Gender and Hair Politics: An African Philosophical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

One wonders if there is anything called philosophy of hair. It may be argued in some philosophy quarters, that to endorse any philosophy of hair is to strip philosophy of its intellectual nature, relegating it into realms of trivialities. While anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists and scholars in the sciences have attempted discussing hair issues, philosophers have paid minimal attention based largely on a claim that there are more important life issues to philosophize. While 'head' (*ori* in Yoruba language) as a concept in African Philosophy has been widely theorized, very little work has been done on hair as a part of the head. Consequently, this paper argues that the importance of hair in the development of social constructs of the body puts forth the need for a gendered study of its philosophy and politics. Politics of hair in Africa is interesting and highly debatable yet overlooked by existing literatures. Using methods of critical analysis, reflective argumentation, deconstruction and reconstruction to carefully consider social, economic, cultural and religious dimensions in the politics of hair among men and women, this work draws out the implications for Africa's holistic development.

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Introduction

Discussions that emerged from the widely read article 'Untangling the Knotty Politics of African Women's Hair'[1] necessitated a more comprehensive paper with a holistic approach of both philosophical and gender outlooks on the politics of hair. This transcends African women to include men in the hair discourse. It is important to clarify that while not ignoring the worth of considering politics of hair for Africans in the diaspora, this work will focus specifically on Africans at home. On one hand, philosophical analysis, as would be employed in this paper, will be an African philosophical analysis, using critical and analytic tools, while on the other hand, politics of hair in this work will encapsulate the cultural, spiritual, economic and aesthetic dimensions among others.

Hair is one of the important and widely shared human features which appear in different forms and parts of the body at different stages of life. Beginning with the Lanugo hair at birth, vellus hair in the first few months of infancy, followed by terminal hair, grown mostly in the pubic part and faces for men and some women (Pergament, 1999), hair remains an attachment to the skin serving varying purposes. Although hair is often argued to be dead and does nothing for humans, the physiological, aesthetic, social, psychological, cultural and religious significances of human hair are widespread across human societies. However, some points of possible variation can be gleaned in the attitudes towards hairstyling, hair-baldness, and complete intentional hair skinning. Sherrow (2006:iv) is perhaps correct in saying that such variations are a function of personal beliefs, status, age, gender or religion.

In Africa, for example, the hair serves a wide range of purposes such as: aesthetics and adornment, defining social status, class distinction and identification, enhancing self-image and esteem. It could also serve cultural and religious purposes in cases where the woman's hair is held sacred such as in situation of mourning the death of one's husband (Sossou, 2002) or in the case of men who as religious figures (spokesperson of deities) grow and weave their hair (Reference of Sango Worshippers). While the foregoing functions of hair were more pronounced in traditional Africa, recent trends in modern African societies suggest a gradual erosion of traditionally held rationale of hair. For instance, different classes of people now share similar hairstyles without reference to sex or class. The politics of hair in Africa presents hairstyles and colours in the global West as archetype to be copied in image while suppressing the traditional as unconventional and uncivilized. In this process, a subtle imposition ensues on Africans who see the necessity to wear non-African hairstyles in order to gain social acceptance. Winter and Bellows' (1981) conception of politics best captures the context of our discussion. Politics, for these scholars is 'a struggle between actors pursuing conflicting desires that may result in an authoritative allocation of values.' Africans have varying yearnings and desired objectives which in most cases gear them into actions aimed towards establishing respected authority, be it in their family circle, career, religious setting, or community. Such motivation does inform concurrent and recurrent change of hairstyles from hair straitening, to wigs, weave-ons, plaiting, growing beards or even keeping low cut. Therefore, this paper is sectionalized into six parts. After the introduction, the second section discusses traditional conceptions and significance of hair across selected cultures and genders. The third section provides justification for a philosophy of hair. The fourth section presents an African philosophy of hair. The fifth section critically examines hair politics in Africa viz-a-viz its ideological and economic implications on African peoples while the final section summarizes and concludes the paper.

