‘How dare she?!’: Parrhesiastic resistance and the logics of protection of/in international security

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Abstract
Malalai Joya, Greta Thunberg, Idle No More leaders – what do these figures have in common? They each decided to act/speak out against the failures, lacks, exclusions, violence and injustices in the words and deeds of different authorities claiming to act on behalf of (their) security and protection, and thus made visible, challenged and disrupted the dominant logics of protection on which such claim is based. More specifically, they each enacted this critique by performing a contemporary form of parrhesia – a practice in Ancient Greece that consisted in speaking truth frankly and courageously to power, taking risks in doing so out of a sense of duty to improve a situation for oneself and others. Yet none of these women stated anything radically new or shockingly unknown. So why, then, did speaking truths that were already known lead to such dire consequences and intense reactions? This article will argue that by mobilizing the frameworks of logics of protection and parrhesia together, we can have a fuller understanding of these figures’ dissident truth-speaking: it is precisely their positionings within logics of protection that made their truths so daring and, in turn, it is through parrhesia that Joya, Thunberg and Idle No More activists made logics of protection visible through their disruption, opening up potentialities for ‘doing’ and ‘being’ otherwise. The dual framework offered in this article thus offers interesting avenues through which to explore resistance, truth and protection in (feminist) security studies today.

Keywords
Civil society, Foucault, gender, insecurity, international security

Introduction
In 2003, Malalai Joya stood in front of the Loya Jirga and gave a three-minute speech denouncing the presence of war criminals in the assembly. Her life has been threatened ever since. In 2018, at age 15, Greta Thunberg started striking from school to demand urgent action for the climate. After
attracting international fame, she faced virulent personal attacks, including rape threats. In 2012, four Indigenous women in Turtle Island/Canada launched the Idle No More (INM) movement to protect water, land and Indigenous rights against encroachment by the Canadian government. The activists faced personal and political attacks, health consequences caused by hunger strikes, arrests and criminalization.

What do these women have in common? We could argue that each of these figures decided to act/speak out against the failures, lacks, exclusions, violence and injustices in the words and deeds of different authorities claiming to act on behalf of (their) security and protection, and thus made visible, challenged and disrupted the dominant logics of protection on which such a claim is based. In doing so, they not only called into question the claim that such authorities were protecting them/others, but also turned themselves into dissident protectors of the unprotected and unprotectable. More specifically, we could argue that each of these figures enacted this critique by speaking truths to power, and that this can be understood as a contemporary form of parrhesia – a practice in Ancient Greece that, as discussed by Foucault and others, consisted in speaking truth frankly and courageously to power, taking risks in doing so out of a sense of duty to improve a situation for oneself and others (Foucault, 2001). Yet none of these women stated anything radically new or shockingly unknown: at the time of their truth-speaking, you could read most of their accusations in a report by Human Rights Watch, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and/or Amnesty International. Hence none of these actors claim to be revealing/uncovering the truth but rather to expose the ‘open secrets’ of different authorities claiming to enact protection. So why, then, did speaking out against those ‘open secrets’ lead to such dire consequences and intense reactions?

To answer this question, we need to make two theoretical moves. First, starting from the work in feminist security studies on the logic of masculinist protection, we need to extend, complicate and pluralize this work to make sense of the multiple, interrelated and sometimes contradictory logics of protection in which we are embedded (such as those of race, age, dis/ability, settler-coloniality, coloniality, and so on), as well as the subject positions, economies of power and, more importantly, inevitable resistance such logics produce, rely upon and function through, beyond the battlefield and traditional sites of power/security. Second, we need to mobilize Foucauldian work on parrhesia from a feminist perspective attentive to the power relations involved in the possibilities and risks associated with speaking truth to power. My argument in this article is that by mobilizing these two frameworks together, we can have a fuller understanding of the dissident truth-speaking of figures such as Joya, Thunberg and INM activists. In fact, by locating them within the multiple logics of protection in which they are embedded, we can better understand the context that makes parrhesia both possible and risky: it is precisely their positionings within such logics that made their truths so daring. In turn, by mobilizing parrhesia, we can better understand what truth-speaking as a praxis does to dominant logics of protection, even when it is about saying out loud what is already known. This article will, first, briefly develop the theoretical framework outlined above, then apply it to the cases of Malalai Joya, Greta Thunberg and Idle No More, before reading those cases together to explore what such a framework can bring to (feminist) security studies.

Logics of protection

Feminists in security studies have long explored how a logic of masculinist/gendered protection is naturalized as common sense to justify the use of force and maintain the status quo. This logic divides the world between masculine protectors (or ‘just warriors’) and feminine protected (or ‘beautiful souls’) (Ase, 2018; Elshtain, 1995; Stiehm, 1982; Young, 2003). In this asymmetric
dynamic, the protector has access to force and knowledge about threats, while the protected relies and depends on her protector, exchanging (some of) her freedom and autonomy for protection. This logic can work at times like a racket: the protectors can become the main threats to the protected who refuse this dynamic. At other times, it works instead like benevolent, self-sacrificing pastoral protection (Young, 2003). Between these two versions lies a continuum. This logic extends to the state by positioning some leaders and professionals, such as police officers, as the protectors and the rest of the citizens as the protected. Internationally, one state can also mobilize such logic to position itself as the (masculine) protector of another state considered vulnerable and incapable of protecting itself (feminized). It serves as a justification for war and a strong motivator for recruitment (Stiehm, 1982). When women do occupy the role of an official protector as female soldiers, for example, they are still caught within the same masculinist logic and are often portrayed as inherently nonviolent and in need of protection by their male colleagues, remaining the beautiful souls ‘who cannot escape the mould even with a gun and a uniform’ (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007: 86).

While this work has been applied in feminist security studies to different contexts, it has not been retheorized in depth and tends to have been applied mostly to situations regarding armed forces and war. But is the protector always the one carrying the gun or ordering its use? How can we use the logic of masculinist protection to understand threats we are facing today, such as the climate crisis? This work has also focused on the important task of studying how the logic of masculinist protection is mobilized by (white) Western actors to justify the status quo. Yet is it universal and/or working the same way across all contexts?

From this important starting point, this work can thus be extended and complicated. First, the logic of masculinist protection is itself plural and varies across circumstances (a soldier on the battlefield as opposed to when he is with his teenage daughter, or a nuclear strategist versus a politician, for example). But, more importantly, the logic of masculinist protection is only one among many that ‘come into existence in and through each other’ (paraphrasing McClintock, 1995: 5), such as race, imperial/colonial, settler-colonial, homo/heteronormative logics of protection, and so on. This also means that such logics are contextual: the race logics of protection in Brazil, the USA and Israel, for example, are not the same, nor do they necessarily intersect with gendered, (settler-) colonial and/or sexualized logics of protection in the same ways. These different logics thus have to be studied empirically in all their complexity and diversity.

