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**Title:** The Tragedy of a Whistleblower. Adamczewski's *Tragic Protest* and the Case of Chelsea Manning

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**Citation style:** Kołtun Monika. (2020). The Tragedy of a Whistleblower. Adamczewski's *Tragic Protest* and the Case of Chelsea Manning. "Review of International American Studies" (Vol. 13, no. 1, 2020, s. 215-233), DOI:10.31261/rias.9620



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# THE TRAGEDY OF A WHISTLEBLOWER

## Adamczewski's *Tragic Protest* and the Case of Chelsea Manning

In recent years, political whistleblowing has become an important element of the public debate. Popular concern about the true political agendas camouflaged under official propaganda skyrocketed when Chelsea Manning was released from prison; millions of people followed the story of Edward Snowden dramatized in a feature film that entered movie theatres shortly after the documentary *Citizenfour* had won the Academy Award. Popular reactions to these productions testify to unprecedented public interest in the now iconic whistleblower figures and to the popular support for the individuals who put their own lives at risk, reporting wrongdoings secretly perpetrated by organizations and governments, including that of the United States.

The above notwithstanding, “blowing the whistle” remains a controversial issue. While, in the public space, whistleblowers are construed as either heroes or traitors (as testified to by press reports and news), it is important to observe that irrespective of how their actions are judged, they are, essentially, *protesters*. Rebelling against certain ideologies, phenomena or activities which they perceive to be unjust, in the name of their belief they fight numerous battles, many of which play out in their minds before they are fought “in the field.” Facing the dilemma of the choice between what is right and what is convenient and safe, many of the contemporary whistleblowers epitomize the *tragic protest*:

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a protest that comes at an enormous cost of a personal tragedy that stigmatizes the protester for life.

Bringing most carefully guarded secrets into light, political whistleblowers deconstruct the essential oppositions upon which superpower ideologies are founded: they draw popular attention to what has been relegated to the margins of the dominant discourses. Torpedoing the reputations of the most powerful organizations in the world, and well aware of the inevitability of retaliation, they put themselves in a most precarious position. Fighting against impossible odds in the name of the greater good, facing the gravity of the consequences, they become heroes in the *classical* sense of the word: arguably, their dilemmas are not unlike those faced by Antigone, Hamlet and other iconic figures in history, literature and mythology. Such is the central premise of this article.

The methodological frame for the analysis of the material in this study has been adopted from Zygmunt Adamczewski's *The Tragic Protest*. Adamczewski's theory, bringing together classical and modern approaches to tragedy, allows for the extrapolation of the principles underlying the protest of such iconic figures as Prometheus, Orestes, Faust, Hamlet, Thomas Stockman or Willy Loman to discourses outside the grand narratives of culture. His theory of the tragic protest serves as a tool facilitating the identification of the features of a quintessential tragic protester, which Adamczewski attains by means of the study of the defining traits of mythological and literary tragic heroes. It is against such a backdrop that I adapt and apply Adamczewski's model to the study of materials related to Chelsea Manning in search of parallels that locate her own form of protest in the universal space of tragedy.

#### THE TRAGIC PROTESTER: IN SEARCH OF AN ARCHETYPE

Chelsea Manning (like other Western political whistleblowers), emerges from a reality which cannot be separated from the legacy of the past. Both historically and today, to build a strong dominion, any "Emperor"<sup>1</sup> imposes his or her rules, establishing an order which

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1. The words "ruler," "Emperor," "government," and other terms of a similar meaning are used interchangeably to denote individuals or privileged

the governed are supposed to believe is universal. As history demonstrates, standing above the law, the “Emperor” wields “absolute power that corrupts absolutely.” Inevitably, he or she becomes the perpetrator of evil. The nature of the “imperial wrongdoings” is especially ambiguous because the “Emperor’s” actions are often justified by means of a rhetorical invocation of the “higher values” or “the greater cause.” Regardless of whether it is the “spreading of civilization,” “defending democracy,” or “fighting terrorism,” the “higher reasons” have always functioned as a potential cover for conquest, legitimizing exploitation, enslavement, torture, or genocide. It is from such an “imperial” order that the whistleblower arises: questioning the foundations of the system, he or she draws others’ attention to flaws in the “imperial” plan, debarring injustice or crimes committed by the “Emperor,” who does not have to abide by the laws he or she creates for all others.

