

**(Re)Narrating the Self: Cross-Cultural Identity and Multivocality in Kim Scott's *That Deadman Dance* (2010)**

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**Abstract**

Written by an Australian author of mixed descent, Kim Scott's *That Deadman Dance* has received high critical appraisal as a major canonical text in Australian literature. The novel hosts the early years of British colonization in Australia that witnessed the initial encounter between Europeans and the Noongars (the original people) on the Southern coast of western Australia, interrogating the nature of this unique moment of cross-cultural encounter and its implications on the history of Australia. For both indigenous Australians as well as the colonial settlers, identity formation and history have long been entangled with their relationship to the land. For long, colonial narratives have erupted to dispossess the natives from their land as well as historical representation and to legitimize the colonial scheme. As a result, violence has emerged giving way to various modes of resistance of which narratology is a basic constituent. As a representative work of Scott's idea of reconciliation between opposites manifested in the relationship between the colonizer and colonized, *That Deadman Dance* strives to bring the Indigenous heritage into contemporary culture through language revival and storytelling, underscoring the opposing cosmologies shaping this unique experience and offering the notion of reconciliation as a mode of resistance and cultural revival. To trace this idea of reconciliation, the present study uses the narratological approach as a tool of analysis, specifically Bakhtin's concept of multivocal narration examining the role of literature as an artistic implementation of human ideology to achieve reconciliation. By doing this, this paper attempts to investigate Scott's polyphonic narrative technique in dealing with this unique moment of cultural encounter as demonstrated through the novel's content and structure.

**Keywords:** Indigenous culture, Australian literature, multivocality, ideology, resistance, identity, reconciliation, narratology.

## Introduction

I'd like to think that writing fiction is sometimes a way to explore, to rethink and possibly to retrieve or create something from between and behind the lines on the page. As such it can help the revitalization of an indigenous heritage (Scott 2007 123).

As a multi-award winning Noongar author of mixed descent, Kim Scott (1957-) has long been considered an acclaimed figure in Australian Aboriginal literature aware of the necessity of reviving indigenous cultural and historical heritage through narration and artistic creativity. The question of identity underlies the body of his writing that primarily addresses the issue of co-existence and questions the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians through his distinctive polyphonic narrative technique and choice of characters that undergo a quest for self-definition. The question of 'Land' or rather of 'Country' lies at the center of Scott's writing. *That Deadman Dance* (2010) depicts a brief moment of the colonial encounter where both sides have co-existed providing the contemporary reader with a diversity of valid voices echoing the various distinctive perspectives associated with the experience, and offering reconciliation as the most powerful mode of Aboriginal resistance.

According to Franz Fanon, "for a colonized people, the most essential value, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and above all dignity" (44). There is an indivisible relation between the people and their 'Mother Earth' in a sense that the environment is always dealt with as a kin living being. In the case of Australian history, the European settlers' exploitation of the land and the surrounding ecological environment has directly induced a violent encounter between the indigenous and white cosmologies. Moreover, in documenting the contribution of the white settlers, history has overlooked the negative aspects the Aborigines were forced to endure, and tarnished the indigenous culture resulting in Aboriginal forced-forgetting. Nevertheless, the Aboriginal cultural identity has remained a fundamental constitution of the Australian nation resulting in the emergence of Australian indigenous literature as a powerful mode of resistance against the colonial narrative that "condemns them to perpetual barbarism" as well as their dispossession from their land and historical documentation (Ingram 15).

In accordance with this, Australian indigenous writers have tried to revive and reconstruct the Aboriginal identity through depicting various images of dispossessed truths. Unlike a multitude of indigenous writers, Scott argues that violence is not an offered solution for reviving the Aboriginal cultural identity and getting back the lost image. For him, reconciliation is the most suitable means for cultural and ideological rehabilitation. Although the term reconciliation literally means "the coming together of both sides of the binary division" (Ahmed 7), in case of the Aboriginal Australian experience, reconciliation "entails the process of overcoming racism and granting the Aborigines their basic rights" (Ahmed 7). That is, in spite of his reconciling approach, Kim Scott clearly challenges capitalism by foregrounding the result of the settlers' misuse and exploitation of the Aboriginal natural resources together with the exclusion of the natives from their own story in the appearance of violence and conflicts among the inhabitants of the Australian land. Accordingly, for him and other indigenous writers, reaching a state of reconciliation is in itself an implication of the indigenous resistance that accepts both existing cosmologies to establish a more cohesive, more inclusive one.

