

Reframing the Olympic Games as a Space of Contestation Rather than a Fixed Place of Peace: Uncovering New Spatial Stories of (De)Securitisation

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Introduction

This chapter reframes **the Olympic Games** as a **space of contestation** rather than a **fixed place of peace**. Initially, this objective sounds ludicrous given that this **mega-event** was deliberately designed as a pathway to transcend conflict and instigate peace. In ancient times the proclamation of a sacred truce during the four Panhellenic Games called on all warring parties to halt their battles before, during and after the competition period to ensure the total safety of athletes and spectators (Georgiadis and Syrigos 2009). While no truce is formally declared in modern epochs, the expectation that peace will prevail during the Games is inscribed in the **Olympic Charter** (1894[2014]) and is avowedly championed by the **International Olympic Committee (IOC)** and **Olympic Movement**. Such sentiments were echoed by the United Nations General Secretary, Ban Ki-Moon, in the preparation for the **2014 Winter Olympics** in **Sochi**. As he noted,

the Olympic Truce is rooted in the hope that if people and nations can put aside their differences for one day, they can build on that to establish more lasting ceasefires and find paths towards durable peace, prosperity and human rights. For these next few weeks, may the torch of the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Sochi remind us what is possible when nations unite (Moon 2014).

The contemporary ambitions of the Olympic Games to create peace go beyond the ancient truce. For, “The goal of the Olympic Movement is to contribute to building a peaceful and better world by educating youth people through sport practised in accordance with Olympism and its values” (Olympic Charter 1894[2014], 15). Elsewhere the Olympic Charter openly declares that “the practice of sport is a human right” and that,

The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Olympic Charter shall be secured without discrimination of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status (Olympic Charter 1894[2014], 11-12).

Through statements such as these, agents (re)constitute and reinforce the Olympics as a fixed place of peace.

Yet, to stop here in the story largely misses the point. Despite repeated attempts to reify the Olympics as a fixed place of peace this ending is never guaranteed. By extension, this place is never totally secure. Taking these observations seriously means that the longstanding spatial story of the Olympics is constantly open to contestation and even rupture. These possibilities cannot be omitted. As history clearly demonstrates the Olympics are not immune from boycotts, protest, violence and even death (Bajoria 2008; Cottrell and Nelson 2011; Hill 1996; Lenskyj 2000; Karamichas 2013; Schaus and Wenn 2007).

On a deeper level, this chapter argues that if we blindly accept storylines that axiomatically connect the Olympics and peace we may obscure the heterogeneity of spaces and stories in play. With remarkable constancy another storyline is characterising the Olympics according

to a sequence of “on your marks, get set, securitise” (Coaffee and Rogers 2008; Hellberg 2014; Lenskyj 2000, 2002; Toohey and Taylor 2012). This alternative story has many facets. For some the Olympics are considered to be securitised on the grounds that host states are increasingly vulnerable to an array of catastrophic attacks (Falcous and Silk 2006; Giulianotti and Klauser 2012; Toohey and Taylor 2008). The risk of agents hijacking this venue to make a statement is a real security concern for any host nation. As Hedenskog reveals, “the power of attraction” created by the Games,

also makes them the prime targets for individuals or groups that want to create attention around political or secessionist demands, as well as opportunity to strike against central authority at a time when it will be vulnerable and highly sensitive to any assaults against its security (2014, 180).

A directly interrelated line of argument is that the Games have been securitised through the use of extensive **surveillance** policies (Bennett and Haggerty 2011; Boyle and Haggerty 2009). A common grievance raised here is that the implementation of such ‘heightened security measures’ in the build-up, duration and aftermath of each Games erodes rather than protects civil liberties and freedoms (Haggerty and Ericson 2000; Hassan 2014; Sugden 2012; Vlcek 2007).

But suggesting that the Games are securitised may not get us very far in reframing the Games as space of contestation rather than a fixed place of peace. At best, **securitisation** provides a useful entry point for understanding how the Olympics become a space of political protest and existential threat. It also helps us to examine how security is spoken in this context and, in turn, how different agents undertake multiple (de)securitising moves. Nevertheless, as

spelled out later on, it is important to be careful about how securitised stories are told and believed.

