"Our Golden Girl": Race, Politics, and Sport in the Creation of Identity in Post-colonial Zimbabwe

MANASE CHIWESHE and TAFADZWA CHOTO

Abstract: This paper offers a nuanced analysis of how sport intersects with race and gender in creating identities in post-colonial Zimbabwe. It traces the biography of Zimbabwe's most successful Olympian swimmer, Kirsty Coventry, from her success at the 2004 Olympics in Athens to her appointment as the Minister of Sport in 2018. The selective acceptance of Coventry's whiteness against the backdrop of a general rejection of white identity in Zimbabwe points to a nuanced understanding of race. It suggests that whiteness in Zimbabwe is not inherently incompatible with national identity but is often constructed as such for political expediency. Coventry's case reveals that the state can redefine who is considered a legitimate Zimbabwean based on contributions to national pride and the political context. This flexibility in racial identity construction highlights the dynamic nature of postcolonial identity politics in Zimbabwe. Her victories came when Zimbabwe descended into a socio-economic and political crisis after the ruling ZANU PF regime took over white-owned farmers in a move meant to redress colonial land disposition. Former President Robert Mugabe's party created a narrative of white farmers as foreigners who did not belong and whose forefathers stole land from black Africans. As a white woman, she was part of these foreigners, yet the former president called her "golden girl" and awarded her US$100,000 in cash for her performance. Through content analysis of media coverage of her success and homecoming, we highlight how success in sport separated Coventry from colonial masters portrayed in the narrative ZANU PF has created around white people. Success in sport created an identity around Coventry, which had nothing to do with her race; she became a Zimbabwean, our golden girl.

Keywords: Kirsty Coventry, Robert Mugabe, swimming, Zimbabwe, ZANU PF

Situating Kirsty Coventry's Story in a Post-Colonial Setting

In August 2004, at the Athens Olympic games, swimmer Kirsty Coventry won two gold medals and a silver medal, 24 years after Zimbabwe's first Olympic medal since the women's hockey team won gold at the 1980 games in Moscow games. Coventry went on to win four more medals at the 2008 Beijing Games to become the most successful African (female or male)

Manase Kudzai Chiweshe is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Community and Development Studies at the University of Zimbabwe. His work focuses on the sociology of everyday life in African space, focusing on sports, leisure and football studies.
Tafadzwa Blessing Choto is a Lecturer in the Department of Community Studies at the Midlands State University in Gweru, Zimbabwe. He is also a PhD Student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Zimbabwe.

ISSN: 2152-2448

Olympian with seven medals.[1] Following her accomplishments in Beijing, then president Robert Mugabe referred to her as "our golden girl" and following his lead, the press in Zimbabwe dubbed her as the "immortal Kirsty Coventry," and a "national treasure."[2] This representation of Kirsty Coventry stands in contrast to the post-2000 characterization by Robert Mugabe and state media of white Zimbabweans as his enemies and as not Zimbabwean.[3] This article provides an analysis of the role of sport in the creation of identity in post-colonial Zimbabwe. To highlight the importance of Coventry in understanding how race was constructed in post-2000 Zimbabwe, Palmer and Wilson conclude, "Thus Kirsty and Robert aka Coventry and Mugabe represents clashes between black and white, freedom through sport and the Olympic ideal for peace versus racial tension and the removal of the white population from this former British colony in Africa."[4]

It is not immediately clear why Coventry, a white athlete, was exempt from the harsh racial rhetoric typically employed by the ZANU-PF regime, particularly during the era of land reforms. There are multiple ways of explaining this exemption. First, it is possible that Mugabe's rhetoric against white farmers was less about race and more about targeting large commercial farm owners for capital accumulation. In this view, Coventry's status as a sportsperson rather than a landowner could have spared her from this specific form of political antagonism. Second, sport—and particularly the Olympics—might hold an apolitical or even unifying characteristic that transcends racial divisions. Coventry's success on the international stage could have provided a rare opportunity for national pride that superseded racial conflicts. Third, Zimbabwe's lack of significant sporting achievements in recent decades could mean that the population was eager to celebrate a successful athlete, regardless of race. Coventry's accomplishments provided a much-needed source of national pride. Another perspective is that the regime, desperate for legitimacy, co-opted any internationally successful Zimbabwean, regardless of race. Coventry's youth and lack of association with the Rhodesian period or political opposition might have also played a role in her acceptance and celebration. These possibilities suggest race relations in Zimbabwe are complex and defy a single explanation of how Kirsty Coventry's trajectory evolved. Coventry's situation, however, offers insights into the multifaceted nature of identity, politics, and race in the country.

The larger point of this paper is that the acceptance and celebration of Coventry highlight the flexible and sometimes contradictory nature of racial narratives in postcolonial Zimbabwe. Her success in sport allowed her to transcend the typical racial divisions that have historically defined the country. This suggests that race in Zimbabwe is not a fixed category but can be negotiated and redefined, especially when aligned with national pride and international acclaim. Coventry's case illustrates how racial identities can be selectively acknowledged or downplayed based on broader socio-political objectives.

The article unravels and comparatively analyzes the narratives around Kirsty Coventry and whiteness in Zimbabwe during the occupation of white-owned farms.[5] At independence in 1980, Zimbabwe had a skewed land ownership structure, which saw a minority white farming population control the majority of productive agricultural land.[6] Subsequent land reforms in the 1980s and 1990s were largely unsuccessful in reversing these land inequities, leading to protracted land occupations, culminating in the violent occupation of white-owned farms in 2000.[7] The farm occupations, dubbed *jambanja* (chaos), preceded the government-initiated Fast

Track Land Reform Program in 2002, which saw the compulsory acquisition of white-owned farms without compensation.[8]

Zimbabwe's colonial history, marked by racial segregation and economic disparities, has left a legacy that continues to influence contemporary politics. The state's official narrative often frames white Zimbabweans as colonial remnants who do not belong. However, Coventry's case demonstrates that this narrative is not monolithic. Her acceptance as a national hero, despite being white, indicates a pragmatic approach by the government to leverage her achievements for national unity and international recognition. This pragmatism reflects a continuation of the colonial strategy of utilizing certain individuals to foster a sense of national identity and cohesion, even if it means temporarily setting aside racial antagonism. The selective acceptance of Coventry's whiteness against the backdrop of a general rejection of white identity in Zimbabwe points to a nuanced understanding of race. It suggests that whiteness in Zimbabwe is not inherently incompatible with national identity but is often constructed as such for political expediency. Coventry's case reveals that the state can redefine who is considered a legitimate Zimbabwean based on contributions to national pride and the political context. This flexibility in racial identity construction highlights the dynamic nature of postcolonial identity politics in Zimbabwe.