The protest incarnates the freedom to rebel. To create a new reality, the protester must step outside the oppressive order, not unlike Faust, for whom the protest “against the reality he has been led to traverse presses him to stand up against the God he has been led to obey” (Adamczewski 119), and not unlike Orestes, who declares: “Neither slave nor master. I am my freedom” (Sartre, *The Flies*, qtd. in Adamczewski 223). By acknowledging his freedom, the protester not only takes upon himself the responsibility to act, but also breaks out of the discursive order, in which he has been imprisoned. Because such acts always carry consequences, one of the most significant elements in the debate concerning the protest has always been the question of the choice: it is standing before an *impossible* choice and its emotional intensity that makes one’s existence tragic.

The *tragic* protester, unlike many others, always stands alone. Like Hamlet, he “is alienated from his entourage, singled out or singling himself out in his choice” (Adamczewski 75). In the situation of a *tragic choice*, all possible options are destructive: one can either choose to exist in the oppressive reality with full awareness of its flaws and thereby doom him or herself to a constant struggle with one’s conscience, or one may choose to take necessary action

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groups wielding power and to emphasize the universality—and constancy—of the “imperial” model of exercising power “above the law.”

and face the consequences, even if that means condemnation, suffering, or death, knowing that “[i]n what you are and choose and become you can strive for property, for integrity, for being true to yourself” (82). The choice of conscious living, which is the essence of being human, is especially consequential in the case of political whistleblowers: “both, or all, of these striving options are in being, are positive, pulling, productive; but mutually for themselves they are negative, repulsing, destructive” (137). For many a political protester this is a Promethean choice: his “is the conflict of value[s], between the existential significance of the human being as such and the essential order of nature as organized by the law of Zeus whose care does not extend to men” (41). The tragic dilemma leaves no hope for a happy end: like Orestes, who “to claim his blood [...] has to destroy his blood, [...] to establish his place in Argos [he] is to be refused and banished by Argos, where, empty, in the attempt to flee his solitude he ends in flight and solitude” (204), the tragic protester acts against what is dear to protect it, often vilified by those he strives to protect, and always alone:

How does Hamlet stand toward the mankind around him? His story is essentially one of isolation, approximating within human limits the solitude of the Titan. [...] Hamlet is alone, and would remain so probably in any station of human society, because he makes himself alone by withdrawal, precisely like Prometheus. (74)

*Captive Minds  
Normativities  
and Protests*

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Like Orestes, also Hamlet and Prometheus carry the burden of responsibility. As they decide to take up an impossible fight, they doom themselves to suffering in isolation. In the final quest in which they are engaged there is no room for other commitments, no space for sharing moments of everyday life with others. Tragic protesters, questioning the “universality” of the order that others find to be the only reality they can imagine, are often outcasts from their own societies. Afraid of losing *what they know*, turning a blind eye to injustice around them, the very people for whom the protesters fight fail to recognize their own champions, who, like Thomas Stockman, are often ascribed “shocking, injurious, seemingly alien label of ‘an enemy of the people’” (162). Choosing to act, a tragic protester chooses to be “ready to accept social exile, sacrificing himself for the sake of his fellow-citizens though against

their present passion; he clings to his liberating idea but is willing to embrace all men within it” (203), even though those he or she fights for may have not yet broken free from the ideology which entraps them. The element of self-sacrifice for sake of those who “do not understand” puts the protesters in a sympathetic light: they are those who do the right thing, expecting no gratitude or glory, yet are ready to suffer for the greater good of others.

