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The Reel Indian or The Real Indian?:

The Three Modes of Representation of Native Americans in Western Movies

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Abstract

Historically, Native Americans have been common and dominant visual elements in the western genre. Modes of representing Native Americans in movies have developed and changed over time. The increasing popularity in global markets of films depicting Native Americans has encouraged more filmmakers to make movies that incorporate native elements. An examination of films depicting Native Americans shows that such depictions change according to who controls the production and mode of representation. The films thus reflect different attitudes about Native Americans, depending on whom the film is made by: American Indians, non-Indians, or directors who use stereotypes of American Indians as a kind of proxy to represent disadvantaged non-American peoples. Using examples from specific movies, this paper will analyze both the images of Native American characters in films and the plots or story lines which are ideologically instrumental in how Native Americans are represented cinematically.

Keywords: Native Americans, western, mode of representation, American cinema

Filmlerdeki Kızılderili mi, Gerçek Kızılderili mi?: Western Filmlerdeki Kızılderili Betimlemelerinde Kullanılan Üç Farklı Yaklaşım

Öz

Tarihsel açıdan incelendiğinde, Kızılderililerin, Western türünün en yaygın ve egemen görsel öğelerinden olduğu görülmektedir. Kızılderililerin temsil şekilleri zaman içerisinde değişikliğe uğramıştır. Kızılderilileri betimleyen filmlerin küresel piyasalarda artan popüleritesi daha çok yapımcıyı filmlerinde yerli unsurlara yer vermeye teşvik etmiştir. Kızılderilileri betimleyen filmlere bakıldığında, bu betimlemelerin üretimi ve temsil biçimlerini denetimi altında tutan otoriteye göre değişiklik sergilediği görülmektedir. Dolayısıyla bu filmler, filmin kim tarafından çekildiğine bağlı olarak—Kızılderili yönetmenler, Kızılderili olmayan yönetmenler veya Kızılderili stereotiplerini Amerikalı olmayan dezavantajlı grupları temsil etmek için bir tür vekil olarak kullanan yönetmenler—Kızılderililere yönelik farklı yaklaşımlar barındırırlar. Bu makale, belirli filmlerden örnekler vererek, Kızılderililerin sinematik temsili üzerinde ideolojik etkiyi sahip Kızılderili karakter imgelerini ve bu filmlerdeki konu ve olay örgülerini inceleyecektir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kızılderililer, western sineması, temsil biçimleri, Amerikan sineması

Some years ago, one guest Native American lecturer at Hacettepe University was blamed by the listeners for not being "a real Indian," as he appeared before the audience as a university professor who was wearing a suit and a tie. Seeing him on the podium, one member from the audience whispered to others around him; "This is not a real Indian. Look! He has been completely *assimilated* by the white American culture. No *real Indian* would appear here like this."[1] Quite possibly, the audience expected to see someone wearing pale buckskin clothes, with paint on his face and feathers in his long hair. This example is a very good indicator of how much an image propagated by films, cartoons, comics and literature can be the primary factor in the formation of the image of an ethnic group not only in its own land but

also in other cultures across the world. Quite probably, there is no other ethnic group in the world that has been defined this way, and this pervasively is due to the wide transmission of Native American imagery throughout the world via the products of mass culture and most notably via Hollywood films.

The problem with the depiction of Native Americans in various films is that the image on the screen has come to be known as so "real" that, it has almost replaced the physical and historical reality. Other than becoming larger than life, the image of Native Americans in films has shaped the visual and behavioral patterns that defined public perception of the whole ethnic group. This fact, apparently, set a number of visual standards and in turn created a continuous public demand for this image. This is not a new phenomenon[2;] even the nineteenth-century tourists to the American West wanted to see traditional clothing and quiet nobility (Bird 4) that they thought were associated with Native Americans, and this interest and expectation has not really changed throughout the 20th century. Mass culture has replaced contemporary Native American realities with movies, television, and romances, which are almost invariably set in the past.

A categorization of films depicting Native Americans illustrates that such depictions change according to those who control the production and the mode of representation. The films thus reflect different attitudes about Native Americans depending on three separate modes of representation: external (by non-American Indians), internal (by American Indians) or by proxy (directors using American Indian stereotypes to represent non-Native American peoples). While these modes as defined by the agents of representation have developed in time, a deeper analysis of these categorizations also reveals that representations take place on two separate layers: an imagery layer and a formula layer, both of which are ideologically instrumental in the creation and maintenance of the Native American image in films. This paper will try to analyze how these modes of representation function in relation to the layers of representation by referring to certain films that portray Native Americans.

Cinema has a special place when it comes to discussions on culture, representation and ideology. The Soviet leader Lenin reminded his comrades, "Cinema, for us, is the most important of the arts" (qtd. in Cowie 137), and what he meant was the fact that social changes, be

they through evolution or revolution, need this indispensable artistic means in the creation and propagation of new meanings to establish a new social order. Many societies have been subjected to such cultural indoctrinations and definitions (by forceful or willing exposure and actively or passively). Native Americans, both as an ethnic group and subject matter, are no exception and Hollywood films helped a great deal in the formation and definition of the Native American within the American popular imagination. As Gore Vidal argued, "the history we believe we 'know' is the history presented in film" (Rollins xi) and thus films were instrumental in the creation of a past and its accompanying imagery. The notion that the only "real" Indians are the historical ones is still pervasive today as Cornel Pewewardy's warning aptly points out:

> Expecting Native Americans to look like the Hollywood movie Indians is a huge mistake. ... There is no such thing as a real lndian, only Hollywood-created images of past tense Indians. "Real Indians" are a figment of the monocultural American psyche. The term comes from a European perspective. Therefore, framing a response to "Are you a real Indian?" requires me to respond by saying, "There are no real Indians in America, only indigenous peoples increasingly forming into a hybrid culture trying to hold on to what little culture, language and sacred knowledge are left." The only real Indians in America are those Indians that originated from the country of India. (Pewewardy 71)

