Yearbook 2012.qxp 24/05/2013 08:43 Page 61

Prisoners' Dilemmas and Humiliation Theory: How Avant-Garde Writers and Radical Politicians have Confronted the Challenge of Incarceration.

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Abstract: In this article the different ways that two avant-garde writers (Oscar Wilde, Jean Améry) and two radical politicians (Nelson Mandela, Aang San Suu Kyi) responded to imprisonment have been subjected to comparative analysis in the light of humiliation theory and a consideration of two versions of the prisoner's dilemma involving challenges with respect to collaboration and identity, respectively.

Two Prisoner's Dilemmas: collaboration and identity

This article explores the interplay between biography and social change through a focus on four high-profile historical personalities who each confronted the challenge of accusation and conviction followed by a period of incarceration intended to demean their reputation and put at risk their health and physical survival. At issue for all four prisoners was the question of their identity or persona: in other words, 'who they were', including whom they seemed to be from the perspective of the public at large. Their approach to this issue had a significant influence on how they responded to the attempts made to impose humiliation upon them.

Two theoretical tools will be deployed. One is humiliation theory, the analysis of the dynamics of forced social displacement, which is summarized later in the paper. The other is the device of the prisoner's dilemma, an idea that was originally developed to explore certain aspects of rational choice theory; for example, the question of how individuals' self-centered pursuit of their own perceived best interest might lead to them forgoing opportunities to cooperate with others for their mutual benefit as members of a group. Let us begin there.

Yearbook 2012.qxp 24/05/2013 08:21 Page 62

As is well known, the classic dilemma, faced by the prisoner alone in her cell, is whether to blame her accomplice, held in a separate cell, for the crime they both committed, or confess to her own involvement.[1] Both prisoners face the same dilemma, and their two responses will determine the relative severity of the punishment each will receive. Unfortunately for the two prisoners, they cannot communicate with each other to coordinate their responses so as to produce the optimum outcome available to them both. Relevant factors include the high degree of control exercised by the police, the low level of communication between the prisoners, the limited extent of the information made available to each prisoner, and the potentially low levels of trust within the three-way relationship between prisoners and police (see figure 1 where J refers to the jailer, the police , the state or the law, P, P1 and P2 refer to the prisoner, and PO refers to public opinion).[2]

The discussion surrounding the classic prisoner's dilemma in rational choice theory has the merit of dealing with cases where the primary object is to minimize prospective losses. This contrasts with the neo-liberal model of 'homo economicus' whose calculus is mainly focused on individuals striving to accumulate advantages, to better themselves. However, for many, even most, people the primary concern is not advancement but survival. Hope of advancement is overwhelmed by fear of losing what they already have. How people respond to a 'downward push' (which overwhelms, relegates or excludes them) is central to humiliation theory, which may be explored by considering another variant of the prisoner's dilemma. To be more specific: alongside what might be called the *prisoner's collaboration dilemma*, which has been just been discussed, we may consider the *prisoner's identity dilemma*.

Figure 1: Two Kinds of Prisoner's Dilemma

PRISONER'S COLLABORATION DILEMMA **J** & % э (**P1** ! ∀ **P2**	PRISONER'S IDENTITY DILEMMA **J** & % э (**P** ! ∀ **PO**
Deny? Confess? Accuse?	Accept? Reject? Escape?
RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY	HUMILIATION THEORY

Yearbook 2012.qxp 24/05/2013 08:21 Page 63

The prisoner's identity dilemma arises during and after conviction and is played out in the courtroom or torture chamber (two scenes of 'trial'), in the place of imprisonment, and after release. This time the players are the prisoner, the jailer (be it the police, the military, or a political regime) and public opinion, partly mediated by press and broadcasters, both national and global. A crucial element built into this second case is that the prisoners concerned are all notorious or controversial. They are all liable to be recognized by a wide public as being of 'special' concern, either as specific individuals (famous writers and well-known political activists), or as members of specific categories that became notorious and controversial in particular historical eras (Jews in Nazi Europe and homosexuals in late Victorian England), or both.

In this case, the persona of the imprisoned individual is subject to a kind of tug-of-war: on one side, the identity that the prisoner is attempting to construct as an arena of self-realization and a means of agency; on the other side, the disreputable reputation the jailer is trying to impose upon the prisoner. The dilemma is: how shall the prisoner respond to the jailer's damaging efforts since all potential responses, such as acceptance, rejection, and attempted escape, are risky? Analyzing the 'prisoner's identity dilemma' may cast light on a wide range of social, political and economic situations involving forced social displacement and the dynamics of humiliation.[3]

The empirical part of the article focuses upon two writers, Oscar Wilde and Jean Améry, and two politicians, Nelson Mandela and Aang San Suu Kyi, whose imprisonment was, in each case, an attempt to crush and extinguish a troublesome person whom the authorities preferred should be off the scene, out of action and, if possible, not there at all.[4] As will be seen, two of the prisoners found themselves facing situations similar to the prisoner's collaboration dilemma, the 'other prisoner' being the un-free subject population whose cause they represented. All four of them confronted the prisoner's identity dilemma.

