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Hetero-sexing the athlete: public and popular discourses on sexuality and women's sport in South Africa

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On the African continent sport has, particularly in the last two decades, been hailed as a useful tool in the quest for nation building and social cohesion. A popular claim is that sport has a particularly powerful role to play in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. Yet what often remains silenced in assertions about the benefits and potentials of sport, are the ways in which sport also produces and sustains exclusion, frequently along sex/gender and racial lines. Sport has social and cultural significance precisely because it provides an avenue for the reproduction of normativities of embodiment, gender-and sexuality. In this article, we critically examine how South African discourses on sport reproduce heteronormative and racialised ideas about women's sport and women athletes. Focusing in particular on representations of South African women' athletes, we raise questions about the type and form of visibility that is afforded South African sportswomen. Using examples of public debates and media coverage regarding three South African women athletes –Eudy Simelane, Caster Semenya and Portia Modise – we argue that three

representational regimes shape discussions of gender, sexuality and women's sport in South Africa; annihilation, domestication, and expulsion.

Key words: Sexualities, Gender, Homophobia, Women's sport, South Africa

1. Introduction

Since the 1990s sport has occupied a central role in imaginaries of social cohesion and social transformation in South Africa; sport is celebrated as a vehicle for building, and a symbol of the existence of, a unified and diverse South Africa. The argument that sport fosters unity and transformation "rests on two main assumptions; firstly, that direct participation in sport and physical activity promotes sustained communication, collaboration and understanding across social divides, and secondly, that the success of national teams and athletes promotes national pride and unity" (Engh and Potgieter 2015: 38). Related to this is the belief that transforming sport itself should effect social justice in wider society, the logic being that a gendered and racially representative national team is evidence of social justice in sport, which can, in turn, foster social justice in general. In this, sport is presumed to do the 'work' of social transformation both materially and symbolically; according to sport policy, equal participation in and access to sport will translate into changes in divisive and exclusionary attitudes, and foster unity and cohesion among South Africans. Precisely how (or if at all), equal participation and distribution of resources in sport translates into equal status and recognition, however, remains unclear. In South Africa, women's sport and women athletes are overshadowed by the achievements of male athletes while men's teams, both in terms of media coverage and financial rewards, and concerns are still raised about the dominance of white athletes representing Team South Africa in international sporting events.¹

Nancy Fraser (2007), reflecting on the development of feminist politics over the last 30 years, argues for the necessity of a broad conception of justice in order to address gender inequality and promote transformation. Highlighting the implications of the shift from a Marxist feminist focus on justice through redistribution to the cultural turn's emphasis on identities, she argues that the struggle for gender justice requires engagement *both* with the redistribution of resources, and with questions of recognition and status. As a result, Fraser suggests a bifocal approach to gender justice constituted of a) a focus on distribution

1 See "Sports minister concerned about 'overwhelmingly' white SA Teams", Sport24, 12/02/2018. (URL:<https://m.sport24.co.za/OtherSport/South-Africa/sports-minister-calls-for-more-transformed-teams-20180212>)

(class-like differentiation rooted in economic structures) and b) an emphasis on recognition (status differentiation rooted in the status order of society) (Fraser 2007: 25-26). According to Fraser “each lens brings into focus an important aspect of women’s subordination, but neither alone is sufficient” (2007: 25). While Fraser uses this proposition to develop a broad two-dimensional approach to gender justice, we wish in this article to pause on the initial argument: that any struggle for gender justice in/through sport requires a focus on both material relations and resources, as well as on the status and visibility afforded to women athletes and women’s sports. We do this to illustrate that while South African policies on transformation in/through sport make a contribution to redistributive justice, along both gendered and racial lines, this does not necessarily translate into justice in terms of visibility and recognition. Although it is suggested in sport policy that improving women’s access to participation and resources in sport will foster gender equality, we know all too well that participation alone does not automatically result in women’s sports being afforded the same status or rewards as men’s sports.