As it was the white settlers and their culture to blame for the demise of the Native Americans, then why have they been so frequently and insistently used in films made by the white man and his culture? Wilcomb E. Washburn offers an explanation and presents four thematic and visual criteria that summarize the characteristics of Native American imagery in films: "While all ethnic groups have been depicted, defined and stereotyped in films, no other [ethnic group] provides the opportunity to convey the image in a narrative form in terms of *rapid physical movement*, *exotic appearance*, *violent confrontation* and *a spirituality rooted in the natural environment* [italics added]" (Rollins ix). Thanks to a unique blend of these qualities, Washburn believes, those films actually have made a very positive contribution to public perception of Native Americans. According to him, films,

> helped promote the recovery of the contemporary Indian in the early and mid-twentieth century and the renaissance of the Indian—particularly in art and literature—in the most recent decades of the century. Motion pictures did this first by not letting the Indian identity be absorbed into the larger American society as just another -and tiny- ethnic minority; and, second, by reminding other Americans of the worthy character of the Indian adversaries of the other principal *dramatis personae* of American history, the frontiersmen and pioneers who form the subject of the current debate over the "new" and "old" Western history. (Rollins x)

However helpful the films made in Hollywood might have been in the protection of the Native American image, they surely had a simplistic attitude by presenting Native Americans as two-dimensional characters: They were either the bloodthirsty warmongering savages or the peaceful and mystical wise men living in harmony with nature. As stated earlier, this image of the Native American created by films and other media is not limited to the American cultural atmosphere. Borrowing from Native American imagery they witnessed in Hollywood films, many other cultures developed similar opinions of who "the real Indians" were and, more interestingly, used this imagery in the films they made.

The issue leads one to take a different look at the phenomenon, to a perspective that involves politics and money; the commercial aspect of filmmaking and marketing. The Indian was depicted and became popular this way because in early days of Hollywood films followed by other filmmaking centers in other countries, including Yeşilçam in Turkey, they realized that the Indian, or "the Redskin," is what the audience found most interesting in Western films and hence demanded more. Thus, as is the case in all products of popular culture;

> Stereotypes sell. To this day, consumers recognize the stylized Indian chief on cans of Calumet Baking Powder and the kneeling Indian maiden on packages of Land O' Lakes butter. The athletic fortunes of [the sports teams of] the Braves, Indians, Chiefs, Redskins, and Black Hawks are followed by professional sports fans across the country. (Pewewardy 71)

What followed this ornamental aspect of the Indian as product

advertisement was the notion that the image somehow depicted "the real Indian." Hence, the Indian many people all around the world took to be "the real" was itself a product designed to be packaged and sold in various shapes and it is only natural that the changes in the way Native Americans are depicted in the films and related media conformed to the rules of the market, i.e. the products were changed and reshaped according to the expectations and trends in the domestic and the global markets. As Pauline Turner Strong observes, for instance, "Disney has created a marketable New Age Pocahontas to embody our millennial dreams for wholeness and harmony, while banishing our nightmares of savagery without and emptiness within" (Bird 3). John O'Connor warns that even the seemingly positive depiction of the Native American was itself a testament to the commodification of this image and the pragmatism involved on the part of the Hollywood filmmaking process:

> Hollywood is presumably not filled with Indian haters' intent on using their power to put down the natives. One need only observe how quickly a director or a studio might switch from portraying a "bloodthirsty" to a "noble savage" if the market seems to call for it. Far from purposeful distortion, significant elements of the Indian image can be explained best through analyzing various technical -and business- related production decisions that may never have been considered in terms of their effect on the screen image. (Rollins 3)

A quick survey of the films that depict Native Americans demonstrates that there is almost no limit to the way Native Americans can be put on the screen by the filmmakers. Most notably in the Westerns, the idiosyncratic American film genre, Native American characters were frequently used and while not all Westerns depicted a Native American character, the Native American figures were widely used in Westerns made by other cultures[3]. As various other countries borrowed heavily from the American Westerns, Native Americans have become an indispensable ubiquitous element of the genre and may have even become more popular than the cowboys at least in the eyes of the non-American audience. Apart from the inclusion of native elements for local color, the Western genre formula required that an antagonist be put in front of the protagonist and the Native American was sometimes much better than the traditional dark cowboy because he offered greater cultural difference and maybe more similarity to the imagery

of evil in a professedly Christian mainstream cultural environment. In Westerns "[the Indian] posed a formidable threat to the dreams of civilization, yet he was almost always faceless and voiceless, little more than a stubborn and irrational hindrance to be crushed and swept aside by progress's reckless vanguard" (Prats xiv).

The replication of the Western formula in foreign markets brought the incorporation of the Native American elements into Western films and a number of examples are cases in point. Almost all of the characters that represent the natives in these films are purely ornamental and detached from their cultural and social experience. The French Western *Les Petroleuses* (1971, dir. Christian-Jacque and Guy Casaril), starring Brigitte Bardot and Claudia Cardinale, is nothing more than a French erotic-action film in which a scantily-clad all-girl gang in cowboy suits robs trains and reveals their bodies as much as they could. In the film, one of the girls of the gang is accompanied by an Indian chief called Spitting Bull (acted by Valery Inkijinoff), who not only adds a fake aura of mystery with his stolid face but also seems to be the only male character that does not display any sexual interest towards the half-naked girls around him. It appears that in the eyes of the European audience, the Native American's contempt for any material pursuit—however absurdly it might be presented—was due to his almost superhuman and transcendental romanticism.