To date, the majority of critical attention for *That Deadman Dance* has been paid to the novel's ecological approaches. According to Jean Gleeson White, the novel provides "a literary study of the relationship of human and non-human [...] reconsidering the nature of the relation between human and non-human in a century facing environmental mayhem" (1). In their study

of *That Deadman Dance*, Wang and Li explore Scott's "ecological consciousness" highlighting his role in experimenting the contemporary "environmental crisis" by exposing the inevitable interrelationship between man and nature and the effect of human intervention in the ecological system (1). Additionally, Martin Staniforth affirms that the text under study traces "the changing pattern of aboriginal/settler relations in that area between 1826 and 1844, showing the way these relations shape and are equally shaped by different approaches to land and the natural world" (11). That is, a major body of scholarly work has been directed to the effect of this infinite relationship with the land and the ecological world on the lives and interactions between the natives and the settlers.

Looking from a variant angle, the current study examines the novel from a narratological position; adopting Bakhtin's theory of polyphonic narration to expose the multivocal discourses posed by the novel in dealing with this unique moment of interaction. In tackling these aforementioned issues and defining their relation to contemporary Australia, Scott's choice of offering a reconciling suggestion for survival is bracketed by his adoption of the plurality of narrative positions. In the novel, the reader encounters a variety of characters populating this "multivoiced world" (Bakhtin, *Problems*: 8), seeking to "reinvigorate a space where the possibility of understanding can be turned actual and lasting" (Molloy 114). Furthermore, the present paper traces the importance of music and artistic expressions to achieve this reconciliatory atmosphere putting together all scattered voices in one single frame with a picture left unclosed to its viewer.

### **Bakhtin's Multivocality and Australian Cultural Re-memory**

As a novel epitomizing Kim Scott's attempt to bring together various types of existing narratives, *That Deadman Dance* embodies Bakhtin's concept of the multivocal, or polyphonic, novel which is constructed "as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other" (Bakhtin, *Problems*: 19). Bakhtin's narrative theories, that mark a shift from classical narratology, stand as a "unique specter" (Zeng 491). The success of multivocality as a medium for producing a unique assimilated version of the story "lies precisely in the fact that the voices remain independent and, as such, are combined in a unity of a higher order" (Bakhtin, *Problems*: 21-2). As previously noted, the process of colonial settlement has long implied the establishment of the settler myth that promotes the conviction of the heroic role performed by the 'invader' as being the establisher of civilization. This colonial legacy propagates that the real Australia came into being after Arthur Phillip's declaring British sovereignty over the Australian land claiming it to be 'no-one's land' in 1788, although the Aborigines have been populating this land for more than 7000 years. According to Staniforth, in their attempt to turn the land into a place to which they belong, the British have strived to clear it from its original inhabitants imparting the image of "the struggle of a small group of white convict migrants to overcome a hostile environment and antagonistic natives" (2); hence reflecting what Paul Carter terms "imperial history" whose purpose is "not to understand or interpret: [but] to legitimate" (xvi).

In his *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon writes of the pervasive colonialist view that "the settler makes history.... He is the absolute beginning: 'This land was created by us'" (39-40). He contextualizes the strategic manipulation used by the invaders in exploiting the colonized land and its people. He further underscores the "aesthetic expressions of respect for the established order [that] serve to create around the exploited person an atmosphere of submission and of inhibition which lightens the task of policing considerably" (38). For Fanon, the settler and the native are old acquaintances; in fact, the settler is right when he speaks of knowing 'them' well. From the settler's point of view, it is him who has brought the native into existence and who perpetuates his presence. On the other hand, the native is aware of his

ownership of the land and original tradition. He is also fully conscious that his historical contact with his land and its constituents tames its wilderness and cruelty; and his acceptance of the newcomer's co-existence stems from his ability to adapt and mingle, not from weakness and helplessness.