If, under the rule of Zeus, people’s lives have no real significance, it is not entirely untrue of real-life “Emperors,” whose primary and overarching interest is the interest of the *polis*. Common people remain insignificant: the ruler may keep them relatively comfortable and occupied to avoid rebellion that could upturn their own sense of safety and comfort. For Prometheus and Orestes—it is unbearable to stand by and watch as people become dehumanized due to their own inclination towards conformity and submissiveness. Yet,

Should men embrace the alternative in flight from tragedy? Many will. [...] But some will choose to stay alone, deeming themselves free, to stand up for their own being, to exist as unique men. To those few a protest, even if always a lost cause, even if only a protest against, in bounds of time, will be worth their while, their short while in the world. To those the Titanic challenger of heaven opens the temporal entrance into tragic being. They will live as proper creatures of Prometheus.(43)

The essential factor conditioning the protester’s decision to act upon the acknowledged fact that there is a flaw in the dominant order of reality is his or her morality. As Adamczewski observes, “the source of man’s tragic possibilities is his own disposition in the world he dwells in, his proper way to be, his ethos” (16). It is the power of his ethos that makes it *impossible* for Hamlet *not to act*.

With qualms, [Hamlet] has to play the game of his own blood. That is what his princely ambition means to him. It means an existence demanding, desperate and doubtful of its own deserts, yet an existence unavoidably human, unavoidably conscious, unavoidably proper. (73)

“The name of his [Hamlet’s] ‘sickness,’” Adamczewski continues, “is quest for integrity” (95). Being a prince demands from him more than is demanded from others: “the time is out of joint”

and to “set it right” he must avenge his father. Although royal blood is not an usual characteristics among the actors of tragedies playing out in the Aristotelian order, their morality and the morality of contemporary tragic protesters work in a similar way. Unlike the crowd, the tragic protesters rely upon a strong set of values that makes them feel responsible for what happens around them irrespective of personal consequences. Orestes, for the sake of his people, accepts the exile from his land: because he cares for others, he sacrifices himself.

In the face of the overwhelming weight of law, divine, natural, social, this outcast promises to admit “no other law but mine.” When so an inter-human frame of reference is lacking, or when the man in question even explicitly demands to be excluded from it, how can a defect be classified, how can crime be contraposed to merit? Certainly, some externally “objective” adverse verdict and sanction are always available: a man can be judged and punished as criminal by powers outside him. Yet such external powers may miss the heart of the problem of justice, when they are powerless to make him recognize his act as improper, and repent for it; when he continues to regard himself not as a criminal but as a persecuted martyr, the task of justice has hardly been fulfilled. (Adamczewski 205)

Throughout history, law has often proven far from synonymous with morality: suffice it to remember that slavery, the Shoah, the Roma genocide, as well as numerous other crimes against humanity were legal in the light of the laws in force, and those who would protest against them would thereby act against the law. Such ambiguities pose a challenge: they pose essential questions concerning the *justification* of existing regimes, but also the essentials of the worldviews shared by those who protest against them.

It is so because at the heart of the tragic protest lies the deconstruction of the linguistic order based on binary oppositions arbitrarily imposed by the “Emperor.” Deconstructing the opposition between good and evil as defined by the discourse centralized by the “Emperor”—a discourse posited as universal and guarded by those in whose interest it is to uphold the order of the empire, the protester deconstructs the fundament of the law, whose function is to normativize the order preferred by those wielding power. Questioning the basic premises of the *organization*, such

an act dis-*organizes* it in a fashion resembling the manner in which dis-*ease* deconstructs and displaces bodily “ease” as either primary of unmarked state of affairs, sending it to the margin of experience, temporarily (or permanently) transferring the position of centrality to un-“ease.” It is reflected in Hamlet’s withdrawal from the world, in Orestes’ frustration with his people, or in Willy Loman’s inability to continue to live.