Kanunsuz Kahraman – Ringo Kid (*The Lawless Hero – Ringo Kid*) (1967, dir. Zafer Davutoğlu) is a Turkish Western film which borrows heavily from John Ford's *Stagecoach,* including a protagonist named Ringo (acted by Cüneyt Arkın) and wagon attacks in the desert. While the film depicts Indians in war-paint charging on the whites, it does not seem to make the slightest commentary on the natives' motives. The Turkish audience was given no information as to what those Redskins demand. Instead, they appear to have been included as merely hostile elements so that the good whites can become victorious. Such ignorant borrowing of the Native American elements interestingly seems more in conformity with Hollywood's vision than any alternative or revisionist interpretation of history that might have presented the Turkish audience an account they might have found more illuminating.

The (notoriously) titled *Atını Seven Kovboy* (*The Cowboy Who Loves His Horse*)[4] (1975, dir. Aram Gülyüz) is another interesting ex-

ample of Turkish Westerns. A slapstick comedy, the film was based on the comic character Lucky Luke, or as he is known in Turkey, Red Kit. The images of the old American West—the stagecoaches, African Americans in tuxedos and Native Americans—are again elements not only removed from their historical conditions, but also reduced to caricatures with no associative meaning. The outlaw Dalton Brothers disguise as Indians while hiding from the good cowboy Red Kit, and their cookie-cutter representation again reveals that the Turkish audience knew the Native Americans only through the Westerns and as barbaric threats against civilization. Actually, however absurd they may seem, what these Western films made outside the realm of Hollywood did was not very different from what the American films had been doing until very recent periods[5;] that is, presenting an absurdly unrealistic vision of Native Americans with the pretext that they were depicting the textbook reality that "the Indians hindered progress" (Prats xiv). The Western genre used (and abused) the image of the Native American as the historical *other* through which the white settlers' ordeals and progress can be elaborated. As A. J. Prats confirmed, "the Western requires him—not because it needs to depict one more moment in the relentless course of empire, but because the Western functions primarily as a source of national self-identifications" (xv).

It must be remembered that genres are commercial categorizations themselves; in other words, the ideas that are commercially proven, and film genres function on two different layers. Hence, representation moves along two different lines: Imagery and Formula. In the imagery layer, as the name suggests, the visual characteristics and certain clichés that help the viewer recognize and categorize an item are dominant. In other words, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is unmistakably apparent. Thus, a Western is a "cowboy movie" and the Indian is depicted as somebody who wears feathers in his hair, has paint on his face and body, carries a bow and arrows, hatchets, rides on bareback horses, lives in nature in tents called tipis, hunts buffalo and sometimes prays to the Manitou etc. and it is this imagery that is generally copied by many other films to make it easy for the audience to identify "the real Indian." In the formula layer, however, the underlying value systems and more abstract concepts are at work on a symbolic or representational level. At this layer, the signifier does not necessarily resemble or remind the signified of the relationship between them making the formula layer ideologically more powerful

while creating and transforming meanings. On this layer, a Western is not necessarily a cowboy movie taking place in the old American West and the Indian may not be somebody whom one can so easily identify, at least visually. The film could be taking place in another galaxy (as is the case in Space Westerns) or actually any other place that might stand for the inhospitable and desolate landscape of the old American West, where presumably civilizing forces are at war against the wilderness and savagery. In these projected forms, the Native American is again not necessarily an indigenous American but could be any form of character or culture that is in one way or another associated with Native Americans. The formula uses Native American elements to contrast the image of the (*non-Indian*?) self and the (*Indian?*) other, i.e. the confronting powers or the cultural anti-thesis the protagonist(s) encounter along the development of the plot. The two layers are not mutually exclusive, i.e. they may coexist (imagery can be a part of the formula) or there may be an exchange of components between the layers; nevertheless, both can be understood separately.

In addition to these layers of meaning, the manner in which the Native Americans were depicted in films -- mainly in Western films -- demonstrates best the "how" of representation process rather than the "what;" i.e. the manner rather than the subject matter. In this regard, the representation of the Native Americans in Western films can be analyzed under three headings, which correspond to the three modes of representation: external representation, internal representation and representation by proxy.

External Representation

Basically, these are the films in which the Native Americans are depicted mostly from the outside, i.e. by forces and mechanisms of meaning created beyond Indian control, regardless of the type of meaning. To put it differently, these are the films made by non-Native Americans,[6] who use Native American imagery to create a narrative story irrespective of the moral goodness or badness of the Native American characters depicted in the final narrative. If the act of representing something is a sign of the ownership of the created meaning, then it becomes apparent that this mode refers not only to the perspective of the mainstream American culture, but also to elements within this culture

that shape the image of the Native American. This is the mode that is employed by a great majority of the films made in Hollywood's mainstream film sector. As Bird Runningwater observed, "If you look at the history of the Native image in film, the vast majority of it has been created without the consent and most often without the control of the Native person, whose image is being taken and utilized in the media" (Lewis xv). This lack of control in the process of representation seems to be crucial especially in the Western films since the genre had a key role in the formation of a national identity and self-definition and while providing this definition, the filmmakers also gave the mainstream culture an unquestioned role as the shaping force of the destiny of the country. Thus, representing the Native American, *the historical other* in the Western, the filmmaker became the owner of the image and held the fate of the Natives at his own discretion. Prats explains, "he is most American, somehow, who knows Indians best—who knows them, we may as well anticipate, principally so that he may destroy them, and who destroys them *even as, if not indeed because, he represents them"* (10).

