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SPORTING SPACE INVADERS: ELITE BODIES IN TRACK AND FIELD, A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT
This article builds on previous work that conceptualizes certain bodies – particularly women and racialized minorities – as ‘bodies out of place’ and ‘space invaders’ – to put forth the notion of the sporting space invader. I argue that certain sporting bodies become sporting space invaders by transgressing sporting boundaries, real and/or imagined. Specifically, this article makes case studies of two South African runners, Caster Semenya and Oscar Pistorius, to illustrate the ways in which certain bodies become viewed as existing ‘beyond’ particular sporting boundaries. The notion of sporting space invaders is specific to time, place and space as focuses the modalities of race, gender, sexuality, nationality and ability as the primary sporting boundaries that render certain sporting bodies as ‘out of place’. Both Semenya and Pistorius were/continue to be framed within the media as possessing characteristics that gave them an ‘unfair advantage’ in their respective events, thus rendering them sporting space invaders. This concept seeks to complicate existing discourse on sport and the body by seeing sporting space invaders as individuals who mark instances of the changing face of modern sport, and thus make room for broader conversations about social justice and sport.

Keywords: bodies, intersectionality, space, place, justice, sport
1. INTRODUCTION

Bodies are complex. As noted by feminist scholars, bodies are shaped by more than the biological, as they are embedded in culture, as well as history, both of which are intimately tied to systems of power (Bordo 1994; Epstein and Straub 1991). In this article, I am particularly concerned with the domain of sport and the ways in which certain bodies become framed as existing beyond the boundaries. Nirmal Puwar’s (2004) Space invaders: race, gender and bodies out of place theorizes the ways in which the bodies of women and/or racialised minorities become seen as ‘space invaders’ when they move into domains that have historically been dominated by white male bodies. Specifically, Puwar (2004) makes case studies of Whitehall, Westminster, academia and the art world to articulate her position, yet argues that her framework can be extended to other sites as well. In this article, building upon the work of Puwar (2004) and Adjepong and Carrington (2014), I put forth the notion of ‘sporting space invaders’.

Specifically, this article focuses on sport in South Africa and examines the ways in which South African runners Caster Semenya and Oscar Pistorius embody the position of contemporary ‘sporting space invaders’. This article makes the argument that sporting space invaders are those who, with respect to space, time, and place, are seen as transgressing particular sporting boundaries, particularly when it comes to the modalities of race, gender, sexuality, nationality and ability. Thus, sporting space invaders exist in a myriad variations as well as over several contexts. In this article I am particularly interested in South Africa, and the legacy of apartheid in which white masculinity – English and Afrikaans (Bolsmann, 2010; Hargreaves 1997) – operated as the sporting ‘somatic norm’, thus building upon the work of Puwar (2004).

Previous work has examined the ways in which black women, particularly in the West, come to be seen as ‘space invaders’ and ‘perpetual outsiders’ (Adjepong and Carrington 2014; Merrett 2014). This article, however, is interested in the diverging ways in which particular bodies can become viewed as sporting space invaders. To that end, I argue that in the case of South Africa, runners Caster Semenya and Oscar Pistorius can both be understood as sporting space invaders, though to varying degrees. Furthermore, I contend that their position as sporting space invaders was often framed within the media as pertaining to issues of fairness in sport. Sport is a microcosm of society. Through the media, it is a site in which notions of race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, sexuality, and essentially what it means to be truly human are not only produced and (re)produced, but are also made hyper-visible. Though these athletes are differently situated in terms of their embodied modalities as well as their particular events, the 400m and 800m respectively, both were framed as possessing attributes that placed them as existing beyond the prescribed boundaries of their sport. Sporting space invaders then challenge existing sporting status quo, in a particular context. The sporting space invader is a malleable concept, one that recognises the ways in which boundaries (both real and imagined) shift over time. Thus, by challenging existing
boundaries, sporting space invaders can be viewed as making space for a reimagining of sport and issues of fairness.

