


RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Chelsea Manning, national security, and the cishetero/homonormative logics of protection

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## Abstract

‘I feel like a monster’, typed Chelsea Manning, referring partly to her gender identity but mostly to her job in the US military. Morally conflicted by what she saw and read while serving in Iraq, extremely isolated from her unit and experiencing emotional distress in relation to her gender identity, Manning would act on these stressors by leaking hundreds of documents to Wikileaks, and coming out as a (trans) woman. While she was quick to be classified as either a hero or a traitor, her case evades such dichotomisation and calls for more sophisticated readings. While a lot has been written on Manning in queer and transgender studies, surprisingly little has been published on this case in International Relations, not even in the quickly growing field of Queer IR. Yet Manning’s case helps highlight many of its core concerns in relation to issues of power, security, and sovereignty. In fact, what is often lost when reading the Manning case are the queer and trans logics of protection that were disrupted by Manning’s disclosures and that made such disruption possible. These dominant logics rely upon a culture of secrecy that must be preserved for performances of national security to hold true.

**Keywords:** Chelsea Manning; Logics of Protection; National Security; Transgender Studies; Queer Studies

## Introduction

‘I feel like a monster’, typed Chelsea Manning in 2010, referring partly to her gender identity but mostly to her job as an intelligence analyst in the US military. In fact, she felt morally conflicted by what she saw and read while serving in Iraq, extremely isolated from her unit for presenting as a then-openly gay man and was experiencing emotional distress in relation to her gender identity. Manning would act on these stressors in the weeks to follow by leaking hundreds of diplomatic and military documents to Wikileaks, as well as coming out as a (trans) woman. More than ten years, two prison stays, and one commuted sentence later, Chelsea Manning found herself once again in court. Indeed, in 2021, five years after being denied entry into Canada, she faced an admissibility hearing in front of the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) to determine if the gravity of her prior conviction should prevent her from entering the country. Yet, even in 2010, Manning did not reveal anything radically new or completely unknown: by the time she leaked those documents, a series of scandals about the Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo prisons had already exposed the abuses of the US military in its War on Terror (WoT). Why, then, did she face such severe consequences and wide backlash, including from trans<sup>1</sup> veterans organisations, for disclosing such ‘open secrets’?

<sup>1</sup>There are many ways to understand trans identities. Here, I will refer to trans or transgender as an umbrella term that includes ‘a wide range of gender-variant practices, embodiments, and identities that challenge the assumed stability of and relationality between biological sex, the gender binary, and sexuality.’ Mia Fischer, *Terrorizing Gender: Transgender Visibility and the Surveillance Practices of the U.S. Security State* (illus. edn, University of Nebraska Press, 2019), p. 9.

And why is Canada feeling the need to put her on trial again, opening the door for other states to do the same? What does it reveal about sovereign performances of security such as protecting borders against perceived threats?

While a lot has been written on Manning in queer and transgender studies, surprisingly little has been published on this case in International Relations (IR), not even in the quickly growing field of Queer IR. Yet Manning's case helps highlight many of the core concerns of Queer IR in terms of the work that (non-)normative genders and sexualities do to issues of power, security, and sovereignty. In fact, it raises issues of security (studies) by questioning who and what is protected by the state, how, and under what conditions. As such, the article argues that what is often lost in (Queer) IR that the Manning case brings to light is how security functions in and through multiple logics of protection and how queerness/transness are also produced by, and function through such logics.

More specifically, this article argues that through her disclosures – of both US misconducts and human rights abuses in its War on Terror (WoT) and of her gender identity – Manning turned herself from the unprotectable trans soldier who could simply not 'be' in the US military into a dissident protector. By doing so, she made visible and challenged the cishetero/homonormative and colonial/imperial logics of protection pertaining to who counts as a subject/object of protection and who are the abjects of protection such logics produce and rely upon. Manning provoked (and keeps provoking) intense reactions because she disrupted those logics of protection by disclosing their 'ugly secrets' and as such, opened up a space for their contestation. More precisely, Manning's disclosures can be read along those lines: if you cannot protect me from my secrets,<sup>2</sup> then I will not protect you from yours. Through this analysis, the case thus also expands the notion of logics of protection and national security by questioning the role of protection and secrecy/the protection of secrets in producing normative subjectivities.

To get to these conclusions, we need to make a number of moves. First, we need to explore transgender studies and what it can bring to the field of Queer IR in relation to the lived experiences of trans subjects within but also beyond sexuality. Second, we need to expand and pluralise the work in Feminist Security Studies on the logic of masculinist protection to encompass the multiple and interrelated logics of protection one can be situated in, as well as the multiple positions one can occupy simultaneously within such logics. Third, we need to explore the specific and contextual logics of protection Manning was situated in, namely the cishetero/homonormative and colonial/imperial logics of protection of the US (military). Then, we can turn to Manning's positioning within those logics before and after her disclosure, and what her whistleblowing and coming out disrupted/challenged as well as reconducted in relation to dominant logics of protection.

### Queer International Relations and transgender studies: Starting a conversation

Queer studies investigate the political work that sexuality does in producing normative subjectivities through which gender, sex, and (heterosexual) desire are made to, not only 'coherently' align, but appear natural, stable, and invariable.<sup>3</sup> Starting from those or that which are not or cannot be 'made to signify monolithically' in relation to gender and/or<sup>4</sup> sexuality,<sup>5</sup> queer studies

<sup>2</sup>This narrative of trans people's (and trans women's in particular) identity, as a 'secret', a deception, or a lie is rooted in cisheterosexism and often used to justify the violence done to them by, mostly, cisheterosexual men. See, for example, Kristen Schilt and Laurel Westbrook, 'Doing gender, doing heteronormativity: "Gender normals", transgender people, and the social maintenance of heterosexuality', *Gender & Society*, 23:4 (1 August 2009), pp. 440–64, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243209340034>. This will be problematised and unpacked later in the article.

<sup>3</sup>Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, UK and New York, NY: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>4</sup>This article adopts the method offered by Cynthia Weber in reference to Roland Barthes's pluralised logic of the 'and/or'. She argues that it offers queer ways to read plural logics and figures that do not signify one thing *or* the other (for example, boy or girl) but can signify one thing *and/or* another *and/or* another *and/or* another. Cynthia Weber, *Queer International Relations: Sovereignty, Sexuality and the Will to Knowledge* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>5</sup>Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008).

seek to destabilise sexualised 'regimes of the normal' and the subjects/knowledge they produce, rely upon and/or reinforce through heteronormativity.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, as some (privileged) members of the LGB(T) community become increasingly absorbed into regimes of normalcy and respectability, the field is particularly interested in the collusion of certain homosexual subjectivities within dominant normative institutions, an inclusion that is always contingent to and conditional on these subjects' upholding of heteronormative frameworks, assumptions, and institutions.<sup>7</sup> Paying attention to the ways in which such newly accepted normativities are always intertwined with, and produced through regimes of race, class, dis/ability, citizenship, (settler) colonialism, and so on, queer work has also examined how forms of homonormative ideologies produce 'domesticated homosexual bodies' that are deployed to reinforce patriotism within and outside the nation against perversely sexualised and racialised 'terrorists', which has been coined as homonationalism.<sup>8</sup>

In reaction to global phenomenon such as the WoT, the crushing victory of neoliberalism worldwide, the pathologising of migration, and so on, queer studies has gone global.<sup>9</sup> Yet, as Cynthia Weber argues, it tends to undertheorise larger discourses/practices of (international) security and power, which are 'precisely [the] issues that IR theorists are adept at drawing out'.<sup>10</sup> Hence while most studies in Queer IR draw from queer studies' theoretical apparatus, it locates queer concepts within larger discourses of power, security, and sovereignty to examine how international politics is shaped by, and in turn shapes sexual norms, arguing that knowledge/power in international relations is always sexualised knowledge/power.<sup>11</sup> Drawing from Global Queer Studies, Queer IR has thus explored how the production of certain LGB(T) figures as respectable and deserving of rights is made possible/functions through international regimes, discourses, logics, and power relations that transcend local contexts, thereby inscribing queer studies in dialogue with IR literatures and debates (Idem).