They are also relational in that they depend upon the co-construction of the protector and the protected, but also of the unprotected (to whom protection is ‘withdrawn’/denied because of their refusal to ‘behave’ like ‘beautiful souls’) and the unprotectable (to whom protection was never offered in the first place, who is considered outside the realm of protection altogether and is thus marking the boundaries of the ‘fully human’ within it). In other words, logics of protection produce the subjects of protection (the protectors) and its objects (the protected), but also the ‘abjects’ of protection (the unprotected and the unprotectable). More importantly, they do not function under an ‘either/or’ logic (as in, you are either protected or protector or unprotected/unprotectable): the autistic girl, the Afghan politician and the Indigenous activists can be both protected and/or protector and/or unprotected and/or unprotectable at the same time. If we are to make sense of figures such as Joya, Thunberg and INM activists, we must analyse how dissident female protectors can occupy all those positionings at the same time.

Using a Foucauldian framework, we can thus say that logics of protection are productive (of subjects, norms, behaviours) and operate through different economies of power: from sovereign/coercive (through demonstrations of force), to pastoral/governing (through benevolent ‘care’), to disciplinary/normalizing (through an inescapable security ‘gaze’ and the never-ending collection of knowledge about the protected) forms of power. People, in turn, internalize judgments/norms about how to behave as a ‘good citizen’ worthy of protection and/or as an actual/potential protector.
Those who ‘fail’ to embody the protector and/or protected figure, whether by action or design, will also internalize these norms by knowing not to count on, and even to avoid, official protectors. These logics are thus not only about providing security in terms of military and state power, but also about protecting social orders, the status quo, and the symbolic and actual borders that keep them in place.

Yet protection can never be fully guaranteed and is always bound to fail. In fact, it regularly fails. How, then, do logics of protection operate? They also function through an economy of fear that involves the symbolic exchange/circulation of obedience/submission for a feeling of security/protection. This affective relief is produced through a performative repetition of security practices by which protection becomes the ‘truth’ it was supposed to describe all along: by taking shoes off at the airport, for example, one feels protected; yet one indeed is/becomes/remains protected by obediently performing such a security act. Therefore, logics of protection are about protecting these ‘open secrets’ from ourselves: institutions of protection offer ‘truths’, and we accept those truths in exchange for a feeling of safety.

But does this mean that logics of protection are always bound to be reproduced/reinforced? Can being protected, unprotected and/or unprotectable be reduced to a position of silent gratitude and submission? How can we account for varying levels of agency within such logics and how they are resisted, disrupted and challenged?

Parrhesia

Studied at length by Foucault (2001: 19) at the end of his life, parrhesia refers to ‘a verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to truth, and risks his life because he recognises truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself)’. It thus involves five core elements: frankness, truth, risk, criticism and duty.

First, parrhesiastes are understood as the ones who speak frankly, without concealing anything, and say as directly as possible everything they have in mind, making it clear that they are stating their own opinion (as opposed to flattery or rhetoric) (Foucault, 2001: 12). Parrhesia therefore involves a binding relationship between the speaker and what they say: through parrhesia, the speaker becomes ‘the person who tells the truth, who has told the truth, and who recognises [her] self in and as the person who has told the truth’ (Foucault, 2010: 68).

Second, in parrhesia, truth does not rely on a demonstration of factual evidence but rather on the personal qualities of the speaker: if there is some way of ‘proving’ that what they say is true, it is through the possession of a certain moral quality, namely, courage (Foucault, 2001: 15). In parrhesia, ‘the truths told are there, what is needed is someone courageous enough to speak them’ (Ross, 2008: 69). In other words, it is stating that the emperor has no clothes: it is saying something that is already known but that needs to remain silent for things to keep going (Weiskopf and Tobias-Miersch, 2016: 1636). Parrhesia is thus not about the content of the truth but about the act of telling: it is an activity, an event. It is not about ‘me’ or ‘this’: it is about ‘me saying this’ (Vandekerckhove and Langenberg, 2012: 38). Hence parrhesiastic truth is not epistemological, as something to be discovered, nor confessional, as something to be extracted from the depth of one’s soul, but political (Dyrberg, 2014: 73).

Third, a parrhesiaste is someone who takes a risk and has the courage to say the truth in the face of some danger, even death in extreme cases. Because the speaker is always inferior to the one they speak to: ‘the parrhesia comes from “below,” as it were, and is directed towards “above”’ (Foucault, 2001: 18). This difference in power involves a risk that the parrhesiastes will be punished by the powerful for their truth-telling.
Fourth, this risk stems from the fact that parrhesia is a form of criticism, and is thus an oppositional practice rooted in disobedience: ‘where there is obedience, there cannot be parrhesia’ (Foucault, 2011: 336).

Fifth, speaking the truth is regarded as a duty by the speaker, who was free to remain silent in the face of danger but chose parrhesia instead. It is thus a practice grounded in freedom that is felt by the parrhesiaste as a moral duty towards truth, a duty towards others and a duty towards oneself.

Parrhesia is therefore an ethical and a political practice that opens up ‘the space for new possibilities of “being” (i.e., the ethical) and “doing with and over others” (i.e., the political) to emerge’ (Contu, 2014: 394). It can also be judicial: it involves someone in a profoundly unequal situation who speaks truth to the injustices committed by the powerful who have misused their own strength (Foucault, 2010: 154). As Lida Maxwell (2019: 24) puts it, in such instances when parrhesia comes from ‘outsiders’ with no access to the agora, it is about constituting ‘power out of a position of powerlessness’ and ‘[c]reat[ing] a community of responsive listeners’. But how can we further account for positionality in who can speak the truth, be heard and recognized as a truth-teller; how such truth can be ‘spoken’ and with what consequences? To do so, we need to ground parrhesia in a framework, such as that of logics of protection, that can provide context for understanding what makes parrhesia risky in the first place, and more risky for some than for others.

Malalai Joya: Speaking truth to warlords

In an interview with Democracy Now! from July 2021, Malalai Joya (2021) commented on George W. Bush’s concerns for Afghan women following the withdrawals of US troops from Afghanistan. She stated what she has been saying with inflexible constancy since she first spoke out in front of the Loya Jirga in 2003: she calls out the impunity of war criminals who sit in democratic institutions without having been judged for their past and ongoing crimes, and she denounces the hypocrisy and complicity of local and international actors who turn a blind eye to those crimes in the name of democratization and women’s liberation while, she argues, the situation of women and Afghans in general has not improved but rather worsened under US and NATO occupation. This fearless truth-speaking can be understood as a form of parrhesia grounded in the gendered colonial/imperial and internal logics of protection in Afghanistan: by speaking out, Joya turned herself from protected/unprotected/unprotectable into a dissident protector of ‘the barefoot Afghan people’ (Mulvad, 2006).