Thereupon, Aboriginal people "have been for a long time victims of what is often called a 'forced forgetting', an almost systematic operation of erasure and/ or concealing of the complexity of their cultures and traditions" (Colombo 303). This reduction to a silent Other has induced an Aboriginal counter-narrative aiming to find a place in history for this silenced Other. These narratives have brought into the world's focus the conflicts that the country has long witnessed; the conflicts that have been lost and expelled from historical documentations, constituting what Edward Said calls, in his *Culture and Imperialism*, secondary resistance which refers to the "network of processes that literature is part of" (209). Therefore, reviving the Aboriginal forgotten history is an act of cultural re-memory through which Indigenous literature strives to achieve "movement towards the future while safeguarding the pride and dignity of the past" (Shoemaker 479), which implies establishing the indigenous identity through resistance. In the body of his work in general and *That Deadman Dance* in particular, Kim Scott attempts to bring together the multiplicity of narrative threads recounting this unique experience so as to restore these forgotten voices and reconnect the conflicting poles.

To both explore the inherent potentialities of narratology and exhaust its effective techniques in orchestrating the opposed voices, the present study employs Bakhtin's concept of multivocality and polyphonic narration to expose this unique experience. In a polyphonic text, the narrative voice presented is "not the voice of the person narrating but the interactivity of texts produced by the narrative and acknowledged by the reader" (Kristeva in Peters 303). Some chief characteristics of a multivocal narrative is the "plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices" (Bakhtin 6); that is, besides the autonomous consciousness of the hero, exist other consciousnesses with equal rights and existing voices. Hence, the character in a polyphonic novel "is treated as ideologically authoritative and independent; he is perceived as the author of a fully weighted ideological conception of his own, and not as an object" of its author's vision (Bakhtin, *Problems*: 5). Thus, a polyphonic novel does not authorize a single consciousness over other objectified ones; it rather offers the reader or the narratee multiple possibilities of interpreting a single event.

Therefore, it can be said that the text under investigation offers a dialogical representation of the experience as a replacement for the monological discourse governing the set of represented histories. The novel in question echoes Bakhtin's definition of a polyphonic project as being "incompatible with a mono-ideational framework" (*Problems*: 77); it pursues a multivocal narrative structure that renders it rich with multiple voices each having its own narrative weight and validity. The reader encounters a story written by various characters unsubordinated to the author's voice, leaving the reader with manifold realities as perceived by their distinct beholders. *That Deadman Dance*, hence, cleverly presents both narrative lines seeking an understanding juncture through a more inclusive prospective, reiterating Bakhtin's view of a holistic truth that requires many entangled voices to be reached.

### ***That Deadman Dance* and Non-verbal Resistance**

*That Deadman Dance* emphasizes the function of artistic expressions, literature, music, songs and dance as non-verbal signifiers of resistance that act as counter-discourse for the English language as the major accepted transmitter of meaning. The dance and the musical implications in the narrative pose music as a metaphorical representation of cultural and

historical phenomena. The title of the novel embodies the core motif of the novel, that of resurrection. The 'Deadman Dance' performed by its pivotal character – Bobby Wabalanginy – proves at the end of the narrative to be his allegorical means of the Noongars coming back to life and his final attempt to bring together the Aboriginal and settlers' traditions, as if he has been rewriting history through his body. According to Fanon, dancing constitutes a major mode of existence and of exploitation in the indigenous culture: The colonized natives "dance; that keeps them busy; it relaxes their painfully contracted muscles; and then the dance mimes secretly, often without their knowing, the refusal they cannot utter and the murders they dare not commit" (18). Originally, the Deadman Dance has been a military drill performed by the British marines before the departure of Captain Matthew Flinders -the discoverer of the 'Terra Australis'. It has turned into a dance after an old Noongar started imitating their gestures and movements.