By illustrating and conceptualising the notion of the ‘sporting space invader’, this article seeks to contribute to the growing bodies of literature, which critically examine Semenya and Pistorius. Furthermore, this article aims to contribute to scholarship that recognises the need to move ‘towards an integrative framework in which gender, race and class are seen as relational and mutually constructing through processes of racialization and engendering, with sport acknowledged as a key institutional site for these processes’ (Scranton 2001: 171). Cho, Crenshaw and McCall (2013: 785) contend that the field of intersectionality consists of three loosely defined practices, one of which is the application of an intersectional frame of analysis ‘to attend to a variety of context-specific inquiries’. This article falls within the scope of this particular aspect of intersectionality insofar as it is concerned with the ways in which ‘race’, gender and ability intersect with respect to sport in South Africa. Intersectionality is a complex paradigm that has contributed greatly to research within multiple fields, and serves as an appropriate frame for projects such as this. In the next section of this article I discuss the meaning of space, time and place for this project by paying particular attention to the ways in which the concepts shape the domain of sport. Next, I turn to a more detailed discussion of sport in South Africa to set the frame for my discussion of Caster Semenya and Oscar Pistorius as sporting space invaders. From there, I discuss the role of ‘fair play’ in sport as a mechanism for constructing particular boundaries, then I explore a focused discussion of Semenya and Pistorius as ‘sporting space invaders’. Next, I examine the concept of ‘sporting space invaders’ as one that can be achieved from diverging pathways. Lastly, I conclude with a discussion of the ways in which the ‘sporting space invaders’ concept translates beyond South Africa, and allows for a more complicated understanding of sport and society.

2. LOCATING SPACE AND PLACE IN SPORT

As Patricia Vertinsky (2004: 9) notes, ‘sport has always, to some extent, been determined by place and space, and has itself produced specific forms of place and space’. Such a statement reflects the work of Henri Lefebvre (1974) who understood space, as well as time, as social products contextualised by a particular society (Butler 2012). The concept of the sporting space invader is greatly concerned with issues of space, place and time, insofar as these three dimensions shape who is seen as belonging. That is, one who is considered a sporting space invader in South Africa today may not be seen as one in the United States, for example. Thus, space, place, and time are inextricably linked. Though space and place are easily linked, and intimately related, they do represent varying concepts both in general and with specific regard to sport. Within society at large, ‘place’ has been signified as: material form, geographic location and an investment with meaning and value (Gieryn 2000). More specifically, Gieryn (2000) argues that a
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‘place is a unique spot in the universe’ (464), one that has been created by either nature or man and which exists in materiality. On the other hand, ‘space’ is what exists in and around ‘place’, thereby making place ‘space filled up by people, practices, objects and representations’ (Gieryn 2000: 465).

Though Lefebvre offers a more complex understanding of sport (see Lefebvre 1974), in the context of this article, sport in its glorious complexity is to be understood as a ‘space (in the imagination) and a “place” (as it physically manifests itself)’ (Carrington 2010: 4). Thus, there is a sporting imaginary (space) that becomes occupied by people, practices, objects and representations (place), both of which are shaped by time, culture and politics. Sport, as both a space and place, has been structured by power dynamics that defined social and spatial boundaries (Vertinsky 2004). Furthermore, these sporting boundaries ‘mark belonging and exclusion – who belongs and who is excluded – as well as the location, site and nature of the particular sporting experience’ (Vertinsky 2004: 8). A ‘sporting space invader, then, is one who occupies a space (imagined) and/or place (physical) beyond constructed boundaries with respect to sport. Thus, a ‘sporting space invader’ is one who transgresses (or seemingly transgresses) imagined (normative mores) and real (regulations and laws) boundaries.

As noted earlier, sport in South Africa is both a space and a place traditionally imagined and reimagined as a site for the public performance of white masculinity, though notions of whiteness (Afrikaans and English) were often in conflict with one another (Allen 2011). Yet, as Dean Allen (2011: 742) notes, the conflicts between these two dominant white groups ‘ultimately determine[d] the development of modern sport in South Africa’. Thus modern sport in South Africa began as one in which racialised minorities and women existed beyond the normative sporting sphere. Therefore, following the work of Puwar (2004), sport in South Africa and beyond operated, and continues to operate, as a site in which the entrance of women and racialised minorities into the ranks renders those bodies ‘sporting space invaders’. Sport, as a domain, is one in which notions ‘race’, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability and nation are created and reimagined over time. That said, the contemporary media discourse surrounding South African runners Caster Semenya and Oscar Pistorius offers unique case studies with which to illustrate the broader concept of sporting space invaders. In this article, I argue that though Semenya and Pistorius are differently situated with respect to multiple modalities, both were framed as existing beyond proscribed boundaries – making them ‘sporting space invaders’ – within the context of media discourses, especially those based in the West and in terms of normative ideas about fairness.

