

RACIAL ISSUES REFLECTED IN DAVID GRANN'S
KILLERS OF THE FLOWERING MOON: THE OSAGE
MURDERS AND THE BIRTH OF THE FBI

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ABSTRACT

The racial issue of the Osage tribe in America is represented in the book *Killers of the Flowering Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI*. This book by David Grann raises the issue of racism and racial injustice faced by the Osage tribe in the 1920s. There are two problem formulations, the first problem is what types of racial issues occur in the book and second problem is how does Mollie, overcome her anxiety due to the racism she experienced. This research uses a qualitative analysis approach with a focus on narrative content, and dialog related to racism.

The researcher uses Bonilla Silva's critical race theory and Freud's psychological theory to assist this research. The primary data in this thesis is a book entitled *Killers of the Flowering Moon: The Murder of the Osage Tribe and the Birth of the FBI* and supporting data in the form of articles, journals, books, and related internet sites. The analysis in the discussion of this research is to find out how racial issues experienced by the Osage tribe and their internal impact through dialog and narration in the book.

The analysis shows that the book depicts three forms of racism, including ethnic racism, ideology, and white privilege racism experienced by the Osage tribe. In addition, Mollie overcame her anxiety with projection, repression, and sublimation.

Keywords: Racial Issue, Racism, Osage Tribe, Self Defense Mechanism

I. INTRODUCTION

In the United States, racial concerns have been a major and persistent problem. The nation has struggled with systematic racism, inequality, and racial discrimination in several areas. Demographic changes, racial inequality, and economic impact, challenges faced by minorities, structural racism and discrimination, and public perceptions and skepticism are some examples of the complex and multifaceted nature of racial issues in America, encompassing demographic shifts, economic implications, systemic challenges, and public perceptions (Bowdler, J., & Harris, B. 2022).

The Osage Tribe in America also dealt with several racial difficulties in 1920, such as oil discovery, land allocation, and forced assimilation. They relocated to the Kansas Neosho River valley in the early 19th century after giving up their land in Missouri to the US government. The Osage were known for their unwavering rejection of the dominant American culture after they moved to a reservation in Kansas. They kept up their traditional housing and attire. They were also against the consumption of alcohol, which had been brought in by traders (Britannica, 2024).

There are several issues related to racism in the *book Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI*, the first of which is ethnic racism. The book depicts various forms of ethnic racism experienced by members of the Osage tribe. They face unfair treatment and rejection based on their customs and culture. Second, ideological racism in which the Osage tribe cannot maintain ancestral land as their residence. They were unfairly cheated by the American government and forced to leave their homes. In addition, the beliefs of the Osage tribe began to change, they began to embrace Catholicism and forgot Wah'Kon Tah. Third, white privilege which is an unfair justice system in this book describes how the unfair justice system by the government affects the lives of the Osage tribe and the main character. They are faced with unfounded accusations and processed unfairly. Fourth, the Social Gap in the movie *If Beale Street Could Talk* describes the social gap that occurs between races in the United States. The regulations made by the American government are only partially beneficial to the American government and detrimental to the Osage tribe. The main character, Mollie faces difficulties due to the compulsion to go to school based on her family background as a member of the wealthy Osage tribe, the American government forces Mollie to marry and be matched. And lastly, Mollie is faced with a difficult situation where she has to lie to her husband and the American government because she is a widow. This movie highlights the violence of the American government aimed primarily at racial minorities, namely the Osage tribe. And the Osage tribe became victims of the American government's abuse of power.

Based on this background, the researcher is interested in analyzing racial issues contained in the book *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI*, and research on Native Americans, especially the Osage tribe, has not been done much by many previous studies. Of course, there will be many moral messages that we can get from this book which is packaged by the author to his readers. Which is where the book *Killer of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI* is the work of David Grann, an American journalist who is a staff writer for *The New Yorker*, and an author (Grann. D, 2023). The book was published by Doubleday, an imprint of Penguin Random House in April 2017 and has been named a National Book Awards Finalist in 2017 (National Book Foundation n.d.).

II. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method. According to Creswell (2014), the qualitative ` 11 research method is a way of understanding data that is gathered in the form of words or text, analyzed, and described by earlier studies to produce the final result in the form of a written report. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994: 2) States that qualitative researcher focusses on things in their natural environment while trying to understand or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings given by different people to various phenomena.

This research uses a book to gather information as data for this research. The total data of this research is 10 data containing narration and sentences of the main character's dialogue in *Puss in Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI* book. The researcher collected data by reading, observe the data, and categorizing the narration based on racism construct in critical race theory. The data was analysed by selecting and classifying, from the data analysis results.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The result of the analysis of racism construct in critical race theory. There are three racism ethnicity, two ideology racism, and two white privileges. For example: "By 1877, there were virtually no more American buffalo to hunt—a development hastened by the authorities who encouraged settlers to eradicate the beasts, knowing that, in the words of an army officer, "every buffalo dead is an Indian gone." U.S. policy toward the tribes shifted from containment to forced assimilation, and officials increasingly tried to turn the Osage into churchgoing, English-speaking, fully clothed tillers of the soil. The government owed the tribe annuity payments for the sale of its Kansas land but refuses to distribute them until able-bodied men like Ne kah-e-se-y took up farming. Even then, the government insisted on making the payments in the form of clothing and food rations. An Osage chief complained, "We are not dogs that we should be fed like dogs." (Grann. D, 2017. p. 43). The dialogue between a military officer and the Osage chief represents the understanding of ethnic racism that can destroy the continuity of a harmonious race. The Osage chief realized that there was an influence from the US government that tried to obstruct and destroy the life of the Osage tribe. The US policy tried to make the ethnic authenticity of the tribe change, starting from the traditional clothing of the Osage tribe who wore a typical Osage Indian blanket for women, and the men painted their faces, then usually wore tufted cowhide leggings and moccasins and breechcloth, a belt woven with fingers holding tobacco pouches and tomahawks. The chest was often bare, and the head was shaved, except for a tuft of hair that fell from the crown to the neck and stood erect, like the crest of a Spartan helmet. The Osage had a survival hunting habit to meet their food needs, but the government accelerated development and killed wild animals. The living

culture of the Osage tribe, which was forced to change due to US policies, is a form of racism ethnicity experienced by the Osage tribe.

In ideology racism there are two data, for example: As with all Osage, the birth of her children had been the greatest blessing of Wah'Kon-Tah, the mysterious life force that pervades the sun and the moon and the earth and the stars; the force around which the Osage had structured their lives for centuries, hoping to bring some order out of the chaos and confusion on earth; the force that was there but not there—invisible, remote, giving, awesome, unanswering. Many Osage had given up their traditional beliefs, but Lizzie had held on to them. (A U.S. government official had once complained that women like Lizzie “keep up the old superstitions and laugh down modern ideas and customs.”) (Grann. D, 2017. p. 24). It is known that the Osage have their own traditional beliefs, the Osage refer to them as Wah'Kon-Tah. In this book, it is mentioned that several Osage tribe members have adopted Catholicism as their faith. However, there is no mention of the number of Catholics in the Osage tribe and when the Osage tribe began to recognize Catholicism. The statement from the US government official is a form of ideology racism that Lizzie received because of her beliefs. Mollie's family, especially her mother, Lizzie still maintains her belief in Wah'Kon Tah. The Osage tribe's belief in Wah'Kon Tah is a hereditary tradition and is a blessing according to the Osage tribe. In addition, the statement from the United States government against Mollie's behavior that belittles modern ideas and lifestyles reflects white people who see the Osage tribe as a primitive tribe and do not appreciate the culture of the Osage tribe.

In addition, white privilege concepts in racism construct there are two data. For example: 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. D, 2017. p. 56). The narratives in the book portray the awareness of wealthy Osage tribe members of the mistreatment and discrimination they experience due to their wealth in oil products on Osage tribal lands. An Osage voices his confusion as to why black people are often treated unfairly, he fights for his country, but cannot exercise his personal rights. While the American government stated that the rich Osage tribe was incompetent in managing their finances without a clear basis, so the American government made unilateral regulations to regulate the finances of the rich Osage tribe. The actions of the American

government are white privilege racism that exists in a society where laws, rules, or actions carried out and made by white people are more favorable to them. In this narrative, their resentment and disappointment are expressed at the continuing reality of racism, as well as the conditions in which they are not valued or treated fairly simply because of their race and their smaller numbers. The narrative shows that what the American government did to the Osage tribe is an example of white privilege and white people as the majority who rule the law.