Colonial logics of protection of/in Afghanistan

Colonialism/imperialism is often seen as a form of sovereign power exercised through domination, exploitation and violence. However, what is notable about ‘imperial formations’ (Stoler, 2006) is that they usually rely on benevolent logics of protection to exercise and justify their reign: ‘The most frightening thing about imperialism, its long-term toxic effect, what secures it, what cements it, is the benevolent self-representation of the imperialist as saviour’ (Spivak, 1999: 54). Through ‘appeals to moral uplift, compassionate charity, appreciation of cultural diversity, and protection of “brown women and children” against “brown men”’ (Stoler, 2006: 133–134, paraphrasing Spivak, 1988), the colonizer establishes himself as the one who protects through forms of pastoral care and who is exceptionally ‘good’ to the colonized compared to other imperial forces (Stoler, 2006: 140). Western women and feminists, following similar logics, often establish themselves as liberated subjects by portraying women from the Global South as monolithic victims of oppression in need of rescue and thus as their constitutive opposites (Mohanty, 2003).
Afghanistan can be placed within such logics. Nicknamed ‘the graveyard of empire’, it is described as the place ‘where empires come to die’ (Manchanda, 2017: 386) owing to its population’s continued and fierce resistance against foreign invasions and the subsequent failure of both the British and Soviet empires (and now also the US empire) to submit, colonize and control the country. If this enduring resistance is a source of national pride, Afghanistan can best be seen as a ‘quasi-colonial’ state: ‘a state that was formed by colonial diktat but not occupied by colonial order, as it were’ (Manchanda, 2017: 390). This location within imperial formations positions the country as both a threat to global safety and stability through hypermasculine depictions of it as a space of deviance, savagery and Islamic fundamentalism, and as in constant need of saving/protecting (hence feminized) through discourses of state failure, fragility and collapse (Manchanda, 2020). In fact, these somewhat contradictory discourses depict Afghanistan as the protected in need of foreign rescue (incapable of protecting its own citizens and borders), the unprotected (for refusing imperial powers’ benevolent protection through local resistance) and, ultimately, the unprotectable (blamed for its own troubles because of its ‘morally, socially and politically bankrupt’ nature [Manchanda, 2017: 389]). This was particularly explicit in the justifications and discourses surrounding the ‘war on terror’ and the need to intervene in the early 2000s.

In fact, such discourses relied heavily on portraying the USA as the patriarchal protector of feminized nations (Iraq and Afghanistan) in need of saving from their brutal and barbaric culture/men/leaders, as was explored by an important body of work in feminist security studies and beyond (Hunt and Rygiel, 2006; Sjoberg, 2010; Steans, 2008). More specifically, the main rhetoric used to justify Western intervention in Afghanistan relied explicitly and heavily on positioning Afghan women as the perfect incarnation of the damsels in distress in need of protection/rescue by an enlightened West, sometimes even from themselves (when/if they refused to express silent gratitude and/or unveil for the foreign ‘saviours’). In these representations, the West is constructed as the ‘just warrior’ through discourses of gender exceptionalism, with the complicity of (some) Western feminists. This new/old discourse aimed at presenting military intervention as humanitarian benevolence thus relied heavily on gendered imperial logics of protection.³

**Internal logics of protection**

As for logics of protection internal to Afghanistan, most writings tend to present the country as divided along ethnic and tribal lines, arguing that a common national identity is recent and weak in comparison to clan- and tribe-based forms of identity (Shahrani, 2002). They also rely on a supranational logic of religious protection, understanding Islam both as the object of protection (protecting Islam from foreign impositions of secularity, as under the Soviets, for example) and as a form of protection (through the pan-Islamic community as a network of solidarity against outside threats). Afghan logics of protection thus seem to rely on local, religious, tribal and ethnic communities offering protection to kin members. Yet, considering the fact that there has never been a national census in Afghanistan (Hyman, 2002: 309), all knowledge about/of the country, in particular about its tribal and ethnic divisions, is inherently colonial and derives from the context of foreign military interventions benefitting from essentializing and exaggerating divisions (Hanifi, 2012; Manchanda, 2020).

Moreover, the ongoing war raging in Afghanistan for over 40 years means that communities tend to organize locally along different lines of loyalty, depending more on survival strategies than on strong ethnic or tribal rivalries (Schu, 2013). More importantly, the division of Afghanistan between violently competing warlord fiefdoms from the 1990s onwards means that security and loyalty are necessarily shifting, resulting in a lack of stability in which local populations have little
choice but to rally under the strongest. In fact, we could argue that Afghan logics of protection under the power of heavily armed warlords function overwhelmingly as a racket.

Joya the protected, unprotected and unprotectable

Malalai Joya, daughter of an exiled father who fought the Soviets and became disabled in the process, grew up in Afghan refugee camps in Iran and Pakistan, her education provided by a boarding school funded by the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan. By the eighth grade, she started teaching other girls and women, and soon joined the Organization of Promoting Afghan Women’s Capabilities in 1998. She then returned to Taliban-ruled Afghanistan to run clandestine girls’ schools. What made Malalai Joya famous, however, was her participation in the Loya Jirga as an elected representative, and more precisely her outspoken speech denouncing the presence of warlords and criminals within it. In 2005, at the age of 27, she was elected as the youngest member of the Afghan parliament before being suspended two years later for calling it a zoo (Joya, 2011: 143). Following her election, Joya also started touring internationally to ‘spread the truth’ about Afghanistan, opposing the occupation of her country by NATO forces and denouncing their complicity with the Karzai government and the Northern Alliance. She has received considerable attention worldwide and been praised as a human and women’s rights activist, while surviving multiple assassination attempts.

Before her parrhesiastic speech, Malalai Joya was already positioned as both protected, unprotected, unprotectable and protector within Afghanistan’s logics of protection. As a Muslim/Afghan woman, she was positioned as the ultimate protected in need of liberation from the Taliban by an enlightened West. Internally, she positioned herself as unprotected for refusing to play into tribal/ethnic logics of protection: ‘I prefer not to play into the hands of those who would use religious and tribal differences to divide us’ (Joya, 2011: 9). As an educated woman and a girls’ teacher, she was also positioned as the unprotected (for not conforming to the rules of purdah in the eyes of those who sought to enforce it) and the unprotectable (in the eyes of the Taliban and other fundamentalists). Finally, we can also say that she was already positioning herself as a protector, both within a national and familial legacy of resistance, and as a protector of human rights, democracy and (girls’) education.

