a better understanding of the themes, Perspectives, and choices present in his writing. This is especially true when looking at the life of David Grann, a contemporary writer and journalist who has focused his career on investigative stories and highlighting lost history that many have forgotten or ignored. understanding his background, his career, and his methods allows us to appreciate the work he did in *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI* more critically.

David Grann was born on March 10, 1967, in New York City to a family with an appreciation for learning and telling stories. Grann's mother was an executive at Penguin Putnam, and his father was an oncologist and professor at Columbia University. this environment helped shape Grann's career. Grann was told stories by his grandfather about traveling through China and Tibet that inspired his interest in adventure and exploration, which he would later draw from as a journalist and author (Literary Arts). David Grann studied with fervor to earn a degree in English literature from Connecticut College and graduated with honors. He also received the Thomas J. Watson fellowship, which allowed him to research while in Mexico. he later completed 2 master's degrees, the first in international relations from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy and the second in creative writing from Boston University (The New Yorker).

After finishing school, he began his journalism career in 1994 at *The Hill*, starting as a copy editor and moving up to executive editor, then became a senior editor and writer for *The New Republic* before joining *The New Yorker* as a staff writer in 2003. The New Yorker recognized Grann as a talented storyteller who wrote engaging and long-form stories on white

supremacist groups and deep-sea exploration (The New Yorker).

David Grann began writing a book after being one of the most well-known nonfiction authors of his time. His books often explore themes of true crime, history, and adventure. His notable books include: *The Lost City of Z, A Tale of Deadly Obsession in the Amazon* (2009), *Killers of the Flower Moon* (2017), *The White Darkness* (2018), and *The Wager: A Tale of Shipwreck, Mutiny and Murder* (2023).

His first significant nonfiction book, *The Lost City of Z* (2009), is a tale of deadly obsession in the Amazon. It follows the travels of Colonel Percy Harrison Fawcett, an adventurer who is hungry for the discovery of the hidden ancient civilization in the Amazon rainforest. The story takes place in the early 1900s, when adventurers were captivated by the huge, unexplored Amazon, known as “the Livingston of the Amazon” (Davidson 128). Davidson, in his review of the book, says that Grann’s story skillfully blends themes of obsession with the unknown and adventure, offering a gripping examination of the mental and physical landscapes that explores “true adventures with geographic themes and huge portions of hardship and suffering” (Davidson 130). The book was widely acclaimed, reaching number one on The New York Times bestseller list, and was later adapted into a film in 2016.

Following the success of his first book, *The Lost City of Z*, David Grann authored another notable work, *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI* (2017). While the first was a story of exploration and mystery set in the Amazon, the second takes a turn to the darker side of American history as it reveals the systematic killing of the Osage people. The book received critical acclaim, becoming a finalist for the National Book Award and winning the Edgar Allan Poe award for best true crime book. It was later adapted into a major film directed by Martin Scorsese, released in 2023.

Grann's next book, *The White Darkness*, published in 2018, is a non-fiction book of Henry Worsley, a soldier in the British Army who attempted to traverse Antarctica by himself

in 2015. Inspired by admiration for Ernest Shackleton's leadership and determination, Worsley wanted to complete an unfinished mission of Shackleton's. The book explores themes of perseverance, obsession, and the human spirit in the face of overwhelming adversity by weaving Worsley's physical and mental hardships, which led to his untimely death from tiredness and organ failure, as well as the harsh Antarctic environment. The personal costs of exploration are also discussed in the story, especially as they relate to Worsley's family. Through access to Worsley's journals and a thorough investigation (Dickey).

Most recently, David Grann published *The Wager: A Tale of Shipwreck, Mutiny and the Murder* in 2023. The book presents a poignant narrative centered on the ill-fated expedition of the HMS Wager during the War of the Jenkins' Ear (1739 -1748). The narrative investigates the disastrous shipwreck along the coast of Patagonia and the subsequent struggles for survival, which ultimately led to mutiny and the disintegration of moral integrity among the marooned crew. Through this historical exposition, Grann scrutinized significant themes of leadership, allegiance, and the manipulation inherent in imperial narratives. All this underscores the propensity of empires to distort historical accounts to obscure inconvenient truths, whilst probing the limitations of human resilience and the ethical complexities of survival in the face of extreme adversity. Grann provides a sophisticated examination of human nature and the more sinister dimensions of imperial ambition (*The Wager*).

Grann also wrote other significant books, including *The Devil and Sherlock Holmes: Tales of Murder, Madness, and Obsession* (2010), *The Old Man and the Gun* (2018). These previous works further exemplify his talent at revealing hidden truths and constructing engaging narratives.

Throughout his career, David Grann has won many awards, including the George Polk Award and the Silver Gavel Award for his investigative journalism. In 2023, he was named Barnes & Noble's first-ever author of the year. More than just awards, his work has started

important conversations about forgotten history and continues to inspire readers of all ages

Today, David Grann lives in New York City with his wife and two kids. He stays committed to finding hidden truths and forgotten stories. His work as a storyteller and investigator continues to show how powerful stories can be in revealing even the darkest parts of history. Through his writing, he reminds us of the importance of remembering the past and giving a voice to those who have been overlooked.

4.2 *Killers of the Flower Moon: A Summary*

*Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI*³ (2017) is a nonfiction book. It is not a novel but a work of historical investigative journalism based on real events, documents, and interviews. It uses storytelling techniques of fiction but for the purposes of revealing historical facts using meticulous research and journalistic investigation.

The book tells the story of violence and greed against the Osage Nation in Oklahoma in the 1920s. It examines racial injustice and corruption. Grann divides his book into three separate chronicles: the Osage Nation as victims, the inquiry made by the FBI agents, and Grann's perspective on the case.

It all begins when the Osage are moved to Oklahoma. The Osage believed the land was useless. However, when oil, or "black gold," is discovered under their earth, they soon become wealthy. In 1920, they were among the wealthiest people in the world thanks to the income they earned from oil. This wealth, though, was accompanied by a huge issue; the United States government considers the Osage incapable of managing their own finances and consequently

³ Explanation of the title "Killers of the Flower Moon": "Killers of the Flower Moon" is titled from the mythology of the Osage, where May is known as "flower killing moon, a period when taller-growth plants begin to emerge and cover up earlier spring flowers and kill them. This natural process is a powerful metaphor for what was done to the Osage people during the 1920s, when white outsiders, motivated by greed for oil wealth, systematically acquired Osage land, wealth, and lives. Just as the small flowers were pushed aside, so were the Osage people ignored and ultimately devastated. The title holds both this cultural reference and the horrific reality of how Native life was suffocated beneath systematic colonial brutality.

labels them “incompetent.” As a result, they introduce a system whereby white people are given the authority to manage the Osage’s finances, that is, the guardianship system. Many of these guardians take advantage of the Osage.

Grann, in his book, provides a historical description of events with particular emphasis on Mollie Burkhart, a wealthy Osage woman who inherits extensive oil headrights when oil is found. Her marriage to Ernest Burkhart, a white man, places her in the heart of a deadly conspiracy. Over time, she suffers the heartbreaking loss of her two sisters, Rita and Anna, her mother, Lizzie Q, and other relatives, all of whom are murdered in an organized attempt to take their money. Consequently, this leads to violence against the Osage people.

Beginning in the 1920s, numerous Osage individuals died under suspicious circumstances. Their deaths are generally disguised as accidents, suicides, or illnesses, but are far too common to be mere coincidence. The earliest documented victim is Charles Whitehorn, who goes missing in early May of 1921 and is later discovered shot to death. A week later, Anna Brown, Mollie’s sister, is found dead in a ravine, also murdered. Another sister of Mollie’s, Minnie, has already passed away from what is reported as a “wasting illness,” although it is later suspected that she has been poisoned. Their mother, Lizzie Q, also dies under mysterious circumstances. Rita Smith, Mollie’s third sister, and her husband and their white housekeeper are killed in a house explosion. Each of these deaths was part of a calculated plan to eliminate the Osage and take over their oil rights.

As the number of murders rises, the Osage people appeal for justice, but local officials and law enforcement agents ignore their calls. The brutality occurred due to widespread racism, which allows the disregard of the misfortunes faced by Native Americans.

It is only when the newly formed Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is assigned with the investigation under the leadership of J. Edgar Hoover, who regards the Osage murders as an opportunity to enhance the reputation and image of the FBI as a federal law enforcement

agency, that the case begins to receive prominent press coverage. The inquiry is headed by Tom White, a former Texas Ranger, who is appointed by Hoover to uncover the truth behind the Osage murders. White assembles a team of undercover operatives to collect clear evidence and piece together the complex web of corruption surrounding the murders. efforts reveal a brutal and corrupt scheme led by William Hale, who pretends to be a friend of the Osage Nation but is the mastermind behind the murders. He orchestrates the murders in collaboration with his nephew, Ernest Burkhart, Mollie's husband, who was directly involved in the plot. The conspiracy is supported by a network of corrupt government officials, medical doctors, police, and local judges who help cover up the crimes and allow the murders to go on for years without punishment.

The last part of Grann's book reflects his own perspectives regarding the case, founded on recent research. Grann revisits the murders, not as the first journalist to report on them, but as a modern investigator who brings new attention to a story that had long been overlooked or forgotten. Through extensive research, he uncovers additional victims and reveals further details about the corruption that permitted the murders to take place for such a long period.

Grann's inspiration to write *Killers of the Flower Moon* started when an FBI historian told him about the case while researching. Grann visited the Osage Nation Museum and became strongly linked to the tribe, especially through the story of Mollie Burkhart. This connection, along with his empathy for marginalized groups, motivated him to uncover the deeper truths behind what had been treated as a closed case. He spent years researching the story, relying on the National Archives, which he thanked for the huge collection of documents. He found surprising sources like stories from the Osage people about the murder reports from private detectives who sometimes hid the truth, and records of how young J Edgar Hoover handled the FBI's first major murder case. These discoveries helped him piece together the entire story in interviews. Grann explained that he was drawn to the story because it was something he had

never heard before. He was shocked to learn that the Osage were once the richest people in the world per capita in the early 90s, only to be targeted and murdered in crimes that became one of the FBI's major cases.

Grann wrote the book because he realized this shocking part of history had been overlooked by many. Like most people, he had never heard of the Osage murders or the FBI's early involvement. The story was both important and tragic yet unknown to most. This inspired him to research and share it, making sure this hidden chapter of American history wouldn't be forgotten. He wanted to highlight the struggles, lies, and injustices faced by the Osage people whose history is well known within their community but not by the others. He also made sure the story could reach readers of all ages. He created versions of *Killers of the Flower Moon* for younger readers and young adults, simplifying the story while keeping its main message. This way kids, teens, and adults could all learn about this dark chapter in history and understand these injustices faced by the Osage nation.

Grann believed it was important for people of all ages to know the truth and remember what happened. In a recent interview, Grann mentioned that his favorite genre of fiction is the detective novel, which might explain his careful and detailed approach to uncovering and telling true stories. His dedication to research, storytelling, and justice has made *Killers of the Flower Moon* not just a book but a powerful way to educate and remember.

5. The Osage Nation

The Osage Nation, or the Wah-Zha-Zhi, as they refer to themselves in their own language, which means "people of the middle waters," is among the most recognized Native nations of North America. They were originally part of the Dhegihan Siouan-speaking nation until they settled in the lower Midwest, in what is now Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. They located themselves strategically close to major rivers like the Missouri, Mississippi, and Arkansas. The Osage had a well-organized society that combined agriculture

with seasonal hunting. They held two large buffalo hunts each year, which were essential for food and strengthening community bonds (Wiegers 198). The buffalo hunts were cultural rituals that brought people together. Their way of life was structured around a council of elders known as the Little Old Men, who played an important role in both spiritual and political matters (196). The Osage Nation was made up of three main groups. The Little Osages lived the farthest north, from Malta Bend to Glasgow in Missouri. The Great Osages were the main group and lived on the Osage River. There were smaller bands that lived on the Niangua, Sac, and White Rivers in Missouri and Arkansas. Between 1700 and 1800, the Osage migrated south and west and settled in the Neosho-Grand Valley of Kansas. They expanded their territory by fighting with nearby tribes (Oko-Odoi 391).

In addition to their strong social tradition, the Osage also had a strong spiritual tradition. Their deep understanding of nature was grounded in their faith in Wah-Kon-tah, a great mysterious force that existed in everything (Oko-Odoi 392). Their religious life was deeply tied to the cycles of nature, as seen especially in their daily prayers, which imitated the path of the sun. They made prayers at sunrise to the Red Eagle as a representation of new life. They paid tribute to the White Eagle at noon, which was a representation of strength and purity. By sunset, they acknowledged the Black Eagle, which was a representation of the end of day, rest, and reflection. For nearly 200 years, the Osage refrained from adopting Christianity, but by the mid-19th century, others began adopting Catholicism since rituals were comparable (392).

