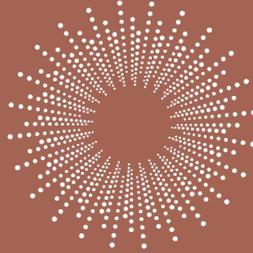


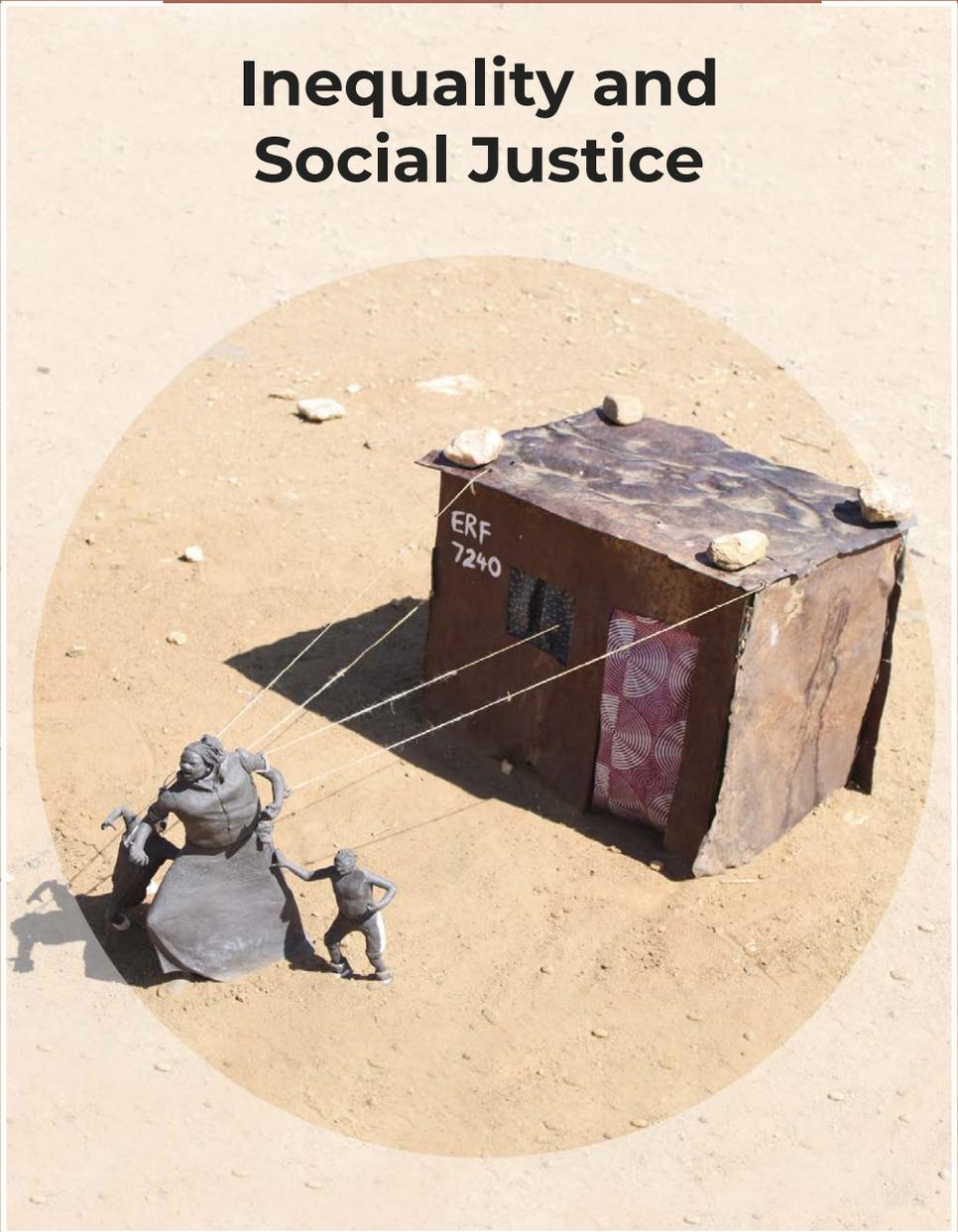
Volume 2

November 2022



Namibian  
Journal  
of Social  
Justice

# Inequality and Social Justice



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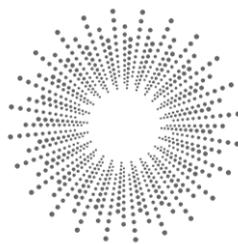
ISSN: 2026-8882

Printed by Solitaire Press, Windhoek, Namibia

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[www.namsocialjustice.org](http://www.namsocialjustice.org)

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## Acknowledgements

The Economic and Social Justice Trust is proud to present the second edition of the Namibian Journal of Social Justice (NJSJ). This edition, on *Inequality and Social Justice*, follows the 2021 edition, which dealt with *Housing*.