Human Hair Across Cultures and Genders

Hair discourse is a space where race and gender intersect (Caldwell, 1991). With this understanding, human hairs have been linked with varying significances across cultures. This section attempts to establish hair significances across continent, to establish cross-cultural perceptions on hair, before moving into the African perspective. Among other things, Bartlet (1994) asserts that hair is a particularly fertile and more powerful bearer of meaning, stressing that hairs cover the part of the body (head and face) with the most concentrated and diverse communicative functions. In the work 'Symbolism of Hairstyle in Korea and Japan', Na-Young (2006) summarizes the significance of human hair in four points which are; to fend off evil influences, to express an ideal of beauty, to express a woman's marital status, and to express social status and wealth. Native Americans argue that hair, like skin, is an extension of the nervous system, it may be correctly seen as exteriorized nerves, a type of highly evolved 'feelers' or 'antennae' that transmit vast amounts of important information to the brainstem, the limbic system, and the neocortex.[2] According to Gordon (2012), long hair for Native Americans represents a strong spirit:

> Men of some tribes used to cut their hair only for mourning for a death of a close relative which meant that a mourner's spirit was desolated by the loss of a loved one. When they cut their hair in the past they had to dispose of it in a ceremonious way ... they put their hair that was cut off in a river. Since they are a part of the earth they always put themselves back into the earth.

Leach (1958) observes that among Hindus in India and Buddhists in SriLanka, long hair represented unrestrained sexuality, short hair, tightly bounded or partially shaved hair depicts constrained sexuality, while shaved heads denotes celibacy. Na-Young (2006) points out that Indians keep their long hair because they believe that cutting of hair is a contributing factor to unawareness of environmental distress in local ecosystems; a contributing factor to insensitivity in relationships of all kinds, also contributing to sexual frustration[3]. Might this be unconnected with the manner with which the hair on our body rises whenever we are confronted with extreme fear or anxiety? From this point, issues discussed are be limited to Africa.

Justifying a Philosophy of Hair

It is a truism that Philosophy began with wonders and curiosity. Salient recurring questions about life, humans and the world have sustained the discipline in retaining its relevance. Thus, inquiring if there could be any philosophy of hair is itself a philosophical enterprise. While certain philosophers would argue that to endorse any philosophy of hair is to relegate philosophical enterprise to realms of trivialities and strip philosophy of its academic nature, I present two theses to prove that philosophy of hair is a mentally instructive and academically sustainable discourse with cognitively relevant insights. First, a *human nature thesis* would maintain that curiosity is a fundamental human trait and that such inquisitiveness about human body parts explains discoveries which have aided improved health and living conditions. Accordingly, whatever has posed salient questions in human mind is worthy of philosophizing.

Secondly, an *inevitability thesis* would rest on an argument that the role of philosophy is to sharpen concepts and systematically explore relations of mind to the body. Following the Greek Aphorism, 'know thyself', every part of the body has a purpose, which if unknown will ultimately result in loss of the true power possessed by that part; thus, when hair is considered as a part of the self, it necessarily opens itself to philosophical scrutiny.

A focused group discussion with selected African women probed why they change their hairstyles, straiten their hair, put on wigs and weave ons? The following responses which explicate both human nature and inevitability theses were captured:

> *It is a part of personal hygiene*
> *It changes my look and gives me a feeling of freshness and confidence*
> *It shows how ingenious and dynamic I am as a woman*
> *That is the trend across the globe and I cannot afford to be left out*
>
> *It is part of African culture, as our matriarchs also wore different hairstyles for different occasion*

The list goes on and on, thereby reiterating differences in taste and lifestyle, regardless of shared feminine physiology. Similarly, inferences from both 'natural' and 'inevitability' theses connect with Schwitzgebel's (2006) assertion that: for all X, there is a Philosophy of X. Justifying Philosophy of Hair, Schwitzgebel (2006) identifies the following as recognizably philosophically relevant questions:

1. What distinguishes a haircut from other events in which one's hair ends shorter (e:g fire, lawnmower accident)?

2. Is a good haircut timelessly good or does the quality of a haircut depend in part on the tides of fashion.

3. Must a haircut please its bearer to be good? Are there, perhaps, several different dimensions of goodness to be pulled apart here?

4. To what extent should a haircut be judged by the intent of the hairdresser?

It is therefore worthy to note that, since human inquisitions (mostly scientific) on hair retain cognitive relevance; the value-focused inquiry of philosophy should also not be dismissed as cognitively irrelevant in hair discourses.