The Deadman Dance is not about dead men; it is rather about people appearing from across the horizon. In Bobby's version, he mimics the settlers' actions and moves, uttering the unutterable and expressing the unexpressed. With Bobby Wabalanginy, the British dance has been transformed to integrate a myriad of ideologies and mixed voices; it is an expression of continuity, of unlimited possibilities. Manipulating an originally-European dance as well as appropriating the settlers' language signifies the endurance of the Noongars and their resistance against the settler's scheme. Hence, within the studied text, the reader encounters a 'readable' kind of music; music that can be read as a metaphorical language that carries significant meanings: "He grew up doing the Deadman Dance -those stiff movements, those jerking limbs- as if he'd learned it from their very own selves; but with him it was a dance of life, a lively dance for people to do together.... It was a dance from way past the ocean's horizon, and those people give it to our old people" (*That Deadman Dance*: 75).

Moreover, this selected dance symbolizes the role intended by Scott's novel and reflects his multivocal narrative technique, where the reader meets an orchestrated multiplicity of voices, echoing Bakhtin's concept of music as a metaphor for the independence of the multiple voices as well as their combination and coordination. That is, Bobby's deployment of this originally European dance to suit his indigenous people and circumstances is his way in speaking up the silenced voices. The dance, that incorporates the multitude of existing cosmologies, has turned into an accepted ritual reflecting the indigenous pain and modes of endurance and articulating the forgotten history.

### ***That Deadman Dance* as a Multidirectional Memory**

I wanted to build a story from their confidence, their inclusiveness and sense of play, and their readiness to appropriate new cultural forms.... Believing themselves manifestations of a spirit of place impossible to conquer, they appreciated reciprocity and the nuances of cross-cultural exchange". (*That Deadman Dance*: 413-414)

Scott's culminating words sum it all and bring together all scattered threads. As previously pointed, instead of focusing on the injustices witnessed by the indigenous community and its inhabitants, Kim Scott attempts to use his creativity to "re-establish a connection with the spirit of the place going back to those moments of shared history in an attempt to restore positive relationships and stimulate new understandings" (Colombo 301). Scott's novel refutes the tendency adopted by most Aboriginal literature to portray the aboriginal people as powerless victims. Instead, he chooses to show how they can 'resist' the imposed stereotypes by telling stories of survival resisting victimhood. *That Deadman Dance* mediates the importance of past remembrance which intervenes with our perception of the present and "activates a regional indigenous memory to address a national and transnational

audience” through Scott’s unapologetic sliding among languages, cultures and cosmologies (Kennedy, “Multidirectional”, 270).

In the novel, the reader encounters Fanon’s mode of colonial existence; the world which is a world “cut in two. The dividing line, the frontiers, are shown by barracks and police stations. In the colonies it is the policeman and the soldier who are the official, instituted go-betweens, the spokesmen of the settler and his rule of oppression” (38). Likewise, the view of the indigenous natives as the ‘Other’ is clearly focused upon. Meanwhile, Scott’s aim is not to focus on this duality of perception; but rather on the concept of agreement and harmony as an inevitable future necessity. The novel at hand is considered to be part of the ‘recovery’ narratives, in which returning to the past “is closely tied to re-connecting with an endangered language like Noongar that forms an integral part of [its author’s] own personal heritage and identity” (Kossew 170). Menak’s -the representative of the old native generation- inherited story brings forth the notion of ‘communicative memory’ that is orally transferred through generations and which preserves a long-forgotten culture. Thus, Scott’s choice of this moment prior to violence and conflict has aimed to renew the early dialogical encounters and foster a period of conformity and cross-cultural exchange as the most convenient way of co-existence that might revive and preserve the original Australian essence.

*That Deadman Dance* is peopled with a spectrum of multivocal perspectives demonstrating how both cultures can “merge to create a new heterogenous culture” reconciling all views and bringing forth this historical era from all its entangled angles (Molloy 144). This multivocal narratology proves the role played by the Noongars in establishing cross-cultural relationships with the settlers. Scott tactfully presents the same event narrated through the characters’ subjectivity and colored by their own personalities and ideological construction. The reader or the narratee finds himself encountering “a multiperspective presentation” of the events, stripping the long-established history off its reliability (Maziarozik 172), and the notions of guilt and innocence become trapped within a web of relative perspectives. Scott’s characters are ‘heard’ rather than ‘seen’, and the plurality of tongues and perspectives are culminated in “a musical image for the interrelationship of voices” through the variety of artistic rituals closely connected to the Noongar culture (Benson 223). One hears the Noongar voice in Wunyeran and Menak’s stories; the self-justifying tone of the settler and his version of the story is clearly discerned in words uttered by Dr. Cross and the Chainé family members; and through the confused, identity-seeking Bobby Wabalanginy, Scott proposes his own dilemma and offers solutions for getting along.

