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Humanity on the Verge of Insanity: Maintaining Cultural Identity Against Oppressive Rule

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**Humanity on the Verge of Insanity: Maintaining Cultural Identity
Against Oppressive Rule**

A senior thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Arts
in Humanities and Cultural Studies

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Abstract

Ubuntu is a South African term in the Bantu language that translates to “human kindness.” This essay discusses the present-day impact of the South African philosophical concept of *Ubuntu* in light of the dehumanization, which Aboriginal Australians and Black South Africans faced, specifically during the period of 1960-1985. How has humanity been enslaved and degraded by assimilation and a cruel division of races, yet positively evolved and progressed due to the efforts of both female and male activists--in particular literary figure Oodgeroo Noonuccal and political leader Nelson Mandela? A lack of respect and tolerance as a result of colonialism has provoked violence and has taken from these groups the land that they owned before European settlers invaded, as well as their personal dignity and cultural identity. The problem of further destruction of indigenous cultures is so great a threat in our collective consciousness as human beings on this planet that, in order to restore the values of those who have come before us, I have researched the value of community and oneness that constitutes *Ubuntu* and the variations of it between these two places as it relates to contemporary American society. For my research, I have conducted an interpretive and thorough examination of what it means to “embrace the other.” In this cross-cultural analysis of the effects of *Ubuntu* and its traces in different cultures, such as the Zulu people of South Africa, the indigenous Noongar people of Western Australia and Americans during the Harlem Renaissance, I incorporate historical and philosophical context in order to find the core of what makes us human and how this shapes our future.

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The past continuously binds us to the present, in which we eventually pass down to the next generation a culmination of morals, stories, and traditions that help us trace our roots and enrich our existential human bond with one another. A sense of interconnectedness and the collective consciousness is found within the South African philosophy of *Ubuntu*, whereby seeds of positivity and hope are sown daily and in times of pain or despair. This concept of human kindness has multiple definitions and interpretations. Broken down, *Ubuntu* in the Zulu culture is expressed as “‘Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu’, which means that a person is a person through other persons. We affirm our humanity when we acknowledge that of others” (Boudreau). In a post-colonial era, intolerance has still pervaded, inevitably bringing two educated and courageous leaders to rise up and fight for the rights of their people. Oodgeroo Noonuccal from the Noongar tribe in Western Australia and Nelson Mandela of South Africa both engaged in a common struggle politically, spiritually, and peacefully within the same biased and unforgiving world. From the exclusion of the Zulu and Noongar tribes by the dominant Western culture, the lens through which the world is viewed has grown limited and the beauty that comes from the diversity of people and ideas undervalued. In this paper, I explore whether, by incorporating the historical and philosophical qualities that make us human and the ways in which they shape our future, we can preserve cultural identity and unleash the societal function of *Ubuntu* that manifests itself in our individual and collective consciousness.

At the heart of this unique philosophy is the idea of restorative communication or intellectual process, which works to benefit the individual as well as the community. It is advantageous for everyone, as Dirk Louw explains how the “perception of the other is

never fixed or rigidly closed, but adjustable or open-ended. It allows the other to be, to become” (Villa-Vicencio 121). It is this process of growing that allows a fresh look into another’s eyes and soul as well as a chance to see in them what was perhaps previously overlooked. This fluidity and consistency is the key to *Ubuntu*, as it is also “a cultural incentive to promote a level of communal coexistence among individuals, clans, ethnic groups, and nations” in the face of conflict and is a way of “moving from an abusive and tyrannical society to the beginnings of democratic rule and respect for human rights” (Villa-Vicencio 127). Nelson Mandela is the prime example of promoting coexistence among all people and maintaining identity in the midst of adversity. By embracing “the other,” boundaries and limits among Western and Non-Western civilizations turn into paths of open-heartedness and mutual curiosity. These values are what I believe makes us inherently human, which we must preserve in order to create a world filled with colorful diverse customs and people who bring out the best in one another. The time of ignorance and oppressive rule, over what we are unfamiliar with or not in favor of, are behind us if we choose to acknowledge the intrinsic value each of us bears inside of us when we form a united front.

A loss of these values has come from our progression as beings on this earth, because we have become materialistically inclined to consume more than we need, whether it is of property, resources, or even status in both the political and personal spheres of life. Presently, we are focused on the individual’s success, rather than working alongside our neighbors towards the wellbeing and progression of us all. Quantity rather than quality has defined our nature, ultimately bringing isolation and a vast withdrawal from the notion of wholeness. Indeed coexistence is not economically determinant as it is

explained in the TED Talk, “The Story We Tell About Poverty Isn’t True.” Mia Birdsong points out that wealth is only a material component of life, and that nobody should be left behind due to a lack of it or placed above everybody else due to an excess of it. We are all invaluable, and as she details, we must “weave and cut new cloth” because all of us “belong to a bundle of life,” and the solution is to “elevate the voices of the unheard,” which is true when we consider the inclusiveness of *Ubuntu*. The unheard are those that lose themselves in the chaos of materialism as well as those who have no desire for wealth and its traps, yet behold the same dignity and innate yearning to belong. Through communal values neutrality is sought, which eliminates superficiality and brings us to a clearer and truer version of ourselves, one that prefers meaningful relationships instead of a vicious battle over wealth and status. We tend to cast out those who do not think like we do or have what we have, but *Ubuntu* is a reminder of our shared commonalities and consists of a call to action, a state of mind, as well as a feeling that must be analyzed and felt with the deepest of emotions, if we are to bridge gaps and return to a nurturing place of love in our society.

