Nelson Mandela's 'Ordinary Love' Addressed in Pop-rock Music: a Long Song of Freedom

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"It is music and dancing that makes me at
peace with the world and at peace with myself"
(Nelson Mandela after Johnny Clegg's
performance of the song "Asimbonanga", 1999)

We rise or fall by the choice we make
It all depends on the road we take
And the choice and the road each depend
On the light that we have, the light we bend,
On the light we use
Or refuse
On the lies we live by
And from which we die.
(Ben Okri, *Mental Fight*, 1999)

Although the role played by music in processes of cultural and political change is still to be thoroughly scrutinized, we may safely state that songs associated with Nelson Mandela have had a huge impact on the Western world. This article seeks to provide a contextualized overview of some of the most significant ones, written by Western

artists for audiences that were essentially Western. This clarification is necessary, because the present study will focus on works produced in Europe or the United States, but without neglecting what Shirli Gilbert stressed in her essay "Singing Against Apartheid", that she described as "an initial contribution towards understanding":

> [T]here has yet been little investigation of how music was used by political movements during the struggle, either within the country or in exile. In addition, little detailed research has been conducted on freedom songs, the ubiquitous but largely informal and un-professionalised genre that was probably the dominant musical medium of popular political expression (Olwage 2008: 157).

Gilbert's essay is included in a seminal work that sheds light on South African music during and since the apartheid era, thus starting to chart the musical world of that period as central to its political agenda. Nelson Mandela himself explained that "African music is often about the aspirations of the African people, and it can ignite the political resolve of those who might otherwise be indifferent to politics. One merely has to witness the infectious singing at African rallies. Politics can be strengthened by music, but music has a potency that defies politics" (Mandela 1995: 209).

The contribution of music to the liberation struggle is represented by both South African music and Western songs, often with their own specific context and audience. This article will therefore try to outline the role that Western pop-rock music has had in raising awareness in the West about both Mandela's imprisonment and South African apartheid, in a sort of musical journey through the years between 1984 and 2013 – the year that marked Mandela's passing – examining the main achievements in songs that generated both from the increasing understanding of the South African leader's situation when he was imprisoned, and the legacy of his *exemplum* after he was set free.

As Dorian Lynksey reports, some Western musicians took an early stand against apartheid after the 1960 Sharpeville massacre, "But compared with Vietnam and the American civil rights movement, apartheid remained a niche interest, even on the left" (Lynksey 2013). According to music critics, journalists and people themselves who witnessed it at the time, British ska group The Special AKA's "Free Nelson Mandela" decreed Madiba's coming into millions of Westerners' lives from 1984 on – and Mandela himself was grateful for the spark ignited in people's consciousness. What follows will highlight how the success of that hit single paved the way for a quick increase in the number of musicians who got involved in the anti-apartheid movement and dedicated songs to the rebel who so inspired them. It is argued that The Special AKA's song actually contributed to make Mandela's name finally known to the Western audiences, thus raising awareness of both his case and apartheid as a whole.

The way The Special AKA's Jerry Dammers came to writing the song is significant. He said that when he wrote the song he had been listening to African music, funk and jazz that influenced him to make up

> a tune that was vaguely Latin-African. [… I]t was very simple. The main melody was just three notes […] with brass embroidered around it. I think writing the tune before writing any lyrics was key. If I'd known anything about Nelson Mandela beforehand, I'd probably have come up with some earnest thing on a strummed acoustic guitar. When I was a schoolkid in Coventry, I used to put up anti-apartheid stickers. And when I was 14, I demonstrated against the Springboks rugby tour [South Africa's whites-only team]. But funnily enough, I hadn't actually heard of Mandela until I went to a concert at Alexandra Palace to celebrate his 65th birthday. People like Julian Bahula, the South African musician who came to Britain in exile, were singing about him, which gave me the idea for the lyrics (Simpson 2013).

The result was a peculiarly joyous protest song that starts with a chorus of black backing singers repeating *a cappella* the refrain "Free Nelson Mandela" which, accompanied by an uptempo celebratory melody, abruptly places the cards on the table. The verses include lines: "21 years in captivity/ Shoes too small to fit his feet/ His body abused, but his mind is still free" and "Pleaded the causes of the ANC/ Only one man in a large army". As songwriter Jerry Dammers said to Dave Simpson of *The Guardian*: "I picked up lots of leaflets at the [Alexandra Palace] concert and started learning about Mandela. At that point, he'd been imprisoned for 21 years and the leaflets said the shoes he had in jail were too small for his feet, so I put that in the lyrics." (*Ibid*.)