An African Philosophy of Hair

The hair is highly valued in African culture and often linked to identity, likewise, philosophy of human hair encapsulates issues of aesthetic, identity, class and so on. It brings to fore recent trends of change and continuity as a two-dimension of choice for hairstyling by men and women. This section focuses on African philosophy of hair, leaving other philosophies for future researchers across the globe. It involves an attempt to logically bring epistemological and

metaphysical perspectives on hair in Africa to bear, although we cannot ignore the ethical perspective, though not within the scope of this study. African epistemology is taken as a way the African conceptualizes, interprets and apprehends reality within the context of African cultural or collective experience (Anyanwu, 1983, p.60). Just as earlier schools of thought on African epistemology held that African modes of knowledge is closely linked with African ontology, stressing a close connection between African knowledge and spirituality (Idowu, 1962; Mbiti, 1970), later thinkers by either seeking African equivalence of some Western concepts, or arguing for a unique African way of knowing, using philosophical methods, have more critically and constructively upheld the reality of African epistemology (See Udefi, 2014). Metaphysics which deals with first principles, seeking to explain the nature of reality (being) and ontology is strongly embedded in beliefs and cultural practices of African peoples (Clack & Clack, 1998). Fundamentally a reality resting on an argument that there is some kind of interdependence and interpenetration of the self (human) and the external world, such that what happens to the one happens to the other establishes that humans are both physical and metaphysical beings. On this note, Diop, (1991) stresses the importance of acknowledging, integrating, and balancing metaphysical and physical knowledge and being, since the supernatural, natural and paranormal in some ways connect with divination, revelation, intuition and reason (N'Sengha, 2005).

The foregoing connotes close relationships between African epistemology and African metaphysics. In the words of Bakari (1997:2) 'African epistemology placed great emphasis on spirituality and involved an understanding of the world through a spiritual source. No reality existed without a spiritual inclination. The universe, nature, humans, and the spirit were all considered one." Bakari was apt to add that "however, this focus…did not prelude recognition and use of rationality or scientific logic'. Consequently, Konadu (2004:36) argues that: "If epistemology is preoccupied with the nature of knowledge and science is the means by which we validate what we know, then it would follow that all methods of inquiry are scientific methods (i.e., they confirm what we know)." Furthermore, Konadu points out that:

> …science must be understood as a cultural science that is anchored in the Africans' understanding of the dynamism of their culture and their ideas about the organisation of reality. Otherwise, what is the use (for the African) of critical examination and empirical verification if these processes are not consistent with the African conceptual universe and cultural orientation? (Konadu, 2004:36)

Discussions of African epistemology and metaphysics of hair begin with the question of identity. Africans' conception of hair is both physical and spiritual. On one hand, as a tool for identity, Tharps and Byrd, (2001) note that hair, in the fifteenth century served as a carrier of messages among Mendes, Wolofs, Yorubas, Mandingo and most West African societies. Hairstyles worn by community members helped decipher age groups, rank in community, ethnic identities, marital status, religion and so on. Among the Asante:

> *Priests' hair was allowed to grow into long matted locks in the style known as mpesempes (a term sometimes translated as 'I don't like it'). Uncut hair is*

> *usually associated with dangerous behavior: madmen let their locks grow, and the same hair style was worn by royal executioners* (McLeod, 1981:64).

Correspondingly, Sierber and Herreman (2000:56) note that the way one wears one's hair may also reflect one's status, gender, ethnic origin, leadership role, personal taste, or place in the cycle of life. On the other hand, the symbolic and religious meanings attached to the hair are evidenced by social taboos connected with it. Except for occupational or ritual reasons, most males shave their head, moustache, and chin. Certain hairstyles, however, may indicate social status or unusual power. For example, instead of sporting the common jongori (the strip of hair in the middle of the head that runs from the front to the back), young princes as well as the children of the rich may wear the *aaso*, which consists of three round patches of hair arranged in the front, centre, and back of the head. Other variations identify powerful hunters and warriors, For example, *aaso* oluode, it is a patch of hair growing on a spot in the middle of the head into which potent medicine has been infused to empower the body both physically and spiritually (see Adeoye 1979:164-167). In later centuries, roles of human hair have drastically transformed, for example, shaving of the head, moustache, and chin is no longer restricted to certain groups; likewise, keeping grown beard is also gaining popularity among men of different groups and ages. Summarily, hair in African culture and as a vital part of the body is closely linked variously with death, disease, sexuality, fertility and vitality (Sierber & Herreman, 2000).