The layers of meaning reveal another political aspect of external representation. In this mode, the Native American is depicted more as a visual element than anything deeper such as a substitute value system. The camera portrays the Native Americans using the most typical imagery and it is these clichés that are supposedly creating the image of "the real Indian" in the minds of the audience. Most Westerns present a heavily polarized version of the whites and Native Americans and the natives are almost always on the wrong side. As stated earlier, the depiction of Native American has alternated between the good Indian and the bad Indian according to the market expectations, but the alternation does not seem to change the subtraction of the Native American from his historical context. Indeed, the films that present the Native American from an allegedly more positive perspective caused another sort of damage and possibly a greater one: They eternally put the destiny of the Native American to be modeled in the hands of the white culture. The damage became two-fold when the Native Americans eventually (quite possibly due to the pressure from their financial constraints) came to assume the forms imposed upon them in these films. Ted Jojola explains;

> In the face of the exotic and primitive, non-Indians had drawn on their own preconceptions and experiences to ap-

> propriate selectively elements of the Indian. The consequent image was a subjective interpretation, the purpose of which was to corroborate the outsider's viewpoint. This process is called revisionism, and it, more than not, entails recasting native people away and apart from their own social and community realities. In an ironic turnabout, Native people eventually began to act and behave like their movie counterparts, often in order to gain a meager subsistence from the tourist trade. In that sense, they were reduced to mere props for commercial gain. (Rollins 13)

The emergence of a Native American who was following the patterns dictated by Hollywood films put him into a more controllable position. He is no longer marketed as an alternative to the cruel whites, but also, further promoted to become a cultural icon of resistance in the hands of the filmmakers regardless of the filmmakers' ethnic origin. A case in point is one of the earliest films that dealt with American indigenous peoples; *The Vanishing American* (1925), which traces the pre-Columbian peopling of the North American continent. While seemingly presenting a very unbiased and sympathetic picture of these peoples, the film nevertheless creates a quasi-scientific version of these civilizations and concludes that their disappearance was inevitable due to the principles of evolution, i.e. faced with the white culture, the natives were doomed to fail and vanish. Even when the subject matter was Native Americans, the leading actors and sometimes actresses were white. The body language, facial expressions and mimics thus were completely irrelevant and unrealistic even for the silent era. The depiction of the seemingly assimilated Indian who comes to reject the values of the white society as symbolized by his throwing a Bible away and resorting to traditional Indian lifestyle might have looked like a criticism of the white society. Nevertheless, while glorifying the fallen Indian, the film infallibly declares that he was doomed to fail by mechanisms which do not make the white the guilty party. The Natives vanish due to an almost natural causality, not due to any wrongdoing by the dominant culture or imperialism, as the whites seem to be depicted as both good and bad. Such an approach, limited to the moral goodness and badness, without touching upon the underlying economic forces and cultural hypocrisy, seems to have helped various filmmakers in Hollywood to create stories that provided a cleaner conscience for the dominant culture by making a martyr out of the fallen and almost ex-

tinct indigenous people. Other titles worthy of attention for this approach are *The Massacre* (1914), *The Covered Wagon* (1923), *Iron Horse* (1924) and *Run of Arrow* (1957).

Another visual preference frequently seen in this mode of representation has political/ideological connotations as well. In many of these films, the filmmakers generally chose to depict Native Americans as groups of people rather than individuals, a visual preference that results in a loss of the individual identity in the mass. Especially in Westerns, the Native Americans are generally presented as a huge silent and expressionless group standing and observing the white settlers from the tops of hills that surround them. They merely point their fingers towards the wagon, town or train, quite possibly showing the target to be attacked and maintain a stoic and laconic attitude throughout the films. This menacing poster-like Indian posture became one of the most ubiquitous and even archetypal image of the movie Indian: A character who stares at the whites from the top of the mountains and then charges towards them: the ultimate inhumane enemy with no just motives and hence deserving whatever form of punishment available in the already lawless West. The two Westerns that are generally considered to be the most important within the genre, *The Stagecoach* (1939) and *The Searchers* (1956), both by John Ford, used this distancing technique. In *The Stagecoach*'s famous chase scene, the stagecoach representing civilization was ruthlessly attacked by the savage natives and this chase ended with the timely arrival of the US Cavalry. When a journalist asked Ford about the then technically marvelous chase scene, "Why don't the Indians shoot the horses to stop the coach?" he answered, "Because that would have been the end of the movie" (IMDB). The answer is self-explanatory: the Indians are used for filmic purposes; they are there to attack and to be pushed back, not as human beings with reason. In the chase scene, similarly, their faces become blurred and the Native American imagery is once again reduced to two dimensional representations of evil passing in front of the coach's windows.

Apart from having racist messages, such as the Indians deserving to be treated harshly as this is *the language* they speak and understand, *The Searchers* seems to have been designed to convey the message that the savages must be destroyed, as Prats observed, "If opposition is essential to the national self, so too is the elimination of it" (10) and the historical other thus becomes an agent whose annihilation is not only justifiable, but also necessary for the safety of the

civilization. In an ironical manner, as was the case with the primary Native American character in *The Vanishing American*, the antagonist in *The Searchers*, Chief Scar is acted by a white actor-the German born blue eyed actor Henry Brandon-, quite possibly due to the fact that the 1930s were still not the right time to create a charismatic Native character from a Native American. Chief Scar, a "stoic, stone-faced, bloodthirsty redskin" (Kilpatrick, 37), is presented as a polygamous rapist, a ruthless killer, and a collector of scalps of the whites he has killed. Nevertheless, Ethan Edwards (acted by John Wayne) "speaks his language" and scalps him after finding him dead. Even when dead, the Indian should not go unpunished and "The annihilating punishment that Scar receives is a warning to adopted non-whites of what awaits their transgressions" (Henderson, 448), reminding the half-Indian character Marty (acted by Jeffrey Hunter) that he has to kill the Indian in him to be acceptable in the white society. Hence, the reduction of the Native American to a purely ornamental level takes a new turn with the addition of elements from Native American faith. In one scene, Ethan shoots the eyes of a dead Indian so that he will be doomed to wander in the lands of the winds and not be able to reach his ancestors. To add insult to the injury of shooting even the dead natives and ridiculing their beliefs in afterlife, in many similar Western films, the native extras were asked to play the part of another tribe, regardless of their relations with that tribe in real life and were sometimes paid in alcohol, tobacco and guns (Singer, 2006: 212).

