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Matrices of Cultural Hybridity and Indigenous Subjectivities in KimScott's *That Dead man Dance*

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Abstract

This research article explores the complicated relationship between cultural assimilation and identity among Indigenous communities in Kim Scott's That Deadman Dance. It looks at how Aboriginal identity has been shaped by the dominant Western powers and the racial superiority imposed by white settlers. The study shows how racial differences created social hierarchies when two different cultures tried to live together, and how Indigenous stories were often ignored or twisted by the colonial authorities to control the narrative. The novel highlights the intense cultural conflicts between the native people and the powerful colonial forces. That Deadman Dance sheds light on the unfair discrimination and forced exclusion faced by Indigenous Australians because of imperial rule. It helps readers understand the racial tensions and the strength of Indigenous peoples in surviving generations of systemic oppression. Scott's novel carefully examines how early relationships between Aboriginal people and British settlers changed from initial cooperation to growing cultural separation due to the uneven distribution of power during colonial expansion. Despite Indigenous peoples' deep-rooted traditions and spiritual connection to their land, they were pushed to the margins through cultural suppression and racial violence. This article discusses the colonial power structures, the erasure of Indigenous knowledge, and the difficulties of defining true Indigenous identity in a contested cultural space. By moving beyond simple colonial ideas, That Deadman Dance calls for compassionate understanding between cultures. The study emphasizes how Scott challenges the false historical stories created by colonizers. Through his novel, he restores the sensitivity and experiences of Indigenous communities, presenting a vision of justice that recognizes their rights and promotes a shared sense of belonging.

Keywords: Culturalhy Bridity, Identity, Multiculturalism, Oppression, Settlers

Multiculturalism is often seen as a political idea, a government policy, or a way of life that supports the presence of different cultures living together. It values and respects different traditions and identities. In That Deadman Dance, Kim Scott offers a different view from the usual idea that everyone should fit into one national culture. Instead, the book shows that culture is not fixed—it changes and grows through people's interactions. Set in the 1820s in Albany, the story

focuses on the first meetings between the Noongar people and British settlers. It shows that identity is not something simple or permanent, but something that keeps evolving through relationships and experiences. This way of thinking goes against the old idea that Indigenous people should give up their own ways to fit into the colonizers' system. Instead, Scott argues that Indigenous communities have the right to keep their own views, even while new, mixed cultures may also develop due to colonial influence. Kim Scott's *That Deadman Dance* connects deeply with present-day discussions on multiculturalism. Some argue that too much cultural difference can weaken social unity, while others point out that just celebrating diversity is not enough if deeper issues of power and inequality are ignored. Through the character of Bobby Wabalanginy, Scott explores the struggles of living between two cultures. Bobby's journey shows that mixing cultures can be confusing and painful, not always smooth or successful. The novel also reflects on how early relationships between settlers and the Noongar people, which began with sharing and openness, slowly changed. As time went on, friendly exchanges gave way to control and separation. The settlers started building systems that pushed Indigenous people aside. These shifts show that real harmony cannot exist unless respect, justice, and equal power are part of cultural interactions. The novel questions the idea that different cultures can simply get along without addressing the deeper problems of power and injustice. Instead of offering easy answers, it shows that such relationships are often shaped by struggle, making it clear that real understanding needs honest recognition and balance. The novel uses history to question today's ideas about living together peacefully, urging a deeper look at who we are, who holds power, and how we share and connect. He is an English doctor who shows both kindness and confusion about their culture. This represents how early settlers acted by trying to build an interdependent bond with the native people without fully understanding the other culture. "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). As Anne Brewster commented that, "Cross embodies the ambivalence of whiteness at this crossroad of generosity and rapacity. He discovers the incompatibility of the two *modus operandi*, that is, the recognition of the subjecthood of the Noongar and the seizing of their lands" (64).

Kim Scott's *That Deadman Dance* depicts a complex colonial society where power is unequally distributed between the invading Europeans, driven by expansionist ideals, and the First Nations inhabitants struggling to maintain their way of life on ancestral lands. The narrative exposes the systemic injustices that enabled colonial acquisition of territory, highlighting how imperial ideological and institutional advantages are systematically granted to white settlers while indigenous

Australians faced escalating marginalization. The novel shows how laws and social rules slowly began to favour the settlers, helping them grow richer and more powerful. At the same time, Aboriginal people were pushed aside by harsh policies that tried to take away their rights, culture, and deep bond with the land. Scott makes it clear that this unfairness wasn't a mistake—it was part of the colonial plan. The story shows how early friendly contact between the two groups didn't last. What started as sharing turned into taking. As settlers claimed more land and resources, the Noongar people were left struggling to survive. They were forced to adjust and endure in a place that was becoming more dangerous and unjust for them every day. "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* 32-33). The novel *That Deadman Dance* thus becomes a powerful critique of colonialism's false promises where the rhetoric of shared progress masked a reality of displacement and cultural erasure for Australia's First Peoples.