More specifically, queer IR scholars have explored how figures/figurations such as the queer soldier<sup>12</sup> and/or the 'gay patriot'<sup>13</sup> are invested in imperial projects/violence; the LGBT rights holder<sup>14</sup> and/or victim of homophobia<sup>15</sup> is produced through regimes of international human rights and colonial/imperial discourses and practices; and how such normative figurations are produced with/against figures of perverse sexualised/racialised 'others' such as the terrorist, the unwanted im/migrant and the un(der)developed.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>6</sup>The institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent – that is, organised as a sexuality – but also privileged.' Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, 'Sex in public', *Critical Inquiry*, 24:2 (1 January 1998), p. 158.

<sup>7</sup>This has been conceptualised as homonormativity: 'a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.' Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2012), p. 50.

<sup>8</sup>Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (New York, NY: Duke University Press, 2007), pp. 38–9.

<sup>9</sup>Weber, *Queer International Relations*, pp. 27–8.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>11</sup>Melanie Richter-Montpetit and Cynthia Weber, 'Queer International Relations', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (24 May 2017), available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.265>.

<sup>12</sup>Anna M. Agathangelou, M. Daniel Bassichis, and Tamara L. Spira, 'Intimate investments: Homonormativity, global lockdown, and the seductions of empire', *Radical History Review*, 100 (1 January 2008), pp. 120–43, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-2007-025>.

<sup>13</sup>Weber, *Queer International Relations*.

<sup>14</sup>Manuela Lavinias Picq and Markus Thiel (eds), *Sexualities in World Politics: How LGBTQ Claims Shape International Relations* (1st edn, London, UK and New York, NY: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>15</sup>Rahul Rao, 'The locations of homophobia', *London Review of International Law*, 2 (2014), pp. 169–99.

<sup>16</sup>Weber, *Queer International Relations*; Melanie Richter-Montpetit, 'Beyond the erotics of Orientalism: Lawfare, torture and the racial–sexual grammars of legitimate suffering', *Security Dialogue*, 45:1 (1 February 2014), pp. 43–62, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010613515016>; Agathangelou, Bassichis, and Spira, 'Intimate investments'.

Queer IR, drawing on queer studies' theoretical/methodological apparatus, provides many important tools to understand the Manning case. But Chelsea Manning's experience as a trans woman cannot be totally encompassed by a reading of her solely as queer. While many Queer IR scholars have looked at gender non-conformity, little work has focused explicitly on trans experiences<sup>17</sup> and what they make visible in relation to both queerness and hetero/gender normativities that the 'homosexual' figurations do not. In fact, Queer IR tends to offer theorisations of transness/gender nonconformity through the figuration of 'the homosexual', thus (mis)reading trans figures/figurations (and the trans feminine in particular) mainly through the lens of sexuality. Trans women, for example, are not necessarily or always read as 'homosexuals' and/or through the lens of homo/hetero sexuality, they are first and foremost embodying gender in ways that can or cannot correspond to different gender and sexuality norms. Manning's case thus needs to be studied in relation to Transgender Studies and what it can bring to the field of (Queer) IR. In fact, Queer IR has yet to engage substantially with Transgender Studies to avoid mistakes many queer scholars have made in relation to trans(feminine) figures.

Transgender studies is often referred to as queer studies' 'evil twin': Susan Stryker famously criticised queer studies' privileging of sexuality over gender identity, thus misreading transness through the lens of sexuality, as well as locating 'transgender' as 'the site in which to contain all gender trouble'.<sup>18</sup> Many trans studies scholars have similarly criticised the ways in which certain strands of queer theory use transgenderism as an exceptional figure standing in for 'a kind of anti-binary subversion of gender',<sup>19</sup> and tends to 'relegate all manner of gender trouble to disembodied thought experiments'.<sup>20</sup> This leads to an abstraction of trans experiences, especially the transfeminine, into metaphors or allegories for gender trouble<sup>21</sup> while ignoring trans people's embodied/situated knowledge as well as their material realities and/or urgent needs in the face of marginalisation, criminalisation, poverty, homelessness, and violence. Transgender Studies has thus aimed to move trans people from 'mere objects of knowledge in the discourses of others about them'<sup>22</sup> to subjects participating in the production of knowledge about gender as a lived/embodied experience.<sup>23</sup>

Yet beyond a concern with a particular category of people (self-)identified as transgender, the field shares with queer studies an aim to 'disrupt, denaturalize, rearticulate and make visible' the normative assumptions held about the natural/stable connections between 'biological sex' and gendered roles/statuses as well as 'the subjectively experienced relationship between a gendered sense of self and social expectations of gender-role performance'.<sup>24</sup> As such, Transgender Studies' critical purpose is to put 'as much pressure on the categories of man, woman, and homosexuality, as on transgender', because 'those terms are no less constructed than transgender itself'.<sup>25</sup> It is thus less

<sup>17</sup>With the notable exception of Laura Sjoberg and Laura Shepherd's piece on cisprivilege and security discourses/practices. The article explores trans bodies' simultaneous invisibility in historical discourses/practices of war/security and suspicious hypervisibility through increased surveillance and security practices such as body scanners at airport. Laura J. Shepherd and Laura Sjoberg, 'Trans-bodies in/of war(s): Cisprivilege and contemporary security strategy', *Feminist Review*, 101:1 (2012), pp. 5–23, available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.2011.53>}.

<sup>18</sup>Susan Stryker, 'Transgender studies: Queer theory's evil twin', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 10:2 (2004), p. 214.

<sup>19</sup>Gabby Benavente and Julian Gill-Peterson, 'The promise of trans critique: Susan Stryker's queer theory', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 25:1 (1 January 2019), p. 24, available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-7275222>}.

<sup>20</sup>Benny LeMaster and Megan Stephenson, 'Trans (gender) trouble', *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 18:2 (3 April 2021), p. 192, available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1080/14791420.2021.1907851>}.

<sup>21</sup>Emma Heaney, *The New Woman: Literary Modernism, Queer Theory, and the Trans Feminine Allegory* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2017).

<sup>22</sup>Susan Stryker and Aren Aizura, 'Introduction: Transgender studies 2.0', in Susan Stryker and Aren Aizura (eds), *The Transgender Studies Reader 2: The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), p. 2.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

concerned with producing knowledge about (trans)gender than critically addressing ‘the social, political, and material conditions through which those identifications emerge, and that knowledge is produced.’<sup>26</sup>

As with Queer Studies, recent evolutions in regimes of normalcy combined with local and global phenomena of militarisation, securitisation, and neoliberalism has redrawn lines around who gets to be recognised as a subject of rights and citizenship, allowing some (mostly white/Western) trans bodies to be included in forms of normativity at the expense of others following lines of racism, xenophobia, (settler)colonialism, classism, ableism, and so on. Hence more recent work in transgender studies has been concerned with critically addressing new forms of ‘trans normativity’ and the complicity of some trans subjects with dominant institutions of power. In fact, while ‘trans people have often been positioned as the innocent Other of homonationalism’ and ‘on the receiving end of the “War on Terror”’ (as targets of increased surveillance and suspicion in airports and other locations, for example),<sup>27</sup> scholars have also looked at a new class of white trans and gender non-conforming bodies whose ‘universalized trajectory of coming out/transition, visibility, recognition, protection, and self-actualization largely remains uninterrogated in its complicities and convergences with biomedical, neoliberal, racist, and imperialist projects.’<sup>28</sup>

We can therefore see how Queer IR would benefit from a deeper engagement with Transgender Studies by: starting from trans people embodied/lived experiences of gender rather than elevating transness as an abstract allegory for gender trouble; examining how transgenderism is constructed through different yet intersecting regimes of normativity within but also beyond sexuality; exploring how certain trans figures are not only victims of dominant regimes of power/violence but also complicit to varying degrees with imperial, colonial, ableist, classist, and other structures of power. In other words, trans figures are not necessarily and/or always ‘queer’ (aka some trans figures can and are made to signify monolithically in terms of their gender and/or sexuality).

But Transgender Studies, like Queer Studies, could be more deeply connected to larger discourses of international power and security. While Transgender Studies have started to explore how global power regimes position certain trans subjects as disposable so that normalised (white) trans subjects can emerge as fully human, it lacks a fuller theorisation of the international security logics underlying such processes. Queer IR brings a theorisation of how normal and/or perverse figurations are imbricated/produced through (international) security regimes that depend upon/stem from/intersect with logics of statecraft/sovereignty and/or colonialism/imperialism that are useful here. Yet what is missing in both fields to fully understand the Manning case is a theorisation of how security functions in and through multiple logics of protection and how queerness/transness are also produced by, and function through such logics. More specifically, examining the (failed) promises of protection from state and social orders and the logics underlying them can help us connect the queer and/or trans figures of both Queer IR and Transgender studies in ways that provide helpful insights into the Manning case and beyond.