The lyrics also feature the repetition of such expressions as: "Are you so blind that you cannot see?/ Are you so deaf that you cannot hear?/ Are you so dumb that you cannot speak?", thus stating clearly what was at stake: it was time for the South African government to acknowledge their guilty conduct, and worldwide awareness and participation were needed. This meant taking a stand in a period when influential political leaders described the ANC as a terrorist organization. Caron Wheeler is one of the backing singers who were hired to perform on the song, and her recalling of the recording is symptomatic: "It was like: 'Wow, we're trying to spring this man from jail via musical powers! Do it right, make 'em feel it!' […] That conviction came across in everyone's playing. […] It was important to belt it out, but sweetly" (Hasted 2010).

At this earlier state of the journey into the way pop music's dealing with Mandela evolved, it is necessary to rely on direct quotes from the musicians who were the main players at the time. The following observation that Dammers made in 2010 is crucial:

> The whole point of a song like "Nelson Mandela" is you're one cog in a wheel, but one thing leads to another. Julian Bahula's song led to mine, which led to the

> Mandela concert at Wembley, which went to 600 million people around the world, more than Live Aid. Before that concert, Margaret Thatcher was referring to Mandela as a terrorist. After it, she wanted to be his friend. The weight of popular opinion must have affected negotiations behind the scenes. But all I did was write a song. People in South Africa gave up their lives. (*Ibid*.)

Dammers' realizing how a "little" thing like a song may have led to a massive growing awareness resulting in a huge chain reaction is emblematic of the whole core of this study. It is not just the confutation of the Rolling Stones' famed "It's only rock'n'roll" view – it deals with the power of information, and of information being conveyed through a means able to reach a vast audience, like music does. So it ultimately involves the responsibilities that such power brings and – surprisingly enough – the acknowledgment that a few songs with a mighty idea have had the power to reach people's ears and minds to an extent that, once heard, could not be neglected.[1] Dammers further explains:

> The song was banned in South Africa, but they played it at football matches, which were communal black gatherings. It was an international hit and helped build momentum against apartheid. Dali Tambo [son of exiled ANC president Oliver] approached me to form a British wing of Artists Against Apartheid, and we did loads of concerts, leading up to a huge event on Clapham Common in 1986 that attracted a quarter of a million people. That was the proudest day of my life. It led to the Wembley Stadium concert with people like Dire Straits and Whitney Houston, which was broadcast to millions around the world – comparable to Live Aid. And then things really took off, with a lot of people who hadn't previously supported anti-apartheid coming on board. (Simpson 2013)

As Wilkinson notes, the song's relentlessly upbeat feel certainly helped push it up the charts.

> "It ends with the thing of 'I'm begging you' and then 'I'm telling you,'" Dammers said. "It is a demand but in a positive way, it brought some sort of hope that the situation could be sorted out." Veteran DJ and broadcaster Paul Gambaccini [a presenter on leading UK station BBC Radio 2] said the song was effective in educating people about Mandela, whose reputation was low in the West at the time. "Now we have this sainted vision of Mandela, but at the time Thatcher treated him as a terrorist. So to release a record about someone whom your PM considers a terrorist is quite brave." […] "It did educate people about apartheid an incredible amount, because they certainly weren't going to learn about Mandela

[1] See Dhaxall (2013) for the activism generated in the US, and Hutchinson (2013) as for Australia. Today the internet also displays a wide range of comments (ie: on Youtube pages showing "Free Nelson Mandela" video, or featured articles about Mandela's death) by people from all over the world maintaining that in 1984 they first learned about Mandela's situation from The Special AKA's song.

> from conventional sources. The word on him from on high was very bad, so it was up to musicians to take a leading role in rehabilitating his reputation." […] "'Free Nelson Mandela' was effective for two reasons," he said. "It's a good pop record in that it's catchy and sounds good. And you immediately know what it's about, because the first three words are 'Free Nelson Mandela.' And secondly it had a clear message that the audience agreed with." (Wilkinson 2013)

As Gambaccini recalls, the consequences of the success of "Free Nelson Mandela" were soon to spread. He was one of the presenters of an event that reached a global TV audience of 600 million, namely the Nelson Mandela 70th Birthday Tribute – later known also as "Free Nelson Mandela Concert" and "Mandela Day". It was Dammers himself who helped organize the show, together with Scottish rock band Simple Minds. Numerous bands and pop-rock stars among the greatest of that time signed up to perform at the event, held at Wembley Stadium, London. Gambaccini maintains: "It might never have happened without the song 'Free Nelson Mandela', because this inspired some of the artists who appeared at Wembley to be there." (*Ibid*.)