Charles Taylor's influential 1994 work, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*, established the theoretical framework that continues to shape modern philosophical debates about cultural pluralism. This groundbreaking text introduced concepts that have become fundamental to our understanding of identity politics in diverse societies. He writes,

A number of strands in contemporary politics turn on the need, sometimes the demand for recognition. The need, it can be argued, is one of the driving forces behind nationalist movements in politics. And the demand comes to the fore in a number of ways in today's politics, on behalf of minority or 'subaltern' groups, in some forms of feminism and in what is today called the politics of 'multiculturalism'. (25)

The study made by Peary Brug and Maykel Verkuyten titled "Dealing with Cultural Diversity: The Endorsement of Societal Models Among Ethnic Minority and Majority Youth in the Netherlands" scrutinizes four distinct societal models for addressing multiculturalism reflecting the ideas of Bourhis, Moïse, Perreault, and Senécal who "have identified four clusters of state ideologies that shape integration policies toward ethnic minorities in different countries. They situate these clusters in a continuum that ranges from pluralism at one end and ethnist at the opposite end, with civic and assimilation ideologies in between" (114). The mosaic approach emphasizes maintaining cultural distinctiveness while coexisting within a diverse society, whereas the melting pot model promotes blending cultures into a unified national identity. In contrast, the assimilation model expects minority groups to adopt the dominant culture's norms and practices, often requiring them to relinquish aspects of their original cultural identity. The segregation model represents the separation of cultural groups with limited interaction. Nina Caldeira points out that Indigenous writing does more than just tell stories from the past—it connects memory, history, and creativity in meaningful ways. These works blend storytelling and fact to show the deep experiences of Indigenous communities. Instead of just listing events, the writers bring different voices together to reflect how people truly lived, felt, and remembered. Indigenous authors make a clear effort to include many viewpoints, helping to give strength and attention to voices that have often been ignored. Through this, they honour their culture, share their truth, and keep their stories alive for future generations. In her foundational work *Multiculturalism and the Marginalized Psyche*, Caldeira makes this crucial observation: "The texts are fictionalised histories. They stand at the intersection of politics, history and literature. Therefore, each one reflects a "collective consciousness" of the minority race. Such a novel focuses not on character but on situation" (15). Instead of telling just one person's story, these works talk about the larger struggles faced by communities. In *That Deadman Dance*, Kim Scott powerfully shows how European settlers in Australia built unfair systems that treated Indigenous people as outsiders. The book explains how the colonizers created rules and ideas to divide people and make their own actions seem right. They did not just take land but they changed how people lived, worked, and connected, all to benefit themselves. Through this, Scott shows how deeply the colonial system affected Indigenous life, pushing them aside and rebuilding everything in ways that only helped European settlers. Every policy, the settlers has implemented, every interaction they maintained with the native people was designed to expand colonial dominance while eroding indigenous rights and their connections to the land. This systematic exploitation extended beyond property to encompass cultural spaces, traditional practices, and even interpersonal relationships. The colonial actions demanded complete, unquestioned authority over every aspect of life in Australia. "The lives of the natives would be altered forever and their generosity and friendliness be betrayed" (*That Deadman Dance* 62).

Modern societies naturally develop multicultural characteristics as people from different ethnic, religious, and national backgrounds come together in shared spaces. This mixing of cultures creates communities where varied life experiences, knowledge systems, and ways of seeing the world

interact productively. Rather than viewing such diversity as a problem to solve, multiculturalism approaches it as an opportunity to build more creative and resilient societies. When people expose to different cultural practices and perspectives often, it stimulates both personal growth and social change. Multiculturalism formalizes this process by creating structures recognizing distinct cultural identities while fostering mutual understanding. It acknowledges that people maintain meaningful connections to their heritage while participating in broader society. This dual belonging strengthens social cohesion by validating everyone's background as equally valuable. Inglis C., in his article “Multiculturalism: New Policy Responses to Diversity,” remarks “Multiculturalism emphasizes that acknowledging the existence of ethnic diversity and ensuring the rights of individuals to retain their culture should go hand in hand with enjoying full access to, participation in, and adhesion to constitutional principles and commonly shared values prevailing in the society”.

Kim Scott's *That Deadman Dance* offers an insightful portrayal of cultural pluralism, reflecting the necessity of fostering mutual understanding among varied cultural communities. The novel does not merely explore peaceful coexistence; it insists that such harmony relies on resisting cultural domination and avoiding forced conformity. Scott critiques the historical patterns of marginalization that emerge when one culture seeks to suppress another. This paper argues that the vision of multiculturalism, as presented in Scott's novel *That Deadman Dance*, is achievable only when political institutions actively ensure fair resource distribution and uphold democratic values.

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