### From the logic of masculinist protection to logics of protection

The concept of logics of protection comes from feminist (security) studies that has long explored how a logic of masculinist protection divides the world between the feminine ‘beautiful soul’ in

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>26</sup>Toby Beauchamp, *Going Stealth: Transgender Politics and U.S. Surveillance Practices* (illus. edn, Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2019), p. 8.

<sup>27</sup>Jin Haritaworn, *Queer Lovers and Hateful Others: Regenerating Violent Times and Places* (London, UK: Pluto Press, 2015), p. 109, available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt183p5vv>.

<sup>28</sup>Jin Haritaworn and C. Riley Snorton, ‘Trans necropolitics: A transnational reflection on violence, death, and the trans of color afterlife,’ in Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (eds), *The Transgender Studies Reader* (Abingdon, UK: Taylor & Francis, 2006), p. 67.



need of chivalrous protection and the masculine ‘just warrior’ providing it.<sup>29</sup> Different scholars have explored how such logic functions to produce docile ‘protected’, who depend on their protector because the latter possesses knowledge about threats and how to address them while the former relinquishes some of her autonomy/freedom in exchange for a promise of protection/security. This logic functions at times as benevolent/pastoral care and at others as a protection racket: those who refuse to abide by the ‘rules’ of the protector can become targets of his violence.<sup>30</sup> In fact, a ‘good protected’ is one who, in the end, never *needs* protection so that we end up paying with our freedom for a protection that never actually comes.<sup>31</sup> This logic also works at the level of the state where some officials such as police officers, firefighters, and politicians act as (masculine) protectors and the rest of the citizens as the (feminised) protected relinquishing some autonomy for a promise of safety. It also functions internationally to justify military interventions and motivate recruitment for them as one state can erect itself as the masculine protector of a feminised state in need of protection and rescue, as was the case in the justifications for and discourses around the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in the 2000s.<sup>32</sup> When women do occupy the role of an official protector (as a soldier or a police officer, for example), they are often recasted as the beautiful soul in need of protection by their male comrades and ‘cannot escape the mold even with a gun and a uniform.’<sup>33</sup>

But where does Manning stand within this logic of masculinist protection? She can be seen as both and neither protector and/nor protected. Therefore, as I have argued elsewhere,<sup>34</sup> while this work has been important and inspirational, to understand the Manning case, it must be complicated further. First, it needs to be pluralised: there is not one single/universal logic of masculinist protection but many that emerge out of different contexts and can coexist simultaneously and sometimes contradictorily. For example, the soldier on the battlefield will enact a very different form of masculine protection than with his teenage daughter; the nuclear strategist and the police officer embody/perform different norms of masculine protection; the politician in Sweden, Russia, or Brazil will also enact very different forms of masculine protection; and so on. But also, the logic of masculinist protection is but one among many logics that are produced/function in and through each other such as the race, (settler)colonial, class, dis/ability logics of protection, and so on. Such logics are contextual: the race and (settler)colonial logics of protection in the US, for example, might resemble but also differ from those of India or Colombia. Second, logics of protection produce the figures of the protector (subject) and the protected (object), but also of the unprotected (to whom protection is refused/withdrawn for their refusal to behave as the ‘beautiful soul’) and of the unprotectable (to whom protection was never offered in the first place because of their incapacity, by action or design, to embody the figure of the protected). The latter is positioned as the ‘abject’ of protection against whom the object/subject of protection are produced. Thirdly, logics of protection do not function under an either/or logic according to which one would be *either* a protector *or* a protected *or* an unprotected *or* an unprotectable: to understand the Manning case, we need to

<sup>29</sup>Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Judith Hicks Stiehm, ‘The protected, the protector, the defender’, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 5: 3–4(1982), pp. 367–76, available at: {[https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395\(82\)90048-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395(82)90048-6)}; Iris Marion Young, ‘The logic of masculinist protection: Reflections on the current security state’, *Signs*, 29:1 (2003), pp. 1–25; Cecilia Ase, ‘The gendered myth of protection’, in Caron E. Gentry, Laura J. Shepherd, and Laura Sjoberg (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Gender and Security* (London, UK: Routledge, 2018), pp. 273–83.

<sup>30</sup>Young, ‘The logic of masculinist protection.’

<sup>31</sup>Ase, ‘The gendered myth of protection.’

<sup>32</sup>Krista Hunt and Kim Rygiel, ‘(En)gendered war stories and camouflaged politics’, in Krista Hunt and Kim Rygiel (eds), *(En)Gendering the War on Terror: War Stories and Camouflaged Politics* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2006), pp. 1–24; Jill Steans, ‘Telling stories about women and gender in the War on Terror’, *Global Society*, 22:1 (2008), pp. 159–76, available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1080/13600820701740795>}.

<sup>33</sup>Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women’s Violence in Global Politics* (New York, NY and London, UK: Zed Books, 2007), p. 86.

<sup>34</sup>This section has also been developed in Béatrice Châteauevert-Gagnon, ‘“How dare she?!”: Parrhesiastic resistance and the logics of protection of/in international security’, *Security Dialogue*, 53:4 (1 August 2022), pp. 281–301, available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1177/09670106221090830>}.

understand how one can be protector and/or protected and/or unprotected and/or unprotectable *at the same time*.

As such, logics of protection are not simply repressive or relying on the sovereign power to ‘make die and let live’<sup>35</sup> through grand demonstrations of force (such as the violence involved in protection rackets), they are also productive of subject positions, norms, conducts, social orders, and desires. They also function through forms of disciplinary power – constant surveillance in the name of protection, for example – and pastoral/governing power – to ‘make live and let die’<sup>36</sup> through the accumulation of data about, and benevolent care for, the protected. Subjects/objects/abjects of protection end up internalising how to behave according to logics of protection. As the Manning case illustrates, such logics are thus not only about protecting individuals but also the existing social orders, the normatively assigned/produced positions within them as well as the actual and symbolic boundaries enforcing/safeguarding them.

Yet, as feminists have reminded us, logics of protection are always liable to failure and in fact regularly fail: it is actually impossible to protect fully/successfully at all times, no matter how many measures are taken at airports, CCTV cameras installed and dataveillance enforced by state agencies. But protection is something ‘we cannot not want’:<sup>37</sup> logics of protection also function through an economy of fear that offers performances of security in exchange for a feeling of protection/safety. In the end, protection becomes enacted into being as what it was meant to describe in the first place (for my protection, I take my shoes off at the airport/I take my shoes off at the airport, therefore I am protected). In other words, we exchange submission/obedience for the affective relief of feeling safe/protected while institutions of protection protect us from the ‘open secret’ of protection’s fallibility and performative nature.

Hence to understand the Manning case, we have to locate her within the specific logics of protection she was embedded in and their relationship to national security, namely the cishetero/homonormative and imperial/colonial logics of protection of the US military, to which we now turn.

### **Soldiering while queer/trans: Cishetero/homonormative logics of protection and the US military**

Institutionalised logics of protection, like other institutions of power, function in and through heteronormativity as a way of enforcing normative sexualities and genders: as a subject, to be protected and/or protector is to ‘coherently’ align, and ‘successfully’ perform your gender, sex, and sexuality. Queers, and all those who are situated outside of normalised sexualities/genders, are thus often positioned as unprotectable whose lives/safety are beyond the scope of protection, but also as threats to social orders. This logic extends to the level of the state by positioning queer people as a threat to national security.

In fact, the period of the ‘Lavender Scare’ in the US saw thousands of suspected gays and lesbians fired from government agencies. The Huey Report published in 1950 established that homosexuals were ‘intrinsically weak, cowardly, unstable, neurotic, and lacking in moral fibre’<sup>38</sup> and led federal security officials to characterise homosexuals as ‘gregarious’ and possessing ‘a great desire to talk,’ ‘confess’; and ‘name names.’<sup>39</sup> It was believed that homosexuals ‘could be more easily blackmailed

<sup>35</sup> Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976* (rpr. edn, New York, NY: Picador, 2003).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (London, UK: Psychology Press, 1996), p. 28.