Wilde, Améry, Mandela and Suu Kyi

Oscar Wilde, who had been involved in a number of actively homosexual relationships, was convicted of gross indecency under section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885. His punishment was two years hard labour, served between 1895 and 1897 in Pentonville, Wandsworth and, most famously, in Reading Gaol where he wrote *De Profundis*, a long letter to his lover, Sir Alfred Douglas ('Bosie').

Jean Améry, born Hanns Chaim Mayer, is the least famous, although his book *At the Mind's Limit*s, (Améry 1980; originally published in 1966) reflecting upon his experiences as a Jew in Nazi and post-war Europe, is becoming increasingly well known. In 1943 Améry, born in Austria, was

Yearbook 2012.qxp 24/05/2013 08:21 Page 64

arrested as an anti-Nazi resistance worker in Belgium, where he had fled with his wife. He was tortured by the Belgian secret police. When they discovered Améry was Jewish, he was sent to Auschwitz. Only 615 of 23,000 Jews from Belgium survived such an experience: less than three percent. Améry was one of them.

Nelson Mandela's offenses were sabotage and treason in South Africa during the *apartheid* regime. Following his conviction in 1963, Mandela spent twenty-seven years in a number of prisons, including Robben Island where he was incarcerated along with a number of members of the African National Congress and people from other resistance groups.

Finally, Aang San Suu Kyi fell foul of the Burmese military regime in 1989 shortly after she helped found the National League for Democracy. She was convicted of conduct 'likely to undermine the community peace and stability' of Burma, an offense under article 10a of the Law to Safeguard the State Against the Dangers of Those Desiring to Cause Subversive Acts. Suu Kyi spent a total of fifteen years under house arrest, living in near solitude in her family home in the middle of Rangoon.

Each case has unique aspects. Unlike the other three, Améry had no public profile as an individual at the time of his arrest, and only he was under daily threat of being shot, hanged or gassed. Only Suu Kyi had a standing invitation from her jailors to take her freedom, as long as she left Burma on a one-way ticket. Only Nelson Mandela had the chance to develop his socio-political skills and persona inside prison within a micro-society of like-minded colleagues. Only Oscar Wilde left prison terminally broken, unable to make the prison experience 'work' for him as an ex-convict, however significant and memorable his prison writings proved to be.

However, all four were guided by distinctive visions of how their societies might be. Suu Kyi has campaigned for free speech and political democracy. Nelson Mandela helped to destroy apartheid, which denied human rights to Black Africans. Oscar Wilde was an opponent of hypocritical social conventions and wanted to see the power of private property weakened. Jean Améry became an existentialist author, challenging oppressive socio-political hierarchies and advocating individual free choice in all matters. All four have struggled to overcome the socio-political and cultural conditions that allowed the persistence of humiliation, whose dynamics are the main focus of inquiry here.[5] Let us briefly explore those dynamics.

Humiliation Theory

What is humiliation? Humiliation is forced social displacement that is experienced as undeserved, externally imposed, diminishment, involving a loss or reduction of the capacity to enact one's will in the world (agency), to do what one wants (autonomy), to have one's identity and interests

Yearbook 2012.qxp 24/05/2013 08:21 Page 65

safeguarded (security) or have one's social identity respected and taken into proper account (recognition).

Figure Two: Aspects of Humiliation

1.Modes of Humiliation	2. Dominant Emotions	3. Key Orientations
Subjection	Anger	Towards The Inner
ρ	ρ	ρ
Relegation Exclusion	Fear Sorrow	Towards The Outer Towards The Other

There are three 'moments' in the humiliation process that have a logical relation to each other (see figure 2, 1). *Subjection* brings reduced autonomy and agency, imposing subordination within a new hierarchy created by the new masters. *Relegation* means being shoved down the hierarchy, out of sight and out of favour, bringing a reduction of recognition. This opens up space for *exclusion*, whereby marginalized inferiors are turned into outsiders, and lose both recognition and security, although they may retain a degree of agency and autonomy (see figure 3).