On the other hand, in self-defense mechanism theory, there are three defense mechanism that the main character uses to overcome her anxiety. For example: Mollie had her doubts about Bill: Had he, in some way, been responsible for Minnie's death? Hale made it clear that he didn't trust Bill, either, and at least one local attorney speculated that Bill was "prostituting the sacred bond of marriage for sordid gain." Grann. D, 2017. p. 62). Bill Smith is a private detective who is close to Rita and was previously married to Minnie, Mollie's sister who died mysteriously. Minnie's death makes Mollie doubt and anxious about Bill's work to help investigate the death of Mollie's sister. Mollie's unfounded anxiety about something that is not certain to happen is called moral anxiety. According to Freud (1959), neurotic anxiety is fear of an unidentified threat that has not yet been identified. This risk, which Freud referred to as a neurotic danger, comes from an innate need that threatens him. It implies that the dread of the unconscious self is the root of neurotic worry. Hall (1954) goes on to say that "neurotic anxiety is a fear of what might happen if the ego's anti-cathexes fail to stop the instinctual object cathexes from acting impulsively." Then Mollie's action by blaming Bill by taking out her stress on Bill for investigating her sister's death is a self-defense projection mechanism as a form of resistance by blaming others.

IV. CONCLUSION

From the discussion that has been carried out by the researcher, this chapter concludes all the problem formulations that have been discussed. The first formulation of the problem is what types of racial issues occur in David Grann's *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Murder of the Osage Tribe and the Birth of the FBI*, which has been analyzed in chapter III using critical race theory by Richard Delgado. The second problem is how Mollie overcomes her anxiety in David Grann's *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI*, which was analyzed using Freud's theory of self-defense mechanisms.

From the first problem, the researcher found that racism was experienced by the Osage tribe through narratives and dialogues in the book, and the researcher classified three types of racism experienced by the Osage tribe in the book. The first is ethnicity racism, ethnicity racism is an attitude or action shown by individuals or groups towards people based on a person's race, ethnicity, and culture. In this case, the researcher found three narratives in the book that show acts of racism

in the form of ethnicity racism where racism is experienced by the Osage chief, Mollie, and members of the Osage tribe. Researcher found a second act of racism in the form of ideological racism which refers to beliefs, traditions, and history that systematically support or maintain racial injustice. This racism involves unfair or unequal treatment of individuals or their ethnic groups. In this case, the researcher found injustice in the field of belief, where the Osage tribe has their own beliefs and traditions, namely Wah'Kon Tah, which began to shift to the Catholic religion introduced by white people. In the funeral tradition of the Osage people, they are required to use the teachings of the Catholic religion, not the Osage tribe's songs. Then the Osage tribe experienced ideological racism because they were forced to move from their place of residence, which is a historic ancestral place owned by the Osage tribe. The discovery of the third type of racism is white privilege racism which refers to the advantage of one side of the majority group, especially white people, and disadvantages other groups. In this case, the researcher found injustice through rules made unilaterally by the American government to the detriment of the Osage tribe. Such unilateral rules include the division of land and financial arrangements for the rich Osage.

The second problem is how Mollie overcomes her anxiety in David Grann's *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Murder of the Osage Tribe and the Birth of the FBI*. In this case, the researcher found three narratives in the book that emphasized the internal conflict faced by Mollie as an Osage tribe girl and the main character in the book. Mollie experiences worry and anxiety when she cannot find the suspect of her sister's murder, then Mollie uses projection by blaming Bill because he cannot help find her sister's killer. In the second case, Mollie uses repression, which is by avoiding the surrounding environment to overcome her fear of the American government's punishment if Mollie does not want to be married off and the pressure if her parents to bear the punishment. Furthermore, Mollie has to hide the secret from her husband if she is a widow and Mollie also has to hide that status from the government because the government will give her punishment, in this case, Mollie uses sublimation, which is by tidying up her house as a positive thing to cover up her past.

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