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Black Women's Hair Consciousness and the Politics of Being

Abstract:

Black women do not want to become white women because they know that this is impossible. Yet, some black women straighten and curl their naturally kinky hair, or wear hair extensions, weaves and wigs that resemble Caucasian hair. Still, they recognize that hair is only one attribute of their Being and that even if they choose to wear non-African hairstyles, they can concurrently embrace other aspects of their black identity. So, is this a matter of cultural assimilation or integration, or is there a deeper ontological problematic underlying these cross-racial hair styling choices? I interrogate three arguments that black women usually advance for their hairstyling choices – the survival strategy argument, the protective styling argument, and the options-choice argument. I use Mabogo Percy More's interpretation of Jean-Paul Sartre's concepts of "the Look," "facticity," and "bad faith" to analyze Black women's hair consciousness through the lens of his "Politics of Being" concept.

Keywords:

black women's hair, politics of black hair, hairism, Mabogo Percy More, Jean-Paul Sartre, the look, facticity, bad faith

Introduction

To interrogate the problematic of black women's hair consciousness, I employ a philosophical account of the ontology and politics of black women's hair. I do this by revealing how embodied racial facticity has been weaponized interra-

cially and intra- racially to influence their hair consciousness. I demonstrate that there are various sites of “hairism” on the ideological battlefield of black women’s culture, identity, and gender. The debate about black women’s hair is centuries long, however, I advance a novel threefold argument in the discourse – the survival strategy argument, the protective styling argument, and the options-choice argument. My overarching argument is that there is a conflation of the interracial and intra-racial sites of hair discrimination, although there is also a dialectical relationship between the two. Within the broader context of the politics of hair, I also discuss a paradox related to the purported superiority of white women’s hair; by giving one example that shows that they too are plagued by intra-racial hairism that influences their hair consciousness. I utilize the Africana Philosophy, Black Existentialism, and Black Consciousness Philosophy lenses of Mabogo Percy More’s work to transcend the usual binary (victim/victimizer) positions of this black hair debate. More has devoted more than four decades of his work to the problematic of “*being-black-in-an-antiblack-world*.”¹ The common thread running through his work is the pervasive phenomenon of anti-black racism and its connection to embodiment. This is both an ontological and political problematic in his view – a problem of the “Politics of Being,” which is a term that he coins.² In More’s unpublished work titled, “The Politics of Race and Black Hairdo”³ he engages a topic that firstly, does not usually feature in traditional philosophical discourse, and secondly, one that male philosophers rarely write about – black hair.

Sharon Adetutu Omotoso rightly points out that certain philosophers may argue that there is no place for a “philosophy of hair” in academic discourse because this subject would “relegate philosophical enterprise to realms of trivialities and strip philosophy of its academic nature.”⁴ However, Omotoso rejects this view, arguing that contextually, as is the case across races, ethnicities, and cultures, “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.”⁵ She is concerned with the metaphysical and epistemological dimensions within the scope of what she refers to as the African philosophy of hair. However, More’s interest, like mine, is with the hair challenges of black people in anti-black societies – more specifically, South Africa. My focus is firstly, on the ontological (what-is) dimension of black hair, as part of the descriptive element of human Being. Simultaneously, I give attention to the teleological (what-ought-to-be) dimension, or its political implications, which are normative, ethical, or prescriptive. In this respect, More argues that “our hair, just like our skin, is a highly sensitive part of our Being upon which competing ideologies and definitions of ‘the beautiful’ are played out in conflict” (PoR, 1). As such, he concurs with Omotoso that there are theoretical and conceptual dimensions to discourse on hair, and for him, this includes opposing aesthetic, ideological, and racial affiliations. I agree with both Omotoso’s and More’s positions on the need for a philosophy of hair, as well as their views that African/black hair is a site of aesthetic and ideological contestation.

In light of the complex terrain within which black hair is situated, More asks three pertinent questions: “Is there a relationship between white superiority and the African obsession with hair? Does the straightening of African frizzy, nappy and kinky hair represent an imitation of the dominant white group’s appearance? If so, is this an indication of internalized Black antiblack racism and/or self-hatred?” (PoR, 1). These questions support my own question about whether the hair styling choices of Black women are mere cultural assimilation or integration, or a symptom of an identity crisis. So, I analyze the ontological and teleological dimensions of

1) More, *Philosophy, Identity and Liberation*, 43, hereafter cited parenthetically in text as PIL along with page number; More, *Philosophy in Black*, 111; More, *Sartre on Contingency*, 264.

2) More, “The Politics of Being.”

3) More, “The Politics of Race.” Hereafter cited parenthetically in text as PoR along with page number.

4) Omotoso, “Gender and Hair,” 7.

5) *Ibid.*, 8.

black women's hair choices in order to address these questions, as they capture the crux of the politics of black hair. To this end, firstly, I present More's case for the symbiosis between the existential categories of ontology and politics, what he coins "the Politics of Being."⁶ Secondly, I discuss More's article on the politics of race and black hairdo and outline the three salient arguments he engages concerning some defences advanced for straightened hair or wigs. Thirdly, I discuss my core theme – Black women's hair consciousness – where I present three arguments for Black women's hair styling choices that I have identified within this debate. Regarding the survival strategy argument, I interrogate it based on Sartre's concept of "the Look." I interrogate the protective styling argument according to Sartre's concept of "facticity." I conclude with the options-choice argument and interrogate it by using Sartre's concept of "bad faith." Finally, I engage Bibi Bakare-Yusuf's article, "Beyond Determinism: A Phenomenology of African Female Difference,"⁷ to suggest how false hair consciousness can potentially be surmounted, interracially and intra-racially.

More's Politics of Being

More pre-empts objections to the theoretical connection he makes between two categories of philosophy that many scholars, particularly in the analytical tradition, argue should be separated – ontology and ethics, or ontology and politics.⁸ He frames possible protestations as the logical question of the "is-ought gap," also known as the fact/value problem, popularized by David Hume. The is-ought problem questions whether it is permissible to deduce value conclusions or imperatives from purely factual premises and thus formulate ethical precepts.⁹ More recognizes Sartre's objection to this connection in *Being and Nothingness*.¹⁰ who argues that "ontology itself cannot formulate ethical precepts" because it is "concerned solely with what is."¹¹ He also notes Martin Heidegger's position in *Being and Time*,¹² where he explicitly rejects the connection between ontology and ethics. More's rebuttal is: "The problem with the is-ought question (also referred to as 'Hume's guillotine') is that it often brings about a 'cult of neutrality' according to which the philosopher's task is not to prescribe or make judgments but simply, in the manner of Ludwig Wittgenstein, to analyse the logical geography of concepts and as such 'leave everything as it is.'"¹³

This is a vast debate that cannot be fully accommodated in this article. So, I adopt More's position in the debate, where he argues that Africana Philosophy and Black Consciousness (BC) philosophy accommodate this symbiosis, where what "is" can lead to what politically "ought to be." This progression is crucial for South African BC philosophy because leaving everything as is, maintains an unfavorable status quo for black people in an anti-black world. In the context of an apartheid society, More explains that Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) insist that what ought-to-be must be deduced from what-is because "the category of 'being' was also a political concern which could be called 'ontology of freedom'" (PIL, 78). I here demonstrate that black female Being is indeed a political issue that is situated on an ideological battlefield. It includes ontological dimensions such as contingency, facticity, and bad faith as well as the political, social,

6) More, "The Politics of Being."