Below I offer a brief history of sport in South Africa as a means of laying the foundation for normative participation in sport over time. Additionally, I continue to build upon this concept of the ‘sporting space invader’ as one that challenges existing conceptions, norms and mores within sport. South Africa and the experiences of Caster Semenya and Oscar Pistorius are intriguing and relevant cases for critical social scientific inquiry grounded in theories of intersectionality.
3. SPORT IN CONTEXT: SOUTH AFRICA

Sport, as has been argued thus far, offers a platform for the extension of Puwar’s (2004) conceptualisation of ‘space invaders’ and ‘bodies out of place’ because it too, like the art world and academia, is a site in which the traditional dominant actors were white and male. However, in the context of South Africa, sport, like all aspects of the society, is a space and place structured by four major epochs of time: pre-colonialism, colonialism, apartheid, and post-apartheid. These epochal moments impacted the development and nature of sport in South Africa and are thus foundational to understanding sport in context. South African sport is tied not only to history and politics but also to the structuring and restructurings of conceptions of race, class and gender – primary boundaries within modern conceptions of global sporting practices. In this section I focus on sport in South Africa in relation to ‘race’, gender and ability in order to set the context for my discussion of Caster Semenya and Oscar Pistorius as ‘sporting space invaders’.

‘Race’, and of course racism in South Africa, ‘did not develop in an even, logical manner over time or through space’ (Booth 1998: 10). Rather, like the development of race and racisms worldwide, ‘it was replete with contradictions, ambiguities and inconsistences which were the result of an exceedingly complex interplay of local and international conditions’. Thus, while sport is sometimes imagined as both a space and a place that transcend ‘race’ and racism, the history of South Africa, particularly that of apartheid, illuminates the ways in which no aspect of society is immune (Booth 1998; Allen 2011). Within the context of apartheid, ‘race’ as a category (or multiple categories) was fashioned upon a white supremacist foundation that was erected decades prior and premised upon ‘socio-legal’ rather than ‘biological’ constructions (Posel 2001: 88). Prior to 1948 racial categorisation in South Africa remained paradoxical (Posel 2001: 97), with legal definitions based upon one or more, of four basic benchmarks: appearance, descent, general acceptance and repute, and mode of living (Suzan 1960: 343). However, with the advent of the Population Registration Act of 1950, there were ‘attempts at producing a more orderly – and rigid – system of racial classification’ (Posel 2001: 98).

With this more rigid system, and the politics of apartheid, South African society and South African sport became contextualised, primarily, as white or black, with ethnic variations therein. As noted by Jones (2003: 136), from the 1940s the policies of apartheid are what ‘provided the framework for the structure, administration and practice of sport in South Africa’. This structure and this administration were primarily a reflection of privileged white (Afrikaans and English) masculinity (Hargreaves 1997; Blosmann 2010). Of course, South African sport under apartheid, and to an extent afterwards, was not only constrained by ‘race’, but gender as well (just as modern sport globally). To that end, it is increasingly important to reflect upon the ways in which ‘race’ and gender intersected to create boundaries within sport in South African society. As Hargreaves (1997: 194) argues:
Throughout South African society, apartheid merged with traditional and Westernized structures to consolidate the combined effects of race and gender on their lives. South African sport, specifically, reflected the extraordinary power and privilege of white men, but was also a site of inequalities between men and women in all groups.

To that end, access and resource allocation within sport was greatly constrained by race, gender and class, creating then, a ‘triple oppression’ (Zuma 1992: 14) for black, working-class women. That is not to say that access and participation were any better for white, Indian or coloured women during the period of apartheid in South Africa, nor was it ideal for black men in general and African men in particular. The complicated nature of sport in South Africa during this period mirrored the social and political context of the nation beyond the field of sport as well. Even still, during this period of social, economic and political oppression, there existed challenges to the dominant order (white and male). For instance, Jones (2003: 131) argues that ‘there were women, mostly of Coloured descent, who used sport to challenge apartheid and through the process realised the potential of sport as a site of personal and group empowerment’.

These sporting activists, whites and people of colour, men and women alike, reflect an earlier generation of South African ‘sporting space invaders’, individuals whose presence challenged the status quo and made room for more complicated sporting practices. It is this movement of sporting bodies into positions that were not ‘designed’ with them in mind that constitutes movements towards change and justice.

As discussed above, sport during this period was largely constrained by ‘race’ and gender (as well as class, and the three were inextricably linked). However, the dismantling of apartheid, democratic elections and a move towards a ‘new’ South African politics did not equally dismantle the boundaries created by the legacies of colonialism and apartheid. To the extent that the restructuring of sport within the context of a ‘new’ South Africa tended to prioritize boys’ and men’s sport (Hargreaves 1997: 200), gender continued to mark a rigid boundary for access, resources and respect within South Africa. In addition to ‘race’ and gender within South African society and sport, the politics of (dis)ability and homosexuality has also remained highly contested modalities within the domain of South African sport. The diverse history of South Africa offers a complex backdrop for the study of sport with respect to several modalities. In this article, I am particularly concerned with the ways in which ‘race’, gender and ability bound the framing of South African runners Caster Semenya and Oscar Pistorius. Specifically, this article examines the ways in which their location in these particular modalities were called into question on the basis of notions of fairness in sport. By challenging dominant ideas of what it means to be a woman and fully human, Semenya and Pistorius, respectively, these two athletes can push forward conversations of what is truly meant by ‘fairness’ in sport.
4. SPORTING SPACE INVADERS: THE QUESTION OF FAIRNESS