Joya the parrhesiastic protector

I argue that Joya’s speech can be best understood as a form of parrhesia and contains its five core components: truth – ‘The truth involves a lot of bad news, yet the truth must still be told’ (Joya, 2011: 155); frankness – ‘How can we be diplomatic with criminals who do not understand the meaning of diplomacy?’ (Joya, 2011: 151); criticism – ‘It is bad enough that war criminals wear the mask of democracy and sit in our Parliament. . . . But what is perhaps more disgusting is that, due to the silence of almost all the Western governments, these criminals have won impunity at the international level as well’ (Joya, 2011: 201); risk – ‘From that moment on, I would never again be safe’ (Joya, 2011: 73); and duty – ‘For me, telling the truth was not a choice. . . . It was my duty and my responsibility’ (Joya, 2011: 71). Joya’s parrhesia is very close to the Ancient Greeks’ version of it: she is speaking dangerous truths from within the agora, despite the risks, as a duty to change a situation for herself and others. It is not about revealing or uncovering a truth but about having the courage to speak a truth that is already there: ‘Everyone knew that a truly democratic election could not take place under the shadows of guns. . . . Someone had to get inside this corrupt assembly and condemn it to the world’ (Joya, 2011: 61, emphasis added). Her speech is also very much centred on courage.
in the face of danger: ‘I am not afraid of an early death if it would advance the cause of justice’ (Joya, 2011: 2).

More specifically, Joya’s fearless truth-speaking contains three main criticisms that all make visible and challenge dominant logics of protection in/of Afghanistan. First, it denounces the impunity of warlords, the Taliban and other war criminals occupying positions of power/protectors as political representatives, along with the complicity of local and international politicians in keeping silent/endorsing them. Second, it denounces the brutality, failure and hypocrisy of an international military intervention presenting itself as protection: ‘We are now under the “protection” of armed forces from forty-three countries yet we are still living with war, brutality, poverty, and crime’ (Joya, 2011: 217). Finally, it challenges the hypocrisy involved in celebrating the ‘liberation’ of Afghan women while their actual situation in terms of casualties, suicide rates, violence, rape and forced marriage was still, she claims, as bad as under the Taliban regime (Joya, 2011: 189).

Her parrhesiastic speech is both highly political (about governing and being governed otherwise) and anti-political (through her refusal to ‘play by the rules’ of electoral democracy’s political compromises, hypocrisy and silence in exchange for security/power). Her parrhesia is also judicial in that she is carrying the ‘voice of the voiceless’ (Joya, 2011: 3) (i.e. the unprotectable), who have been abused by the powerful, and is about demanding justice through truth. In fact, people regularly confide in her in the hope that she will carry their truths to spheres of power and trust her to do so because she speaks the truth (see Joya, 2011: 190). Accordingly, Joya is not only protecting ‘the barefoot Afghan people’ in whose names she speaks: she is also protecting the invariant truth of Afghans’ suffering against the hypocrisy of national and international actors. Her parrhesia is thus also ethical: it is about uncompromising ways of being otherwise, promoting modes of self-relation based on inflexible honesty, integrity, truth, justice and courage.

By speaking out, Joya turned herself from un/protected and unprotectable into a dissident protector. She both challenges local and international logics of protection (by refusing to stand as the silent victim of oppression gratefully welcoming ‘liberation’; by refusing to compromise in exchange for political privilege; by refusing to stay silent in the face of protectors’ injustices/violence), while also reproducing some of their modes of functioning at the same time (by protecting and speaking in the name of the ‘barefoot Afghan people’). However, some Western leftist elites see in her capacity to speak openly and critically a success in terms of the liberation of Afghanistan (and Afghan women in particular). Hence the fact of ‘her saying this’ sometimes contradicts the content of her fearless speech and allows imperial/colonial logics of protection to remain unpunctured, while also reinforcing forms of hero sanctification and narratives of individual exceptionalism. But what about those who do not stand within institutions of power/protection and speak in their own name as unprotectable? How can they speak and be heard as parrhesiastes?

**Greta Thunberg: Reclaiming children’s stolen future**

In 2018, at the age of 15, Greta Thunberg vowed to strike from school until the Swedish elections, urging politicians to take radical action for the climate. She sat in front of the Swedish parliament with her famous sign ‘Skolstrejk för Klimatet’ and silently distributed fliers stating crucial facts about the climate crisis and blaming adults for their inaction and failure to address the climate emergency. After word spread on social media, she was soon joined by other schoolchildren. Once the election was over, they started striking from school every Friday, which led to the Fridays For Future movement joined by thousands of young people around the world. As the movement grew, so did Thunberg’s notoriety, and she was soon invited to give speeches in different political forums. The rest is herstory: from national parliaments to the UN Climate Action Summit, her incisive critique and passionate plea for action in the face of the climate crisis have resonated fiercely
around the world. While Thunberg has received many accolades, prizes and recognition, she has also faced harsh criticism and several personal attacks based on her age, gender and/or disability (Thunberg has been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder as well as selective mutism and obsessive-compulsive disorder). To understand those reactions, we must first locate her within age/parental, dis/ability and neuro(a)typical logics of protection before exploring her acts of parrhesia in relation to such logics.

**Age logics of protection**

While masculinist logics of protection rely on a division between the public and the private, we tend to forget that the private sphere is not only gendered but ‘highly kindered’ too (Watson, 2006: 242). In fact, ‘womenandchildren’ are often bundled up together within such logics, which not only infantilizes women and confines them to/confletes them with their role as mothers, but also places children as the ultimate ‘beautiful soul’ in need of protection: pure, innocent and completely dependent. This age/parental logic of protection is itself gendered (‘maternal’ and ‘paternal’ protection are constructed as complementary opposites). Internationally, it has often been used to justify interventions in a state’s domestic affairs with the aim of protecting not children themselves, but ‘an idealized version of childhood’ (Watson, 2006: 241). In fact, Western conceptions of childhood rely heavily on notions of innocence and are ‘produced and maintained through the rhetoric of protection’ (Garlen, 2019: 57): to be a child is to be protected from difficult knowledge and adult depravity. But not all children are entitled to ‘childhood’ in the first place: those born within situations of abuse, poverty, discrimination and racism are excluded from this notion of innocence from inception (Garlen, 2019: 63). They are therefore positioned as unprotected, unprotectable and/or threats through other dominant logics of protection (Black children in the USA or Palestinian children, for example, are always already threatening and never entitled to ‘childhood’).

Yet, as Ruddick (1990: 247) argues, ‘to give birth is to commit oneself to protecting the unprotectable’: all children can ultimately be seen as unprotectable. The age/parental logic of protection is indeed always bound to fail, as this notion of childhood-as-protected-innocence is unattainable and unsustainable. First, by equating silence and oblivion with security, it ends up making children more vulnerable to the very dangers we seek to protect them from (Garlen, 2019). Second, children are not seen as fully humans but always humans-in-the-making, ‘a potentiality rather than an actuality, a becoming rather than a being’ (Castaneda, 2002: 1): they are empty signifiers onto which we project our ideals, nostalgia, fantasies and dreams for the future. This places children as having no epistemic existence and thus virtually reduces them to silence.