7) Bakare-Yusuf, "Beyond Determinism."

8) More, *Philosophy, Identity and Liberation*, 77–78.

9) *Ibid.*, 77.

10) Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, hereafter referenced as BaN in text parenthetically along with page number.

11) More, *Philosophy, Identity and Liberation*, 77.

12) Heidegger's position in *Being and Time*.

13) More, *Philosophy, Identity and Liberation*, 77–78.

cultural and economic implications. In other words, it cannot be merely accepted that "Black women's hair is what it is," given that contemporary black hair consciousness – the status quo – is influenced by the norms of an anti-black racist world. Therefore, there is an ethical imperative to intervene in the status quo, in the interests of determining whether false consciousness has taken root, and if so, to confront it.

More's Politics of Race and Black Hairdo

More explains that there are three popular arguments that are advanced by black women in defense of chemically straightening their hair or wearing wigs (PoR, 4). The first one is that natural (kinky) hair requires too much work and attention, as opposed to straightened hair. As such, natural hair is conceived of as a problem that can be circumvented by straightening it. He says that this is considered as a survival strategy. However, he questions whether this argument implies that African hair is "the enemy, a problem to be solved, a territory to be conquered" (PoR, 4). He concludes that "since our hair is part and parcel of our body, the extent to which we are uncomfortable about our hair reflects our feelings and attitudes toward our bodies: *Problematic*. Problems require solutions" (PoR, 4, emphasis original). More is raising two issues in this argument that I consider to be separate as I will demonstrate later in the paper. Firstly, he raises the practical or technical problems that black women face with their hair (it requires too much work and attention), which is an issue of the facticity of hair type and texture, a matter of genetics and genealogy. Secondly, he speaks about the popular solution to this hair type problem (straightening and wigs), and asserts that it is assumed as a survival strategy. I will later demonstrate that the practical hair problem he raises belongs in the ambit of the protective styling argument; and that his survival strategy argument is different from mine, which instead pertains to surviving the inter-racial and intra-racial objectifying "Look" of the other.

The second argument, More says, is that black women straighten their hair because they long for both male and female approval (PoR, 4). He asserts that the claim in this respect is that people respond favorably to those with straightened hair and prefer their appearance over that of people with natural hair. He laments the tragedy of this argument because it is, in his view, constructed externally and implies that one has no control over people's judgments of one's hair. As such, he finds that "African men and women, whether consciously or not, are therefore complicit in racialized and politicized straightened hairstyles" (PoR, 4). He considers these to be gaps in our collective consciousness and cites bell hooks in this respect, who argues that these are "the spaces where mindless complicity, self-destructive rage, hatred and paralyzing despair enter" (hooks in PoR, 4). The desire for approval which leads to complicity with hair discrimination is the focal point of this argument. I identify two aspects within his argument. Firstly, the issue of approval, in my view, is better situated within the scope of my survival strategy argument because it is associated with the concept of the "Look." Secondly, the notion of complicity that More perceives as a gap in collective consciousness, pertains to bad faith and self-deception, which aligns with my options-choice argument.

The third argument More mentions is based on the prevalent attacks against those who wear their hair natural, who are accused of being obsessed about natural hair and thus still victims of outmoded racial politics (PoR, 4). More offers an example of the South African post-apartheid context, where proponents of this position argue that racial politics have been transcended since the advent of the democratic dispensation in 1994. They argue further that in the non-racialism era, "binaries such as white/black, superior/inferior, beautiful/ugly, good/bad, and therefore kinky/straight, which characterize the racial divide, should be jettisoned because they do not apply any longer" (PoR, 5). Instead, the proponents insist that "the issue is not about straight hair or 'going white,' but about black cultural production of hair-styling in the New World Order" (PoR, 5). An additional disclaimer is that, in fact, straightened black hair is different from white hair styles because it provides "blacks

with new cultural creative impulse” (PoR, 5). More, however, interrogates the notion that straightened hair and wigs are a new mode of creativity and contends that the argument ignores the following questions: “Why does one style oneself in a certain way? Is the motive conscious or unconscious? Is the style an identification with a collective (fashion) trend, or is it the articulation of personal or individual preference?” (PoR, 6). These questions speak directly to the hair consciousness of black women in the context of the options-choice argument.

Conversely, More questions whether the contrary choice of natural hairstyles such as an Afro or dreadlocks represents “cultural resistance to a colonized mentality” (PoR, 6). He wonders if these styles affirm and celebrate Africanness or whether they are a sign of political militancy or ideological radicalness. In short, he asks:

Does a simple hairdo reflect a colonized or decolonized mind? Are these hairdo’s an affirmation of African pride, an expression of political and radical consciousness or a clear expression of a rupture and break with the dominance of white-bias? (PoR, 6).

What More is raising in the passage above is the dialectical relationship that arises when one chooses natural hair styles versus those that are considered to be part of the “new cultural creative impulse.” In other words, the sets of questions he raises on both sides of the debate reveal that he does not consider this to be a binary issue (artificial hair = bad; natural hair = good). His concern is with the type of consciousness that drives the two choices. As such, this particular argument is situated in the domain of my options-choice argument, as I will demonstrate.

Notwithstanding the dialectical relation he shows, More’s view is that natural hairstyles have indeed become depoliticized and instead they have been assimilated into mainstream fashion, and have become commercial and social statements within dominant western culture (PoR, 7). As such, they have lost their political, ideological and racial status. This neutralized state, differs from the “Black Power” era of the 70s, where the slogan “Black is Beautiful pierced American consciousness, deeply unsettling conventional standards of body aesthetics” (PoR, 6). Instead, he maintains that in contemporary times the preoccupation that black people have with their hair, reflects the psychology of their racial oppression, as well as the impact that has had on their collective psyche. He cautions that to deny this reality would prevent an effective resistance against assimilation and domination in other areas of Black life, such as language, culture, religion, and aesthetics. He recalls Steve Biko’s caution that Black people have to acquire a critical consciousness that would enable them to examine issues of race and beauty within a sexist and racist society (PoR, 8). In the conclusion that More reaches about natural hairstyles, he is essentially arguing that there is a deficit of the “Black is Beautiful” consciousness and as such, I suggest that he makes the symbiotic connection between the ontological and the teleological domains of black hair consciousness.