Another film by John Ford, *Drums along the Mohawk* (1939) used color imagery and sound elements, such as silhouettes of Native American characters in backlit door scenes and drum sounds, to further aggravate the effect of the native menace with the addition of comic touches. The film focuses on the ordeal of a settler family trying to survive in the native land and the natives' attacks on them. Trying to illustrate the frontier culture in a visually rich way, Ford focuses on the vulnerability of the individual family when faced with the harshness of frontier life. The solidarity of the frontier people against various ordeals is glorified and the real reason of the attacks by the Six Nations of the Iroquois Indians (to acquire the land that had belonged to them before it was forcefully taken from them) is not touched upon and the white settlers are presented as victims. As the natives were allies with the British during the War of Revolution, any chance on the part of the audience to sympathize with them disappears. In real life, the war

against the Six Nations was won when General John Sullivan attacked the natives' villages and massacred them. However, the film focuses on how the settlers won the war to exist and hence, according to Ford, such massacres, unspoken as they may remain, might be necessary for a still more glorious end, i.e. the formation of the USA. Such a lack of an attempt to provide any different look at white experience and history in North America renders the movie constrained to the limits of external representation.

As can be seen in the examples, although there were many Western films that included Native American characters, none offered the level of depth their white counterparts had. The Native Americans, as they were, were nonexistent. This was the dominant mode of representation until 1968, when American Indian Movement (AIM) became popular and Native Americans began to make their own films. Although external representation is no longer considered popular, this is more because the filmmakers have found more ingenious ways of creating Native American imagery and have abandoned this relatively outdated way of cinematic representation.

Internal Representation

This mode is employed in the films that depict Native Americans more or less from their own perspectives or at least try to present a Native American reality professedly without resorting to clichés and representation made by the dominant culture. This mode is not restricted to Native American filmmakers and it also includes many films that attempt at presenting a perspective that might be considered alternative to the external mode of representation. In this mode, the Native Americans are depicted from the point of view of an insider, mostly from that of a white Anglo-Saxon American but sometimes by one with supposedly greater insight into the Native American culture and society. A common technique used in this mode is the narrator who starts as an outsider and finds himself in circumstances that force him to become acquainted with Native American society and life. While relying on the imagery layer heavily again, this mode at least appears to be more constructive towards the formation of a Native American image as an alternative culture. Hence, the films made in this mode supposedly reflect the change in the point of view towards the Native Americans, or

life, people and the past as seen through their eyes. Nevertheless, what is interesting and ideological about this mode is the fact that it can present a totally subversive message. While seemingly presenting a more positive image of the Native American, this mode of representation leads the viewer to other less recognizable pitfalls that are potentially more damaging. As external representation made use of the good Indian for commercial purposes, these films present Native Americans as an endangered species, not a threat towards the white culture to be protected just like the panda (or buffalo would be a more appropriate example); no longer a threat but an element of cultural richness which must still be kept alive. By creating another sort of romantic image, in direct contrast to the external depiction of the Native American, this mode presents, in many cases, a victimized Native American, who becomes further removed from the reality and a more easily marketable product for cultural consumption. The change from the good white vs. the evil Indian to the victimized Native vs. the morally evil white presented in these films does not seem to serve for any change or development of cross-cultural perception. In contrast, the victimization process makes the process more commercial, making it harder to perceive the Native American reality. In other words, while the internal representation mode is a relative development over the external, because of it, as Michael Riley concludes, now Native Americans are not only trapped by history, "but are forever trapped in the history of film" (Rollins 6). While individual examples existed earlier, it was the 1970s that witnessed the change in this mode of representation. In an age when minorities made their voices heard and people were becoming politically more active and even militant while demanding their rights, filmmakers can no longer portray any minority the way they used to do. Furthermore, the Vietnam War and its perception by the American public also had repercussions in filmmaking and led to a reevaluation of the American past taking into consideration the Native American experience. To provide material to the market, films with similar themes and perspectives emerged and new techniques were required, which resulted in the change of mode rather than a change in the status of the natives.

Thanks to the internal mode of representation, Native Americans are no longer the savages eyeing the white folks' stagecoaches from the tops of the hills but now they have names, faces and some depth of character. In this mode, there are two basic story lines. In

the first, an outsider, a white man finds himself in a Native American community for some reason and he gains insight into the then so-called savage way of life. As the story progresses, he becomes not only one of them, but also a hero among them as he gains recognition. The second type of narrative is more daring; the central character is a Native American and the audience is asked to empathize with him and see the world through his eyes. In the first story type, there are films like *Soldier Blue* (1970), *A Man Called Horse* (1970), *Little Big Man* (1970) and *Dances with Wolves* (1990).

A Man Called Horse (1970) narrates the story of an English aristocrat (acted by Richard Harris) who is kidnapped, tortured, humiliated and held as a hostage by a native tribe. To further insult him, the natives call him Horse and give him to their children to play. As time passes, Horse gets used to the ways of the Native American tribe and not only begins to dress like them but also adopts their behavior to survive. He fights with a man and kills him only to find that he must scalp the man in accordance with the ways of the tribe. He later takes part in the Ceremony of the Sun (better known as the Sun Dance), a very lengthy and painful ritual, after which Horse becomes the tribe's leader. Nevertheless, the filmmakers make him leave his tribe by making whites attack the tribe and kill his Indian wife (acted by a non-Native female character again). He thus has to go back to his white lifestyle -- a testament to the fact that filmmakers did not know what to do with a white leader in a native tribe, which is a problem repeatedly seen in similar films. Yet, following a significant box office success, two sequels followed; *The Return of A Man Called Horse* (1976) and *Triumphs Of A Man Called Horse* (1982). The idea of making the white man the leader of the natives seems to have found its target audience and the studios wanted to exploit the method. *A Man Called Horse* is a quite fitting example of how "making the Indian look good in films" does good only to the white man.