On sexuality, young Wolof girls in Senegal partially shaved their hair as an outward symbol that they were not courting; Yoruba girls and women mostly from Nigeria have distinct hairstyles to show their sexual status depicting spinsterhood, wifehood and widowhood as the case may be. In recent past, cutting of hair among women have been interpreted as a sign of avoidance of sex. While some have argued that long hair is feminine and sexy, others believe that short hair is liberating. For men, the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries promoted hair grooming culture, popularly referred to as *Afro* (Though Afro style is not restricted to men), indicating that grown hair made men sexually attractive. This trend was gradually replaced with low-cut and clean shaves, which is also fast disappearing and getting replaced with grown hairs and beards in line with beard gang styles.

From an equally interesting standpoint, scholars have also raised issues concerning pubic hair. Explaining how public hair removal grew to become a norm, the act is justified by men and women as promoting attractiveness, sensation, hygiene and sexual improvement. Pubic hair removal is believed to enhance femininity in women and to emphasize body muscularity in men (See Braun, Tricklebank and Clarke, 2013).

In connection with fertility and vitality, keeping loose hair is generally regarded as inappropriate because it signifies filth, and untidiness. It is believed that if a woman has thick hair, she demonstrates the life force, the multiplying power of profusion and prosperity (Tharps & Byrd, 2001) and therefore will have many children, farms and riches. Hair leanness and sparseness are often connected with ill-health and old-age, while grey hairs of aged people are highly respected more often for experience and wisdom.

The hair in widowhood has various interpretations among African cultures. While widowed women in certain communities are expected to maintain unkempt hair as a sign of mourning (Venkitesh, 2012), some cultures in West Africa, particularly in most parts of Igbo (land), shave off the hairs of a woman's head and body both as a mark of respect to the departed spouse and as a status symbol (Sossou, 2002). Men also partake in the hair shaving ritual when they lose their wives (Tasie, 2013; Nwogu, 2015)

More profound are religious and spiritual importance attached to hair in African culture. Hair may be described as both a divine gift and a religious object. Described as the most elevated point of the body, thus closest to the divine, hair is held useful in communicating with divine beings. On this, Wilson (1994:13) affirms that highly stylized hair in African culture is interpreted as an extrusion of the life force and, hence [serves] as a corporeal measure of physical and metaphysical potency. Such potency is founded on a belief that hairs do not decay at death. The hair is believed to possess certain powers such that when taken by an enemy, it could be used to cast spells or inflict harm on the owner. Accordingly, it is often advised that hair cut in brush and combs be burnt to avoid spells. In the same vein, special recognition is given to children (male and female) born with knotted or curly hair, popularly described as dreadlocks; Yorubas regard them as specially endowed with wealth, hence the appellation in their panegyric 'Dada- olowo eyo', meaning one divinely blessed with cowries (money) to attract wealth to their family. A Dàda's head is not shaved during the naming ceremonies because it is believed that the knotted hair has special powers. The hair may be washed but must not be combed. As Marilyn Houlberg has noted, the heads of Dada children are shaved only under special ritual conditions. The act of head-shaving may be said to mark the incorporation of the already sacred child into the world of the living (Houlberg 1979:377).

It will be no understatement, that spiritual importance attached to the hair raises the question of trust between the hair groomer and his/her clients. Trust, here is three-fold, comprising of competence, purity and availability, in line with a widely used Chinese proverb which says; You cannot prevent the birds…from flying over your head, but you can prevent them from building a nest in your hair.

Trust in this regard is circular to both parties in hair grooming; first, there is some expectation as regards a groomer's ability to make soothingly appropriate hairstyles for his/her client. Likewise, is the appropriateness of clients' personality and hair texture to wear proposed hairstyles. Secondly, spiritual and physical purity of both parties are required; on the spiritual side, clients usually prefer to put their head under groomers of similar or closely related spiritual/religious dispositions. Likewise, on the physical side, while no hair groomer will willingly specialize in grooming hairs for mentally infirmed persons, an average client expects a level of decorum from her groomer. The third criterion of trust is availability, which is an assurance that both parties can be readily available for service or to be serviced as the need arises.