Black Women’s Hair Consciousness

In the private, intra-racial realm, black women often trade animated war, victory, and defeat stories about their hair. It is readily accepted that mothers, grandmothers, aunts, sisters, female relatives and friends have license to resentfully criticize the hair of black girls that they are tasked with grooming. They might complain about how unkind her family genes were to the girl with “kaffir” (the most derogatory racial slur against black South Africans) hair, which is so tough that it can break the teeth of an afro-comb. The use of the “k-word” (similar to the American “n-word”) as an adjective in this context, is a norm in South African black communities, that is part of the legacy of the apartheid lexicon. On the other pole are the hair victories for black females with dense but pliable hair, which is soft to the touch, abundant in the grip. This kind of hair is usually able to grow to

shoulder length when pulled straight or it can be tied into a bun the size of a hat. It is considered as the epitome of crowned African glory and beauty. These are merely two examples of the types of black hair on a spectrum, in the vast terrain of hairism.

The Survival Strategy Argument and the "Look"

Let us now consider the interracial dimension of the survival strategy argument, after which I will discuss the intra-racial component, and then I identify the point of conflation between the two. As mentioned in the previous section, I argue that More's version of the survival strategy argument is about surviving what is considered to be problematic black hair, whereas I argue that black women actually complain about having to survive interracial and intra-racial hairism. First, I focus on the interracial sphere, where I discuss the Sartrean "Look," More's conceptualization of it, and how it applies to Black women's hair consciousness. In part three of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (BaN), he discusses the ontological implications of *being-for-others*. In chapter one of this part, he discusses existence for Others, and the concept of the "Look" is situated here. Whereas he distinguishes the one's "Look" at the other and the other's "Look at" one, my interest is in the "Look of the Other" and the alienating effect it has on the one who is looked at. In this respect, Sartre explains that:

I grasp the Other's look at the center of my act as the solidification and alienation of my own possibilities. In fear or in anxious or prudent anticipation, I perceive that these possibilities which I am and which are the condition of my transcendence are given also to another, given as about to be transcended in turn by his own possibilities. The Other as a look is only that – my transcendence transcended. Of course I still am my possibilities in the mode of non-thetic consciousness (of these possibilities. But at the same time the look alienates them from me. (BaN, 263)

What is significant for me in this passage is that the "Look" evokes either the solidification or alienation of possibilities, and I understand this to mean that it could be enabling or limiting. As such, one's consciousness is influenced in a way that either promotes or prohibits transcendence and ultimately freedom. In terms of the implications of an alienating "Look," Sartre explains that "by the mere appearance of the Other, I am put in the position of passing judgment on myself as on an object, for it is as an object that I appear to the Other" (BaN, 222). However, the "Look" is not unidirectional because one also deploys or reciprocates the "Look," and in this way, "the objectivation of the Other ... is a defence on the part of my being which, precisely by conferring on the Other a being-for-me, frees me from my being-for the Other" (BaN, 268).

How does this dialectic of the "Look" operate or function between black women and others? Hazel E. Barnes, in her translator's introduction of *Being and Nothingness* aptly sums up this dialectical relation of the "Look," when she asserts that "upon this unstable shifting of subject and object is erected the whole edifice of Sartrean love, hate, sadism, masochism, and even indifference, all of which together constitute that conflict which is at the basis of all inter-human relationships" (BaN, xli). Additionally, More asserts that humans do not experience each other as objects of knowledge but rather experience themselves and others directly through the "Look," through the consciousness of looking at and being looked at (PIL, 92). The encounter with the Other through the Look, annihilates one's subjectivity and turns one into an object body, and this produces a sense of alienation, shame or pride. However, More clarifies that Sartre's "Look" is not merely a general look, but one that dehumanizes the one who is looked at. He gives an example of its operation in an anti-black racist society, as follows:

It is clear then that Sartre cannot be referring to the look in general, but to a particular type of look... . racism makes productive use of the dehumanizing and objectifying look. Thus, in an anti-black world, the look that the racist directs at black people is best described by the Sartrean look. Through the Other's look, I discover my body, my racialized body. The Other's look constructs my body in its nakedness, "causes it to be born, sculpts it, produces it as it is, sees it as I shall never see it. The Other holds a secret – the secret of what I am." (PIL, 93)

From More's definition of the "Look," it is evident that people in general are always conscious of being looked at, simply because they too look at others. However, this is not merely a benign phenomenon because the "Look" is accompanied by various perceptions, assessments, and judgments of its object, so More specifies that the Sartrean "Look" intends to objectify and dehumanize. In the context of an anti-black world, the "Look" leads black people to become self-loathing as they internalize the objectifying "Look" of the racist, and feeling powerless to challenge it, they deflect their anguish into black-on-black disrespect in various forms (PIL, 258). It is this type of "Look" that I associate with the survival strategy argument. My conceptualization of the survival strategy argument is linked to the potential entrenchment of a false consciousness that plagues black females, when they vacillate between their self-perception and the "Look" and perception of them by the other. More argues extensively throughout this work that BC philosophy provides the avenue for transcending false and negating consciousnesses. Specific to the challenges of aesthetics and identity, More cites both Sartre and Chabani Manganyi in this respect:

Hence Biko's characterization of Black Consciousness as an attitude of mind, which involves an existential conversion from a corrupted consciousness or "the self-recovery of being, which was previously corrupted' (BaN, 70). Thus when the vibrant truth that Black is Beautiful emerged, and that this blackness is immutable because it is one's facticity, 'Ahaa!' the blacks said, at that moment the radical transformation came into being. Those with adequate inner resources could now snap out of the trance of the false consciousness and become, through much pain and anguish, the rebels who understood history and have a deep-seated conviction that it is on their side."(PIL, 271)¹⁴

The statement "Black is Beautiful" has its origins in the African American Black Power Movement, as mentioned earlier, and in the passage above More shows how Manganyi appropriated it for the South African context. It is a self-evident statement but one that was not readily accepted as true at the time, so the BCM campaigned to popularize it as a slogan for radical transformation. Black men and women alike were implored by the BCM to embrace this emancipatory slogan. However, even though one may internalize consciousness of black beauty, this does not necessarily alter the negative conceptions that others have of blackness and the accompanying myths and stereotypes. For example, if a black woman embraces her natural black hair and considers it to be beautiful, she may have surmounted internal false consciousness. However, she still has to survive the external judgments made about the same hair. To assert your freedom as a black woman requires taking the responsibility that comes with your choice. Freedom implies responsibility. This responsibility has to be assumed when confronted by both intra-racial and interracial hairism. However, at the same time there is the danger of conflating these domains and sites of hair discrimination. So they have to be distinguished and the dialectical relationship between the two has to be determined, in order to identify false consciousness.

14) Manganyi, *Looking Through the Keyhole*, 170.