Moreover, there is a tendency in South African policies on sport to make discussions and strategies regarding racial transformation an issue of men’s sport, while transformation in women’s sport is considered primarily in relation to strategies and targets for women’s empowerment and/or gender equality. The result of this is a construction of South African women as a homogenous group, whose primary and shared challenge is the male domination of sport. This leaves invisible the ways in which intersections of gender, sexuality and race affect women athletes’ experiences and visibilities. Mention of sexuality in relation to women’s sport tends to appear primarily as part of discussion of heterosexual attractiveness, hate crimes and so-called ‘corrective rape’, and/or in instances where the existence of homophobia in sport is denied.

In this article, we highlight three representational regimes that produce misrecognition and silences, and illustrate that as a result of a one-dimensional focus on redistributive justice in sport, recognition and visibility remain hurdles to gender justice in/through sport. In order to do so we provide a critique of what we see as the dominant public (state-driven) and popular (civil society and media driven) discourses on gender, sexuality and race in relation to women athletes and women’s sports in South Africa. Focusing in particular on representations of South African women athletes, we raise questions about what type and form of visibility is afforded them. Using examples of popular debates regarding three South African women athletes – Eudy Simelane, Caster Semenya and Portia Modise – we argue that the ways in which gender and sexual diversity is (not) discussed publicly reinforces the heteronormative and racialised gender binaries that sustain homophobic and sexist attitudes. In so doing, we argue that three

representational practices shape discussions of gender, sexuality and women's sport in South Africa. The first is *annihilation*, which refers to the fetishised repetitions and narratives of homophobic violence and so-called 'corrective rape'. The second we have termed *domestication*, and refers it to representations of 'difficult' and non-normative sexualities and gender performances in heterosexualised ways. The third is *expulsion*, which refers to the silencing and positioning of sexual orientation and gender performance as private matters, that do not deserve or require public attention or discussion in sport media or policy. This also entails the actual expulsion and exclusion of athletes who openly identify as queer. We argue that these representational practices stifle productive engagement with gender and sexuality in South African sport, and further marginalise the South African women athletes who are not seen to 'fit' with hetero- and white-normative ideals of sporting femininity, thus also making unattainable broad gender justice in sport.

2. Sport, gender and sexualities: trends in South African scholarship

In the early stages of social scientific research and scholarship on sport, focus areas and authors mirrored the male focus and domination of the sport industry itself; men's sport was positioned as 'sport', men athletes were written of as 'athletes', whereas women's sports and women athletes were consistently gendered and presented as an alternative to 'the real thing' (Hargreaves and Anderson 2014). In the 1970s, however, feminists began to raise questions regarding women's marginalisation from sport participation, leadership and scholarship. While typically restricted to scholarship focused on and written from the global North, in this first phase emphasis was placed on illuminating how sexism and male domination affected women's experiences of sport participation. An important issue here was to "put women on the map", and shed light on the exclusionary practices that kept women out of sport, both in terms of scholarship and practice (Hargreaves and Anderson 2014: 6; Hall 1996).

While key in raising the visibility of women in sport, and their experiences of sport participation, much of the early feminist work was additive, and often resulted in separate 'her-story' accounts and discussions (Hall 1988). However, inspired by developments in feminist theory and scholarship, the 1980s saw the emergence of feminist sport scholarship that challenged male hegemony by gradually moving "away from an exclusive and restrictive focus on women and femininity to the nature of gendered social behaviour and the impact of gendered social structures on *both sexes*' (Hall 1988: 338 emphasis in original). Thus, the theoretical foci and foundations of social scientific studies of sport were

challenged. A key contribution of this phase of gender-sensitive sport scholarship was analyses that illustrated that patriarchy and heteronormativity not only affected women's experiences in and of sport, but also had an impact on men's sporting lives. This was possible because of a theoretical shift towards viewing gender and sexuality in sport not as "categories of difference, but relations of power which do not come from heterosexual males alone" (Hargreaves and Anderson 2014: 8).