Man is not in question here as an organism nor yet as a mind alone. And yet tragedy can be said to effect for the human being what illness does for the human organism: dis-organize it—or what insanity does for the human mentality: render it de-mented, un-mindful, in the sense of moving it outside the wholesome norms in security and accomplishment of man-kind. In a darker significance, tragedy is dis-ease.(265)

Many cultures recognize one’s existence in a balance, in “ease” and in harmony, as a precondition of a healthy body and a healthy mind. Familiarity with what we craft to be our lives, in the present and in the future, gives us as individuals a sense of safety, predictability—and an illusion of being in control. All of that falls apart when the tragic protest becomes one’s life. Paradoxically, the deconstruction of an oppressive ideology (which, in the case of a tragic protester, may prove tantamount to throwing one’s self-definition—or even the whole frame of one’s life’s reference—entirely out of balance) may then result in deconstructing the binaries underlying the discourses of justification for, or explanation of, one’s whole existence. *Dis-ease* is an *absence* of *ease* one needs to live a harmonious life—and simultaneously it is an ailment, defined, on the contrary, by its painful *presence*. One contradicts another, one makes another impossible, because presence and absence are mutually exclusive. Yet it is exactly this oscillation that underlies tragedy in its aporetic ineffability.

Thus, the knowledge of the truth beyond centralized discourses of “the only truth” condemns the protesters with double intensity, placing them in an existential deadlock: their choice is either to live a life of constant suppression of conscience or to take action, as a result which their lives may turn to ruin. No matter how objectively significant the truth is, it is critical for those whose heretofore existence stops in a sudden moment of awakening and a new, dis-eased life starts henceforth. The quintessential

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protester “wages a campaign in the name of truth, as truth were a goddess or an idol and he the select defender, as if it were above and not within his own being there; and so he despises the ‘false’ altars of truth erected by other men” (Adamczewski 171).

In the face of its alternatives, truth becomes a higher moral value: it is worth risking one’s life, especially that suppressing such a realization would make one’s life unbearable anyway. Importantly, the “false altars of truth,” which the protester already recognizes as structures catering to the celebration of lies, may be erected to institute any ideology, regime or preferred perception of the world: capitalism, communism, religion, nationalism or imperialism, liberalism or conservatism.

The truth emerges as a complex phenomenon: for the truth about what proper existence is about one is ready to fight and make sacrifices. Nonetheless, even such a truth is far from absolute: like objective laws or objective execution of those laws, the word “truth,” upon which the former concepts depend, is a product of discourse. Existing in (and owing to) language, it reflects the principles of the metanarrative which gave rise to the language and, as such, is conditioned by the limits of the category-based linguistic image of the world. Therefore—“[t]his above all,—to thine own self be true! [...] Truth to one’s own is a disposition not publicly accessible, not objectively measurable, not susceptible to judgement of others; it is the unique feeling of weight in the task of one’s own existence. Is it then any different from conscience?” (Adamczewski 75).

The moment in which truth and the ethos of the protester intertwine is the one in which the nature of subjectivity as well as the tragic nature of the human condition are revealed: “truth which is distinctly and genuinely tragic, truth in which content and not just form is tragic, truth which is displayed only to those whose vision is tragic, is a prospect not to be dismissed” (Adamczewski 10). The truth as one sees it causes one’s tragedy as it propels an individual to act. Irrespective of whether it is easy or hard to undermine, regardless of the fact that its perception is always perspectivist, it has a tangible effect on an individual’s life.

Therefore suffering is an inherent element of the tragic protest. In its most profound dimension, suffering engages all of the human mind and influences all physical aspects of one’s existence. Oedipus

“cries and curses [protesting] against this truth of existence which is by no means easy to bear” (Adamczewski 61). Hamlet is “a man who knows he is dealing with a dangerous affair, an affair of state, but an affair which disturbs him very intimately” (Adamczewski 71). And

what makes Loman’s protest tragic is not its quality, its objectives, its influence on him, but its mere continuous though fading presence: its existence in him. This is his cry: “The woods are burning!” He is as a human being fully aware of the oppressive heat, of flames pressing ever closer, of himself sinking suppressed. (Adamczewski 190)

Tragic protesters suffer as they struggle with unanswered (and sometimes unanswerable) questions; they suffer as they give themselves wholly to the cause that often remains beyond the logic of institutionalized discourse; they suffer because their sacrifice is often futile; they suffer because no matter what they choose to do, they will face tremendous consequences.