Those who deliberately impose humiliation have the satisfaction of exercising strength in a way that damages others, and may reduce their capacity to pose an obstacle to the intentions of the stronger party. For those at the receiving end, humiliation brings the experience of involuntary displacement from their established and familiar social position and social identity. These feelings are experienced by individuals although sometimes in a collective context, as, for example, in a family, crowd, organisation, community or society.

The immediate source of discomfort is the difference between the sufferers' perception of who they are and where they fit into society, and the less worthy and desirable identity and social position being imposed upon them by the act of humiliation. At the same time, forced social displacement reframes the sufferers' location in social time, transforming their perception of their own past (now seen as better than before), their present (now less bearable) and their future (now worse than previously anticipated).

Being forced to acquiesce in something totally unacceptable typically stimulates three emotional responses, anger, fear and sorrow, and these compete for priority (figure 2, 2). At the same time (see figure 2, 3), the threat or fact of humiliation may trigger a reworking of the victim's orientation towards her own self (the 'inner'), her relationship with the socio-political

Yearbook 2012.qxp 24/05/2013 08:21 Page 66

structures in which she is embedded (the ‘outer’), and her attitude and behaviour towards the master, enemy or rival who has imposed the humiliation (the ‘other’).

Reactions to the threat of humiliation may be divided into two kinds of movement: retreating from the threat, in other words, *yielding responses,* and advancing to meet the threat, in other words, *challenging responses* (see figure 3).

Figure Three: Responses to Attempted Humiliation

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Yielding Responses</td><td colspan="2">Acceptance</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Escape</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Challenging Responses</td><td rowspan="2">Rejection</td><td>Revenge-Rejection</td></tr>
<tr><td>Resistance-Rejection</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Conciliation-Reform</td></tr>
</table>

Yielding Responses: Escape and Acceptance. The response of escape entails *removing the object of humiliation* (i.e., the actual or potential victim), for example by physical relocation. By contrast, acceptance means *removing the objection to humiliation* on the part of the victim.

Escapees relocate themselves but do not try to reform themselves. Instead, they re-make their new society, home or ‘promised land’ in their own image. The object of escape is to find a well-defended place in which the escapees can ‘be themselves’ without having to deal with inconvenient ‘others.’ Escapees are, in many cases, wounded and distrustful. They fear trouble from their neighbours. This makes them liable to strike out repeatedly against unfamiliar strangers who may well, in reply, take revenge against them.

By contrast, accepters try to reform themselves without relocating themselves. They remake themselves in the image required by those who have power over them. Acceptance of humiliation means redefining the forced social displacement as being appropriate and deserved. This means signalling agreement with the humiliating actions that have hurt them and also with the norms, values and judgements that lie behind those actions. In effect, it turns humiliation, which is seen as the product of another’s unjust action, shame, which is seen as the result of unworthy behaviour by those who ‘justly’ feel ashamed. But if those who control their fate regard the victims of humiliation as intrinsically unworthy, no matter how they behave, the latter may become vulnerable to a cycle of victimization involving further acts of humiliation.

Accepters try hard to engage with potentially threatening ‘others’ in a positive way. As a result, they get valuable experience that may empower them in a wide range of future situations. Not least, they learn where the other’s strengths and weaknesses are, and about what works or does not work in dealing with them. Furthermore, if accepters decide to act out a part, presenting the ‘required’ face to the ‘master’, they develop their skills of

Yearbook 2012.qxp 24/05/2013 08:21 Page 67

deception. In effect, they learn to cultivate both an inner self and an outer self and use one the former to control the latter. These are transferable skills.

Finally, accepters develop the capacity to self-transform. They learn how to work on their own individual self or the group's sense of identity so as to mould it to the needs of the situation. Usefully, those who have remade themselves by becoming accepters know the relevant techniques and in many cases can do it again, changing themselves in another direction, if and when it becomes necessary.

Challenging Responses: i) Resistance-Rejection. Turning to challenging responses to humiliation, we can distinguish between rejection, which tries to *eliminate the effects of humiliation*, and another approach, mixing conciliation and reform, which works to *eliminate the causes of humiliation* by combining two things: conciliation through truce and dialogue; and reforming initiatives in relation to attitudes, culture, socio-political structures and orientations towards the other.

Effective rejection of attempted humiliation requires: the ability to self-transform; willingness to restructure aspects of the socio-political context that are within reach and can be changed; and strict control of anger. In fact, as will be seen, there is a fundamental division between two strategies within the rejection approach: resistance-rejection and revenge-rejection.