We wish to thank the editor, Prof. **Lucy Edwards-Jauch**, and the co-editor of this edition, Dr **Ndumba Kamwanyah**. We are likewise grateful for the contributions of the other members of the NJSJ editorial board, Ms **Ndeshi Namupala**, Dr **Guillermo Delgado**, Dr **Ellison Tjirera**, Dr **Job Amupanda**, Prof. **Trywell Kalusopa** and Ms **Rinaani Musutua**, and for the commitment towards our journal shown by all our **authors** and **peer reviewers**.

We also thank:

- **William Hofmeyr**, for a comprehensive and meticulous language edit;
- **Bryony van der Merwe**, for the design of the journal's cover page and the layout;

- **Frieda Luehl**, from **the project room Namibia**, for introducing us to the artworks printed in this edition;
- **Lynette Musukubili**, **Mitchell M. Gatsi**, **Dörte Berner**, **Saima Iita**, **Trianus Nakale**, **Rudolf Seibeb**, **Ina-Maria Shikongo**, **Titus Shitaatala**, **Mateus Alfeus** and **Tuli Mekondjo** for making their artworks available for publication; and
- all **photographers** for making their photos available for publication in this journal. They are mentioned in the captions of the photos.

A special word of thanks goes to the **Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Namibia Office**, for their generous support that has made the publication of this volume of our journal possible. In particular, we wish to thank the Country Director, Ms. **Freya Grünhagen**, for her unfailing encouragement, as well as the Project Manager, Ms **Inge Neunda**.

**FRIEDRICH  
EBERT  
STIFTUNG**  
Namibia Office

## Acronyms and Initialisms

AMCU	Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union
BEPS	base-erosion profit shifting
BIEN	Basic Income Earth Network
BIG	basic income grant
CCN	Council of Churches in Namibia
CEDAW	UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSOs	civil society organisations
DSD	Differences of Sexual Development
ELCN	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia
ELCRN	Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia
ESOP	Employee Share Ownership Plan
FMS	Finnish Missionary Society
GBV	gender-based violence
GDP	gross domestic product
GEWE	gender equality and women's empowerment
GRB	gender-responsive budgeting
GRN	Government of the Republic of Namibia
HDI	Human Development Index
HTA	Hai  om Traditional Authority
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICT	information and communication technology
IFFs	illicit financial flows
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMR	International Mineral Resources
IOC	International Olympic Committee

LMS	London Missionary Society
MAWLR	Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform
MGEPEWSW	Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare
MGEPEWSW	Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
MPUCT	Madhya Pradesh Unconditional Cash Transfer
MTEF	Medium-Term Expenditure Framework
NLF	Namibia Labour Force
NNSCH	Namibian Senior Secondary Certificate Higher-level
NPC	National Planning Commission
NSA	Namibia Statistics Agency
NSSCH	Namibian Senior Secondary Certificate Higher
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PDS	Public Distribution System
PIT	personal income tax
RMS	Rhenish Missionary Society
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SEM	structural equation modelling
SEWA	Self-Employed Women's Association
TAA	Traditional Authorities Act (No. 25 of 2000)
TVUCT	Tribal Village Unconditional Cash Transfer
UCT	unconditional cash transfer
VAT	value added tax
WHO	World Health Organization
WMMS	Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society
WSWB	willing-seller-willing-buyer

## ***Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Rights***

# **A Feminist Critique of Institutional Racism and Gender Essentialism: In Defence of Christine Mboma and Beatrice Masilingi**

*Ndeshi Namupala and Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja*

### **Abstract:**

*This article is a critical response to World Athletics (formerly the International Association of Athletics Federations) and the western ethos of athletics for their sustained systemic*

*exclusion of women, particularly black women. We make a case in defence of two Namibian athletes, Christine Mboma and Beatrice Masilingi, who were removed from the 400-meter race*



*John Kalunda (also known as Jacky Mabaso) standing in front of his mural painting titled “We are Proud of You” that was produced as part of the #WindhoekMuralProject curated by the ENK Institute of Public Art*