The philosophy of hair in Africa could be approached from four possible standpoints: Pre-colonial, colonial, postcolonial/neo-colonial and globalized standpoints perspectives. Pre-colonial Africa featured a philosophy of 'occassionalism'. Being a highly religious continent, it was held that occasions and class should primarily determine hairstyles or hair patterns; these are believed to be set by God; who ultimately design seasons of joy and sorrow and solely decide the

one to come to His subjects; the creatures. The philosophy of hair in colonial Africa was that of 'ambivalence', as Africans (men and women) were caught in a dilemma to either imbibe colonialist cultures or to keep strictly to their cultural ideals. What has crept in since post-independence in most African states is neo-colonialism, being gradually transformed by globalization. Neo-colonialism is also a notorious culprit, using cultural imperialism as its major tool. Africa's contact with the West through slave trade and colonialism culminated to exposure to a so called 'civilization' through Western education and Christianity, all of which were laden with Western cultures and lifestyles; presenting the Western as the 'formal', and by implication, the traditional as unconventional and uncivilized. This imposes on Africans, a necessity to wear non-African hairstyles in order to gain social acceptance. Thus, we may describe the post-colonial philosophy of hair as that of 'cultural imperialism'. For those who do not believe in the neo-colonial argument, globalisation is another infallible argument in the philosophy of hair in contemporary Africa. Both neo-colonialism and globalisation are active forces that have continued to shape the contours of hair philosophy in post-colonial Africa. Perhaps a liberalist thinker would argue that: 'it is my hair, and I am entitled to the freedom to do whatever I please with it'. Although such liberalist defense may be permissible, it remains, largely, a residue of mental hair logic enslavement which results from uncritical analysis.

It is worthy to note emerging changes between traditional and current conceptions of hair in order to critically appraise them. These would be drawn from Venkitesh's (2012) list of some common traditionally held beliefs associated with hair among tribal people across Africa:

1. Hair should be cut on a full moon day for it to grow longer.

2. Two people are not allowed to braid a person's hair at the same time. It could result in the death of one groomer.

3. Pregnant women should not braid others hair.

4. A boy's hair should not be cut before he comes of age.

5. Hair caught in a brush should be burnt to avoid black magic spells.

6. Women should not cut men's hair.

7. It is unlucky to thank the groomer.

8. Hair should not be combed or braided in the open.

9. Hair should be covered during menstruation, which is associated with the belief that the head is the closest to the divine God. Menstruation is considered an unclean period, so women cover their heads with scarves.

10. The person who braids hair performs it as both a ritual and a social service. The man or woman who braids does it as a social duty. No rewards are expected.

Basing the claims on superstition and logic, some of these beliefs are held as superstitious, mainly because they have been defied with no serious repercussion. Some of these beliefs (such as 3, 5 and 8) are held for safety reasons; to promote healthy lifestyle; some, (6) are held to deter role-crossing which used to be seen as a taboo; while others (1, 2, 4, 7 and 9) grew out of traditional regard for hair as well as beliefs about attendant significances. But why should anyone adhere to these traditional beliefs in the twenty first century? The fact that some of these claims have been defied with impunity is another justification for both empirical studies as well as critical rational scrutiny of the hair discourse in Africa. In the first instance, the belief that a boy's hair should not be cut before he comes of age does not cut across the continent, as some

cultures believe that a new born baby should be given a clean shave as an initiation into the material world. I reckon that economy is a major defiance factor identified to have contributed to recent non-compliance with these cultural beliefs. In this context there is time economy and monetary economy. While time economy knocks off (1, 2, 3, 5 & 10), monetary economy knocks off all the beliefs except (5).

Concerning time economy, hair cutting is now done as need arises and not necessarily on a full moon day; the idea that doing so will make hair grow longer is no longer popular, seeing that research has shown that the average speed of hair growth is roughly 1.25 centimeters or 0.5 inches per month, being about 15 centimeters or 6 inches per year[4] .Besides, several hair boosting formulas have been made available and can be applied to achieve such purposes. Due to the need to maximize time as a resource, the belief that two people are not allowed to braid a person's hair at the same time is gradually extinct. In more recent past, more than two people may braid for a person depending on the hair thickness and the need to quickly attend to other customers. These have been done severally without the death of one groomer resulting. Also, the fact that pregnant women now specialize in hair grooming for financial gains nullify the belief that they (pregnant women) should not braid others' hair. There is still a strong belief that hair caught in a brush should be burnt to avoid 'black magic' spells, however, time does not permit hair burning each time it is caught in a brush, rather, flushing in the toilet is a new and easier disposal method.