Resistance-rejection seeks to: weaken the rival, oppressor or enemy and undermine their capacity to inflict damage; protect the individual or group under threat; and build up the capacity and resources of the threatened individual or group, not only for defence but also for development in a direction that allows them to fulfil themselves.

Challenging Responses: ii) Revenge-Rejection. This approach aims at recovering honour and self-regard by striking back at a target closely associated with the hated 'other.' The object is to express anger, inflict damage, and impose a counter-humiliation. Success in 'scoring a hit' may be good for morale but revenge has disadvantageous effects for those who inflict it, because it demands an answer on the part of the recipient. It begins or perpetuates a revenge cycle that is difficult to end without mutual exhaustion or the utter defeat of one side or the other.

The Honour Code and the Human Rights Code. Revenge is a concept drawn from the heart of the honour code, which greatly values the very ability to impose humiliation on others. More specifically, the honour code recognizes as 'honourable' an actor's strength. In other words their capacity to: enter, survive, and achieve success in the social struggle, even at the cost of damaging or destroying rivals; and provide or withhold care, protection and life-enhancing benefits for others, or damage or destroy others at will. It is in sharp contrast to the human rights code, which recognizes that all human beings have rights to enter, and be fairly treated in, the social competition (eg for jobs and income); and to receive care and protection and life-enhancing benefits.

Yearbook 2012.qxp 24/05/2013 08:21 Page 68

The honour code values most those who can strike down and destroy others or nurture and protect them, depending on what they decide to do. By contrast, the human rights code respects the principle that all human beings have a legitimate expectation to be treated humanely. The two codes coexist in all modern societies. However, there seems to be a built-in drift towards revenge-rejection when other strategies fail – for when acceptance leads to victimization, and when escape leads to fear cycles – and this favours the honour code.

Challenging Responses: iii) Conciliation and Reform. The strategy of conciliation and reform seeks to remove the causes of humiliation by acting upon the structures and processes that shape relations between the parties concerned. If conflict become too costly for both parties, a pause in the violence may sometimes become possible. This may give the opportunity for conciliation to take place. But truce talks may be hindered by resurgences of distrust.

One relevant factor is how flexible and receptive are the dispositions of the individuals and groups concerned? It is likely that the most 'conservative' will be the escapees and the revenge-resisters. They are tough without being flexible. They may have great courage, which enables them to take risks and withstand hardship. But that does not make them open-minded or ready to look at their assumptions with a critical eye.

By contrast, conciliation-reformers have positive orientations towards transforming themselves and their circumstances, including their relations with the other. Normally, this group is in a minority. However, potential allies exist: for example, both accepters and resistance-rejecters, like conciliation-reformers, have experience of transforming themselves. Some disillusioned accepters may be prepared to work for socio-political reform, and some resistance-rejecters may become ready to consider more positive engagement with 'the other'. It is out of such building blocks that new post-humiliation structures and attitudes might be constructed.[6]

Bringing theory and empirical cases together

The next task is to bring together two things: the biographies of our four famous prisoners, each of whom confronted one or both versions of the prisoner's dilemma, relating to collaboration and identity: and some aspects of the humiliation theory that has just been sketched out. As we conduct this experiment we should be alert to a number of dynamic relationships between elements at work within each of the biographies, for example:

- between being an 'insider' and an 'outsider';
- between coping with publicity and dealing with anonymity;
- between communicating with an audience and managing a crowd;
- between cultivating the self as an arena of personal sensibility and projecting the self as a highly public agent of influence upon society;

Yearbook 2012.qxp 24/05/2013 08:21 Page 69

- between working for reform and seeking revenge; and
- between fear and anger (sometimes mediated by sorrow).

Two radical writers[7]

Oscar Wilde and Jean Améry each worked quite deliberately upon his persona. Both hoped to use their literary talents to shape their audience's aesthetic, social and political attitudes. Améry (born 1912) had less early success than Wilde (born 1854). At an age (32 years old) when Wilde was already a literary lion enjoying international publicity,[8] Améry was keeping his head down in a Nazi concentration camp. Améry adopted his French-sounding name after World War II as a tribute to Jean-Paul Sartre and the tradition of existentialism to which he ardently wished to contribute. In fact, he did not 'break through' in the literary world until his early fifties, and not in the way he would have chosen.