By reframing the Olympics as a space of contestation I hope to provide a timely reminder that the Olympics do not have to be securitised. On the contrary, there is no clear way in which securitisation and this mega-event are mutually compatible. Returning to the principles inscribed in the Olympic Charter, this mega-event should be immune from any type of **politicisation** or securitisation. Making this plain the latter explicitly notes,

Recognising that sport occurs within the framework of society, sports organisations within the Olympic Movement shall have the rights and obligations of autonomy, which include freely establishing and controlling the rules of sport, determining the structure and governance of their organisations, enjoying the right of elections free from any outside influence and the responsibility for ensuring that principles of good governance be applied. (Olympic Charter 1894[2014], 11)

Before proceeding it is necessary to clarify the following points. First, this chapter in no way rejects that intimate relationships exist between peace and the Olympics. Undoubtedly the Games have been, and continue to be, used as a way to improve intra, inter and supra-national relations. Decisions to fly the United Nations flag at all competition sites of the Olympic Games in 1998 (UN General Assembly 2002 [A/595]), and to bring the Olympic flame to **the United Nations** for the first time in 2004 exemplify the common aspiration of both organisations to create international peace. Equally, this chapter does not argue that the Games cannot de-securitise antagonistic disputes. Such a claim would be simplistic given that many countries have sought to create new agendas for peace and ameliorate old hostilities

under the Olympic banner. A contemporary example here is the inclusion of Dublin, the capital of the Republic of Ireland, as a destination for the London 2012 Olympic torch relay (Addley 2012). Speaking at the opening ceremony of the latter event, Sebastian Coe¹, conceived, “in 1948, shortly after the Second World War, my predecessor stood where I am today and made the first tentative steps in turning the world from war to sport” (cited in Kelso 2012). However, accepting that the Olympics have the potential to turn ‘the world from war to sport’ is not difficult given its stated purpose. The puzzle confronting us is how it is possible for the Games to create securitisation rather than peace? This is the research puzzle I am going to address. However, to reiterate the goal here is not to assume that the Olympics are securitised but to take a step back to ask how this outcome is becoming possible in this particular context.

The remainder of the chapter is structured as follows. Drawing on the work of Michel de Certeau, the first section introduces the spatial perspective adopted throughout. Next I analyse the Copenhagen School’s securitisation framework and a number of its critiques. The goal here is not to resolve disputes over how the original securitisation framework can be advanced. Instead I attempt to bridge de Certeau’s concept of ‘spatial stories’ with securitisation to create new lines of inquiry. Section three shifts our attention to the empirical analysis. There I trace some of the core ‘spatial stories’ constructed to frame the 2014 Sochi Games as a fixed place of peace on the one hand and securitised space on the other. Through my analysis it becomes clear that these two different stories are in dialogue with each other. What is also highlighted is that there is a precarious balance between them. By way of conclusion, the final section relays the promises of reframing the Games as a space of contestation.

Methodology

To conceptualise the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics as a space of contestation I set out to examine the complicated semantic nexuses surrounding this mega-event. However, I was quickly confronted with the dilemma of ‘information overload’. During the seventeen days of this competition period alone the world was inundated with multiple speech acts, ranging from official IOC press statements to speeches made by national governments to spectacular opening and closing ceremonies to interviews with athletes to boisterous protest rallies. Moreover, each of these utterances attracted extensive media coverage that was disseminated instantaneously across the globe through various communicative platforms. As Gerhard Heiberg, Chairman of the IOC Marketing Commission, emphasised,

from a broadcasting perspective, these Games broke new ground by offering more coverage on more channels and platforms than ever before, with the amount of digital coverage of Sochi 2014 exceeding traditional television broadcasts for the first time in Olympic history (International Olympic Committee Marketing Report 2014, 7).

Confronted with an inundation of speech acts, this chapter limits itself to considerations of how security was spoken by key actors before, during and after the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics. From my analysis, the IOC and official Russian spokespeople emerged as the main speakers for peace and security in this context. This observation is somewhat counterintuitive given the venomous amounts of scrutiny these actors came under over how they were running the Games. However, as illustrated, a variety of voices emerged to challenge the dominant spatial story that was advocated by Russia and the IOC.