<sup>38</sup> David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 112.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

or coerced into divulging state secrets for fear of being publicly revealed.<sup>40</sup> These myths have established an enduring connection between homosexuality and 'security risks', encompassed by the idea of 'queer psychopathology – an ill-defined condition that presumably makes homosexuals prone to disloyalty and emotional instability, and, therefore, more likely to spill secrets.'<sup>41</sup> From 1993 to 2011, the DADT policy continued the connection between homosexuality and security risk by stating that: 'the presence in the armed forces of persons who demonstrate a propensity or intent to engage in homosexual acts would create an unacceptable *risk* to the high standards of morale, good order and discipline ...'<sup>42, 43</sup> Even though DADT has been repealed and gay people are not necessarily portrayed as 'psychopathic' anymore, the fact that they might be, and often are, victims of homophobic abuse positions them as particularly vulnerable to emotional distress, continuing to mark them as unstable and unreliable, and thus representing a 'security risk'.<sup>44</sup>

Yet in recent decades, some members of LGB communities have been officially and openly 'accepted' into institutions of protection such as the military and have also been increasingly portrayed as in need of and deserving state protection. Such homonormative logics of protection rely on relatively 'new' militarised figures: 'the persecuted homosexual' and/or 'the gay rights-holder' (the protected) that require the extended intervention of state institutions of protection against those backward threats now understood as homophobic.<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, the figure of the queer patriotic soldier reinforces tropes of US/Western sexual exceptionalism by allowing certain (mostly white, male, and homonormative) bodies to be included into regimes of militarised normalcy. This partial and conditional inclusion of certain queer bodies into state institutions of protection relies on a reinforcement and expansion of imperial logics of protection while disciplining queer and/or sexually perverse bodies within the nation that fall outside of this homonational normativity.<sup>46</sup>

Cisnormative logics of protection can be understood within the context of hetero/homonormative logics of protection, yet cannot be reduced to them, as trans identities have been and still are particularly demonised as perverted, abnormal, not-fully-human, and/or mentally 'deranged'. Trans people, and trans people of colour in particular, face alarming levels of violence as a result, often from the very people in charge of their protection. Trans people are thus positioned as both unprotectable and as 'highly threatening in a world that essentializes, polarizes and dichotomizes genders'<sup>47</sup> because they make visible the necessary failures and inherent fragility of cisnormative systems as well as the huge pressure put on individuals to 'do their gender right'.<sup>48</sup> This is especially true for trans women (of colour) because of their expression of femaleness, seen as particularly threatening for its challenge to male (white) supremacy and masculine superiority.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>40</sup>Hamilton Bean, 'U.S. national security culture: From queer psychopathology to queer citizenship', *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, 1:1 (24 February 2014), p. 55.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>42</sup>Department of Defense, 'Directive 1304.26: Qualification Standards for Enlistment, Appointment, and Induction' (21 December 1993), emphasis added, available at: <https://biotech.law.lsu.edu/blaw/dodd/corres/html2/d130426x.htm>.

<sup>43</sup>It is estimated that 13,000 people left the military because of the regulation, although the increased demand for troops to fight the Afghanistan and Iraq wars saw the decline of discharges under the policy in the 2000s. While the focus of both mainstream LGBT rights association, and media and political attention has been placed on (white) gay male soldiers affected by DADT, women and minorities were disproportionately targeted by the regulation, making women of colour the front-line casualties of the policy. Gary J. Gates, *Discharges Under the Don't Ask, Don't Tell Policy: Women and Racial, Ethnic Minorities* (Los Angeles, CA: Williams Institute, 2010).

<sup>44</sup>Bean, 'U.S. national security culture', p. 60.

<sup>45</sup>Dean Spade and Craig Willse, 'Sex, gender, and war in an age of multicultural imperialism', *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, 1:1 (24 February 2014), pp. 5–29.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*; Jasbir K. Puar and Amit Rai, 'Monster, terrorist, fag: The war on terrorism and the production of docile patriots', *Social Text*, 20:3 (2002), pp. 117–48.

<sup>47</sup>Emi Koyama, 'Whose feminism is it anyway? The unspoken racism of the trans inclusion debate', in Stryker and Whittle, *The Transgender Studies Reader*, p. 704.

<sup>48</sup>Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (annotated edn, Emeryville, CA: Avalon Group, 2007), p. 12.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 15.



Trans women are also often portrayed as gender (and/or sexual) ‘deceivers’, preying on cisheterosexual men while concealing their ‘real’ sex/gender.<sup>50</sup> This portrayal of trans people as treacherous, untrustworthy, cheating, and lying has often been used to justify (and in fact blame them for) the transphobic violence they face. Being perceived as always already suspect/dangerous and/or pushed into criminalised activities due to high rates of homelessness, joblessness, poverty, stigmatisation, and/or undocumented migration<sup>51</sup> also means that this positioning of trans people/women (of colour) as unprotectable/threat leads to high levels of incarceration/criminalisation within the prison-industrial complex, as well as high rates of violence within it (Idem).

However, as highlighted by trans studies scholars, the US has recently seen a shift towards allowing some (mostly white, wealthy, hetero/gender normative) trans people to enter regimes of the normal, joining their homonormative counterparts into the category of the protected ‘trans rights holder’ and ‘victim of transphobia’ deserving, and in need of, state protection. But trans people were not allowed, in 2010 at the time of Manning’s disclosures, to occupy the position of protectors of the nation.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, (openly) transgender people were usually precluded from serving and deemed unfit for duty for psychological reasons (transsexualism was listed as a type of paraphilia alongside exhibitionism or voyeurism, for example) and/or medical reasons (including any ‘history of major abnormalities or defects of the genitalia’ such as sex change).<sup>53</sup> People who entered the military and later began to openly identify as transgender could be discharged on those bases, but also risked criminal charges for ‘conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman’ and under the infamous article 134, criminalising any conduct that might cause ‘prejudice of good order and discipline in the armed forces’ or ‘bring discredit to the armed forces’.<sup>54, 55</sup>

Yet, transgender Americans are twice as likely to serve in the armed forces than the general population.<sup>56</sup> A study also reported that among its male-to-female transsexual participants, 30 per cent were veterans, a prevalence that is three times higher than in the general population.<sup>57</sup> Trans women thus seem to be overrepresented in the American armed forces, despite (or because of) their official rejection: many trans female veterans stated that they joined the armed forces in the hope that it ‘would make a man out of them’ and as a last resort at resolving their gender identity ‘disorder’.<sup>58, 59</sup>

<sup>50</sup>Serano, *Whipping Girl*; Schilt and Westbrook, ‘Doing gender, doing heteronormativity’.

<sup>51</sup>See Fischer, *Terrorizing Gender*, p. 4.

<sup>52</sup>While the ban on transgender military personnel was lifted in 2016, President Trump passed a controversial policy in 2019 restricting access to most transgender people, what many have seen as in effect reinstating the ban. President Biden as now lifted the policy. Ironically, Chelsea Manning might have indirectly contributed to this latest lift: Commission member Gen. Thomas Kolditz argued that allowing trans people to serve openly would enhance national security because ‘When you closet someone, you create a security risk, and we don’t need another Chelsea Manning’, cited in Fischer, *Terrorizing Gender*, p. 76, echoing earlier lines around queer psychopathology as a security risk.

<sup>53</sup>Adam F. Yerke and Valory Mitchell, ‘Transgender people in the military: Don’t ask? Don’t tell? Don’t enlist!’, *Journal of Homosexuality*, 60:2–3 (2013), pp. 436–57, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2013.744933>.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>The ‘toleration’ of trans people within the military did occur, however, as some were accepted by their units and superiors who turned a blind eye to military regulations, while others had a very difficult experience. See, for example, Fiona Dawson, ‘“Transgender, at war and in love”’, *The New York Times* (4 June 2015), available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/04/opinion/transgender-at-war-and-in-love.html>. Also, as shown by Sjoberg and Shepherd, gender non-conforming people have always taken an active part in Western militaries and wars even though their historical presence is often erased or made invisible. Shepherd and Sjoberg, ‘Trans-bodies in/of war(s)’.

<sup>56</sup>James E. Parco, David A. Levy, and Sarah R. Spears, ‘Transgender military personnel in the post-DADT repeal era: A phenomenological study’, *Armed Forces & Society*, 41:2 (1 April 2015), p. 223, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X14530112>.

<sup>57</sup>Yerke and Mitchell, ‘Transgender people in the military’, pp. 439–40.