Even among Western civilizations, despite a colonial past, it is possible to honestly and productively incorporate this philosophy in our lives today. In Stephen Lundin and Bob Nelson’s book *Ubuntu!*, they depict this South African practice in a manner that exposes its beneficial aspects both broadly and intimately. The authors express how *Ubuntu* “draws on the fact that we are one human family...When one man is poorly fed, all are malnourished. When one is abused, we all feel the pain. When a child suffers, the tears wash over us all” (Lundin 2). It appears that our actions, however small, have a domino effect on those around us and in return, we inevitably experience the same

repercussions that unravel for others because we are linked by not only our actions but our reactions as well. This broad definition of *Ubuntu* connects us all together in everyday life across the globe as consumers and producers, just as it can intimately between co-workers in a corporate office, through the decisions we make. Lundin and Nelson tell us that *Ubuntu* “is about teamwork and brotherhood. It is finding that part of you that connects with other people and bringing it to life” (Lundin 26), whether it is demonstrated by a group project or a personal endeavor meant to help others. Genuine kindness, cooperation, and empathy are all equally and vitally important for the advancement of the human race, regardless of our ethnicity. In addition, Lundin and Nelson refer to *Ubuntu* in success according to business: “With trust and respect, others will give you the benefit of the doubt. Without trust and respect, motivational techniques come across as manipulation” (Lundin 29), and it is these qualities of *Ubuntu* that create opportunity and understanding between international companies, and which we cannot do without. They conclude their inspiring book by stating that “the door to Ubuntu is called gratitude, and it is always open. The spirit of Ubuntu is found through community. Community is created when you find unity of purpose with others” (Lundin 132). It is evident that a sense of belonging is ultimately the motive for seeing oneself as part of “the other,” and this can be achieved when we work collectively with purpose inside and outside of the workplace.

In its original form, *Ubuntu* is the fundamental practice that is personally experienced between members of the Zulu society in KwaZulu-Natal South Africa. In this culture, people are known best by their generosity, empathy, and sense of tradition. The Zulu people naturally give all they have and share with one another, whether it is

food on the same plate or something larger like the land they live on. However, this generosity that they believe provides salvation in the afterlife must be protected, as it can easily be taken advantage of. With the arrival of colonists, “it was clear that blacks and whites had a different concept of land ownership. Blacks did not regard the land as private property but as a communal possession. Whites, on the other hand, overran large tracts of land to better their position and power” (*Cultures* 61), and this greed in return led to the clash between the Europeans and Zulus. An infamous leader by the name of Shaka victoriously ruled and fought valiantly for his people during the late 1800s and it is the legacy of his warrior mentality that continues on within this tribe today. In the times of extreme opposition and misunderstanding, trusted leadership was crucial. Culturally speaking, then, “Black indigenous groups were formed through a hereditary system of authority,” and with the rule of Shaka, a “period of coexistence between the blacks and whites followed but there was no integration” (*Cultures* 62), leaving two groups dispersed and disconnected. This lack of integration is expected as a result of both the brutal invasion upon these peaceful people and the following bloody war over territory, neither one of which are components of *Ubuntu* but rather weapons of defense. The violence from warriors shows the common way of protecting hunter-gatherer groups, which become vulnerable when there is no communication or understanding with foreign invaders. Despite tragic outcomes of colonialism, the quality of human kindness itself persists and is equated with a spiritual significance among the Zulu people, who sense it as part of being alive.

An aspect of *Ubuntu*, which works to prevent assumptions about the “other” that arise from discrimination, is the method of spiritual healing. In South Africa, “traditional