The dialectical tension between these two domains of hair consciousness is aptly illustrated by a recent racial debacle that was ignited in South Africa in 2020. The source of the controversy was four categories of advertising images that depicted hair that is “Frizzy & Dull,” “Dry & Damaged,” “Normal,” and “Fine and Flat.” The images were posted on social media (Twitter) and were associated to an advertising campaign of *TRESemmé* hair products on the *Clicks* retail outlet website. These arguably innocuous adjectives were subsequently weaponized because the first two categories (frizzy, dull, dry, damaged) were illustrated with images of the hair of black women, and the latter two (normal, fine, flat) were depicted by images of the hair of white women. The adjectives and their associated images implied that black/African hair is frizzy, dull, dry and damaged; while white Caucasian hair is normal, fine and flat.

There was unprecedented backlash from social media users. Those on Twitter reacted swiftly and accused *Clicks* and *TRESemmé* of anti-black racism, and traditional media commenced a news cycle about the “assault” of white monopoly capital on the dignity of black women. The subsequent social media protest was captured by the *#ClicksMustFall*. They demanded that *Clicks* should apologize to black women, that the retailer should fire the people responsible for the advertising campaign, and that *TRESemmé* products should be removed from shelves. These protests were accompanied by the physical barricading of several *Clicks* stores nationwide by members of opposition political party Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), and a public statement of condemnation from the Minister of Small Business Development, Khumbudzo Ntshavheni. The overwhelming outcry from those who denounced the advertising campaign was that black women were compelled to be in constant survival mode within a white normative world. What this saga also brought to the surface is the survival strategy argument, as black women in particular cited this incident as an example of how their hair image is constantly held hostage by the looks and judgments of others, particularly non-blacks. In addition to the emotionally-charged discourse on various public and media platforms, and the escalation of the issue by various private and public sector interest groups, a formal complaint of racist and unfair discrimination was lodged by 18 black women with the Equality Court. The named respondents were the *Click Group Limited* (the retailer) and *Unilever South Africa Proprietary Limited* (owner of *TRESemmé* brands and products). The judgments was delivered on February 28, 2022 and the decision was that the social media images and descriptions were cropped from the original advertisement with the intent to stoke racial outrage. Specific to my discussion of the survival strategy argument, as reported on the *Politicsweb* website, Judge M.J. Dolamo ruled in subsection 75, that:

An objective, dispassionate and contextual assessment of the impugned advertisement does not support the applicants' contentions. On the original advertisement, the six images appear below a banner that shows a black woman with a beautiful Afro-hair side-by-side with a woman who appears to be a Caucasian sporting beautiful flowing hair. It is below this banner that the 6 images of woman with different types of hair and the dreaded inscription on images of Black women appear to amount to differentiation. But this differentiation does not amount to unfair discrimination when the entire advertisement is viewed in context.¹⁵

A contrast between the outrage and the court decision shows firstly that, as More mentions earlier, black hair like black skin is a highly sensitive part of our black Being, and gives rise to competing ideologies about beauty. Secondly, as black women navigate this torturous terrain, constantly dreading the unsettling “Look of the Other,” what is subjective and objective often collides, and in this case, the court's objective decision does

15) Subsection 75, *Politicsweb*, March 15, 2022.

not support the subjective accusation of racial discrimination. However, with a slightly different set of facts, (for example if the images and descriptions posted on social media aligned directly with those on the Clicks website), perhaps the complaint of unfair discrimination would have been upheld. As such, the example of the Clicks-*TRESemmé* debacle, demonstrates that the hair of black women is as a contested site, where they are perpetually placed in survival mode. Whereas More frames his survival strategy argument around the contingent measures employed to manage difficult natural hair because it is perceived as an enemy or problem to be solved and conquered, I suggest that the notion of survival in this context, pertains to the acute shame caused by the interracial “Look.” I think a more appropriate survival strategy argument that More could advance is his citation of Frantz Fanon’s and Linda Martin Alcoff’s conceptions of the “Look,” as follows:

It is precisely this special look that made Fanon complain: “I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am fixed ... I had read it rightly: It was hate; I was hated, despised, detested, not by the neighbor across the street or any cousin on my mother’s side, but by an entire race.” ... It is this horrifying look, therefore, that Linda Alcoff refers to as “fully justifying of all Sartre’s horror of the Look.” (PIL, 93)

While I agree with More’s interracial conception of the “Look” in the above passage, I also argue that this is an incomplete account because intra-racially, there is also a prevalence of a “Look” that objectifies females, in particular. Whereas Fanon excludes “the neighbor across the street or any cousin on my mother’s side” from complicity, I insist that they are in fact included in objectifying others in their community with the “Look.” As I described earlier, hairism is prevalent among Black people because there is a hierarchy to such an extent that even the “k-word” that was coined by white Afrikaners to dehumanize black South Africans, is used in the community, and sometimes as an adjective for hair that is judged as bad. As such, the dehumanizing and objectifying “Look” can come from those of other races, as well as those from their own race. There is, however, a significant caveat to this objectifying intra-racial “Look,” in the context of hairism. It is a learned and internalized “Look,” and how it is deployed through judgments of black hair does not seem to escape its racist source. This raises the question of agency when black people unconsciously assimilate racist notions about their hair. To what extent should they still be held accountable for their intra-racial hair discrimination? While “victim-blaming” is not a productive departure for ascertaining accountability, complicity with false consciousness perpetuates as a problem.

South African feminist literary scholar, Pumla Dineo Gqola also raises the problem of beauty standards within the black community. She highlights its intra-racial problematic nature. The notion of beauty is commonly linked to how men deploy language to dehumanize women and, in this respect, Gqola argues that masculinity feels entitled to comment on the appearance of women.¹⁶ Together with their assumed right to express their opinions about women’s bodies, they expect women to entertain those opinions and to respond in ways that show deference to men. While men may retort that their words are merely playful or appreciative banter, the proof that they do so to target females is that they would not engage other men in the same way.¹⁷ Moreover, the same men are quick to protect their mothers, daughters, sisters, and other female acquaintances from this kind of attention. She argues that these opinions create an inferiority complex in black women, and that they issue from a hatred for the feminine, which in turn encourages self-loathing.¹⁸ This has far-reaching consequences

16) Gqola, *Female Fear Factory*, 34.

17) *Ibid.*

18) *Ibid.*, 54.

as it causes women to become obsessed with fixing themselves, not to attain the full humanity conferred to the masculine, but instead to become desirable and approved by the masculine. This approval is illusive and perpetually deferred and they are blamed for their purported inadequacies. Conversely, it can be argued that women also categorize men in terms of their aesthetic body structures, with adjectives such as handsome, tall and dark, muscular, and so on. The argument here is that black men's conception of their bodies is also usually determined and influenced by female values and preferences. So, this could be considered a bi-directional issue as well. However, due to space constraints, this debate falls out of the scope of this article.