Wilde had placed himself in the avant-garde of the metropolitan Aesthete movement by his early twenties. The following decade brought increasing success. The man who in 1882 returned from his speaking tour in the United States was a highly sophisticated dandy, flirting along potentially dangerous boundaries: a baptized protestant that loved the idea of converting to Catholicism, an Irishman who swam in English waters, a homosexual who loved his wife and children, a man who used jokes to make serious points, someone who enjoyed paradox.[9]

His humour in plays such as *The Importance of Being Earnest* conveyed a radical message expressed clearly in his essay *The Soul of Man under Socialism*[10]. Wilde believed all had a right to create and appreciate beauty but thought both rich and poor were denied this right by the private property system's self-centered and materialistic competitiveness. Wilde favoured socialism. However, he failed to reconcile his own pursuit of aesthetic and sensual satisfaction with effective public advocacy. The self as an arena of pleasure continually subverted the self as an agent of socio-political influence.

Wilde was an outsider in late nineteenth-century English upper-class society, made welcome amongst insiders for a while but always vulnerable. This was due to his lack of wealth (his father died bankrupt), his dependence on 'audience approval' for a decent living, and the fact that, after male homosexuality was criminalized in1885, he belonged to a legally proscribed category. When Wilde tangled, disastrously, with the Marquess of Queensberry, Bosie's father, in the high court, he fell heavily. No-one reached down from within the English establishment to save him. Wilde was humiliated in the subsequent trial.

Why did Wilde not escape to France before his trial? Was he, perhaps, trapped by his public persona, by his established audience waiting to see how he would deploy his renowned wit in court? In fact, the trial was a newspaper sensation throughout the world. Wilde was painted in lurid colours as a corrupter of youth, a danger to decent people. His amused audience

Yearbook 2012.qxp 24/05/2013 08:21 Page 70

transformed into a hostile crowd, enjoying his precipitate collapse.

Months spent on the treadmill in prison broke Wilde's health and he never fully recovered. How did he take all this? Part of the answer is found in *De Profundis*, his long prison letter composed over several weeks.[11] Wilde begins by venting his rage, declaring that Bosie has no talent, his mother no strength of character and his father no self-control. It is they who landed Wilde in this mess. However, the tone changes as Wilde recognizes that the prosecuting barrister had the finest lines in court. Pursuing this line of thought he adopts with some gusto the role of his own accuser and begins to accept that he can justly be seen as the author of his own misfortune.

Confronted with the pain of humiliation, Wilde now accepts it as his due punishment. He expresses a peculiarly Wildean sense of shame, one imbued with pride at his personal achievement in so readily embracing the feeling of being deeply sorry: both for the faults that brought him low and the suffering he now endures. Proud because he feels that, acting as a kind of scientist of the emotions, he has discovered for the first time the complex feelings and insights that sorrow brings. In fact, Wilde believes that once he has recovered from prison he can bring the lessons he has learned to a wider public and take a lead in reforming society. But it was not to be. The mud thrown at him during the trial could not be brushed off. Wilde had been thoroughly branded as contemptible in the public eye, and he had no power to change this. After prison, Wilde was afraid to put himself on show. He changed his name and fled to France, dying three years later at the age of forty-six.

There are some intriguing parallels between Wilde and Améry. Like Wilde in 1895 (the year of his trial), Améry in 1943 (the year of his arrest) was a member of a category that had recently been proscribed by legal enactment. In fact, despite his Jewish ancestry, Améry had been brought up as a Christian in rural Austria. Améry, like Wilde, was given the opportunity to escape from danger before it struck but he, too, declined. Wilde, it seems, could not leave his audience, and Améry refused to abandon his Jewish wife.[12] Like Wilde again, Améry was both an outsider and an insider, a condition mixing advantages with vulnerability. As a Jew Améry was placed on the conveyor belt leading towards extermination, but as a native Austrian, he shared the literacy skills of 'the masters.' It was, indeed, his educational qualifications combined with his ability to read Germanic handwriting that saved him from destruction since he was valuable as a functionary in the factories using slave labour.

Améry and his wife found themselves in Belgium when war broke out. Améry, arrested for spreading anti-Nazi propaganda, had no public trial, unlike Wilde; instead, the secrecy of the torture cell was followed by depersonalization, expressed by the anonymous number burnt into his body at Auschwitz. Améry did share with Wilde the fact that his chosen identity as a radical intellectual dedicated to subverting socio-political oppression and promoting a more just society was completely ignored by the authorities when

Yearbook 2012.qxp 24/05/2013 08:21 Page 71

they arrested and condemned him. Wilde was condemned as a corrupt deviant, Améry as a degraded sub-human. It was not what they did but what they were, or were judged to be, that counted. They were both humiliated by being misrecognised.