African religion is based on fundamentals such as ancestor worship. Believers practice *Ubuntu*, which is exemplified by treating others kindly, showing concern for others, and working for the good of the community” (*Cultures* 84). There is a simple wisdom that comes from being kind to everyone, whether they are part of one’s own clan or not. Without reflection we blindly judge the person who might have become a friend but instead continues to be a stranger, and we ignore our ancestral roots. Inward reflection and outward projection is found with the assistance of a *sangoma*, which is “a holy man or a holy woman who is a skilled diviner and healer within the tradition of Ndebele and Zulu native people” (*Cultures* 89). *Sangomas* are specialized in dealing with “all forms of metaphysical healing, divination, clairvoyance, telepathy, and soothsaying” using the traditional herbal medicine *muti* (*Cultures* 88), and whose assistance works for seekers presented with particular obstacles in life. Through acts resembling *Ubuntu* such as spiritual healing, a person becomes one with the divine Creator, Unkulunkulu, the God in Zulu pre-colonial myth as well as the father of the tribe who created land and man, and finds the clarity necessary to resolve conflict. In realizing the self in relation to the powerful Unkulunkulu, *sangoma* healing consists of “offerings and sacrifices made to the ancestors for protection, good health, and happiness,” where the individual sees spirits in the “form of dreams, illnesses, and sometimes snakes” (SAHO) as visions to be either accepted or avoided. It is by praising the ancestors, that one sees himself as a branch on an ancient oak tree rooted and grounded in the past of humanity while living and thriving in the present.

On the other hand, in Aborigine culture, Dreamtime was a spiritual way for the Noongar tribe to connect with their ancestors. Like *Ubuntu*, Dreamtime does not exist

without the unity of the tribe and brings out the same qualities of worship and power, which members associate with all living things both natural and supernatural. Similar to the Zulu's leader Unkulunkulu, the Supreme Creator, Waugal, is a sea serpent which holds great significance in the Noongar tribe, as they believe he controls earth and sky, and is the source of rain, lightning, and thunder. This creature is associated as "the giver of life, maintaining all fresh water sources," which is important, as the Noongar tribe derives most of their resources from the sea, and He thus "made Noongar people custodians of the land" (Kaartdijin). Also, the incorporation of *Boodja*, meaning land, *Kura*, as past, and *Yey*, as present, is the equivalent of cultural identity in Aboriginal culture, compared to family and relationships, which is the main source of identity for Zulu people. These interconnections between two cultures, resemble the ways in which the same respect for living creatures through land cultivation can bring people closer together and allow meaningful relationships among the group to flourish.

An important aspect of cultural identity among the Noongar tribe in the Southwestern part of Australia exists in the songs and sacred ceremonies that reflect their strong ties to the land. It is evident that as much as "Australian Indigenous music demonstrates unbroken continuity of connection to country" because the tribe uses the land to reach their "sense of place and personhood," this connection happens to also be "reflected in contemporary Noongar literature" (Bracknell 5). The ways in which the Noongar people valued land as something to be shared and appreciated with music brings *Ubuntu* to mind. From this concept, one can deduce that the unwavering consciousness of land as a source to be respected and identified with, stems from community-based rituals such as the *corroboree* and *bora ring* in which song and dance are representative. The

Noongar people express themselves freely and in harmony, as “both men and women composed and performed” (Bracknell 5), and “a great deal of vocal music was shared openly...within their public musical traditions” (Bracknell 7). This example of equality for land and its people, as it pertains to *Ubuntu*, demonstrates an artistic wholeness that transcends gender roles and which Oodgeroo Noonuccal has strived to maintain as an exemplary poet and activist.

In music and art, Oodgeroo Noonuccal’s work is a fine example of the poetry that circulated during the protest period of the 1960s and 1970s, by the way she evoked compassionate change and refused to accept the assimilation of her people. Similar to the traditional songs of the past, modern poetry has also been used to represent the struggle of coexistence with white Australians, although some poems are more progressive while other songs are simply humorous. For example, one song that remains a favorite is one “about a large kangaroo attempting to find shelter from the rain under a small tree,” which shows the musical variety of songs that were inspired from either “historical events...or purely for entertainment purposes” (Bracknell 13). It appears that the Noongar people have always retained a sense of light-heartedness and wonder with the world around them in spite of the destruction that came with the wave of Eurocentrism. In Oodgeroo Noonuccal’s poem “Son Of Mine” she glimpses into the suffering experienced by many indigenous people, by addressing a figurative boy: “Your black skin soft as velvet shine/ what can I tell you son of mine?/ I could tell you of heartbreak/ hatred blind/ I could tell of crimes that shame mankind” (Australian). The progressive and fierce nature that uplifts us and makes me think of *Ubuntu* is when she writes, “I’ll tell instead of brave and fine/ When lives of black and white entwine/ And men in

brotherhood combine” (Australian). The brotherhood that is referred to is not at all assimilation, but rather a mutual respect of culture and expression whereby one group is not pushed to conform to the mannerisms of the other. It is natural to celebrate and sing songs full of spirit, but as Oodgeroo Noonuccal reminds us, we must continue to pursue dignity and equality for the sake of mankind, and replace Eurocentrism with humanism.