Having moved beyond the initial and narrow focus on women's exclusion and male domination, this was also the point at which discussion and analysis of sexuality and homophobia entered sport scholarship. A key aspect of this phase was an engagement with the 'lesbian stereotype', and attendant analysis of this stereotyping as a practice of attempting to keep women out of sport (Griffin 1998; Lenskyj 1990). Of particular importance here was the exploration of lesbian women's experiences of sport. One of the first feminists to present critical analysis of homophobia in sport – Pat Griffin – has argued that the lesbian stereotype functioned not only to make women athletes defensive about their femininities, but also had the effect of keeping lesbian women out of sport. She argues that the construction of a persistent "monolithic image, a lesbian bogeywoman, [that] haunts all women, scaring young athletes and their parents, discouraging solidarity among women in sport, and keeping women's sports advocates on the defensive" (Griffin 1998: 53). In the South African context, the image of the 'lesbian bogeywoman' persists, although she remains largely invisible in sport scholarship. Burnett has argued that while homophobia is contested, there nevertheless exists a "negative association of female athletes with lesbianism, expressed in a particular lifestyle which is not accepted in the wider society" (2001: 73).

While South African sports have received a fair amount of attention from sport historians and sport sociologists, particularly when it comes the role of sport in anti- and post-apartheid politics and governance, questions of gender and sexuality still garner limited attention. In general, when gender has entered sport scholarship, it has tended to do so in one of two ways; either in relation to sport and development research, examining how and whether sport can function to foster gender equality and women's empowerment, or as part of an effort to highlight women's experiences of exclusion and marginalisation, particularly when negotiating access to resources, equipment and training facilities. Jennifer Hargreaves (1994, 1997; Hargreaves and Jones 2001), Denise Jones (2001, 2003) and Cheryl Roberts (1992, 1993) have all offered insightful and important analyses of the development and state of women's sports during Apartheid. They have focused in particular on how the racial segregation of sport limited the opportunities for black women to compete nationally and internationally,

as well as how the legacies of segregation are manifest today. Cora Burnett has questioned the sport and development industry, querying the impact of such programmes, as well as the most effective ways in which to assess their impact. She has also argued for increased attention, in policy, practice and scholarship, to realities of gendered and racial inequity in South African sports today (Burnett 2001, 2002).

In much of the scholarship on gender and sport in South Africa women's football has been the sport of choice, perhaps not surprising since it still is seen as a male-dominated sport (Lenskyj 1990; Pelak 2005), despite being increasingly popular among women and girls across the world. Though women's football has received the most attention from scholars in this context, it is by no means the only modern sport within which women have experienced exclusion and marginalisation. In South Africa football is still considered a game for and of men; it is a sport that serves to maintain and support masculine domination (Pelak 2005). The male dominance goes beyond that of monopolising corporate and popular support; it also defines the sport as being essentially 'male' in character, positing men as having a collective entitlement to its leadership (Pelak 2010). As a result, women who do play football receive very little attention from scholars, newspapers and magazines. When they are considered, media stories tend to portray "women footballers as victims of bigger and more powerful systems of inequality, discrimination, marginalization and exclusion...[in South African media] there emerges the image of a poor, struggling, usually black, young woman facing problems of under-resourcing, poor training facilities, poor support mechanisms and so on" (Naidoo and Muholi 2010: 107-108). Saavedra (2004, 2009), Pelak (2005, 2006, 2009, 2010), Clark (2011; Ogunniyi 2013, 2015) and Engh (2010a, 2010b, 2011; Engh and Potgieter 2015) have made important contributions to scholarship on women's football, focusing, in particular, on the development of the game, as well as historical and current challenges and experiences of marginalisation and under-funding. They have also commented on the persistence and strength of homophobic attitudes towards women footballers, and how heterosexism shapes women's participation and visibility (Ogunniyi 2013, Ogunniyi 2015; Engh 2010c; Engh and Potgieter 2015).