As noted by Thomas Murray (2010: 13), ‘from steroid scandals of major league baseball to analysis of Oscar Pistorius’s cheetahs to the sex-verification tests of Caster Semenya’ making sense of fairness in sport is by no means simple. Yet, though we struggle with conceptualising what fairness is, calling out what it is not fair seems (at least at face value) a far less daunting task (Murray 2010: 13). Sport competitions, particularly those at the elite level, are constrained by set mores, norms and regulations (boundaries) to which competitors must adhere in order to participate. That said, though, a ‘fair’ competition does not hinge upon athletes being equal in every respect (Murray 2010) – all professional basketball players are not over six feet, nor do they each possess an outrageously impressive wingspan. Rather, when it comes to fairness in competition, what marks fairness hinges upon determining the point at which certain traits (differences) cross ‘the line from inevitable and acceptable to iniquitous and deplorable’ (Murray 2010: 13). That said, fairness in sport is ultimately about boundary making. Lines are drawn in the sporting imaginary as well as within the context of sporting materiality (rules, guidelines, etc.). In the section that follows, I highlight the ways in which Caster Semenya and Oscar Pistorius are framed as having transgressed boundaries beyond the point of the ‘inevitable and acceptable’ into the domain of the ‘iniquitous and deplorable’, thereby becoming ‘sporting space invaders’ in the eyes of many, though to varying degrees.

Specifically, I rely on a critical reading of the dominant themes in media commentary and image construction of both athletes. Utilising critical social theory, I pay particular attention to the ways in which both athletes are differently situated in specific social, political and historical contexts shaped by injustice (Collins 1990; 2000). Sport, like society at large, is not a static domain. As such, it is a vital site for the examination of changing statuses over time. If we can understand the ways in which sport helps to shape, as well as (re)produce dominant understandings of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, nation and beyond, new frameworks can be developed and a reimagining of sport can occur; particularly one that is shaped by the goal of justice.

5. ELITE SPORT: SOUTH AFRICAN SPORTING SPACE INVADERS

Elite sport has functioned and continues to function as a site of contested terrain for women and racialised minorities in particular. The first modern Olympic Games held in Olympia, Greece, and organised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) founded by Baron Pierre de Coubertin; was an exclusively homosocial male space. Though the Games were intended to symbolize humanitarianism, cooperation and post-nationalism, from the beginning they have also been deeply entrenched with multiple
forms of prejudice. The Olympic Games (and many other elite sporting competitions) were created and developed as a part of the European colonial project, and thus are steeped in the mores and moral codes of European practice (Adjepong, Brown and Carrington 2013). As such, sporting boundaries, both real and imagined, are marked by European imperialism and thus connected to a xenophobic past. It is this past which continues to shape the ways in which contemporary athletes are received, portrayed and discussed within mainstream as well as academic culture. Caster Semenya and Oscar Pistorius occupy the status of sporting space invaders because they possess traits said to transgress sporting boundaries influenced by colonialism and notions of ideal South African sporting bodies. Thus, a sporting space invader is one who in a particular context shaped by history, cultural mores and geographic location, operates outside dominant notions of a particular sporting context.

Below I focus specifically on the particular ways in which Semenya and Pistorius are framed as possessing traits that give them an unfair advantage, by placing them outside the dominant imperial understandings of femininity and masculinity. Specifically, I am concerned with the ways in which the boundaries that these athletes cross (or are framed as crossing) challenge the sporting status quo. It is difficult to deny the ways in which notions of femininity and humanness (read bodily perfection) are dominant boundaries within elite sport. Semenya and Pistorius were, and continue to be, read as sporting space invaders for their seeming transgressions of these boundaries, respectively. Elite sport is a site in which our understandings of multiple modalities from race and gender, to sexuality and nation, are created and (re)produced over time. As a public, mass-mediated domain, sport remains a vital area of critical analyses within multiple fields of study. Understanding the ways in which sporting boundaries are created and seemingly transgressed allows room for a reimagining of the system. Sporting space invaders challenge existing norms, and mores, thus creating a space and place for change as well as justice.

6. BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF ACCEPTABLE FEMININITY: THE CASE OF CASTER SEMENYA

It is undeniable that elite sport was (and continues to be) structured by conceptualisations of a particular form of white masculinity as it was historically conceived as a homosocial space and place for their public performance. However, with the inclusion of women into elite sporting practices, dominant understandings of femininity (particularly white colonial manifestations of femininity) began to take hold as well. That is to say, to the extent that sport began as a marker of European colonial ideals of masculinity, the movement of women into the space and place of sport brought with it too the mores, norms and statues based upon ideal European feminine standards. Ruth L. Hall (2005: 387), for instance, argues that ‘femininity, and traditional gender roles continue to stick to women like white on rice and sport is no exception’. Though her analysis is primarily
focused on the United States and the experiences of African American women, her arguments translate well to the lived experiences of black women in general and African women in particular. Hall writes, ‘Many of us (African American women) don’t fit the Anglo mold. We stretch the parameters of gender roles by our presence, our physical appearance and sometimes, unorthodox style’ (2001: 386). When it comes to the position of women in sport, the boundaries are locked into a feminine mystique shrouded in whiteness, making the place for female athletes of colour all the more contentious.

The entrance of women into elite sport marked them as ‘sporting space invaders’ and is exemplified by the stringent scrutiny and policing to which female bodies were subjected. Scholars note that, while sex/gender verification was not officially on the books until the 1968 Olympic Games, female athletes were heavily monitored in an effort to make sure they possessed the attributes of ‘true womanhood’ in terms of both the biological (genitalia) and social (femininity and beauty) characteristics (Vannini and Fronssler 2011). In order to be sure that female athletes were indeed truly women, practices such as naked parades before a panel of judges and contemporary genetic testing reify the dominant notions of gender and sex as binary categories (Cavanaugh and Sykes 2006; Cooky, Dycus and Dworkin 2012). Gender and sex remain central boundaries within the imagined (space) and real (place) of sport and sporting practices, and are deeply tied to colonial understandings of femininity and masculinity. To that end, the addition of racialisation to processes of sex and gender further complicates the ways in which they operate in sport. Though black women are not alone in the subjection to sex/gender verification, the fact is that the black female body has historically been regarded as more masculine than other women (Collins 2005; Davis 1981); the field of sport has only served to dramatise such representations and mark the black female athlete, doubly, as a ‘sporting space invader’.

Fanon (1952) discusses the ways in which the trope of the black athlete became the most ‘eroticized’ form of blackness within the white imaginary. Furthermore, he notes that this particular archetype was heavily characterised by notions of hyper-masculinity, hyper-sexuality, and animalism. Building upon Fanon’s (1952) theorization of the black athlete, Carrington (2010) argues that the dominant frames of the black (male) athlete also came to frame how black female athletes, as much as black male athletes, [are] viewed. In fact, the effect, it could be argued, was more damaging to black females as the masculine coded representation of “the black athlete” simply heightened the centuries-old discourse that black females were already “mannish amazons” and hence potential if not actual hermaphrodites. Put another way, whereas black male athletes come to be seen as hyper-masculine, black female athletes were seen as not female at all (Carrington 2010: 80).
While the inclusion of women into elite sport was marred by the best female athletes being characterised as possessing ‘masculine’ or ‘mannish’ traits, for black women this construction was doubly coded in racialised and gendered tropes that existed for centuries. That is to say, while individual women have been subjected to sex/gender testing in sport, such practices for black women are tied to legacies of scientific racism that categorised all black women as masculine. That said, as black women moved into the domain of track and field, they were met with derogatory images of themselves as ‘man ladies’ (Vertinsky and Captain 1998; Hardin et al. 2004). It is within this contested terrain that in 2009, South African runner Caster Semenya emerged on the scene as a ‘sporting space invader’. Born 7 January 1991, Semenya was 18 when her victory in the 800 meters during the International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF) World Championships in Berlin, Germany, set off a maelstrom of media speculation. Beating her own personal record with a time of 1 minute and 55.45 seconds, 7.5 seconds faster than her previous times in the event (Cooky and Dworkin 2013), led to her performance being called into question. While some speculated that her improvement was the result of performance-enhancing drugs, others argued (vocally) that Semenya is not in fact a biological woman (Cooky and Dworkin 2012; Dworkin, Swarr and Cooky 2013).

