

## **Preface: *Space Invaders Revisited***

Jo Littler and Anamik Saha

‘Some bodies are deemed as having the right to belong, while others are marked <https://hopenothate.org.uk/about-us/contact/imagined> (politically, historically and conceptually) circumscribed as being ‘out of place’. (Puwar, 2004: 8)

Two decades ago, Nirmal Puwar published *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies out of Place* (Berg, 2004). This book pointed out that some bodies are ‘deemed as having the right to belong’: they fit into social institutions with ease, due to the sedimented histories, cultures and politics of ‘race’, gender and class. Such people are the ‘somatic norm’. The rest are positioned as ‘space invaders’: marked out as trespassers, as being ‘out of place’. Written at a time when ‘increasingly, women and minorities are entering fields where white male power is firmly entrenched’, the book used an expansive range of interviews and examples from across UK national institutions (including parliament, civil service, the art world and academia) together with an interdisciplinary range of theory to pick apart how and why such forms of classification and exclusion works and how people negotiate and contest it. In doing so, the book asks: what happens when those bodies not expected to occupy certain places do so?

This special issue emerges out of an event we co-organised with Nirmal Puwar, *Space Invaders Revisited*, which was held online via City, University of London in 2022. We thought it would be a good idea to revisit this book for two reasons. First, to consider its legacy and to celebrate it: to recognise and to trace how it has been such an important and useful book for so many people, both inside and outside academia. For, as the issue shows, this is a text which has been profoundly influential for work in the museum and cultural sector; the ideas in it have inspired a wide range of other academic work; and in our experience, it has been highly popular with students who have appreciated both the concepts and book’s clarity. Second, we wanted to revisit the themes it discusses in the current conjuncture. What does it mean to talk about these issues *now*, in a different moment, when some dynamics have changed and some stayed the same?

At the time we organised the event, it was a moment marked by renewed activist work and institutional attention to ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusion’. It was also a moment marked by the weaponisation of these themes and issues: through the mobilisation of images of diversity to push through exclusionary agendas and programmes and policies that are against equality. Now, two and a half years later, as the expanded special issue that we invited Nirmal Puwar to work on with us is ready to publish, the ground has shifted again, through the (related) issues of DEI/EDI rollbacks in so many companies and public institutions and the rise and mainstreaming of the far right. We are proud that this issue collectively tackles all these different moments – these social, political and cultural shifts – in its revisiting of the challenge and invitation presented by this lucid and compelling book.