A major shortcoming of South African sport scholarship, however, is the neglect of LGBTI sport, and intersections of race and sexuality in women's sport. To date, the only publication to take the experiences of lesbian women in sport seriously is a book chapter written by Prishani Naidoo and Zanele Muholi, from 2010. In this Naidoo and Muholi focus on the Chosen FEW, a football team for black lesbians set up by the Forum for the Empowerment of Women that "represents a challenge to mainstream gendered and heterosexist representations of the world of football" (2010: 139-140). Examining how the team functions as an 'alternative

space' and a support structure and network, Naidoo and Muholi (2010) also offer an analysis of the (in)visibilities of queer black women's bodies, thus illustrating the critical importance of intersectional analyses of gender, sexuality and race. While some North American feminist scholarship has included intersectional analyses of racism, racialisation and sexuality (see Adjepong and Carrington 2014; Adjepong 2014; Douglas 2002, 2005; McDonald 2014), studies of sexuality in sport still mainly focus on the experiences of white women, and, in part, white gay men (Douglas and Jamieson 2006). Likewise in South African sport scholarship: when sexuality is explicitly examined it is seldom analysed as mutually imbricated with race and racism, thus entrenching the constricted visibility of black queer women within and beyond sport.

It is precisely here that we aim to contribute to critical sport scholarship on South Africa. Focusing on public and popular discourses, we aim to illustrate the ways in which sexualities in sport are, and are not, made visible, and how sport studies may draw on wider scholarship, particularly from gender and feminist studies, to begin to take more seriously the intersections of gender, sexuality and race. We draw on selected examples of media reports about women athletes in South Africa, constituting what we here refer to as popular discourse. By categorising media reports, and civil society commentary thereon, as part of 'popular discourse' we emphasise that these articulations also emerge in everyday conversation. Public discourse, however, by virtue of being state-led, has a different function in the public domain, in so far as it privileges an idea of sport as a force for social cohesion and mobility. Thus, to focus only on public discourse would be to neglect those aspects of gender justice that lie beyond redistribution. Bringing the public into conversation with popular discourse makes it possible to examine manifestations of gender injustice in/through sport, as it pertains to gender, sexuality and race.

The media reports that we draw on were selected as examples of where and how questions of gender, sexuality and race in women's sport have provoked particular public interest and debate in the last 15 years. These media reports are also those that refer to the three women who have, arguably, been the most well-known South African women athletes in the same time period. The reports are drawn from media outlets that are national and popular, including the *Mail and Guardian*, the *Daily Maverick*, *News24* and *You* magazine. These media reports (the data set) are not a representative sample drawn from a survey, but were selected as particularly illuminating examples of when and how sexuality emerges in conversations about women's sport in South Africa. In a context where public discourse positions sport as a site for transformation, these media reports illustrate how prejudice and stereotypes not explicitly addressed in policy are sustained and articulated. We suggest that the three representational regimes

presented below offer a conceptual map (not a detailed survey) of how sexuality is imagined and articulated when it comes to women and sport in South Africa.

3. Annihilation: sportswomen should be ‘real women’ who love men

On 28 April 2008, former Banyana Banyana player and LGBTI activist Eudy Simelane was brutally raped and murdered in Johannesburg. Following her murder, advocacy groups such as the Gay and Lesbian Equality Project played a key role in pushing for public recognition of the attack on Eudy as a hate crime. Eudy’s murder, and the subsequent prosecution of the perpetrators, received extensive public and media attention in South Africa and across the world. Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy and Moletsane have argued that Eudy’s public position and the committed work on the part of LGBTI groups and NGOs were key reasons why the legal proceedings were partially complete within 18 months of the attack. In other cases “while perpetrators have been identified, the process of bringing the cases to trial has been prolonged by all kinds of delays, non-appearances of crucial court actors, incomplete presentation of evidence, and complications that regularly beset the South African justice system” (Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy and Moletsane 2010: 48). Despite the international attention given to Eudy’s murder, Judge Mavundla’s sentencing of one of the perpetrators included the assertion that Eudy’s sexual orientation had ‘no significance to her killing’. Hence, while queer activists and others have claimed a small ‘victory’ in bringing Eudy’s attackers to justice, Judge Mavundla’s refusal to accept this as a hate crime was a major setback.