Recurring themes within media commentary of Semenya in 2009 and beyond include her ‘outward masculine or mannish characteristics’, overall ‘physical appearance’, ‘masculine style of running’, and ‘deep voice’ (Bull 2011; Cooky and Dworkin 2012; Dworkin, Swarr and Cooky 2013; Findlay 2012; Levy 2009). Such media commentary, as well as photographs meant to exaggerate her musculature (thereby reifying her lack of feminine appeal) hark back to colonial conceptualisations of the black female body as inherently more masculine. Indeed, fellow runner Mariya Savinova of Russia declared, ‘Just look at her … these kinds of people should not run with us. For me, she’s not a woman. She’s a man’ (Clarey and Kolata 2009). Semenya’s framing in the Western media in particular is intimately connected to her position at the intersections of race and gender, as well as class and sexuality. Narratives of black female bodies in the west are tied to the legacy of slavery just as the bodies of African women are tied to legacies of colonialism, apartheid and other forms of oppression. During the 19th century, a South African woman, Saartjie Baartman (captured or coerced), spent six years of her life as a spectacle of black denigration, hypersexuality and the basis for the construction of ‘scientific’ notions of black bodies. Even after her death, Baartman’s body remained an object of public consumption as a cast of her body, skeleton, brain and genitalia (a prime site of exploitation of black bodies) remained on display in the Musee de l’Homme in Paris until the 1980s, and were not returned to South Africa for a proper burial until 2002 (Hobson 2003: 92). The exploitation of Baartman and other women of African descent served to position the black female body as the antithesis of white (therefore ideal) femininity (Collins 2000; Davis 1990). Thus the presence of black women in society renders them space invaders; just as in sport they come to occupy the status of the ‘sporting space invader’.
Due to the speculation, publicised heavily by the media, Semenya was ordered to undergo sex/gender verification to determine her ability to continue to compete as a woman (Shultz 2011). Thus, sporting officials sought to verify that Semenya did not possess the ‘unfair advantage’ of being male. Such thinking highlights the continued anxiety around the ‘sexes’ (as binary) within sport, as it places appropriate masculinity as superior to feminine athletic prowess. Semenya was cleared to compete in 2010 by the IAAF and was able to compete in both the 2011 World Championships and the 2012 Olympic Games in London. Prior to her return to the sporting arena, Semenya also graced the cover of South African You Magazine in a more ‘feminine’ style. The magazine itself boasted ‘Exclusive: We turn SA’s power girl into a glamour girl – and she loves it’ (Smith 2009). Though the article served only to highlight what South Africa had already proclaimed about their super star, her legitimate status as a woman, it highlights the ways in which dominant discourses of the feminine still abound. Equating femininity with dresses, make-up and coiffed hair only serves to limit the meanings of what it means to be a ‘real woman’ as well as limiting what it means to be a real man as masculinity and femininity are inextricably linked.

Semenya’s appearance in You Magazine did not quell the suspicion surrounding her ‘true’ gendered status, nor did her clearance by the IAAF in 2010. During the 2012 Olympic Games, Semenya’s performance in the 800 meters (a silver medal finish) seemed to spark new controversy as bloggers such as June Thomas speculated that she lost the race on purpose in an effort to further dispel rumours surrounding her identity (Warren 2012). Such media commentary serves to illuminate the power of dominant discourses of race, gender and sexuality as they manifest within the context of sport and beyond, and limits the ways in which we interpret and understand the meanings of feminine and masculine identities. Feminist scholars call for the recognition of multiple femininities and masculinities that are shaped by the myriad intersecting identities (Collins 1990; Gonzalez-Lopez 2005; Pyke and Johnson 2003). Semenya’s presence and visibility as a ‘sporting space invader’ allow us to recognise the ways in which sport operates a site of socialisation in which social inequalities are maintained (Cooky, Dycus and Dworkin 2013). By understanding a ‘sporting space invader’ as one who challenges the narrowness of sporting paradigms, Semenya and others can serve to transform the ways in which femininity and masculinity are understood and discussed in sport and beyond, thereby creating a move towards true justice. If the mass-mediated, public sphere of sport can openly challenge racial, gendered and sexual injustices, the potential impact can be extraordinary.

The construction of femininity in sport has largely been dictated by hegemonic conceptions of beauty wherein ideal beauty is represented by a black/white binary in which whiteness is the standard and blackness the farthest opposite. Semenya’s position as a ‘sporting space invader’ challenges primary assumptions of what it means to be a woman, as well as what it means to be beautiful through her location at the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality and nation. By reimagining notions of beauty, femininity
and womanhood, we also complicate our understandings of men, masculinity and manhood, thereby making space for self-definition.

6.1. Beyond the boundaries of masculinity: Oscar Pistorius and cyborg anxiety

Throughout this article an argument has been that sport emerged as a homosocial space for masculine performance deeply entrenched in the power of European colonialism and identities. Intimately tied to the westernised ideal of masculinity, particularly in the domain of sport, is the notion of ‘bodily perfection’. Sport as a social space magnifies notions of ability and (dis)ability as well as skill and the lack thereof (Norman and Moola 2011). That is to say, sport ‘is a site in which competitive physicality is revered, flawless bodies are idealized, and desirable cultural values are inculcated’ (Norman and Moola 2011: 1265). Though the first modern Olympic Games were held in 1896, the first Paralympics (so named as they occur parallel to the Winter and Summer Games) was held in Rome in 1960, over six decades later (Adjepong, Brown and Carrington 2013). In addition, while the Paralympic Games have increased in both profile and size with time, most of the athletes who participate in these games, with few exceptions, are not nearly as well known as their able bodied peers (Adjepong, Brown and Carrington 2013). In that way, ability or rather (dis)ability similarly to ‘race’, gender and sexuality, serves as a central boundary within sport in particular and society in general. Swartz and Watermeyer (2008: 188) argue that