White People and Settler Colonialism in Zimbabwe

The presence of white people in Zimbabwe is based on a violent, systematic occupation and displacement of Africans. This history underlies the racial relations that characterize the post-colonial space analyzed here. In 1890, the British South Africa Company (BSAC) under the control of Cecil John Rhodes and using the Rudd Concession as a basis, utilized the Pioneer Column to occupy Mashonaland.[9] Palmer argues that when the discovery of gold and diamonds failed to materialize, settlers focused on fertile lands for agriculture, identifying areas suitable for commercial farming and large-scale ranching.[10] They displaced local populations, resettling them in less fertile lands, some of which had challenges with pestilence. Shona and Ndebele peoples resisted land displacement but were defeated in 1897 during the First *Chimurenga* (war of liberation).[11] Subsequently, the BSAC conferred land rights to European settlers and indigenous Africans were confined to Native Reserves, a process that accelerated throughout the 20th century. Enactment of laws—such as Land Apportionment Act (1930), Native Land Husbandry Act (1951), Land Tenure Act (1969), the Land Tenure Amendment Act (1977), and the Tribal Trust Lands Act (1979)—displaced Africans. Between 1908 and 1915, about 1.5 million acres were given to white settlers, with 1 million acres transferred in a single year by the Native Reserves Commission (1914-1915). By 1914, Africans occupied just 23 percent of the poorest land in the colony.[12] By 1919, a dual system of land ownership was legally established, granting whites private land titles while blacks were governed by customary law.[13]

Race and ZANU PF in Post-colonial Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) formed in 1963 as a splinter from the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). From its inception, ZANU subscribed to Maoist socialist ideologies, emphasizing collectivist mobilization.[14] At its formation, one of the primary

objectives of ZANU was the fight against colonialism. Eventually, a protracted civil war resulted in the Lancaster House Agreement and the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980. After independence, one of the fundamental issues confronting the new ZANU regime was creating a national identity across an ethnically and racially fractured geopolitical space that would legitimize and perpetuate its political hegemony.[15] The first step towards this national identity was the reconciliation policy advocated by Prime Minister Robert Mugabe, who, in his post-1980 election speech, highlighted:

> I urge you, whether you are black or white, to join me in a new pledge to forget our grim past, forgive others and forget. Join hands in a new amity and together as Zimbabweans trample upon racialism, tribalism and regionalism, and work hard to reconstruct and rehabilitate our society as we reinvigorate our economic machinery.[16]

Subsequently, a unity government was formed in line with the stipulations of the Lancaster House Agreement. ZANU PF immediately formed a coalition government with both ZAPU PF and the Rhodesian Front. Per the Lancaster House Agreement, a limited number of parliamentary seats were reserved for the whites for the first seven years after independence.[17]

However, this post-independent reconciliation trajectory was impeded by the absence of institutional processes or agreements to develop interracial recognition in practice. It was a temporary 'stay of execution' before the inevitable confrontation around Zimbabwe's entrenched racial legacies.[18] For Muchemwa et al., the envisioned post-independent reconciliation was elitist and exclusivist and neglected the input of both blacks and whites.[19] Huyse argues that this situation was compounded by the post-independent attitude of the white Zimbabweans, with most preferring to remain in their exclusive racial and social enclaves.[20] This factor made them even more conspicuous as a privileged minority resented by the African majority. In 2008, McGreal claimed that,

> Liberation had not changed the fundamental link between being white and rich and being black and poor. Zimbabwe's whites were not only complacent; they also misjudged how Mugabe saw their place and the unwritten pact that allowed them to stay on. In the cities they kept their houses and their pools and their servants. Life went on as before, but without the war. The white farmers had it even better. With crop prices soaring they bought boats on Lake Kariba and built air strips on their farms for newly acquired planes. Zimbabwe's whites reached an implicit understanding with ZANU PF; they could go on as before, so long as they kept out of politics.[21]

In many ways, white people continued an exclusive and privileged existence. As a community, they did little to integrate into wider Zimbabwean society. Hence most black people never saw white people as citizens, as belonging.

Moyo and Yeros argue that another deliberate practice of the post-independent ZANU regime was the indigenization of the bureaucracy, whereby the state devised strategies that allowed the previously marginalized black majority to gain opportunities, particularly in the civil service.[22] Whilst this practice succeeded in Africanizing the civil service, twenty years after independence, whites still retained control of much of the economy and agricultural land, in a kind of compromise between the ZANU regime and white capital.[23] To an extent, the regime's

compromise with white capital was driven by economic realism, an understanding of Zimbabwe's economic dependence upon external markets and capital.[24] The lenient attitude towards white economic interests gained the ZANU regime international favor, particularly from the British and Americans, leading them to overlook the 1980s ethnic political repression and killings known as *Gukurahundi* (Shona - early rain that washes away the chaff) that lasted four years.[25] By its end, an estimated 20,000 civilians had been killed.[26] Gukurahundi ended with the 1987 Unity Accord, which resulted in the merging of ZANU and ZAPU into a united ZANU PF. The expiry of the Lancaster House parliamentary privileges rendered whites politically irrelevant with no significant role in national politics.[27]

The regime's accommodation of white capital resulted in a paradoxical situation whereby, despite the prevalent socialist rhetoric, the country's mixed economy remained dependent on white-controlled market forces whilst parastatals were run inefficiently. The bloated public service was an important resource for Mugabe's political patronage, offering lucrative economic benefits to party cadres, political cronies, and family members.[28] Economic marginalization of the black majority—particularly the veterans of the liberation war who demanded economic inclusion and land—threatened the regime's hegemony. The situation was compounded by emergence of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), the first real threat to the regime's political hegemony, followed by rejection of the government-sponsored constitutional referendum in 2000.[29] The British government also failed to put up promised funds for land reform. Before the Lancaster Agreement, the British had proposed a Zimbabwe Development Fund with 75 million pounds to buy out white farmers, but by 1979 this initiative was shelved.[30] Claire Short (then Foreign Secretary), in a letter to Kumbirai Kangai (then Minister of Agriculture) in 1997 distanced the British government from the land issue in Zimbabwe. Part of the letter read:

> I should make it clear that we do not accept that Britain has a special responsibility to meet the costs of land purchase in Zimbabwe. We are a new Government from diverse backgrounds without links to former colonial interests. My own origins are Irish and as you know we were colonised not colonisers.[31]

The British government was not willing to fund any accelerated land reform program and felt that it had no obligations to Zimbabwe. These events triggered the invasion of white-owned farmland. The government, on its part, refused to protect whites. Instead, it instituted compulsory land acquisition under the Fast Track Land Reform Program.[32] The government further purged white judges from the high and supreme courts following court rulings that deemed the fast-track land reform program unconstitutional.[33]

The land redistribution program was dubbed the Third *Chimurenga* (liberation war). It was legitimized by a racist and nativist liberation discourse which denied citizenship to whites as well as political opposition supporters.[34] Freeman argues that,

> The expropriation of white commercial farms in the early 2000s signaled the reconfiguration of citizenship and nationhood…the whites were presented as not authentic Zimbabwean citizens. They were framed as 'unrepentant ex-Rhodies' in the mainstream media and in ZANU-PF's discourse but black Zimbabweans were divided into patriots and puppets where opposition supporters and politicians

> were puppets of whites and Britain whilst ruling party politicians and supporters were patriots.[35]