Aware that **discourse analysis** is not a homogenous methodological approach, it is necessary to mention that I concentrated on verbal and written texts of the dominant speakers at the expense of non-verbal or visual genres (Milliken 1999). This decision is justified since the primary goal here is to explore what types of (de)securitising moves were undertaken to (re)frame the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics as a secure and insecure space. A crucial limitation of the analysis presented is that I do not speak fluent Russian. Consequently, I relied on English based sources and translations to engage with the speech acts uttered by Russian spokespeople in this context. However, it was possible for me to access the majority of texts relevant to this study because the official languages of the IOC are English and French (IOC Factsheet 2015). Nevertheless, the question of how the analysis presented here travels to other spatial and linguistic milieus should be a future line of inquiry.

Theorising spatial perspectives

Today it is habitual for scholars to speak of a '**spatial turn**' within International Relations and other disciplines (Hubbard and Kitchin 2011; Tally 2013; Warf and Arias 2014). However, despite the ascendancy of this 'turn', space remains notoriously difficult to pin down in theory and in practice. To reframe the Olympic Games as a space of contestation rather than a fixed place of peace this section outlines the writing of Michel de Certeau. My reasons are threefold. First, de Certeau provides a lens to extrapolate the interrelationships and differences between place and space. Second, foregrounding his concept of spatial stories enriches our analytical toolbox for uncovering how actors attempt to impose order on fluid spaces. Third, taking his ideas on board illustrates that different (de)securitising moves were attempted during the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics.

Space and place

In essence, de Certeau studies the multiplicity of space and its constant **mobility**. According to him, “space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it” (de Certeau 1988, 117). An important point foregrounded in this quotation is that space is constituted by and constitutive of multidimensional spheres of **interaction**. In short, it is not fixed. On the contrary, de Certeau portrays space as a tapestry of complexities that can never be reduced to or contained by static boundaries. Rejecting any kind of reductive delineations he conceptualises space as a **‘practice’** (ibid). Considered from this angle, it is not possible for actors to step outside space to understand it in a detached fashion. On the contrary, spatial practices are lived in and experienced through everyday settings, encounters and **‘pedestrian speech acts’** (1988, 97).

Although de Certeau depicts spatial practices as fluid and mobile parameters of action, he does not portray them as benign or emancipatory projects. Instead, spatial practices can transcend limits but they can also be reduced to them. It is in the latter capacity that de Certeau calls on his readers to become critically aware of how spatial practices can normalise power relations to an illusory inertia (1988, 125-126, 201). Indeed, as a critical project his work seeks to expose the banal rituals of inclusion and exclusion that are constituted and enforced by certain orders.

Another defining feature of de Certeau’s theorisation of space is its distinguishability from place. He makes this distinction on the grounds that the latter, “implies an indication of

stability” whereas the former takes into consideration, “vectors of direction, velocities and time variables” (1988, 117). Going further, he notes,

in relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualisation, transformed into a term dependent on many different conventions, situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts. In contradistinction to the place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability of a “proper” (1988, 117).

An outstanding observation here is that spaces and places both constitute and enforce a certain order.

Spatial Stories

Throughout his writings de Certeau reflexively problematises the binary he draws between space and place. He does this by suggesting that space can transform into place and vice versa. Here, ‘spatial stories’ are deemed to be vitally important. Ultimately, de Certeau claims ‘spatial stories’ facilitate transitions between spaces and places. To be exact, stories, “transverse and organise place; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories”. From this baseline he further argues that, “every story is a travel story – a spatial practice” (1988, 115).

What stands out in de Certeau’s discussion of spatial stories is that they are not simply told. As spatial practices, they are enacted. By the same token spatial stories are intimately interwoven into how spaces and places are constructed, inhabited and embodied.

Reciprocally, where stories are disappearing or deprived of narrations, there is a loss of space (1988, 123). Another salient observation de Certeau makes here is that spatial stories always remain **polyvalent** and thus can be interconnected with other stories. Taking this line of argument seriously ensures that opposing stories can be combined together whilst always remaining separate and unfinished (1988, 119).

Against this backdrop, the remaining sections incorporate de Certeau's ideas to reframe the Games as a space of contestation rather than a fixed place of peace. Doing so also paints a more holistic picture of how the Olympic Games can be securitised in theory and in practice.