In Noonuccal’s books *My People: A Kath Walker Collection*, and *The Dawn is At Hand*, she enlightens us with an abstract view of the activism she was involved in by fighting against assimilation and the cruel degradation of indigenous people. The Aboriginal experience of the dark side of humanity coincidentally coincides with the deep segregation that spread throughout South Africa, in the way that both had a lasting impact. In Noonuccal’s poem “Let Us Not Be Bitter,” she writes to her people, saying “time for us stood still/ now we know life is change/ life is progress/ life is learning things/ life is onward” (Australian) and how now is the time to start shedding the past and striving towards a better future. She continues on to say, “accept them as they accept us/ let us judge white people by the best of their race/The prejudiced ones are less than we,” and this is an example of what living in a loving communal society brings, despite a grim history. In this poem, there is a cautionary yet encouraging predisposition and protectiveness over the whole of a people, and that is one of many qualities that Noonuccal and Nelson Mandela share. The road to morality ingrained in the Zulu expression of *Ubuntu* and in Noonuccal’s poems shows the oppressed remembering the brutality of their oppressors, yet demonstrating who can and cannot be trusted when it comes to power and control.

As power is wielded and the amount of control is either tightened or loosened from one's grasp, communities either thrive or collapse. When the British and Dutch colonized South Africa, and the British forced indigenous Australians to be subject under discriminatory laws that regarded them as inferior to Whites, power was lost on one side and used to divide the masses. Due to this division, racial discrimination, which still permeates Aboriginal society today and happens when "you are treated unfairly because of your race, colour, ethnic background, religions background, descent or nationality" (Korff), is associated with the use and abuse of colonial power. The lack of control that comes when power is in the wrong hands is evident from the way "anti-discrimination laws failed to result in any successful prosecutions since they were introduced in 1989, despite more than 27 public complaints about alleged breaches" (Korff) and, as a result, negatively impacted the Noongar community. Laws and politics do not seem to coincide with human kindness, when change of behavior has not even been effected in politicians themselves. With the assimilation politics of the 1970s in mind, today "more than half of surveyed Australians support the idea that 'people from racial, ethnic, cultural and religious minority groups should behave more like mainstream Australians'. Only a third disagreed with this idea" (Korff). A major dissolution of cultural identity and pride to be of Australian Aborigine origin will prove to be a major problem, unless racial discrimination is addressed and respect grows for all who look, act, and think differently than the European men who unfortunately continue to wield their power in ignorance. This ignorance is not a part of *Ubuntu*; however, the principle of respect, of oneself in relation to others, leads to a level of power that Aborigine people can utilize to help their community, and all communities in fact, build and expand from the ground up.

The fallout of *Ubuntu* and the problems we have when relating to a stranger is true and proven with the colonial takeover in Australia during the 19th century and again with modern racism that persists still today. When we are in a judgmental state of mind, we fail to acknowledge our humanness and instead tend to categorize people. Between the Noongar people and British colonists, the categories that were created were ones described as either animalistic or civilized. In March 1836, the explorer and naturalist Charles Darwin described the scene of a tribal dance by this particular tribe as ““a group of naked figures... all moving in hideous harmony”” (Bracknell 7), a viewpoint which was typical of most colonists who were both in awe and afraid of these unheard-of people. It is not as simple to visualize the people around us as our brother or sister when we praise the Anglican individualistic culture that promotes the divide and conquer theory, of us versus them. Even today, we take pity on those who struggle economically and socially, rather than reaching out a hand and encouraging them to seize opportunity. Perhaps the Noongar tribe danced and expressed themselves differently, but they still felt the fear, joy, and anguish that overcame British colonists, and should not be seen as animalistic for their self-expression.

Unfortunately, self-expression and culture has been treated as a crime and something to be controlled in recent human development. European settlers put the Aborigines Act of 1905 (WA) in effect for “protection, control, and segregation of Aboriginal people” because they saw Noongar people as a “dying race” and essentially a road block in their smooth road to modernization. This forced assimilation and exclusion then evolved into the Native Welfare Act of 1963-1972, which is described under Australian law as the “custody, maintenance, and education of the children of natives”

(Find & Connect). In response to this horrendous history, Oodgeroo Noonuccal has written in her poem “We are Going,” referring to her tribe, “We are nature and the past/ all the old ways Gone now and scattered/ The scrubs are gone/ the hunting and the laughter/ The eagle is gone/ the emu and the kangaroo are gone from this place/ The bora ring is gone/ The corroboree is gone/ And we are going,” (Australian) which refers to the problem of being seen as “a dying race.” She puts up a fight in her next poem, “Assimilation-No!” with her words “we are different hearts and minds in a different body” and that this should not be dismissed. Her voice is loud and clear when she states, “we will go forward and learn/ Not swamped and lost/ watered away/ but keeping our own identity/ our pride of race”(Australian). It is this voice of determination, when heard by the Noongar and Europeans alike, that serves as a reminder to realize the beauty of this culture and preserve its originally beautiful ways. Laws of assimilation and previous exclusion, now prove limited where love and the future of humanity is concerned.