The following map, titled “Osage Ancestral Territory,” represents the vast region the Osage Nation originally inhabited before European settlement and U.S. expansion. The red-lined area is the Osage Nation ancestral territory that extended across most of the current states of Missouri, Arkansas, Kansas, and Oklahoma, and extended as far east as Tennessee and Kentucky. This large region marks where the Osage once lived before being displaced by American expansion and broken promises. The interior smaller region, in purple, is the location of the current Osage Reservation in Oklahoma. The map clearly demonstrates how much land the Osage lost over time, and helps us understand the impact of forced displacement and colonization on their land and identity.

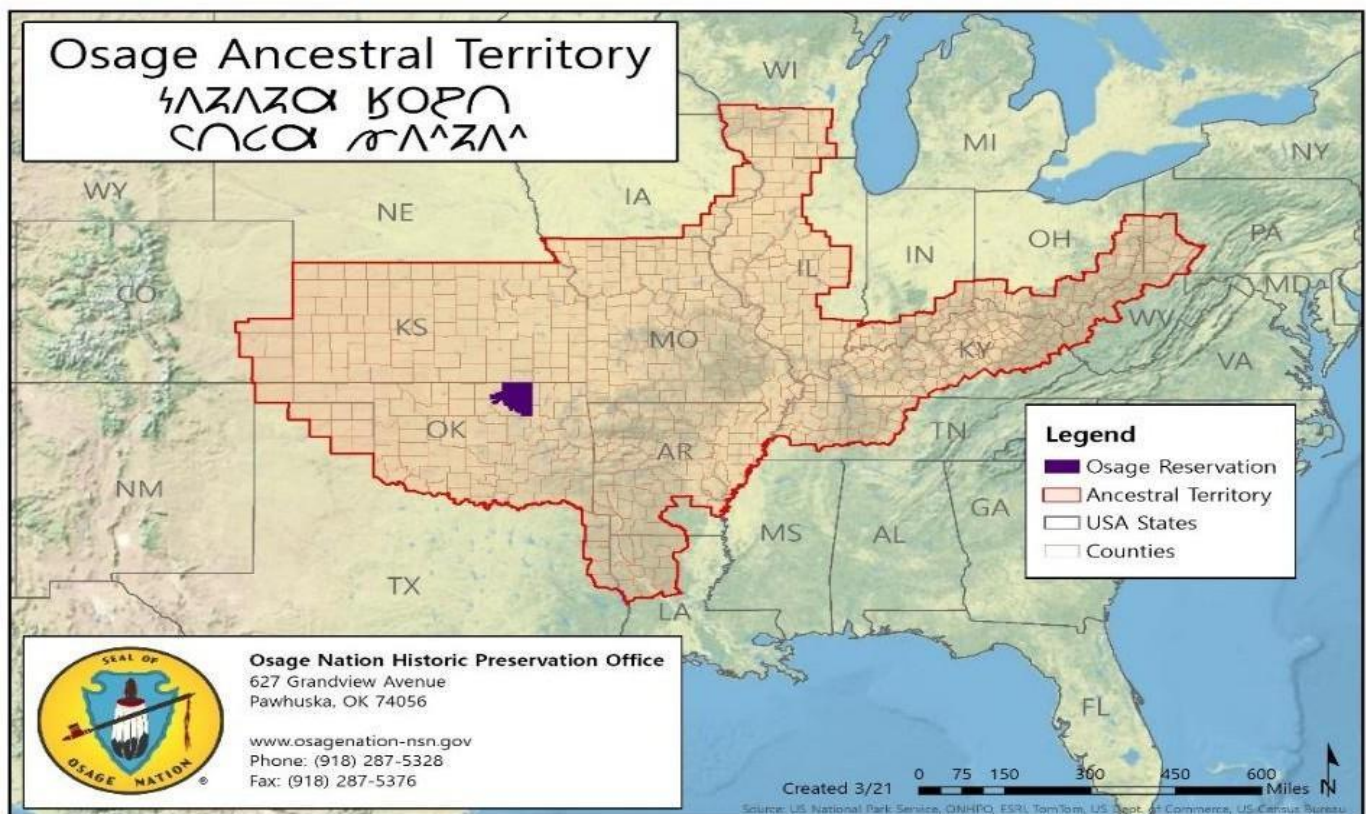


Figure 1. Osage Ancestral Territory. (Credit: Osage Culture Traveling Trunk)

As the Osage continued their way of life, things started to change when European explorers arrived in the late 1600s. Their first recorded contact with Europeans was in 1673 when French explorers Jacques Marquette and Louis Jolliet traveled down the Mississippi

River. The meeting led to a strong trade relationship between the Osage and the French. The French gave them guns, metal tools, and cloth, making their hunting and fighting easier. In return, the Osage gave them furs, hides, and other valuable resources. Through this alliance, they were able to remain superior in the region. In the late 1700s, however, the Spanish who owned land to the west and south wanted to take over. The Osage, refused to give up control and took advantage of their close relationship with the French to preserve their independence. Because of their wise alliances, strong warriors, and good location near the Missouri and Arkansas Rivers, they were able to delay European colonization for many years (Miles 376).

However, everything changed with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. The Osage Nation's official records explain: "Our ancestors-controlled millions of acres in what is now known as Missouri, Arkansas, Kansas, and Oklahoma before the existence of the United States. Their lives changed drastically after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. At that time, the United States Government claimed ownership of Osage land, leading to a period of forced displacement and land loss" (About Osage Reservation). This was the start of a tough time for the Osage. They were pushed off their land, and their way of life was never the same again.

Following the Louisiana Purchase, conditions worsened for the Osage. The U.S. government started taking more of their land, forcing them to move again and again. Between 1808 and 1839, they were pressured into signing treaties that took away huge parts of their territory across Missouri, Oklahoma, and Arkansas (Oko-Odoi 390). Forced relocations began with their first treaty in 1808, when bands living along the Osage River in central Missouri were moved to western Missouri. In 1828, they were again resettled onto a reservation in southeastern Kansas. Later treaties and U.S. policies further reduced their lands, and in 1870, the Osage were permanently removed to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma, leaving behind their remaining lands and way of life (Oko-Odoi 391).

Figure 2, titled "Osage Ceded Lands," illustrates the Osage Nation's historical

displacement and loss from 1808 to 1872 through a series of forced removals and treaties. All of the colored regions are land that the Osage were forced to cede, beginning with the Treaty of 1808 and ending with their removal in 1872. The map even shows the current-day Osage reservation in Oklahoma, allowing viewers to trace the long process of dispossession and forced migration the Osage Nation went through.

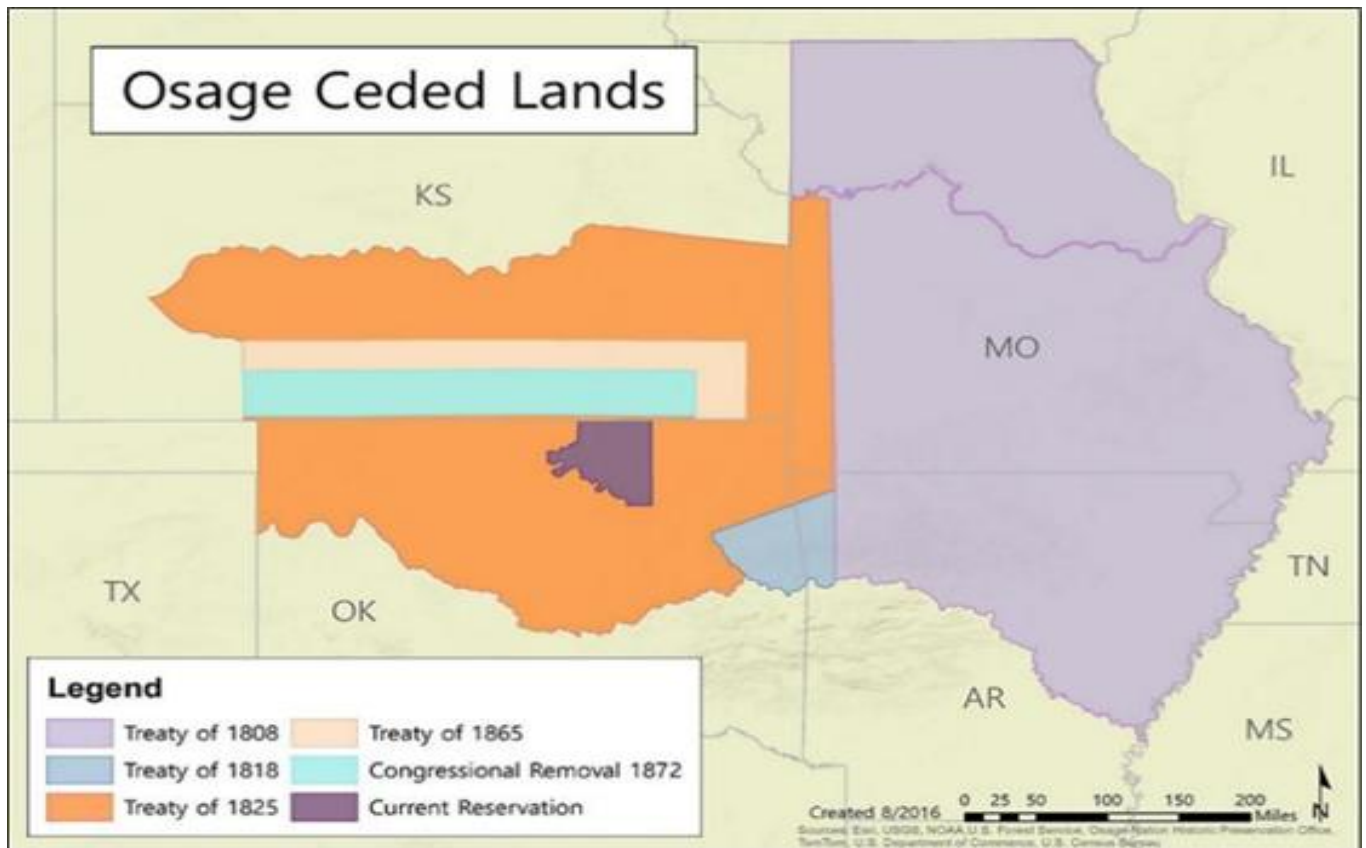


Figure 2. Osage Ceded Lands. (Credit: Osage Culture Traveling Trunk)

The journey to their new home was heartbreaking. A witness described the scene: “The air was filled with cries of the old people, especially the women, who lamented over the graves of their children, which they were about to leave forever” (Grann 44). The land in Oklahoma was dry and rocky, making farming difficult. Still, some Osage elders saw a small advantage. One said, “This is good. Now the white men won’t want it as they did our Kansas land” (Grove 44). At first, the Osage tried to continue their way of life by setting up camps and hunting buffalo. But by 1877, the buffalo were almost gone, and the U.S. government forced them to

become farmers. Their income from leasing grasslands started to decline, but then something unexpected happened, oil and natural gas were discovered beneath their land (Grann 46). In 1906, the Osage Allotment Act was passed. Unlike other tribes, the Osage negotiated to keep communal mineral rights to their land. This meant that any oil found on Osage land would benefit the tribe. By 1925, some Osage families were making around \$52,800 a year from oil profits, equal to nearly \$600,000 today. This sudden wealth transformed the Osage Nation, making them some of the richest people per capita in the world at the time (Oko-Odoi 390).

The Osage people became targets because of their wealth. Between 1921 and 1925, at least twenty-four Osage people were murdered in what became known as the “Reign of Terror.” Fred Grove described the situation: “In the 1920s, the Osages had become the richest nation in the world per capita... and they were being robbed and murdered for what they had. The year 1923 had been the bloodiest, and the little town of Fairfax appeared to be a wellspring of killings” (Grove 44). Basically, people were willing to kill members of the tribe for their oil money, but that wasn’t the only problem. The government forced Osage people to have white “guardians” who controlled their money. Instead of helping, many of these guardians stole from them. It was a system designed to keep the Osage from controlling their wealth.

Even with all these hardships, the Osage never gave up. They survived, adapted, and fought for their rights. While Osage people now live all across the U.S., Oklahoma remains their homeland, and their connection to it has never faded. They have their government, their culture is still alive, and they’re making sure their language and traditions do not disappear.

6. Trustee System

The following information about the trustee system comes from a court document published in February 2020 by the United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit. It discusses how the U.S. government is in charge of managing the Osage Tribe’s wealth.