While Gqola speaks broadly about the onslaughts upon the black female body, by black males, I highlight that the hair of black women is scrutinized in the same way. I suggest that hairism constitutes the problem of the body-for-others and as Sartre points out, it is one's transcendence-transcended, and it in turn, puts black women in the position of objectifying and passing judgments on themselves. As a result, black hair is subjected to degrees of comparison intra-racially, and a hierarchy will tend to be established depending on the health of the hair (dry, brittle, normal, fine, etc.), and the hair beauty rating (shiny, rich, full, long, normal, etc.). This is an uncomfortable truth, one that even Fanon evaded, because conceding the prevalence of a type of hairism within the African/black community means that non-Africans cannot simply be made the scapegoats for internal hair politics. By not acknowledging intra-racial hierarchization of hair type and texture, there is an emphasis on the interracial dimension that engenders white cultural assimilation, but a failure to address the perpetuation of hair discrimination in the black community.

There are many and varied causes of intra-racial hairism but I suggest that the one with arguably the deepest historical roots, is competition among females for the attention and affection of those around them, particularly from males. As discussed earlier, More also identifies this impetus for hair styling choices. For this reason, hair becomes an instrument in this competition as women attempt to outshine each other. This accounts for a beauty industry that was founded on giving women an edge over each other. In recent times, however, attempts have been made to market the notion that beauty has been commoditized for the service and pleasure of the subjective woman and I will discuss this argument later. Notwithstanding, women's hair is a valuable tool for drawing attention to them, to help them gain significance, and to enable them to amass self-esteem reserves in a world that seeks to depreciate their dignity and worth at every turn. Unfortunately, however, the male judging panel has proven to be decidedly ambivalent in its evaluation of beauty, so women find themselves in a perpetual cycle of hits and misses. Some manage to garner wins with very little effort because of so-called "natural beauty," while others have to work more intentionally and intensely at enhancing what they have been led to believe is either absent or inadequate beauty.

I have given an extensive account of the interracial and intra-racial dimensions of this argument and I have demonstrated how the Sartrean "Look" operates in this context. However, white/Caucasian women could contest that it is not only black women who have to contend with intra-racial hairism. In other words, they would insist that there is the "white hair" version of the survival argument. Due to space constraints, I am unable to discuss their challenges in detail, so I will briefly touch on one example of an intra-racial hair challenge that is unique to non-African/non-black women. Caucasian hair is usually ranked on hierarchies of hair type, colour, texture and length, similarly to black hair. While the Clicks-*TRESemmé* advertising campaign may have exploded into an anti-black racist incident, what was absent in the backlash, was the acknowledgement that white females also face hair struggles based on the "Look," as well as the capitalist hair and beauty industry that preys upon their ontological anguish. In their intra-racial context, they are preoccupied with shampoos, conditioners, hairspray, mousse, gel, dyeing, highlights, extensions, and wigs, which do not only have a bearing on keeping their hair healthy. Instead, these preoccupations are also rooted in hair consciousness that is influenced by judgments about who is deemed more attractive and youthful in the eyes of all sexes.

The most prevalent and enduring challenge is the hair color categories that compartmentalize white women into “blonds,” “brunettes,” and “redheads.” Each category houses stereotypes about the personality characteristics of women with yellow, brown, black, orange and red hair. White women the world over have to contend with judgments made about them on a “Look” or first impression basis, due to their natural hair color. These socio-historical judgments give rise to, among other myths, that blond women are “dumb,” sexy, fun, or shallow; brunettes are smart, serious, ambitious, or boring; redheads are temperamental, mysterious, or complicated. It is then up to the women to either embrace or reject these stereotypes and myths by emphasizing mannerisms that they believe best define them. Alternatively, they may highlight traits associated with the other hair categories that are not theirs – to prove that they cannot be essentialized and reduced to their hair color.

Effectively, the hair of white women is used as a marker to determine how their society will treat them. They can rebut this *prima facie* evaluation by presenting evidence that they are more than just their hair or its color. The hair and beauty industry steps in at this juncture to offer them resources that will help align their hair aesthetic with their self-perception. As is the case with my application of the “Look” to the beauty and hair challenges of black women, the concept also largely applies to the intra-racial domain to white women. However, paradoxically, in the interracial domain, Caucasian/Asian/Latina hair is considered almost unanimously by black/African women to be unproblematic. This view influences the wearing of hairpieces, weaves, and wigs that emulate these non-African hair types. I now turn to the protective styling argument and how it relates to Sartre’s concept of facticity and More’s interpretation of it in his conceptualization of the politics of Being.

The Protective Styling Argument and Facticity

According to More, Sartre uses the term “facticity” to denote the various factual attributes of a person who exists in the world (PIL, 2). Sartre situates the notion of facticity in the realm of the body and argues that “it is a permanent structure of my being and the permanent condition of possibility for my consciousness as consciousness of the world and as a transcendent project toward my future” (BaN, 328). In other words, facticity is a necessity for being-in-the-world. Specific to my discussion of how facticity is associated to the protective styling argument, I quote Sartre briefly on the aspects that inform the constitution and definition of facticity. In this respect he asserts that:

My birth as it conditions the way in which objects are revealed to me ... my race as it is indicated by the Other’s attitude with regard to me (these attitudes are revealed as scornful or admiring, as trusting or distrusting); my class as it is disclosed by the revelation of the social community to which I belong inasmuch as the places which I frequent refer to it; my nationality; my physiological structure as instruments imply it by the very way in which they are revealed as resistant or docile and by their very coefficient of adversity; my character; my past, as everything which I have experienced is indicated as my point of view on the world by the world itself: all this in so far as I surpass it in the synthetic unity of my being-in-the-world is my body as the necessary condition of the existence of a world and as the contingent realization of this condition. (BaN, 328)

Even though the aspects of facticity that Sartre outlines span across many facts that are revealed to a person about themselves from birth onwards, the ones that I focus on are race, class, and physiological structure. I note that he maintains that physiological structure can be revealed as docile or resistant as well as the coefficient of adversity. As such, all these facts have to be surpassed when one is in the world. He also explains how a person

with a disability is also still able to function in the world through the choices they make. This is a crucial point because as I will demonstrate in this section, black women may also consider their hair to be a disadvantage, a form of disability or a problem as More asserts. However, Sartre insists that even in this case a choice can be made when he argues that:

Even this disability from which I suffer I have assumed by the very fact that I live; I surpass it toward my own projects, I make of it the necessary obstacle for my being, and I can not be crippled without choosing myself as crippled. This means that I choose the way in which I constitute my disability (as “unbearable,” “humiliating,” “to be hidden,” “to be revealed to all,” “an object of pride,” “the justification for my failures,” etc.). But this inapprehensible body is precisely the necessity that there be a choice, that I do not exist all at once. In this sense my finitude is the condition of my freedom, for there is no freedom without choice; and in the same way that the body conditions consciousness as pure consciousness of the world, it renders consciousness possible even in its very freedom. (BaN, 328)

Essentially, in alignment with the topic of this paper, Sartre demonstrates in this passage the relationship between facticity and consciousness, consciousness that can lead to freedom despite the facticity of the body. However, facticity produces anguish that arises when a person gets consciousness of their freedom. In this consciousness of Being, one confronts both their freedom and facticity, which amounts to the recognition of a sense of responsibility for oneself (Sartre in PIL, 2). This relation between freedom and facticity reveals a paradox where natural surroundings, the world, or facticity make freedom possible as well as limit it. In More's words, it limits possibilities, while being the very condition for freedom (PIL, 109–10). More explains this paradox further when he states: “as human subjects, we always encounter resistance and obstacles in our lives, resistances and obstacles which we have not created but which acquire meaning only in and through the free choices we make” (PIL, 110). More cites Sartre to further explain facticity as follows: “Thus freedom can be truly free only by constituting facticity as its own restriction ... Without facticity freedom would not exist – as a power of nihilation and of choice – and without freedom facticity would not be discovered and would have no meaning” (Sartre in PIL, 109–10).