There were two primary responses to this by whites. Some went into exile, others joined the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), and some, like David Coltart and Roy Bennett, became prominent politicians.[36] The whites who were invisible in national politics from 1980 became increasingly visible and vocal following the Fast Track Land Reform Program.[37] The removal of the Mugabe regime in November 2017 ushered in a new era in Zimbabwe, dubbed the second republic.[38] New president Emmerson Mnangagwa's political strategy focused on seeking re-engagement with Western countries to restore amicable political, economic, and diplomatic ties. Part of this strategy included the signing of a compensation deal with former white farmers. Moyo argues that by compensating white former commercial farmers, the political tactic is to project an image of a 'new dispensation' thus correcting historical violations of private property rights that were the hallmark of the previous Mugabe regime.[39]

Race, Whiteness, and Sport in Zimbabwe

The history of modern sports in Zimbabwe begins with colonialism in the 1890s. The diffusion of modern sport followed British imperial networks such as missionary education, military conquest, trade activities, railroads, and European settlement.[40] The motives for introducing sport in colonial Zimbabwe vary. For white settlers, sport was an essential site of social acculturation, allowing for contact among the relatively remote settlements and contributing to a unified white culture essential to maintaining hegemony over a much larger indigenous population.[41] On the other hand, sport was introduced to the native Africans as a 'civilizing device' to teach mannerisms and discipline compatible with British imperial hegemonic ideologies.[42] From its introduction, sport in colonial Zimbabwe was segregated along racial lines, though not legislatively as in apartheid South Africa.[43] Sports like rugby and hockey were considered elite and dominated mainly by whites, whilst football and boxing were more multi-racial.[44] Cricket included Indians who used it to create their own space within the white settler colony.[45]

Novak theorizes that this segregation can be traced to two intersecting realities.[46] Firstly, the role of sport in fostering white social identity, an identity motivated by the need to cover up the transience and underlying heterogeneity of the white population, which threatened unity and hegemony. Novak highlights that,

> Rhodesian sport became part of the white 'myth,' one tied to the pioneers and heroes of Rhodesian history and to Cecil Rhodes himself, the godfather of the country, who bequeathed much of the country's symbolism and self-identity. Sport was both an opportunity for often rural and isolated white settlers to engage in a social activity, and a means by which white settlers could begin to form their own communal identities and allegiances. A sports jersey tagged 'Southern Rhodesia' helped to give some content to a Southern Rhodesian identity separate from British and South African identities.[47]

Cricket and rugby were central to the white sports culture as they provided social networking and expressed imperial power ideologies through race and masculinity.[48] From this perspective,

the racial segregation of sport resulted from the need to construct and maintain a Rhodesian white identity, separate from the subjugated and numerically superior Africans around them.

According to Novak, the second reality that contributed to racial segregation in sport was the relationship with South Africa.[49] Most white sports federations began as part of South Africa's federations, given the close geographical proximity and improved opportunities for higher caliber competition. In the case of hockey, heavily intertwined with its South African counterpart, the sport's league, teams, and competitions tended to be more segregated.[50] South African sport from 1948 onwards, following apartheid policy, was segregated by law.[51] Rhodesia faced international isolation following the Unliteral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in November 1965, so it increasingly became dependent on South African sports competition, funding, and organization. This likely increased racial discrimination in Rhodesian sports.[52]

UDI markedly impacted sport in Rhodesia. The British government's response to UDI was to move towards denying the international legitimacy of the Rhodesian regime, which included sponsoring trade sanctions, an arms embargo, and restrictions on the transfer of currency. From 1967 onwards, the efforts of the British government to de-legitimize the Rhodesian regime extended to sport. Part of these efforts included preventing international tours by the Rhodesian hockey team and dissuading British cricket and football teams from touring Rhodesia.[53] The Rhodesians were excluded from the 1966 Commonwealth Games in Jamaica after most African and Asian nations threatened to boycott.[54]

The 1968 Olympics held in Mexico was a significant test of resolve for the two countries. These Olympics presented an opportunity for the Rhodesian regime to assert their independence and legitimacy. For the British, Rhodesian non-participation would be a public relations coup.[55] The bilateral and multilateral efforts of the British government finally resulted in the exclusion of Rhodesia after the Mexican government allegedly lost their entry forms.[56] On the eve of the 1972 Munich Olympic games, though the International Olympic Committee had initially allowed Rhodesia to participate, it withdrew Rhodesian participation after almost all African states threatened to boycott.[57] In 1976, the Canadian government refused to issue visas for the Rhodesian team to participate in the Montreal Olympic Games.[58] The international exclusion of Rhodesia from sports extended beyond the Olympics to football. In 1970, FIFA suspended Rhodesia from participation in international competitions until independence in 1980.[59]

The attainment of independence in 1980 abruptly ended this pariah status, and many sports began affiliating themselves once again with international federations.[60] The post-colonial state appreciated the role of sport in promoting or resisting political discourses and thus sought to control and utilize sports for its hegemonic purposes.[61] The establishment of the Sports and Recreation Commission in 1991 went a step further in entrenching state control over sports administrative bodies and seeking to align them with prevailing political narratives.[62] This direct involvement in sports represented a significant departure from the colonial policy of giving autonomy and control to sports federations.[63] In the cases of football and cricket, individuals with links to the ruling ZANU PF government, such as Leo Mugabe and Ozias Bvute, used their political relations to become sports administrators and further the interests of the ruling party, effectively making these sports into subsidiaries of the ruling party.[64]

Despite its attempts to control sport, the ZANU PF regime also encountered resistance through sport. Ncube documents how opposition groups like the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) appropriated symbols from football to articulate its message against ZANU PF's political hegemony.[65] In the case of cricket, Batts documents how cricketers Andy Flower and Henry Olonga took advantage of the 2003 World Cup—co-hosted by Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Kenya—to protest against the increasing undermining of democracy in Zimbabwe.[66] Sport in post-colonial Zimbabwe is a politically invested space that the state seeks to control actively yet faces resistance at the same time.

It is also important to highlight the role of the original 'Golden Girls,' the all-white women's hockey team that won a gold medal at Zimbabwe's first Olympic games in 1980. Though the Moscow Olympics were marred by Western boycotts, Harris argues that the story of the team is still a sporting fairy tale and an irresistible story.[67] In any case, the players from the team, "…freely acknowledge that they won the gold medal without competing against the best in the world…but, like many athletes in Moscow in 1980, they seized their chance."[68] The victory of the Golden Girls was a historic moment for Zimbabwe and the African continent. The women's hockey team was welcomed and celebrated as heroes upon return. The team members were widely celebrated for their success, inspiring a new generation of young Zimbabweans to pursue their dreams and aspirations.[69] On their return from Moscow, the team was welcomed by then Prime Minister Robert Mugabe, briefly becoming national celebrities at a time when a young nation fractured by years of internal conflict required national inspiration.