As Eudy’s murder, as well as the court proceedings, caught extensive national and international public and media attention the case soon came to stand as a key symbol for the fight against homophobic hate crime and violence. The international NGO ActionAid (Martin, Kelly, Turquet and Ross 2009), for instance, released a now oft-cited report about “The rise of corrective rape in South Africa”, in which they cite hate crimes against lesbians as a growing phenomenon. This attention contributed to the construction of a discourse of urban South Africa as being a ‘dangerous place’ for black lesbians, and motivated numerous media outlets to release reports and testimonies of the plight of South African black lesbians. The discourse persisted, and now forms part of a familiar refrain in academic and media reports, perhaps particularly those from outside the country, that focus on questions of gender, sexuality (and sometimes race) in South Africa. References to South Africa tend to emphasise the dangers for women associated with non-normative gender performances and sexual diversity; “women who defy gender norms in South Africa are often the targets of hate crimes, “curative rape”, and

homophobia” (Cooky, Wachs, Messner and Dworkin 2013: 43). In many of these reports, Eudy Simelane’s murder, and her membership in the senior women’s national football team, is cited. Yet, few of these reports link the fear of the athletic ‘lesbian bogeywoman’ or the prevalence of homophobia in sport, to the discussion; Eudy’s status as a national athlete appears incidental. While in public discourse sport is hailed and valorised as a powerful and important tool for social transformation, popular discourse and media reports insulate sport “from critical examination... by trivializing it – as merely entertainment, recreation or as a hobby for spectators” (Travers 2008: 80). The lack of engagement with the role sport plays in maintaining the binary two-sex system and gender injustice, also silences sexism, homophobia and transphobia in sport (Travers 2008).

Bringing attention to the dynamics and experiences of hate crime and “corrective rape” (a term we employ with much hesitation) in South Africa is important, and has made a significant contribution to raising public awareness of gender non-conformity and sexual diversity. Nevertheless, public and popular discourse on “corrective rape” entails several challenges, particularly with regards to discussions of women and sport. These range from sensationalist exposés of the violence of hate crimes in South Africa, to a tendency to fix queer black South African (sporting) women in representations of victimhood, and a resultant silencing of the persistent heteronormative practices and discourses that rationalise hate crimes in the first place, thus situating black queer South African sportswomen as primarily intelligible through narratives of fear, violence and victimhood – suggesting perhaps that while sport may foster ‘women’s empowerment and gender equality’ the women who do participate must be mindful of their ‘lack’ of femininity lest they become targets of homophobic violence.

Since the murder of Eudy Simelane in 2008 it is not uncommon for media reports concerning (particularly black) lesbians in South Africa to draw attention to the “rise” or “wave” of homophobic violence plaguing the country. Consider, for example, these examples of headlines from national news outlets:

- “Only a matter of time before next ‘corrective rape’”, Mail and Guardian.²
- “‘Corrective rape’: Lesbians at the mercy of powerless men”, Mail and Guardian.³

2 Donna Bryson. Mail and Guardian. 11th May 2011. URL: <http://mg.co.za/article/2011-05-11-only-a-matter-of-time-before-next-corrective-rape> (Accessed 14 May 2015)

3 Khuthala Nandipha. Mail and Guardian 15th July 2013. URL: <http://mg.co.za/article/2013-07-15-00-violence-against-black-lesbians-is-a-struggle-for-power> (Accessed 22nd May 2015)

- “The horror of lesbian corrective rape”, News24.⁴
- “We’ll make you a ‘real’ woman – even if it kills you”, Daily Maverick.⁵

In these reports, incidences of hate crimes and violence are often described quite explicitly, and include details of the number of stab wounds on women’s bodies, the instruments of rape, as well as where and in what shape their bodies were subsequently discovered (see “Only a matter of time before next ‘corrective rape’”). Despite increased attention to the brutality and violence of hate crimes and murder in South Africa, media coverage of other incidences of homophobic incidents and heterosexist violence remained unreported (Sanger 2010). The increased tendency, after 2008, towards sensationalist and dramatic media coverage of homophobia has contributed to a “tendency not to notice or report ordinary, everyday experience of hate victimization” (Nel and Judge 2008: 27 cited in Sanger 2010: 120). As a result, Sanger argues, the focus on exceptional and brutal violence contributed to inconsistent reports “with heterosexist violence being reported on only when a murder occurs” (2010: 119).

