

One Nation, Different Bodies: The Naming of Caster Semenya

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Abstract

The recent outcry of Caster Semenya as an alleged intersexual received an overwhelming backlash of support from the South African public. However, the feminist psychological literature shows that those who do not conform to heteronormative stereotypes are continually victimized. How, then, was Caster Semenya's identity negotiated? Drawing on feminist theory, as well as South African feminist thought, I attempt to outline the various positions that Caster Semenya adopted within the public imaginary. In this paper, I employ Laclau and Mouffé's broad discourse theoretical approach in order to analyse texts in the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* between August 1 and September 30 2009. I show that she was framed within a national identity, which curbed critical discussion regarding her gender. Moreover, the negotiation of her identity drew upon various attempts to locate a material/subjective essence around the surface of her body. This paper attempts to broaden and extend feminist debates around patriarchy in South Africa, by highlighting how the public negotiates embodied subjectivity.

Key words: Caster Semenya; feminism; intersexuality; body; gender

The recent outcry towards the alleged intersexuality¹ of South African athlete Caster Semenya has added to the escalation in (international) public awareness around the phenomenon of “intersex”. Hours before winning the 800m at the International Association of Athletics Federation’s (IAAF) 2009 World Championships, the IAAF decided to perform “gender testing” on her to establish whether she could compete against other women athletes.² This story was leaked to the international media before she ran, wherein she was accused of being a man at worst – a hermaphrodite at best. In response, South African newspapers, blog sites, and other media forums offered overwhelming support for Caster Semenya against the imposition of a “gender test” by the IAAF. Upon returning home from the championship, she was greeted by crowds of South African supporters at the airport. President Jacob Zuma prompted her to say a few words to the public. She responded, “I killed them in the last 200 metres.”

This image of support for a potentially intersexed identity appears antithetical when one considers the social status that they possess in South Africa. The only two organisations in the country that offer services exclusively to intersexed and transpeople, Gender Dynamix and Intersex South Africa (ISA), continue to report the large-scale victimisation and harassment of intersexuals (Klein, 2009). Added to this, South African feminists continue to affirm the patriarchal state of contemporary post-apartheid South Africa, characterised by pervasive gender-based violence and a heteronormative culture (Gqola, 2007). What, then, are we to make of the idolisation of Caster Semenya? How are we to integrate feminist thought with the support that Semenya received?

Furthermore, psychological studies show mixed results. Studies of families who have intersexed children reveal the shock, anger, grief, disappointment and sometimes hatred the parents harbour towards their child (Gough, Weyman, Alderson, Butler, & Stoner, 2008; Santos & Aroujo, 2008; Slijper, Frets, Boehmer, Drop & Niermeijer, 2000; Zeiler & Wickstrom, 2009). Moreover, studies with intersexuals show that they remain pathologised, victimised, and treated unfairly both in public and medical domains (Brinkmann, Schuetzmann, & Richter-Appelt, 2007; Katinka, et. al., 2009). On the other hand, quantitative

¹ “Intersexual”, here, refers to a person born with ambiguous genitalia and/or chromosomal “abnormalities” XXY, XO, XYY, XXYY, XX males and 47,XXX females (Currah, Juang, & Minter, 2006). They are usually grouped within the overarching category of “transpeople”, which includes transsexualism, transgenderism and transvestism (Blackless et al., 2000). This paper has not focussed on the latter identity categories.

² See M10 in Appendix.

studies appear to show that the majority of populations are tolerant towards and very accepting of transpeople (Antoszewki et al., 2007; King et al., 2009; Landen & Innala, 2000).

However, no qualitative studies have been performed on analysing people's perceptions of intersexuals outside the medical domain, and how they negotiate alleged intersexuality. Added to this, South African research on the phenomenon is very scarce, with no studies looking at the public's perceptions of intersexuality. This paper, then, attempts to contribute to feminist literature on the topic, attempting to answer three questions: how was Caster Semenya represented within contemporary South Africa, what discourses did they draw upon in negotiating her identity, and how can we make sense of the overwhelming support of Semenya in light of current-day patriarchy? Whilst writing this paper, the IAAF has officially declared that Semenya can compete as a woman within international athletics. The data analysed took place when her sex remained undetermined within the public's mind; therefore, the question remains open whether the conclusions drawn in this study pertain to other cases. Rather, we ought to garner an idea on the methods of determining intersexual identity within a potentially "fuzzy" realm.

I will first give an overview of feminist theory pertaining to subjective embodiment, intersexuality and South African women; following this, I will outline my data analysis.

Literature Review

This section attempts to provide the framework that will be used in understanding how Semenya's identity was negotiated in the public media. I will go onto describing corporeal feminism and feminist theory associated with intersexuality; following this, I will provide a brief overview of South African feminism, focussing on the representation of "black" South African women. Insofar as Semenya was defined as an intersexual and a "black" South African woman in the media, both these approaches inform my analysis of how her identity was staged.

Corporeal subjectivity/intersexed identity

A variety of currents within feminist theory have come to stage and critique the problematic associated with the normative divide between biological "sex" and socially constructed "gender", characteristic of second-wave feminist theory (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Loosely defined as "corporeal feminism" (Chadwick, 2006), these feminist philosophies of sexual difference attempt to negotiate the complex and overdetermined relationship between

the material body and lived subjectivity outside the norms ascribed to “sex” and “gender” (e.g., Braidotti, 2003; Butler, 1993; Grosz, 1994; Irigaray, 1985), and emphasise a redefinition of the body against social and symbolic signification which silences “a play of forces, a surface of intensities, pure simulacra without originals” (Braidotti, 2003, p. 21).

Although this paper does not deal with embodied subjectivity, corporeal feminism shares two assumptions with feminist theory of intersexuality which ground my intent. Both of them attempt to critique, firstly, how sexed/gendered identities are (re)defined along binary oppositions relating to internality/externality, materiality/subjectivity, curved around the body and sexuality (Fausto-Sterling, 2000), and, secondly, how the signification of the body comes to denote a fixed, true essence, and how this process of signification produces meaning within a heteronormative system (Butler, 1993).