The trustee system refers to an arrangement in which one individual, a trustee, holds

and actively manages property on behalf of another individual, a beneficiary. In the case of the Osage Tribe, the U.S. government is the trustee of the tribe's mineral estate, managing and holding the trust property to protect it, as well as paying out royalties to the Osage tribal members who own rights. The Osage Allotment Act (1906) stipulates that the trustee is obliged to account for all funds placed in trust chronologically, showing both daily and annual balances, to ensure transparency in how money is spent and saved over time. This requirement is necessary for the protection of the beneficiaries, who should receive the assets they are entitled to claim. As pointed out in the document, "the Act also requires the Secretary of the Interior to provide an accounting for the daily and annual balance of all funds held in the trust" (Fletcher 2). This system was put in place in the early 1900s, when "deposits of oil, gas, coal, and other minerals were found on the reservation. In light of this discovery, Congress enacted the Osage Allotment Act of 1906, which placed the reservation's mineral estate in a trust for the Osage Tribe with the Government as the trustee" (Fletcher 2). In this case, it can be said that the primary aim of the governance under this arrangement is to enable the defined members of the Osage Tribe to gain maximal advantage from the resources in the territory, which is supposed to be managed as trust resources on their behalf and benefit the tribe members in various ways.

7. Guardianship Program

On March 3, 1921, Congress implemented a so-called "guardianship" program for the Osage Nation intended to help them manage their wealth. An individual deemed half "Indian blood" or an Osage minor required a guardian. Such guardians were appointed until they proved able to manage their funds. Guardians were allowed to be paid for their services, which often came directly from Osage profits. People of the Osage Nation who showed they could manage on their own were eventually tracked on Indian census rolls.

The guardianship program did not protect the Osage but rather put a target on them. There was a surge in white settlers flocking to claim land in Oklahoma, and dubious

businessmen, lawyers, and others tried to con the Osage out of their wealth. However, the most deceitful attempts were from white male settlers who married Osage women and then took over their funds, their mineral rights, and their complete estates (National Archives Foundation).

To sum up, for the Osage, the trustee system meant the U.S. government controlled their oil money to “protect” it. But many Osage were called unable to handle their own money, so white guardians were put in charge of their finances and lives. Trustees handled the money, but guardians had control over the person. Instead of helping, this system was unfair and led to many Osage being taken advantage of.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided essential background for understanding *Killers of the Flower Moon* from both literary and historical perspectives. The literature review explored the role of Native American literature in preserving cultural memory, asserting identity, and resisting colonial narratives. Particular attention was given to Osage authors, whose works contribute significantly to the broader American literary tradition while uniquely reflecting tribal specific experiences.

After that, the chapter discussed how *Killers of the Flower Moon* was received by other critics and researchers, especially in terms of indigenous representation and colonial violence. A focused biographical overview of David Grann was also provided, tracing his evolution as a journalist and narrative historian. His investigative approach and thematic interests, particularly in lost histories, systemic violence, and human resilience, clarify the intellectual and ethical framework behind *Killers of the Flower Moon*. This was followed by a summary of *Killers of the Flower Moon*, which provided an overview of its three-part structure, recounted the key events surrounding the Osage murders, and highlighted the investigative methods Grann employed in reconstructing this overlooked chapter of American history.

Finally, the chapter transitioned into a historical contextualization of the Osage Nation, outlining their forced displacement, the discovery of oil on their land, and the violent systems of control imposed through the trustee and guardianship structures. This background is essential for comprehending the socio-political forces that underpin the events depicted in Grann's narrative.

Taken together, these sections offer a vital foundation for the postcolonial reading that follows in Chapter Two, where theories will be applied to examine how the text constructs and interrogates power, identity, and resistance.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework and Key Concepts

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework and Key Concepts

Introduction

David Grann's *Killers of the Flower Moon* carefully chronicles the dark history of how the Osage Nation was manipulated and systematically killed in the early twentieth century. The non-fiction work offers a strong base for postcolonial critique, showing the colonial systems deep inside and their long-lasting effects on the Native people. It is necessary to employ a postcolonial theoretical approach to analyze the power dynamics and cultural interactions within Grann's work. This framework helps reveal both the explicit and implicit ways in which colonial domination operates, as well as expanding our understanding of how subaltern groups respond to and resist such dominations.

To help analyze the complex layers of colonial rule and resistance in *Killers of the Flower Moon*, this chapter recalls the early postcolonial theory of Edward Said, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Edward Said's theory of Orientalism will be used in examining the construction and reinforcement of colonial identities, while Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's subaltern study will be used in examining the representation and agency of the Osage people throughout the book.

All these theoretical approaches will present a different perspective of colonialism's effects as seen in the narrative. Applying Edward Said's broader theory of Orientalism, this analysis will consider the portrayal of the Osage Nation in *Killers of the Flower Moon* as "the Other." Through an examination of the stereotypes employed to portray them, we can understand how these images serve to justify their exploitation under colonial power. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the subaltern will then be used to examine how Osage voices are spoken or silenced by the colonial discourse.

1. Postcolonialism: Definition, Origins, and Key Concepts

Postcolonialism investigates how colonialism has influenced various countries and cultures. It became popular in the 1970s as a new method for analyzing what happened when former colonial countries gained independence. Postcolonialism analyzes history and literature from the perspective of the colonized, not the colonizers. It examines the impact of colonialism on language, myth, and identity, not events that occurred after colonialism ended. Postcolonial studies are a broad and diverse field, encompassing texts from numerous regions of the globe, and not only Europe. It also considers countries overlooked in traditional studies, for example, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Canada, Australia, South Africa, and many Islamic nations. Such extensive coverage provides a more comprehensive understanding of the voice and experience of numerous formerly colonized cultures (Sawant 1). Farzanah Loonate goes on to explain that postcolonial studies refer to “the academic study of the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism, with a focus on the human consequences of control and exploitation of colonized people and their lands” (2). This definition emphasizes the enduring influence of colonialism, which continues to influence societies worldwide.

The term “postcolonialism,” especially the prefix “post,” is often misunderstood as meaning a time “after” colonialism. This is too simplistic. Postcolonialism is rather an ongoing process of undoing and reversing the aftermath of colonialism, although different nations gained independence at different points in time. Though the colonial rule was legally abolished, its legacy may still be felt in most aspects, ranging from culture and society to economy. Postcolonialism is a valuable theory to apply in examining how the colonial past continues to influence the world (Postcolonial literature 13). Scholars like Bill Ashcroft, Slemon, and Robert Young have emphasized that the prefix “post” can have different meanings. While others claim that it simply translates to “after colonialism,” others, such as Moore, protest saying that such an interpretation makes the incorrect assumption that all of colonialism’s impacts have vanished

(Rukundwa and van Aarde 1172).

The argument between the application of the terms postcolonial or post-colonial further confuses discussion in the discipline. Catherine Lynette Innes clarifies that historians often apply post-colonial, with a hyphen, to describe the period following a nation's independence. In contrast, in the field of Postcolonial Studies, which includes literary and cultural studies, the term postcolonial (without a hyphen) often refers to the consequences of colonialism from the beginning of colonization, including cultural interactions and power relationships. Innes notes that the definitions of these terms are not settled and continue to be discussed among scholars (1-2). Postcolonialism expresses itself through two primary forms: postcolonial literature and postcolonial theory/criticism (Postcolonial Literature 12).

2. Postcolonial literature

Postcolonial literature emerged as a response to centuries of European colonial rule, which started in the late 15th century and lasted until the mid-20th century. Dharmesh Kumar Sunilbhai Patel, in his article "Postcolonial Literature: Its Importance And Modern-Day Relevance," has defined postcolonial literature as a significant movement that examines the long-term impacts of colonialism on previously colonized nations (240). This literary movement challenges dominant narratives and provides a voice to marginalized perspectives, examining the complicated relationships between the colonizers and the colonized (BOUZIANE 105). Postcolonial authors employ colonial languages and indigenous languages, attempting to undermine stereotypes and challenge traditional literary forms of colonialism (Postcolonial Literature 12). Postcolonial literature takes the form of various genres, including novels, poetry, essays, and plays by authors in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, and other areas colonized by European nations (Postcolonial literature 200). The characteristics of postcolonial literature also vary according to the particular colonial experience of different regions of the world, and Asian, Caribbean, and African literature address different matters

from those addressed by literature in settler colonies such as Canada or Australia (Postcolonial Literature 238).

Notable authors of postcolonial literature are Chinua Achebe, whose novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), is considered a seminal work in the field. Achebe played a major role in shaping postcolonial literature into a distinct genre. Chinua Achebe's critique of colonialism has motivated most writers and scholars to explore the impacts of colonialism on Africa and other regions worldwide (Postcolonial Literature 16-17). His influence is large, but many other writers have also made comparable contributions to the domain. Authors like Salman Rushdie, Michael Ondaatje, Derek Walcott, J.M. Coetzee, Jamaica Kincaid, Isabel Allende, and Eavan Boland have examined various aspects of postcolonial experiences. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), for instance, investigates the complexities of post-independence India, while Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) and *Disgrace* (1999) offer nuanced critiques of colonialism and its enduring legacies in South Africa.

These writings collectively offer an understanding of the multifaceted nature of postcolonial literature. They reveal how colonialism has influenced societies and shaped the identity of the individual (Patel 241). Even as authors such as Achebe, Rushdie, and Coetzee vividly described the postcolonial concerns in their writings, a group of scholars developed the critical framework to analyze these texts and their cultural impacts. The evolution of postcolonial writing has been aided by the efforts of influential theorists such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, Anthony Appiah, Ashcroft, and Griffin (Hoque 87).

Major themes in postcolonial literature include the blending of various cultures, the search for individual identity, resistance to oppression, and the long-term effects of colonial rule (postcolonial literature 200). These themes demonstrate that the heritage of colonialism still affects society today. They contribute to our understanding of power relations, identity

construction, and cultural narratives in the modern world. This emphasizes the importance of postcolonial literature.

This overview of postcolonial literature sets the stage for our exploration of postcolonial theory. While literature shows us how writers express postcolonial ideas creatively, theory provides the analytical tools to examine these works and their broader social implications. As we move forward, we will see how postcolonial theory builds upon and complements the themes and concerns raised in postcolonial literature.

3. Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory, also known as postcolonial studies or postcolonial thought, is an academic approach that emerged in the late twentieth century to investigate how colonialism and imperialism continue to affect societies worldwide. It is applied in a variety of academic disciplines, including literature, history, and political science. Postcolonial theory developed as a response to the limitations of European-centered theories in adequately addressing the complexities of post-colonial societies and literature. As Ashcroft et al. explain in *The Empire Writes Back*, “emerges from the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing” (11). This theory recognizes that although European theories attempt to be universal, they are defined by some cultural contexts that fail to account for the diverse experiences of colonized peoples. The key points of postcolonial theory are challenging the Western-dominated worldviews of history and culture, giving voice to those who were colonized, analyzing power dynamics between former colonizers and the colonized, and exploring how colonial ideals continue to impact modern societies (postcolonial literature 26).

Scholars such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha played a crucial role in redefining the field, introducing concepts like “Orientalism,” the “Subaltern,” and “Hybridity.” Nevertheless, their approaches received serious criticism from scholars such as

Benita Parry and Aijaz Ahmad. Ahmad claims that dominant theories oversimplify “Third World” literature by concentrating mostly on European languages such as English and French while ignoring works written in indigenous languages such as Arabic, Hindi, Urdu, and Yoruba. Furthermore, Ahmad and Parry criticize the abstract nature of poststructuralist influence on postcolonial theory, including that of Spivak and Bhabha. Instead, they call on a Marxist approach to studying colonial and postcolonial relationships, highlighting the necessity for deeper and realistic frameworks for understanding the complexity of postcolonial literature and resisting ongoing forms of dominance (Innes 12).

These specific critiques align with broader debates surrounding postcolonial theory. Some scholars see it as a strong way to fight against oppression and inequality, helping people stand up against discrimination and exploitation at any time or place. However, not everyone supports this idea. Some critics believe that postcolonial theory is confusing, contradictory, or even unrealistic. They argue that it lacks a clear direction and can be ironic in the way it criticizes Western influence while relying on Western ideas (Rukundwa and van Aarde 1171). Some theorists have argued that postcolonial theory is difficult to apply because no consensus exists concerning what it defines. Slemon, basing his argument on Jacoby’s, explains that the theory has an inconsistent definition, thus making it confusing for scholars. On a similar note, Young wonders why postcolonial criticism so often uses such complex and opaque language. Other theorists, however, argue that this lack of clarity makes postcolonial studies all the more useful. Since societies are continually changing, postcolonial theory needs to remain flexible to describe new social and political realities (1172). This ongoing debate does, however, illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of postcolonial theory, showing that its evolving nature is both a point of critique and a sign of its adaptability.