Moreover, these reports also contribute to the general perception that South African lesbians are not safe in their own country. Drawing from debates during a 2011 seminar on gender-based violence in Cape Town, Mary Hames writes that “there was the awareness that although there is collective action to eradicate the particular hate actions against black lesbians not all black lesbians live in constant fear” (2011: 89), making it clear that while the threat of danger might be collectively shared, fear does not constitute the entirety of black lesbian lives in South Africa. Through constant repetition these assertions silence varieties of ‘lesbian experience’, while also framing black South African lesbians as needing protection from ‘sadistic’ or mentally unstable black men (Sanger 2010). This contributes to a trope-like public representation and engagement with the black body as a site of violence (Fanon 1967) wherein black men are the perpetrators and black women the victims of brutality.

Lastly, what the public and popular discourse on hate crimes and ‘corrective rape’ following the murder of Eudy Simelane illustrates, is the inability of sensationalist coverage of brutal violence to support meaningful engagements with heteronormativity and homophobia. Sanger argues that, in general, reports on hate crimes against black lesbians “are not contextualized in terms of social

4 News24 online. 6th April 2013 URL: <https://www.news24.com/MyNews24/The-horror-of-lesbian-corrective-rape-20130406> (Accessed 10 January 2018)

5 Mandy de Waal. The Daily Maverick 9th November 2011. URL: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2011-12-09-well-make-you-a-real-woman-even-if-it-kills-you/#.Wo3GnoKY034> (Accessed 6 October 2017).

norms around heterosexuality, and the ways that these norms drive homophobia and heterosexist language” (2010: 119). Sensationalising the brutal nature of hate crimes enables the general public to condemn acts of violence without necessarily condemning the underlying attitudes towards sexual diversity. In fact, when reading such reports of hate crimes we are morally ‘required’ to rebuke the violent acts, regardless of our personal stance and attitude towards sexual diversity. This enables the formation of an imagined consensus against homophobia, wherein the condemnation of violence may be (mis)interpreted as a statement of support to the fight against homophobia and heterosexism.

4. Domestication: women should be feminine, even though they are athletes

South African media tend to mostly cover men’s sport and tend to portray women athletes not in their professional or sporting terms, but as ‘sexy’, ‘mothers’ or ‘having a feminine side’ (Burnett 2001: 76). This contributes to the practice of overlooking sporting achievements in favour of feminising and hetero-sexualising women athletes. Women athletes are, particularly when competing outside the country, also tasked with performing femininity – as symbolic representatives and embodiments of the nation (Eng and Potgieter 2015).

Following the international outrage and obsession with the appearance and performance of Caster Semenya at the 2009 Athletics World Championships in Berlin, South Africa celebrated and hailed her. She was “celebrated by the national collective” (Magubane 2014: 766) and claimed by the media and sporting fraternity as ‘Our First Lady of Sport’. These initial celebrations and the vocal support for Caster Semenya was according to Schuhmann suggestive of an “encouraging disregard for a woman’s non-conforming gender performance” (2010: 96). However, the revelry and seemingly liberal attitude towards gender non-conformity was “short-lived, and quickly replaced by concerted efforts to domesticate and feminise Caster so as to illustrate her legitimate (heterosexual) womanhood” (Eng and Potgieter 2015: 48). The continued reference to Caster through words such as ‘girl’, ‘child’, ‘lady’, is a clear illustration of the desire to feminise and domesticate her ‘unruly’ gendered performance.

Another example of the feminising treatment Caster Semenya received is the front- and multi-page spread in the September 2009 issue of *YOU* magazine, which suggested that through clothing, make-up and hairstyling South Africa’s “Power Girl” could be transformed into a “Glamour Girl”. The magazine’s marking of Caster Semenya’s athletic body as ultimately also a feminine body, reinforces racist heterosexism and illustrates the seeming incompatibility of the black female athlete with femininity.