Security speech acts and securitisation

According to the Copenhagen School security does not exist *a priori* or unfold in any predictable way. Rather they contend, “security is a self-referential practice, because it is in this practice that the issue becomes a security issue—not necessarily because a real existential threat exists but because the issue is presented as such a threat” (Buzan et al. 1998, 24). Inspired by Austin's speech act theory, the Copenhagen School contends that speaking security does something. By uttering a security **speech act** agents undertake a ‘**securitising move**’ that identifies a referent object as posing an existential threat. In the most general terms, securitising speech acts and moves signify attempts to legitimate the use of extraordinary measures to deal with said security threat. In effect, this requires agents shifting issues outside of the rules that “would otherwise bind” (Buzan et al. 1998, 24).

It is imperative to note that neither security speech acts nor securitising move(s) equate to securitisation. The latter requires **audience** acceptance. For, “if no sign of such acceptance

exists, we can talk only of a securitising move, not of an object actually being securitised (Buzan et al. 1998, 25). By making audience acceptance a paramount prerequisite for securitisation, the Copenhagen School reinforces that speaking security is not the ideal choice or a banal action. Instead, “it is always a political choice to securitise or accept a securitisation” (1998, 29). Building from this platform the Copenhagen School go so far as to contend that securitisation is a failure (1998). According to them, this failure emanates from the inability of agents to resolve issues within the normal political sphere.

It is in this vein that **de-securitisation** becomes pivotal. Indeed, Vuori presents, “de-securitisation as a counter-strategy or-move to securitisation” (Vuori 2011, 191). Within the Copenhagen School framework this concept is defined as, “the shifting of issues out of emergency mode and into the normal bargaining processes of the political sphere”, thus, moving them out of a “threat-defense sequence and into the ordinary public sphere” (Buzan et al. 1998, 4, 29; Wæver 1995). Typically, de-securitisation is presented as the preferable long range option, “since it means not to have issue phrased as ‘threat against which we have countermeasures’ but to move them out this threat-defense sequence and into the ordinary public sphere” (Buzan et al. 1998, 29).

Two points should be taken away. First, “securitization is a process that unfolds as agents start and stop speaking security” (Donnelly 2013, 45). Second, the Copenhagen School is largely adverse to materialisation of securitised space.

Securitisation and ‘spatial stories’

To date, the Copenhagen School's securitisation framework has been the subject of tremendous debate. Some sceptics maintain that this concept is not emancipatory, and as such should be abandoned altogether (Booth 1991, 2007; Dalby 2009). Other scholars engaging with the original framework favour modification as opposed to total abandonment. A large part of what is going on in the latter debates touches on contextual considerations (cf. Balzacq 2005, 2011, 2015; Ilgit and Klotz 2014; McDonald 2008; Salter 2008; Stritzel 2007). Specifically, Balzacq has advanced a more 'sociological approach' to securitisation as a way to solidify the, "1) the centrality of audiences; 2) the co-dependency of agency and context; 3) the structuring force of the dispositif, that is a constellation of practices and tools" (Balzacq 2011, 3). Concurrently, his alternative approach calls for a richer appreciation of how, "securitisation occurs in a field of struggles" (2011, 5).

Amidst the burgeoning securitisation debates, very few attempts have been made to incorporate de Certeau's conceptualisation of 'spatial stories' into the fold. This absence is particularly notable for three reasons. First, de Certeau may provide the Copenhagen School with a more robust reply to those who suggest that this process is not emancipatory. Although traces of this argument find expression in the Copenhagen School's claim that de-securitisation should always be the ideal, bringing de Certeau in would reinforce that spaces and places are never benign. Second, his emphasis on conceptualising space as polyvalent would enable scholars to show that 'context' matters in securitisation studies. To recall, de Certeau contends that, "space is composed of intersections of mobile elements [...] actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it" (de Certeau 1988, 117). Finally, I would like to add another contribution by suggesting that securitisation can be easily reframed as an ongoing spatial story. The innovation here could be important for changing different scholarly attitudes towards this approach. What is then distinctive about the Copenhagen

School's securitisation framework is the explicit and implicit spatial perspectives it contains about the (re)telling of security and (de)securitised stories. Of course, rooting securitisation in different spatial stories could make it more relevant to those exploring how security is spoken in banal, everyday local and urbanised environments (Becker and Muller 2013; Huysmans 2011). Beneficially, de Certeau illustrates that there are countless stories about and space and place for (de)securitisation.