The latter point is made explicit in most feminist theory on intersexuality, which follows Foucault’s (1978, p. 29) argument that, in the history of Western sexual discourse, social institutions have often “established various points of implantation for sex; [they have] coded contents and qualified speakers”. Intersexed theory argues that medical and scientific discourses are central to the definition of the sexed and intersexed body (Kessler, 1990). A key notion here is how meanings associated with biological sex have been constructed along norms pertaining to female sexuality and bodily difference. Thomas Laqueur (1990) has argued that the economic, political and cultural transformations of the eighteenth century revolutionised our interpretation of sex and sexual difference. Previously, humans were aligned along a hierarchical, or vertical, structure of difference, all “versions of one sex” (Laqueur, 1990, p. 10). This system emphasised the similarities between genitalia. In order to “[solve] ideological problems inherent in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century social and political practices” (Gallagher & Laqueur, 1987, p. viii), as opposed to advances in medical science, a horizontal model of sexual difference ossified around the body. The emergence of reproductive biology, and taxonomy (Preves, 2002), stressed the binary opposition of male and female bodies, the women’s automatic reproductive cycle, and her alleged lack of sexual pleasure.

Feminist theories extend this and argue that the historical production of “male” and “female” as binary bodily “truths” along medical and scientific axes structures the contemporary identity of the intersexed (Butler, 1993). Dreger (1998; 1999), in her historical outline of the intersexed, or hermaphrodite, identity, has argued that medical research has been central in creating a “pathological” intersexed identity, thereby influencing the public’s

perceptions. Medical professionals have also been shown to perform evaluations and surgeries of intersexed infants within a heterosexist framework for social and/or political reasons (Kessler, 1990). Feminist psychological studies (Hird, 2000; Kitzinger, 1999; Preves, 2002) have also shown how the meaning of intersexed identity follows the gender binarism model grounded in discourses of medicalisation, where an authoritative and hegemonic “medical gaze” defines their “true” identity. Finally, an emphasis on a “true” gender identity, beneath the ambiguous genitalia of the intersexed, appears to define the public’s heteronormative reaction to intersexuals (Fausto-Sterling, 2000).

In light of corporeal feminism and feminist intersexuality theory, then, we might characterise a tension with regards to negotiating intersexuality within a sexed/gendered framework. This is located between a reduction of the body to scientific and medical discourses, and an attempt to locate an intersexed and/or “true” gendered subjectivity beyond this. Central to my concern will be to see how these two aspects came to define the public’s response to Caster Semenya within public media.

Representation of “Black” Women in South Africa

The problematic surrounding Caster Semenya not only focuses on issues pertaining to intersexuality, but also in her depiction as a “black” woman, insofar as she was identified as such in the media. Literature shows how historical depictions of “black” women employ discourses of concupiscence and hyper-sexuality. It appears, then, that the negotiation of Caster Semenya’s gendered identity within the media could be grounded in historical and racist depictions of “blackness”, which play a role in the literature surrounding the representation of “black” women in South Africa. This section will provide a brief overview, which will inform my data analysis.

Sexually deviant African

The image of the “black” African as an “icon for deviant sexuality” can be traced as far back as the visual arts in eighteenth century Europe (Gilman, 1985a, p. 83). Even further back, in the Middle Ages, the “Black” was associated with a pervasive concupiscence, “inhabited by a flux of mysterious sexual desires” (Gilman, 1985a, p. 79). This process of Other-ing based on sexual representation continued, in various settings, and under various guises, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and beyond, for “the role of the Black as the icon of sexuality ... permeates the entire liberal discussion of the Black during

the early 20th Century” (Gilman, 1985a, p. 120). Postcolonial writers have taken up these racist ideologies in their writings. As Fanon noted, “sexual anxiety is predominant” (2006, p. 68) in the case of racism. “Negrophobia” takes on various images from the length of his penis to his sexual potency, where “the Negro symbolizes the biological” (p. 72). It has been argued, then, that their image in the European consciousness has been historically represented alongside notions of a “deviant” sexuality and rampant sexual behaviour.

A further template for the constructed “black” subject focuses on “black” female sexuality. This is provided by the image of Sarah Baartman, the “Hottentot Venus”, who was taken to Europe in 1810 where she was exhibited as hypersexualised and possessing deformed genitalia (Abrahams, 2000). One factor that led to her representing “black” women’s sexuality, both in medical circles and surrounds, was the supposed anomalous sexuality found in the European woman. This was, partly, located in the stereotyping and pathologising of the “prostitute” during the 19th Century – her loss of control and hypersexuality (Gilman, 1985a). With the introduction of Sarah Baartman as both the image and spectacle of African sexuality, this fascination for uncovering deviance in the realm of sexuality was sustained on both a sexist and a racist level. The “black female”, then, not only exhibited the same sexual deviance of European women, but was also merged with those deviances that were ascribed to the genitals and sexuality of Africans at the time. And, not only was the concupiscence of “black” female sexuality from previous eras re-articulated in the image of the “Hottentot Venus”, “but also the external signs of this temperament – ‘primitive’ genitalia” (Gilman, 1985b, p. 213) was invoked to cement the image of deviant sexuality possessed by the black woman. In other words, it was in the image of the black female that “the central icon for sexual difference between the European and the black was found” (Gilman, 1985a, p. 83).