The story is told through a third person narrator chronicling Bobby Wabalanginy’s life which will be exposed in a non-chronological way as a representative of this generation who have been apt to absorb and appropriate the colonizer’s language and culture while trying hard to hold tight to their land and people. Scott opens the lines of his narrative symbolically by Bobby writing the Noongar word ‘Kaya’ meaning ‘hello’ written in the settlers’ language as an indication of mixing both worlds: “Nobody ever done writ that before, he thought. Nobody ever writ hello or yes that way” (*That Deadman Dance*: 1). More emphatically, the choice of his name is symbolic; Bobby is a name given by the colonizers to native ambassadors, and Wabalanginy means “all of us play together” (*That Deadman Dance*: 365). In this sense, Bobby may stand for Scott himself whose formative inheritance is both Aboriginal and European, the fact that makes him capable of moving between languages and cultures.

Scott’s choice of Bobby for this narrative position is highly significant. Bobby stands for the “Aboriginal everyman” (Molloy 164); together with other selected Aboriginal characters in the novel, as Wunyeran and Menak who echo Sartre’s notion of the ‘native elite’; the promising young adolescents who are picked up by the colonizer and are “branded ... with

the principles of Western culture; they stuffed their mouths full with high-sounding phrases, grand glutinous words that stuck to the teeth”, and “after a short stay in the mother country they were sent home, whitewashed. These walking lies had nothing left to say to their brothers; they only echoed” (qtd in *The Wretched of the Earth*:5). Throughout his life journey, Bobby, whose role is to fill the narrative gap left in the given story, gets exposed to multicultural encounters that shape his consciousness and historical identity. He attempts to prove to the settlers that the Noongars are capable of incorporating the European culture and language without losing the fundamental base of their own to provide sufficient support. Hence, to echo Bakhtin’s words, Bobby is a “sencretic construction” that includes “two semantic and axiological belief systems” within himself (*Discourse in the Novel*: 304).

This ‘native elite’ who has sailed far away and returned is introduced from the novel’s commencing scene as being inseparable from the land and its non-existing inhabitants -the whales: “He was not much more than a baby when he first saw whales rolling between him and the islands” (*That Deadman Dance*: 1). He is associated with the sea and the natural environment; he has “so much family out there in the sea... knows there’s life under the sea still, like there was at the cold, frozen time... outside and inside, ocean and blood; almost the same salty fluid” (*That Deadman Dance*: 293-4). The different stories Bobby has heard and even witnessed constitute the communal memory of these early encounters: “Bobby Wabalanginy heard the stories so many times they lived as memory, and now he told them as if he was the central character: the gifts, the sails, the Deadman Dance” (*That Deadman Dance*: 82). He thus lives in two different worlds that hardly ever collide within him; he naturally moves across the two spheres giving way to cross-cultural agreement and acceptance.

The novel’s primary narrative- that of Bobby- coordinates other discourses that work together to shape the plot. With a sudden flashback to “once upon a time”, the third person narrator takes the reader to the year 1833, marking the early moments of the Noongar/settler encounter (*That Deadman Dance*: 15). The deployment of such a fairy-tale opening reflects the early feelings of hope which have consequently turned into a nightmarish reality. In a brilliant scene portraying the early settling of a European ship, Scott describes such a crucial moment from various perspectives. He describes the feelings of the settlers together with those of Bobby on board the ship, and at the very same moment the thoughts and apprehension of Menak and his Aboriginal people on the island seeing the approaching ship. Bobby’s excitement and fear while preparing the sail for settling is skillfully mixed with the feelings of everyone on deck; the captain – Geordie Chaine- is hopefully holding the telescope to his eye thinking of the land as “empty...trackless. Waiting for him” (*That Deadman Dance*: 23), while other passengers are feeling frustrated and the Chaine kids anxious.