**Dis/ability and neuro(a)typical logics of protection**

As activists remind us, disability is part of the human experience and is the one social category everyone will inhabit if they live long enough. Yet the medical model of disability sees it as an individual defect, an undesired abnormality to be cured or solved. Hence ‘a future with disability is a future no one wants’ (Kafer, 2013: 2): disabled people are meant to disappear to protect us from the realization of the inevitability/potentiality of a disabled existence. Accordingly, they have long been positioned as the unprotectable: the not-fullly-human, the monstrous, the abnormal/abject, who have been/are the main target of eugenics programmes, selective abortion, infanticides, ‘mercy’ killings, assisted suicide, and so on (Garland-Thomson, 2020: 9).

Yet disabled people are also simultaneously/alternatively positioned as the protected: regularly figured as objects of charity and pity, they are infantilized as eternal children in need of protection (Cooley, 2011). They are also delimited between the economically productive – who are often
encapsulated in ‘supercrip’ stories as people ‘overcoming’ their disability to accomplish exceptional feats (Kafer, 2013) – and the economically burdensome to be taken care of in the private sphere by un(der)paid feminized/racialized labour (Cooley, 2011). In the end, those who will not gratefully accept the posture of eternal children/charity props and/or who cannot/will not ‘overcome’ their disability to become economically productive are positioned as unprotected. The dis/ability logics of protection are also heavily gendered, racialized, classed and sexualized: having a ‘normal’ body/mind has long been equated with having a white cis-heterosexual male body/mind.

Neuroatypical/autistic people can be positioned within such logics yet cannot be reduced to them. First, like disabled people, they are overwhelmingly positioned as the unprotectable in accordance with the medical model of disability – as ‘abnormal, abject, and in need of fixing or solving (as a puzzle)’ (Jack, 2014: 9). They are also infantilized and presented as eternal children (Stevenson et al., 2011) in need of medical and/or maternal protection. Yet there is very little scientific knowledge about autism’s origins, causes, variety of symptoms and cures, which leads to autism being seen as a dangerous and mysterious ‘presence’ taking over the child, who then becomes a threat to the family and society in general (De Hooge, 2019). Logics of neuro(a)typical protection are thus not about protecting autistic children, but about protecting children from autism, and, once it has ‘taken over’, protecting other people from the autistic child. As in age/parental logics of protection, autistic people are thus rendered silent: ‘To have one’s voice stolen by autism is to be incapacitated epistemically. When autism speaks, autistic people do not’ (De Hooge, 2019).

But not all neuroatypical/autistic people are equally positioned within such logics: ‘high-functioning’ people (previously diagnosed with Asperger syndrome) are seen as superior not only to ‘other’ low-functioning autistic persons but even to the rest of humanity (De Hooge, 2019; Heilker, 2012) Such discourses, referred to as ‘Aspie supremacy’, are rooted in Hans Asperger’s diagnosis of the condition in Nazi Austria as ‘an extreme variant of male intelligence’ (cited in Baron-Cohen, 2004: 233) he found in some of his ‘gifted’ patients (usually from middle- to upper-middle-class background), whom he saw as having exceptional aptitudes for coding and cryptography (hence potential protectors). While many of his ‘feebleminded’ patients (a diagnosis often associated with lower-class status) were sent to their death, Asperger ‘saved’ high-functioning autistic boys.

More recently, Simon Baron-Cohen (2004) drew on Asperger’s work to conclude that Asperger syndrome is a form of extreme male brain. Neuro(a)typical logics of protection are thus heavily gendered: the association between maleness and autism relies upon/reinforces the connection between masculinity, technology and intelligence. Yet the gender essentialism behind autism theories and ‘treatments’ is all the more surprising given that autistic people are more likely than neurotypical ones to be transgender, queer and ‘otherwise gender variant’ (De Hooge, 2019), sometimes identifying as ‘neuroqueer’ (Yergeau, 2018). They are also heavily racialized: such logics are equally rooted in the association of (Western) whiteness with superior intellect and technological innovation (Heilker, 2012; Matthews, 2019), so that Aspie supremacism ‘aligns uncomfortably well with commonplace tropes of white superiority’ (Heilker, 2012) and (patriarchal) social Darwinism (De Hooge, 2019). Autistic people, depending on their positioning within and through other logics of protection, can thus be simultaneously located as unprotectable/threat, protected, unprotected and/or protector.

Greta Thunberg: The unprotected, the unprotectable and the threat

Alternately/simultaneously protected, unprotected and unprotectable, Thunberg must be located within age/parental, dis/ability and neuro(a)typical logics of protection. First, for Western leaders, Thunberg, with her whiteness/Western-ness, stands for their own (protected) children and/or projected childhood, which might partly explain her fame and success in comparison with other
racialized/Global South young eco-activists. The critiques and attacks she faced also presented her as a disturbed child (‘Greta Thunberg’s parents are irresponsible to put forward a child so fragile who needs calm and rest’; cited in Wagener, 2020);6 a manipulated puppet (an ‘adult-exploited empty-headed child’; cited in Waldman, 2019) whose ‘disability makes her easily manipulable’ (cited in Wagener, 2020); an asexual/agentred cyborg (‘She has the face, the age, the sex and the body of a cyborg of the third millennium: her envelope is neutral. It is alas where man is going’ (Onfray, 2019); and a mystical prophet (with a ‘look of apocalyptic dread in her eyes’; cited in Waldman, 2019); and she has been compared to young female Catholic saints who are reputed to have had visions, such as Thérèse de Lisieux (see Wagener, 2020).

As a child, she was thus regularly positioned as the un/protected who should stay within the private sphere of the school: ‘At that age, she is not an adult, and therefore she has no right to influence people in a political process’ (cited in Waldman, 2019). As an autistic (female) child, she was seen as not fully human (a cyborg), manipulable (a puppet, thus epistemically silenced) and in need of maternal protection (as an object of pity); but also as an illuminated mystic, and thus mad, abnormal and dangerously manipulative. With her childlike, asexual figure/demeanour, she could not be sexualized in the ways teenage girls and their bodies frequently are,7 and could thus not embody the female ‘beautiful soul’ but rather represented the threat of a (neuro)queer (non)futurity (to paraphrase Edelman, 2004: 3). Finally, for supporters of petro-masculinity (‘the relationship – both technically and affectively, ideationally and materially – between fossil fuels and white patriarchal orders’ [Daggett, 2018: 28]), Thunberg embodies everything that threatens the fossil-fuelled patriarchy, which positions her as a threat to be contained/tamed, sometimes through sexual violence: an Alberta energy company, for example, produced a decal showing what appears to be Thunberg being raped (Bartko, 2020).