4. Major Postcolonial Theorists

4.1 Edward Said

Edward Said, a Palestinian-American cultural critic and literary theorist, emerged as a prominent scholar in the field of postcolonial studies following the release of his iconic book *Orientalism* in 1978. Before this seminal work, Said was not a popular name among Western or Arab scholars. However, *Orientalism* marked a significant turning point, both in Said's scholarly reputation as well as in the field of postcolonial studies itself (Elmenfi 64). Said later expanded his ideas in other works, but *Orientalism* remains his most influential contribution to postcolonial theory.

Edward Said's academic work contradicted the ideology of "art for art's sake" in that he declared literature could not be separated from real-life experiences. His critical work consistently underscored the need to link literary analysis to what is currently occurring today in the world. The principal aim of Said was to expand the reader's knowledge and appreciation of literature in its wider social context (Elmenfi 65).

In his seminal book *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said gave a comprehensive definition of the term that has become a classic of postcolonial studies. Said's multifaceted approach to *Orientalism* can be understood through three interconnected perspectives: Firstly, Said put forth an academic definition of *Orientalism*. For him, any scholar who studies, writes, or researches the Orient, regardless of his or her particular discipline, is practicing *Orientalism*. Secondly, it was defined by Said as an ideological framework. He believed it to be a manner of thinking that creates a division between "the Orient" and "the Occident." This definition underlines how *Orientalism* builds and rebuilds a fundamental difference between Eastern and Western cultures in Western minds. Thirdly, Said presented *Orientalism* as a political tool. He defined it as a Western strategy of dominating, reconstructing, and exerting authority over the Orient. This approach highlights the power relations that exist within Western representations of Eastern

societies (Elmenfi 65).

To define his complex idea of Orientalism, Said made use of several terms that have since become central to postcolonial theory. Said used terms like ‘Orient,’ ‘Occident,’ and ‘the Other’ to analyze the power imbalance between Western and Eastern cultures. He argued that the Western discourse has historically dominated and misrepresented the East and thus produced a clear divide in which the East is represented as ‘mysterious’ and ‘backward,’ whereas the West is ‘rational’ and ‘civilized’ (Ashcroft et al. 23, qtd. in Shahadat 12).

Said’s approach to literary and cultural criticism was not developed in isolation; rather, it was deeply influenced by and in dialogue with other critical thinkers, particularly Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci. Shahadat discusses that Edward Said’s conception of Orientalism is derived from Michel Foucault’s theory of power and knowledge. For Foucault, knowledge isn’t objective; rather, it is inherently connected to power. The dominant define what knowledge is, and they use this knowledge to maintain their dominance. Said extended this tenet to describe how the Western understanding of the East was employed to maintain Western dominance. Orientalist literature, for instance, portrayed the East as strange, backward, and static, a depiction that was not just an error; it was expressly written to justify colonialism (12). Said also claimed that Orientalism was a means to control the Western perception of the “Other” (14). Since the West had control over knowledge, it thereby excluded other voices. Not only did this make their ongoing dominance easier, but it also fits Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony (19). Said’s theory is particularly useful for my analysis of the Osage Nation in *Killers of the Flower Moon*, as colonial discourse plays a crucial role in shaping how the Osage are depicted within the structures of power and knowledge.

4.2 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Edward Said’s analysis of “Orientalism” laid the foundation for the field of postcolonial studies. However, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak developed these ideas further by focusing on the

voice of the subaltern. Spivak, who was born in Calcutta, India, and later became a Renowned scholar in the United States, played an important role in connecting postcolonial theory with other areas of thought, such as Marxism, feminism, and Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction (Innes 11). Her seminal essays, including "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" and "Can the Subaltern Speak?", strongly influenced modern critical theory and helped establish her unique feminist approach in postcolonial studies.

The foundation of Spivak's theory is her sophisticated development of the concept of the "Subaltern." It was originally employed by Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Marxist theorist, who applied it initially to oppressed and powerless groups, such as peasants in southern Italy. The concept was later developed in the 1988 volume "Selected Subaltern Studies," edited by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, to include any social group that is subordinated or marginalized in society on grounds of class, caste, gender, age, or other forms of social inequality (Farahbakhsh and Khanmirzaie 32). Spivak used this military-derived term, as argued by Datta G. Sawant in his article "Perspectives on Post-colonial Theory: Said, Spivak and Bhabha", to specifically describe the marginalized status of women and to critique the literature that addresses this condition. Hans Bertens states that this application has made Spivak a pioneer of postcolonial theory with a distinctly feminist perspective, unwittingly making her the "theoretical conscience" of postcolonial studies for the last two decades (Sawant 3-4). Her significant contributions to the field extend beyond the concept of the subaltern and encompass theories of essentialism and strategic essentialism, which have become foundational to postcolonial literary and critical studies.

According to *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English*, the word "subaltern," in the case of Spivak, describes marginalized societies that have no power and no presence in history. These are people who are dominated, oppressed, or ignored by those in power. Subaltern history as a field emphasizes the need to document the histories of such

oppressed people, rather than simply voicing the opinion of the powerful (Innes 11). This approach is particularly significant, as histories have traditionally been written by those who were in power, neglecting the lives of ordinary people, colonized subjects, enslaved individuals, and indigenous peoples. In her seminal essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1994), Spivak argues that the subaltern is someone who has no way to move up in society (no class mobility) and cannot speak in such a way as to empower herself or enable herself to be heard as a real subject. That is, they do not have a voice that can bring change or be heard by those in power (Akcesme and Sayar 22). She points out that even when one from the subaltern group tries to make their view heard, as in the case of a so-called “native informant,” their voice is often adapted to meet the demands of Western or elite listeners. These subaltern representatives are considered to speak for the subaltern, yet they fail to speak for them. Instead, they occupy what Spivak describes as a “vanishing point,” a position that seems close to the subaltern but still fails to provide real access to their true experiences. Even if such critics or informants attempt to be helpful, they are still viewed by the West as exotic or other, and this makes it hard for the real subaltern voice to be understood (Maggio 427). Spivak’s theory of the subaltern applies to *Killers of the Flower Moon*, as it helps us understand how the Osage were denied a true voice and presence within both legal and narrative structures.

Conclusion

This chapter provides a solid theoretical foundation by combining Edward Said’s and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s postcolonial theories. We have developed a coherent framework for understanding colonial and postcolonial processes using Said’s theory of ‘Orientalism’ and Spivak’s investigations on ‘the subaltern.’ These ideas not only help us understand the historical and cultural context of *Killers of the Flower Moon*, yet they also set the stage for more detailed analysis in the upcoming chapter.

The insights developed in this section will have a significant role in analyzing the

narrative structure and the portrayal of individuals in Grann's book, *Killers of the Flower Moon*. The theoretical framework established in this chapter will inform our application of postcolonial criticism, enabling us to uncover hidden meanings and forms of resistance inherent in a narrative about the Osage tribe as an ethnic minority in the United States of America.

Chapter Three: Otherness, Silence, and Resistance in *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI*

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Introduction

Drawing on postcolonial theory, this chapter is a postcolonial reading of the book, emphasizing the issues of otherness, silence, and resistance. This analysis will be guided by the theoretical concepts of Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, developed in the previous chapter. Here, we shall discuss how these concepts are seen in the lives and roles of Mollie Burkhart, Anna Brown, Tom White, and William Hale. Special focus will be placed on the trustee system and how it imposed a form of colonial control over the Osage Nation, transforming them from the wealthiest people per capita into targets of systemic exploitation and brutal murder.

1. Otherness in *Killers of the Flower Moon*

In postcolonial theory, “Otherness” is a term used to describe how the colonized people are excluded from the dominant society by the imperial powers and characterized through their differences from the dominant culture. The non-European regions tend to be depicted as inferior, dangerous, and less valuable. The concept entails a double view of the “Other”; at times, they are viewed as wild, mysterious, and dangerous, and at other times, they are imagined as innocent or naive (Dimitrijovska-Jankulovska & Denkovska 47). The framework of Otherness is obviously at work in the presentation of the Osage Nation in *Killers of the Flower Moon*. Despite newfound wealth, the Osage are still marginalized and perceived as fundamentally different from white America, presented as being incapable of caring for themselves and in need of supervision.

Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism further explains how Western societies often divide the world into two parts: the “Self” (the civilized West) and the “Other” (non-Western or Indigenous people). In this way of thinking, the West considers itself modern and intelligent, while others are viewed as primitive, irrational. This ideological framework serves to justify

domination, as it casts the colonized as inherently inferior and incapable of self-governance. Orientalism is not limited to the Middle East or Asia, but is a broader way the West constructs and maintains power over any group it defines as “Other,” including Indigenous peoples like the Osage. In *Killers of the Flower Moon*, William Hale shows this colonialist mindset. He acts like he is helping the Osage people, but in reality, he is using that position to take advantage of them, treating them as if they are incapable of managing their own lives or money. This part of my analysis will focus on the theme of otherness and will explore how Hale exemplifies Orientalist thinking and how that thinking supports a broader system of colonial violence and dispossession against the Osage Nation.

1.1 William Hale a white criminal in disguise

This attitude was not only theoretical but was practiced through actions and violent acts. The United States government had started the unjust treatment of Native Americans long before the Osage murders by violating treaties and appropriating their land. In chapter four of *Killers of the Flower Moon*, Grann refers to the children’s book *Little House on the Prairie* (1935) to highlight how anti-Native attitudes were normalized in American culture. In one scene, young Laura Ingalls asks her mother why she does not like Native Americans, her mother simply answers, “I just don’t like them” (Grann 43), illustrating how prejudice was transmitted without justification. This matter-of-fact rejection illustrates how white settlers viewed Native Americans as the unwanted “Other,” despite living on their land. Children’s voices often reveal the moral contradictions that adults ignore. Laura’s confusion shows how racism is illogical; settlers disliked Indigenous people but still wished to have their land and resources. But even more revealing is the following remark from her father: “White people are going to settle all this country, and we get the best land because we get here first and take our pick” (Grann 44). In this quotation, we have encapsulated the reasoning of colonization, the belief that land can be appropriated simply because one arrives and then takes it. The book also explains the concept

of otherness, in which the Native Americans were strangers in their own country. Laura's naive questioning points out that the Osage and other Native people were not seen as equals, but rather as impediments to be eliminated.

To understand the theme of otherness and colonial rule in *Killers of the Flower Moon*, we must begin with the United States government's guardianship policy or the trustee system in the early 20th century, a policy that reflected deep-rooted colonial attitudes. The law gave white men control over Osage money, thus reflecting the common belief that Native Americans could not handle their own wealth. These beliefs defined the Osage as childish, irrational, and inferior, reinforcing a clear divide between the so-called "civilized" white Americans and the racialized "Other." As David Grann states:

Many Osage, unlike other wealthy Americans, could not spend their money as they pleased because of the federally imposed system of financial guardians... The law mandated that guardians be assigned to any American Indians whom the Department of the Interior deemed 'incompetent'. (Grann 82)

William Hale symbolizes the Orientalist viewpoint of the exploitable and incompetent Native person, illustrating how the theme of otherness justified his criminal actions. He is not only a criminal in David Grann's *Killers of the Flower Moon* but a symbol of white colonial power disguised as friendship. Known as the "King of the Osage Hills," Hale had built a public image as a kind and beneficent friend to the Osage, as Grann describes, "Mollie Burkhart and many others considered him Osage County's greatest benefactor. He aided the Osage before they were flush with oil money, donating to charities and schools, and a hospital" (30). However, this appearance of kindness was merely a disguise. Beneath the surface, Hale views the Osage not as equals but as individuals who are exploited for his own personal gain. His kind and helpful behavior made him look trustworthy, allowing him to mastermind a complicated plot of murder and theft. According to Edward Said, colonial power frequently disguises itself

as caring. Hale's actions show that white control was maintained not simply through violence, but also through manipulation, betrayal, and strategic use of institutional authority.

Once he was a trusted friend and benefactor, William Hale planned one of the most violent conspiracies of terror in American history against the Osage Nation because they were rich in oil. The following statement by Earnest Burkhart describes Hale as, "the best man you 'ever saw until after you found him out and knowed him,' ... But the longer you stayed around him, he'd get to you. 'He'd beat you some way'" (Grann 197). The line, 'He'd beat you some way.' perfectly captures Hale's two-sided nature. While he was outwardly charming, he was a manipulator who used trust as a weapon.