This context is crucial for understanding the significance of Kirsty Coventry's achievements and her subsequent acceptance by the Zimbabwean government. Coventry's success, like that of the Golden Girls, provided a source of national pride that transcended racial boundaries. Just as the women's hockey team was celebrated in 1980, Coventry's victories offered a narrative of excellence and unity that the state could leverage to foster a sense of collective identity. This comparison highlights how sporting success has been used strategically by Zimbabwean leaders to inspire and unify the nation, even when it involves reconciling with figures who might otherwise be marginalized by the dominant racial discourse. Coventry's narrative, therefore, can be seen as a continuation of this tradition, where sporting achievements create opportunities for reconfiguring national identity. Her celebration as a golden girl by the same government that propagated anti-white rhetoric underscores the complex interplay between race, politics, and national pride in Zimbabwe. This duality in state narratives illustrates the pragmatic use of sport as a tool for national cohesion, offering insights into how postcolonial states navigate their colonial legacies while forging new identities.

Theorizing White Identities in Post-colonial Africa

There is a need to situate an understanding of whiteness that guides the analysis in this paper. Focusing on whites brings to the fore the racialized nature of power and privilege. Since the end of white colonial rule in Africa, the racial divide between whites and blacks no longer neatly fits into the divide between dominator and dominated as black majority governments have replaced the racist colonial regimes.[70] Fundamentally, the end of colonialism reconfigured the constellation of powers that governed social relations of race and gender in colonial societies.[71] In contexts like South Africa, Rhodesia, and Kenya, colonialism was defined by laws and

practices emphasizing white privilege and separateness. Therefore, one of the critical issues confronting whites was how to fit into the broader post-colonial community.[72]

Steyn and Foster argue that the central question for whiteness in post-colonial South Africa was maintaining privilege where black people had achieved political power.[73] Political independence and the transition from white-minority rule to black majoritarian rule thus led to a radical identity transformation of whiteness in post-colonial African countries. Kruger argues that one of the consequences of the demise of colonialism and white rule in Africa has been the increased visibility of 'poor whiteism,' a phenomenon previously hidden by artificial safety nets such as job reservation, priority education, and housing.[74] In South Africa there has been somewhat of a resurrection of white poverty in the post-apartheid period, with many poor whites enduring different forms of poverty and being categorized as a despised low class.[75]

There have been various, often contradicting, approaches by whites to the post-colonial political order, which have ranged from deeply reactionary to anti-racist and transformative.[76] Some whites have embraced the post-colonial political reality and deliberately identified themselves as Africans, basing their claim on their upbringing in Africa, pushing back against narratives that challenged their Africanness.[77] On the other hand, some whites have strived to maintain their separateness through deliberate efforts to avoid racial integration, such as maintaining white-only social and physical spaces.[78]

From Harare to Alabama: Kirsty Coventry's early years (1983-2003)

Kirsty Coventry was born on 16 September 1983 in Harare, three years after Zimbabwe attained its political independence. She was born into a family of swimmers, with her grandfather being a former chairperson of the Rhodesian Swimming Board, whilst her parents, Rob and Lynn, were also avid swimmers.[79] She attended the Dominican Convent school in Harare, a predominantly elite catholic girl's school established in 1892 by Irish nuns.[80] The privileges of attending an elite school gave Coventry access to swimming, considered an elite sport, which at this time in Zimbabwe was still predominantly a white preserve.[81] This was a trend that the post-independence government tried to address by constructing swimming facilities like the aquatic complex in Chitungwiza in preparation for all Africa games in 1995. These have, however, mainly remained underused.[82] Investments in sports such as swimming and hockey were an attempt by the government to change the view that such sports were predominantly for white people.

While at Dominican Convent, Coventry qualified for the 2000 Sydney Olympic games, where she became more exposed to the glaring differences in sport between Zimbabwe and advanced economies. Reflecting on this experience, she highlighted that, "I said to myself I am from a small country in Africa, I shouldn't be here, I knew I deserved to be at the Olympics because I had qualified, but I come from a place that doesn't have many opportunities, a place that doesn't have the financing that first world countries have."[83] In this narrative, she expresses her inferiority complex and understanding of her disadvantaged sporting background.

Regardless of these setbacks, Coventry made it to the semifinals of the 100m women's backstroke event, eventually being ranked the 12th best female swimmer.[84] After Sydney, Coventry received a scholarship to study at Auburn University in Alabama, USA. This move greatly benefited her swimming career; she noted that, "After the Olympic games 2000, I

received a scholarship to Auburn University. This facilitated better training because I was able to compete against people who were either of my caliber or stronger, at this point most of my age-group back home had quit swimming."[85]

Coventry won her first major international medal at the 2002 Manchester Commonwealth Games, taking gold in the 200m individual medley. State media dubbed this as a "golden performance."[86] Manchester was Zimbabwe's last appearance at the Commonwealth Games following its subsequent suspension from the Commonwealth in 2002 for human rights violations following a disputed presidential election.[87] Zimbabwe eventually withdrew from the Commonwealth in December 2003, with Mugabe describing the grouping as "an Anglo-Saxon unholy alliance," a narrative compatible with his racial attacks against Britain and whites.[88] This withdrawal has to be understood within a context of targeted sanctions against Zimbabwe by the USA and EU in response to the land occupations.

Coventry then helped Auburn University win two consecutive National Collegiate Athletic Association championships.[89] She remained loyal to her Zimbabwean roots even at the height of international isolation and condemnation of the country. Some observers noted,

> A generous ambassador, she may be heralded a hero for not dissociating herself from her homeland and its President Robert Mugabe, who has a dubious record of human rights violations. Rather, she embraces her nationality and promotes it for good on the international stage of sport, whilst onlookers may question why. Kirsty, proudly, carried her National Flag at the opening of the London Games.[90]

Her dedication did not go unnoticed by Mugabe, who saw her patriotism as admirable, yet other white people have increasingly seen her as selfish and calculating.[91] This led to her being described as a token white in the corridors of ZANU PF politics, used to legitimize a corrupt and violent regime.[92] Either way, her authenticity as a Zimbabwean is enmeshed within a complex web of race and the post-2000 crises defined by the occupation of white-owned farms.

From Athens to Rio: Kirsty Coventry as a Sporting Icon (2004-2016)

In 2004, Coventry qualified for the Athens games, where she won Zimbabwe's first Olympic medals since Moscow. In winning three medals she became Zimbabwe's most decorated Olympian. Reflecting on the experience, she highlighted that, "My first medal was silver, and I was overjoyed. I pushed harder in my next event and got bronze. This gave me the much-needed confidence and I put everything into my last race, finally, I got what I had come for, gold in the 200m backstroke."[93] Coventry's success in Athens was well received in Zimbabwe and upon arrival home she was met with a reception and a parade usually reserved for visiting dignitaries and Mugabe himself. "Thousands upon thousands of traditional dancers, tribal drummers and a presidential motorcade and banners welcoming 'our princess of sport' and cries in Shona '*mupei munda*' (give her a farm)."[94] The irony of this statement was lost on the multitudes shouting that a white person should get a farm that has been taken from another white person based on restoring colonial and racial imbalances. Kirsty's whiteness was covered by the glow of sporting excellence. Her victories made her a 'daughter of the soil' and cemented her credentials as a Zimbabwean. Reflecting on the impact this reception had on her, Coventry stated, "It was very overwhelming I felt so much pride seeing how much it meant to so many people. It really brought tears to my ears. There were no political or racial issues. Everything

was put aside for a few days so people could celebrate. It was so nice to meet so many people happy for the same reason."[95]