<sup>58</sup>George R. Brown, ‘Transsexuals in the military: Flight into hypermasculinity’, in Stryker and Whittle (eds), *The Transgender Studies Reader*, pp. 537–44; Parco, Levy, and Spears, ‘Transgender military personnel in the post-DADT repeal era’.

<sup>59</sup>This was true of Chelsea Manning who also claimed to have joined the military in the hope that it would help her get rid of ‘her problem’. Chelsea Manning, ‘Bradley Manning’s Statement Taking Responsibility for Releasing Documents to WikiLeaks’,

While there are many reasons to join the military, many of which are the same for trans and cis enlistees (for example, the desire to save lives and protect people), the perceived rigidity of gender roles and hypermasculinity seem a determinant factor for many trans women to enrol. In a militarised country such as the US in which being a citizen is closely linked to 'serving one's country', maybe the high proportion of enlisted transgender personnel should not come as a surprise: since being 'out' was not an option, the military might have offered a space in which one can 'count as a subject' and 'qualify as a citizen' while the norms by which one is constrained are so rigid that one cannot begin to ask what one may become.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, class/economic logics of protection in the US makes the military one of the only avenues for poor/lower class people and/or undocumented migrants to access healthcare, education, citizenship, and a reliable income. Given the overrepresentation of trans people (of colour) in low-income, jobless, homeless, and/or undocumented situations, such class/economic logics might also explain the high presence of trans people/women within the ranks of the US military.

The high number of trans veterans as well as campaigns for the inclusion of openly trans people in the military has led to a form of transpatriotism,<sup>61</sup> a form of militarised trans normativity that relies on the simultaneous inclusion of some exceptional gender-conforming trans subjects and exclusion of 'deviants/perverts' who, willingly or unwillingly, question/challenge the gender binary, and/or question the state and its imperial logics of protection. In fact, through her work on the Manning case, Mia Fischer has coined the concept which she defines as: 'a form of jingoism characterized by both an unwavering devotion to the state and a strict adherence to the gender binary to illuminate the conditional inclusion and recognition of certain, privileged trans people into the national imaginary.'<sup>62</sup> As homonationalism reinforces heteronormativity, transpatriotism similarly does not question the gender binary but rather reinforces it by relying on discourses of sexual/gender exceptionalism through which some patriotic trans subjects who follow and adhere to the biopower script of Gender Dysphoria and its reinforcement of the gender binary<sup>63</sup> are included into national institutions, while 'ruthlessly polic[ing] boundaries of acceptable racial, gender, sexual, and class performances.'<sup>64</sup>

What all this means in terms of logics of protection is that the US military aims at representing not only the protector of the nation (and of the 'free world') and the benevolent protector of 'persecuted queers' abroad but also the protector of a certain moral and social order based on a strict gender binary, (hyper)masculinity, (implicit) whiteness, heteronormativity, and so on. Some queer/trans bodies will be included within its ranks as a result of, and not *despite*, such moral and social orders. This inclusion serves to uphold and reinforce disciplinary norms presented as benevolent protection (sometimes protection from oneself, as shown by the trans women signing up in the hope of getting rid of their 'gender dysphoria'). Such inclusions will be accomplished on the backs of those who will not and/or cannot embody those normative subjectivities, and who will face increasing coercion for not performing their selves within the new/old 'regimes of the normal'. Cishetero/homonormative logics of protection are thus reinforced and not challenged by the inclusion of some LGBT people, and the US military becomes the site where those logics are safeguarded and protected against those who threaten the stability, fixity, and 'naturalness' of binary, normatively aligned, gender/sex/sexuality.

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Chelsea Manning Support Network (28 February 2013), available at: <http://chelseamanning.org/news/bradley-mannings-statement-taking-responsibility-for-releasing-documents-to-wikileaks/>, as will be developed later.

<sup>60</sup>Judith Butler, 'Doing justice to someone: Sex reassignment and allegories of transsexuality', in Stryker and Whittle (eds), *The Transgender Studies Reader*, pp. 183–93.

<sup>61</sup>Fischer, *Terrorizing Gender*.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>63</sup>The GID/GD diagnostic paradoxically reinforces/naturalises the gender binary by assuming that everyone is, feels like, wishes to, and/or should be either male or female. See Dean Spade, 'Resisting medicine/remodeling gender', *BERKELEY WOMEN'S L.J.*, 18 (1 January 2003), p. 15.

<sup>64</sup>Fischer, *Terrorizing Gender*, p. 72.

These logics also cannot be read outside of imperial logics of protection since those newly included queer/trans bodies must adhere to, perform, and reinforce US patriotism. While colonialism/imperialism is often understood as functioning mainly through violence and exploitation, it relies heavily on establishing the colonisers as benevolent protectors of 'brown women' (and, we could add, some brown queer/trans subjects) 'from brown men'.<sup>65</sup> Imperial formations thus build themselves as exceptionally 'good' to the colonised due to their moral, social, and intellectual superiority<sup>66</sup> often expressed as/through gender/sexual tolerance and liberalism. It was particularly true of the US invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan and its overall War on Terror, justified as benevolent protection through discourses of gender and sexual exceptionalism, as was studied by a large body of work in feminist IR and beyond.<sup>67</sup> Hence to 'be' a subject of protection is to embrace US patriotism and its militarised forms of not only gendered but also homo/trans/hetero normativities. It is within such logics of protection that Manning must be situated to fully understand her disclosures. In fact, such logics not only motivated her disclosures of state secrets and of her gender identity: they were required to make such disclosures possible.

### Chelsea Manning's story

Manning was born in 1987 in Oklahoma. Her father was a former IT specialist in the US military whom she described as abusive, and she grew up in a dysfunctional family. As a 'very effeminate boy who was always glued to the computer screen' and came out as gay when she was 13,<sup>68</sup> she experienced frequent bullying. Manning's parents divorced when she was 15 and she moved to Wales with her mother before moving back with her father in the US four years later. Following tensions with her dad and stepmother, she was homeless for a while before enrolling in a community college where she hung out with gay students and around hacker communities. In 2007, dropping out of college, Manning followed her father's footsteps and enlisted in the US military as an IT specialist. She said her decision was based on a desire to 'save lives' and 'protect people'.<sup>69</sup> At first, she 'actually believe[d] what the army tries to make itself out to be: a diverse place full of people defending the country ... we all wear the same green uniform.' (Idem)

But soon after her training started, she was bullied, harassed, and quickly placed in the 'discharge unit' for enlistees. Yet in 2007, recruitment numbers were low and the need for recruits with IT skills was high. Therefore, Manning was brought back to active duty as an intelligence analyst. During her first deployment in upstate New York, her supervisors reported regular angry outbursts and recommended against her deployment in Iraq, but she was nonetheless deployed near Baghdad in October 2009. Things quickly escalated from there. In November 2009, she sent an email to her supervisor entitled 'My Problem', in which she came out as a trans woman and expressed emotional distress.<sup>70</sup> A few weeks later, Manning started sending documents to Wikileaks that would total

<sup>65</sup> Gayatri C. Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?', in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271–313.

<sup>66</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, 'On degrees of imperial sovereignty', *Public Culture*, 18:1 (1 January 2006), pp. 125–46, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-18-1-125>.

<sup>67</sup> Hunt and Rygiel, '(En)gendered war stories and camouflaged politics'; Laura Sjoberg, 'Gendering the empire's soldiers: Gender ideologies, the U.S. Military, and the "War on Terror"', in Laura Sjoberg and Sandra Via (eds), *Gender, War, and Militarism: Feminist Perspectives* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), pp. 209–18.; Steans, 'Telling stories about women and gender in the War on Terror'.

<sup>68</sup> Evan Hansen, 'Manning-Lamo chat logs revealed', WIREd (13 July 2011), available at: <http://www.wired.com/2011/07/manning-lamo-logs/>.

<sup>69</sup> Ed Pilkington, 'Bradley Manning's Internet chats with Zach Antolak: The full text', *The Guardian* (7 July 2011), available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jul/07/bradley-manning-chat-logs-zach-antolak>.