Little Big Man (1970) is another film that followed the same formula. Blended with visual and intellectual humor, *Little Big Man* presented the main character Jack Crabb (acted by Dustin Hoffman), who was adopted and raised by Native Americans and has difficulty readapting to the ways of the white folk. Not being able to make it among the white culture, Little Big Man continuously comes back to the native community but cannot help witnessing their slow but sure collapse. While Crabb provides interesting commentary into the lives

and troubles of the Native Americans, he himself has a morally ambiguous position within the narrative; he is a cheater and keeps changing his identity between the white and the Indian to get away from the thick of the trouble. The insider is thus not somebody who has learned the ways of the natives but also someone who betrays them. While the film may be referred to as one of the most anti-establishment films, it was more a reaction towards the Vietnam War and the killing of Asians rather than the historic incident of the massacres of Native Americans. In other words, the filmmaker's usage of Native American motifs was more an allusion to the American involvement in Vietnam than a historic reevaluation of the Westward Movement, leading some scholars to call films like *Soldier Blue* and *Little Big Man* as "covert Vietnam films" (Basinger and Arnold, 192).

In the final scene, the Little Big Man accompanies his Indian grandfather and mentor to his death ritual. The Indian character Old Lodge Skins (acted by Chief Dan George) gives a long sermon on what death means for a native and offers his soul to the Great Spirit but fails to die on that specific day saying, "Sometimes the magic works, sometimes doesn't" (02:13:40). The humorous aspect of the scene seems to create the impression that Native Americans are not mystical creatures with special bonds with the supernatural. However, the director Arthur Penn's own words in an interview signify that the preference to make the Chief live rather than die, as was the case in the original novel written by Thomas Berger, was due to his own directorial preference for narrative style:

> We thought long and hard about this and in the first draft of the script [the Indian Chief] does die, but this death would have introduced an element of sadness into the film and we didn't want this. The film would have become dramatic, even melodramatic, instead of being picaresque. I also wanted to show that not only were the Indians going to be destroyed, but they were also condemned to live. On the whole, audiences like their entertainment dramatically compact and homogenous, but I want the opposite. A film should remain free and open, not with everything defined and resolved. (84)

Penn's seemingly critical attitude towards America was, more or less, an attempt to create a different narrative among other films.

Little Big Man, despite all these, can still be considered one of the most positive films that came closest to presenting a different point of view. Penn further added "The history of this country is the story of a nation destroying communities on the one hand and on the other re-creating them and letting new ones evolve. This is why we can't lose all hope for the future" (84). This ambiguous commentary seems to support the view that the destruction of the native, however unjust and barbaric it may have been, was like a constructive destruction. Hence, the justification of destruction, with the hope that it will lead to the emergence of a new society and the formation of new communities, becomes equally political as both the film and the director's comments leave one question unanswered, "Who will make up the new society that we hope for?" The recreation of the Native American not only sounds ideologically manipulative but it also makes the issue of rebirth more romantic and abstract. Therefore, the demise of the Native American is once more glorified and the martyred Indian is given the solace that his Phoenix-like reemergence will be within the new American society, not against it. As Prats observes, "America, the Western tells us, comes into being when the Indian is out of the way," and adds, "Perhaps the ambiguity explains why the Indian is the Western's everlasting revenant: the Western had to save the Indian so that it could destroy him" (10).

Despite Hollywood's attempt to rectify its image, Indians in the leading roles were continued to be played by non-Indians except for *House Made of Dawn* (1987) and *The White Dawn* (1985). Jojola says: "This … guaranteed that a movie cast by and about Native Americans was a losing investment" (Rollins 14). Name recognition was necessary for success in Hollywood and this revised Indian activism reached a bizarre level in *The Legend of Walks Far Woman* (1984) starring buxom Raquel Welch as a legendary Sioux woman warrior. Only in 1989, with *Powwow Highway*, Indians played by Indians was accepted by Hollywood as a successful technique for the first time.

Then came *Dances with Wolves* (1990), winner of seven Oscar Awards and almost a remake of *Little Big Man* (1970). Both films depicted Lakota and Cheyenne as heroic tribes fighting against the US Cavalry and Pawnees. Yet, unlike *Little Big Man*, which had a Vietnam era anti-militaristic message, *Dances with Wolves* had no remarkable "redeeming social merits" (Rollins, 17) and it was indeed apolitical and made use of the New Age concepts of universal peace and Mother

Earth. Thanks to its commercial success, it led to the emergence of another wave of Indian sympathy films. Nevertheless, as Jojola asserts, "these were as surreal and bizarre as a Salvador Dali painting" (Rollins 17). *Dances with Wolves* was instrumental, maybe much more than *Little Big Man*, in the Native American films becoming more and more commercialized with further transformation of the image of Native Americans into promotional material. Having found a new image to sell, in the 1990s, Hollywood continued to rely on mythmaking with Native American characters becoming gentler and kinder mystic chiefs instead of true to life Indians. *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992) is a very good example of what Hollywood can do to a potentially illuminating story: To fuse fact with fiction; "The fact was supplied by Native American consultants, the fiction by James Fenimore Cooper" (Rollins 18). The film turned Cooper's frontier story into a love story, in other words Hollywoodized it, and the last Mohican was there to add a melodramatic overtone instead of any information that illuminates the audience about what actually happened to many Native American tribes and cultures. All these films were indeed nothing but Hollywood's multicultural love affair. In the age of multiculturalism, the Indian sells and at the turn of the century, the market expressed its demand for victimized Indian stories. None of these films depicted the most pressing issues in the Native American communities and the most important problems for them, such as substance abuse and alcoholism, school desertions, fragmented families and problems regarding school curriculum ("Native American Issue Today"). Instead, these films presented a polished face over the Native American community, transforming it into a nonrealistic social entity.