After the Athens games, Coventry participated in the 2008 Beijing Olympics, winning three silver medals and defending her gold in the women's 200m backstroke. This took her total to seven Olympic medals. Coventry's unparalleled success at the Olympics made her an icon for the success-starved Zimbabwean sports faithful. Upon returning to Zimbabwe, she was granted a victory parade in the streets of Harare and a state banquet at State House, the official presidential residence. Robert Mugabe congratulated "most heartily on her heroic performance."[96] In his speech, Mugabe said, "Our national spirit must exude joy and pleasure and say you have done well, daughter of Zimbabwe. We are proud of you we wish you well. She is our golden girl, take care of her."[97]

Mugabe also gave her US$100,000 and a diplomatic passport in recognition of her achievements. Mugabe's conduct towards Coventry starkly contrasted his use of rhetoric to undermine the citizenry of white Zimbabweans. Mugabe couched Coventry's victory in nationalistic narratives that defined her as a legitimate citizen. Mugabe's description of Coventry following her victory was strikingly similar to that of the all-white women's hockey team after winning gold at the 1980 Moscow Olympics. He conveniently abandoned his anti-white rhetoric to accommodate these female sporting champions into his nationalistic project.

Yet opposite sentiments and narratives around white people continued, particularly farmers. In a 2000 speech Mugabe had threatened, "They say: 'I'm white and so I have the divine right to ride roughshod over all others who don't have my skin colour, especially the black ones.' Goodness me. What do they think we are?...Our party must continue to strike fear in the hearts of the white man, our real enemy."[98] In another speech, Mugabe noted, "We say no to whites owning our land, and they should go…They can own companies and apartments… but not the soil. It is ours, and that message should ring loud and clear in Britain and the United States."[99] Juxtapose the coverage and narratives around Kirsty Coventry with "This country is our country, and this land is our land…The white man is not indigenous to Africa. Africa is for Africans. Zimbabwe is for Zimbabweans."[100] Sporting success negated Kirsty Coventry's problematic whiteness. Mugabe's rhetoric fueled violence on the farms, leading to deaths and injuries, including white farmers.[101] Yet Kirsty's success complicated the official state narrative.

Following Mugabe's lead, state media portrayed Kirsty Coventry positively, referring to her as a patriot with an unwavering commitment to her country, a daughter of the soil—language usually reserved for ZANU PF leaders. The ZANU response to Coventry's sporting success was part of its broader contradictory logic of race relations. The ZANU regime's attitude towards race relations since independence has always been motivated by political expediency, not political ideology. Ngwenya argues that Mugabe's treatment of Coventry reflects "a good white and bad white categorisation of white Zimbabweans" whereby the 'good whites' were those politically passive white Zimbabweans accommodative to his political ambitions like Timothy Stamps, whilst the 'bad whites' were those who oppose and challenge him politically like opposition lawmakers Roy Bennet and David Coltart.[102] One can then argue that the positive portrayal of Kirsty Coventry by ZANU PF can be understood as a case of political expediency, with Coventry seen as politically beneficial to their hegemony. This strategy by the regime makes more sense considering that in 2008, Zimbabwe was reeling from

an unprecedented socio-economic and political crisis following the disputed, violent June 2008 presidential election. Coventry's victory provided a unique opportunity to deflect national attention away from the national problems.

On her part, Coventry herself has consistently sought to identify herself as Zimbabwean by downplaying racial differences: "Zimbabwe is my home, it is where I was born, it is my culture, I will always represent Zimbabwe, colour doesn't matter."[103] Coventry had further affirmed her identity as a Zimbabwean when she insisted on marriage by Shona customs, which involved her fiancé Tyrone Seward paying *lobola* (bridewealth) to her father in the form of cattle.[104] Coventry's marriage follows another white Zimbabwean sports personality, Steve Vickers, who paid *lobola* for his wife.[105] The payment of *lobola* plays a central role in the identity of Shona women as it represents the formal union of two lineages and the transference of the bride's reproductive and economic capacities from her family to that of her husband.[106] State media has sought to subtly Africanize both Coventry and Vickers by giving them Shona nicknames that attest to Shona identity. Coventry is occasionally referred to as *mangwenya*, a name loosely derived from crocodile, which coincidentally was Mugabe's clan totem. For Nyambi, giving nicknames in the Zimbabwean context is an established socio-politico-cultural trend that either seeks to legitimize or delegitimize an individual's social standing. [107] The association of Coventry and Mugabe contrasts the state media's use of racial slurs to denigrate whites that challenged ZANU PF's political hegemony.[108]

Following disappointment at the 2012 London and 2016 Rio Olympics where she won no medals, Kirsty Coventry announced her retirement from competitive swimming in 2016. In a video announcing her retirement posted on her Facebook page, Coventry quickly clarified that her retirement from swimming didn't mean cutting ties with Zimbabwe. She noted, "Just because I won't be swimming competitively doesn't mean I am walking away from representing our beautiful country and our beautiful nation in sport and giving back."[109] True to her word, Coventry established a sports academy to train young girls in swimming and contested for a position in the Zimbabwe Olympic Committee.

From the Pool to the Cabinet: Kirsty Coventry and Whiteness in Zimbabwe's 'Second Republic' (2017 – 2023)

In November 2017, Mugabe's regime was overthrown. The new leader, Emmerson Mnangagwa, started talking about shifting towards a new dispensation and developing a second republic to distance the post-coup period and his administration from the previous regime.[110] Mnangagwa's policy has been to seek re-engagement with the West and remove Zimbabwe's pariah status, part of which included applying to re-join the Commonwealth and improving relations with the former white farmers.[111] With this policy, Mnangagwa appointed the recently-retired Kirsty Coventry as the Minister of Sport in September 2018.[112] The state-owned *Herald* editorial hailed the appointment as demonstrating the new regime's progressiveness.[113] In addition to appointing Coventry, Mnangagwa also contacted former footballer Bruce Grobbelaar asking him to become an Ambassador of Sport, Recreation, and Reconciliation.[114] Chagonda argues that,

> By wooing Coventry and Grobbelaar, Mnangagwa is clearly hoping to achieve a number of outcomes, the first is that he is hoping to repair the damaged relations

> between ZANU PF and Zimbabwe's white community. As a long he might also be hoping that this will normalise relations with the west, which could in turn, unblock much needed foreign direct investment.[115]

The post-coup regime continued with the previous regime's practice of preferentially treating Coventry by awarding her a farm, the Cockington Estate, which had been seized from Bob Cary at the height of the Fast-Track Land Reform Program. The farm had first been allocated to Robert Zhuwao, nephew of the former president.[116] After Mugabe's removal in 2017, the new government repossessed the farm. Her decision to accept the farm was condemned as a reward for her silence and decision to remain in a crooked, vicious government. Some former white farmers saw her decision to accept the farm as a betrayal,