Feminist thought and “black” South African women

Several scholars have discussed the historical forces that have contributed to the contemporary situation of “black” African women (Gqola, 2001; Hay & Stichter, 1995; O’Barr & Firmin-Sellers, 1995; Imam, 1997). The key argument here is that an understanding of contemporary gender relations within South Africa cannot be understood without acknowledging the influence of colonialism and Western ideology, “white” racism, class, and sexual oppression. The effect of European modernity and its division of labour that generated appropriate European gender roles (Rowbotham, 1981) were imposed within

colonial South African society which resulted in the severe hindering of autonomy and status among “black” African women (Johnson, 1986; Mama, 1997; Daymond, 2003). Feminist thought in South Africa, therefore, attempts to critique the imposition of gendered colonial categories upon pre-colonial South Africa, the structural and ideological effects of apartheid which affected (“black”) women more harshly than men, and how feminist thought has largely been characterised by “white” women’s voices, to the detriment of women from other racial, ethnic, and cultural groups (Daymond, 2003; Levett & Kottler, 1998). The exclusion of “black” women’s voices is also highlighted by the dominance of nationalist over feminist rhetoric within the national liberation struggle, with gender issues being treated as secondary (Gqola, 2007). Finally, despite the transformation to a democratic post-apartheid society attempting to alter the gender relations that existed under the racist and patriarchal system that dominated previously, feminist theory highlights how African women have kept their inferior status, being treated in ways that perpetuate ideals of domesticity within colonial culture (Mama, 1997). In critiquing our contemporary situation, feminist scholarship continues to expose the status of patriarchy within South Africa (Gqola, 2007).

This investigation into how the sexual identity of Caster Semenya, as a “black” allegedly-intersexed woman, cannot be situated outside of this scholarship. “Black” South African women’s bodies have historically been depicted as primitive and inferior to those of “white” women, in line with the argument drawing upon Sarah Baartman above (Abrahams, 2000, Gqola, 2008; Magubane, 2001; Mama, 1997). This paper is therefore located within the feminist literature that critiques patriarchal power structures and sexist depictions that continue to marginalize the status of South African women.

Summary

Both of the areas above represent important historical and discursive arguments by which we might read the positioning of Caster Semenya within the public’s imaginary. With regards to my discourse analysis, the former will serve as affording us a view on how embodiment and intersexuality is negotiated; the latter provides an historical account on the position of women in South Africa that reflects into the present.

Methods

Sample and Data Collection Procedure

One of the central goals of radical qualitative research in psychology is the subversion and transformation of traditional methods of garnering psychological knowledge (Parker, 2005). In light of this, I have chosen to disregard a focus on human participants, as is found in orthodox psychological research, and decided to focus on analysing texts that appear in the media in order to garner an understanding of how the public negotiates sexual identity. The media does not exist separate from the reality it claims to represent, but rather actively and effectively constructs reality by employing discourses that attempt to assert an objective meaning, whilst silencing the oppression and subordination of the other (Fiske, 1987). Therefore, insofar as qualitative research in psychology attempts to uncover discourses, power relations and ideologies that saturate our lived experience embedded within various social contexts (Parker, 2005), news texts can be an important site where these meanings are produced and circulated within society.

In this study, news items regarding the alleged intersexuality of Caster Semenya were collected from two sources of South African print media, the *Sunday Times* and the *Mail & Guardian*. The former was chosen as it represents the largest national weekly within South African print media with a readership of 4 229 000 readers (South African Advertising Research Foundation [SAARF], 2009). The latter was chosen because of its history of attempting radical and subversive social critique, especially under the era of Apartheid, and in its ostensibly left-leaning focus – despite, as with all print media, remaining subject to commercial interests and political agendas (Lewis, 2007; average readership is estimated at 233 000 [SAARF, 2009]). Insofar as it remains more critical than other print media, I hoped to analyse the positioning of Semenya’s sexuality in light of the hypothesised “tolerance” and “acceptance” of her alleged identity.

I used the SA Media database for the subject term “Caster Semenya” to retrieve the articles. A 2-month sampling period, from 1 August 2009 – 30 September 2009, provided the temporal parameters for the data set. On 18 August 2009, Australian newspapers fed the story of Semenya’s alleged “gender testing” to international spectators. Semenya won the 800m race at the IAAF World Championships on the 19 August. Thus, her story gained prominence between these two months (although it continued well into November – owing to limitations on this paper, I could not analyse texts beyond September).

Thirty three news articles were collected: sixteen from the *Sunday Times*; seventeen from the *Mail & Guardian*. I have labelled each article either M or S, depending on whether they were published in the *Mail & Guardian* or the *Sunday Times*, respectively. I have also labelled the articles numerically (M1, M2, M3 ... etc.) in order of their dates of publication. I have attached a list of the articles, described by title and date of publication (see Appendix). News items here include newspaper stories written by journalists, letters to the editor, editorial opinions, and “feature” articles.

Laclau & Mouffé’s discourse theory

I have employed some concepts from Laclau and Mouffé’s (1985) discourse theory to analyse the media texts, for a number of reasons which will be made apparent below. A disclaimer must be mentioned: there are other methods of analysing media texts, which focus on different areas of interest; certainly, structural, corporate, ideological, and so forth, notions influence the production-consumption-production cycle (Richardson, 2007). The concept of newsworthiness appears apparent in this case; however, I hoped to focus on particular aspects of Semenya’s identity, and so I chose the approach below. The conclusions drawn ought to remain limited insofar as they do not take into account certain aspects of mediated production and consumption.

For Laclau and Mouffé (1985), all social phenomena and objects obtain meaning(s) through discourses, which are defined as “a structure in which meaning is constantly negotiated and constructed” (p. 254). Each contingent and historical discourse is a social construction that attempts to establish relationships between objects and practices whilst situating subjects within various subject positions, termed subjectivation (Howarth et al., 2000). Central to this paper is their approach on the construction of identity, informed by Lacanian theory. Firstly, they reject the postmodern approach regarding the “fluidity” of identity; what matters in an analysis is how identities come to be “fixed” within a particular discursive field, and thereby attain hegemony (Stavrakakis, 2007). This fixation occurs via the “nodal point” (or *points de capiton*, from Lacanian theory) – “privileged signifiers that fix the meaning of a signifying chain” (Laclau & Mouffé, 1985, p. 112). Secondly, it draws upon the notion of “lack” and negativity central to the Lacanian Subject and the Lacanian Symbolic order (Laclau, 1990; from the concept of the Other); both of these are radically “lacking” insofar as no signifier can capture the totality of identity or the social, as

a signifier is that which represents the subject for another signifier. This signifier will therefore be the signifier for which all the other signifiers represent the subject: that is to say, in the absence of this signifier, all the other signifiers do not represent anything, since something is only represented for something else. (Lacan, 1977, p. 316)