<sup>70</sup> 'This is my problem. I've had signs of it for a very long time. It's caused problems within my family. I thought a career in the military would get rid of it. It's not something I seek out for attention, and I've been trying very, very hard to get rid of it by placing myself in situations where it would be impossible. But, it's not going away; it's haunting me more and more as I get older. Now, the consequences of it are dire, at a time when it's causing me great pain it itself.' Manning, 'Bradley Manning's Statement Taking Responsibility for Releasing Documents to WikiLeaks'.

thousands of files, including the Collateral Murder Video exposing the killing of unarmed civilians and two Reuters journalists by a US helicopter crew in Iraq; the Afghan and Iraq war logs that revealed, among other violations of International Law, that the US had widespread knowledge of the use of torture by Iraqi authorities; and a set of US diplomatic cables, later known as ‘Cablegate’, revealing the role played by corporate interests and spying in international diplomacy. In April 2010, Wikileaks released the Collateral Murder Video, leading to widespread media coverage and attention. A month later, Manning was demoted from Specialist to Private First Class after hitting a supervisor. Soon after, she started chatting online with Adrian Lamo, renowned hacker confined under house arrest by the FBI.

By then, there were no more traces of ‘wearing the same green uniform’: ‘im in the desert, with a bunch of hyper-masculine trigger happy ignorant rednecks as neighbors [sic] ...’<sup>71</sup> As the disconnect grew between what she experienced and the promises of the US military to provide security both internally to its members and externally to the ‘free world’, the initial enthusiasm for the role of protector had faded away. In fact, what her experience in the military illustrates is how Manning was left unprotected by her supervisors and the military establishment in general. Despite multiple incidents in which she had ‘angry outbursts’ in reaction to her extreme isolation and bullying, despite the coming out email to her supervisor in which she clearly expressed ‘it’ was causing her a lot of pain, despite many disturbing incidents in which she clearly expressed emotional distress in front of counsellors and supervisors, Manning was left to her own devices. The Internet provided her with the only ‘safe place [she] seemed to have.’<sup>72</sup> Yet even her chats with Lamo (who presented himself as both ‘a journalist and a minister’ offering ‘a modicum of legal protection’<sup>73</sup> in whom she confided and looked for support turned out to leave her unprotected: two days into their chat, Lamo contacted the federal authorities and started working as an informant.

On 29 May 2010, Manning was arrested by military police and detained in Kuwait for a year before being transferred to a maximum-security detention facility in Virginia. She stayed in detention for over one thousand days before her trial began, under conditions classified as torture. Here again, Manning was left unprotected: she did not benefit from the existing legal protections around whistleblowing, humane detention conditions, and against torture. A court martial ultimately sentenced Manning, on 21 August 2013, to 35 years in an all-male military prison. The day after the trial ended, Manning publicly announced that she wanted to be referred to as Chelsea Manning and by the use of female pronouns. In January 2017, President Obama commuted her sentence to four additional months and Manning was released on 17 May. Her seven years in prison were marked by her fight to get treatment for transitioning (partly granted by the use of hormone therapy after years of legal struggles, but she was denied sex-reassignment surgery and had to follow male grooming protocols), and harassment from guards. She attempted suicide twice in 2016. In 2019, after she refused to testify in front of a Grand Jury against Wikileaks, she was, again, incarcerated for a year and released in 2020 after a third suicide attempt.

### **Chelsea Manning: Heroic protector, victimised un/protected and/or treacherous unprotectable**

Before her disclosures, we can see how Manning was complicatedly positioned within cishetero/homonormative and colonial/imperial logics of protection as both protector (as a soldier), protected (as the ‘victim of homo/transphobic’ bullying), unprotected (for presenting as an openly gay man at the time and making no effort to conceal her sexuality while in the military despite DADT), but perhaps mainly as unprotectable. Indeed, as a transwoman, Manning was as far

<sup>71</sup>Hansen, ‘Manning-Lamo chat logs revealed’.

<sup>72</sup>Manning, ‘Bradley Manning’s Statement Taking Responsibility for Releasing Documents to WikiLeaks’.

<sup>73</sup>Hansen, ‘Manning-Lamo chat logs revealed’.

from hypermasculinity as one can be and as such, was bullied and harassed but mainly consistently ignored (and feeling 'like a ghost').<sup>74</sup> she could simply not 'be' in the institution.

After her disclosures, many labelled her a hero belonging to a long line of American whistleblowers, who didn't differ from them in her motives or moral quality.<sup>75</sup> These defenders tended to focus solely or mainly on the political and moral justifications for her actions while disregarding her struggles with gender identity as a personal/private matter being used by her detractors as a smoke screen distracting us from the political issues she raised. The decision to disclose the documents she found was indeed clearly motivated by moral and political motives such as the public's right to know and ideals of democracy, truth, and justice.<sup>76</sup> In her own words, she felt she 'had accomplished something that allowed me to have a clear conscience based upon what I had seen and what I had read about and knew were happening in both Iraq and Afghanistan everyday'.<sup>77</sup> A few members of LGB(T) communities also praised Manning as not only a hero, but a hero *because* of her gender/sexuality. As Daniel Choi, a gay veteran and LGBT activist stated: 'I'm proud of [her], as a gay soldier, because [she] stood for integrity ... the gay community is [the] only one that bases its membership ... on integrity and telling the truth'.<sup>78</sup> In both versions, Manning is seen as a patriotic protector not despite but because of her disclosures, seen as either disconnected from her 'personal' struggles with gender and sexuality or explained by her sexuality (before she came out as a transwoman).

Meanwhile, Manning's detractors portrayed her as a traitor: unstable, neurotic, untrustworthy, narcissistic, an 'egotistical anarchist', and 'lacking in moral fibre'.<sup>79</sup> Some similarly argued along those lines that she leaked<sup>80</sup> these documents out of personal and self-serving motives, such as a desire for revenge for being bullied in the military or 'delusions of grandeur'.<sup>81</sup> In many of these narratives, the GID/GD<sup>82</sup> diagnosis is implicitly or explicitly pathologised as attention-seeking, self-interested narcissism, and her 'treatise' to the state is reflected through and/or explained by her gender dysphoria, seen as a mental health disorder (read: crazy, unstable, weird, or sick) and/or deception (read: liar, manipulative, or untrustworthy).<sup>83</sup> Yet none of the mainstream US LGB(T)

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> See Glenn Greenwald, 'Bradley Manning: The face of heroism | Glenn Greenwald', *The Guardian* (28 February 2013); or Chase Madar, *The Passion of Bradley Manning: The Story of the Suspect Behind the Largest Security Breach in U.S. History* (New York, NY: OR Books, 2012).

<sup>76</sup> Manning, 'Bradley Manning's Statement Taking Responsibility for Releasing Documents to WikiLeaks'; Madar, *The Passion of Bradley Manning*.

<sup>77</sup> Manning, 'Bradley Manning's Statement Taking Responsibility for Releasing Documents to WikiLeaks'.

<sup>78</sup> Fischer, *Terrorizing Gender*, p. 68.

<sup>79</sup> Nathan Fuller, 'Govt's Closing Arguments; Judge Allows Charge Sheet Change: Trial Report, Day 21', Chelsea Manning Support Network (25 July 2013), available at: <http://chelseamanning.org/news/closing-arguments-over-major-manning-charges-judge-allows-charge-sheet-change-trial-report-day-21/>; Bean, 'U.S. national security culture'.

<sup>80</sup> These narratives avoided using the term whistleblowing and mostly used 'leaking' instead, which is itself negatively connoted: 'rhetorically speaking, national security "leaking" is espionage's close cousin, as both evoke images of anonymity and disloyalty' (Bean, 'U.S. national security culture', p. 56). It is also profoundly gendered: while whistleblowing invokes an active and intentional act linked to 'grand and masculinized gestures of speaking truth to power', leaking invokes an unintentional failure to contain a spill and is usually associated with female and queer 'leaky' bodies, unable to control their bodily functions. Daniela Agostinho and Nanna Bonde Thylstrup, 'If truth was a woman: Leaky infrastructures and the gender politics of truth-telling', *Ephemeria: Theory & Politics in Organization*, 19:4 (November 2019), pp. 745–75.

<sup>81</sup> See Lida Maxwell, 'Truth in public: Chelsea Manning, gender identity, and the politics of truth-telling', *Theory and Event*, 18:1 (2015), available at: [http://about.reader?url=https%3A%2F%2Fmuse.jhu.edu.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk%2Fjournals%2Ftheory\\_and\\_event%2Fv018%2F18.1.maxwell.html](http://about.reader?url=https%3A%2F%2Fmuse.jhu.edu.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk%2Fjournals%2Ftheory_and_event%2Fv018%2F18.1.maxwell.html).