Hale's true nature is also revealed through his manipulation of family relationships. He arranges the marriage of his nephew, Ernest Burkhart, to Mollie, a full-blood Osage woman, then increasingly causes the death of her relatives, thus ensuring that her headrights (oil money) are inherited by Ernest and eventually controlled by Hale himself. He hired killers to murder Anna Brown, had Rita Smith's house bombed, and plotted the poisonings and shootings of other Osage individuals, such as Henry Roan, a former wife of Mollie, on whom he had taken out a life insurance policy. Mollie herself nearly died from slow poisoning, which had been set up by Hale and his nephew, Ernest.

Crucially, Hale did not act alone. The crimes were supported by others in power, including local doctors, James and David Shoun, who played a crucial role in covering up the killings and facilitating the ongoing exploitation of the Osage Nation. An example was when Anna Brown's body was discovered with a bullet wound in the back of her head, Dr. James Shoun lied about her death, claiming she died of alcohol poisoning. The Shoun brothers also contributed to Mollie's illness by continuing to give her insulin poisoning. This indicates that Hale's impact was not limited to violence. He also relied on a group of corrupt professionals, including doctors, attorneys, and officials, who helped him cover up the murders and maintain

control. Many others in town, including bankers, businessmen, and even police officers, took part. They all benefited financially and politically by the guardianship system and the killings of the Osage people.

William Hale's actions and words throughout *Killers of the Flower Moon* make it clear that he did not see the Osage as human beings deserving of respect, but rather as obstacles or opportunities for personal profit. Hale's statements reveal this mindset. For instance, in one quotation, Hale freely complains about the legal barriers to his buying mineral rights from the Osage, suggesting that he regarded these laws as unjust, not due to their harmful impact on the Osage, but because they were blocking his profit: "I, like many other good men, believed it would be only a short time until Congress would pass a law permitting every educated Indian who had his certificate of competency to sell or convey his or her mineral rights to whom they wished" (Grann 163). This quote reveals Hale's belief that he should be entitled to buy Osage property and that legal protections were unjust barriers to his profit, not protection for Osage rights.

Burkhart's testimony also exposes how Hale reduced people, even his family members, for money. When Burkhart objected to killing everyone in the house, Hale replied: "What do you care? Your wife will get the money" (Grann 193). This sentence perfectly illustrates Said's concept of how colonial ideology destroys humanity and individuality. Mollie, her family members, and other Osage are not human beings to Hale, they are merely wealth.

William Hale's silence and lack of remorse following his conviction reflect his personality and state of mind. Despite strong proof that he was the mastermind behind the Osage killings, Hale never admitted guilt or expressed sorrow. "No, sir," (Grann 223) replied blankly when the judge asked if he had anything to say, exposing a man who did not see his crimes as morally wrong, but a "business proposition" (Grann 230). This cold, calculated attitude removes any illusion of regret. A psychological evaluation reconfirmed that Hale "has put

behind any feeling of shame or repentance” (Grann 230) and described “‘extremely vicious components in his make-up’” (Grann 230). What makes Hale’s actions even more disturbing is the contrast between his inner cruelty and the respectable image he presented to the world. As Grann writes, “Cloaking his savagery under the banner of civilization, Hale portrayed himself as an American pioneer who had helped forge a nation out of the raw wilderness” (Grann 230). This quotation demonstrates how Hale took advantage of the idea of the civilized man to justify exploitation and brutality. This is a typical way that colonizers have used false concepts of “civilization” to hide their crimes and to portray themselves as heroic.

This false image also connects to Hale’s belief that “money will buy the protection or acquittal of any man for any crime in Osage County” (Grann 198). This shows how he not only felt superior to the Osage but also to the law. He felt entitled by his money and status to do anything, including murder, and not be punished. His confidence in using money to escape justice shows how he controlled both the legal system and public opinion through power and hegemony.

Even after being imprisoned, Hale never expressed regret. He once wrote a letter from prison to a member of the Osage tribe. In his letter, he wrote:

‘I am in perfect health. I weigh 185 lbs. I haven’t got a grey hair.’ When he got out of jail, he said, he hoped to return to the reservation: ‘I had rather live at Gray Horse than any place on earth.’ And he insisted, ‘I will always be the Osages’ true Friend’” (Grann 268).

These words are shocking because Hale pretended as though nothing was wrong. He acted like they were friends, even though he was involved in the conspiracy of the murders of numerous Osage individuals. His tone shows that he was attempting to act gentle and innocent, after everything he had done.

Later, after he was released from prison, Hale was not allowed to return to Oklahoma.

Yet, some relatives reported that he returned to see them anyway and stated: “If that damn Ernest had kept his mouth shut we’d be rich today” (Grann 249). This reveals that Hale was still worried about money, more than the lives he had destroyed. He was not remorseful; rather, he blamed others for not remaining silent. His words demonstrate how he viewed the Osage people as opportunities to be wealthy, not as human beings. This type of mindset comes from colonial ideas where the powerful exploited land, wealth, and lives of Indigenous peoples without regard for the pain they caused.

The book *Killers of the Flower Moon* additionally reveals white men’s highly racist language and attitudes toward the Osage people. The terms “rich redskin,” “red millionaires,” “squaw,” and “wild Indians” were widespread, alongside broader stereotypes that labeled the Osage and other Native Americans as “lazy, pathetic, cowardly, dissipated” (Grann 119). Even cruel racial insults were used, such as the remark “It was as black as a nigger” (18). These phrases demonstrate a social perception that denied the legitimacy or naturalness of the Osage wealth.

In our opinion, the case of William Hale clearly shows how dangerous it is when power and trust are used to control others. The Osage were treated unfairly simply because they were seen as different and incapable, a clear example of the theme of otherness. But the real question is: would the Osage have gone through the same suffering if they had not been rich? The answer is yes. They were already treated unjustly long before the discovery of oil. They had been forcibly removed from their lands and relocated several times, and many died along the way. This shows that the roots of injustice were already in place. However, their wealth brought national attention. The presence of money made the violence more visible and more extreme, but the deeper issue, the colonial mindset and Orientalist view that saw them as inferior, would still have existed.

In addition to being seen as “other,” the Osage also faced a deeper problem: they were

silenced. Their pain was often ignored, and their voices were pushed aside, which brings us to the next theme: silence.

2. The Theme of Silences in *Killers of the Flower Moon*

Silence can be made to appear so simple a concept, such as the absence of sound or doing nothing, and keeping quiet. However, silence carries significant emotional weight, tension, and meaning. In postcolonial studies, silence is a common motif that expresses itself in the voicelessness and marginality of the colonized. It is a sign of powerlessness or oppression and signifies the way that individuals are ignored or denied the use of their voices. Here, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's seminal essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", is essential. Spivak discusses how colonial powers silence the most oppressed individuals, whom she calls "subalterns." She asks the question, "Can the subaltern speak?" highlighting the essential issue of whether the oppressed ever have a chance to speak for themselves instead of being ignored through the voices of the powerful.

Silence is employed throughout *Killers of the Flower Moon* as a symbol for the colonization of the Osage Nation by colonial institutions, such as the trustee system. This is particularly observed in the lives of female women such as Mollie Burkhart and Anna Brown, who are silenced physically and emotionally. Silence, however, as the narrative unfolds, is not the absence of speech, but evolves into a language in itself, revealing truths that words cannot express.

2.1 Mollie Burkhart and the Dilemma of Silence

In *Killers of the Flower Moon*, Mollie Burkhart stands as a central figure whose silence is deeply symbolic. Her silence is both personal and political, functioning as a mirror to the historical violence enacted upon the Osage people. Here, we will explore how Mollie's silences operates on two interconnected levels: emotional silence and systematic silencing. Through her silence, she becomes a postcolonial image of the subaltern.

2.1.1 Emotional Silence

Mollie Burkhart is the central figure in *Killers of the Flower Moon*. She is a wealthy Osage woman whose family becomes the main target of a series of murders known as the Osage Reign of Terror. She represents the Osage Nation's collective pain. Her silence is not merely personal or passive; it is a complex emotional reaction to layers of betrayal, sadness, and fear. From the beginning of the narrative, Mollie loses her family members one after another. First, her sister Minnie dies under unclear circumstances, raising unsettling questions that remain unanswered. Then, her older sister Anna Brown disappears, only to be discovered murdered, shot in the back of the head; a brutal crime that profoundly affects Mollie. The tragedies continue as her mother, Lizzie Q, dies of illness and leaves Mollie without a vital source of strength and guidance. Then her younger sister Rita Smith, her husband Bill, and their servant Nettie Brookshire are all brutally murdered in a devastating explosion at their home, an incident that highlights the intentional targeting of the Osage. To make matters even more devastating, Mollie also loses her young daughter, Anna, whose death adds to the deep pain and suffering she is already facing. Mollie witnesses the deaths of almost her whole family. Throughout the book, she does not openly show her anger or sadness. This quietness is not a sign of weakness; rather, it demonstrates emotional strength and self-preservation.

From the very first chapter, silence is used to capture Mollie's emotional world. When her sister Anna disappears, Grann writes, "When Anna came inside, she liked to slip off her shoes, and Mollie missed the comforting sound of her moving, unhurried, through the house. Instead, there was a silence as still as the plains" (7). This silence is long and unnatural, hanging over Mollie when she realizes her sister Anna is not present; It is not just the lack of sound, it is the absence of Anna herself, which causes Mollie anxiety and dread. The silence in her house feels strange, like a warning that something horrible has happened. Without the typical noises of Anna moving around, sliding off her shoes, or laughing, the silence is much more terrible and obvious. It mirrors the uncertainty and fear growing inside Mollie.

In many Indigenous cultures, silence is a way of expressing dignity and maintaining emotional control in the face of hardship. Mollie's silence follows this tradition. Her quietness symbolizes profound pain and trauma and echoes the historical silencing of Indigenous women. Even when she is slowly being poisoned, she chooses to remain quiet about her suspicions rather than speaking out. Her quietness indicates her fear and sense of isolation. She does not yet trust the people around her enough to openly express her fears; thus, she chooses to reveal them to her priest alone, someone she believes she can trust. As Grann writes, "Then, in late 1925, the local priest received a secret message from Mollie. Her life, she said, was in danger" (104). This moment shows that Mollie is starting to understand the danger around her. This idea comes back many times in the book as she slowly learns the truth about who killed her family. Her fear of food, along with her admission of fear, demonstrates that she knows something is seriously wrong, yet she prefers to keep this information back to protect herself from further danger. Grann elaborates on this fear when he notes, "Soon after, the priest reported that he had received a secret message from Mollie: she was afraid that someone was trying to poison her. Given that poisoned whiskey had been one of the killers' preferred methods..." (Grann 185). Mollie's fear of being poisoned connects to earlier cases of violence, like the deaths of Anna Brown and Rita Smith. It shows that these murders were not random but part of a bigger conspiracy to harm the Osage people.

Mollie Burkhart's emotional silence reaches its deepest and most painful point when she finds out that her husband, Ernest, helped kill her family and even tried to poison her. She remains mostly quiet. Mollie's emotional silence is powerfully depicted:

Many people in the gallery gossiped about an Osage woman who was sitting on one of the benches, quiet and alone. It was Mollie Burkhart, cast out from the two worlds that she'd always straddled: whites, loyal to Hale, shunned her, while many Osage ostracized her for bringing the killers among them and for remaining loyal to Ernest. Reporters

portrayed her as an ‘ignorant squaw.’ The press hounded her for a statement, but she refused to give one (Grann 206).

This silence is further highlighted in moments of grief and tension, such as when Mollie sits in the courtroom: “The courtroom was still. Mollie Burkhart looked on, listening” (211).

And after her daughter’s burial, her wordless endurance is clear: “She sat down in the gallery by herself, not saying a word, just listening” (212).

This is not a silence rooted in ignorance; it is a silence born of total emotional devastation. She had trusted Ernest deeply. Grann captures Mollie’s denial and heartbreak when she insists, “‘No,’ she said adamantly. But she couldn’t, wouldn’t, believe that Ernest had been involved in such a plot. Later, a writer quoted her saying, ‘My husband is a good man, a kind man. He wouldn’t have done anything like that. And he wouldn’t hurt anyone else, and he wouldn’t ever hurt me.’” (197) This moment reflects how her love and trust blinded her to the betrayal happening around her.

Her silence in this moment shows her deep sadness and heartbreak. It is a heavy silence, one that words cannot explain. Mollie had trusted Ernest with all her heart, and it is hard for her to believe he could hurt her. This makes her silence even more powerful; it is a quiet reaction to a deep betrayal, a pain too overwhelming to express aloud.