Within the structure defined above, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) attempt to outline a political theory of discourse, relying on social antagonism, Gramscian hegemony, and the logics of equivalence and difference. Social antagonisms result in revealing the limit points, the ruptures, in social communication around which meaning can never be materialised, disclosing the lack at the heart of all social identity and objectivity. Insofar as identity is purely negative, *logics of equivalence* create equivalences negatively defined against an Other, and *logics of difference* do exactly the opposite, by focusing on a given set of differences organised around a signifier, dissolving equivalence.

Three key concepts from their analytics, then, will inform my approach. Firstly, “floating signifiers”, insofar as they represent signifiers that different discourses struggle to invest with meaning (which then come to define the discourse); secondly, “master signifiers”, and their fixation within the discursive field that “fix” identity, suturing the gap within the Symbolic order; and thirdly, “social antagonisms”, contradictions, or “deadlocks of perspectives”, with an emphasis on the Real of social antagonism.

The reason, then, for why I chose this approach was its focus on the radical lack within identity, as well as in the problematic posed by the social always remaining incomplete. The latter allows for the image of Semenya in the public’s mind as being presented as radically lacking when her gendered essence came into question; following this, I hope to delineate how discourses achieved hegemony via the sedimenting of nodal points within the discursive field. Moreover, the public engaged in debate surrounding her identity; I hope to stage the different positions, focussing on what was positivised, and what was disavowed or excluded, in order to generate significance in the public terrain.

Reflexivity

Parker (2005, p. 25) defines reflexivity as “a way of attending to the institutional location of historical and personal aspects of the research relationship”. It also attends to the power dimensions in the research relationship, together with broader implications of the study.

Looking at my own position, and insofar as I am a sexed male, I have had to come to terms with my own investment with intersexuality, as well as with Caster Semenya. Insofar as I attempt to expose the dominant discourses that fixed her body, the question always remains regarding my own libidinal investment within her image, and the extent to which I can “recycle” it within theory. I hoped to consider her story as a means of contributing to feminist theory – myself identifying as a feminist – so as to critique the patriarchal structure that continues to silence and oppress those that do not conform to stereotypical identities. My position as “reader”, as “interpreter”, has, at every stage, come under critique; I hoped to offer a fair and careful reading so as to avoid over-identifying with various positions, and thereby coming short of my cause. In terms of using theory to support the notion of fascination, I hope to expose the public’s reliance on heteronormative stereotypes. Yet to what extent is my coming to choose this topic an element of this? Finally, Semenya will never see this report; her voice will remain silenced, to some extent, via its very production. I have also had to question whether typifying her experience so as to contribute to feminist research maintains the distance that she had to live with.

Results and Discussion

If one glances through the text, one immediately notes some peculiar gaps. “Intersex” is mentioned only once (S6); moreover, only six articles brought up “race” (S2; M4; M6; M7; M8; M13). Also, there were many references to the nation – expected, seeing as she represents South Africa as an athlete. However, the emphasis on a national identity in negotiating hers was predominant. The nature of her “traumatic experience” was precariously staged as desexualised/ hypersexualised. The problem with an initial analysis of the trauma is that, although assumed to be explicit, the field does not clearly define what this was: was it the fact that she was suffering, the loss of rights, the sexual humiliation, the unethical conduct of doctors, the fact that she was lied to, the fact that she did/did not undergo gender testing before the scenario, the fact that her medal was taken away, the fact that she underwent testing hours before the race and not months before, the fact that it was “racist”, that being an intersexual has a stigma to it, that her test results were leaked to the press, or the gender testing itself? The shifting of blame, and positioning of Semenya, I will argue, allowed the public to disavow critical perspectives on her sexual identity. Central to this section, then, will be the antagonism within the heteronormative socio-symbolic sphere that was “ruptured” upon questioning her embodied identity.

Central to the notion of her trauma was some Other that engendered it: the signifiers that came to represent it oscillated between the international media (S1, S7, M2, M4, M11, M13, M15, M16), the greed of professionals (S11, S14, M1, M5, M6, M15, M17), the lies of Chuene (S2, S7, S10, S12, S15, S16; M2, M5, M10, M13, M14, M17), how professionals did not take her off the race track (S9, S14, S16, M5), how the IAAF and the ASA managed to reveal the results to the public (S5, S7, S8, S9, S16; M1, M5, M10, M12), the IAAF’s testing procedure (M3), South Africa’s own support (M1, M8), and patriarchal gender norms and gender testing (S2, S3, S6, S13, M7, M8, M13).

The Nation

I hope to show that the nation functioned to sustain meaning along three dimensions: firstly, Semenya was repeatedly combined with the nation to confer identity; secondly, the Other which caused the trauma was staged in a binary opposition against the nation; thirdly, the appropriate response to these cases incited “national support” to contend with the problematic within the social antagonism. These will be argued to have developed a national

identity around Semenya; moreover, discourses around “support”, “truth” and “race” allowed the public’s national fascination to limit critical contributions to her embodied identity.

Firstly, her identity and her trauma were defined around the nodal point of “nation”: “that’s our girl you’re messing with” (S1); “South Africans have been denied a rightful reward” (S2); “a country girl from South Africa ... found a saviour that the public believes in” (S5); “damage that has been caused to Semenya, her family, and the South African nation” (S7); “the rainbow nation has rallied behind this girl” (S8); ASA “deceived the nation” (S10); “Chuene lied to us” (S12); “did her country proud” (S14); “the real extent of the lies officials have been feeding South Africa ... the leadership of the country had let the country down” (S16); “it is important that we all make her feel loved ... she is our Usain Bolt” (M2); “what South Africa really needs is [Semenya]” (M6); “Chuene has been lying to the nation from the onset” (M14); “The *Telegraph* also relies heavily on some vigorous South African-bashing ... [South African p]oliticians and ASA have virtually frothed at the mouth in their defence of her against the outside world” (M16); “It is vital that [Zuma’s] office rescue national assets from irresponsible hands” (M17).