Ubuntu then evolves into the notion of becoming aware of those who appear different on the outside but are truly one and the same underneath it all. In her poem “Then And Now,” Noonuccal describes this process from feeling inferior to rising above: “In my dreams I hear my tribe/ Laughing as they hunt and swim/ But dreams are shattered by rushing car/ By grinding tram and hissing train/ And I see no more my tribe of old/ As I walk alone in the teeming town” (Australian). Dreams seem to be losing their significance in modern times, as she finds herself alone because most of her tribe has been cast off from civilization and erased from memory. A reference from the past to the present is once again acknowledged: “Children of nature we were then, No clocks hurrying crowds to toil. Now I am civilized and work in the white way, Now I have dress,

now I have shoes” (Australian). This is the epitome of inferiority and loss of identity, to have a forced structure and dress in a certain way against one’s will. The awareness is evident in Oodgeroo Noonuccal’s poem “The Dawn is At Hand” as she tells her tribe to “Go forward proudly and unafraid/ For soon now the shame of the past/ Will be over at last” and concludes by explaining “For ban and bias will soon be gone/The future beckons you bravely on/ To art and letters and nation lore/ Fringe-dwellers no more” (Australian) Fringe dwellers are people who live on the outskirts or fringes of accepted Australian society, due to law or land alienation. In a way, *Ubuntu* manifests itself in the idea of growing together, not separately as fringe-dwellers, but as people who have more in common than they realize.

As the Noongar people have been subject to forced assimilation and rejection by the Eurocentric methodology throughout the 1900s, so has a revolution of physical change in South Africa persisted with Nelson Mandela, one of the greatest leaders of nonviolent protest during the period of apartheid. He is a reminder of the great good that comes from bringing people together to fight for human rights, as his life constituted a prolonged battle and revolutionary cry from the very beginning. When he first lived away from home, he moved to a small city called Alexandra. In his autobiography, he describes this place with roads “unpaved and dirty, and filled with hungry, undernourished children scampering around half-naked... a single water tap served several houses,” and it was commonly known “as ‘Dark City’ for its complete absence of electricity” (Mandela 66). In this seemingly depressing and hopeless dwelling, Mandela believed that “the township was also a kind of heaven... an urban Promised Land” (Mandela 66) from the way Africans could attain the right to property and run their own affairs without consulting

white authorities. The perseverance of Mandela to survive in a place that lacked basic resources compared to other cities in South Africa is symbolic of his faith and ability to bring people together under harsh circumstances. It is apparent that the vision for an inclusive and undying Promised Land, for all South Africans, began here. In a place like Alexandra at the time, “urban life tended to abrade tribal and ethnic distinction,” and Mandela says “this created a sense of solidarity” (Mandela 67). Solidarity among Black South Africans from various tribes is indeed a feat. Although a temporary safe haven was a beginning to bring neighbors together to fight for one another rather against each other, which demonstrates a quality of *Ubuntu*, the divisive separation between whites and blacks was still prevalent, and complete equality seemed a distant dream.

The central focus of *Ubuntu* seems to lie in solidarity, of brothers and sisters joined together as one, especially during times of conflict and disparity. In his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*, Mandela also tells us how a fellow Black South African, Chief Joyi, described “the coming of the abelungu, the white people, who arrived with fire-breathing weapons” and that before this happened, “the Thembu, the Mpondo, the Xhosa, and the Zulu were all children of one father, and lived as brothers,” but as a result of colonization, “the white man shattered the abantu, the fellowship, of the various tribes” (Mandela 20-21). This story may be exaggerated, but it follows a similar pattern of what happens when greed and ignorance spread in society. The association of all tribes during Mandela’s adolescence in Alexandra and in Chief Joyi’s story shows the value of human connection and understanding, but aside from this example, the poisonous residue from colonial times still permeates to this day. The *abantu*, which Chief Joyi refers to and is more easily described as *Ubuntu*, does not discriminate

according to race, but rather is what humans have in common--a desire to belong and relate.

Without communication, both listening and speaking, the consequence is silence and indifference. The animosity that perpetuates racial discrimination comes from our own inability to speak truthfully to others and ourselves while acknowledging our similarities and differences. Nelson Mandela acted upon the idea of putting oneself in another's shoes, when he claimed that if there is no language, "one cannot talk to people and understand them; one cannot share their hopes and aspirations, grasp their history, appreciate their poetry, or savor their songs..." which tells us that he viewed South Africans not as "different people with separate languages... but one people, with different tongues" (Mandela 73). One of the ways in which *Ubuntu* supports oneness is the engagement with all kinds of people who happen to either speak the same language or a different one but are human nevertheless. When we speak the truth, accept "the other," and find a middle ground, we are practicing the essence of *Ubuntu*. This is done by listening rather than pointing fingers and discriminating out of fear. From these values, Mandela enacted the role of brave and honest leadership and liberated his people from brutal oppression. He recalls in his book how "a thousand slights, a thousand indignities, a thousand unremembered moments, produced an anger" (Mandela 83) which spoke to all South Africans, regardless of race, who were seeking peace and unity. This necessary rebellion is what brought legislators to acknowledge the injustice, but it is the remaining two-sided communication that will endure and lead us to the inclusive Promised Land Mandela so eloquently portrays and has worked toward.