*Photo credit: ENK Institute of Public Art.*

*in the 2021 Olympics in Tokyo, Japan due to the World Athletics testosterone rule. The rule appears to be primarily applied to female athletes from the Global South. This article argues that the testing regulation is demeaning, is based on questionable science, and targets women based on racial and gender stereotypes. We posit the testing regulation to be problematic and demeaning to all women, as it implies that women having high testosterone levels places them at a competitive level similar to that of men, and that testosterone is the sole key to their athletic success. This strategy, which we see as a form of institutional racism and sexism, has been widely criticised in international scholarship, media and other public spheres. Mboma and Masilingi are amongst the black women who have recently been excluded from elite sports and subjected to this kind of scientific racism and gender essentialism. Other athletes include South Africa's Caster Semenya, Burundi's Francine Niyonsaba and Kenya's Margaret Wambui. Caster Semenya, an Olympic athlete, "was subjected to genetic, gynaecological, psychological, and endocrine gender verification" (Swarr et al., 2009). The article will unpack how black gender-non-conforming bodies pose an administrative challenge for institutions such as World Athletics, and how as a result they are othered through overt human rights violations. Our critique of gender essentialism is also extended to racist, sexist, homophobic*

*and transphobic people in the Namibian context who seemed to be offended by witnessing this systemic violence in their performativity of nationalism.*

**Key terms: Sports; gender essentialism, testosterone, sexuality, World Athletics, performative nationalism**

## **Introduction**

The world of sport impacts society in various ways, including by promoting social cohesion and national pride. This has been reflected in the outpouring of national pride after Team Namibia's excellent performance at the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games in Japan. For a moment, Namibia seemed to have set aside differences and divisions, particularly those based on different economic status, ethnic identity and social values. The focus was specifically on Christine Mboma, Beatrice Masilingi, and their coach Henk Botha. Mboma and Masilingi are from Namibia's northern regions of Kavango East and Zambezi respectively. The athletes, together with their coach, re-established Namibia's presence on the international scene through success in their sport codes, as other athletes such as Frank Fredricks, Helalia Johannes and Johanna Benson, among others, had done before them. We argue that the two athletes and their coach re-energised many Namibians' sense of national identity,

with people from all corners of the country forging a stronger sense of nationhood. The whole nation cheered when the 200m final was broadcast live on television and social media platforms. The jubilation and support for the Namibian athletes were echoed in different parts of the world. The spectacular performances of Mboma and Masilingi led to their becoming targets of discriminatory rules against women athletes. Mboma and Masilingi became the latest victims of the gender verification testing instituted by World Athletics.

In as much as the world of sports encourages nationalism, it also gives insight into issues of sexism, racism and other social injustice such as homophobia. Arguing for diversity from a social justice perspective, we make a case in defence of two Namibian athletes, Christine Mboma and Beatrice Masilingi, who were removed from the 400-meter race in the 2020<sup>24</sup> Olympics in Tokyo, Japan due to the World Athletics<sup>25</sup> testosterone rule. The rule appears to be primarily applied to women athletes from the Global South. This article argues that the testing regulation is demeaning and based on questionable science, and

targets women on the basis of racial and gender stereotypes. We posit the testing regulation to be problematic and demeaning to women. It implies that women with high testosterone levels are at a competitive level similar to men, and that testosterone is the sole key to their athletic success. Mboma and Masilingi are amongst some of the black women who have recently been excluded from elite sports and subjected to this kind of scientific racism and gender essentialism. The article unpacks how black gender non-conforming bodies pose an administrative challenge for institutions such as World Athletics, and as a result, they are othered through overt human rights violations. Our critique of gender essentialism is also extended to racist, sexist, homophobic and transphobic people in the Namibian context who seemed to be offended by witnessing this systemic violence in their performativity of nationalism.

Considering the long history of women's struggle for equal participation in the Olympics and other elite sports arenas, what becomes evident is that these arenas are entangled and implicated in the global "coloniality of sex, gender and sexuality" (Tamale, 2020). In this article, we analyse this struggle from a feminist perspective, particularly as it pertains to black and gender non-conforming women athletes. Methodologically we relied on

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24 The 2020 Tokyo Olympics were postponed and took place in 2021, although they are still referred to 2020.

25 World Athletics was previously referred to as the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF). Although some of the sources used referred to the IAAF, for the purpose of this article we will make use of 'World Athletics'.

secondary or desk sources consisting of media reports, journal articles, reports and documents, as well as cultural production such as public art. We present a discursive analysis drawing on feminist perspectives from our respective fields of sociology, cultural studies and performance studies.