In all of these, Semenya was defined in terms of her national identity *explicitly* against the evil “Other” that harmed her. In the following quote, her trauma is staged in direct relation to her symbolising the nation: “Caster Semenya gave her all in the 800m final at the world championships in Berlin and did her country proud. In return, it is slowly emerging she has been abused, deceived and shamefully exploited” (S14). Here we can see how both Semenya (in the first sentence) and the Other (in the second sentence) who abused her revolved around the National nodal point that was invoked in defining the ordeal. In other words, the over-arching idea was that her trauma became a symbol for a nation that was attacked.

Support.

Also, “support” was specifically defined along this axis: “He pleaded with the South African public to support her in the face of the assault by the foreign media. ‘It is important that we all make her feel loved and appreciated on her return home, like a true hero’” (M2); “There has been a huge outpouring of patriotic support for Semenya” (M16); “‘The rainbow nation has rallied behind this girl and it’s humbled (us)’” (M8). This, in some sense, appropriated the “lack” within her sexed identity

Truth.

It is also clear how the nodal point of “Nation” came to be associated with positive moral qualities of “Truth”. It was repeatedly noted – S2, S5, S7,S8, S9, S10, S11, S14, S16; M1, M2, M3, M5, M6, M10, M12, M13, M14, M15, M17 – that Semenya’s trauma was caused by acts of deception on the part of professionals/IAAF/ASA/Chuene and the fact that the results were revealed to international media/the public. The “lying” Other stood against the Nation: “Chuene has been lying to the nation from the onset. It’s time for him and his crew to tell the truth, apologise to the nation and resign” (M14). Another quote also draws upon this: “Let the truth be heard and let anyone who betrayed her be damned by us all” (S14). Here, the “truth” is not simply to heal the trauma in Semenya; rather, it comes to justify the nation’s support. Chuene was also repeatedly staged as having “deceived the nation” (S10), with associated calls for independent inquiries and for him to own up to the truth.

What underlies this “truth” discourse, though, is the direct exclusion of a critique of the “gender tests”, or of the heteronormative standards that were imposed upon her body, in light of the literature. In other words, any critical discussion surrounding the validity of the gender tests were excluded from debate via locating their truth against Chuene/IAAF. Here we can see the binary opposition emerge: in order to critique the fact that Chuene/IAAF had deceived her, we need to assume the truth of the tests. One such example of this is the following:

She was sent to race by men and women who knew that serious questions were being asked and probably could not be satisfactorily answered, but whose lust for gold trumped any concern for her wellbeing. ... But the evidence is mounting that Semenya’s ordeal is a direct and probably inevitable result of the greed and ambition of [ASA] professionals around her (S14).

This is also exemplary in the following by-line, indicating the central argument of the article: “By revealing Caster Semenya was to be subjected to a gender test, the federation gave the speculation official sanction, a de facto blessing” (S5). Or, in more emotional terms: “It is shameful that those responsible for the destruction of this young life can still look at themselves in the mirror. The IAAF has betrayed Caster by flouting its own privacy regulations” (M17). Another example, (M16), titled “Expedient outrage and the Semenya tests”, notes three reasons for what caused the trauma: that “the public interest in the case did not weigh sufficiently strongly to justify the invasion of privacy”, that “it is also worth

remembering that she is just 18”, and finally, “the revelations made about Semenya are of an extraordinarily intimate kind”. No questioning of the basis of these revelations was made at all. Rather, “privacy”, “innocence”, and “public interest” come to function as defining the trauma in a particular way, and affording support to why it was bad. It is also no surprise how it staged the international media against “South-African bashing”.

Race.

The signifier “nation” was staged against “race” in one article:

In a week when white and black South Africans united to pour scorn on the global athletics establishment for questioning her sex and to celebrate a constitution that honours diversity, Julius Malema understood that he could put the young woman from Limpopo to work. White South Africans, had not, he suggested, showed up in adequate numbers to welcome her home... For now, though, what South Africa really needs is the example of a ruthless winner who stared down the IAAF and the international media to win. (S6)

The nation is used against “race” to establish hegemony by invoking signifiers pertaining to victory and winning; this excludes any critical analysis of Semenya’s identity by linking her with a discourse on “performance”. The opposite instance of this is found in another article:

There was conscious reference, by parliamentarians, to Saartjie Baartman, and perhaps the national anger at Semenya’s humiliation arises out of what we might call our Bartman [sic] complex, a particularly South African anxiety, that we will gain notoriety for our alleged abnormality rather than celebrity for our excellence. (S2)

Here, the image of Saartjie Baartman is equivocated with a “Bartman complex” that pertains to national identity, devaluing its historical legacy and reducing it to a reaction of jealousy. Semenya’s trauma as one of “race” is excluded; either her performance is emphasised or the issue is reduced to a pathological worldview.

We might question the fact that this occurred only twice; however, the signifier “race” only functioned at the centre of a discourse in six articles (S2; M4; M6; M7; M8; M13), and in four of the articles it is rejected (see below).

From the above analysis, it appears that the support and response to her was structured around the nodal point of nation and involved various discourses to restructure the crisis whilst excluding other signifiers, notably pertaining to her embodiment. I argue that this was an attempt, following the analytic approach at hand, to ground a sense of

“wholeness” and “completeness” to the national identity. This discourse obtained hegemony by being structured around “truth” and “support”, and by directly labelling Semenya as a “national asset” (M17). Moreover, it suppressed a critique of the gender tests at points, which allows us to note the antinomy between the development of a national identity and a feminist critique of the situation. It was also suggested that it was based on a discourse of performance; this point will be analysed in more depth below. However, when I argue “disavow”, I do not mean that these pertained exclusively to nationalist discourse; rather, I suggest tentatively that her embodied identity, nevertheless central to the news story, was distorted around the “evil” Other, resulting in misidentification with the body nodal point.