Greta Thunberg’s parrhesia

Thunberg’s message is fairly simple: We are in the midst of the sixth mass extinction (and other facts about the climate crisis); leaders need to act now; the climate crisis has to be treated like a crisis; listen to and unite behind the science. Given how relatively banal such statements are today, both her popularity and the hatred she receives are somewhat surprising. As she herself states: ‘I am not saying anything new, I am just saying what scientists have repeatedly said for decades’ (Thunberg, 2019: 36). It is because of her positioning within logics of protection that Thunberg’s truth-speaking to power, which can be seen as a particularly frank form of parrhesia rooted in disobedience, criticism and (scientific) truth, roused so much passion.

First, Thunberg’s speech contains parrhesia’s five core components: truth – ‘the truth is we are basically not doing anything’ (Thunberg, 2019: 20); frankness – ‘now is not the time for speaking politely. . . . Now is the time to speak clearly’ (Thunberg, 2019: 25), ‘no matter how uncomfortable that may be’ (Thunberg, 2019: 18); criticism – ‘you’re acting like spoiled, irresponsible children’ (Thunberg, 2019: 42); risk – ‘I am just a messenger, and yet I get all this hate’ (Thunberg, 2019: 36), ‘people tell me that I’m retarded, a bitch and a terrorist, and many other things’ (Thunberg, 2019: 8); and duty – ‘We children shouldn’t have to do this. But since almost no one is doing anything, and our very future is at risk, we feel like we have to continue’ (Thunberg, 2019: 36).

Politically, Thunberg’s parrhesia is a cry for urgently needed change in the ways we are governed in relation to the climate emergency and is about daring world leaders into action. It is also about protecting scientific truth from corrupt adults/officials, in a ‘strange world . . . where everyone can choose their own reality and buy their own truth’ (Thunberg, 2019: 45). In terms of judicial parrhesia, Thunberg’s fearless speech is about the injustices committed by the powerful against the powerless: ‘the people who have contributed the least to this crisis are the ones who are going to
be affected the most’ (Thunberg, 2019: 45). Through regular mentions of equity and climate justice, Thunberg is also speaking truth about the climate injustices committed by the Global North against the Global South. In that sense, she is also turning herself into the protector of unprotectable ‘poorer countries’, reproducing a form of colonial logics of protection. Ethically, Thunberg is promoting a mode of self-relation grounded in disobedience, criticism, courage and (scientific) truth. She also regularly invites others into civil disobedience, while speaking as ‘we’ the school-striking children. By promoting collective modes of self-relation, she is therefore not only turning herself into a dissident protector but inviting others to do the same. This critical mode of subjectivation is also related to dis/ability and neuro(a)typical logics of protection: she turns herself from abject target of mockery or pitiful object of concern to a proud and agentive subject with a ‘super-power’ (Rourke, 2019). Yet reclaiming Asperger syndrome with pride, while challenging the medical model as well as the association between maleness and autism, simultaneously echoes discourses of Aspie supremacy.

By stating uncomfortable truth about children’s future, Thunberg is disrupting logics of age/parental protection by challenging the idea of children’s innocence/ignorance of ‘difficult knowledge’, while also addressing the failure of ‘adults’ to ‘protect the future for children growing up today’ (Thunberg, 2019: 41). By acting/speaking out publicly, she also challenges dis/ability and neuro(a)typical logics of protection positioning her as epistemically silent and the eternal child needing maternal protection within the private sphere. Accordingly, Thunberg’s parrhesiastic speech is about challenging those logics of protection and turning herself, as well as other child eco-activists, from (un)protected/unprotectable into protectors.

As an outsider forcing her way in through silent and stubborn protests/occupation of space outside the agora, Thunberg’s parrhesia differs from the Greek version in that she had to use other forms of courageous acts (striking from school, sit-ins, silently distributing flyers) to be heard by the powerful, but it soon ended up resembling it, as a verbal activity within political arenas. It was also explicitly relying upon, as well as creating, collective forms of protests/movements for climate action. Yet, despite her best efforts to reject her popularity and redirect the focus onto collective fearless speech, Thunberg is often reinscribed within liberal narratives of individualistic exceptionalism, hero sanctification and ‘supercrip’ stories. But does parrhesia always have to be an individual praxis? What about collective forms of parrhesia that do not rely (or end up relying) mainly on verbal activity?

Idle No More: The round-dance revolution

On 10 November 2012, four Indigenous women organized a teach-in in Turtle Island/Canada, under the hashtag #IdleNoMore, to raise issues about the Omnibus Bill C-45. These issues included ‘the move to strip environmental protections from most of this country’s waterways [and] a lack of consultation on amendments to the Indian Act’, but also ‘the chronic failure to maintain and uphold treaties; the continued refusal to acknowledge the rights of those still without treaties’ and ‘repeated calls for a national inquiry on missing and murdered Aboriginal women’ (King, 2014: 80). In the weeks that followed, Canada would experience the biggest Indigenous resurgence/resistance movement since the proposed White Paper of 1969 (White, 2014: 160). Thousands of Indigenous people heard the call to be #IdleNoMore and, led by women and youth, stood up/spoke out by performing round dances in shopping malls and streets, marching, rallying, protesting, hunger striking and blockading. Speaking truth to settler-colonial power, Idle No More (INM) is a parrhesiastic movement of resistance through which Indigenous women and other activists reclaimed their position as protectors of the land, promoting ways of being and doing otherwise grounded in
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Indigenous modes of governance, and spoke fearless truth to Canada’s ongoing settler-colonial logics of protection.

**Settler-colonial logics of protection**

Settler-colonialism, as a territorial project centered on settlers’ accumulation of land, requires the disappearance of Indigenous peoples. Accordingly, it is an inherently genocidal project: ‘Native peoples are entrapped in a logic of genocidal appropriation. This logic holds that indigenous peoples must disappear. In fact, they must *always* be disappearing, to allow nonindigenous people’s rightful claim over this land’ (Smith, 2010: 53, emphasis in original). In Canada, this genocidal logic includes or has included overt physical extermination (through massacres and the voluntary spread of fatal diseases by early colonizers to death by torture, disease and/or neglect in residential schools, to missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls [MMIWG]), assimilation policies through structures such as reserves, the Indian Act, residential schools (and now the foster-care system) and, some would argue, politics of ‘recognition’ and ‘reconciliation’ (Coulthard, 2014).

Settler-colonialism in general, and in Canada in particular, relies upon two systems of oppression that are fundamentally antagonistic to Indigenous traditional spiritualties, relationships and modes of governance: (extractivist) capitalism and (heterocis)patriarchy. First, Canada’s wealth is built mostly on exploiting natural resources and thus on ‘a predatory economy that is entirely at odds with the deep reciprocity that forms the cultural core of many Indigenous peoples’ relationships with land’ (Alfred, 2008: 171). Indigenous peoples thus stood/stand in the way of colonial power for opposing extractivism and had/have to be removed from the land and/or assimilated into capitalism. Second, before the Europeans’ arrival, many scholars argue that most Indigenous communities were not patriarchal, nor particularly hierarchical: women used to occupy leadership positions, both politically and spiritually; lineage was matrilineal and matrilocal; gender-based violence was not unheard of but was considered a serious crime; and two-spirited individuals were seen as a pride and privilege for the family (Barker, 2006; Gunn Allen, [1986] 1992; Smith, 2005, 2010).