On the other side of the frame appears Menak looking at the settling ship with mixed inherited feelings: “Menak had seen ships come and go since he was a child, had seen his father dance with the very earliest visitors...[who] stayed so long” (*That Deadman Dance*: 20). Moreover, an old Noongar woman sums it all: “These people chase us from our own country. They kill our animals and if we eat one of their sheep, they shoot us” (*That Deadman Dance*: 32-3). The reader is furthermore introduced to the colonial scheme through Cross’s letters and writings. Although he is portrayed as an amiable man, still Dr. Cross is a settler whose primary aim is to own this found land and transform it into a British colony. He is the one who draws the colonial strategy and even suggests Chaine for the coming step as being “the sort of man the settlement required” (*That Deadman Dance*: 43).

Throughout the novel’s events, Bakhtin’s multivocality is clearly employed. The reader moves smoothly from one voice to another, with Scott’s transitioning narration that embarks

him on a journey through the different phases of the Noongar/ settler interaction. The first phase is symbolized by the relationship between Dr. Cross and the natives before conflicts erupt. Dr. Cross is the English character who embodies the generosity and ambivalence of the early Europeans; he reflects the early settlers' views: "The colony needs people, wrote Cross in a sudden rush, who are willing to explore the surrounding country and able to rise above torpor and timidity so that they might aid and assist each other, create a mutual demand and supply, and extend themselves into the interior" (*That Deadman Dance*: 43).

Throughout the years of his stay on the island, he discovers the incompatibility of the two modus operandi, that is, the recognition of the subjecthood of Noongar and the seizing of their lands" (Brewster, "Whiteness", 64). He is worried that by taking the natives' lands "the lives of the natives would be altered forever and their generosity and friendliness be betrayed" (*That Deadman Dance*: 62). Although he is portrayed as an amiable settler, he is not free from carrying on the colonial project. The reader is allowed to see Cross's sadness and bewilderment when writing the letter in which he declares his retirement; we touch through the omniscient narrator the weak part in Cross while declaring for his "wife and family" that he has let them down (*That Deadman Dance*: 38).

The relationship between Dr. Cross and Wunyeran, and later Bobby, represents these early days as days of friendship and compatibility. Both parties exchange experiences in a "genuine give and take paradigm" which has helped in the temporary disappearance of the colonizer/colonized dichotomy (*That Deadman Dance*: 62). This reciprocal dialogue between a colonizer and the aboriginal people is meant to propose a new version of history and present a better alternative. Dr. Cross knows that it has been "their home" but also believes he has earned that land (*That Deadman Dance*: 96). His role in the establishment of the colony rests in his friendly approach in dealing with the natives, his ability to accept and be accepted: "the surprisingly soft and pliable kangaroo skin hung easily from Cross's shoulders, enclosing him in the smell of another man, a very different man, of course, but a man for all of that. Noongar, he remembered" (*That Deadman Dance*: 100).

Still, it is worthy to note that this attitude towards the natives has sprung from the argument of the 'settler narratives' for giving these savages the right to be civilized, not for their rightful ownership of the land. That is, giving them excuses for being "slow to appreciate what we offer" (*That Deadman Dance*: 104). Additionally, Cross's awareness of the danger of the early natives comprise his ideological need for a peaceful settlement; he tells Wunyeran: "We are two men of such different backgrounds,...and, attempting to fuse them, we were preparing for the birth of a new world" (*That Deadman Dance*: 140). From the other side of the scale, the indigenous people themselves accept and welcome those early visitors since they themselves are not good traders, so they think they would exchange benefits not to lose everything: "We learned your words and songs and stories, and never knew you didn't want to hear ours" (*That Deadman Dance*: 116).

This settler narrative is further underscored in the relationship between Bobby and the Chaine family with first-hand dialogues tactfully interwoven into the narrative fabric. Bobby, as a capable young native who can be of great help, has been given the chance to be brought up with Christopher and Christine Chaine; Mama Chaine has even taught him with them with the generous intention of getting him out of savagery: "It is our moral duty to do so, her husband suggested, to help him move toward civilization, and our friend Dr Cross established it as a priority, to help and save him" (*That Deadman Dance*: 175). Mrs. Chaine also realizes the frequent deaths caused to the natives with "their arrival...though [they] do not lift a hand" (*That Deadman Dance*: 176). However, although Bobby has felt among his family, by the passage of time, he starts to see the real picture.