### **Gender Essentialism: A Western Construct?**

It is necessary to unpack the idea of gender essentialism, the problem of gender, as a western construct that has been historically enforced through systemic and institutional structures of the state, religion and tradition. Gender essentialism refers to the uninformed assumption that men and women are fundamentally different, based on biology. This theory is responsible for gender stereotypes and hence enforces rigid gender roles as a way of maintaining the patriarchal system. These essentialist notions produce gender binaries through stereotypical ideas such as ‘women are caretakers and men are aggressive’. Such perspectives are usually better understood when placed in their specific historical contexts. That is to say, that gender essentialist perspectives are often entangled with other essentialist ideas such as race, class and sexuality. It is on this basis that feminist scholars such as Narayan (1998) remind us of the similarities between gender essentialism and cultural essentialism.

Narayan writes:

There are a number of similarities between gender essentialism and cultural essentialism. While gender essentialism often proceeds to assume and construct sharp binaries about the qualities, abilities, or locations of “men” and “women,” cultural essentialism assumes and constructs sharp binaries between “Western culture” and “Non-western cultures” or between “Western culture” and particular “Other” cultures.

*(Narayan, 1998, p. 88).*

Narayan’s argument poses an interesting challenge to our point that gender essentialism is inherently a western construct. It does so by reminding us that this dichotomy of ‘the west and the rest’ in itself is a colonial construct which does not always account for what is situated between the two sides. To support our insistence on the point that gender essentialism is a western construct, we draw on Oyèrónké’s (1998) acclaimed theorisation of making African sense of western gender discourses. Oyèrónké writes, “Yoruba kinship terms did not denote gender, and other nonfamilial social categories were not gender-specific either. What these Yoruba categories tell us is that the body is not always in view and on view for categorization” (Oyèrónké,

1998, p. 14). Oyèrónké argues that social hierarchy amongst the Yoruba people of West Africa has always been about relatedness and social relations; reminding us that one's biology was not a determining factor for one's social position.

Oyèrónké's perspective is not to be conclusive for all African contexts. However, in the Namibian context, previous gender studies, notably the work of anthropologist Heike Becker (2000; 2007) have established that religious practices like Christian Evangelism, German colonialism and apartheid regimes, were central in shifting gender dynamics and enforcing essentialist notions of gender. In her 2007 study on tradition and gender, Becker notes that relationships in pre-colonial Owambo, for example, were egalitarian, and that women held positions of influence and power. There were women who occupied leadership roles, including in the preservation of indigenous knowledge. This meant that there was a matrilineal system which afforded women considerable measures of agency, authority, and ownership. Becker highlights how Christianity laid a foundation for concretising rigid roles and stereotypes through their imported systems of social control. Becker notes:

The colonial construction of gender further led to essentialist ideas of gender, as it isolated the

category of 'women' from other social categories such as age, wealth and so forth. It negated social differences between women and between men, which had very real consequences for their power and their identities. The idea was that 'women' were a social category whose place was in the 'tribal areas' producing agriculture or engaged in animal husbandry to subsidise the system of cheap male migrant labour.

*(Becker, 2007, p. 29).*

This historical context tells us that gender essentialism is a global issue that was expanded through colonial modernity, and therefore functions as a device of what feminist author bell hooks called "White-Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy". While gender essentialism might differ in every other context, it is a practice of sameness that is globally distinctive as a part of what bell hooks also termed as "interlocking systems of domination" (hooks, in Sully, 2018). The Olympics are no stranger to this globalised system of oppression. Abolitionist author Namupa Shivute reminds us that "misogyny was a key cornerstone of the Olympics since its inception in 1896 and no women participation was allowed until 1900. Afterwards, women continued to be unfairly constrained within patriarchal and sexist confines" (Shivute, 2021).

## Gender and Sexual Diversity in Sports

There are many areas of diversity and inclusion that warrant attention in the world of sport. Among them are the diverse forms of sexuality and gender. While sports bodies such as World Athletics, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and others are content to take positive action around equality in general, there appears to be major hesitancy in taking action related to sexual diversity and gender identity. The world of athletics in particular continues to disadvantage female athletes who do not conform to the idealised standards of femininity and masculinity. Although many of these sports bodies claim to practice diversity, the assumption that individuals must precisely fit into the binary of female and male is contrary to the inclusivity they preach. For individuals to compete as athletes, they must align themselves as female or male. This becomes challenging for individuals with Differences of Sexual Development (DSD), such as Christine Mboma, Beatrice Masilingi, Caster Semenya and others. These athletes are excluded from participating in elite competitive structures of sport due to the non-conformity of gender and sexual essentialism.