Re-presenting and domesticating Caster Semenya through verbally reinforcing her womanhood and feminising her appearance is an illustration of the power of the “feminine apologetic” (Felshin 1974; Griffin 1998; Ezzel 2009); the pressure on sporting women to emphasise and ‘prove’ their heterosexual femininity – through behaviour, clothing and performance. Schuhmann argues that this representation “reinforced that Semenya must be what the public needed her to be: a woman; a South African woman; a black South African woman; a black, South African, heterosexual, woman; a ‘normal’ woman” (2010: 96). The domestication of Caster Semenya reinforced her womanhood and feminised her appearance, thus silencing her queerness. The fear of the ‘lesbian bogeywoman’ in sport and the desire to make black sportswomen symbols and representatives of the nation, produces a desire to silence the existence and experience of queer women in sport. Since heterosexual, white, middle-class femininity remains the norm and symbol of respectability and attractiveness in sport (Douglas 2005, 2012) ‘black sportswomen take up space as simultaneously belonging and not belonging’ (Adjepong 2015: 2). While white (and even queer white) women athletes are more likely to be celebrated as national cultural icons (Adjepong 2015), black women athletes are faced with efforts to feminise and silence their irresponsible and pathological genders and sexualities (Adjepong and Carrington 2010; Douglas 2012). Those sportswomen who do not ‘fit’ with being national symbols of honour and pride are excluded, made invisible, or more insidiously domesticated through feminised and heterosexual imagery.

5. Expulsion: silencing queer women athletes

On 19 May 2015 South African football legend Portia Modise announced her retirement from international football. After being the first African footballer to score 100 goals for her national football team, she received accolades and some media attention. Fellow footballers, athletes and numerous media outlets commented on Modise’s retirement, saying it was a great loss to South African football but that she would be remembered as a legend of South African sport. Indicating the role that Modise played in the imaginaries of South African women in sport, the runner Nolene Conrad thanked Modise for her contributions to women’s sport in South Africa: “I would just like to thank Portia for inspiring young female athletes by making the best of her talents, and for being a positive role model to ALL women not just women in sport.”⁶ In response to Modise’s retirement, several media outlets applauded her for an outstanding career, and highlighted her plans to become a football coach. In none of these reports, however, was any mention made of the complicated and sometimes antagonistic relationship

6 Gsport, 19.05.2015 <http://gsport.co.za/sa-women-in-sport-laud-portia-modise/>

Modise had with the South African Football Association (SAFA) and the national team. No mention was made of the activist position Modise took on issues of sexual diversity, her involvement with the Chosen FEW, nor of her attempts to expose and confront the homophobia and sexual harassment that she and other women footballer players experienced while being part of the senior women's national team. This, we argue, forms part of the practice of expulsion; of expelling debates about homophobia and heterosexism in South African women's sport, of excluding sexuality as a salient factor in women's sporting lives, and of excluding women athletes who attempt to confront homophobia.

Naidoo and Muholi argue that with regards to South African women's football, it "has been those women who have chosen to remain silent about their sexual orientation, and to render issues of sexuality secondary to the game and to issues of development of talent, that have maintained their positions in the game" (2010: 137). Modise herself has commented publicly on the exclusion she experienced as a result of being an out lesbian in women's football. In October 2010 Modise was quoted as saying that her absence from the national team for a number of years was due to the homophobic attitudes and practices of the then coach – Augustine Makalalalane. When several former players publicly accused Makalalalane of sexual harassment, homophobia and excluding lesbian women from the national team, Portia Modise responded that;

"It is true. He treated lesbians in an abusive manner, verbally insulting us in front of our teammates. He said he didn't want us in the team."

Makalalalane denied the allegations, suggesting it was part of a vicious smear campaign and that he was certain he knew exactly who was 'behind it all'. Upon the allegations becoming public, SAFA suspended Makalalalane pending investigation. Despite promises to the contrary, SAFA never issued any public statement regarding the allegations against Makalalalane, but he was later replaced as the head coach of the senior women's national team, supposedly because his contract had come to an end. While Makalalalane's suspension indicates that the allegations made against him were not unfounded, SAFA has never publicly acknowledged homophobia in its own structures, nor that the