as with other forms of segregation (like the racial ‘science’ of Nazism and apartheid), the policies of keeping disabled people away from others fulfilled a central function of imposing order on chaos and diversity. Once firmly in the category of disabled (or, for example, ‘black’ in apartheid South Africa), people whose existence might have been perceived as disturbing or dangerous to others could be controlled through the ascriptions that are made about large categories of people.

That said, in the ways that policies of inclusion on the basis of race, and gender in sport created (and continue to create) anxieties among the dominant bodies (white able-bodied males), so too does the inclusion of (dis)abled bodies create similar tensions, thus marking another type of ‘sporting space invader’.

Bodily perfection, as linked to notions of ideal masculinity, then, is intimately connected to the issue of ‘fairness’ in sport as well. As argued by Norman and Moola (2011: 1269), sport as an institutional domain, ‘is not a neutral physical engagement governed by a disinterested arrangement of rules, values and beliefs, but a discursive set of practices that are productive of certain bodies through the normalization, regulation and disciplining of the boundaries of the humanist subject’. Thus, sport can be seen as boundary project facing a ‘crisis of the natural’ (Cole 1998; Norman & Moola 2011). This ‘crisis of the natural’ becomes increasingly complex as technologies improve and expand, making questions of what constitutes ‘fairness’ in sport questions about what constitutes the core of humanness. The (dis)abled athlete then becomes subject to
inquiries about the boundaries between what is essential for sport participation and what crosses the line into ‘unfair advantage’ (Burkett, McNamee and Potthast 2011), thereby creating a technological rehashing of the debate between the ‘inevitable and acceptable’ into the domain of the ‘iniquitous and deplorable’. It is at this particular juncture that I argue South African runner Oscar Pistorius becomes framed as a ‘sporting space invader’.

Pistorius was born with a congenital condition that led to the amputation of both of his legs early in life (Norman and Moola 2011: 1270). As an athlete, Pistorius ‘uses high-tech prostheses called Cheetahs’, (Norman and Moola 2011) in order to compete. For years, Pistorius competed among his (dis)abled peers in the Paralympics; however, Pistorius’s fight for inclusion in non-disabled competition sparked a wave of controversy (Burkett, McNamee and Potthast 2011; Jones and Wilson 2009; Norman and Moola 2011). As with fellow South African runner Semenya, the media maelstrom that ensued was often predicated upon issues of ‘fairness’ and whether the use of the Cheetahs would give Pistorius an edge over able-bodied competitors. Similarly to the ways in which Semenya was subjected to testing in order to compete, in 2007 the IAAF had German professor Gert-Peter Bruggemann tested the performance-enhancing potential of Pistorius’s prosthetics (Norman and Moola 2011: 1271). Initially, Pistorius was excluded from competition against able-bodied athletes in the Olympic Games. However, the decision was later overturned by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (Jones and Wilson 2008: 126). Even with the overturning of the original ruling, Pistorius’s presence on the elite stage still contributed to anxieties. Then, while Pistorius did not make it into the 2008 Olympic Games, in the 2012 London Games, he became the first double amputee to compete in the Games, thereby solidifying his status as a ‘sporting space invader’. In reaction to Pistorius’s presence on the track, fellow athlete Michael Johnson stated, ‘my position is that because we don’t know for sure whether he gets an advantage from the prosthetics that he wears it is unfair to the able-bodied competitors. That is hard for a lot of people to take and to understand when you are talking about an athlete and an individual who has a disability’ (Pickup 2012: 1).

Johnson’s comment reflects the anxiety and fragility of issues of fairness in sport. However, unlike the comments made by Mariya Savinova of Russia about Semenya, Johnson did not challenge Pistorius’s status, Savinova directly negated Semenya’s womanhood by declaring that for her ‘Semenya was a man’; Johnson on the other hand acknowledged and legitimated Pistorius’s position as a (dis)abled athlete but challenged the potentially ‘unknown’ technology of his prosthesis. Such comments reflect the differences between Semenya and Pistorius as ‘sporting space invaders’ and bodies in the global world. During this period of media uncertainty for both athletes (roughly 2008–2012), Pistorius maintained his privilege in terms of ‘race’, gender and class. Nevertheless, the uncertainty of fellow athletes, spectators and sporting officials regarding his legs brings up issues about where the human ends and where technology begins. It is difficult to dispute that most sporting events (and the athletes who perform
in them) utilise one form of technology or another (aerodynamic shoes, body suits, etc.). The technology that Pistorius utilises, however, raises certain anxieties around ‘cyborg bodies’ as his prosthetics are often framed as a bodily construct as opposed to an accessory. Nevertheless, Pistorius, like Semenya, raises important issues about the changing nature of sport, the human and society. As a ‘sporting space invader’ his visibility offers a point of entry into creating new discourses that could be used to reimagine sport and take steps towards justice.