Despite their claim to practice diversity and inclusion, institutions such as World Athletics, with

barefaced disregard for the diversity of individuals, enforce discriminatory regulations based on gender and sexual stereotypes. Diversity or inclusion here is used to refer to acknowledging and appreciating a diverse range of differences in terms of gender, sexuality, race, ability and other social relations through inclusion and acceptance. According to According to Brayboy (2003, p. 73, in Spaaij et al., 2018), sports institutions often view diversity as “something that can be implemented without necessarily changing the underlying structure of the institution and its day-to-day operations”. This is reflected in World Athletics justifying their “gender verification” instituted for female athletes especially from the Global South, paying only lip service to the diversity and inclusion which they claim to practise. What we witnessed in the 2021 case of Christine Mboma and Beatrice Masilingi is a tale of World Athletics’ obsession and fixation with policing, controlling and confining gender non-conforming bodies, particularly those of women.

African feminist scholar Sylvia Tamale (2020) makes a compelling argument in her comparison between two Olympic athletes Caster Semenya and Michael Phelps, showing us how they were treated differently even though both their bodies do not fall in the neat lines of gender and sex essentialism. Tamale argues:

“What they share in common is that both are contemporary Olympic athletes whose bodies defy conventional understandings and challenge the normative colonial logics regarding the human body. Beyond that, the two inhabit very different worlds, particularly in terms of race and class. Indeed, there is a world of difference in their sporting experiences. Discourses imposed on Phelps and Semenya by the public and other external entities are also quite different” (Tamale, 2020, p. 100).

While both Semenya and Phelps are treated as “Othered”, as freaks of nature (Tamale, 2020, p. 108), one fundamental difference that Tamale points out is that Semenya, a black intersex woman from rural South Africa, was subjected to testing and hormonal therapy while Phelps, a white American heterosexual male with socioeconomic privilege, was not subjected to these institutional interventions (Tamale, 2020). In order to “...liberate our knowledge production from the pitfalls of European rationality/modernity” (Tamale, 2022, p. 44), we need to revisit African indigenous genealogies of gender while making space to reimagine gender beyond heteronormative thinking. Tamale therefore returns us to ‘Decolonial African Sex/Gender Systems’, referencing previous African studies on gender and sexuality that have demonstrated that African

indigenous concepts of gender and sex were fluid.

## **Institutionalised Racism and Sexism**

Throughout history, athletes, particularly black and female athletes, have faced social and sexual injustices within their various sport codes. At the same time, these athletes are often confronted with similar challenges within the larger society. Sexism, racism and other injustices are endemic in professional sports and daily life. Various scholars (e.g. Lee & Cunningham, 2019; Spaaij et al., 2018) have argued that sport as an institution still reflects and reinforces various hegemonies of oppression and inequality, such as racial, gender, sexual orientation, and social class prejudices. Those prejudices and inequalities have negative effects on sport as a whole (Lee & Cunningham, 2019). Most notable is the overt manifestation of racism and sexism towards two Namibian black female athletes, Christine Mboma and Beatrice Masilingi, who have been victims at the hands of World Athletics and the IOC. The two girls were banned from participating in the 400- and 800-meters races due to their high testosterone levels. For years, World Athletics and the IOC have been accused of institutional racism and sexism due to their mandatory gender testing rule, as we unpack in the following section of this article. This

rule implies that Mboma and Masilingi qualify as female when they are running shorter 100- and 200-metre races, but are not officially female when running distances that are beyond 400 metres. The rule appears to be biased against excelling black and brown women athletes, particularly from Africa and the Global South. The discriminatory rule was seen as unfair as it only applies to some athletes but not others. For example, a New Zealand weightlifting athlete, Laurel Hubbard, was allowed to compete as a female under the rules if her testosterone level was below the given threshold. Hubbard, who transitioned from male to female, competed in the female category and won. When the IOC was questioned about this, they could not pronounce themselves on the issue of transitioning time (Southern Times Africa, 2021).

Institutional racism and sexism are reflected in the World Athletics' mandatory gender testing rule. As Human Rights Watch report puts it, "the fact that there is only such a regulation for women and none for men, means the regulations are intrinsically discriminatory against women. Athletics regulations have resulted in profiling and targeting women according to often racialised gender stereotypes, which has a deleterious impact on all women" (Karkazis, 2020). Inasmuch as sport has the power to unify communities

and even the world, various media have shown us that it has also been used to perpetuate racism, sexism and other social injustices (CNN, 2021; Dzhanova, 2021; Love, 2019). It has been used to privilege some social groups over others.