Despite the differences among members of society due to their varied facticity, they would still be free to participate in the construction of society and its values. This view, More says, goes against Sartre's call for the end of particularism and the emergence of universality.¹⁹ Conversely, Biko advocates for unity and diversity, difference and sameness, the universal and particular.²⁰ In addition, Biko argues that bad faith keeps black people in their facticity to the exclusion of their transcendence, and their body to the exclusion of their consciousness.²¹ More asserts that Biko recognizes the lie or duplicity of black people who silently condemn white society and simultaneously cater to their master's impatience. As such, the black person assumes an attitude of facticity in the presence of the white master, where they live by fleeing their situation, denying it or denying their responsibility for it.²²

In the context of my discussion of the protective styling argument pertaining to Black women's hair, I highlight that firstly, the facticity of black people is both an enabler and limiter of freedom. Secondly, as per

19) More, “Biko,” 98

20) Ibid.

21) Ibid.

22) Ibid., 100

Biko's observation above, black people attempt to flee their responsibility for their freedom in an anti-black society by opting for facticity over transcendence. In this section, I discuss the facticity of black women's hair and how it is either used as an excuse for disempowering choices, or it is transcended in the pursuit of freedom. To recall, I also argued earlier that the first component of More's version of the survival strategy argument, where he asserts that Black women insist that natural hair is a problem that can be circumvented by straightening it, actually belongs in the ambit of the protective styling argument.

So far, I have demonstrated that black hair gives rise to various polarizing issues, possibly the most pertinent being which hair types and styles are most authentic and representative of black identity. This issue is highly contested and relates largely to what black women do with the hair growing directly from their scalps. African American, Audry Davis-Sivasothy wrote the ground-breaking book, *The Science of Black Hair: A Comprehensive Guide to Textured Hair*²³ to help Black women to navigate this complex terrain. She confesses to secretly despising her hair and that the self-affirming, black is beautiful moments were few and far between. She admits that she "was socialized by the prevailing culture as well as by many well-meaning people into believing that [her] hair, unless super long or relaxed to the brink of straightness, made [her] inferior" (SBH, 18). Throughout years of misunderstanding her textured hair, viewing it as rough and needing to be manhandled into place, she suffered both hair breakage and heart break.

In the introduction of the book she highlights the "shoulder length threshold" that is occasionally achieved but rarely exceeded because the number one problem of black hair is hair breakage. So, women who do manage to grow their natural hair beyond their shoulders are envied, considered to be blessed with good genes and the majority of black women have to resort to hair extensions to achieve similar results. In the hair growth stakes, black women cannot afford to trim their hair arbitrarily as women of other races usually can, because they may never recover their length. She cites misinformation as the chief enemy of black hair, which is capitalized upon by hair companies that develop and sell products that promise miraculous results of healthier, longer, and stronger hair, and instead produce the opposite results. This is because, according to Davis-Sivasothy, "in black hair care, healthy techniques always trump hair products" (SBH, 23). To be able to employ the appropriate techniques, she argues that black women have to understand that their hair is different to the hair of other races based on hair fiber and its composition. Contrary to the perception that kinky hair is strong because it is thick, tough, and course, it is actually not as strong as it appears because "every twist, bend and curl represents a point of weakness and vulnerability along the hair fiber" (SBH, 23). In addition, black hair has a natural tendency toward being dry which is an obstacle to achieving length, leading to the "shoulder-length plateau" (SBH, 56). This means that black hair, often with the assistance of chemical relaxers, usually grows no longer than twelve-inches. Davis-Sivasothy emphasizes that black women need to understand the common causes of hair damage which includes chemical damage (relaxers, texturizers, curly perms, permanent hair colour); physical damage (manipulation of the hair fibers through heat-producing appliances, combing and brushing, tight braids, hair accessories, shampoos and conditioners); environmental damage (UV light sun rays, pollution, water); and nutritional/dietary deficiencies (prior to hair emergence from the scalp).

In terms of the crux of this particular argument, what is protective styling? Davis-Sivasothy explains that "protective hair styling is the ultimate key to hair ends preservation" (SBH, 144). These styling options are divided into three broad categories: complete protective styles, low-manipulation protective styles, and styles that are a combination of the two (SBH, 146). Complete protective styles include: buns/chignons, French rolls, tucked styles, and pinned-up style. Low manipulation styles include short hair, twists or locks, braid outs or twist outs, spiral, and roller sets. Finally, combination protection includes cornrows, braids, sew-in weaves,

23) Davis-Sivasothy, *The Science of Black Hair*, 18. Hereafter cited as SBH parenthetically in text along with page number.

and wigs. Whereas the first two categories of protective styling are usually associated with authentic black hairstyling and are even politicized in antithesis to white normative hair standards; it is the third category that is highly contested because it requires enhancement tools such as synthetic hair extensions, human hair extensions, or complete synthetic or human hair wigs. The former two categories fall on the natural hair side of the debate, and the latter one on the artificial or “fake hair” side. I will explore this debate in the context of my discussion of the options-choice argument. My argument in this section corresponds better with More's survival strategy argument because he speaks about the facticity of black hair. However, his explanation that black hair is considered “the enemy” is situated in the domain of the options-choice argument, which I will discuss in the following section.