The 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics: A space of contestation, peace or securitisation?

On 4 July 2007, the President of the IOC, Jacques Rogge, announced Sochi as the host city for the XXII Olympic Winter Games to be held in 2014 (Olympic.org 2014). The Games were organised in two clusters: a coastal cluster for ice events in Sochi, and a mountain cluster located in the Krasnaya Polyana Mountains.

For many the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics signifies a carefully choreographed sequence of 'political mythmaking' that showcased Russia as a powerful and unified country (Müller 2011; Persson and Petersson 2014; Petersson and Vamling 2013). As Richmond claimed, "from the start Moscow hailed the selection of Sochi as the host to the Winter Olympics as a multifaceted victory for the Russian people" (Richmond 2013, 203). Affirming this point Dmitry Chernyshenko, President of the Sochi Organising committee, proclaimed: "The Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics showed the new face of Russia to the world. We constructed – from scratch- state of the art sport venues that set the perfect stage for the performance of a lifetime" (International Olympic Committee Marketing Report 2014, 8).

The purpose of this section is to highlight how the longstanding spatial story of the Olympics as a fixed place of peace was reproduced and then contested in this context. As will be shown, there was an extreme disjuncture between views of what was thought to be required for peace to prevail at these Games.

Setting the scene: spatial stories of peace

Within the parameters of the spatial story espoused by the IOC and Russian officials the 2014 Winter Olympics were clearly denoted a fixed place of peace. From the outset it was declared, “Russia is determined to complete all the projects at the highest level in due time—and of course in full cooperation with the IOC. The Games have the full support of the Russian government” (Russian Federation Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Zhukov cited in International Olympic Committee 2010).

This line of argument finds expression in several interrelated narrative strands. One area where it manifested itself most interestingly was in the considerable effort Russia devoted to ensuring that the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics were safe and secure. The eradication of any types of insecurity thus became a top priority. Indeed, the whole semantics framing the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics as a fixed place of peace were very frequently rationalised through concerns about safety. Under the slogan ‘safest in history’ Russia choreographed an extensive array of security measures (Cyveillance 2014, 2). For example, in August 2013 the Kremlin issued a Presidential decree that severely restricted access to and from the Black Sea resort. The decree resulted in the demarcation of a vast “forbidden zone” as well as a number of “controlled zones” (BBC 2013a). Enveloped in the decrees was also the prohibition of, “protests, meeting, rallies demonstrations, marches and pickets from 7 January 2014 to 21

March 2014” (Cyveillance 2014, 3). Notably, these measures were justified by the Russian authorities and the IOC in the name of safety and security measures. As Chernyshenko memorably stated Sochi was the, “most secure venue on the planet” (cited in Wilson 2014).

‘Transcending the limits’

Irrespective of Russia and the IOC putting the longstanding spatial story of the Olympics as a fixed place of peace into practice, their speech acts quickly became a nodal point for contestation and opposition long before the opening ceremony took place in Sochi on 7 February 2014. Immediate concerns were raised about the suitability of Sochi as a venue for the Winter Games given the subtropical climate of the Black Sea summer resort (The Economist 2013). More seriously, many activists condemned, “the forced evictions of some 2,000 families to make way for the Olympic venues and infrastructure”, alongside “migrant workers abuse, environmental degradation, crackdowns on civil society and the press” (Human Rights Watch 2014). Charges of corruption at what Russian President Vladimir Putin described as, “the biggest building site on the planet” also tainted the 2014 Winter Olympics (Putin 2014; also see Gibson 2013; Lenskyj 2014, 3).

At a more regional level, attempts by Russia to frame the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics as fixed place of peace was complicated by, “a centuries-old row it has with the disposed Circassian nation” (Zhemukhov 2010). Here, the actual sites of the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympic stadiums aroused powerful memories and strong emotions (Zhemukhov and Orrtung 2014). As one commentator noted, “Circassians are saying don't play games with the memory of our ancestors and since the Games represent peace and dialogue between civilisations, don't hold this event on the site of a genocide” (cited in Sahin 2013).