The existential condition of the tragic protester, as Zygmunt Adamczewski’s analysis demonstrates, epitomized by literary, mythological and historical figures, seems to be timeless. Brought together, the traits of the characters studied by the scholar form a model so old and so deeply inscribed into the texture of culture that its significance is close to that of an archetype. It is therefore possible to argue that the iconic contemporary political whistleblowers, like Daniel Ellsberg, Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning, seem to emulate that archetype, as their personal tragedies, invisible beyond the surface of their mass media image, share in the sublime dimension of the epic tragedies of the canonical tragic protesters of the western world.

#### AGAINST APATHY: THE TRAGEDY OF SPEAKING OUT

“This is possibly one of the more significant documents of our time removing the fog of war and revealing the true nature of twenty-first century asymmetric warfare. [...] Have a good day” (Shaer 2017)—Chelsea Manning wrote in an anonymous text file she wanted to attach to the largest collection of classified or sensitive military and diplomatic documents ever leaked to the public. As is well known, serving as a United States army intelligence analyst,

Manning disclosed nearly 750 thousand documents to WikiLeaks, including, as Wikipedia informs us, 250,000 diplomatic telegrams, video footage of the July 12, 2007, Baghdad airstrike, and the video of the Granai airstrike). Reported by Adrián Alfonso Lamo Atwood, a threat analyst and a hacker, in whom she had confided, she was arrested in 2011. Having spent two years in confinement, including eleven months in the level 1 military prison in Quantico, Virginia (in maximum-security custody),<sup>2</sup> she was charged under the Espionage Act and sentenced to 35 years of imprisonment (“Wikileaks: The Forgotten Man”). In 2017, she was released after her sentence was commuted by President Barack Obama.

Although patterns seem similar, the case of Manning is different than the cases of other contemporary whistleblowers like Daniel Ellsberg or Edward Snowden. It is so because of the clash between her gender identity and her biological sex, which she later described as a “giant, cosmic toothache” to which no remedy could be found. “[...] Morning, evening, breakfast, lunch, dinner, wherever you are. It’s everywhere you go” (Shaer). Especially in the context of the military profession, such a “cosmic” experience might sensitize a person to the suffering of others to a greater extent than could be the case otherwise. Admittedly, until her trial, conviction, release and sex change, Manning had spent all of her life hiding her true self. “[L]iving such an opaque life,” she confessed, “has forced me never to take transparency, openness, and honesty for granted” (Hansen). Yet, the sense of loneliness experienced while being with others had always been a part of her existential experience, and a familiar space. “I’ve been so isolated so long...,” she recalls, “I just wanted to be nice, and live a normal life... but events kept forcing me to figure out ways to survive... smart enough

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2. “[B]y definition, Level I means that it ‘provide[d] pretrial and short-term posttrial confinement support. Level I confinement facilities are generally limited to 90 or fewer days. When necessary, Level I facilities may confine prisoners more than 90 days, but not to exceed 1 year.’” The Army Corrections System, AR 19–47 Section 2–2 “Components of the Army Corrections System,” qtd. in the Wikipedia entry: “Marine Corps Brig, Quantico,” in: *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marine\\_Corps\\_Brig,\\_Quantico](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marine_Corps_Brig,_Quantico) (Accessed 15 April 2020).

to know what's going on, but helpless to do anything... no-one took any notice of me" ("Bradley Manning in his own Words")<sup>3</sup>.

Perhaps it is also because of her otherness that some of the traits characterizing the prototypical tragic protesters had been hers long before she became one of the world's most prominent whistleblowers. Before she embraced her female identity, she had often been misunderstood and, since elementary school, found fitting into her environment challenging. But it was especially during the time of her service in the army that her experience of marginalization became particularly hurtful (Hansen; Shaer). One of the soldiers who served with her later recalled that "Manning was routinely called a 'faggot.' The guy took it from every side. He couldn't please anyone. And he tried. He really did" (Shaer). Manning's perception of war was, therefore, multifaceted: downgraded and slighted as a soldier "trying her best" and overwhelmed with the gravity of her sudden discovery of the unbearable truth about the war in which she was obliged to fight in the name of her country, she faced a dilemma of epic dimensions.