Against Nation

What emerges, however, are points whereby the nation was construed as “evil” and harmful. This discourse was found in only two articles: M1, M8. M1 staged South African response in a negative light, insofar as it misinterpreted the actions undertaken by the IAAF:

Yet questions have been asked and it is well within the rules of international athletics to interrogate them. The IAAF’s first public response was sensitively put ... Which is far more than can be said for a range of South African responses thus far. Furious counter accusations of everything from ‘imperialism’ to ‘jealousy’ to ‘suspicious timing’ have been flung the IAAF’s way.

Here, the article stages “fairness” of the “rules” against South Africa’s critique. The problem with this, of course, is that it excludes from the debate the heteronormative assumptions underlying the rules of sports, and positions Semenya against South Africa (“response was sensitively put”). Again, though, the usual “Others” are staged as “evil” against Semenya within the rest of the article – except for the rules of sport. This discourse of rules will be analysed in more detail below. M8 associated itself against heteronormative determination of her identity; therefore, it will be taken up below.

Sex/gender

The first thing that strikes the eye is the frequency with which “sex” collapsed into notions of “gender”. As such, it became incredibly difficult to isolate exactly how sex was used, and how gender was used, and how these were defined. Three features evidenced this. Firstly, it was repeatedly stated that she underwent “gender testing” of her genitalia/testosterone levels to establish whether she was a woman. Only six articles made

explicit reference to “sex testing”, as opposed to “gender testing” (S16, M7, M8, M10, M13, M16). Secondly, there were frequent statements whereby “gender” simply collapsed into “female”, e.g., “female gender” (M9). Thirdly, the point around which both of the terms revolved frequently involved her masculinity: “The basis of their speculation is that the teenager has masculine features, such as facial hair and a deep voice and is well built” (M2). This, again, was collapsed into both sex and gender, where different articles used the terms differently, even within the same article.

As a result, “sex” and “gender” assumed a logic of equivalence around the nodal point of the body. The result was two-fold: firstly, the differential position of “sex vs gender” (via a logic of difference) was excluded from the debate; secondly, and more importantly, this remained within the same symbolic co-ordinates as those employed by the sporting body, and those which began the crisis. In other words, a focus on the body in terms of labelling her identity achieved hegemony. I also suggest that her embodied identity here remained co-substantial with the determination of her “trauma”, the “lack” generated by the test. This will be measured below.

Body

The central divide pertaining to the body, as suggested within the literature, related to the materiality/subjectivity divide. The issue, here, is that no discourse managed to remove itself from the problematic: every time it attempted to either stage one or the other, a tension arose in terms of the logic of difference (what was excluded). Insofar as this section focuses on the nodal point of the body, I will first consider those articles that did not appear to label and construct an image of her body. As suggested above, however, this is problematic insofar as collapsing “sex” into “gender” renders the nodal point visible. One identifying feature, then, was the Master Signifier woman that was asserted authoritatively, without question, in a number of places. Following this, I will focus only on those articles that explicitly linked signifiers with her bodily identity. Selected articles were: S1, S2, S3, S4, S6, S8, S13; M1, M2, M3, M5, M7, M8, M9, M11, M13.

Woman.

First, we might look at those articles where this was excluded. They simply denoted Semenya as a woman, without question. The problem is that, on the one hand, in all of these articles the tests were repeatedly assumed as uncovering a “truth” about her with the real trauma being that they were made public (as highlighted above); whilst, on the other, they

still affirmed the “truths” of the tests. The emphasis here, then, is on a focus beyond her materiality. What is being excluded, however, is any positive dimension of subjectivity, as well as any reference to an “intersex” identity.

Within.

The majority of discourses that reduced her identity to the level of “within body” – the materiality of the body – employed signifiers relating to science and/or rules of sport (S4, S6, S8, M1, M2, M3, M5, M9). This confirms what was found in the literature review. Science here was used to define the signifier “intersex” (S6) or the “masculinity” of her body (the rest of the articles).

Two central differences emerged here: firstly, in the case of “intersex”, a lot more scientific signifiers were used in attempting to capture the identity: “testosterone”, “physiological”, “foetal development”, “chromosomes”, “genes”, “gonads”, “hormone receptors”. With the case of the “rules of sport” discourse, only “testosterone” was related to her identity. This perhaps allows us to see the silence/lack of an intersexual identity within the domain of sport, as confirmed in the literature.

Secondly, in the case of “intersex”, the scientific discourse was used to describe only part of the identity – the material side. Yet, the article makes references for how “the public had to respect Semenya’s expression of her gender as being female” (S6). Unlike heteronormative identities, the case of the intersexed subjectivity remains an expression of one’s biological self – what is excluded is an expression of sex. Again, for the intersexual, sex and gender become reductive. Moreover, this element of agency, associated with gender, is different from the one used with “woman”, analysed below in the next section. This refers back to Fausto-Sterling’s point, whereby the “truth” status of the intersexual is sought beyond the genitalia, yet nevertheless reduced to them.