Likewise, restricting hair grooming among persons of similar sexes is both patriarchal and sexist. This belief which discourages role crossing for cultural reasons has been defied in hair grooming, as there are now as many female barbers as male hair dressers, all without reported negative outcomes. That a woman must cover her hair during menstruation is highly stigmatizing and objectifying. This has lost touch with the dynamism of contemporary Africa where a good number of women now take up white collar jobs with attendant dress codes which may not permit hair covering. Above all, hair grooming has transcended ritualistic and social service status to an entrepreneurial option for those who are skilled therein. It is also being passed down not only by generations, but also to interested people outside the cultures. Consequently, since payment is a way of appreciating a hair groomer's service, the belief that it is unlucky to thank a hair groomer no longer subsist in twenty-first century Africa. A significant loss in this regard is the communal sense of helping each other which has been eroded by the commodification hair grooming

Hair Politics in Africa

In the emerging Africa, the definition of beauty is no longer exclusive to the African cultural uniqueness; it now has a shared outlook. A more fundamental dimension of human hair is its political underpinning, which encompasses the ideological and economic dimensions. The ideological basis is that Africa looks to the West for everything including hair. Beyond all the significances discussed above, African hair has been highly politicized. Blacks at large, are often discriminated against because of their hair[5]; such discriminations contribute to self-hatred, low self-esteem and the desire to be white (Konneh, 2013: iii) thereby pushing them into application

of chemicals, colours and hair extensions as deemed fit in order to gain recognition within an imagined class of the 'formal'. The episteme of hair in contemporary thought has been introduced through the concept of Hybridity. Politicization, by implication involves transitions through colonial, postcolonial, neo-colonial eras into globalization thereafter, giving birth to *re-colonization*.

Nations who provide solutions to perceived problems in this globalized world also take charge of economies; thus, hairs (particularly African hairs) have been problematized, not on altruistic grounds, but for economic reasons. In all ramifications, hair has several inputs to the economy of a state, such that the side that continues to demand for resources remains at the mercy of the solution provider. A very good example is Africa's importation of hair and hair products from India, Korea and Brazil. As at 2005, African-Americans spend $81.6 million per annum on chemical products 175 (especially relaxers), and purchase 83% of hair care products in the $308.6 million ethnic personal care market. (Bitz, 2005), recent reports have it that African women spend approximately $1.1 Billion on hair extensions and hair weaves (Parker, 2015). Affirming that Africa is a prime market for Indian Hair, and that Indian companies often organize auctions to get undamaged hair. Brown notes that

> the Indian hair market is typically known to export two types of hair: Remy and non-Remy. Remy hair, usually collected from temples, is of the highest grade and gives a natural look …. Non-Remy hair, on the other hand, is processed because the cuticles do not face the same direction. So it is treated with hydrochloric acid to remove the cuticles, which reduces the quality of hair, before export. (Brown, 2015)

The Tirupathi Temple in Andhra Pradesh (one of the 29 states of India), which holds online auctions annually, has earned $97 million through the sale of hair via e-auctions since 2011 (Brown, 2015). In addition to their ownership of hair care businesses in Morrocco, South Africa and Nigeria, the Indian hair export market is estimated to be worth about $393.5 million annually, with a yearly growth rate between 10 percent and 30 percent (Brown, 2015). In their quest for enlargement, an Indian company recently expressed enthusiasm to buy a South African based hair extension company; with excitement, they iterate tremendous potentials of the African market, hoping that it would increase their productivity to meet the needs of African consumers. We may pause here to ask some questions; if hair across cultures has so much spiritual significances as earlier discussed, why should anyone choose to sell his or her hair? At what instances should hair ever be sold? Why must a temple be a major venue for hair auction? Of what value is adding other peoples' hair to one's hair? If the African philosophical conceptions and arguments on head (*Ori)* remains valid, why should anyone accept the 'head' (hair) of another when it is not a situation of life and death as is in other cases of organ transplant? These questions among others are open to further philosophizing in future researches on hair.