Noticing obvious contradictions between the official discourse and the ruthlessness of the daily military practice, in her final Facebook message to her partner, Tyler Watkins, she would comment upon her experience thus: "I live in a very real world, where deaths and detainment are just statistics; where idealistic calls for 'liberation' and 'freedom' are utterly meaningless" (O'Kane). The situation in which she found herself was governed by unclear rules, where moral values would fluctuate and where "patriotism [would be] used to excuse acts that a democracy should abhor" (Rosenthal). When she witnessed unjust and undemocratic actions, she decided to report it to her commander in hope of his intervention. Then,

[s]he is told to 'shut up' and instead to 'explain' to her commander how she can help further restrict free speech and democracy. It would be a mistake, though, to read this moment as a simple *silencing* of Manning. Rather, her commanding officer also commands her to *speak*

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3. Spelling (sometimes reflecting pronunciation) and text editing in the citations from the chat logs are quoted in the original form, except for apparently unintentional underlining, which has been removed.

*differently*—to speak in the register of American interests rather than in terms of right and wrong, true and false. (Maxwell)

In this quote from her “Truth in Public: Chelsea Manning, Gender Identity, and the Politics of Truth-Telling,” Linda Maxwell focuses on the language of the army—the language where there is no room for distinctions based on elementary moral values. Instead, with no regard for democracy or the value of human life, the soldiers are to be concerned with patriotism defined broadly as “doing what is good for the United States.” Nonetheless, the imposed compulsion to engage in what is a parallel to Orwellian newspeak did not have an expected effect on Manning.

The most obvious thing that jumps out at the reader from this story is American hypocrisy: Manning realizes that the United States says that it is promoting democracy and free speech, when in reality it is helping the Iraqis restrict free speech and democracy on behalf of stability. (Maxwell)

Realizing the truth, she could not feel comfortable witnessing the abuse of human rights and the values of democracy as a representative of the abuser. The discourse of justification imposed by the army and expected to be taken for granted by the U.S. soldiers underwent an unanticipated deconstruction: the oppositions between “just” and “unjust,” “honorable” and “dishonorable,” “patriotic” and “unpatriotic” collapsed, activating an altogether new configuration of values, which made it impossible for Manning to suppress the knowledge that she attained. In one of her chats, she declares:

(02:26:01 PM) bradass87: i dont believe in good guys versus bad guys anymore... i only [see] a plethora of states acting in self interest... with varying ethics and moral standards of course, but self-interest nonetheless. (Hansen)

Evidently, the disillusionment with the world around her let Manning perceive reality more clearly than ever before. It allowed her to see that what the “Empire” construes as “objectively just” and based on allegedly “universal values”—is only an illusion. Once she found the material testifying to the U.S. military crimes (particularly the video of the July 12, 2007, Baghdad airstrike known

as *Collateral Murder*) she no longer was able to rationalize them. "It was still on my mind," she declared, "... i kept that in my mind for weeks... probably a month and a half... before i forwarded it to them" (Hansen). Her dramatic confession demonstrates that Manning faced an impossible choice between staying loyal to the state, which she represented as a U.S. soldier, and staying loyal to herself by doing what she thought was right.

Her dilemma was finally resolved when Manning's strong sense of responsibility prevailed. Interpreting her choice, Ellsberg claims that "Manning was defending the Constitution in revealing the truth about the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan" (qtd. in McGreal), but what seems clear from the logs of her chats is that it was her empathy, perhaps to an extent greater than her rationality, that was the driving force of her actions. In her conversation with Lamo she declared: "i cant separate myself from others... i feel connected to everybody... like they were distant family... i... care?" and then she adds: "we're human... and we're killing ourselves... and no-one seems to see that... and it bothers me... apathy... apathy is far worse than the active participation" (Hansen). Manning's sense of connectedness with those suffering made it impossible for her to suppress the gravity of the truth that she had discovered about how the U.S. fought its war, and to stand by the ideology underlying both the American propaganda and the army cease-and-desist rules. She confessed: "i just... couldnt let these things stay inside of the system... and inside of my head..." (Hansen).