> Kirsty was an inspirational, iconic figure but has ruined her legacy in a few short years. She has now trapped herself in this corrupt and cruel regime. If she wants to keep her farm, she has to remain loyal. Farms are taken away as quickly as they are given. We cannot take away her gold medals those were thoroughly deserved - but she lost that special place millions of Zimbabweans had for her in their hearts.[117]

Coventry's tenure as Sports minister has had its fair share of racial controversy. In one instance, a local publication criticized her for allowing an all-white hockey team to represent Zimbabwe at the 2022 Africa Cup of Nations.[118] In another instance, she was criticized for preferring White Zimbabwean cricketers to their black compatriots. It is also important to note that despite the efforts to negotiate with whites who lost farms and reengagement with Western governments, Mnangagwa's government has continued with some of the previous rhetoric about whites in Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

The paper highlights the complex relationship between sport and racial politics in a post-colonial state. It showed the different narratives around whiteness at a time when Kirsty Coventry was winning Olympic medals for Zimbabwe. Back home, Robert Mugabe was initiating the takeover of white-owned farms and employing rhetoric constructing whites as enemies of the state. We conclude that in the case of Kirsty Coventry, sporting success negated her whiteness, and she gained the status of 'golden girl' which allowed the creation of an individual narrative, away from the homogeneous construction of whites in Zimbabwe at that time as racists and colonizers. Coventry became a cabinet minister under a government that still promotes narratives of white Zimbabweans as outsiders. The paper utilized content analysis of media coverage of her success and homecoming. It highlighted how success in sport separated Coventry from the colonial masters portrayed in narratives ZANU PF created around white people.

Works Cited

Barnes, Lawrie and Charles Pfukwa. 2007. "Ethnic Slurs as War Names in the Zimbabwean Liberation War." *Names* 55: 427-436.

Batts Callie. 2010. "'In Good Conscience': Andy Flower, Henry Olonga and the Death of Democracy in Zimbabwe." *Sport in Society* 13.1: 43-58.

BBC. 2004. "Paying for a Wife." 1 September. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3614248.stm

Bulawayo, Philemon. 2014. "Mugabe: Whites Can't Own Land in Zimbabwe." *Newsweek*, 7 July. https://www.newsweek.com/mugabe-whites-cant-own-land-zimbabwe-257529

CBC News. 2000. 'Strike Fear in the Heart of the White Man': Mugabe." 14 December. https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/strike-fear-in-the-heart-of-the-white-man-mugabe-1.250205

Chibuwe, Albert. 2022. "Indigeneity, Belonging, 'Madness' And 'Corruption': Brett Muvet and the White Man's Identity Crisis in Post-2000 Zimbabwe." *African Identities* 22.4: 857-874.

Chagonda, Tapiwa. 2018. "Why Mnangagwa's Been Wooing Zim's White Sports Heroes." *Mail & Guardian*, 18 October. https://mg.co.za/article/2018-10-18-why-mnangagwas-been-wooing-zims-white-sports-heroes/

Chigonga, Brenna. 2005. "Zimbabwe: Public Swimming Pools Neglected." *AllAfrica.com*, 12 November. https://allafrica.com/stories/200511140615.html

Chiweshe, Manase Kudzai. 2018. "Zimbabwe." In De Waele et al. (eds.), *Palgrave International Handbook of Football and Politics* (London: Palgrave McMillan): 447-468.

Chiweshe, Manase Kudzai. 2017. "Zimbabwe's Land Question in the Context of Large-Scale Land-Based Investments." *Geography Research Forum* 37: 13-36.

Choto, Tafadzwa and Manase Kudzai Chiweshe. 2022. "Gender and the Politics of Patriarchy in Zimbabwean Football Administration." In Molnár & Bullingham (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Gender Politics in Sport and Physical Activity* (Routledge: London).

Dominican Convent High School, n.d. "Our History: Tracing Our Strong traditions." https://www.conventharare.co.zw/about-us/history

Gleeson Mark. 2016. "'National Treasure' Coventry Chasing Olympic Record." *Reuters*, 16 May. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-olympics-swimming-coventry-idUSKCN0Y70E2

The Guardian. 2002. "Commonwealth suspends Zimbabwe." 19 March. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/mar/19/zimbabwe

Dube Vusumuzi. 2016. "Kirsty Coventry Quits Swimming." *The Sunday News*, 18 September. https://www.sundaynews.co.zw/kirsty-coventry-quits-swimming/

Freeman, Linda. 2005. "Contradictory Constructions of the Crisis in Zimbabwe." *Historica* 50.2: 287–310.

Flanagan, Jane. 2020. "Kirsty Coventry: Zimbabwe's Olympic Heroine Under Fire for Accepting Farm Stolen by Mugabe." *The Times*, 3 July. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/kirsty-coventry-zimbabwes-olympic-heroine-under-fire-for-accepting-farm-stolen-by-mugabe-6mc68rkpr

_____. 2018. "Olympic Golden Girl Kirsty Coventry is Surprise Choice in Zimbabwe's New Cabinet." *The Times*, 11 September. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/olympic-golden-girl-kirsty-coventry-is-surprise-choice-in-zimbabwes-new-cabinet-qxcxtfnr7

The Herald. 2022. "Kirsty Coventry Honoured in Auburn." 11 April. https://www.herald.co.zw/kirsty-coventry-honoured-in-auburn/

_____. 2018. "Editorial Comment: Ball in Kirsty Coventry's Court." 22 September. https://www.herald.co.zw/editorial-comment-ball-in-kirsty-coventrys-court/

_____. 2017. "Kirsty Coventry Defends Zimbabwe." 5 April. https://www.herald.co.zw/kirsty-coventry-defends-zimbabwe/

_____. 2016. "The Immortal Kirsty Coventry." 30 July. https://www.herald.co.zw/the-immortal-kirsty-coventry/

_____. 2013. "Kirsty Coventry Ties the Knot." 4 January. https://www.herald.co.zw/kirsty-coventry-ties-the-knot/

_____. 2012. "This is My Story: Kirsty." 30 June. https://www.herald.co.zw/this-is-my-story-kirsty-2/

Harris, Cathy. 2008. "Caught in Time: Zimbabwe Win Hockey Gold, 1980 Moscow Olympics." *The Sunday Times,* 11 May. https://www.thetimes.com/article/caught-in-time-zimbabwe-win-hockey-gold-1980-moscow-olympics-8czcd0ppmth

HitzAfrik Radio. 2021. "Zimbabwe Sends its 1st Black Swimmer to the Olympics." 23 July. https://hitzafrikradio.org/2021/07/23/zimbabwe-sends-its-1st-black-swimmer-to-the-olympics/

Huyse, Luc. 2003. "Zimbabwe: Why Reconciliation Failed." In Bloomfield et al. (eds.), *Reconciliation after a Violent Conflict: A Handbook Series*. (Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance): 34–39.

Irish Times. 2000. "Whites Are Real Enemy, Warns Mugabe." 15 December. https://www.irishtimes.com/news/whites-are-real-enemy-warns-mugabe-1.1121229

Kabonga, Itai and Kwashirai Zvokuomba. 2021. "State–Civil Society Relations in Zimbabwe's 'Second Republic.'" *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies - Multi-, Inter- and Transdisciplinarity* 16.1: 177-201.