### **Mandatory gender testing rules in athletics**

For many decades, the world of sport has been subjecting women to exclusionary, restrictive and oppressive systems by regulating their participation in sport. This includes the mandatory gender testing rules targeting female athletes that violate their fundamental rights to dignity and privacy. World Athletics is one of the biggest culprits in violating female athletes' human rights with their DSD testing regulation. With their long history of gender testing, in 2018 World Athletics "revised" regulations that requires the blood testosterone level of female athletes with DSD to be reduced to below 5 nmol/L for a continuous period of at least six months, and thereafter to be maintained to below 5 nmol/L continuously for as long as the athlete wishes to remain eligible (World Athletics, 2018). This applies to female athletes who wish to compete in races over 400 metres or more, and all hurdle races. Such athletes have to change their bodies either through medication or surgery, failing which they must compete as males. The testosterone

rule thus implies that athletes who have testosterone levels above the threshold are male when they run in some races, but female in others.

World Athletics' obsession with testosterone and the supremacy of the male hormone is inherently concerned with the essentialisation of gender and the assumption that testosterone equals power and control, which are the preserve of men in a patriarchal society. World Athletics has been widely criticised for this absurd rule, which is regarded as a violation of the athletes' human rights. Writing in Human Rights Watch, Karkazis (2020) states:

Sex testing regulations, including the World Athletics 2019 regulations and its precursors, and the manner in which they are implemented, including their repercussions, discriminate against women on the basis of their sex, their sex characteristics, and their gender expression. Sex testing violates a range of internationally protected fundamental rights including to privacy, dignity, health, non-discrimination, freedom from ill-treatment, and employment rights. These punitive regulations push them into unnecessary medical procedures that are conducted in coercive environments in which humiliated women are forced to choose between their careers and their basic rights

World Athletics continues to maintain that the rule is a way to “level the playing field”, (World Athletics, 2018). The Court of Arbitration for Sport, while admitting that the rules are “discriminatory”, holds that such discrimination is “necessary, reasonable and proportionate” (Chung, 2019). Besides, the “level the playing field” argument uses the sex binary of male and female, while ignoring the innumerable other natural and environmental factors that contribute to each athlete's relative advantages and disadvantages, from height and lung capacity to coaching and training facilities, none of which are used as a formal basis for separate categories of competition (Krech, 2017).

World Athletics has also been accused of being discriminatory towards women athletes from mostly Africa and Asia when applying the DSD rule. Among those who have been critical of the mandatory gender testing rule are India's Dutee Chand and South Africa's Caster Semenya. The two have been subjected to gender testing and challenged the World Athletics rule through the Court of Arbitration for Sport in 2015 and 2019, respectively. Chand won her case (Krech, 2017), setting a precedent for other athletes who have experienced similar bans. It was expected that Chand's win would show that World Athletics, despite being the duly authorised regulator of

international athletics competition, should not operate unconstrained in policing the boundaries of sex and gender (Krech, 2017). However, Semenya lost her case, allowing World Athletics to continue forcing women with high testosterone levels to take suppressive medication if they want to participate as females in the longer distance track events of 400 metres to one mile, and hurdles events. Other female athletes affected by the rule are Burundi's Francine Niyonsaba, Uganda's Annet Negesa, and Kenya's Margaret Wambui. Some of these athletes' running careers ended due to coerced surgery or medication enforced by the regulation. According to Chung (2019), the treatment of athletes with elevated levels of testosterone in the last decade is not only abusive but also a modern reflection of colonialism that must be considered within the context of racial hierarchies. Chung argued that:

Throughout history, colonists have imposed violence on peoples of the Global South, often patronizingly in the name of care for those they harmed. Female Black bodies, specifically female Black bodies from South Africa, have a long history of violence stemming from the white, male gaze. In the early 1800's a Khoikhoi woman was taken to England from her home of South Africa and given the name Sara Baartman. In

London and later in Paris, she was displayed naked to Europeans who were fascinated with her genitals. When she passed away, her body was dissected and put on display in a French museum. Modern sex testing is strikingly reminiscent of both this fascination with the Black female body and the concept of violence disguised as care.

*(Chung, 2019)*

Mandatory gender testing re-emerged in July 2021 with the cases of the Namibian athletes, Mboma and Masilingi. They were allowed to compete in the 200-metre race, which required quite different preparations at short notice. Furthermore, their case has reopened the debate about DSD athletes, who still criticise World Athletics for infringing on human rights. The athletes have to endure their sexuality being questioned publicly over their higher testosterone levels. Mboma and Masilingi are quoted as describing the ban as “a very bad experience”, “quite disturbing”, “I just don't get it [...] It's very cruel” (Burke, 2021; Ronay, 2021). Affected athletes thus feel discriminated against and struggle with emotional and psychological trauma. The questioning of their womanhood and sexuality and the violation of their privacy are unacceptable. At such a young age, these girls are asked to take hormone-suppressing medications. Ronay

argues: “There is something troubling about asking a woman athlete to take a drug that alters your natural state, affects your mood, interrupts your talent, suppresses what your body does naturally. This solution feels like the wrong side of history. Time will not judge it kindly” (Ronay, 2021).