The ideological shift in the settlers' plans is marked by the death of Dr. Cross and empowerment of Geordie Chaine who has been recommended by Cross himself for this stage of establishing the so-called 'civilized' society on the 'wilderness'. The fact that Geordie Chaine takes Dr. Cross's place reflects and "recalls the first colonizers' perception that lies at the basis of the doctrine of terra nullius and which was used to justify the appropriation of Aboriginal land by virtue of the fact that there was (apparently) no trace of human civilization on it and no evidence of a sense of belonging on the part of local inhabitants" (Colomba 305). Although Chaine starts as a good loving person, who tries to pursue Cross's friendly role, at a certain moment he decides that "whaling was better than attempting to work this land" (*That Deadman Dance*: 287) for the unsettled seasons and for fear of getting into conflicts with natives whose number was initially larger than the settlers', the point when everything takes an unexpected turn.

Chaine, who is described by the narrative voice in the early lines of the novel as the profit-seeking capitalist developer, "the embodiment of the settler, the exploiter of land and history" (*That Deadman Dance*: 3) and the leader that only wants "profits, not prophets" (*That Deadman Dance*: 293) increases dramatically the number of whales hunted thinking only of his welfare "not the rhythms of the embedded world around him" (White 4). This leads to the disappearance of whales and the triggering of a tragic relationship between the indigenous people and the settlers, emblemized by Bobby Wabalanginy and the whites. Hence, the transformation of the land and the devastating consequences faced by the natives, together with the disappearance of the whales, render the collision between the two sectors inevitable. The great connection between the Aborigines and the 'Place' makes it so hard for them to witness their land and the whales -considered as their own kin- vanish in front of the colonizer's project of settlement and conquest. The extinction of whales is allegorical of indigenous dispossession, and Bobby's change from a friendly boy to a lonely old man marks the change of Indigenous people and the development of the relation between the settlers and the real owners of the land.

Now, there becomes no need for faking amiability and understanding; thus, with the illumination of the settlers' intentions, a resisting mode has appeared to protect the land. Menak sums the essence of the problem as follows: "We share the whales, you camp on our lands and kill our kangaroos and tear up our trees and dirty our water and we forgive, but now you will not share your sheep" (*That Deadman Dance*: 352-53). Gradually, the word 'Noongar' has been forgotten and replaced by 'blackfellas', even Wunyeran's skeleton has been broken and chipped in an act that Bobby felt to be "deliberate and careless all at once" (*That Deadman Dance*: 368). Cross's body -which has initially been buried with Wunyeran's- has been reburied in the "new town cemetery" with a headstone describing him as "Surgeon Pioneer and Land Owner" for his "important role in the history of St. George Town" (*That Deadman Dance*: 368-69). Furthermore, the settlers, led by Chaine and the governor, decide to take steps against the Noongars whose number and strength have obviously diminished, especially after most of the Noongars became Chaine's allies. Even Bobby, their supposed-to-be favored Noongar has been arrested for defending one of his people and acting in the favor of his ones.

With the advancement of events, Bobby's vision clarifies. Bobby goes through numerous whaling trips and on returning, he comes home "on the shoulders of brothers and uncles and cousins and, coming home high, held in the sky, he saw things with new eyes" (*That Deadman Dance*: 313). He starts to change, to realize and 'see' the true picture. Although he has shared a lot in the whaling experience, and although he has been considered an ally for the settlers, still "his hands could not kill a whale" (*That Deadman Dance*: 332). With the disappearance of the whales, Bobby recognizes that "it was all true" (*That Deadman Dance*: 356). The violent scene between Menak and Chaine signifies the break of violence on the

island. Suddenly, Bobby, Wooral and Menak side against Chaine and the others. These three blacks were shocked to find Chaine against them. At this juncture, Bobby feels “himself at an intersection of many different rhythms” (*That Deadman Dance*: 364).