What is also different with regards to the intersexed identity is that the scientific discourse was coupled with both her identity – masculinity – *and* the norms of sport. This latter assertion is exemplified in M4, titled “Why she stunned the world”: an attempt to answer the question of what it was that became so traumatic. The article quotes an expert of medical science and notes that “Caster Semenya’s rapid progress would have caused “alarm bells” to go off at the IAAF ... He said Semenya was bigger and more masculine than most 800m runners and had the ability to maintain her fast pace in the second lap of the event” (M4). This coupling of a scientific discourse with the rules of sports also occurs in M5, which states that “World champion Caster Semenya has been tested in South Africa and found to

have higher-than-usual testosterone levels, but she is well within the range that allows her to participate in women's races." It goes onto describing the terms "testosterone" and "epitestosterone", and employs scientific terms to justify the rules of sport: "IAAF protocols regarding [sic] the normal ratio between testosterone and epi-testosterone as 1:1. When it becomes exceptionally high, like 4:1, you start suspecting a problem ... It is understood that Semenya's tests show she is well within the acceptable range." However, a contradiction emerged when science was coupled with the "rules of sports" in order to negotiate hegemony. This is best posed by M3, noting that

"South African teenage athletics sensation Caster Semenya's gender test should have involved only a medical examination of her external genitalia. Anything more extensive is unfair to the athlete. Tim Noakes, head of the University of Cape Town's exercise science and sports medicine research unit, said an external examination is all that is needed to establish whether she is masquerading as a female."

Here, scientific terms come to ground the "rules of sport" in a different way. Here, "testosterone" does not feature in the "gender test". This alternative formulation emphasised the direct externality of her sex, thereby betraying the complexities that are typically constructed of intersexed individuals. This relates to Dreger's (1998) depiction of the intersexual as changing historically with regards to the importance of its sexual organs – a shift between externality towards internality with medical advances.

One final point needs to be made with respect to how these negotiate hegemony with respect to Semenya's trauma. The signifier "intersex" was associated within a purely sympathetic discourse. Here the identity itself becomes a "traumatic identity", associated with a discourse of tolerance. In S6, intersexuality is staged as something traumatic, insofar as it transgresses our normal conceptions of sex and gender, "shrouded in secrecy". They characterise it as "a terrible sadness", that it was a "huge stigma", involves a "hard time coping", that she needs "a lot of reassurance and assistance" for being labelled as such, and that "it's very often their parents and peers who respond in such an emotional manner". The problem, of course, arises when the identity itself is defined against the heteronormative stereotypes that are positioned as "bad". A tension between labelling someone as different, and negotiating respect for this, emerges (which will be explored in more detail below). One also sees this fact being repeated in the article cited above, M3, which employs a moral complex to capture her identity: "Tests on Caster 'unfair'". Yet, when the rules of sports are

justified by science, there is no clear sympathetic discourse (S4, S8, M1, M2, M5, M9). How might we come to understand this difference? It appears, I suggest, that it is because the rules of sport began the crisis. When they are justified through recourse to “scientific discourse”, then no sympathy is required. However, the minute they are critiqued, she becomes an individual that has suffered.

A further example of tension between within/beyond the body relates to her positioning alongside other athletes through equivalence, and her body as private with regards to womanhood. One such example is the following “There’s no doubt that Semenya doesn’t look anything like that which the world desires girls to be, but to question her gender on the basis of muscularity and looks requires that you cast your eye across that entire athletics field” (S1). However, following this, it notes that “women continue to be expected to look a certain way in today’s world, and even on the sports field – and if they don’t they are castigated or harassed. It’s a travesty.” The foregrounding of the body in the former, and in disavowing it in the latter (notably around the gaze) generates a tension between positioning her within the norms of sports (former) or heteronormativity. Notably, sport does not come under the latter.

Beyond.

Here, her identity is located ostensibly beyond her bodily co-ordinates. Four different levels were located: performance, proof, behaviour with other women, and speech. This was employed by four of the five articles that critiqued the gender tests: M3, S1, M7, M9 (M8 did not go “beyond the body”, but remained within its co-ordinates, nevertheless critiquing the tests). It is also surprising that out of 33 articles, only four critiqued the tests. M3, noted above, argues that it “should have involved only a medical examination of her external genitalia”, thereby reducing her to the body again. This will be excluded. The other three articles employ a discourse that challenges the patriarchal gaze in defining what women are supposed to be: “Women continue to be expected to look a certain way in today’s world – and if they don’t they are castigated or harassed” (S1); “I know for a fact that you’ll never find a single woman in the world who is happy to be told she looks like a man” (M9); “Just because she defies skewed and pre-existing norms and stereotypes of what people think a woman should look like is no reason to think she isn’t” (M7). To make up for this traumatic fact, all three articles employ the same discourse – that of “performance” and “talent”: “I’m over the moon about Mokgadi “Caster” Semenya’s achievements. She deserved a big loud welcome when she landed at home” (M9); “Here is a case of that which is largely unspoken –

bigotry by those who refuse to accept the notion that those who are different from them can rise to positions of success. But our Caster Semenya showed them all and, on Wednesday night, took the gold anyway – attagirl!” (S1);

What a dreadful ordeal for this poor woman. After performing such a magnificent feat, doubt is cast on her and her performance all because the powers that be don't believe that this woman could outstrip others in the manner that she did. Her excellence on the track is being put to test because it's believed that a person bearing her genitalia couldn't possibly be that awesome. (M7)

This discourse of agency came to be one of the major discourses within the articles (S1, M1, M2, M7, M9, M13): “Virtually unknown until this year, this young black woman blasted her way onto the athletics scene by simply demolishing her opposition and silencing everyone, cynics and commentators alike ... [the trauma is the result of] bigotry by those who refuse to accept the notion that those who are different from them can rise to positions of success” (S1).

This performance element was also used in another discourse, into other methods of describing a particular agency: “The fact that Semenya felt that no such embellishments were necessary shows that in her own mind the question of her sex is crystal clear: she's a woman who needs to prove nothing beyond winning the race, which she did in breathtaking style to the strains of tragically muted celebration” (M1). Again, however, this element of “proving oneself” also came to be defined under the rubric of performance.

This “agency” element took the form of another discourse: one of analysing her behaviour. In other words, it was insofar as her behaviour fitted stereotypical norms of womanhood that her gendered subjectivity became established: “What is happening to this girl is very traumatic. I know she is a woman. She does not only share a room with my daughter, but the two girls also train and shower together” (M2).

However, this locus of subjectivity as a form of agency broke down at one point. M13 represents two opposing views in a single article that attempts to critique/justify her position within the South African *You* magazine where Semenya was dressed up in a feminine light.