In 1990 music critic and BBC presenter Robin Denselow wrote that the 1988 Free Mandela Concert was the "biggest and most spectacular pop-political event of all time, a more political version of Live Aid with the aim of raising consciousness rather than just money" (Denselow 1990: 276).[2] One of the most famous songs dedicated to Madiba was, in fact, "Mandela Day":[3] the Scottish band Simple Minds wrote it specifically for that event. The day Mandela passed away, Simple Minds' singer Jim Kerr posted his thoughts and memories about the South African leader on the band's website:

> To so many of our generation, Nelson Mandela was both an extraordinary and inspirational human being. [... He] became the symbol, a focus for many of us increasingly more intent on doing whatever we could in calling out to those in power to do everything necessary to end the distortion of human rights that was endemic to apartheid.
>
> 'Mandela Day' was written in five minutes, such a lovely tune. It's more about a sentiment. Political songs have to have memorable tunes. [...W]e are glad that our [song] is still out there and is still symbolic of that time. I'm so glad we did it. I'm so glad we had the balls to get involved because you got criticism then. It can be a rather clumsy thing to do, try and take some huge issue and put it into a three minute song. But I remember when Mandela was eventually released and came to London for the first time in 1990. There was a celebratory concert for him

[2] On music and music events as bearers of consciousness, see the role of rock as the *lingua franca* of a crowd (as Ellen Willis puts it, in Kelly-McDonnell 1999: 154) and "the utopian moment of the rock'n'roll crowd" (*Ibid*: 155).

[3] Mandela's birthday, 18 July, is also referred to as Mandela Day. Hence the name of the Mandela Day Campaign, that promotes international involvement in taking action on a number of initiatives and inspiring change. See <http://www.mandeladay.com/static/what-is-mandela-day> (16 January 2014).

> [...H]e said something that has stuck with me ever since. 'When we were in Robben Island, when there was no voice allowed, we could always feel and hear the voice of the artists, and it gave us great sustenance.'
>
> That's why we can play 'Mandela Day' now and, as much as it's about Mandela, it's about Tibet, it's about wherever there is prejudice or oppression.
>
> For me, the underlying musical power of 'Mandela Day' will always convey more than words how much of an inspiration Nelson Mandela was to us and so many of our generation. (Kerr 2013)

Such a long quotation is needed because Kerr addressed several crucial aspects of what it means for a pop singer to embark on a "clumsy thing to do, try and take some huge issue and put it into a three minute song". In such circumstances, pop stars often receive mixed reactions, being either praised for their humanitarian activism or criticized for just oversimplifying topics they are not thoroughly well-informed of. My view is that we shouldn't expect any in-depth analyses from songs and singers, whose aim on such occasions is to help vast audiences to find out about social issues of freedom and civil rights being violated. Of course, songs are also a part of the music industry, therefore they must fit there, too. But delving further into this issue would mean going beyond the scope of this article. What should indeed be considered is that popular music as a vehicle for raising awareness is a particularly powerful means, due to its very nature, and implying also the audience' admiration for artists, who are aware of being potentially good mouthpieces for great causes, even at the cost of addressing them in an oversimplified manner. This crucial issue is stressed by Shirli Gilbert as well, while explaining how several South African exile forms of cultural expression and music in the apartheid era were produced: "truly revolutionary art served to educate, awaken political consciousness and galvanise people to action. Finally, art was a vehicle for condemning the regime and informing the world about apartheid" (Olwage 2008: 172). To this aim, Gilbert illustrates, South African Amandla Cultural Ensemble – that from 1970 to 1990 became "a successful ambassador for the ANC, travelling throughout Africa" (*ibid*.: 171) and other continents, performing freedom songs, African jazz, popular township music, theatre and dance – had to face the limitations and obstacles inherent in "producing a show that would first and foremost appeal to international audiences" (*ibid*.: 172). Gilbert cites Ian Steadman's observations about South African 'adversarial' theatre marketed abroad in the 1980s, according to which "the image of the country presented to foreign audiences is necessarily a selected one, which as a result sometimes 'reinforces the very stereotypes that it seeks to undermine'"(*ibid*.).[4]

[4] Other scholars observed that this problematic issue – i.e., a sort of simplified, "predigested" presentation of South African issues was a common denominator for cultural expressions. "With regard to film, Rob Nixon similarly argues that popular representations intended to deepen outrage over apartheid and mobilize foreign audiences needed to make certain modifications to render the struggle not only accessible, but also acceptable, to those audiences" (Olwage 2008: 174).