The active resistance that Mandela used against his government is similar to what Oodgeroo Noonuccal experienced with her words and poetry, in the way that both were powerful tools for transformation. The racial discrimination that was present towards Zulus as much as the Noongar tribe had lasting effects, and it seems that only through the lens of *Ubuntu* can we properly examine their social histories. The philosophy of human kindness was at a crossroads when Black South Africans demonstrated peacefully with speeches, marches, strikes, and voluntary imprisonment, seeking equal rights to Whites, only to feel the backlash and no change. Mandela expresses his frustration in his autobiography when he says, “it is the oppressor who defines the nature of the struggle, and the oppressed is often left no recourse but to use methods that mirror those of the oppressor. At a certain point, one can only fight fire with fire” (Mandela 144), which suggests that human kindness became a burden rather than the way to resolution. It seems that both tribes attained a fight-or-flight response, which their enemies forced upon them, to combat discrimination. When cornered and attacked with weapons as ferocious as exclusion in one’s society, it is the instinctive reaction to either come together to fight the destructive force or flee from it. In the way that poetry transformed the sacred Noongar people to strive towards being equal to White Australians rather than inferior, African music also shows a similar pattern of humanity.

The love and beauty that comes from poetry and music across these two cultures aims to eliminate the evil that racial discrimination subsequently spreads. In her poem “Integration-Yes!” Oodgeroo Noonuccal voices the struggle that her people faced, ending with a message of hope for the future: “Why change our sacred myths for your sacred myths? /No, not assimilation/ but integration/ Not submergence but our uplifting/ So

black and white may go forward together/ In harmony and brotherhood” (Australian). An echo of this thinking is reflected in Mandela during the period of apartheid. Harmony and brotherhood reside in the cultural traditions in Africa as well because they are one of many attributes of *Ubuntu*. The human side of transformation that shows in African music is that it “uplifts even as it tells a sad tale. You may be poor, you may have only a ramshackle house, you may have lost your job, but that song gives you hope” (Mandela 154), which resembles the same themes in Noonuccal’s poetry. Mandela explains how traditional music is “about the aspirations of the African people, and it can ignite the political resolve of those who might otherwise be indifferent to politics. Politics can be strengthened by music, but music has a potency that defies politics” (Mandela 155). The use of drums, upbeat rhythm, and singing reaches across generations into the souls and hearts of an entire people. Within the Black South African collectivist society, free musical expression is used as an outlet for change. No one is left behind from the way that sound and words are shared in ceremonies and processions both political and non-political, in the same way that poetry reaches into the depths of most Australians fighting adversity.

Despite the inherent artistic elements of beauty that are present in the struggle, we naturally seek the rational, psychological perspective when it comes to morality. The work of psychologist Carl Jung suggests that the idea of individuation is found to clash with that of the collectivism inherent in *Ubuntu* and values present in most indigenous cultures. Jung was focused on finding rational meaning by consciousness, which calls for separating “from identification with the collective -- both the collective unconscious of childhood and the collective consciousness of one’s culture” (Brooke 39). There is a

distinct difference, according to Jung, when one “becomes increasingly undivided against oneself...a ‘separate, indivisible unity or whole’” (Brooke 39) through self-realization as opposed to exploring “participation mystique, in which psychic life is submerged in an animated world of projections” (Brooke 40). This same world of animation exists in the philosophy that ties *Ubuntu* to the roots of the Zulus. The Aborigine Noongar tribe also partook in Dream Time, which consisted of spiritual imaginings that were constructed to experience God. These two free-flowing forms of consciousness appear inferior to Jung’s singular thought process of “reason which ‘comes to grips’” (Brooke 47). Jung thought that from living “rationally in a ‘de-spiritualized’ scientific world...” one may “rediscover meaning within the self” (Brooke 40) and logic would prevail. However, this logic is what extinguishes the idea of cultural ties and personal relationships. As he continues to explain, his own prejudice presents itself when he sheds a negative light on the African and indigenous consciousness in contrast to the European consciousness.

Aspects of identity rely on group healing in theory and in practice, especially when it comes to *Ubuntu*. This philosophy, as described by Roger Brooke, is “the animating spirit behind African virtues such as patience, hospitality, loyalty, respect, conviviality, endurance, and sympathy... owning what we call the shadow by recognizing that the failures and sins of others are also our responsibility” (Brooke 49). Unlike individuation, proposed by Jung, in *Ubuntu* there is “no heroic loneliness, no growing separation from others regarded as a ‘herd’” (Brooke 50), and from shared responsibility and a naturally forgiving nature, the clan is held together. In this collective consciousness, the emphasis is on “personal responsibility, ethical self-knowledge, strength and courage, humility, forgiveness, human understanding, a knowledge of

history, and a sense of the sacred” (Brooke 50) all of which constitute one’s ongoing process of self-discovery and embracing of “the other.” *Ubuntu* is a part of one “from infantile dependency to mature spirituality...the psychological home in which we become fully persons” (Brooke 50), and these stages culminate the ongoing collective experience in which the way we treat others is how we treat ourselves. The individual is part of the whole group and does not painfully go through life alone and afraid.