<sup>82</sup> In the DSM5, the Gender Identity Disorder diagnosis has been replaced by Gender Dysphoria in an attempt to depathologise transgenderism by removing the term 'disorder', while recognising the psychological distress it can cause. However, the DSM5 was published in May 2013, just before the trial began and after Manning had been 'diagnosed'/come out. Hence this article uses both terms, according to context.

<sup>83</sup> Both the prosecution and the defence followed such lines. In fact, at the beginning of the trial, Manning's attorney tried to use the GID/GD diagnostic as proof that she had 'diminished capacities' for suffering from a psychiatric disorder and therefore could not be charged in line with the 'Aiding the enemy' statute, punishable by death or life imprisonment. This line



organisations came out to support her. In their fight for the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT), still in place at the time, Manning was a liability: not only because the state labelled her a traitor but also because 'with [her] slight frame, lower-class background, questioning of her gender identity, inability to hold down a typical job, general dorkiness and dysfunctional family life, Manning does not fit the poster boy image that GLAAD or the HRC would hold up and promote.'<sup>84</sup> In other words, Manning was too 'queer' to be held up as a gay hero by mainstream LGBT rights groups.

This was also true of major trans veterans' rights associations. For example, Denny Meyer, a spokesperson for TAVA (Transgender American Veteran's Association) stated that: '[d]espite all of our discrimination, I don't think that it occurred to any of us once to sell out our country because of that ... We're not supporting him ... or her.'<sup>85</sup> Trans female author Kristin Beck, former navy SEAL, portrayed Manning as 'a liar, thief, and traitor, who came out as transgender in order to stay alive in prison' – in order to be shielded from those who had been given 'minor sentences, but [were] still loyal to American interest[s]'.<sup>86, 87</sup> Here, Manning is a traitor to her country, and by using her gender identity to try to mitigate or excuse her actions, she is also a traitor to the trans community, especially those serving/having served in the US military. Through these narratives, she was thus portrayed as a security threat following lines of 'queer psychopathology' inherited from the Lavender Scare, positioning her as either/both unprotected (the ungrateful victim of bullying who refused to behave as a good 'protected') and/or unprotectable (the perverse queer/trans subject undeserving of protection and threatening national security).

Arguably, we could say that Manning was all/none of those things at the same time: neither/both hero and/nor traitor, she was protector, protected, unprotected, and/or unprotectable. Hence while queer and trans studies scholars have provided useful analysis of the Manning case in relation to homonormativity, homonationalism, and transpatriotism in the US (military), reading her case through the framework of logics of protection allows to connect such concepts more deeply together and within larger dynamics of power pertaining to security discourses/practices. It also highlights how one can be both protector, un/protected, and/or unprotectable/threat at the same time. Yet to fully understand this case, we have to address what motivated her actions and made them possible in the first place, as well as why she aroused such intense reactions for disclosing what was already known. Namely, we need to explore not only the logics of protection she was embedded in/produced through, but how she challenged/disrupted such logics by leaking those documents. More specifically, I argue that Manning's disclosures – of state secrets and of her gender identity – have to be read together and could go along those lines: if you cannot protect me from my secrets, then I will not protect you from yours.

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of defence was strategically trying to shift the blame from Manning to her supervisors for not acting on evidence of Manning's mental health issues and calls for help. Later on, a defence's expert on forensic psychiatry said that Manning 'displayed some "narcissistic traits", such as "grandiose ideations", and "arrogant and haughty behaviour"' when stressed and suffered from "post-adolescent idealism", a relatively normal focus on making a difference in the world and enacting social change, for those aged 18–24'. Nathan Fuller, 'Bradley Manning, Family, and Doctors Take Stand: Report and Analysis: Trial Day 34', Chelsea Manning Support Network (14 August 2013), available at: <http://chelseamanning.org/news/bradley-manning-family-and-doctors-take-stand-report-and-analysis/>).

<sup>84</sup>Devon Douglas-Bowers, 'The politics of abandonment: Siding with the state and heteronormativity against Chelsea Manning', *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, 1:1 (2014), p. 135, available at: <https://doi.org/10.14321/qed.1.1.0130>).

<sup>85</sup>Adam Klasfed, 'Gender Politics in Manning-Wilileaks Case', Courthouse News Services (13 March 2012), available at: <http://www.courthousenews.com/2012/03/13/44632.htm>).

<sup>86</sup>Cited in Mia Fischer, 'Contingent belonging: Chelsea Manning, transpatriotism, and iterations of empire', *Sexualities*, 19:5–6 (1 September 2016), p. 578, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460715613332>).

<sup>87</sup>Many of these accounts refuse to recognise Manning's gender identity, or present it as unstable, self-interested, and unreliable, thereby policing whose gender gets to be recognised as legitimate.

### Chelsea Manning's disclosures: What does it cost to tell the truth?<sup>88</sup>

Manning's disclosures were not only made possible by logics of protection, they were actively and purposefully challenging them so that she could turn herself into a subject. In fact, through disclosing the truth of the atrocity and abuses of the US military in Iraq, Afghanistan, and beyond as well as the truth of her gender identity, Manning turned herself from the abject who could not 'be', into a subject (of protection) by transgressing/dissenting to both military codes of conduct and normative codes of gender/sex/sexuality. Yet, as stated before, Chelsea Manning did not reveal anything radically new or hidden from public knowledge when she leaked those documents as well as coming out as a (trans)woman: the abuses committed by the US military in its WoT were widely known and given the statistics revealing high numbers of trans veterans, the US military was fully aware that there were many people struggling with gender identity among its ranks. If she attracted so much vitriol, including from trans veterans organisations, it is precisely because Manning's disclosures exposed the 'open secrets' she was entangled in that should have remained untold for logics of protection to hold true: since the military could not protect her from her own secrets (namely, she could not 'get rid of her problem' despite joining the military), she refused to protect the state (from its) secrets about the failures, the injustices, and the violence underlying the logics of protection on which it claims its right to govern.

As such, what her case highlights is the relationship between logics of protection and secrecy. Through her incapacity, failure, and/or unwillingness to embody the figure of the hypermasculine protector, Chelsea Manning refused to keep the secret of her sexuality and gender identity, but most of all, she refused to protect the omerta around the atrocities of the WoT. She therefore made visible through its disruption the secrecy surrounding logics of protection/the protection of secrecy. In fact, logics of protection are partly about protecting secrets: to be a protector is to protect secrets in the name of (national) security, to be protected is to keep secrets about oneself (if/when it would clash with the required behaviour/subject position of a 'beautiful soul'), while both roles are about protecting the 'open secret' of the necessary failure of logics of protection. Secrecy is thus particularly central to US military and national security logics of protection: through policies such as DADT and the ban on (openly) transgender personnel, as well as through intelligence work enforcing an omerta on what happens on the battlefield, they heavily function through a culture of secrets' protection.

In fact, as Eve Sedgwick has argued, the secrecy/disclosure binary is central to Western modes of thought, and secrecy can be as performative, varied, and multiple as the knowledge it aims at obscuring.<sup>89</sup> Hence Elspeth Van Veeren argues that the craft of secrecy in the US military elite produces not only knowledge/discourses about secrets and how to keep them, but whole technologies that produce 'stealth' subjects 'who seemingly become all knowing and all powerful by their capacity to be secretive and to detect secrets, and are heroic, even superheroic, for doing so.'<sup>90</sup> These subjects are produced through and reinforce militarised hegemonic masculinity while the code of silence they protect is a 'deeply masculine one': "snitches" and "leakers" are derided for their inability to contain themselves, as feminized "gossips" who have "gone wild"<sup>91</sup> Protecting secrets, in that context, is about protecting what is 'pure and uncontaminated' from the 'defilement' or 'prying eyes' while also 'signaling its existence' without revealing all, which would be 'obscene' and 'spoiling it.'<sup>92</sup> Hence secrecy is ultimately about protecting secrets while partially revealing them

<sup>88</sup> Michel Foucault, 'How much does it cost for reason to tell the truth?', in Sylvère Lotringer (ed.), *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961–1984* (New York, NY: Semiotext, 1996), pp. 348–62., cited in Riki Anne Wilchins, 'What does it cost to tell the truth?', in Stryker and Whittle (eds), *The Transgender Studies Reader*, pp. 547–51.

<sup>89</sup> Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*.