As for the films that relied on the Native American protagonist, they fared much better in this regard. Films like *Smoke Signals* (1988) and TV series like *Northern Exposure* (1990-95) may have portrayed Native American communities with all their problems but they were few in number and could not help but sentimentalize their subject matter. The primary native characters presented in these films are naïve adolescents and have many comic aspects, which are not necessarily negative qualities themselves. Actually, as Vine Deloria Jr. observed, humor is a very vital element of Native American life: "Indians have found a humorous side of nearly every problem and the experiences of life have generally been so well defined through jokes and stories that they have become a thing in themselves" (39). Interestingly, these qualities, while making the characters more sympathetic for the audience, result in their being

painted on the screen as less than intelligent human beings. Despite the acceptance of the grotesqueness and absurdities of the closed and small community whose pitfalls and destructiveness have been depicted many times over in the American canon, the natives, not being able to make it in the big city, keep coming back to the reservation, the only place where they can survive as they are. Within the closed sphere of the reservation, the native character is invited to enjoy and take pride in the brave ancestors who fought against the white man while they are depicted to have completely accepted the American way of life in their daily lives. The resistance issue is no longer practical and the struggle for an Indian cause has been a thing of the past or not very different from the acts of any other ethnic group to become more visible within the American mosaic. The native movement seems to have taken its place among street parades and demonstrations that are so common in American life that at times they become a part of daily life and less perceptible during the daily rush. This attitude, the crippling of the native cause by forcing it to take place within the vagaries of the legal system, limitation of the few survivors to the reservation while the accompanying depiction of the reservation as a place which is not for the mentally stable, shows that the native has come to rest on the assumption that the battle has been lost against the white man's possession of the native image in his films. The Indian, who just began to depict himself in his own films can only depict a struggling race under the overwhelming influence of the mainstream popular culture. Thus, the place for the Indian to reach success is in things like playing basketball while getting aspiration from his brave ancestors, being a brave soldier in the American military while claiming that he has a long history of warriors is the ultimate deflection of a culture's own values and its being put to the service of commercial processes. *Smoke Signals*, the first film, written, acted and even produced by Native Americans seems to be the only film that comes closest to depicting a Native American reality that makes use of Native American humor as "the cement by which the … Indian movement is held together" (DeLoria 53).

Representation by Proxy

This approach is the most interesting one not because it treats the Native Americans better, but because of the ingenuity in the methodology it utilizes in their representation. In this mode, the imagery layer has been reduced to a minimum and in many respects it may even be impossible to recognize the Native Americans as they are only

depicted by the imagery. Yet, what has taken over is the formula layer; that is, in these films the Native Americans do not appear as themselves, but are represented by proxies; in other words, by still *others* that symbolize and correspond to a certain culture and its value system. In other words, the proxy makes the native twice removed from his present state and transforms it into a being which is absolutely removed from the reality of the present world. Hollywood uses these proxies to make use of the commodity of the noble savage who lives in nature and under the threat of imperialistic forces to market it into less perceptible masses. To put it bluntly, this mode is what many members of the audience discovered saying, "those bluish creatures in *Avatar* are actually Indians!" The change is most visible in the change from the Western to Science Fiction as the popular genre that depicts the white man's adventures in hostile land. Actually, many films especially in the Science Fiction genre utilize this approach and thus provide indirect commentary on the Native American experience. These depictions ultimately remove the Native Americans from their direct historical condition and turn them into cartoonish or animated proxy figures who might still represent the Native Americans, but also, who have surrendered to a commercial process without staining the conscience of the white man, providing him with good white protagonists to identify with while at the same time putting the blame on the bad characters who caused all the destruction and massacres. The "alienation of the Native American" in his own land is the final step that is taken in Hollywood to further profit from the native imagery in an environmentally conscious consumer market. Removed from historic experience, Native Americans have completely become a commodity to be redesigned, repainted, reanimated and remarketed in different guises in processes beyond their control. Now, the natives cannot even protest the depiction of their ancestors because there is no nominal, historical and legal proof that these are -or were- the Native Americans of the old West. This mode presents a homogenized picture of the diverse indigenous cultures, blending them all into a "feathered bunch" who love nature and have the ability to form mystical connections with it. The individual identities and differences of Native Americans have been reduced to a monolithic mystical culture and thus their role in American history has been distorted. The proxies that the white man encounters in his further voyages into *terra incognita* are the embodiment of a strange amalgamation of the romantic qualities -good or bad- that the supposedly real Indians used to carry.

It appears that some examples in this mode of imagery that may not directly conform to the Native American imagery. Nevertheless, the formula layer makes it clear that the main issue is not what the proxies look like but what they stand for. Sometimes, these creatures are depicted as Native Americans, as in the case of *Star Trek: Voyager*, easy to identify but most of the time they were other types of non-human beings; aliens, extraterrestrials, other races and those who are "different" in one sense or another. They have certain things in common that define their culture: They live in harmony with nature, most of the time in the forest and have special ties with their environment. On occasion, directly or indirectly, they state that they consider themselves not as the owners of the land and nature but rather a part of it. The superficial romantic portrayal seems to be the most idiosyncratic quality of science fiction's creation of others that are the alternative to materialistic conquest, without providing any acceptably true solution to the very same issue in the USA.