The psychological urge to shake off the unbearable burden excluded the possibility of her passivity: reinforced with her belief that "apathy is worse than wrongdoing," it pushed her into action. Heather Brooke confirms it, arguing that it was Manning's sensitivity to human suffering which energized her: "if Manning is convicted, it will be because his individual dedication to human ethics far surpasses that of the U.S. government" (Brooke). Describing herself as a humanist, Manning acts on the values that the philosophy of humanism embraces; that, however, does not exclude her struggle with doubt, which is strongly manifest in her conversations with Lamo. Although the exchange below was partly related to her insecurity regarding her gender, parts of it express concern about the disclosed material.

(02:20:57 AM) bradass87: well, it was forwarded to WL  
(02:21:18 AM) bradass87: and god knows what happens now  
(02:22:27 AM) bradass87: hopefully worldwide discussion, debates,  
and reforms  
(02:23:06 AM) bradass87: if not... than we're doomed  
(02:23:18 AM) bradass87: as a species  
(02:24:13 AM) bradass87: i will officially give up on the society we have  
if nothing happens. (Hansen)

Manning put her faith in people and in essential democratic values. She was confident about the fact that people had an obligation to act, to defy the government, rather than conform to the U.S. war policy. Her choice to do so, however, rendered her the epitome of loneliness, and that in more than one respect. The disclosure of the materials caused the multiplication of the dimensions of isolation that Manning would have to simultaneously suffer. Next to metaphysical and emotional isolation she had been experiencing for years, her actual imprisonment would physically isolate her from others in the world. After her arrest, the protester was detained in Quantico, in solitary confinement which lasted roughly eleven months. Some time after her release, Manning thus recalls the time when her detention began: "I was completely isolated. [...] I've been forgotten about, and I've just disappeared" (Shaer). Experiencing loneliness in such a profound way, when she felt her existence was ignored, Manning discovered yet another dimension of tragedy: even those whose rights she fought for failed to appreciate her sacrifice. It was only after enough international political pressure from various non-governmental organizations and from the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights was exerted upon the U.S. administration that she was moved to Fort Leavenworth (Rothe). In the context of the violation of human rights, it cannot be questioned that what she experienced in the first years after her arrest was deep emotional trauma combined with humiliation. During her stay in Quantico, Manning stated:

In fact, I am currently the only detainee being held under MAX Custody [...] As a result of being placed on Suicide Risk, I was confined to my cell for 24 h a day. I was also stripped of all clothing with the exception of my underwear. Additionally, my prescription eyeglasses were taken from me. Due to not having my glasses, I was forced to sit in essential

blindness during the day. [...] The determination to place me on Suicide Risk was without justification and therefore constitutes unlawful pre-trial punishment. (Manning)

Facing severe punitive measures even before her trial, isolated, humiliated, forgotten, Manning did not have a future to which to look forward with much hope. A lifetime in prison or even a death penalty were distinct possibilities and, at the time of her arrest, the commutation of the verdict seemed unlikely. Yet, beyond the point of no return, her individuality found expression mainly in terms of conscious shaping of her worldview against a backdrop of the binaries defining the dominant norms of the heteronormative society, which, in the context of the military, would assume acute forms of unrelenting domination of the language of masculinity. Self-conscious and unable to suppress that self-consciousness, Manning suffered the consequences of her defiance of both the social norms and the principles underlying the functioning of the military environment with its simplified ethics and its obvious denial of empathy: those trained to shoot and kill must be systematically de-sensitized to the suffering they cause and cannot afford any doubts that could result in hesitation putting their survival at risk. Yet, driven by empathy, Chelsea Manning lived up to her declaration: "i had always questioned the [way] things worked, and investigated to find the truth" (Hansen). She wrote to Lomo: "i want people to see the truth... regardless of who they are... because without information, you cannot make informed decisions as a public" (Hansen).