<sup>90</sup> Elspeth Van Veeren, 'Secrecy's subjects: Special operators in the US shadow war', *European Journal of International Security*, 4:3 (October 2019), p. 397, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2019.20>.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 405.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 409.

through gendered and sexualised logics of protection relying upon/reinforcing dichotomies such as pure/soiled, leaky/contained, disciplined/messy, obscene/proper.

But what exactly were those secrets that Manning refused to protect and how did disclosing them challenge dominant logics of protection?

First, in disclosing the 'ugly truths' about the WoT and bullying diplomatic tactics, Manning was challenging the positioning of the US as the ultimate protector of the 'free world'. In fact, Manning challenged and subverted discourses positioning the US as enlightened saviour of Iraqi and Afghan peoples from their backward and barbaric cultures. She stated how she felt more and more conflicted about the documents she leaked, precisely because they were revealing the contradictions between official narratives, relegating the atrocities committed to a few isolated 'bad apples', and US systemic conduct described in the war logs and 'Cablegate'. By leaking documents that specifically called the official narratives about protection in Iraq and Afghanistan into question, but also documents about the conduct of the US towards smaller nation like Iceland and Haiti, or 'how the first world exploits the third, in details, from an internal perspective',<sup>93</sup> Manning was problematising the tacit acceptance of 'ugly truths' in the name of protection that colonialism/imperialism relies upon. Manning's disclosures were thus about challenging the power of a military institution claiming to protect not only vulnerable people in need of protection/salvation, but also moral values such as freedom, democracy, and human rights. Yet she also reinforced logics of protection by turning herself into a benevolent/pastoral protector who cares for those 'others' in whose names she leaked the US secrets.<sup>94</sup> In trying to humanise people in Iraq and Afghanistan and show the truth of their 'pressure-cooker environment',<sup>95</sup> Manning also turned herself into the 'real' benevolent protector that she first thought joining the US military would allow her to become,<sup>96</sup> reinforcing forms of imperial/colonial logics of protection while simultaneously challenging them.

Second, her disclosures challenged the construction of the US military as protector of a sexual/gender order, both in protecting its vulnerable (normative) members and in enforcing/protecting a sexualised/gendered logic strictly aligning sex/gender/sexuality. Since joining the military had 'proven to be a disaster', and given that she felt 'like a monster', 'emotionally fractured', a 'mess',<sup>97</sup> disclosing the military's war logs can also be seen as a way to claim justice for herself from an institution that consistently ignored her distress and failed to protect her from her bullying colleagues, but that also failed to protect her from herself/her gender identity. In fact, as the unprotected and unprotectable transwoman, she was confronting an institution that would not let her *be*, yet could not and would not help her 'get rid of [her] problem' either. She thus turned herself into a dissident protector of the unprotectables by speaking truth to the ultimate failure and/or unwillingness of the military to enforce the norms through which it claims to govern, while simultaneously denouncing the violence such enforcement entails.

Third, she challenged/resisted discourses of homonationalism and transpatriotism in refusing to hide the gruesome realities of both serving while queer/trans and of the WoT, thus challenging the collusion of queer/transness with imperial violence. Manning was thus also challenging the internal logics of the US military by pointing 'to the ways in which vulnerable soldiers are tasked with the dirty work of empire'.<sup>98</sup> It is not only because of her figure or background that Manning could not be portrayed as a queer/trans 'poster boy/girl', but also because of her refusal to respect the secrecy

<sup>93</sup> Manning, 'Bradley Manning's Statement Taking Responsibility for Releasing Documents to WikiLeaks'.

<sup>94</sup> 'I feel connected to everybody ... like they were distant family. I ... care?'. Hansen, 'Manning-Lamo chat logs revealed'.

<sup>95</sup> Manning, 'Bradley Manning's Statement Taking Responsibility for Releasing Documents to WikiLeaks'.

<sup>96</sup> As she told a friend she chatted with online when she first joined the military: 'I feel a great responsibility and duty to people ... I'm more concerned about making sure that everyone, soldiers, marines, contractor [sic], even the local nationals, get home to their families.' And 'what's even better with my current position is that I can apply what I learn to provide more information to my officers and commanders, and hopefully save lives ... I figure that justifies my sudden choice to do this[.]' Pilkington, 'Bradley Manning's Internet chats with Zach Antolak'.

<sup>97</sup> Manning, 'Bradley Manning's Statement Taking Responsibility for Releasing Documents to WikiLeaks'; Hansen, 'Manning-Lamo chat logs revealed'.

<sup>98</sup> Spade and Willse, 'Sex, gender, and war in an age of multicultural imperialism', p. 19.

pact allowing some queer/trans soldiers to operate within the realms of normalcy/protection as long as they remain silent about the military's ugly secrets. Manning's disclosures thus exposed not only the US military's international and internal abuses and human rights violations, but also the LGBT rights groups' complicity in keeping such violence silenced. Manning's disclosures made her unprotectable precisely because she became the 'other' in all those discourses, therefore receiving the violent treatment that 'other', usually brown, bodies receive.

Yet while Manning was herself positioned as unprotectable and endured torture, degrading and inhuman treatment while incarcerated, it can also be argued that 'the production of Manning as an exceptional transgender individual occurs through the disposability of other lives.'<sup>99</sup> The unnamed, faceless victims of the US WoT in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantanamo she aimed at protecting through her disclosures became a form of 'raw material' from which value could be extracted to produce Manning as an exceptional, individual protector. Her mistreatment while incarcerated has also been exceptionalised by ignoring the violence routinely faced by high numbers of trans people (of colour) in US prisons. Furthermore, if Manning's disclosures were about raising awareness and attention to political and moral issues, they also inadvertently made her the centre of attention, drawing public scrutiny away from institutional wrongdoings.<sup>100</sup> This was exacerbated, we could argue, by Manning's coming out which, willingly or not, made the disclosures about her, partially allowing the public to ignore the plea for a change in the nation's dominant logics of protection. Hence Manning's disclosures made visible dominant logics of protection through their disruption, opening a space for their contestation. But they also inadvertently reinforced some of those logics at the same time.

## Conclusion

While important work has been conducted in Queer IR on the political/international workings of sexualised and gendered power in producing forms of normative subjectivities, what is often missed when reading the Manning case is how queerness and transness function in and are produced through logics of protection. Such a framework, applied to specific contexts such as that of Chelsea Manning, allows to engage both with material conditions of abjection/violence as well as with the promising lure into the protector/protected subject positions such logics encompass. It also offers one way to connect different queer and trans non/normative figures – such as the queer soldier, the trans patriot, the gay/trans rights holder, the victim of homo/transphobia and the perverse/threatening other – together, while grounding them within broader logics of security. Moreover, it highlights how trans logics of protection cannot be fully encompassed/reduced to queer ones and thus opens the door to more attention in Queer IR to the specificities of trans experiences and how they intersect and/or differ from queer readings of sexuality. More specifically, the reading of the Chelsea Manning case through such a framework showed how resistance to logics of protection made them visible through their disruption, and how such logics were necessary for/made this disruption possible in the first place. It thus points to the ways in which people in general, and queer/trans people in particular, resist as well as reinforce dominant discourses/logics. It also invites more attention to be paid to the ways in which queer/trans normativities and complicities with systems of (imperial and other) violence always already produce/rely upon resistance to them. Finally, Chelsea Manning's case points to the ways in which secrecy is central to logics of protection and how national security relies upon the protection of secrets/the secrecy of protection.

In April 2022, the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada ruled against Chelsea Manning, keeping her barred from entering the country. She will thus remain a *persona non grata* on Canadian territory.<sup>101</sup> We could argue that by performing the role of protector (of its borders against

<sup>99</sup> Beauchamp, *Going Stealth*, p. 128.

<sup>100</sup> Bean, 'U.S. national security culture'; Beauchamp, *Going Stealth*.

<sup>101</sup> Her legal team is appealing this decision.

an outside threat), Canada reaffirms itself as in charge of protecting deserving citizens, warning those who would be tempted, like Manning, to leak its dirty secret and speak truth to the constitutive power of its logics of protection. Through such performances of national security, Canada reasserts its sovereignty by enacting protection against the figure of the unprotectable dissident, opening the door for other states to do the same. By warning that such figure can be tried repeatedly on different sovereign grounds, it produces the figures of the deserving protected citizens. This case thus transcends Manning herself, the US, and the Canadian contexts: it highlights the ways in which logics of protection also function transnationally to produce normatively aligned and obedient subjects who accept the conditions under which protection is offered.

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