These polyphonic narrative threads are brought together when Bobby finds violence a losing choice, the moment that leads him to orchestrate these various cosmologies, schemes, scattered voices into one uniting dialogue. Bobby knows his capabilities; he knows “that he could sing and dance the spirit of this place...he would show them how people must live here, together” (*That Deadman Dance*: 405). That is, Bobby uses his intelligence and tactic to gain his freedom and help his own people through reaching a compromise, a dialogic intercourse, not a violent confrontation; survival through co-existence under agreed-upon conditions not exploitation. This unique choice is summed up in his reconciling speech reflecting Scott’s message and belief in the inevitability of reconsidering the modes of existence on the Australian ‘land’ giving all stories and voices an equal chance:

I change, doesn’t mean all about my people and their ways. But some people come to live here, and wanna stay like they never moved away from their own place.... One time, with Mr. Cross, he share his food and his beds with us, because he say he our guest. But not now, so we gotta do it ourselves [...] Because you need to be inside the sound and the spirit of it to live here properly. And how can that be, without we people who have been here for all time? [...] This is my land, given me by Kongk Menak. We will share it with you, and share what you bring. (406-10)

## **Conclusion**

The study illustrates how both experiences are equally presented from the multiple participants’ points of view, together with Scott’s own embedded influential voice. These multivocal voices and consciousnesses reflecting Bakhtin’s concept of polyphonic narration have distinguished Scott’s writing “where the multiplicity contrasts the colonial linearity and historical fixity, and encourages models of inclusion rather than working for exclusion” (Colombo 301). Hence, Bobby’s dance, as well as Scott’s novel, are means of bridging the gap between the two distinct cultures constituting the Australian cultural and political existence. However, these bridges are “fraught with dangers of unequal power relations, of one learning too much about the other, or of one becoming too much like the other” (Cooke 6).

In documenting the contribution of the white settlers, history has long overlooked the atrocities the Aboriginal Australians have been forced to endure as well as their inevitable existence. The settler narrative has portrayed the natives as savages that inhabit a ‘terra nullus’, and idealized the role of the white settlers in civilizing this land and its inhabitants. In accomplishing this colonial scheme, the indigenous Australians and their history have undergone a process of ‘forced-forgetting’, arousing the Aboriginal need for resistance. In response, Aboriginal narrative has emerged to picture the forgotten violent settler/native encounters and call for the natives’ rights to their lands. Kim Scott, however, has chosen to base his resistance against Aboriginal forced-forgetting through reviving the Noongar voice and striving to establish a reconciling relationship between the two existing sectors of the Australian experience in an attempt to gather his own dispersed mixed identity as being from European/Noongar descent: “As a writer it seems to me that my identity is about articulating a position I inhabit at an intersection of histories and peoples, and it is an obligation to speak for those people in my family who history has silenced” (Scott 171).

Instead of a colliding existence, Kim Scott calls for reciprocity and understanding as a means of reviving the Aboriginal Australian culture and language into contemporary life contribution. *That Deadman Dance*, thus, emblemizes Scott’s suggestion for cross-cultural

existence in contemporary Australia through his use of multivocal narratology in depicting this brief moment of historical encounter when the two cosmologies intersected and co-existed. The novel belongs to the ‘recovery’ narratives based on recovering the past as a means of establishing a more solid-grounded futuristic version of the future. This inherited story told from multiple perspectives brings forth the notion of ‘communicative memory’ that is orally transferred through generations and which preserves a long-forgotten culture. Accordingly, Scott’s choice of this moment prior to violence and conflict has aimed to renew the early dialogical encounters and foster a period of reconciliation and cross-cultural exchange as the most convenient way of co-existence which might revive and preserve the original Australian essence.

Scott’s use of the polyphonic narrative technique, furthermore, helps him in detaching himself from this “us/them binary logic which has led so much aboriginal writing to act as counterpart to the dominant white discourse” (301). Allegorically, Bobby is Scott’s imagined Australia; Australia that would only survive as Bobby “just by loving him, wanting him, and wanting him to stay... in this place” (*That Deadman Dance: 140*). Bobby is thus an attempt to revive the Noongar language and traditions, and bring them together with the settlers’, as if he has been rewriting history through his body. Nevertheless, although co-existence for Scott is an inevitable solution for the eternal violence and ever existing problems, this can only be accepted under fair agreed-upon conditions that would preserve the indigenous history and regain the Aboriginal forgotten identity.

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