Embracing democratic values, Manning thus expressed her rational belief that it is the role of people to decide whether or not to curtail what in her perspective was their state's wrongdoings. However, it was her *emotional* awareness of the truth that put Manning in a position in which she found it impossible to suppress her knowledge: the gravity of the facts affected her whole existence. "I prefer a painful truth over any blissful fantasy" (Hansen), she declared, and blowing the whistle on the government she disclosed the lies propagated by the U.S. to cover up their real actions and motives, possibly in hope of changing her own dis-eased existence despite the inevitable consequences.

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She declared that after she had realized the truth under the veil of the military propaganda “everything started slipping” and that she “saw things differently” (Hansen). With all the former moral imperatives losing validity as a result of the spontaneous deconstruction of the basic distinctions between good and evil, Manning felt lost in her reality: “im just kind of drifting now...,” she declared, and plainly confessed her depressive state: “im a wreck” (Hansen). Her dramatic projection of the unavoidably painful future (“still gonna be weird watching the world change on the macro scale, while my life changes on the micro” [Hansen]), seems to indicate that her choice to embrace the possible death sentence or lifetime imprisonment would still be more bearable than living in silence, haunted by the facts about the war she would not be able to unlearn. Believing in democracy and in freedom of information, yet aware of the unavoidable fallout of her possible action, she struggled with the decision she faced: although she had been in possession of the shocking material for several months, she did not disclose the truth immediately. Yet, when she finally blew the whistle, her tragic protest was a mature act of conscience, one based on self-reflection and on the acknowledgment of the impossibility of a choice for which she would not be ready to pay the price of her peace of mind.

APORIAS: THE MAKING OF A TRAGIC HERO  
(CONCLUDING REMARKS)

*Captive Minds  
Normativities  
and Protests*

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In Manning’s perception, the governmental propaganda, resting upon the ethical connotations of such words as “democracy” or “patriotism,” has been used by the state to help exercise its power world-wide. In light of her discoveries, the essential binary oppositions underlying the axiological matrix of the language and ideology imposed by the state became deconstructed. As a result, the primary senses of the key words of the state ideology became marginal, while the formerly marginal interpretations of them, gaining the status of centrality, would result in a complete reversal of her reading of the U.S. government as the warrant of the stability of the essential American values. Driven by a higher moral imperative, recognizing the superiority of the higher law—be it the U.S. Constitution or human rights,

Chelsea Manning faced the dilemma of what it means to serve one's own country.

She came into knowledge which changed her life. The ramifications of the classified facts she discovered made it impossible for her to either suppress the new knowledge and live her life pretending to subscribe to the discourse of the state, or avoid the consequences of the disclosure of the classified information in the public space. The choice she faced was the choice between options of catastrophic consequences: blowing the whistle would come at the price of the loss of her previous life, her identity and her freedom; the decision not to act would compromise her integrity. She liberated herself from the state-imposed ideology when her new knowledge energized the deconstructions of the categories upon which the preferred, allegedly "universal" ideological discourse was based. "Awakened," she in-read her own meaning into the microhistories to which she (involuntarily) became privy, debarring the imperial agenda of the official language of axiology. Aware of the consequences, Manning decided to follow her own conscience and to choose the path of non-conformity rather than adjust to the norms dictated by a sinister ideology used to manipulate masses. True to her beliefs, paying homage to the essential human rights, exercising empathy, Chelsea Manning would epitomize the archetype of a tragic protester, inscribed into the basic metanarratives of western culture and embodied in such iconic characters as Prometheus, Orestes, Hamlet, or Faust. In a world where the opposition between "patriot" and "traitor" ceased to be ethically productive, her defiance of the great system ruling the world, which came at a great personal cost, broke the aporia and provided new directions not only to Manning, but to those who, dis-eased with what they see, needed a trigger for action. Thus, Chelsea Manning became an icon of a whistleblower, and as an icon of heroism she incarnates the values shared by the mythical heroes of the past. As a tragic hero of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, she is perceived as the champion of essential human liberties and rights and a model of personal integrity, all too often opportunistically exchanged for the comfort of conformity by the captive minds of the societies of the late capitalist era.

Because she lived.

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