As Jung describes consciousness, there is a version of it that is referred to as Negritude, an affirmative consciousness of those who are of African descent. Negritude is “a spiritual mystery; its knowledge is engaged and intimate rather than detached, disinterested...for the whole person: sensual, affective, and thoughtful, integrating” (Brooke 48). From this point of view, at the core of humanity there does exist a universal consciousness, which binds us together. This mysterious, integrative, and affectionate nature that is called Negritude was demonstrated during the artistic period of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s in New York City, and has echoed African tribalism with a claim on heritage and identity. On the contrary, as Jung suggests, “individuation does not shut one out from the world but gathers the world to oneself” (Brooke 46), but I find that individualistic qualities that are ego-driven and selfish distance us even further apart from each other. Does a firm grasp on the world around us really come from solitary confinement, or from a supportive and loving community? The universal bond that I visualize and experience “involves surrender of the ego, and a communion of subject and object” with love and respect for one another as the foundation. The tangible emotional expression, “sense of communion, the gift of myth-making, the gift of rhythm” (Brooke

48) of Negritude is more humane and relevant to *Ubuntu* and Aborigine culture than what Jung presumes with his concept of individuation.

It is apparent that the beauty in the concept of *Ubuntu* as it functions to preserve cultural identity of humans in various civilizations across time and space lie in its durability and relatability. Among these qualities as they pertain to the fight for equality, in Aborigine society and in South Africa, is a continuous desire for meaning, which has swept across America and given the voiceless a voice. This period known as the Harlem Renaissance is representative of the quality of Negritude, which presents itself in *Ubuntu* and shows the universality among us all. The philosophy, along with Oodgeroo Noonuccal's poetry, intertwines with art, blues music, and literature, most notably from the authors Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes. The central artistic expression that reflects struggle towards oneness and an acknowledgement of the "other" is blues music, which is defined as the aesthetic that "can lead disbelievers into an understanding of what it is to bend and not break, to bear up under pressure and keep on keepin' on" (Tyehimba 19). It is a form of music that is fluid, and offers an empowering experiential exchange between the performer and the audience. It is rooted in observing the musician's anguish and transforming it as one's own personal experience: essentially seeing one another eye to eye and soul to soul.

As Langston Hughes's poetry flourished in the Harlem Renaissance, so did blues, creating an interwoven tapestry of the human spirit and welcoming everyone to be a part of it. The highly inclusive value of Negritude increased its sense of relatability and durability among all people, as we see in instances resembling *Ubuntu*. Connections between Negritude, in song and poetry, is shown by Hughes, as his poems consist of

“lively and active repetitions...variations which closely resemble the variations present in a blues song” and “exhibit a slow tempo and rhythm which is a common trait to most styles of blues” (Davidas 267). These similarities are also found in the shared “dissonance, discordance, and line irregularity” where both poetry and music use “the ‘call-and-response’ pattern, in order to create an atmosphere of intensive interaction” between individuals (Davidas 268). This interaction is what sustains when the sound eventually fades, and leaves a memorable impression upon its listeners amidst societal discord. For example, in Hughes’s poem "Burden," he writes, “It is not weariness/That bows me down/ But sudden nearness/ To song without sound” (Banes), in which despair and defeat by society is the burden being carried. During the Harlem Renaissance, there was a time of rebirth as well as a striving to reach equality for African Americans as they migrated to the North from the South in search of a new life. Blues music and poetry were modes of expression that recognized a great divide in society and resolved to bring people together regardless of their differences. Music linked heritage and pride together, with Negritude as the main tool in creating a changed future that did not contain any trace of past misfortunes.

Blues music was enjoyed by all people and was one of the arts that made a community out of various groups of people- -both artists and intellectual leaders. In this period, African Americans shared a distinctively revolutionary voice, which became known as "the deformation of mastery” and worked to refuse subjugation by those who had historically exercised power and superiority over them (Banes). The deformation of mastery benefited most African Americans socially and morally in accordance with modernism. It was based upon “self-presentation and political tactics created by blacks in

order to combat pervasive racism in the United States” towards the self and by cultural means (Banes). Art and literature also played similar roles in recognizing the people who have been overlooked by society and speaking out for them. In terms of regarding one another as equals, *Ubuntu* is a reminder to disregard discriminatory practices and embrace the person next to us as an extension of ourselves.