The ability of Russia to host secure Games in Sochi was also questioned on the grounds that, “this region has been shaken by ethnic conflicts and has experienced two Chechen wars. It is also the part of Russia over which Islamic radicals have the strongest hold” (Malashenko 2013). Fear of possible terrorist attacks by regional actors were fuelled when Doku Umarov, head of the Russian group Im irat Kavaz (IK), released a video dated June 2013 that called on his rebels to disrupt the upcoming Winter Olympics (Edler 2013). The suicide bomber attacks in Volgograd that killed 34 people in December 2013 did little to dampen suspicion that, “Sochi itself would be turned into a tantalizing target for Islamic terrorists” (Myers 2014).

Vociferous concerns were also expressed about the use of an enhanced version of SORM, Russia’s domestic electronic eavesdropping system (Galeotti 2013). In the face of what was described as “Russia’s surveillance state” (Soldatov and Borogan 2013), the US Department of Homeland Security issued a series of ‘security tips’ to those travelling to Sochi and those watching the Games abroad. Apart from raising the possibility of ‘hacktivists’ these tip also noted that,

Russia has a national system of lawful interception of all electronic communications. The System of Operative-Investigative Measures, or SORM, legally allows the Russian FSB to monitor, intercept, and block any communication sent electronically (i.e. cell phone or landline calls, internet traffic, etc.). (US Department of Homeland Security (ST14-001) 2014).

Storylines that equated the 2014 Winter Olympics as a fixed place of peace were seriously strained in relation to the anti-gay propaganda laws that the Russian Government passed in

the period leading up to the Olympics. Several developments in 2013 raised fears of an ‘open season’ on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered (LGBT) people, “including the torture and murder of a young gay man, a violent attack on a trans woman, and a Russian member of parliament’s call for public whipping of gay men” (Lenskyj 2014, 4). Adding weight to these concerns Human Rights Watch reported, “this law openly discriminates against LGBT people, legitimises anti-LGBT violence, and seeks to erase LGBT people from the country’s public life” (Human Rights Watch 2014). Tensions over the rights of LGBT individuals in Russia culminated in the branding of Sochi as the ‘Gay Olympics’ (Friedman 2014). In tandem, this issue was politicised to the point of overt calls for governments to boycott the Games. One example of moves in this direction came from Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, a member of the Russian punk band Pussy Riot, shortly after she had been released from jail (BBC News 2013b). Fry also warned that inaction on this matter would ensure that the Olympic, “five rings would finally be forever smeared, besmirched and ruined in the eyes of the civilized world” (2013). Likewise, President Barack Obama included three openly gay athletes in the American Olympic Delegation while refraining from attending himself (Office of the Press Secretary 2014).

A space of contestation

Against the tension laden backdrops sketched above, the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics appear to be anything but a fixed place of peace. Instead, this mega-event can easily be conceptualised as a securitised space. Which of these two radically different spatial stories is correct? Can they be reconciled? It is precisely at this point that the promise of reframing the 2014 Sochi Games as a space of contestation shines through. From this viewpoint it is clear that this mega-event became a polyvalent space in which securitising and desecuritising

moves were enacted simultaneously. Thus the two stories do not exist in splendid isolation. More frequently than not they were enacted in the same places and in the same spaces to speak security and peace in different ways.

Returning to de Certeau's concept of spatial stories also exposes how different actors sought to promote and prioritise certain spatial stories over other. Something that is often overlooked in discussions about the 2014 Winter Olympics is that it is possible to (re)tell either story from a different perspective. To exemplify, whilst the acts of protest mounted in the build up to and during the 2014 Sochi Games are largely framed as desecuritisising moves, they can also be viewed as attempted securitisising moves against the Russian government and even the IOC. As mentioned, both of these actors were in different respects categorised as posing an existential threat to various groups, ranging from LGBT communities to Circassians to migrant worker to spectators. Leaving aside whether these securitisising claims are true, the point being made here is that these (de)securitised stories have a counter-narrative and many competing strands of meaning embedded in them.