For instance, *Star Wars: Episode I: The Phantom Menace* (1999) takes place on a planet called Naboo, in a galactic system that is in turmoil like the old West and located in the outer rim, just like a frontier town caught in lawlessness and waiting for noble and brave rescuers. The planet's Edenic landscape is inhabited by two sentient races, the humanoids; that is the aristocratic whites, and the Gungans, the underwater and forest dwellers that are friendly but at the same time "great warriors and riders," wearing feathers, carrying shields and fighting with spears and arrows against the invading imperialistic drone army that is after their land. They have sacred places in the forest where they go when in distress and boast about never surrendering to any authority. The filmmakers, George Lucas in this case, chose these not as a coincidence in an age of ecology and environmentalism. As the Star Wars paraphernalia has shown, from the very start Gungans were modeled on Native Americans, but not the Native Americans living in the USA today, but on the Native American as the image or the proxy presented as the nature warrior, a restoration of the noble savage in space. The Imperial Army, paradoxically, destroys the land they are trying to capture, quite possibly trying to make it unlivable for the creatures on it. Hence, "the inhuman" practices of the Imperial Army against "the humanitarian" natives serve as the basis of the moral conflict and the natives become victorious at the end. Nevertheless, the victory of the Gungans has no meaning for the Indian living on the reservation today.

In the *Star Trek*s series of films, as well, many aliens encountered in different star systems depict the same qualities, such as being warriors on the run, having strict social and/or communal rules instead of a legal codex and wearing clothes unusually similar to Native American clothing. Even the iconic Mr. Spock has interesting similarities to Chingachkook of *Last of the Mohicans;* he is also the last of his race as his home planet Vulkan has exploded. In one episode of *Star Trek: Voyager* (1996), the crew of the Voyager is stranded on a primitive planet and continuously refers to the planet's native population as "the aliens." The audience is invited to perceive the others as alien and different, even though they are the indigenous population of an area the protagonists happen to visit. Thus, the audience is invited to choose their sides in any potential future conflict; the unfamiliarity is enough to consider the natives as hostile. The estrangement makes the underlying moral questions irrelevant, such as "what right do we have to be there, even if we claim to ourselves that our intentions are good?" Science Fiction or space westerns do reiterate the basic argument of the white man with slightly different terminology and in better (or maybe funnier) looking shapes: "We are good people and we have a right to be here." The Manifest Destiny of the frontier era has been replaced with the drive for scientific exploration that results in a complete distortion and reversal of historical reality that seems to justify intergalactic conquest.

Lastly, *Avatar* (2009), which was marketed with hype such as "a revolution in the history of filmmaking" and "nothing will be the same from now on" in its trailers, has once again proven that almost nothing has changed and the future will be the same unless somebody does something about it. The symbolic symbiosis of the planet in the film and its heavenly peaceful inhabitants, the Na'vi, who worship a mother goddess and have dreamwalking warriors among them, are angelic missionaries for the environmentally-conditioned global eco-genteel market wrapped in noble savage attire. The absurdity of the very existence of such a humanoid race is apparent by the fact that they are presented as warriors on a planet where there is no other race to fight against. Disregarding reason, the blockbuster focused on the peace brought by the unification with nature and the group meditation reminiscent of mass rituals of indigenous peoples around the world. As the main argument presented to the audience, the mystification of life vs. the cruelty of materialistic possession is seriously in conflict with

a film which at the same time claims to be one of the most expensive productions Hollywood has ever made, grossing more than 2 billion US dollars.

As a conclusion, the three modes of representation outlined here are, as this study tried to portray, are nothing more than basically marketing strategies that recreate and reinstate the image of American indigenous peoples. The change from one mode to another appears to be a response to the demands of the market and Hollywood seems to be making an art and science of this pragmatic shift between modes of thinking for material gain and ideological superiority. As the image of the Native American continues to be shaped by the hands whose motives are fundamentally different from the natives, it is unlikely that the image will depict historical reality and cause any change for the good. Nor is it likely that the Native American filmmakers, who resort to using the very same methods utilized by Hollywood in an attempt to depict their status, will witness any development in that status. History has shown that commercialization has but one aim and once this aim is made the objective of a filmic narrative, which, due to its nature, is very prone to be abused for material pursuit, the result will be equally destructive and will render the Native American problem eternally insoluble. At the same time, it is likely that Hollywood's primary aim is to keep its status as the determining force of the meaning and control of images and continue to find novel means to make use of this subject material. This ideological aspect, that is the maintenance of a status quo, as practiced by Hollywood may not be as clear as keeping, buying and selling slaves and call the process "the white man's burden," but nevertheless is no less unethical.

Notes

[1] The quotation is from a personally observed anecdote.

[2] In the 1890s, it was the German writer Karl May who wrote about the adventures of a fictional Native American character called Winnetou through the eyes of his German blood brother Old Shatterhand. The popularity of May's novels not only sparked an interest in Europe towards the Native Americans but also became the source of inspiration for a series of movies made between 1920s and late 1960s.

[3] As a genre, the American Western has its own set of conventions, practices and norms and not every single Western included a Native American character.

[4] The alternative title of the film is *Red Kit Daltonlar'a Karşı*. The film is an adaptation of the animation *Lucky Luke: Daisy Town* (1971, dir. René Goscinny).

[5] It must here be noted that the depiction of the Native Americans in Turkish films is not limited to the negative portrayal reminiscent of the US-made Westerns. There are various examples in which the Native American was depicted as the social outcast and even revolutionary. Such films worthy of attention are *Kovboy Ali* (1966, dir. Yılmaz Atadeniz) and *Yedi Belalılar* (1970, dir. İrfan Atasoy) both starring Yılmaz Güney. Quite possibly due to his own political views and experiences, Güney, who also wrote the script for *Yedi Belalılar*, chose to act on the side of the Native Americans, forming a striking parallelism between the revolutionary-socialist cause in the late 60s in Turkey and the Native American condition of the old West. Nevertheless, the Native American imagery used in these films is again limited to visual layers.

[6] While a great number of films in this category were made by non-Native Americans, there are a number of films in which Native Americans took part as scriptwriters or producers/directors. Nevertheless, this does not change the fact that the way the these films were made still adopted an outsider's perspective. The reason why such films adopted an exterior gaze may be due to commercial/market expectations and this also shows that such motives led even some Native Americans to internalize the type of perspective imposed by the dominant culture.

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