Unlike Wilde, whose death was surely hastened by prison, Améry survived torture, the camps, and the war. He lived on for over three more decades before dying by his own hand in 1978. Wilde journeyed from anger through ruefully optimistic sorrow to fear. Améry followed this route in reverse. He began in fear, facing the torturer in a Belgian fortress. Later, as he describes in *At the Mind's Limit* (Améry 1980) the enormity of the existential threat posed by the concentration camps nullified any intellectual or aesthetic propensity he might have retained. The camp inmates' basic feeling, he reports, was self-disgust.[13]

When Améry emerged from the camps, his feelings of sorrow were for the deeply disappointing fact that his captors could have imposed such suffering upon him, a fellow Austro-German.[14] Améry, without the burden of notoriety born by Wilde, was able to recover from his trauma at his own pace, earning his living as a journalist. Like Wilde, Améry wanted to bring healing and moral elevation to his audience, an audience Améry intended to create through his writing. He believed the Germans were educable, and so would recognize their mistakes and change their ways.

Améry envisaged his artistic persona as a kind of existentialist everyman, mediating between Germany and the world, between Jew and non-Jew. But Améry's audience did not come into being. His universalist existentialist persona had no followers. Ironically, when in the late 1960s he did find an audience, initially for a series of talks on West German radio, he explicitly presented himself as a Jew openly expressing his feelings as a survivor of the death camps. In other words, Améry had been unable to shake off the persona his torturers had imposed upon him in 1943. Faced with that fact, Améry made that same persona, the universal Jew, so to speak, work for him. It gave him a voice and a large audience, especially in Germany and France. In effect, like Wilde, Améry turned himself into the accuser, but unlike Wilde, he did not accuse himself. Through the medium of the airwaves and in the published version of his talks, Améry was able to have the public trial he was denied in 1943. But in the late 1960s Améry was the prosecutor and the Germans were in the dock.

Améry declared that he felt extreme resentment for the way he had been treated and believed the Germans were as arrogant and inconsiderate of others as they had been in the Hitler era. He could not forgive them for what they had done. He made it clear that he could not feel the matter was properly dealt with in his own mind until those who had hurt him so badly were put in a similar position themselves. In contrast to Wilde, Améry, who had begun in fear, ended in anger. In practice, the treatment Améry wished for could not be

Yearbook 2012.qxp 24/05/2013 08:21 Page 72

meted out upon the Germans. In the end, he removed his hurt by removing himself, asking for his Auschwitz number to be carved upon his gravestone.

Two radical politicians[15]

Turning to Mandela and Suu Kyi, it is not widely realised that they both had a revenge motive for becoming determined rebels. The white colonialist regime of the British had broken Mandela's father, a prominent village chief of royal African descent. The local British magistrate had ordered him to appear in court to answer charges but Mandela senior had refused. As a result, the chief was deprived of his income, land and cattle. Suu Kyi's father, named Aung San, had a more bloody fate. He was the general and political leader who fought and negotiated successfully to establish a modern independent Burma. His rivals in the military had him killed in 1947, the year of his daughter's birth.

The careers of Mandela and Suu Kyi were both, so to speak, 'second rounds' in conflicts with dynastic interests at stake. Perhaps the desire to 'take down' their parent's oppressors, or their successors, explains why both Mandela and Suu Kyi turned away from easier life options. In fact, they did not preach revenge to their followers, but stressed reason, restraint and reform. One reason, surely, is that revenge cycles are destructive and unpredictable and both leaders worked hard to avoid them for everybody's sake. In addition, both leaders surely wanted to preserve the inheritance they hoped would eventually fall to them.

Like Wilde and Améry, Mandela and Suu Kyi were both 'outsider-insiders.' Mandela, brought up within the court of an African king, and trained for the role of royal adviser, was also, like millions of Black Africans, treated as an inferior under the *apartheid* regime. For her part, Suu Kyi has challenged the conservative assumption that Burmese women, politically an outsider group, are unsuitable for government, and that their proper place is in the domestic sphere. Her mother, a prominent Burmese diplomat, was a rarity: a female active at the higher levels of public service in Burma. In the early twenty-first century, Burma remains by far the lowest ranking country in Southeast Asia in respect of female political participation as measured by membership of parliamentary bodies: 3.5 per cent in the lower house, 1.8 percent in the upper. Compare those participation rates with Thailand (15.6 per cent), Bangladesh (19.7 per cent), China (21.3 per cent) and Laos (25 per cent).[16]

The military regime attempted to typecast Suu Kyi as a lightweight who had spent her formative years outside Burma touring the degraded fleshpots of the West. For her past, Suu Kyi has displayed courage and cultivated an air of inner depth and high seriousness. Her father's name is incorporated in her own, a political weapon far more powerful on the streets of Rangoon than the regime's campaign of personal denigration.