Enforcing (heterocis)patriarchy on Native communities was central to the settlers’ colonial strategy so that they could enforce hierarchy and obedience/submission.

With their deep connection to the land and non-patriarchal systems of governance standing in the way of settlers, Indigenous people, and women in particular, were constructed as a threat to colonial orders, and as unprotectable ‘savages’ to be eliminated. This positioning as threat/unprotectable was achieved in part by sexual violence through which their bodies, seen as impure, dirty and sinful, became ‘marked as inherently “rapable”’ (Smith, 2005: 3) and, by extension, Native land as inherently violable (Smith, 2005: 12). But, as in other logics of protection, settler-colonialism also relies on logics placing white men as the ultimate protectors, simultaneously positioning Indigenous (as well as white) women as the protected (Smith, 2005: 23). Indigenous people were also seen as permanent children in need of enlightenment/protection that could only be afforded by white civilization through assimilation.

The residential schools were a pillar of Canada’s assimilation/genocidal strategy: their explicit aim was to ‘kill the Indian in the child’. Children were taken from their communities, forbidden to speak their language, and often physically, sexually, verbally and psychologically abused. The other pillar of the Canadian settler-colonial project was the Indian Act, ‘designed with the explicit intent of assimilating Indians into Canadian society’ (Lawrence, 2003: 31). The Act was a way to officialize/bureaucratize the imposition of (heterocis)patriarchy and formal hierarchy, as well as land dispossession, through logics of protection: it ‘was a piece of colonial legislation by which, in the name of “protection,” one group of people ruled and controlled another’ (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015: 55). Yet the state’s power to indeed protect or harm
means that accepting its colonial ‘protection’ racket makes one indeed safer than if one refuses to do so. Therefore reserves, while being a colonial tool towards assimilation and dispossession, were also the only protected enclaves of Indian identity and sovereignty – or, put otherwise, ‘protected spaces of “unfreedom”’ (Simpson, 2014: 187). The Indian Act is also infamous for its sexist provisions,¹¹ which were only repealed after long-fought legal battles by Indigenous women.¹² It thus relied on an explicitly patriarchal logic of protection ‘invested in establishing and protecting the status and rights of Indian men over Indian women’ (Barker, 2006: 133), with lasting consequences on Indigenous women today, who have lost the status, power and authority they used to hold in their communities.

**Idle No More’s parrhesia**

In short, Idle No More spoke four sets of uncomfortable truths: it challenged the myth that settler-colonialism is located in the past by speaking truth to Canada’s ongoing policies and practices of dispossession, assimilation and death; it spoke truth to settler-colonialism about its failure to make Indigenous people disappear by highlighting Indigenous people/women’s resilience; it spoke truth to Canada’s image of itself as the ‘good guy’ by ‘re-storying’ Canada through the violent and ongoing history/legacy of colonialism; and it spoke truth to Indigenous communities themselves about their own internalization of colonial modes of (patriarchal) governance and sense of self. As such, it can be seen as a parrhesiastic movement of collective truth-speaking.

First, INM was very much about truth – it ‘speaks a bitter truth about Canada – it has failed to deliver on human rights and equal opportunity for Aboriginal peoples’ (Turpel Lafond, 2014: 340); frankness – ‘It is radical to some people when we speak because the silence was so comfortable and easy and quiet, that the soft sounds of our voices creates a humming and drumming along the edges of people’s consciousness and awareness that is unwelcome and troublesome to the colonial comfort zone’ (Belleau, 2014: 181); criticism – ‘To say that the government treats Aboriginal people well ignores its wilful neglect, and its failure to negotiate in good faith and settle the hundreds of outstanding, now intergenerational, land claims’ (Turner, 2014: 122); duty – ‘We cannot stand by and watch the devastation of our lands, the contamination of our waters, and the deaths of our young ones. We need to take action and make the change we want to see’ (McMahon, 2014: 138); and risk – ‘What I know is that Chief Theresa Spence’s hunger strike has inspired a generation of Indigenous youth to stand up, organize, and speak out. “She is prepared to die for us”, one young man explained’ (Richard and Gazan, 2014: 135).

Politically, INM’s parrhesia was about resisting and contesting the continued colonial domination over and dispossession of Indigenous lands and communities by Canadian authorities. But, by contesting the lack of democratic process underlying the Omnibus Bill, INM was also directly challenging Canadians on the truths of their own democracy’s gaps and failures, placing Indigenous activists as the whistleblowers/protectors of Canada’s democracy (see, for example, McMahon, 2014: 138–140). Yet Canada’s political landscape at the time allowed many to see the Harper government as exceptionally ‘bad’ – as opposed to previous liberal modes of governance – thus shifting the blame from settler-colonialism more generally to its contemporary (conservative) political expression.

The movement was also about reclaiming Indigenous self-governance and land-based self-determination. As such, it was about performing alternative modes of nationhood: ‘Not nation-state-hood, but nationhood – the ability to take care of the land, our children, and our families in the way we best know how’ (Williamson, 2014: 153). Therefore, INM was challenging state-based governing power with alternative modes of belonging/governing: it meant ‘holding these nation-states in a position of doubt, sometimes interrogation and sometimes refusal. Their political
posture is, in short, saying I am not playing with you. You are not the only political or historical show in town, and I know it’ (Simpson, 2016). Finally, INM was also ‘a radical remembering of the future’ (Manu Meyer, cited in Smith, 2014: 225), in which women’s traditional leadership was recognized and celebrated. In enacting female leadership and power within the movement, INM’s leaders were embodying/performing the truths both about traditional Indigenous modes of governance that were not based on patriarchy and the fact that contemporary governance structures inherited from the Indian Act are.

Judicially, INM was very much the cry of the powerless against the injustices of the powerful. The continuing demands for Canada to address the hundreds of MMIWG through a national inquiry, for example, was about criticizing Canada’s judicial power over Indigenous lives, while also somewhat reinforcing it by asking for its protection. Chief Theresa Spence’s hunger strike can also be seen as the stubborn, quiet and embodied fearless speech of a woman in a position of powerlessness who denounces the injustices committed by the powerful. She did so both by symbolically performing Indigenous peoples’ dispossession and dire living conditions and by courageously risking her life to speak truth to Canada’s injustices.