2.1.2 Systematic Silencing

Systematic silence serves as a mechanism through which Mollie Burkhart and, by extension, the Osage Nation, are actively marginalized or erased by larger social, legal, and historical forces. In contrast to emotional silence, which may be based on personal or psychological aspects, systematic silence is externally enforced by those in authority, intent on excluding, controlling, and silencing the voices of the oppressed. Through Mollie’s story, David Grann illustrates how colonial systems aim to suppress Indigenous voices, particularly those of women.

To begin with, Mollie was silenced by authority and institutions. This silence is not a personal or cultural aspect but rather the result of institutionalized racism, sexism, and colonial dominance that tried to erase Indigenous voices, particularly those of Indigenous women. Despite her direct connection to numerous victims, Mollie was largely overlooked during the official investigation into the Osage murders. This is evident when the lead investigator with the FBI, Tom White, takes up the case. He is surprised that agents who worked on the case previously did not interview Mollie more, particularly since most of her relatives are victims of the Reign of Terror. Grann reveals in the book that Agent White was surprised by how poorly the case had been handled, particularly the exclusion of Mollie, one of the victims' closest relatives, from the investigation. As Grann writes, "Surprisingly, agents hadn't spoken to Lizzie's surviving daughter, Mollie Burkhart" (116). Yet another quotation highlights this neglect: "At the inquest, while Mollie seemed eager to answer every question, to make sure that nothing was missed, the justice of the peace and the jurors asked her barely anything. Perhaps they discounted her because of prejudice—because she was an Osage and a woman" (33). This disregard for Mollie was not merely an oversight; it was due to the prevalent prejudices of the time. People judged her based on her social class, gender, and race.

Another example of systematic silencing was through the legal mechanism of the trustee or guardianship system. This system was meant to "protect" Native Americans by managing their money, but it was used to control and exploit their wealth. Instead of protecting them, it made it harder for them to speak up or make their own decisions. Mollie, like many Osage people, is declared legally "incompetent" to manage her own money. This is made clear in Chapter Five when Grann writes:

The U.S. government, contending that many Osage were unable to handle their money, had required the Office of Indian Affairs to determine which members of the tribe it considered capable of managing their trust funds. Over the tribe's vehement objections,

many Osage, including Lizzie and Anna, were deemed “incompetent,” and were forced to have a local white guardian overseeing and authorizing all of their spending, down to the toothpaste they purchased at the corner store. One Osage who had served in World War I complained, “I fought in France for this country, and yet I am not allowed even to sign my own checks.” The guardians were usually drawn from the ranks of the most prominent white citizens in Osage County. (Grann 61)

This quote illustrates how the trustee system was used as a tool of oppression, based on greed and racism. It was used to exploit and oppress the Osage Nation, making them powerless in their own nation. The white guardians symbolize hegemonic control, since they were given absolute control over the Osage’s fortunes, even though it came from oil discovered on their lands. Although the Osage were among the wealthiest individuals in America during that era, they were not able to manage their money independently. Rather, white guardians made decisions in all aspects of their finances, from major purchases to minor essentials such as toothpaste. The U.S. government had the Osage declared “incompetent,” showing the racist attitude that white individuals were more competent with money. This is a classic instance of a colonial mentality in which Indigenous individuals are viewed as second-class and incapable of self-governance. The system not only exploited the Osage people economically but also humiliated them. The fact that Osage individuals, such as Lizzie and Anna, were labeled “incompetent” despite their objections illustrates the inherent unfairness of the system, which was designed to maintain white supremacy. As a whole, this system shows how Native Americans were treated as second-class citizens, even those who had served their country.

2.2 Anna Brown’s Silence

Anna Brown was a woman of the Osage Nation and one of Lizzie Q.’s four daughters. She was Rita Smith’s and Mollie Burkhart’s sister. Anna Brown is also listed as one of the initial victims of the Osage Reign of Terror. Her passing is a mark of literal as well as

metaphoric silence. It is a powerful example of how colonial brutality silences subaltern perspectives. Anna was murdered in May 1921; her body was discovered in a remote ravine in northern Oklahoma. She had been shot in the back of the head. In chapter one, the moment her family identifies her remains is described:

Mollie and Rita arrived and stepped close to the body. The stench was overwhelming. Vultures circled obscenely in the sky. It was hard for Mollie and Rita to discern if the face was Anna's; there was virtually nothing left of it, but they recognized her Indian blanket and the clothes that Mollie had washed for her. Then Rita's husband, Bill, took a stick and pried open her mouth, and they could see Anna's gold fillings. "That is sure enough, Anna," Bill said. (Grann 18)

This quote clarifies that Anna is not just dead, but she has been erased. Her face is unrecognizable, her voice is gone, and her identity is reduced to other people's memories. She cannot speak for herself; thus, it is left to others to speak for her, as Bill does when he identifies her through her gold fillings. This painful moment reflects how even in death, the Osage were denied dignity and silenced. Anna's body thus becomes a powerful symbol of all the Osage victims whose voices were suppressed or erased by a system that considered them as less than human beings. Her murder and the tragic way it is discovered illustrate how colonial violence silences the subaltern, leaving only fragments of their existence.

Gayatri Spivak's seminal question, "Can the subaltern speak?" is profoundly applicable to Anna. As an Indigenous woman, Anna is the subaltern whose voices are structurally silenced by dominant power and historical records. Her life is not narrated in her own voice but is instead reconstructed by others, thereby highlighting how colonial systems not only devastate lives but also control who gets the opportunity to be heard and remembered. Anna's body becomes a powerful symbol for all the Osage victims whose voices have been silenced, those who have been erased or forgotten by a system that sees them as invisible. How her existence is confirmed

by gold fillings not only shows how colonial violence wipes out voice, agency, and humanity, leaving only traces behind.

Mollie describes Anna's disappearance as silence that fills their house, which is "silence as still as the plains" (Grann 7). The silence becomes a haunting presence in both Mollie's life and the broader Osage story. Anna's disappearance brought about more than just physical silence; it also brought about an emotional emptiness in her household. Anna's disappearance made everything feel unsettled, and her loved ones were left with open-ended questions and a deep sense of loss.

Following the death of Anna Brown, the forces that silenced her in life still worked to silence her more profoundly in death. Early on, Anna Brown's disappearance was not given much attention, either by society in general or, more importantly, by her own family. Known for her "sprees," which involved nights of drinking and partying that lasted into the early morning hours, Anna was often seen as irresponsible by her family, who viewed her behavior with disapproval. Due to this reputation, her family likely thought that her disappearance was simply another case of her normal behavior and expected her to return eventually, as she had done before. As Grann points out, "Anna had disappeared three days earlier. She had often gone on 'sprees,' as her family disparagingly called them: dancing and drinking with friends until dawn. But this time one night had passed, and then another, and Anna had not shown up on Mollie's front stoop as she usually did," (Grann 7). This shows that even within her own family, Anna was judged based on her actions and not recognized as an individual at risk. Mollie, while she shared a close relationship with her sister, was torn initially between concern and acceptance of Anna's unpredictable behavior.

Even after her body was discovered, Anna remains silent, not as a victim whose life matters but as an issue to be dealt with silently. Her murder was violent, but worse than that was what followed; total absence of concern on the part of the white authorities, who did not

receive her murder with the seriousness, respect, or urgency it warranted. As Grann discusses in chapter two, “No other evidence was collected. The lawmen were untrained in forensic methods and didn’t make a cast impression of the tire marks, or dust the bottle for fingerprints, or check Anna’s body for gunpowder residue. They didn’t even photograph the crime scene, which, in any case, had already been contaminated by the many observers” (Grann 24). This means that the authorities did not bother to discover who killed Anna and for what reason. Their failure to act is a way of silencing her even in death. Not only is Anna physically erased, but she is erased from justice, memory, and public concern. This is proof of the ideas presented by Gayatri Spivak in her subaltern theory. As explained in the theoretical background, the subaltern woman is left out of history, denied subjectivity, and represented by the powerful. Anna was not recalled for who she was; rather, she was defined by the authorities as irresponsible and reckless.

The investigation into her murder showed little interest in her humanity. In the end, Anna’s story was no longer hers to tell; it became yet another example of how colonial structures silence the voices of those they harm. Spivak’s claim that the subaltern cannot speak their experiences is demonstrated here, not because of Anna’s absence of agency, but because those in power did not want to hear.

As demonstrated in *Killers of the Flower Moon*, it became increasingly clear that the Osage did not simply remain silent; the system actively enforced their silence, making it evident that it was not a choice but something that was systematically imposed. After witnessing so many brutal murders, fear became a language in itself. Every Osage person knew their turn might come next, and this fear made silence the only option. Even when they did not wish to remain silent, the system, powerful, racist, and manipulative, forced that silence upon them. They were buried under a system meant to repress them, and they had learned to believe in their white guardians, many of whom betrayed their trust.

Some people would say the Osage should have spoken out or fought back more. We often wonder why the Osage did not say anything, but that question ignores the weight of the world they lived in. In a time when every institution, law, and stereotype was against them, it was almost impossible to speak out. What this reveals is that silence became a weapon, but not for the oppressed; rather, for the oppressors. even someone like Mollie, intelligent and well-educated, was declared incompetent because of her race. This reveals a deeper truth: white guardians feared the potential of the Osage. They feared what they might become, so they created systems, like the trustee system, to make them powerless, to control their money, their decisions, and their futures. unfortunately, the institutions only worked to reinforce the system.

Having seen how silence was imposed upon the Osage, one might wonder: Did they ever fight back? Were there moments of resistance, even in the face of such a violent system? In the following section, we will examine whether the Osage, despite being silenced, attempted to resist and oppose the oppressive forces that surrounded them. Did they even try to fight for their survival, or was resistance something they could only dream of?

3.The Theme of Resistance in *Killers of the Flower Moon*

In *Killers of the Flower Moon*, resistance is a powerful theme underlying the Osage fight for survival. Though they were oppressed and systematically silenced during the Reign of Terror, the Osage did not passively surrender. Rather, they resisted in various ways, even though their resistance was often small or hidden. In this section, we will analyze whether the Osage fought to preserve their way of life and assert their cultural identity even in the face of immense pressure to assimilate. We will further look at the forms of resistance they used and if their efforts were enough to protect their community from the forces of greed, violence, and colonial dominance that wanted to eliminate them.

The Osage Nation, once known as the wealthiest Native Americans due to the discovery of oil on their territory, encountered several issues as a result of their wealth. It attracted selfish

foreigners, white settlers, businessmen, and even local authorities who sought to take their money using any means necessary, including marriage, fraud, and murder. As we have already seen, the Osage were systematically silenced through legal systems like the trustee system, through violence, and fear, leaving them with almost no way to speak out or defend their rights, which was exactly the government's goal. However, David Grann's book shows moments when the Osage tried to resist this system. During the devastating period of the Reign of Terror, many Osages were slaughtered without explanation, while others lived in constant fear that they might be next. Through the bravery of figures such as Mollie Burkhart, the determination of other Osage families, and the efforts of the Tribal Council, the Osage demonstrated small but powerful acts of resistance against those forces attempting to control them.

3.1 Personal Resistance: Mollie Burkhart's Fight for Justice

Mollie Burkhart shows a quieter but strong form of defiance within the broader theme of resistance in *Killers of the Flower Moon*. Mollie suffers unimaginable losses; her entire family was murdered, and she discovers that her husband, Ernest, and his uncle, Hale, who pretended to be a friend helping her, were involved in betraying her and the Osage community. As previously discussed, Mollie remains silent in the face of her trauma; this silence can be understood as a form of resistance. In a dangerous and oppressive environment, choosing when and how to speak was itself an act of survival. Mollie's silence was not just a reaction to her grief, but a protective way to protect her remaining family and herself emotionally. She did not want to be seen as a victim, as we see in the book when it says, "Mollie was not one who liked to be seen as a victim" (Grann 196). However, while she remained silent, she did not remain passive. She tried to do something to resist the forces around her in her own way. Here, we will highlight specific quotes from the book that demonstrate how Mollie made efforts to resist the system and sought justice for her family through specific actions.

"After the third night, Mollie, in her quiet but forceful way, pressed everyone into

action. She dispatched Ernest to check on Anna's house" (Grann 16). This quote is significant as it reveals many things about Mollie's experience and how she handles difficult situations. Mollie is concerned about what happened to her sister, Anna Brown, and as she waits, no one else appears to be doing anything. Rather than waiting for someone else, such as her husband, Ernest, or the police, to figure out what happened to Anna, Mollie takes matters into her own hands. She does not allow Bryan's denial or the situation's complexity to discourage her. By sending Ernest to Anna's home to make inquiries, Mollie takes clear and strong action. The phrase "quiet but forceful way" highlights that Mollie's strength does not come from being loud or demanding. Instead, she shows her strength through quiet but determined actions. She is strong because she is capable of doing things without being loud or aggressive. This shows Mollie's strength and her silent opposition to the injustices she faces, even though she cannot control everything, she soundly refuses to be passive in the face of trouble.