Kalaora, Léa. 2011. "Madness, Corruption and Exile: On Zimbabwe's Remaining White Commercial Farmers." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 37.4: 747–762.

Kesby, Mike. 1999. "Locating and Dislocating Gender in Rural Zimbabwe: The Making of Space and the Texturing of Bodies." *Gender, Place & Culture* 6.1: 27-47.

Killander, Magnus and Nyathi Mkhululi. 2015. "Accountability for the Gukurahundi Atrocities in Zimbabwe Thirty Years on: Prospects and Challenges." *The Comparative and International Law Journal of Southern Africa* 48.3: 463–487.

Kirsty Coventry Academy. N.D. https://www.kirstycoventry.com/new-page

Kruger Christi. 2016. "(Dis)empowered Whiteness: Un-whitely Spaces and the Production of the Good White Home." *Anthropology Southern Africa* 39.1: 46–57.

Little Charles. 2011. "The Sports Boycott Against Rhodesia Reconsidered." *Sport in Society* 14.2: 193–207.

Magaisa, Alex. 2010. "The Land Question and Transitional Justice in Zimbabwe: Law, Force And History's Multiple Victims." *Oxford Transitional Justice Working Paper Series*. https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/migrated/magaisalandinzimbabwerevised2906101.pdf

Matondi, Prosper. 2007. "Institutional and Policy Issues in the Context of Land Reform and Resettlement Programme in Zimbabwe." In Khombe (ed.), *The Livestock Sector after the Fast Track Land Reforms in Zimbabwe* (Bulawayo: National University for Science and Technology): 32-45.

McGreal, Chris and Andrew Meldrum. 2000. "Mugabe Turns Fire on White Employers." *The Guardian*, 15 December. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/dec/15/zimbabwe.chrismcgreal

McGreal Chris. 2008. "There Are Many Villains to Blame for Zimbabwe's Decade Of Horror." *The Guardian*, 13 April. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/apr/13/zimbabwe

McRae, Donald 2018. "Bruce Grobbelaar: 'How Many People Did I Kill? I Couldn't Tell You.'" *The Guardian*, 2 October. https://www.theguardian.com/football/2018/oct/01/bruce-grobbelaar-interview-donald-mcrae

Melber, Henning and Roger Southall. 2021. "Zimbabwe's Foreign Policy Under Mnangagwa." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 56.2: 234–250.

Moyo, Philani. 2021. "Contested Compensation: The Politics, Economics and Legal Nuances of Compensating White Former Commercial Farmers in Zimbabwe." *Review of African Political Economy* 48.170: 630-645.

Moyo, Sam and Yeros Paris. 2007. "The Radicalized State: Zimbabwe's Interrupted Revolution." *Review of African Political Economy*, 34.111 : 103-121.

Muchemwa, Cyprian et al. 2013. "When Will the Long Nightmare Come to an End?" *African Security Review* 22.3: 145-151

Mwonzora, Gift and Kirk Helliker. 2022. "Truce and Reconciliation in Zimbabwe: From Mugabe to Mnangagwa." *Critical African Studies* 14.2: 124-137.

Ncube, Lyton. 2014. "'Bhora Mugedhi Versus Bhora Musango': The Interface between Football Discourse and Zimbabwean Politics." *International Review for Sociology of Sport* 51.2: 201-218.

_____. 2018. "'Highlander Ithimu Yezwe Lonke!': Intersections of Highlanders FC Fandom and Ndebele Ethnic Nationalism in Zimbabwe." *Sport in Society* 21.9: 1364-1381.

Ndebele, Lenin. 2020. "Zim Sports Minister Kirsty Coventry Named in Farm Reallocation Case." *Times Live*, 8 June. https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/africa/2020-06-08-zim-sports-minister-kirsty-coventry-named-in-farm-reallocation-case/

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo J. 2009. "Making Sense of Mugabeism in Local and Global Politics: 'So Blair, Keep Your England and Let Me Keep My Zimbabwe'." *Third World Quarterly* 30.6: 1139-1158.

Ngwenya, Rejoice. 2008. "Kirsty Coventry: A Good 'White' Girl and A Hypocritical 'Racist' Mugabe." *Afrik News*, 25 August. https://www.afrik-news.com/article14340.html

Novak, Andrew. 2006. "Rhodesia's 'Rebel and Racist' Olympic Team: Athletic Glory, National Legitimacy and the Clash of Politics and Sport." *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 23.8: 1369-1388.

Novak Andrew. 2012. "Sport and Racial Discrimination in Colonial Zimbabwe: A Reanalysis." *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 29.6: 850-867.

_____. 2021. "Rhodesia and FIFA: Racial Discrimination, Political Legitimacy and Football, 1960 to 1980." *Soccer & Society* 22.3: 266-279.

Nyambi, Oliver. 2017. "'The Blair that I know is a Toilet': Political Nicknames and Hegemonic Control in post-2000 Zimbabwe." *African Identities* 15.2: 143-158.

Palmer, Clive and Joseph Wilson. 2013. "Kirsty and Robert." In Palmer (ed.) *The Sporting Image: Unsung Heroes of the Olympics 1896-2012* (Preston: SSTO Publications): 181-184.

Palmer, Robin. 1990. "Land Reform in Zimbabwe 1980-1990." *African Affairs* 89.335: 163-181.

_____. 1977. *Land and Racial Domination in Rhodesia*. London: Heinemann.

Patel, Trishula. 2019. "Played Out on the Edges of the Cricket Boundary: The History of an Indian Cricket Team in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, 1934–1995." *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 45.3: 465-483.

Pazvakavambwa, Simon and Vincent Hungwe. 2009. "Land Redistribution in Zimbabwe." In Hans et al. (eds.), *Agricultural Land Redistribution: Toward Greater Consensus* (Washington, DC: World Bank): 137-168.

Pilossof, Rory. 2014. "Reinventing Significance: Reflections on Recent Whiteness Studies in Zimbabwe." *Africa Spectrum* 49.3: 135–148.

Politics Web. 2008. "Mugabe on Reconciliation." 13 March. https://www.politicsweb.co.za/documents/mugabe-on-reconciliation

Raftopoulos, Brian. 2004. "Unreconciled Differences: The Limits of Reconciliation Politics in Zimbabwe." In Raftopoulos, and Savage (eds.), *Zimbabwe: Injustice and Political Reconciliation* (Cape Town: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation): viii-xx.

Reuters. 2008. "Mugabe Hands Olympic Medalist $100,000 Cash Reward." 29 August. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-olympics-zimbabwe-coventry-idUSLT51139020080829

Roth, Michael J. and John W. Bruce. 1994. "Land Tenure, Agrarian Structure, and Comparative Land Use Efficiency in Zimbabwe: Options for Land Tenure Reform and Land Redistribution." Land Tenure Center Research Paper, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Schmidt, Elizabeth. 1991. "Negotiated Spaces and Contested Terrain; Men, Women and the Law in colonial Zimbabwe, 1890–1939." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 16.4: 622–648.