Interestingly, my analysis has also hinted that deliberate de-securitisising moves are interwoven within the allegedly securitised policies of the Russian government. In response to rising concerns about the new propaganda laws he had passed, for instance, President Putin assured the international community that LGBT athletes or visitors would not be subject to any kind of intimidation during their stay in Russia. Instead, he stressed that they, "can feel relaxed and calm, but leave children alone please" (cited in Walker 2014). It is also possible to suggest that the Russian government decision to retract the absolute ban on public protests and demonstration that was originally legitimated under the 2013 Presidential decree constitutes a de-securitisising move. The latter 'move' was particularly welcomed by the IOC

Executive Board on the grounds that, “the people will now have an opportunity to express their views and freely demonstrate their opinions in Sochi” (2013).

Conceptualising the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi solely as a securitised story also overlooks how the IOC reaffirmed the Games a fixed place of peace. Addressing the rising concerns over Russia’s anti-gay legislation, for instance, it stressed that it had, “received assurances from the highest level of government in Russia that the legislation will not affect those attending or taking part in the Games” (IOC 2013). In conjunction, the IOC President, Thomas Bach, took a firm stance against the Games being used as a space of protest. Speaking at the opening ceremony he noted, “we are grateful to those who respect the fact that sport can only contribute to development and peace if it is not used as a stage for political dissent or for trying to score points in internal or external political contests” (Bach 2014). Here again, the story being told conforms more to a de-securitising logic than a securitised one.

Markedly, the plots, characters and endings of the stories constructed about the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics vary dramatically. An important improvement of the spatial stories told about Sochi would be to reframe them as competing but also contested discursive frames and (de)securitising strands. This would unmask the presence of multiple spatial enactments rather than simply pitting one story against the other.

Conclusions

Relationships between the Olympic Games, peace and security are complicated, multi-layered and changing. However, there is a tendency for contemporary accounts of the

Olympics Games to coalesce around two dominant stories. Proponents of the Olympics contend that this sporting occasion signifies a fixed place of peace. This narrative has a long legacy. Nevertheless, an antithetical supposition has now emerged which suggests that the Olympics are securitised.

Drawing on the work of Michel de Certeau this chapter has argued that neither story is fully complete. Instead, each is better understood as a segment of a much larger totality of enacted spatial practices. As de Certeau reaffirms, no place is ever fixed and thus no space is ever fully secure. Conversely, spatial practices and stories are always multifaceted and mobile. This revelation entails a number of profound implications. If taken seriously, de Certeau's ideas can convert the spatial stories currently being told about and through the Games. First and foremost his ideas disturbs the boundaries of the dominant spatial story of the Olympics, namely that it is a fixed place of peace. As illustrated, the manifold contestations that erupted in relation to the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics demonstrate the IOC it must constantly put the meanings of its Charter into use no matter what place or space it is operating in (Williamson 2014).

Another benefit of drawing on de Certeau is that it allows us to reframe the Olympics as a space in which securitisation can occur, rather than a securitised space de facto. This may seem like a trivial differentiation. However, conceptualising the Games in this way offers a much richer picture of the complexities at play. At first glance, the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics appear to confirm that this mega-event is securitised. Clearly extensive arrays of security measures were installed to monitor anyone attending and watching this particular sports spectacle. Arguably, such measures indicate that Russia felt existentially threatened by an array of actors and referent objects located inside and outside of its national borders.

However, returning to de Certeau the limits of this securitised story can be transgressed. Indeed, as shown, there is evidence to suggest that the Russian government and the IOC sought to continuously de-securitise the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics and reaffirm it as a fixed place of peace.

Thus, the types of spatial stories that are told about and enacted in the Olympics have enormous ramifications. In many ways, the mega-event we know today is becoming a product of spatial stories of securitisation. This scenario is bleak for it suggests that the Olympics have been transformed from a fixed place of peace to a space where spectators and athletes alike are existentially threatened. Hence a negative consequence of securitising the Games is that this space comes to be framed as a perilous zone where people are never safe. It remains to be ascertained which spatial story, peace or securitisation, will prevail or how either will end. If we follow de Certeau, the goal must be to resist any fixed ending.

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