Mandela and Suu Kyi each managed to find a successful resolution to both of the prisoner's dilemmas with which we began. Consider, first, the

Yearbook 2012.qxp 24/05/2013 08:21 Page 73

collaboration dilemma. Unlike Wilde and Améry, who had no choice but to take the punishment coming to them, Mandela and Suu Kyi were each offered the chance to strike a bargain with their jailors involving collaboration in the unchallenged continuation of the oppressive regime. After a few years behind bars, Mandela was offered the chance to have a comfortable retirement on one of the *bantustans*, the largely rural tribal areas set aside for African settlement. For her part, for many years Suu Kyi had a standing invitation to walk away from her place of imprisonment as long as she departed from Burma itself. Both offers were refused.

In the classic prisoner's (collaboration) dilemma, there are two prisoners 'in play.' In a sense, the peoples of Burma and Black South Africa under their oppressive regimes were living in states that operated as a kind of 'open prison.' Indeed, one of the successes of the narratives spun around the two leaders' periods of incarceration was to broadcast the implicit suggestion that Mandela and Suu Kyi were enacting in an intense form the loss of liberty imposed upon their peoples as a whole. Both Mandela and Suu Kyi were able to rely upon and use the relationship that each had built with the people outside their place of imprisonment. In that sense, the leader and the people were like the two prisoners in the classic dilemma. They had much better communication than those 'original' prisoners and it was their collaboration and mutual trust that helped transform the regimes of their national 'jailers', the apartheid regime and Burma's military junta.

Mandela was an effective rabble-rouser before he disappeared, first underground as a covert ANC organizer, and then behind bars. His trial performance transmitted a strong message of courageous defiance. Subsequently, amongst his ANC colleagues and in intermittent confrontation with the prison hierarchy, Mandela had years of practice in negotiation and in cultivating a quiet and slightly distant leadership style, especially in Robben Island. This, combined with the effective campaign to cultivate his image on the outside, especially during the 1980s, meant that when he re-appeared in public in 1990 he had tremendous authority. Mandela was able to use his charisma to quell the anger of his youthful supporters, urging them to cultivate their own strength as future citizens of a free South Africa.

For her part, Suu Kyi followed a similar track to Mandela. Acts involving spectacular disregard for personal safety built up her reputation as a proud warrior for her people. This helped to sustain the movement outside, many of whose members were jailed and suffered torture. Suu Kyi was effective in diminishing fear amongst her followers, thus putting added pressure on the regime. After her release in 2010 she shifted focus, counseling caution, dampening expectations and advising her supporters to restrain their angry impatience.

Turning to the prisoner's identity dilemma, Wilde was the least successful at negotiating this. Despite his intellectual and aesthetic achievement in *De*

Yearbook 2012.qxp 24/05/2013 08:21 Page 74

Profundis, Wilde could not win back his old audience amongst his late Victorian contemporaries. He found himself helpless when stereotyped as a disgusting deviant. His intense suffering culminated in early death. By contrast, Améry played the game to a draw, a balanced stand-off: he could not impress his chosen persona upon the public but he made the Jewish identity with which he had been stamped against his will by the jailer work on his own behalf. He turned the coin over, so to speak, and gave his audience his own side of the story, good and hard.

The two big winners in the identity version of the prisoner's dilemma were Mandela and Suu Kyi. In both cases, the court of public opinion reversed the verdict of the regimes' judicial system, turning both leaders into heroic martyrs for the cause of human rights and national freedom. In fact, as has been seen, all four prisoners secured 'virtual retrials' of a kind: Mandela and Suu Kyi in the afore-mentioned court of public opinion, Wilde in *De Profundis*, and Améry in *At The Mind's Limit.*

Some concluding reflections

This experiment of putting into fruitful juxtaposition humiliation theory,[17] two kinds of prisoner's dilemma and the experiences of four well-known prisoners has enabled us to compare their prison stories to each other in a systematic way.We have seen, for example, that all four prisoners turned away from the escape option when it appeared. Their personal responses to the threat of humiliation ranged from resentment leaning towards, but not quite reaching, revenge (Améry), acceptance in an attempt to staunch inner collapse (Wilde), and strategies that led through resistance-rejection towards conciliation and reform (Mandela and Suu Kyi).

We have also seen that the capacity of these victims of intended humiliation to respond to that challenge was influenced by the extent to which their feelings of security and self-identity were undermined and the extent to which they retained significant degrees of autonomy and agency.