Bearing these points in mind, this study will look at Western musicians' efforts to raise public awareness on Mandela's plight before his release, and then to praise his iconic figure in the most recent years. In the work cited above, Grant Olwage wrote: "the meaning of music resides in its receptions, and often in its institutional receptions" (*ibid*.: 7). The presence of different receptions (in different times and places) of music related to South African issues is therefore acknowledged here, as well as the awareness of the historical distance that separates songs written in the Eighties from today's complex South African context, with the process of nation-building still facing a high level of criticality.[5]

After the success of The Special AKA's top ten single, the well-known tune that Simple Minds dedicated to the father of the Rainbow Nation, "Mandela Day" became the late-Eighties anthem for Mandela, characterized by the band's distinctive guitar sound woven into an evocative atmosphere. It is interesting to notice how the sound pattern matches the lyrics. The latter, in fact, reflect the hope that the release of the South African prisoner may happen soon, as in the first lines: "It was 25 years they take that man away/ Now the freedom moves in closer every day", prefiguring his liberation that is clearly envisaged in line "They say Mandela's free so step outside". Times were gradually changing: the events worldwide and the increasing awareness were showing that the eyes of foreign nations – both people and governments – were on South Africa, with initiatives and boycotts on several levels. So in the lines "Still the children know the story of that man/ And I know what's going on right through your land", the social consciousness both in South Africa and outside is clarified: South African younger generations know Mandela's story, therefore his legacy is already there and the regime couldn't erase it. The lyrical, Western, "I" knows what's going on, so there's nothing more to hide. "And now the world come down say Nelson Mandela's free/ […] From the one outside to the ones inside we say/ Oh oh oh oh Mandela's free/ Oh oh oh set Mandela free". The shift from "Mandela's free" to "set Mandela free", until the final line "We know what's going on", creates a mixed atmosphere of hope, wait, and longing for something so long-awaited that it starts to be celebrated in advance while never forgetting the horrors of the past which is still part of the present.[6]

In 1989 African American singer-songwriter Tracy Chapman dedicated the heartfelt folk-rock song "Freedom Now" to the by then well-known freedom fighter Mandela. Also a social activist deeply concerned with human rights, she has addressed

[5] South African Nobel laureate Nadine Gordimer frequently lamented that post-liberation South Africa hasn't followed Mandela's example, highlighting that liberation has been accomplished, while justice is still to be achieved, because of the inequalities and spreading corruption still unresolved (Mastrolilli-Simoncelli 2013).

[6] What H. R. Jauss observed about works of art anticipating something of a future experience, imagining non-experimented models of behaviour and answering questions that have just been asked (Jauss: 77) seem applicable here

issues such as poverty and equality in her whole work. "Freedom Now" is a compelling protest song rooted in folk balladry sounds; the lyrics are effective, starting from the first stanza: "They throwed him in jail/ And they kept him there/ Hoping soon he'd die/ That his body and spirit would waste away/ And soon after that his mind/ […] Hoping his memory'd die". These lines describe what every regime hopes for their prisoners, but Mandela's extraordinary endurance and powerful vision were stronger. The singer also lashes out at that kind of "fool" (as Chapman calls them) that is born every day, "One who thinks that he can rule/ One who says tomorrow's mine/ One who wakes one day to find/ The prison doors open the shackles broken/ And chaos in the street/ Everybody sing we're free free free free". Chapman is clearly addressing the South African regime, made of "fools" who are bound to see the end of their system. Then the lyrics express the final vision of their author: "Soon must come the day/ Oh when the righteous have their way/ […] Give the man release/ Oh go on and set your conscience free/ Right the wrongs you made/ Oh even a fool can have his day/ Let us all be free free free free".

American country rock and folk singer-songwriter Jackson Browne has long been involved in political activism in causes such as human rights, antinuclear organizations and opposing past U.S. policy in Central America. His song "When the Stone Begins to Turn" is included in the 1989 album *World in Motion* and was not released as a single. Browne's political stance had already permeated his songwriting, and "When the Stone Begins to Turn" was his personal tribute to what had become a major issue at the time, namely Mandela's imprisonment. While the tune features reggae rhythms and African percussions, the lyrics address both the figures of Mandela and Martin Luther King, seen as great leaders who have lightened the way of strong, peaceful resistance to race discrimination and violence. About Dr. King, Browne sings, "He found a light in the darkest hour/ And the strength for speaking truth to power/ And in the years since they shot him down / You see changes that once were a dream". Dr. King's *exemplum* – with a significant reference to King's well-known "I have a dream" speech – allows Browne to prefigure similar "changes that once were a dream" for South Africa, too:

> And I come here to praise Mandela
> And to bring this message to his jailer
> Your walls may hold the man inside
> But they'll never ever hold back the tide
> 'Cause in the years you've shut him away
> A generation has grown where he stood
> They're gonna see the day
> When the walls have begun to crumble
> When the laws have begun to burn
> When the wind is singing freedom
> When the stone begins to turn

Browne's references to the younger generations' increased awareness over time creates space for hope, and is a shared trait with Simple Minds' "Mandela Day" lyrics, also addressing the youth being aware of Mandela's story. Jackson Browne's following lines "Freedom for South Africa/ And justice for Nelson Mandela" are still a clear, explicit statement about the stance that was needed in a historical period that was ready for the big change, i.e. Mandela's liberation.

And that time arrived on 11 February 1990, with the unconditional release of the world's best-known political prisoner. Two months later, another concert was held at Wembley, "Nelson Mandela: An International Tribute for a Free South Africa". This time Madiba was in the audience, and the event was broadcast in 67 countries.

Once he was set free, and after he was elected President of the new South Africa, Mandela had to deal with a number of problems his country was still facing. One of them was the HIV/AIDS pandemic.. Mandela himself agreed to create the "46664 Campaign", a series of charity concerts to spread awareness about that issue. In October 2003 he announced that his campaign would be launched with a major concert in Cape Town on November 29. The international campaign was titled after the number 46664, Mandela's prison number on Robben Island, near Cape Town. The concert was broadcast worldwide with numerous artists performing, and was followed by other "46664" events in South Africa and Europe in 2005, 2007 and 2008, culminating in the Nelson Mandela 90th Birthday Tribute held in Hyde Park, London, twenty years after the 1988 Mandela Tribute at Wembley.

An outstanding group of artists worked on the song "46664", written specifically for the 2003 event in Cape Town: The Clash's singer Joe Strummer wrote the song, in collaboration with U2's Bono and Dave Stewart of Eurythmics. Strummer died shortly afterwards, but the other co-authors could perform the song together with a number of other artists who enriched the line-up at the event. As guitar plays in a loop, Bono sings stanzas that have an impressive Clash rhythm pattern. The lyrics deal with the central theme that is repeated several times by the chorus: "It's a long walk, long walk to freedom", that echoes the title of Mandela's autobiography and is also the very core of what Madiba's experience has been about. The opening stanza refers to the idea of freedom that can never be restrained or limited: "Freedom rises from the killing floor/ No lock of iron or rivet can restrain the door/ And no kind of army can hope to win a war/ It's like trying to stop the rain or still the lion's roar". Any possibility for an army is negated: the struggle must be peaceful, there's no winning where an army is involved. Besides representing regal, natural strength – and also Mandela's noble origins – the lion gives an immediate image easily ascribable to African nature "under Western eyes". The lion metaphor is also found in *izibongo*, South African praise poems, particularly in "the 'Shakan' period of Zulu literature, in about 1800-1850".[7]

[7] Kresse (1998: 177) explains that during the "expansive phase of military conquest under 'the Zulu Napoleon, Shaka' […] bolder metaphors and symbols than before were used in order to create a

Other lines in "46664" seem to describe the past of the prisoner: "when these hands are manacled it's your spirit that gets raw/ It's not the small patch of sky you see but the spirit as it soars". The final stanza recalls elements of the South African landscape that were certainly part of Mandela's experience, such as rocks and waves: "In townships of humanity there would be no poor/ From where the rock is heavy comes the purest ore/ The first six waves might break in the bay but the seventh breaks on the shore / It's a long walk, long walk to freedom". On Robben Island, which is made of metamorphic rocks, prisoners had to endure heavy labor breaking rocks at the limestone quarry. In 2013 Irish rock band U2 released the most recent songs dedicated to Mandela, "Ordinary Love" and "Breathe (Mandela Version)". The former, a Golden Globe-awarded anthem whose melody is sustained by a patterned work of keyboards and guitar, was written for the soundtrack of the biopic *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom*, directed by Justin Chadwick and premiered in London the night Madiba passed away. Producer Anant Singh said: "This is really fitting as U2 has always been a staunch supporter of Madiba. As a board member of Madiba's 46664 anti AIDS initiative together with U2, I was fortunate to be with them when we visited Robben Island together, accompanied by Madiba" (u2.com 2013). Producer Harvey Weinstein added: "When I asked them to consider writing a song for *Mandela: Long Walk To Freedom*, it was the fastest 'yes' I have ever received. The band saw various cuts of the film over the summer and worked diligently to write a song that truly reflects Nelson Mandela. I think they did a brilliant job honoring the man and the leader they have known for over 20 years" (*Ibid.*). Since their early years, in fact, U2 have supported anti-apartheid movements, including the Artists United Against Apartheid protest group, back in 1985. As for "Ordinary Love", its lyrics have been particularly crafted. To facilitate the analysis, here's the whole text:

> The sea wants to kiss the golden shore
> The sunlight warms your skin
> All the beauty that's been lost before wants to find us again
> I can't fight you anymore; it's you I'm fighting for
> The sea throws rocks together but time leaves us polished stones
>
> We can't fall any further if we can't feel ordinary love
> And we cannot reach any higher if we can't deal with ordinary love
>
> Birds fly high in the summer sky and rest on the breeze
> The same wind will take care of you and I, we'll build our house in the trees
> Your heart is on my sleeve, did you put it there with a magic marker
> For years I would believe that the world couldn't wash it away

wider and more powerful image of the growing community – 'elephant' and 'lion' instead of birds and antelopes as dominant symbols for the rulers. After the peak of military expansion a more lyrical tone re-emerged".

Cause we can't fall any further if we can't feel ordinary love
And we cannot reach any higher if we can't deal with ordinary love

Are we tough enough, for ordinary love?
[…]

The first two lines of both stanzas introduce the South African landscape; then the focus shifts on the dialectic relationship past/present. The shores and rocks featured also in the lyrics of "46664"; now, besides sunlight, also birds and trees appear. Interestingly, the South African coat of arms also includes a secretary bird and the rising sun as emblems of the country. The lyrics also present the South African setting through elements that recur in the genre of praise poetry in South African literature.[8] R. H. Kaschula (Attwell-Attridge 2012: 46) cites one of the most famous poems by Xhosa D.L.P. Yali-Manisi, "The bird of the forest grows restless" (1985), that features some natural elements the song here analyzed also presents: bird, sun, sea. It might also be added that the majority of animals on Robben Island have always been birds. The reference to the island reinforces the feeling that the moment addressed in the lyrics could be the one following Mandela's release.

The central theme of the song is the relationship. In fact, an element that strikes at a glance is the I/you dichotomy – and consequently the "we/us" also mentioned. While it can be easily inferred that the poetic "I" is that of Mandela himself, as for the "you" addressed repeatedly in the lyrics multiple possibilities arise. The line "I can't fight you anymore; it's you I'm fighting for" might be generally addressed to his political counterpart: now that Nelson is free, only peace and dialogue will help rebuild the nation. In his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*, Mandela says: "I never sought to undermine Mr. de Klerk, for the practical reason that the weaker he was, the weaker the negotiations process. To make peace with an enemy one must work with that enemy, and that enemy becomes one's partner" (Mandela 1995: 734-735). Then, talking about him and de Klerk again, Mandela adds: "I think we are a shining example to the entire world of people drawn from different racial groups who have a common loyalty, a common love, to their common country" (*Ibid*: 740-741). However, even though the kind of "ordinary love" expressed by the lyrics might be seen as a straightforward political reference, I suggest we should consider another issue at stake, as poetry and song lyrics usually do: the feeling for Mandela's partner when he was set free, his then-wife Winnie. I argue that in these lyrics Bono deliberately deals with the issue of love on a wider scale, thus implying both the general love Mandela

[8] "There are […] praise poems of domestic animals, of wild animals, of trees and crops, of rivers, hills, and other scenic features". (L. Mphande, in Irele-Gikandi 2004: 75, v. I). Kaschula (Attwell-Attridge: 42-59) has largely studied Xhosa oral poetry, whose use of animal metaphor and imagery reflects textual elements of traditional *izibongo* – South African praise poems whose tradition features a poetry production including also several poems in honour of Mandela.

himself talks about (also in his autobiography) – the one for his country, his people and the whole human freedom at stake – and the more specific issue of love for his beloved one, being questioned (and eventually ended) by their different political views.

The protagonist of Bono's lyrics might well be speaking to the whole South African community – blacks and whites – and this is definitely true of the anthemic refrain, universally engaging: "We can't fall any further if/ We can't feel ordinary love/ And we cannot reach any higher/ If we can't deal with ordinary love", as well as the lines, "I can't fight you anymore/ It's you I'm fighting for". At a first glance, the concept of "fight" in a song about Mandela can be linked to his – and South Africa's – struggle for freedom and equality: if we can't stick to the "love thy neighbour" good practice, we can't get any lower than this and we won't reach peace. However, especially the second stanza stands as a confirmation that this song is about more than just the father of the new South Africa talking to his fellow countrymen: "The same wind will take care of you and I/ We'll build our house in the trees/ Your heart is on my sleeve/ Did you put it there with a magic marker?/ For years I would believe/ That the world couldn't wash it away" – these words might have been written by the recently-freed Mandela and dedicated to Mandela's wife at the time, Winnie.