7. DISCUSSION: SPORTING SPACE INVADERS, DIVERGING PATHWAYS

The ‘sporting space invader’ offers an extension of the work of Puwar (2004) by focusing on the domain of sport. As I have argued throughout this article, sport is a microcosm of society at large and offers a public, mass-mediated platform in which notions of ‘race’, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, nation and ability are continuously shaped and reshaped over time, across locations and in the contexts of history, culture and politics. As such, sport remains a vital area of critical social scientific inquiry. Building upon Puwar’s (2004) framework, I have argued that within the context of sport particular bodies raise certain questions and anxieties as they challenge status quo conceptions of masculinity and femininity that structure sport. Modern sport was structured around European colonial ideals about masculinity; however, with the inclusion of women into sport European ideals about femininity also began to structure aspects of sport, as the ‘game’ became a gender binary playing field.

As the landscape of sport changed with respect to ‘raced’ and gendered dynamics, however, the driving colonial discourses did not evaporate, thereby placing particular actors into the status of ‘sporting space invaders’. As a space (imagined) and place (physical manifestation) contextualised by a white racial frame predicated on notions of bodily perfection, differently situated bodies have been continuously disparaged and discriminated against. However, as within society at large, those bodies that challenge the existing status quo make room for change and offer the potential for the creation of justice. In South Africa, apartheid politics were challenged, and change and moves towards justice occurred with respect to democratic processes, economic reform and full status for members of society who for centuries had been denied rights. Within sport in South Africa, even though developed and structured by white masculinist (particularly Afrikaans) ideals, steps have been made towards diversity. This is not so say that things have been allocated equally and that injustice is no longer a factor. Sport in South Africa and beyond still needs reformation. Issues of ‘race’, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, nation and ability continue to cause conflict within sport and society, and changes and steps towards full inclusion remain necessary.

‘Sporting space invaders’ make room for such changes in and beyond South Africa. Though sport at large was conceived as a white male hegemonic space, that terrain
became disrupted largely by ‘the birth of the black athlete’ in a boxing ring in Sydney, Australia, when Jack Johnson became the first black heavy weight champion of the world (Brown 2012; Carrington 2010). The title of heavy weight champion of the world had long been regarded as the epitome of white masculinity. Johnson’s victory shattered that frame and ushered in the age of the black (male) athlete as a sporting norm, particularly within the context if the U.S. sporting stage. Johnson was a sporting space invader, and his presence shifted notions of athleticism and made space for a reimagining of sport. In South Africa, Semenya and Pistorius, among others, make a way for new conceptualisations and creative discourse about sport and politics. There is a need to move beyond binary thinking when it comes to gender and constructions of masculine and feminine identities in order to effect true change and for justice to occur (Connell 2011). Specifically, there is a need for a more complex language when it comes to discussing sporting bodies within the media. Such language would reflect the multiple modalities that persons embody, without limiting discourse to colonial conceptions and archaic representations. Sport is a complex domain, one that is a highly visible reflection of society at large, making it a fitting platform for movements of change and justice.

8. CONCLUSION

Sport is a domain of society in which notions of ‘race’, gender, sexuality, nation, ability and more, are continuously shaped and reshaped. Moreover, through the highly visible position of sports offered by a multitude of media outlets, it often becomes a domain in which social dramas are played out as public spectacle. Such social dramas then offer a platform for discussion of issues that exist not only within the realm of sport, but in society at large. As such, the domain of sport offers a platform through which movements for social change and justice can be presented to the public. Justice in sport, however, requires attention to more than just gender, or ‘race’, or ability. It requires an emphasis on the ways in which such modalities form mutually constructing systems of power. Intersectional analyses lend themselves to a more complicated understanding of social life, and are integral for movements of social justice. In sum, the ‘sporting space invader’ represents an avenue for creative scholarship and activist potential in sport and should continue to be analysed and expanded. ‘Sporting space invaders’ are not static conceptions, nor are they new creations. Since the beginning of modern sport, there have been sporting bodies that challenged the status quo. Understanding the past and the politics that shaped and continue to shape sport is necessary for the breaking down of old barriers and boundaries, thereby making space for change in general, and the reimagining of sport as a field of inquiry.
REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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