On the one hand, it is argued that “this courageous young woman, who survived

‘sex tests’ in school toilets to win gold in Berlin, has been reduced to the blank façade of off-the-shelf femininity. In recent years black women have died in this country for daring to subvert gender. What is being done to Semenya is also violence. (M13)

Here the trauma is found in a lack of agency, in the sense that patriarchy overdetermines her identity. Although this might be correct, the other article in this section argues that, “on the cover Semenya regards the camera boldly, her gaze warm, relaxed. Almost as if she’s done it before – privately, perhaps, in the mirror, as some little girls do.” It goes on to quote Semenya a few times, saying how she enjoys her feminine side, and relates it to her womanhood. It states that “the Big Girls have laid it down. The rest of us may speculate about what Caster Semenya dreams about at night, but they really understand her. She ‘doesn’t like glamour’?” (M13). The problem of this, of course, is that agency is grounded in both the body and the subject; the latter assumes a one-to-one fit, whereas the former attempts to subvert this.

Rejecting heteronormativity

Two articles (S2; M8) reject labelling the body Woman. M8 argues that “the patriotic support she is receiving is based on clearly reinforcing her sex as female”. However, the article goes on to describing “the uncomfortable fact of Semenya’s transgender performance” and ends off with the statement:

For our country, this moment must make us measure our progress on the constitutional imperatives of freedom, equality and dignity for all. And it is an opportunity to question how truly we are willing and able to engage and embrace difference. (M8)

The problem, of course, is that one can only embrace the difference of Semenya if we stick to heteronormative roles. Despite only two articles following corporeal feminist theory in rejecting the binary sex/gender model for a more fluid embodiment, both of them grounded their approach based on the “uncomfortable” body. Here, the body is being both excluded and included, based on its difference. S2 argues that we need to “apply the humanity on display across South Africa to all people who challenge conventional gender and sexuality conventions, no matter how uncomfortable this makes us”. The discomfort here, I take it, also betrays the very ability to accept difference. The problem of locating Semenya as someone who is different locates itself around the nodal point of the body.

“Race”

One method by which race was discussed relates specifically to the comments made about Sarah Baartman. All of those who mentioned Baartman with relation to Semenya (as opposed to S2, which related it to the nation) rejected the notion that Semenya ought to be

viewed in light of the historical depiction of “black” women (M4, M6, M8, M13). Here, discourses oscillated between “Semenya’s nonconformity” (M7) and the emphasis on how “women’s [not “black”] bodies are scrutinised” (M13). Both of them emphasise the body; however, the latter does so within the heteronormative framework that generated the interrogation. The nodal point of her body, then, comes to replace her “racial” identity in both cases, whilst being related to either conforming/nonconforming discourse.

However, some comments made, e.g., “She may be from a rural area, but Semenya clearly is a capable young woman” (S14), positioned her class as having the possibility of having an inferior womanhood.

Conclusion

What might we say of Semenya with regards to patriarchy in South Africa? The major discourse that came to frame the debate pertained to a particular national identity, as well as one negotiating her identity in relation to the body. I am unsure how to relate the national identity to Gqola’s (2007) critique of nationalist rhetoric during the liberation struggle; on the one hand, it silenced the identity of “woman” around Semenya; however, on the other, this was shown to have been linked to the validity of the “gender tests”, which was irrelevant for Gqola’s critique. What was also relevant was the tension between the naming of intersexuality as beyond-the-body, yet remaining within its borders, which follow on from corporeal feminism.

Many of the discourses remained locked within the framework that generated the trauma. Not one article critiqued the rules of sports in providing a normative discourse that generated the saga. Out of all 33 articles, “intersex” was mentioned once. This is perhaps a result of either the silence or stigma associated with it, or the uncertainty as to the outcome of her “tests”. Ostensibly, it appears that sympathy for Semenya was well-shared, and the calls to end her trauma appeared to be well-received across the country. Yet, it seems that there existed a tension between the sympathetic discourse afforded to those who are intersexuals, and the heteronormative assumptions that come to define it. Perhaps we might leave this as an open question as to whether it refers to the case of Semenya as a whole.

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Appendix

Sunday Times

- S1 Caster Semenya: that's our girl you're messing with. 23/8.
- S2 Castigated and celebrated – 30/8
- S3 Hero Caster's road to gold – 30/8
- S4 Why she stunned the world – 30/8
- S5 Shame on you, IAAF – 6/9
- S6 Leave the poor woman alone – 13/9
- S7 Big shot who failed Caster – 13/9
- S8 "They've made Caster a freak" – 13 / 9
- S9 Too late not to do harm – 20/9
- S10 Chuene 'treated Caster as a pawn' – 20/9
- S11 Legal eagles to fight her case – 20/9
- S12 How Chuene lied to us – 20/9
- S13 Indian athlete experienced hell too – 20/9
- S14 Let Caster speak to expose the truth - 20/9
- S15 No rush to condemn Chuene, says official – 20/9
- S16 Caster's lawyers set their sights on Chuene – 27/9

Mail & Guardian

- M1 Racing to conclusions – 27/8
- M2 She's a lady, man – 27/8
- M3 Tests on Caster 'unfair' – 27/8
- M4 Malema raps ANC leaders on race – 3/9
- M5 Caster tried, tested – 3/9
- M6 The real lesson of Caster – 3/9
- M7 Run, Caster, Run! – 3/9
- M8 Feminine masculinities, masculine femininities – 3/9
- M9 Engendered potential – 3/9
- M10 How the saga unfolded – 3/9
- M11 At cross purposes over Semenya – 10/9
- M12 Chuene runs wild – 17/9
- M13 Dressing up, dressing down – 17/9

M14 ASA's tall tales – 23/9

M15 Semenya sold to the highest bidder – 23/9

M16 Expedient outrage and the Semenya tests – 23/9

M17 Let down by everyone – 23/9