It is precisely the complex relationship between Nelson and Winnie that makes these lyrics particularly intriguing – also thanks to the expression "ordinary love" Bono came up with, that is the crucial element in the song. It implies, how much does it take to feel ordinary (and even more so, extra-ordinary) love at any level, in human life? As for Winnie and Nelson, their most contrasting views ignited especially after Madiba's release. So the song is also a sad verification of not being able to share the same view, as well as the same kind of love.[9] The implication might be: how can we hope for a greater reconciliation (i.e. blacks and whites after apartheid) if we cannot feel "simple" love? Therefore, there isn't actually any distinction between a "higher love" and a love that is just ordinary: the ordinary *is* extraordinary – and vice versa – and the effort it takes is proof of that. In Mandela's experience, the "ordinary" and taken for granted freedom that all people should have, had become an extraordinary value to fight for and to cherish once regained. And that is why after dreadful mistreatment, it takes everyone's efforts to turn the most extraordinary strength – i.e., not giving in to revenge and violence – into the most ordinary love possible. Hence, the final question "Are we tough enough, for ordinary love?"[10]

[9] Curiously enough, a quote from Winnie is reported by Krog (1999: 257), when Mandela's ex wife described herself stating: "I am an *ordinary* human being" (italics mine).

[10] In *Ibid.*: 24, Krog reports a similar observation: "The most important lesson the struggle taught me and my friends is that no one is endowed with remarkable courage. But courage is another name for learning to live with your fears. Now, after eighteen years and the Chilean Truth Commission, courage has again evolved a new definition: the guts not to give in to easy justice".

Reading the author's own explanations of the "Ordinary Love" lyrics confirmed my intuition. Bono said that the title "Ordinary Love" works on a couple of levels:

> [W]e were so surprised to discover that the film, as well as being a big historical drama that it has to be, is made much more interesting by being a love story — a very complicated love story, but a love story. [… Mandela] didn't want to become a monster to defeat a monster, and so "Ordinary Love" is also an appeal to South Africa. So it works in the personal and it works in the political. That's why we took it in the central image of the song. The rest of the lyrics were inspired by the letters of Nelson to Winnie Mandela. Anant Singh, the producer, sent them to me. (Hammond 2014)

Bono made a statement to commemorate Mandela after his passing on U2's official website: "In the end, Nelson Mandela showed us how to love rather than hate, not because he had never surrendered to rage or violence, but because he learnt that love would do a better job. Mandela played with the highest stakes. He put his family, his country, his time, his life on the line, and he won most of these contests." ("Love rather than hate" 2013).

In the relevance that human relationships and relatedness acquired in Madiba's experience, we might identify a specific African trait, that of *ubuntu* humanism. Without "you", the "I" disappears, life is relationships. The importance of reconciliation, that Mandela sought as a primary goal for South Africa after his own release, is strictly related to peaceful survival: "The South African experience has taught us that reconciled coexistence is essential for survival. Personal survival is inextricably linked to the survival of others" (Krog 1999: 111). In this respect, love can actually be seen as "ordinary": as Archbishop Desmond Tutu explains, "In the African *Weltanschauung* a person is not basically an independent, solitary entity. A person is human precisely in being enveloped in the community of other human beings […]" (*Ibid*., p. 110). Michael Battle has observed that "As Tutu's *Ubuntu* theology unfolds it gives access to a new identity for South Africans; it also appeals to ancient African concepts of the harmony between individual and community which John Mbiti concludes as: I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am." (*Ibid*.).

This leads us back to "Ordinary Love", whose lyrics still have more to unfold. The line "The sea throws rock together but time leaves us polished stones" seems to show Nelson speaking of his desire for a peaceful reconciliation, both between blacks and whites in South Africa and between himself and Winnie – time being able to polish stones, therefore smoothing the rough edges off. As for the line "We'll build our house in the trees", it may be remembered that when Mandela was born he was named Rolihlahla, meaning "Shaker of trees" in Xhosa, therefore, "troublemaker". The image of building a house in the trees conveys a sense of both lightheartedness and intimacy. In this respect, an excerpt from Mandela's letter to Winnie of 26 June 1977 suggests a situation that Bono might have read and transfigured into his lyrics. Nelson

writes: "I had hoped to build you a refuge, no matter how small, so that we would have a place for rest and sustenance before the arrival of the sad, dry days. I fell down and couldn't do these things. I am as one building castles in the air." (PBS 2014).