Zora Neale Hurston is a fine example of a progressive female author who actively wrote plays and novels, with the intention of giving a voice to women who felt particularly powerless and inferior to males under the wave of modernism passing through Harlem and the South. As a successful novelist, analytical anthropologist, and proud Black woman, Zora Neale Hurston evolved as an exemplary model citizen during difficult times, never losing sight of who she was or her purpose in life. In her play *The Country in the Woman*, she discusses class, agency, and gender by developing “implicitly and explicitly the conflict between rural and urban gender norms, between working-class and middle-class womanhood” and emphasizing the female perspective as crucial in creating and “maintaining their social spaces within the community” (West 482-3). She presents her characters as strong, stubborn, and rooted in their values as they navigate through certain hurdles. In *The Country in the Woman*, the protagonist Caroline boisterously confronts her cheating husband about his infidelity in front of the neighbors, with humor and grace, giving the Southern woman a platform to be herself and not feel forced to conform to society’s standards. Overall, Hurston’s characters which appeared in her writing “during the Harlem Renaissance, reflected the complexity of the transition from rural to urban life” using “humor that masks a deeper critique of gender roles and New Negro ideology” (West 483-4). The Great Migration from the South to the North

made many women question their behaviors and beliefs, but Hurston eloquently speaks out for all women to be themselves and still retain pride in their African American identity. The celebration of diversity, for all American people, is the common quality that both the Harlem Renaissance and *Ubuntu* seem to have organically grown from.

This type of consciousness is more accepting and experienced by all, from the past to the present and on to future generations. Opposite of individuation is the collectivistic culture that is present in Aborigine societies as well as in African tribes and in contemporary America. From this point of view, *Ubuntu* is “a person’s sense of community, of responsibility toward others, both living and dead, and toward the wider world at large” (Brooke 49) which incorporates the past, present and future, rather than just the here and now, which is what we see in Jung’s philosophy. This perspective is evident in Noonuccal’s poem “A Song of Hope” when she refers to finding acceptance within society: “Now light shall guide us/ no goal denied us/ And all doors open that long were closed”. The doors that were closed affected the older generations, and the light that guides the Noongar people refers to the younger generation, as is explained in the lines “To our fathers’ fathers the pain the sorrow/ To our children’s children the glad tomorrow” (Australian) This vision of unity, that was for too long unobtainable, is apparent in both places, as Mandela also fought for the future of his country to make sure the next generation would not have to suffer the burden of inequality that existed for him. However, to be aware of our human bond is not enough; one must be persistent and proudly go forth as an indigenous person with ancestral roots, claiming personal identity within the broader collective culture that we are all entangled in, to be truly heard and valued.

Furthermore, a major difference between Noongar and Zulu people in regards to spotting *Ubuntu* in their respective cultures is the notion that as much as the Noongar tribe relies on each other, the land and their resources have a greater significance on who they are and how they remain unified. They still maintain a spiritual bond, which is an aspect of *Ubuntu*, but the connection to land makes up most of their heritage, whereas in Zulu culture, the ties are between the clan members first and foremost. The Zulu term *umndeni* meaning family “includes all the people staying in a homestead who are related to each other, either by blood, marriage, or adoption,” and it is a symbol of friendship to be “drinking and eating from the same plate.” This ritual contributes to their custom of “sharing what you have’ which is part of *ubuntu* (humane) philosophy” (SAHO). Zulu people will go through great lengths of selflessness, and expect the same in return, because *Ubuntu* ultimately “entails voluntary self-offering, which requires the Other to duly and unselfishly reciprocate as well” (Gianan 66). Family and community is the core of who the Zulu are, and holds sacred significance. However, with the exclusion of both cultures from the larger modernized society, displacement and oppression resulted for both groups when greed and power came into play, leaving the sense of unity eroded. I believe that these special ties to one another and the land have dissipated and are still in danger of complete dissolution, if they are not pursued, protected, and maintained based on a fundamental reciprocal loving relationship between all people.

In conclusion, I have found that the proof of *Ubuntu* and its enriching quality, which is prevalent in numerous civilizations such as the Noongar and Zulu, and extends into and beyond our own society, is evident as it unifies people in times of peace as well as conflict and promotes human rights. Through coexistence and participation, empathy

and understanding, this philosophy transcends individuality and uplifts our awareness to see the striking similarities we hold with one other. The sacred values that constitute identity in most cultures, such as communion, respect, and ceremonial worship, are what we must remember when certain selfish tendencies began to overrule. Apartheid, assimilation, and land displacement between 1960 and 1985 for these two tribes are some of the many battles lost in the stream of humanity, due to a lack in communication and complete detachment from *Ubuntu*. As Professor Mick Dodson, Australian of the Year in 2009, states, “Human rights do not dispossess people. Human rights do not marginalize people.... The value of human rights is not in their existence; it is in their implementation” (Korff), and that is essentially how *Ubuntu* functions at its best, with the consciousness and active implementation of its ideals from all who participate and advocate for the common good. The future of humanity rests in recognizing the intrinsic value, which we all behold and that manifests itself through poetry, art, music, and other forms of literature, as well as honoring the various differences that equate the similarities humans share collectively as a species. *Ubuntu* leaves one assured that the journey they are walking is not to be walked alone, but to be shared and felt with those one is connected to, within the physical world as well as in spiritual realms led by one’s intuition.

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