To conclude this discussion on the protective styling argument, I briefly mention the role that white monopoly capital hair care brands play with respect to black natural hair. When they advertise hair care solutions to black women, first they would have to claim that they have scientifically tested them on African hair with proven efficacy. Secondly, they need to demonstrate their understanding of the various challenges that they can address for the benefit of their customers. However, the controversy arises when they use common adjectives denoting the common problems faced by black women, but then black women react by deploying the survival strategy argument that I discussed in the previous section. Drawing again from the *Clicks-TRESemmé* court decision, I demonstrate that the science of black hair is indeed employed toward understanding the facticity of black hair. However, the excerpts that I quote below also reveal that on the one hand, the applicants in the court case demand that the facticity of their hair type should not be mocked, whereas the judge finds that this facticity in fact informs the service that Unilever provides black women. As such, they provide solutions to factually dry and damaged hair, which is an intra-racial concern. The following two passages from the court ruling demonstrate, in subsections 72 and 73, the interplay and conflation between facticity (intra-racial) and perceived discrimination (interracial):

Unilever refuted the submission by the applicants that the impugned advertisement was commissioned intentionally with the object to belittle, hurt, or mock black women. In this respect, Unilever explained that *TRESemmé* was originally a brand more focused on Caucasian women's hair but that, from 2017, it took a number of steps to ensure that this product became more diverse and inclusive. To achieve this objective its marketing communications and products were diversified, focusing on hair types rather than race. It consciously embarked on ensuring that 80% of its advertisement campaigns used content that was sourced from South African agencies, using models of different hair types and ethnicities to introduce hair products suitable for South African women with natural hair.²⁴

According to Unilever the steps it took were backed by market research. One such market research, called Afro-textured hair in SA conducted in 2017, showed an increase in topical conversations around Afro-hair and showed that maintaining afro-textured hair was a challenge. These findings afforded Unilever an opportunity to position *TRESemme* as a leading product that cares for Afro-textured hair. A survey conducted in April 2019 identified different hair types, with Afro-textured hair in a category referred to as range 3C to C being plagued by dryness and damage. These findings led to the creation of the impugned advertisement.²⁵

24) Subsection 72, Politicsweb March 15, 2022.

25) Subsection 73, Politicsweb March 15, 2022.

In light of the foregoing discussion about Davis-Sivasothy's explanation of the science of black hair, as well as the evidence presented by Unilever in the Clicks-*TRESemmé* case about black hair being "plagued by dryness and damage," a number of questions arise. Does the facticity of black hair mean that it is inherently fragile? As such, is black hair inferior? Does daily maintenance of black hair require expert handling? Are those who are not exposed to information on correct black hair maintenance at risk of suffering hair damage? If the goal of protective styling is to nurture and grow natural hair, when is it ever worn loose? Although I reject the judgment that black hair is a disadvantage or disability, I do think that my discussion earlier of Sartre's view on the facticity of disability could apply to these questions. As such, I agree with him when he states that, "I am able to surpass my disability toward my projects" and "choose the way in which I constitute my disability (as 'unbearable,' 'humiliating,' 'to be hidden,' 'to be revealed to all,' 'an object of pride,' 'the justification for my failures,' etc.)" (BaN, 328). Even if one is saddled with what they consider to be an "inapprehensible body" (such as problematic hair type and texture), this is precisely why there is a necessity for choice, in order to apprehend freedom instead. In this respect, I agree with Davis-Sivasothy, when she insists: "no one should feel that they have to wear a weave to have presentable hair; a weave should be a conscious styling choice, not a crutch" (SBH, 24). I do, however, have a caveat to my view. Since Sartre also mentions the various negative reactions to the facticity of the body, I recognize that both the survival strategy and protective styling arguments that I have advanced are deeply rooted in feelings of humiliation and are sometimes used as justification for failure to make conscious hair choices. Black women's hair consciousness is situated at the nexus of the relation between freedom and facticity and, as More argues, this reveals a paradox where natural surroundings, the world, or facticity make freedom possible as well as limit it (PIL, 109–10). This paradox is best articulated by the options-choice argument and its relation to bad faith, which I discuss next.

The Options-Choice Argument and Bad Faith

This third argument, as I mentioned earlier corresponds with More's "non-racialism" argument, where he asserts that black women in South Africa argue that "the issue is not about straight hair or 'going white,' but about black cultural production of hair-styling in the New World Order" (PoR, 5); and that straightened black hair is different from white hair styles because it provides "blacks with new cultural creative impulse" (PoR, 5). As I will demonstrate, More's non-racialism argument and the counter questions he poses, that I mentioned in the survival strategy argument, speak to the hair options that black women have and the conscious or unconscious hair styling choices that they make, as well as the problem of bad faith that arises.

In chapter two of *Being and Nothingness* Sartre discusses bad faith and falsehood. He argues that there is an attitude that is essential to human reality, which is when consciousness directs its negation toward itself instead of outward (BaN, 48). To him, this attitude is bad faith (*mauvaise foi*) and it is usually associated to falsehood and as such, he grants that a person shows bad faith when they lie to themselves (BaN, 48). However, he distinguishes this type of lying due to bad faith, from lying in general, in the following way:

One does not undergo his bad faith; one is not infected with it; it is not a state. But consciousness affects itself with bad faith. There must be an original intention and a project of bad faith; this project implies a comprehension of bad faith as such and a pre-reflective apprehension (of) consciousness as affecting itself with bad faith. It follows first that the one to whom the lie is told and the one who lies are one and the same person, which means that I must know in my capacity as deceiver the truth which is hidden from me in my capacity as the one deceived. Better yet I must know the truth very exactly in order to conceal it more carefully. (BaN, 49)

The salient point that I note from the passage above is that a person is conscious of the truth and is also conscious that they choose to deceive themselves instead. As Sartre highlights, there is a deliberate deviation from the original intention. Pertaining to the relation between bad faith and consciousness, he explains that:

There is then no question of expelling anguish from consciousness nor of constituting it in an unconscious psychic phenomenon; very simply I can make myself guilty of bad faith while apprehending the anguish which I am, and this bad faith, intended to fill up the nothingness which I am in my relation to myself, precisely implies the nothingness which it suppresses. (BaN, 44)

When Sartre's insight is applied to the condition of black people, the situation becomes paradoxical. One such paradoxical consequence of bad faith is that black people also become complicit in their psychological, economic, and physical oppression, which results in a state of self-negation and alienation (PIL, 257). This particular paradox is significant for the hair consciousness of black women. They are alienated by both interracial and intra-racially induced loathing and disrespect, which affects their hair choices. Previous discourse in African philosophy, Black existentialism, and Black Consciousness literature has focused on the debate about chemical hair straightening and perming and its links to the aspirations of black people to become white. However in the new millennium, weaves and wigs have begun to corner the market and they have raised new and complex questions about the ontology and politics of black hair. As I stated in the previous section, it is the third category of protective styling that is highly contested because it requires enhancement tools such as synthetic hair extensions, human hair extensions, or complete synthetic or human hair wigs – "fake hair." So, I focus on this styling modality and its association with bad faith.