Scoones, Ian. 2011. "Review: *Whiteness in Zimbabwe: Race, Landscape and the Problem of Belonging* by David Hughes." *Journal of Agrarian Change* 11.4: 603–606.

Sharuko, Robson. 2002. "Zimbabwe: Swimmer Kirsty Coventry Clinches Gold Medal in Manchester." *The Herald*, 31 July. https://allafrica.com/stories/200207310384.html

Sikes, Michelle M. et al. (eds.). 2021. *Sport and Apartheid South Africa: Histories of Politics, Power, and Protest*. London: Routledge.

Sibanda, Octavia. 2018. "Wounded Citizenship: The Post-colonial City and Poor Whites." *Anthropology Southern Africa* 41.1: 15-24.

Steyn, Melissa and Don Foster. 2008. "Repertoires for Talking White: Resistant Whiteness in Post-apartheid South Africa." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31.1: 25-51.

Taruvinga, Mary. 2022. "Kirsty Coventry Under Fire Over All-White Hockey Team." *New Zimbabwe*, 16 January. https://www.newzimbabwe.com/kirsty-coventry-under-fire-over-all-white-hockey-team/

Tendi, Blessing-Miles. 2008. "Not a Black and White Story." *The Guardian*, 28 August. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/aug/28/zimbabwe

van Zyl-Hermann, Danelle and Jacob Boersema. 2017. "Introduction: The Politics of Whiteness in Africa." *Africa* 87.4: 651-661.

White Michael. 2003. "Mugabe Quits Commonwealth." *The Guardian*, 7 December. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/dec/08/zimbabwe.politics

Winch, Jonty. 2008. "'There Were a Fine Manly Lot of Fellows': Cricket, Rugby and Rhodesian Society during William Milton's Administration, 1896–1914." *Sport in History* 28.4: 583-604.

_____. 2016. "Rhodesia, Rugby and the Afrikaner: 'Working Together to Send this Country Ahead.'" *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 33.15: 1808-1825.

Zenenga, Praise. 2012. "Visualizing Politics in African Sport: Political and Cultural Constructions in Zimbabwean Soccer." *Soccer & Society* 13.2: 250-263.

Notes

[1] Kirsty Coventry Academy n.d.

[2] Reuters 2008; *The Herald* 2016; Gleeson 2016.

[3] *Irish Times* 2000.

[4] Palmer and Wilson 2013, p. 182.

[5] The research used document analysis as the data-gathering technique. Document analysis is a form of qualitative research in which the researcher interprets documents to give voice and meaning to a selected topic. In the current research, data was collected from archived and online newspaper articles, primarily state media publications like *The Herald*, on the representation of Kirsty Coventry. The achieved newspaper material was accessed from the Zimpapers library in Harare, Zimbabwe, which contains archives from two daily Zimbabwean newspapers, *The Herald* and *The Chronicle*, and two weekly newspapers, *The Sunday Mail* and *The Sunday News*.

[6] Chiweshe 2017.

[7] Chiweshe 2017.

[8] Chiweshe 2017.

[9] Magaisa 2010.

[10] Palmer 1977.

[11] Pazvakavambwa and Hungwe 2009.

[12] Roth and Bruce 1994.

[13] Pazvakavambwa and Hungwe 2009.

[14] Scarnecchia 2021.

[15] Nyambi 2017.

[16] Politics Web 2008.

[17] Mwonzora and Helliker 2022.
[18] Mwonzora and Helliker 2022.
[19] Muchemwa et al. 2013.
[20] Huyse 2003.
[21] McGreal 2008.
[22] Moyo and Yeros 2011.
[23] Raftopoulos 2004.
[24] Raftopoulos 2004.
[25] Alexender 2019.
[26] Killander and Nyathi 2015.
[27] Raftopoulos 2004.
[28] Raftopoulos 2004.
[29] Chibuwe 2022.
[30] Palmer 1990.
[31] Matondi 2007, p. 12.
[32] Scoones 2011.
[33] Kalaora 2011.
[34] Ndlovu–Gatsheni 2009.
[35] Freeman 2005.
[36] Chibuwe 2022.
[37] Pilossof 2014.
[38] Kabonga and Zvokuomba 2021.
[39] Moyo 2021.
[40] Winch 2008; Novak 2012.
[41] Novak 2012.
[42] Stuart 1989; Novak 2012.
[43] Winch 2008; Novak 2012.
[44] Winch 2016.
[45] Patel 2019.
[46] Novak 2012.
[47] Novak 2012, p. 853.
[48] Winch 2016.
[49] Novak 2012.
[50] Winch 2016; Novak 2012.
[51] Sikes et al. 2019.
[52] Novak 2012.

[53] Little 2011.
[54] Little 2011.
[55] Little 2011; Novak 2006.
[56] Little 2011.
[57] Novak 2006; Little 2011.
[58] Little 2011.
[59] Novak 2021.
[60] Novak 2021.
[61] Zenenga 2012; Chiweshe 2018.
[62] Ncube 2014.
[63] Chiweshe 2018.
[64] Choto and Chiweshe 2022; Batts 2009.
[65] Ncube 2018.
[66] Batts 2009.
[67] Harris 2008.
[68] Harris 2008.
[69] Novak 2006.
[70] Van Zyl-Hermann and Boersema 2017.
[71] Kesby 1999.
[72] Mathews 2010.
[73] Steyn and Foster 2008.
[74] Kruger 2016.
[75] Sibanda 2018.
[76] Steyn and Foster 2008.
[77] Mathews 2010.
[78] Steyn and Foster 2008.
[79] *The Herald* 2016.
[80] Dominican Convent High School n.d.
[81] HitzAfrik Radio 2021.
[82] Chigonga 2005.
[83] *The Herald* 2012.
[84] *The Herald* 2016.
[85] *The Herald* 2012.
[86] Sharuko 2002.
[87] *The Guardian* 2002.
[88] White 2003.

[89] *The Herald* 2022.
[90] Palmer and Wilson 2013, p. 181.
[91] Flanagan 2020.
[92] Chagonda 2018.
[93] *The Herald* 2012.
[94] *The Herald* 2017.
[95] *The Herald* 2016.
[96] Tendi 2008.
[97] Reuters 2008.
[98] McGreal and Meldrum 2000.
[99] Bulawayo 2014.
[100] CBC News 2000.
[101] McGreal and Meldrum 2000.
[102] Ngwenya 2008.
[103] *The Herald* 2017.
[104] The Herald 2013.
[105] BBC 2004.
[106] Schmidt 1991.
[107] Nyambi 2017.
[108] Barnes and Pfukwa 2007.
[109] *The Sunday News* 2016.
[110] Mwonzora and Helliker 2020.
[111] Melber and Southall 2021.
[112] Flanagan 2018.
[113] *The Herald* 2018.
[114] McRae 2018.
[115] Chagonda 2018.
[116] Ndebele 2020.
[117] Flanagan 2020.
[118] Taruvinga 2022.