The last song this survey will deal with is U2's "Breathe (Mandela Version)", that the Irish band released as a B-side of "Ordinary Love" vinyl in 2013. As the title suggests, it is an alternative, acoustic version – and written in the same period – of the song "Breathe" that featured in the band's 2009 album *No Line on the Horizon*. In this song too, Bono's work on lyrics turned out to be interestingly engaging.

> 18th of July on the banks of a not well known river
> I started a journey to where I am now
> Troubled soul, troublemaker guided by the drums of my creator
> Toward a rhythm and rhyme, a melody line of a song called freedom
> Which once heard will never leave your head
>
> We are people born of sound
> The songs are in our eyes
> Gonna wear them like a crown
>
> Walk out into the street
> Sing your heart out
> This love it can't be beat
> We're neither down nor out
> There's nothing you have that I need
> While I can breathe
> Breathe, while I can breathe
>
> All those who stood together fist in air now know this
> That real division is not a scar on the land
> but in the heart of every man
> who began as a kiss
> Not to resist, a knotted fist
> Now an open hand, open face, an open page
> Where history might rewrite its rage
>
> And the life you get to live is the one you give away
> To forget who to forgive is a good thing…
> […]
> Rolihlahla, Rolihlahla, Rolihlahla, Rolihlahla

In the 2009 album version ("Breathe") the date in the opening line is a homage to the "Dubliner day" *par excellence*, 16th of June (Bloomsday, after Joyce's *Ulysses*), that in the "Mandela Version" is 18th of July, namely Mandela's birthday. The link here is striking because 16th of June is also a central date for South African history: the Soweto

Uprising began on 16 June 1976 – and today the date is a public holiday. Bono's replacing of the date of a massacre and death – generated by a South African uprising to stand up for their own rights and identity – into a date of birth, therefore life, is a brilliant move.

In lines "18th of July on the banks of a not well known river/ I started a journey to where I am now" the river detail – together with the irony of its description – suggests a reference to Nelson's personal journey (i.e. life) since his own birth, and an embodiment of the "I" being Madiba himself. And this is confirmed by facts: Mandela was actually born along the "not well known" Mbashe River in the village of Mvezo. Another connection with the meaning of "Rolihlahla/troublemaker" name follows in the next lines: "Troubled soul, troublemaker guided by the drums of my creator/ Toward a rhythm and rhyme, a melody line of a song called freedom". They also include a homage to African drums and rhythm. A sort of allusion to the troubled history of both U2's homeland – Ireland and its past "Troubles" – and Mandela's South Africa, is contained in the lines, "real division is not a scar on the land/ but in the heart of every man", highlighting that, rather than focusing on revenge and rage towards those who caused divisions, "history might rewrite its rage", and "To forget who to forgive is a good thing". Bono sets up a parallel between Ireland and South Africa, developing the lyrics of this version of the song on a track that embraces peacemaking efforts akin to those made by the South African leader. The outro of the song is a repeated chorus "Rolihlahla, Rolihlahla" that pays U2's final tribute to the most iconic figure of recent decades.

The hints at unbeatable love, endurance ("while I can breathe") and singing maintain the *fil rouge* of elements that have characterized Mandela's experience. This summons up features that recall what Ben Okri identifies as the "true orientation to life", enriched with "archetypes of prophetic rebels, who combine hybris with service, individual genius with self-sacrificial impulses" (Costantini 2002: 14). Okri – an author held in high regard by Bono – sees these elements as those of the *engagé* "demiurgic writer" who seeks to redeem the world through artistic creativity, and Mandela has clearly epitomized, for a great number of musicians, the most inspiring rebel of their own time.

In the way the figure of Mandela has been addressed and represented in songs over time, a distinctive element emerges, related to what sort of information could be included in the lyrics, as audiences became more and more familiar with the global icon. When he was still unknown to the vast majority of people, an anthem with a plea, "Free Nelson Mandela", was the spark that lighted the flame of growing indignation. Once the South African leader was released, freedom demands were no longer necessary, so the focus became the victory conquered through endurance (as in "46664"), or an insight into the human side of the hero, as in U2 songs: feelings in "Ordinary Love", and a warm account of Mandela's accomplishments through stubbornness and forgiveness in "Breathe (Mandela Version)". What remains, after this

journey across notes and words, resistance and gratitude, is that we can still hear all these artists' creations resonate and vibrate in a long song of freedom.

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