7 Baloyi, Patrick 2010. "Rude predator! Randy coach' too hands-on. *Sunday World*, 21 November. Available from: <<http://www.sundayworld.co.za/article.aspx?id=1179761>> [Last accessed 22 January 2011]. The article is no longer available on this URL, but is referred to on the following existing site: Doyle, Jennifer 2010. Disturbing allegations against South African team coach Makalalalane. From a Left Wing: Soccer, Sport Polemics, 2 December. Available from: <<http://fromaleftwing.blogspot.com/2010/12/disturbing-allegations-against-south.html>> [Accessed 10 June 2015].

allegations played any role in Makalalane's replacement. Importantly, it was not only Modise's queerness that was silenced in public discourse; practices of homophobia and exclusion within sporting structures themselves were also silenced. This is suggestive of a strategy of silence when issues of sexual diversity and heterosexism are concerned.

The silence on homosexuality and homophobia among sport officials and policymakers reinforces heteronormativity, and exists as a forceful reminder of the feminine apologetic; that women athletes are celebrated insofar as they make themselves appear recognisable as heterosexual and feminine. The refusal of sport officials and policy makers to openly recognise homophobia or sexual diversity in women's sport, appears to rely on two positions; firstly, that to openly acknowledge that there are lesbians in South African women's sport will give women's sport and women athletes a 'bad reputation', and secondly that sexuality has nothing to do with sport or sporting performance because it is a private matter. The logic of the first argument was evident in the feminising treatment that Caster Semenya received, as we discussed above. It was also evident in 2005 when Ria Ledwaba, then chairperson of SAFA's Women's Committee, suggested that "the senior women's national football team, Banyana Banyana, start playing their games in tighter shirts and shorter shorts, and that they attend 'etiquette classes' to learn how to behave and appear as proper and feminine representatives of the nation" (Engh and Potgieter 2015: 46). Hence, women athletes are made to carry the burden of reinforcing heteronormativity in sport. Masked through appeals to respectability and morality, the underlying sentiment that is expressed in one where homosexuality is unacceptable and unnatural. The second argument, that sexual orientation is irrelevant to sporting performance, may at first glance appear as a progressive and respectful position towards the right of national athletes to retain privacy despite being public figures. Yet, in a context rife with homophobia and heterosexism, it functions to silence women athletes' experiences of discrimination. If sexuality is irrelevant, there is no space in which to talk about homophobia in sport. The (in)visibility afforded Portia Modise illustrates this; her refusal to submit to the feminising treatment of wearing a more appropriate kit, and her queerness, resulted in her being excluded from the national team, and the insistence that sexuality is 'irrelevant' resulted in a silencing of her experiences of homophobia in sport.

6. Concluding remarks

The above discussion of the three representational practices is intended as a mapping exercise that we hope might enable scholarship to extend analyses of sexuality and sport in Africa beyond narrow discussions of the brutality of

homophobic violence, and beyond the denial and silencing of the experiences of queer women in sport. What holds the three representational practices together is the way in which they contribute to the silencing of meaningful debate and interventions on heterosexism and homophobia in South African sports. The first – annihilation – closes down conversations by fetishising the violence acted upon queer black women in South Africa, and enables the condemnation of violence without confronting the underlying attitudes that produce violence. This also reinscribes tropes of black women's victimhood. The second – domestication – silences discussion by presenting the female athlete as heterosex-feminine, and reinforces a racist 'gaze' on black and queer women. The practice of expulsion situates sexual orientation and gender performance in the realm of the private. Through expulsion, questions of sexual orientation are positioned as irrelevant to the public and to athletic performance. This is an example of how popular discourse converges with public discourse; homosexuality in sport and the experiences of queer athletes are not commonly discussed, lest the sport, the team and the nation be brought into disrepute.

The silence on sexuality thus functions to mask underlying homophobic prejudice, in sport policy and in popular discourse. In an effort to make women's sport and women athletes palatable and respectable representatives of social transformation in/through sport, public policy fails to confront homophobia, resulting in narrow popular discourses wherein black queer women athletes are brutalised, sexualised, or made invisible. The state-led push for social transformation in/through sport thus leaves much to be desired. When gender justice in/through sport is articulated in public policy and discourse as merely a matter of increased participation numbers and material redistribution, a key dimension of gender justice – recognition and visibility – is unattainable.

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