### **Performativity, Public Discourse, and Nationalist Sports**

The critique of institutionalised racism and sexism also applies to Namibia’s elite institutional cultures. The post-apartheid nation state’s project of nationalism and nation-building and the public discourse that it dominates are characterised by performativity and notions of performance. One literal example of this is how the state uses ‘traditional performances’ for the construction of a national culture that relies on ethnicity (Akuupa, 2015). This ‘Namibianess’ is a form of cultural essentialism in the sense that it does not recognise the colonial roots of ethnic production. Another example of performative Namibianess is the temporary and fragmented moments of unification that were performed as a response to Mboma and Masilingi’s outstanding performances at international meetings. During these moments, various members of the Namibian public experienced this collective euphoria and national pride. The tears of joy as

well as the excitement were refreshing to experience and offered moments of reconciliation for many Namibians during a difficult time in which many were not feeling united due to sustained and growing socioeconomic inequality. Other Namibian athletes who made the nation feel this euphoria were Frankie Fredericks (between 1992 and 2003), Agnes Samaria (in 2002, 2007, and 2008) and Johanna Benson (between 2012 and 2015). The public reaction to these recent exceptional performances by Namibian athletes on the international stage shows us that athletics occupies a special place in forging national unity.

In Namibia, the performativity of the nation tends to be a kind of unity that is euphoric, yet superficial. The ways in which it is embodied can be understood along the two trajectories of euphoria and superficiality. For instance, consider how Namibians from diverse backgrounds collectively celebrated the success both Masilingi and Mboma while also standing in solidarity with them. Countless individuals and institutions were Mboma’s and Masilingi’s cheerleaders, using diverse fora such as social and traditional media and public art to express their appreciation and support. Mboma, Masilingi and their coach Henk Botha became notable and heroic figures; the symbolism of this euphoric moment became part of the visual

register of Namibian iconographies when the Windhoek-based ENK Institute of Public Art curated a mural by local visual artist John Kalunda at a prominent site in the capital city. This piece of public art, created in 2021, reflects the national pride generated by recent athletic victories.

In their curatorial statement posted on the Facebook page, the ENK Institute of Public Art describes the inspiration behind this work of cultural production as follows:

Throughout the pandemic, many forms of routine were taken away from us. However, our focus turned to our television screens as we viewed the electric rise & achievements of our athletics athletes. Christine Mboma, Beatrice Masilingi, along with their tactically gifted coach Henk Botha - gave Namibians the thrills of excellent global achievement throughout the year 2021. And through their achievements, we began to learn that our paralympian athletes that have also been achieving with Ruben Gowaseb, and more recently with Ananias Shikongo”.

*(ENK Institute of Public Art. (2021, 17 November). Throughout the pandemic, many forms of routine were taken away from us. Facebook.*

This note highlights the symbolic and material significance of these recent athletic triumphs. It serves to remind the viewer about the difficult period in which these athletic successes occurred and the possibilities of reconciliation and nation-building that they bring. This difficult period is marked by immense loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic that claimed so many lives in Namibia, and throughout the world. It is also defined by the sustained socioeconomic inequalities and the widening poverty gap in Namibia. Hence, the exceptional performance of Namibian athletes on an international stage was what the nation needed to feel the spirit of the popular slogan, “One Namibia, one nation!” It is difficult to reconcile this feeling with what we argue to be the superficial performances of nationalism. The complexity here lies in the contradiction that even though Namibians stood in solidarity with the young women athletes who were being systemically excluded based on race and gender, the nation is yet to confront the heteronormative thinking that is rooted in patriarchal nationalism.

To understand other manifestations of performative nationalism, we must pay attention to the body and its politics. We must not only be attentive to what is prescribed for the body but also to how the body reinforces and rehearses that which has been socially constructed. The Namibian public’s

repeated acts of waving the national flag and patriotically singing the national anthem as ways of “showing love” and standing in solidarity with the athletes is caught up in the contradictions that we have pointed out above. One such contradiction is that the sentiments expressed in lines like “*we give our love and loyalty*”, “*beloved land*”, and “*we love thee*” seem limited to occasions on which the national anthem is sung. This is to say that although the love and loyalty extended to Mboma and Masilingi is heartfelt, it is not necessarily reflected in the everyday life of Namibian nationalism. Nationalism does not allow for this imagined love to manifest fully. Another noticeable danger of performative nationalism is the pressure that athletes’ bodies are subjected to. This national and professional pressure to compete and be victorious can be detrimental to the overall health of athletes. We see this pressure as a major contributing factor to the injuries that Masilingi and Mboma recently experienced. For example, Mboma’s injury during a 100 meters race at the 2022 Kip Keino Classic meet in Nairobi, Kenya reminds us of the pressures and risks related to performing sports and performing the nation alike.