Ethically, INM was about speaking truth to Indigenous people about themselves: building new modes of de/subjectivation; reinvigorating traditional beliefs, practices, and leadership modes; decolonizing the self; ‘healing’; and so forth. While different people instilled different meanings and priorities into the movement, many focused on the radical effect it was having on Indigenous communities and their sense of self (see, for example, Allooloo and Simpson, 2014: 193–199). INM’s parrhesia also appealed to settler Canadians’ ethical relationship to truth and to their selves in ways that made it impossible for them to hear those truths and not question their ethos.

Through speaking truth to power, the female leaders of INM not only reclaimed their positions as leaders of their communities and protectors of the land, but also, by doing so, challenged their positioning as the unprotectable/unprotected and/or protected upon whose silence/disappearance/assimilation the whole logics of protection rely. Apart from the issue of violence against Indigenous women, we can argue that Idle No More’s activists were situated very much outside of dominant institutions of protection and were also ‘walking away’ from them by performing/enacting alternative logics of protection in relation to governance, self-relations and the land.

Conclusion

Reading the three cases discussed above together, we can see how logics of protection function through different economies of power: colonial/imperial, settler-colonial and dis/ability/neuro(a)typical logics of protection, for example, are built through the sovereign power to ‘let live and make die’ as much as the governing power to ‘make live and let die’ (Foucault, 1976: 213). We can also see how distinct logics function in and through each other and cannot be reduced to a single logic of masculinist protection: seeing Greta Thunberg only through a gendered logic, for example, fails to understand how her simultaneous positioning as a child and as autistic, as well as her disidence from such assigned positions, is crucial for understanding the reactions she awoke. Those multiple logics can position subjects simultaneously as protected, unprotected, unprotectable/threat and/or protector: logics of protection in Afghanistan, for example, positioned Joya as both protector of her country’s legacy, protected in the eyes of Western ‘saviours’, and unprotected and/or unprotectable for fundamentalists and enforcers of tribe/clan-based identity. We also saw how logics of protection are not only about protecting people from traditional security threats, but also about protecting certain moral and social orders that maintain people within assigned categories of subjectivation. In the same vein, Joya, Thunberg and INM leaders were protecting not only people from tangible threats but also certain intangible ideas (the invariant truth of Afghan people’s
suffering, the status of scientific truth in climate emergency governance and Indigenous people/women’s continuous existence as protectors of the land). Moreover, verbal speech is not the only way to ‘speak’: it seems that the further away from the agora, the more diverse and spectacular one’s parrhesia has to be in order to be heard. INM activists, for example, relied on round dances, hunger strikes, mass protests, blockades and more since they had no access to the agora.

By focusing on resistance rather than power, we were able to see how Joya, Thunberg and INM activists made logics of protection visible through their disruption, while also reproducing some of their modes of functioning at the same time. We could also see how, despite their parrhesiastic speech/acts, some logics remained unpunctured: Joya was reinscribed as a symbol of Western war-as-liberation’s success; Thunberg was seen as ‘our’ exceptional (‘supercrip’) child; and INM activists were seen as facing an exceptionally ‘bad’ government. Reading these cases through both logics of protection and parrhesia thus allows for nuances and complexity in how we understand power/resistance. It also strengthens each framework’s potential for how we understand security today: it is not only because these figures dared say out loud what needed to remain untold that their parrhesia was shocking, but also because they broke their assigned positioning within dominant logics of protection in doing so. Reading their speech/acts through parrhesia in turn made it possible to see the crucial role played by resistance-through-truth in making such logics visible/contestable.

At a time when global insecurities such as the climate crisis and pandemics highlight the urgent need to think in/security and protection beyond the strict confines of nation-states and traditional sites of power/violence such as war, and at a time when global movements such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo locate insecurities/violence along a continuum that goes from the personal to the international, we must (re)think protection as always contingent, plural and relational, beyond the battlefield and in non-Eurocentric ways. Similarly, at a time when the line between truth and lie has been eroded and more people than ever claim to be truth-tellers, it seems important to assess the potential and limitations of speaking truth to power as a form of resistance. Taken together, the frameworks developed in this article thus offer timely and interesting avenues for studying resistance, truth and protection in (feminist) security studies.

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**Notes**

1. Indigenous people resisting extractivist capitalist projects on their land, such as those at Standing Rock or on Wet’suwet’en territory, prefer to be called ‘water protectors’ and/or ‘land defenders’ rather than protestors (see, for example, Herrera, 2016). Since the Idle No More movement has not issued a clear statement on this issue, this article will use ‘activists’ to encompass the wide range of demands/changes the movement calls for.
2. As Parpart and Parashar’s (2019) edited volume reminds us, the relationship between silence, power and agency would gain from being questioned and complicated in feminist security studies. As will be explored in this article, and as Foucault also claims, speech/silence can be both an instrument of power and a means of resistance: it can construct disciplined, governmentalized subjects and/or disobedient, de-subjectified ones, sometimes simultaneously.

3. This dual mobilizing of sovereign/coercive and pastoral/governing forms of power was nowhere better illustrated than through the controversial decision of the USA to drop food alongside bombs (Schmeidl, 2002).

4. The author refers here to the biggest US-based autism advocacy group Autism Speaks.

5. Gender-appropriate behavior is still a core ‘social skill’ taught through applied behavioural analysis (ABA) treatments (De Hooge, 2019).

6. All translations are by the author.

7. As expressed in a tweet by a French writer: ‘Dans ma génération, les garçons recherchaient les petites Suédoises qui avaient la réputation d’être moins coincées que les petites Françaises. J’imagine notre étonnement, notre trouille, si nous avions approché une Greta Thunberg’ [In my generation, boys sought out little Swedish girls who had the reputation of being less uptight than little French girls. I imagine our astonishment, our fear, if we had approached a Greta Thunberg]; see Ouest France (2019).

8. Andrea Smith is a controversial figure within Native studies for her claims to be of Cherokee origins, claims that have been disproved many times in the past by Indigenous communities who called her out for lying about her origins. Yet her work on sexual violence as a tool of genocide against Native peoples in the USA has been foundational and continues to be very influential for feminist Native studies. For a glimpse at the controversy, see Solomon (2015).

9. See Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015).

10. It established the system of reserves (small pockets of territories assigned for self-government to certain recognized Indians), band governments (with limited rights to self-determination over these territories), and crystallized the legal category of ‘status Indian’ and rules determining to whom it would be accorded or withdrawn.

11. Indigenous women marrying white men would irrevocably lose their ‘Indian’ status while the same was not true of Indigenous men marrying white women.

12. Legal battles are still ongoing for women and their children who had lost their status before the provisions were repealed and are seeking to be reinstated.

13. Without romanticizing precolonial Indigenous societies and/or pretending that they could emerge from centuries of (heterocis)patriarchal imposition intact, the expression refers to the radical potential of actually remembering a past (and thus imagining a future) that was ‘not necessarily structured through hierarchy, oppression, or patriarchy’ (Smith, 2010: 50).

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