As already noted, Oscar Wilde was deeply wounded by the trial and prison experiences. In prison he struggled to regain balance and composure. His main interlocutor was himself, the only person prepared to listen with undiminished care and total understanding. It would not be far-fetched to see *De Profundis* as a long letter by Wilde to himself and history, whoever the addressee ('Dear Bosie') might be on the first page. However, any reassurance Wilde might have achieved within the prison walls did not survive his release. He was fundamentally disabled, deprived of his audience and his old persona. Wilde was thoroughly branded as a despicable outcast and failed to find a secure resting place.

For his part, Améry was also deeply wounded and permanently branded. However, his relative obscurity during the 1940s and 1950s gave him the

Yearbook 2012.qxp 24/05/2013 08:21 Page 75

chance to recover. His autonomy was less than he desired: he could not become the person he wanted to be in the literary world. Nevertheless, Améry achieved for himself what Wilde failed to recover: a bitter-sweet sense of powerful agency. In the 1960s Améry took the chance to grab his old persecutors, as he saw them, by the lapels and give them a virtual dose of their own medicine, forcing them get a clearer sense of who he was and what he had been required to experience.

Unlike Wilde and Améry, Mandela and Suu Kyi avoided being deeply wounded and permanently branded by imprisonment. Ironically, prison gave them a degree of physical security that would have been denied to them outside where assassins lurked. The two politicians not only managed to retain a high degree of autonomy and agency but also achieved a level of positive publicity that would probably have been difficult to obtain otherwise. They were 'branded' in another way, achieving global recognition as icons of the struggle for human rights.

There was obviously a massive cost in terms of freedom of movement and in their personal relationships, especially with their families, a cost imposed on others as well as themselves. However, both leaders made a conscious decision to place the forging of a powerful public persona that could be politically instrumental high above the private satisfactions that would have accrued to the abandoned roles of life partner and parent.

It is tempting to conclude by asking two questions. The first is: if Wilde had lived on for over a quarter of a century after his release, as did Améry, would he, too, have become similarly bitter and pessimistic? The second question is: in, say, fifteen years time, will Suu Kyi have been instrumental in helping to move Burma towards a socio-political condition similar to that achieved in South Africa, where apartheid has been abolished, entry into business and the professions widened to include a substantial number of middle-class Black Africans, and a wide degree of freedom of thought and expression achieved? However, much more research and reflection would be needed before attempting responses to these two questions. Caution is advisable. History is notorious for its capacity to humiliate those who make hasty judgments about the unknowable or the unknown.

Notes

1 See, for example, Axelrod 2006.
2 See, for example, Axelrod 2006.
3 See, for example, Smith 2006; Smith 2010; Smith 2012.
4 For a discussion of these four prisoners focusing on the role of emotions in politics, see Smith (forthcoming).
5 For initial orientation on Wilde, see Ellman 1987, on Améry see Heidelberger-Leonard 2010, on Mandela see Mandela 1995, and on Suu Kyi Wintle 2007.
6 It is also convenient if rich, powerful and respected third parties exist who are willing

Yearbook 2012.qxp 24/05/2013 08:21 Page 76

and able to mediate and, if possible, provide resources that help to build up a reformed post-humiliation socio-political order.

7 This section draws on the scholarship of Ellmann and Heidelberger-Leonard for basic biographical details although the comparative analysis is my own.

8 By 1886 Wilde had toured the United States, become a regular contributor to the Pall Mall Gazette and other London publications, had a play produced in New York, and set up a household with his new wife in central London where they frequently entertained members of high society. On Wilde, see, especially, Ellmann 1987.

9 See, for example, Meyer 1994a.

10 Written in 1891. Reprinted in Wilde 1963 915-36.

11 Reprinted in Wilde 1963, 755-824.

12 The offer to help Améry came at Vienna in 1938 from an old school friend working in the Office of Genealogy. He proposed that Améry should divorce his Jewish wife and persuade his mother to say that her son was the product of adultery with an Aryan man. See Heidelberger-Leonard 2010, 48.

13 The reduction of the self's perceived value in this way is one the basic tactics available to victims, minimizing the sense of anticipated loss in case the executioner strikes: 'since I am worthless, what would my death matter?'

14 He also grieved for his wife who had died while he was away.

15 Basic biographical details in this section come from Mandela 1995 and Wintle 2007 but the comparative analysis is my own.

16 These figures comes from a study by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women released in March 2012 to mark the 101st annual International Women's Day. Cited in http://www.dvb.no/news/burma-lags-in-female-political-participation/20638

17 For references to the wider literature on humiliation see, for example, Smith 2006. It would be impossible to cover such ground adequately in the current paper.

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Yearbook 2012.qxp 24/05/2013 08:21 Page 77

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