Queer theorist Judith Butler (1990) writes, “gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this

sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed” (Butler, 1990, p. 25). Butler’s argument is crucial for this paper in situating what we have presented as performative nationalism in the analysis of public discourse on the politics of international athletics. We draw on this argument to make connections between gender and nationalism as inherently social constructs that are aimed at reproducing repeated acts that uphold the rigid historic binaries of masculine/feminine, national/foreigner, and man/woman, as well as western/Global South. These dichotomies fail to account for the knowledges between and beyond them. The notion of performative nationalism is one that many subaltern communities and oppressed people have grappled with in negotiating their national identities. For example, Murphy (2003) references the term performative nationalism in his review of Amy Baas’ book, which delves into the 1968 participation of African-American Olympic athletes and the racial politics of the time.

### **Intersection between Gender, Race, and Class: The Need for Social Justice in Sports**

Black women athletes continue to suffer at the hands of some of the international sports bodies, particularly World Athletics, who

continue with their overt manifestation of racism, sexism and other social injustices. This has drawn attention to the racial and gender inequalities in the world of sport, which in the past few years has been pledging support in the fight against racism, inequality and other social injustices. Images of sports stars taking the knee, some with fists up, and others wearing clothes or masks with messages about injustices have regularly been seen in some major elite sports leagues. While many of these sports and their stars use their platforms to fight against these injustices, gender and sexual inequalities including homophobia rages on. The social justice protests in sport do not seem to recognise that issues related to racism are intertwined with other social inequalities such as gender, sexuality and nationalities. We argue that dismantling these systemic injustices requires that cognisance be taken of the fact that various ‘isms’ that affect society also affect sport, and that this does not mean that they cannot be highlighted and challenged. Sport has long been “used” as a platform for social justice, for communicating matters of racial injustice, and for promoting social change.

These global injustices exist on a local level; therefore, we have included a discussion on performative nationalism in this article. We posit that there is a need to understand the experiences of

Mboma and Masilingi in relation to ongoing feminist struggles for gender and sexuality justice in Namibia. Contemporary feminist movements in Namibia are becoming increasingly aware and prominent through regular protests and other ways of organising against the national crisis of sexual and gender-based violence. This is also a response to performative nationalism’s inability to take drastic measures to address the sexual violence and GBV in the country. There is a need to connect these multiple feminist struggles – for example, the reproductive justice movement working towards the decriminalisation of abortion legislation, the #ShutItAllDownNamibia movement against femicide, sexual violence and GBV, and the struggles for queer rights – both at home and in the wider world as a way of generating solidarity and working across difference. These are all local struggles that are embedded in this global crisis of race, class, gender, and sexuality. We argue that it is possible to transform international sports platforms and to work towards the fair and just inclusion of gender non-conforming bodies without subjecting them to inhumane treatment. This will require that international sports bodies learn from feminist, decolonial and anti-racist entities that are at the forefront of not only dismantling “White-Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy”, but also imagining new relational ethics.

## Conclusion

Because sex and gender are so complex, there are certainly no easy answers when it comes to who should compete on women's teams. The takeaway is that this dominant tradition of fitting everyone into two categories, male and female, is impossible in both sports and in everyday life. Using arbitrary definitions of femininity and racial stereotypes (Karkazis, 2020) to profile athletes works against the effective promotion of a genuine consideration of diversity and equality in the world of sport. World Athletics can provide a space where athletes such as Mboma and Masilingi can thrive without conforming to the idealised standards of femininity and masculinity. They can invoke significant diversity and inclusion issues in practice as an institutional value. This article has offered a feminist discursive analysis of institutional racism and gender essentialism and how they play out on the international stages of athletics. We have discussed in particular how the institutional system in the world of sport deliberately controls the participation of black women, consequently violating their human rights. The article also goes beyond a critique in that it hints at and mobilises a social justice framework in both nation-building and international sports. It adds to the limited scholarly contributions in sports and feminism in Namibian studies.

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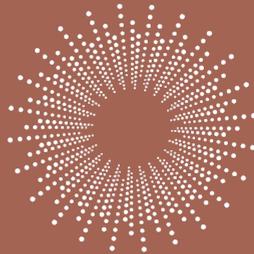
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Namibian  
Journal  
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Justice

Namibian Journal of Social Justice  
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Volume 2, November 2022  
ISSN 2026-8882