From an economic viewpoint, should it not worry an average African that he/she remains a consumer? Shea butter, honey and palm oil are vital ingredients for hair care products, they are largely produced by Africa, yet not taken seriously enough to develop local brands which will compete with foreign made; instead they are produced largely for export. Like their Indian counterparts, Brazilians and Koreans also enjoy a sizable market share of Africa's hair and cosmetic industry.

In what seems like an improved trend, Parker (2015:1) observes recent trend of a return to Afro, averring that:

> More and more black women are embracing their naturally curly hair, no longer enamored by the universal trend of straight, kempt hair. At present, the Afro hair industry is worth over $500 billion, and the growth is expected only to continue. Reports also indicate that black women are not averse to trying out new products and investing more on hair care if it guarantees them better results.

On the contrary, recent trends within Africa show increased inclinations towards hair extensions and chemicals among men and women. Although a huge amount of money flow out of the continent's economy; only a little of it flow back for Africa's economic development. This is what Sharpton (2010) describes as economic retardation as he avow that, you get up and comb your oppression and exploitation every morning...how are you going to sleep right, when you're wearing exploitation all the time? he (Sharpton) raises a fundamental argument on a real grassroots need to recapture the fact that we can't control something as close to us as the hair on our head. Politics of hair in Africa transcends demand for beauty and belongingness; it is not played for the benefit of Africa; it vividly portrays insensitivity and ultimately, the failure of leadership. Omotoso (2013) attributes such leadership failures to dearth of an African philosophy of political communication. Without ignoring the fact that politics of hair is perpetuated by both conventional and new media, where reality is not only constructed but also distorted (Omotoso & Razak, 2015), it must be categorically stated that African leaders' ignorant neglect of political underpinnings of hair has also contributed largely to the continent's underdevelopment.

Summary and Conclusion

This paper began by asserting physical and spiritual importance of hair across cultures. By positing that due to its cognitive relevance, research on hair (particularly, philosophical analyses) cannot be ignored, the paper proceeded on an African philosophical scrutiny of hair as it transits through occassionalism, ambivalence, cultural imperialism to the globalized age, as it nose-dives into re-colonialism. It thereafter presented ideological and economic arguments on the politics of hair in Africa. The roles of cultural uniqueness in today's political economy cannot be underestimated. One may argue that the hair is not an important issue to consider at this time on a continent riddled by terrorism, conflicts and insurgencies, however, it would be logical to argue that inadequate distribution of wealth is an important factor fueling threatened peace in Africa; a

part of the insufficient resources is what is expended on beauty and cosmetics, which could have been poured back into the economy if the masses are well informed to be afro-optimists, these would have in some way curbed terrorism and insurgencies.

Politics of hair remains a subtle worm, quietly eating into the fabrics of Africa, and must not be treated with levity; it is a growing avenue for re-colonization which must be fought with vigor. While depoliticizing African hair may not be a possible task, decolonizing, which is an expressive re-affirmation of Africanness may be more appropriate; to this end, all hands must be on deck. Policy makers must embark on public enlightenment and national orientation programs; media portrayals must take a conscious turn towards promoting critical reflections in fashion climes by reconstructing 'the African' as unique and standardized not requiring foreign approvals; indigenous businesses must intensify on researching and making products that will meet global standards so as to encourage the masses to 'buy Africa'; individuals and groups in Africa must re-awaking the culture of promoting the traditional as formal and the indigenous as peculiar and unique enough to be proud of. The call to Afro-optimism is not for a complete turn towards keeping a natural hair; rather, it is a call for critical reflections for informed decisions on the part of all stakeholders; a category to which all Africans belong by virtue of maintaining some strands of hair on their bodies and their use of certain product for its enhancement. Africa must wake up to this task to avoid re-colonization!

Endnotes

[1]See Sharon Omotoso's article on theconversation.com/untangling-the-knotty-Politics-of-African-Womens-Hair. October 6, 2015.

[2]See http://www.davidwolfe.com/hair-is-an-extension-of-the-nervous-system-native-americans-keep-hair-long/.

[3]See https://www.sott.net/article/234783-The-Truth-About-Hair-and-Why-Indians-Would-Keep-Their-Hair-Long.

[4]See How to Make Your Hair Grow Faster. Web. http://www.howtomakeyourhairgrowfast.net/how-fast-does-hair-grow.html)

[5]For testimonials on discrimination of Blacks because of their hair, see Alex Janin (2016) What the Perception of 'Professional' Hair Means for Black Job Seekers

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