Mollie's personal efforts were only the beginning; she also took her fight to the authorities, as shown in the following quote: "Mollie pressed the authorities to investigate Anna's murder, but most officials seemed to have little concern for what they deemed a "dead Injun." So Mollie turned to Ernest's uncle, William Hale" (Grann 29). This quote shows that Mollie was not passive; she did not just sit back. The phrase "Mollie pressed the authorities" shows that she was not making a polite request. The word "pressed" suggests that Mollie actively pushed, insisted on, and repeatedly demanded an investigation into Anna's death. This word choice highlights Mollie's agency and persistence. Still, the fact that "most officials seemed to have little concern" shows that the authorities were careless and did not conduct a serious investigation. They had little to no effort in pursuing evidence and interviewing witnesses, just because Anna was Osage. They also called her a "dead Injun," an insulting and dehumanizing name for Native Americans. This was a reflection of the racism the Native people received, a perception that their lives were not as valuable as those of whites. In including this

sentence, the writer emphasizes the institutionalized prejudice that made it nearly impossible for the Osage to get justice. Mollie was fighting not only for her sister but also against an entire system of racism and indifference.

Since the authorities let Mollie down, she did not give up. Instead, she turned to another way of finding justice by turning to William Hale, a highly respected man in society due to his kindness and power. Mollie did not know Hale was one of the prime conspirators.

Mollie's refusal to back down on Anna is the Osage Nation's refusal to back down. Despite racism and betrayal, she continued to fight. What we learn in this moment is that resistance takes many forms. Sometimes it is speaking up when no one will listen, and sometimes it is discovering creative ways to resist, like Mollie did.

However, informing the police of their suspicions and waiting for them to investigate did not bring any real results; therefore, Mollie decided to use what she believed was the most effective way to motivate the white authorities: money. As the book states, "To prod investigators, Mollie's family issued a statement saying that because of "the foulness of the crime" and "the dangers that exist to other people," they were offering a \$2,000 cash reward for any information leading to the apprehension of those responsible. The Whitehorn family also offered a \$2,500 reward for the capture of Charles's murderers" (Grann 59). Months passed without any sincere investigation, and Mollie knew that financial rewards were one of the limited ways to bring attention and ask for justice. She and her family were not alone in doing so; the Whitehorn family also offered a large reward for information that would lead to the arrest of Charles's killers. Charles Whitehorn was one of the earliest Osage victims, murdered at the same time as Anna Brown. This event highlights the tragic reality that money, not justice or human dignity, was the only thing capable of making the authorities respond, and in so doing, the deep racism and indifference confronted by the Osage.

At another point in the book, the field agent of the Office of Indian Affairs described

Mollie as “willing to do everything she can in order to... bring the guilty parties to justice” (Grann 33). This statement captures Mollie’s determination and courage in seeking justice. Despite the fear and sorrow that accompanied the death of her family members, she did not let these emotions get in her way. Rather, she remained actively involved in the investigation. For example, she attended a hearing in Fairfax and provided important testimony about her awareness of the situation. This quote highlights her commitment to seeing the guilty brought to justice, demonstrating that she would overcome any obstacles in pursuit of justice.

3.2 Collective Resistance: The Osage Tribe’s Struggle Against Oppression

In addition to individual acts of resistance like Mollie’s, the Osage Tribal Council made collective efforts to resist the injustices that they were experiencing. In 1923, after the Smith bombing, the Council resolved that “prompt and strenuous action be taken to capture and punish the criminals...” (Grann 102). Furthermore, they requested “the services of the Department of Justice in capturing and prosecuting the murderers of the members of the Osage Tribe” (Grann 102). The Osage leaders understood that local law enforcement was corrupt and ineffective so they sought justice elsewhere. The Osage Tribal Council made a unified decision to find help beyond their tribal boundaries. The Osage people officially requested that the Department of Justice step in and examine the murders that were specifically targeting their people.

The Tribal Council, as the voice of the entire Osage Nation, issued a formal resolution that rejected remaining silent or passive in the encounter with violence and injustice. By turning to a higher, more powerful institution, the Osage demonstrated a strong act of collective resistance, using their official authority to demand justice and protection.

The Tribal Council’s courageous act played a crucial role. The newly formed FBI entered the case because of their actions and became essential for solving the murders and revealing the conspiracy that led to the Reign of Terror. The Osage leaders’ willingness to resist

and challenge local corruption, take their cause to the federal government, and seek justice is a strong example of organized resistance and the fight for justice.

The declaration of the latest hereditary chief of the Osage Tribe is another powerful illustration of collective resistance, just like the Osage Tribal Council's resolution demanding federal intervention due to the Smith bombing. Whereas the Council concentrated on revealing the murders aimed at their citizens, the hereditary chief spoke about another, different yet equally devastating form of systemic oppression: the guardianship system.

It is widely known that following the U.S. government's institution of new legislation in 1921, the Osage people, particularly those referred to as "full-bloods," such as Mollie, were under strict financial control. In response to this, the last hereditary addressed the public through a press statement, speaking not just to the government but to the American public and those individuals taking advantage of the Osage people. He spoke his mind not just for himself, but on behalf of the entire tribe, showing his bravery in speaking up for the truth. In his statement, the chief declared:

We have many little children," the last hereditary chief of the tribe, who was in his eighties, explained in a statement issued to the press. "We want to raise them and educate them. We want them to be comfortable, and we do not want our money held up from us by somebody who cares nothing for us." He went on, "We want our money now. We have it. It is ours, and we don't want some autocratic man to hold it up so we can't use it....It is an injustice to us all. We do not want to be treated like a lot of little children. We are men and able to take care of ourselves (Grann 84).

In making his message public, he stood up to injustice with determination and demanded fair treatment for his people. When the chief states, "We want our money now. We have it. It is ours," he is asserting ownership and making it clear that the Osage people had every right to their own money, which was money they had gained from oil profits. These were theirs, not the

governments or any guardians. In asserting, “We are men and capable of taking care of ourselves,” he firmly rejects the idea that the Osage needed to be controlled like helpless children. He insists that the Osage were not weak, but rather fully capable of managing their own lives, thereby denying the racist and paternalistic belief that the government or guardians knew better than the Osage themselves. than that of the Osage themselves.

The chief went on to emphasize that not only was the government’s handling of Osage money unjust, but it also caused significant harm. He explained that the Osage wanted to educate and develop their children and live a comfortable life; however, the restrictions prevented their access to their funds when needed. He stated that these policies have caused severe issues, like additional hardship in being able to pay for education or hospital bills. This illustrates how the guardianship system was not only a means of control; it was negatively affecting the lives and futures of the Osage individuals.

Mollie, being a full-blooded Osage, was also directly impacted by these restrictions. Even though her husband, Ernest, was her guardian and managed her money, she was still under extreme restrictions to access her funds.

In sum, the chief’s statement is a powerful declaration of respect, independence, and justice. It is an act of courage as well as strength at a time when Native American voices were often silenced or dismissed. In taking a firm stand and declaring confidently, “We are men,” the chief rejected the government’s control over the Osage people’s lives and the oppressive system of guardianship. He made an undeniable stand against injustice by speaking publicly, demanding fair treatment for his people.

Even though the Osage resistance proved that they would fight back, they did not do so alone. A few who did not belong to their group, like Tom White, were significant in their struggle against injustice as well.

3.3 Tom White, an FBI Agent Resisting Corruption

“Too much credit cannot be given these gentlemen” (Grann 214). This powerful statement, made by the attorney general of Oklahoma concerning Tom White and his team in 1926, followed the confession made by Ernest Burkhart in the Osage murder cases. It reflects not only gratitude but also significant acknowledgment of their contributions. Yet behind this brief statement is a long tale of resistance.

White was a Texas Ranger turned special agent for the Bureau of Investigation, which later became the FBI. He was assigned by J. Edgar Hoover to head the federal investigation of the Osage killings in the early 1920s. By the time Tom White took charge of the investigation of the Osage killings, the case had become a symbol of systemic failure. The local authorities had either been bribed, threatened, or were part of the criminal network. White’s investigation soon exposed this harsh reality. As David Grann puts it, “He soon uncovered that there had been a conspiracy to obstruct justice, including bribes and perjury” (Grann 220). This shows that powerful people were working together to cover up the truth, manipulate witnesses, and prevent the legal system from protecting the Osage. White, however, refused to be a part of this corrupt system. One of the most powerful explanations of Tom White’s method is included in the book itself. David Grann explains: “As White strove to be a modern evidence man, he had to learn many new techniques, but the most useful one was timeless: coldly, methodically separating hearsay from facts that he could prove... White needed to weed out half facts and build an indubitable narrative based on what he called an ‘unbroken chain of evidence’” (Grann 117-118). This means that White did not listen to rumors or make emotional decisions. Rather, he carefully concentrated on what could be confirmed. This quotation illustrates his refusal to give in to the corruption and the chaos surrounding him. Where others ignored the truth or were easily influenced, White chose to follow a strict, honest process, and that’s what helped him succeed.

His tactics, integrity, and persistence in standing up to local corruption started to change the environment of the case. As noted in a message from a Justice Department prosecutor to J. Edgar Hoover stated that “in the few months since White had assumed command of the investigation, many new angles of these cases were successfully developed and a new and enthusiastic spirit seemed to pervade the hearts of all of us” (Grann 166). This reveals that, through White’s leadership, the investigators discovered new leads and evidence that had been ignored before, and this gave the team a sense of hope and optimism for the first time in many years. He established a new culture for the FBI team, a culture that maintained hope in the possibility of justice in a world largely defined by colonial violence and white supremacy.

The most heartfelt recognition, however, came from the Osage themselves. The Osage Tribal Council was the only governing body to publicly recognize and honor the efforts of White and his team. In a formal resolution, the Council declared: “We express our sincere gratitude for the splendid work done in the matter of investigating and bringing to justice the parties charged” (Grann 255). This spoke to the profound gratitude of the Osage people, who had been exploited and dehumanized by outsiders for so long. The Osage Tribal Council’s resolution shows just how important Tom White’s work was to the community. Where other officials were silent, perhaps not wanting to take responsibility for their failures or complicity, this was a genuine expression of relief and appreciation from a people who had finally seen justice served. To the Osage, White’s integrity and persistence were more than professional attributes; they were hope, dignity, and a restoration of faith in a system that had betrayed them for so long.

This is proof that resistance does not necessarily mean fighting back verbally; other times it is standing up and doing what one believes is correct. Tom White did not seek fame; he resisted corruption by refusing to accept bribes, protecting key witnesses like Henry Roan’s widow, and building a strong case that served justice to the Osage. He resisted the system that

had allowed the crimes to remain unpunished for such a long period. His dedication, careful research, and respect for the Osage Nation made him a silent type of resistance against both crime and the overall unfairness they suffered. In the postcolonial world, where Indigenous voices like the Osage had been silenced for decades by colonial and capitalist structures, White's actions challenged hegemonic forces that protected white elites.

In addition to the significant assistance provided by Tom White, there should also be an acknowledgement of another courageous man, W.W. Vaughan, a fifty-four-year-old white lawyer who worked closely with the Osage people. When George Bigheart, an Osage and one of the victims, started suspecting the conspiracy, he confided in Vaughan before his death, as he was believed to have been poisoned. The book explains, "Bigheart then apparently shared his information, including incriminating documents" (Grann 99). Vaughan immediately set out to share this information with the authorities, with the hope that it would put a stop to the killings and lead to justice. Once he left the hospital, Vaughan called the new sheriff of Osage County and told him that he had gotten all the information he needed. When the sheriff asked Vaughan if he knew who was behind Bigheart's murder, Vaughan said he knew more than that. This means that Vaughan had learned of a larger conspiracy or deeper involvement in the killings, not just one person.

However, Vaughan did not make it. Following this conversation, Vaughan vanished, and his vanishing act soon attracted widespread media coverage. The Tulsa Daily World reported the following: "OWNER VANISHES LEAVING CLOTHES IN PULLMAN CAR... MYSTERY CLOAKS DISAPPEARANCE OF W. W. VAUGHAN OF PAWHUSKA" (Grann 99). Then, the book describes the grim discovery: "Thirty-six hours later, Vaughan's body was spotted lying by the railroad tracks, thirty miles north of Oklahoma City. He'd been thrown from the train; his neck was broken, and he'd been stripped virtually naked, just like the oilman McBride" (Grann 99). This shows just how dangerous it was to get involved in the Osage

murder case. Vaughan, in his effort to act with integrity by sharing what he knew, was silenced before there was any opportunity to reveal the truth. His death was not merely tragic; it was a threat. It showed how deep corruption ran in Osage County. The killing of Vaughan is proof that even white allies were not shielded from violence if they seemed to threaten the system that enforced the white elites. His death highlights the danger that comes with truth in a society controlled by greed. Vaughan's story may also be construed as a portrayal of resistance to the corrupt forces in Osage County.

After considering all that the Osage went through, what did they truly gain? Did anything change in their lives? After years of injustice and suffering, we finally see in Chapter 21 a moment of real change: "There was another dramatic change in Mollie's life. She and the Osage had fought to end the corrupt system of guardianships, and on April 21, 1931, a court ruled that Mollie was no longer a ward of the state: '...'" (Grann 232). This meant that Mollie could now live freely and spend her money as she wanted, like any other American citizen. And in Chapter 20, we see that the Osage took their steps to protect their future, not waiting for others to do it for them. The book says: "The Osage, meanwhile, had taken their own steps to protect themselves against future plots, persuading Congress to pass a new law. It barred anyone who was not at least half Osage from inheriting

headrights from a member of the tribe" (Grann 225). This shows that the Osage people resisted, and yes, they did gain something in the end. Their voices were finally heard, the murderers were caught, and some justice was served.

However, it came too late. It came after they had already lost so many loved ones. As the book says, "Over the sixteen-year period from 1907 to 1923, 605 Osages died" (Grann 283), and historian Louis F. Burns even said: "I don't know of a single Osage family which didn't lose at least one family member because of the headrights" (Grann 283) That's heartbreaking. The very wealth that once brought them happiness later became a curse, a reason for them to

be murdered, controlled, and treated as inferior human beings. All because of a racist system created by white officials who believed they were smarter, better, and more “competent.” Just because someone was Native or Black, they had to suffer under these ugly and dehumanizing stereotypes.

Unfortunately, it is probable that this was not the end. Maybe no one talks about it today, but these systems of injustice likely continued quietly. Even the story of the Osage murders was forgotten for many years, known to only a few people. It was buried in silence, like so many other stories of pain and injustice. Mary Jo Webb, a retired teacher, spent decades investigating the suspicious death of her grandfather during the Reign of Terror. “He was one of those victims who didn’t show up in the FBI files and whose killers didn’t go to prison,” she said (Grann 287). This reminds us that not all the victims received justice or recognition, even some families are still searching for the truth. And we can only imagine how many other communities suffered in the same way, losing their land, families, and rights, yet their voices were never heard, and their stories were never told. This is why remembering the Osage story matters not just for justice, but for truth, for history, and for those who were never given a chance to speak.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we examined how *Killers of the Flower Moon* reveals the underlying colonial power dynamics that were imposed on the Osage people, specifically the trustee system. The system was an economic control system as well as a tool for racial discrimination and silence. By making white guardians over the Osage's wealth, the U.S. government reduced them to a position of dependency, stripping them of agency and dignity. The Osage were seen as unable to look after themselves and their economic affairs, with their fortune being a tool of oppression instead of a safeguard.

By examining key historical figures, such as Mollie Burkhart, Anna Brown, Tom white, and William Hale, this study explores how otherness, resistance, and silence arose as themes

from the Osage experience. Apart from taking away their money, the discriminatory system destroyed their families and shattered their sense of cultural identity. Despite these injustices, the Osage community demonstrated strength and resistance, even when their voices were ignored or silenced.

One central question remains: can a white outsider like David Grann truly capture the pain and emotions of the Osage people? The story evokes deep emotions: sadness, anger, and shock. Grann's work succeeds in many ways. He spoke directly with Osage members and used official archives and testimonies, giving voice to a history that had been forgotten. Still, no outsider can fully understand the suffering of a people who lost their land, wealth, loved ones, and heritage. What Grann did achieve, however, is to bring global attention to their story, and that is a step toward justice.

To conclude, this chapter provides an analysis of the themes of otherness, silence, and resistance through selected individuals using the frameworks of Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak. In *Killers of the Flower Moon*, the trusteeship system is revealed as a colonial tool that managed and ultimately undermined the autonomy of the Osage people. It depicts the transition of the Osage people, who were once among the wealthiest in American history, into victims of one of the darkest crimes in American history. From this examination, it is evident that Grann's book demonstrates the enduring effects of colonial systems and silencing the voices of Indigenous individuals, while also showing their resilience and strength.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

The present research explored the story of the Osage and the Reign of Terror in David Grann's book *Killers of the Flower Moon*. To reach this objective, we divided the dissertation into three chapters. In the first chapter, entitled "Literature Review and Historical Background," we provided necessary background: it started with the origins and definition of Native American literature, and highlighted important Osage authors and their contribution to American literature. We also included works done on the book under scrutiny, *Killers of the Flower Moon*. Later in this chapter, we added a short biography of David Grann and his major works, along with a summary of *Killers of the Flower Moon* to provide readers with a clear context. Then, we provided a historical and literary background focused on the Osage Nation, showing how they were originally spread across large areas in Missouri, Arkansas, Kansas, and Oklahoma. We explained the discovery of oil on their land, which made them wealthy but also made them targets. This led to the creation of the trustee system and the guardianship program, where the U.S. government and white guardians controlled Osage money. This background was important to understand the postcolonial analysis developed in the following chapters.

The second chapter entitled "Theoretical Framework and Key Concepts" served as the theoretical framework of this dissertation. First, we introduced postcolonial theory, its origins and main ideas, explaining how it helps us understand the lasting effects of colonialism on cultures and identities. Then we discussed the contributions of major postcolonial scholars such as Edward Said's Orientalism theory and Gayatri Spivak's concept of subaltern, along with her critical question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

The third chapter, entitled "Otherness, Silence, and Resistance in *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI*," applied these theories to David Grann's book. We first introduced the theme of otherness through the figure of William Hale, a representative of colonial control and racial dominance. He shows how white people held power

over Native Americans, keeping them under control through unfair laws and violence. Then, we analyzed the theme of silence through the experiences of Mollie Burkhart and Anna Brown, showing how emotional and systematic silencing worked to keep Osage voices unheard. Next, we explored the theme of resistance, including Mollie's personal fight for justice, the Osage tribe's collective efforts to resist oppression, and the role of Tom White, the FBI agent fighting corruption. Through all this, we explained how the trustee system was a tool to control Osage money and how the racist system of the U.S. government made the Osage "the Other" and silenced them.

Each chapter aimed to move from context to theory to deep analysis, helping us better understand how colonial legacies shaped the Osage tragedy.

This research contributes to the academic discussion by offering a postcolonial reading of *Killers of the Flower Moon*. Even though David Grann's book has been analyzed by researchers and journalists, few studies focus specifically on its postcolonial dimension, especially those that combine Edward Said's *Orientalism* with Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* What makes our research different is that we treated the book not just as a crime story or a history book, but as a story that reflects colonial power structures, especially through the trustee system. This study focuses on the representation of power, voice, and identity. Most importantly, this dissertation builds on Grann's investigation by analyzing how the trustee system affected the lives of the Osage people and how it operated as a hidden form of internal colonialism that controlled Indigenous wealth, bodies, and even emotions.

However, this research, like any academic work, has some limitations. One of the main constraints was the limited time and the length requirement set by the department, which did not provide us with room to research some ideas to the fullest. One theme we hoped to explore, but could not include due to space constraints, is the theme of hybridity, especially in relation to Mollie Burkhart's complex position between two cultural worlds. But had to limit our

analysis in the context of page limits. Another limitation is that the research was focused on a specific book and did not compare it with other works of Indigenous or Native American authors, which may have given a broader and more varied picture. In addition, our analysis was centered mostly on postcolonial theory, and we were unable to include Indigenous theoretical discourses, which may give a more culture-based reading of the Osage experience. Lastly, we depended heavily on secondary sources, and access to direct Osage voices or oral traditions would have added that much more authenticity and depth. Despite these challenges, we tried our best to present a clear and well-supported analysis, and we believe this dissertation makes a meaningful contribution to understanding David Grann's *Killers of the Flower Moon* and the Osage Reign of Terror through a postcolonial lens.

Furthermore, this study offers many future research opportunities. One could, in the future, explore how Osage writers such as Charles H. Red Corn and John Joseph Mathews deal with such themes as colonization, silence, and resistance, but from their perspective. It would also be interesting to compare David Grann's book *Killers of the Flower Moon* with other indigenous communities that experienced similar forms of violence. Another suggestion is to apply Indigenous theory alongside postcolonial theory to more effectively understand how Native individuals perceive identity, trauma, and narrative. A deeper focus on the concept of hybridity, particularly in the case of Mollie Burkhart, would also be worthwhile. As a woman caught between Indigenous heritage and forced assimilation through marriage and social position, her story reveals the complex negotiation of identity under colonial pressure. Lastly, the 2023 film adaptation by Martin Scorsese presents another research path. It would be useful to analyze how the film's visual storytelling conveys Osage suffering and whether it reinforces or challenges dominant representations. All of these suggestions show that the topic is still open for further exploration, and future studies could bring even more understanding and give space to Native voices that are often overlooked.

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Appendices List

Appendices

Appendix A: Mollie Burkhart and Her Family



Figure 4. Mollie Burkhart. (Credit: David Grann)



Figure 3. Ernest and Mollie Burkhart. (Credit: David Grann)



Figure 5. Mollie with her sisters Rita (left), Anna (second from left), and Minnie (far right). (Credit: David Grann)

Appendix B: Crime Scene: The Death of Anna Brown



Figure 6. The ravine where Anna Brown's body was found in 1921. (Credit: David Grann)

Appendix C: key figures of justice and corruption



Figure 8. Hale in front of the Guthrie jail. (Credit: David Grann)



Figure 7. Tom White. (Credit: David Grann)

Appendix D: Osage County: Before and After the Oil Boom



Figure 9. Downtown Pawhuska in 1906, before the oil boom. (Credit: David Grann)



Figure 10. Pawhuska was transformed during the oil rush. (Credit: David Grann)

Résumé

Killers of the Flower Moon : The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI (2017), écrit par David Grann, revient sur un épisode majeur mais méconnu de l'histoire américaine : les meurtres systématiques et l'exploitation du peuple Osage dans les années 1920, à une époque où ils étaient les individus les plus riches par habitant au monde. Ce mémoire explore la manière dont l'ouvrage met en lumière l'impact profond du colonialisme à travers les thèmes de l'altérité, du silence et de la résistance. S'appuyant sur la théorie postcoloniale, notamment les travaux d'Edward Said et de Gayatri Spivak, cette recherche examine comment le système de tutelle instauré par le gouvernement américain a servi d'outil de contrôle, de mise sous silence de l'exploitation des peuples autochtones, dans une continuité historique de domination coloniale et de discrimination raciale. Cette perspective permet de mettre en lumière les effets durables du colonialisme de peuplement et son rôle dans la transformation d'un succès en tragédie pour les Osage.

Mots-clés : Nation Osage, système de tutelle, subalterne, études postcoloniales.

ملخص

يُعيد كتاب "قتلة زهرة القمر: جرائم قتل الأوساج ونشأة مكتب التحقيقات الفيدرالي" (2017) للكاتب ديفيد غران النظر في فصل بالغ الأهمية لكنه مهمَل في التاريخ الأمريكي، وهو جريمة القتل المنهجي والاستغلال الذي تعرضت له أمة الأوساج في عشرينيات القرن الماضي، حين كانوا أغنى شعب في العالم من حيث نصيب الفرد. تتناول هذه الأطروحة الكيفية التي يكشف بها الكتاب عن الأثر العميق للاستعمار من خلال موضوعات مثل الأخيرة، والصمت، والمقاومة. واستنادًا إلى نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار، ولا سيما أعمال إدوارد سعيد وجاياتري سبيفاك، تبحث هذه الدراسة في الطريقة التي عمل بها نظام الوصاية الذي أقرته الحكومة الأمريكية كأداة للسيطرة، ولإسكات استغلال الشعوب الأصلية، وهو نظام متجذر في التاريخ الاستعماري والتمييز العنصري. ومن خلال هذا المنظور، تستقصي الدراسة الآثار بعيدة المدى للاستعمار الاستيطاني ودوره في تحويل النجاح إلى مأساة بالنسبة إلى الأوساج.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أمة الأوساج، نظام الوصاية، المهمّشون، دراسات ما بعد الاستعمار.