Over the past decades, hair extensions made of synthetic plastic fibers that were used to plait box braids and cornrows (that sometimes inconveniently melted and burned in the sun), were refined into fibers that locked into plaits or twists using hot water (rather than smelting the ends with fire). Then came the bulky mixtures of synthetic and human hair which mimicked the appearance and movement of Caucasian/Asian/Latina hair. Still seeking the ideal of attractive hair, 100% Brazilian, Peruvian, Malaysian, and Indian hair was discovered to be the most compatible textures to fuse and combine with natural black hair and to complement the darker skin complexion. In these respects:

The proliferation of weaved styles on the market has been both a blessing and curse to cosmetology. These services are lucrative in this craft, and they also provide clients considerable flexibility with their menu of styling options. However, the rampant abuse of this styling modality cannot be ignored. Sadly, many clients believe that weaves are their only means of having long hair and their REAL hair suffers underneath the style. (SBH, 12)

Clayton raises the critical problem of weaves damaging natural hair instead of protecting it. This is the paradox of the protective styling argument, but also evidence that there is likely bad faith in operation with this styling choice. I will discuss this paradox later. There has been a progression from weaves and wigs that look patently synthetic to ones that are a close likeness to Caucasian/Asian/Latina hair. As is the case with many consumer products, the more expensive it is the more refined and sustainable. So, the first measure of quality wigs specifically is that the hairline should be completely covered and instead, the wig has a lace net circumference on which hair shafts are planted individually. This new hairline subsequently looks as though the hair extensions are growing directly from the hair roots, while in fact the natural hair is fully covered. Additionally, over the past few years, an upgrade has been implemented where the hairline also has so-called

“baby hair” to make it look even more realistic. In terms of texture, these lace wigs come in an assortment of straight, wavy, and curly varieties that at first glance look like the kind of hair that is not merely ordinary, but that would be depicted in hair commercials. The second measure of quality is the movement requirement, where the hair on the wig must swing and flow like that of Caucasian/Asian/Latina women with the slightest movement of the head or with the wind. Wigs that do not meet this requirement are considered to be inferior because it means that they are made from synthetic fibers and not 100% human hair. The third measure is that the hair on the wig should not change texture by losing its silky sheen, by becoming dull in color, or by producing split ends. It should be borne in mind that natural hair draws nourishment and hydration from its roots, so in the case of hair used for wigs, even if it is 100% human hair, once it is cut off from the scalp of the original owner, it is dead. The more expensive the wig, the longer it takes for it to become damaged, however, this is inevitable, and so wigs have to be replaced regularly. Consequently, Black women who opt for this styling modality might find that they are in bad faith through the evasion of the truth about the reality of their hair type and texture. However, this bad faith that plagues some black women may be used by black men and people from other races to capitalize on black women’s anguish and ambivalent hair consciousness, to perpetuate myths and stereotypes about black female identity. Lewis R. Gordon’s *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism*²⁶ goes into more detail about the types and mechanics of bad faith, which are very illuminating, but fall out of the scope of this paper.

Pertaining to my options-choice argument and how it relates to bad faith, increasingly, black women who wear wigs are on the receiving end of much ridicule and judgment. Additional criticisms are that black women do not maintain their weaves and wigs well and at times they smell or parts become dislodged and hang untidily. In addition, one can often tell the socio-economic class of the black woman by the quality of their weave or wig, which has ignited class wars among them. In response, black women who wear Caucasian/Asian/Latina hair wigs have amassed reasons and justifications which speak not only to their aesthetic preferences, but also expose the hairism that I claim, as well as their battles with racialized patriarchy, white normativity, and capitalism. They are often accused of self-hatred because they appear to want to look white, so as to meet western standards of beauty, which is a question that More also raised. As can be expected, the criticism of their chosen hairstyles does not sit well with many black women. Whereas black women can handle casual enquiries about their hair business, they are extremely defensive when accused of self-hate and mental colonization. They tend to then deflect by blaming their accusers of making life difficult for the black woman in every aspect of her life because critics are constantly trying to dictate her identity and image, right up to how she should wear her hair. They complain that men call women who wear wigs and weaves “fake” when they claim that they would only seriously date or marry those who honor their culture by wearing natural hair. In a sharp hypocritical turn, these purported Afrocentric men proceed to pursue the very women sporting fake hairdos. So, black women see this as a no-win scenario that defeats the object of them trying to meet the natural-hair authenticity criteria. Consequently, many of them are induced into a state of bad faith by all these interracial and intra-racial factors.

What could be the way forward in terms of advancing from what-is, to what-ought to be, bearing in mind that this would be a continuous project of becoming? In her article titled, “Beyond Determinism: The Phenomenology of African Female Existence,” Nigerian literary scholar, Bibi Bakare-Yusuf advocates a theory that analyzes the intersection between the power, history, and blockages that inform and shape the everyday experiences of women on the African continent.²⁷ She suggests an approach that theorizes within a framework

26) Gordon, *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism*.

27) *Ibid.*, 8.

of the “philosophy of African female embodied existence” that does not perpetuate a reductivist approach which essentializes identities and social systems.²⁸ To this end, she advocates an approach that is a fusion between capacity (power to), which pertains to the capacity to bring about changes in the world; and its limitation (power over), which limits the power of the capacity.²⁹ As mentioned earlier, More concurs with Sartre that facticity limits possibilities, while being the very condition of freedom, and I maintain that this position corresponds with Bakare-Yusuf's “power to-power over” concepts. As a result, according to her, the simultaneous operation of the two transcends generalizations and determinism of African identities and lived experience. The specific theoretical approach or methodology that she proposes is the phenomenology of Simone de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In this respect she argues that:

It is precisely because phenomenology consistently seeks to avoid making prior assumptions that it is a useful methodology for investigating the specificity of African embodied existence. For both Merleau-Ponty and de Beauvoir, any account of existence must be approached from a variety of angles simultaneously. These would include cultural patternings, biological factors, historical forces, aesthetic patterns, ethical considerations, biographical details and all other perspectives that impinge on the nature of the phenomenon in the context of existence. That being said, the primary entry point for phenomenological analysis is always lived experience.³⁰

In the passage above, Bakare-Yusuf suggests a philosophical approach that has the potential to help black women to surmount the victim-victimizer binary when they are faced with the existential anguish brought on by the “Look,” their facticity and induced bad faith. Whatever hair styling choices they make; they would be better positioned to make them consciously. In turn, others, whether in the interracial or intra-racial domains, who perpetuate myths, stereotypes, and misconceptions about the facticity of black women and their hair, would be held accountable for their discrimination. Moreover, by approaching the account of black female hair consciousness from a variety of angles simultaneously, one can identify the presence or absence of false hair consciousness; as well as avoid conflating interracial and intra-racial sites of hair discrimination, while recognizing the dialectical relationship between the two domains.

Conclusion

Throughout my paper, I have provided a detailed analysis of the phenomenology of black women pertaining to their hair with the intention of situating conflicting arguments within their proper domain, in order to theorize and conceptualize them accordingly. My aim was to demonstrate that there are various sites of what I term “hairism” on the ideological battlefield of black women's culture, identity, and gender. My novel argument was that there is a conflation of the interracial and intra-racial sites of hair discrimination, although there is a dialectical relationship between the two. I provided an existential-phenomenological account of black/African female embodied difference pertaining to hair, by analyzing black women's hair consciousness through the lens of More's politics of being. The three novel arguments that I discussed align with Biko's Black Consciousness view that black people must acquire a critical consciousness that would enable them to examine issues of race and beauty within a sexist and racist society.

28) Ibid., 13.

29) Ibid.

30) Ibid., 13.

My survival strategy argument revealed that the hair consciousness of black women is sandwiched between interracial and intra-racial forces, and that the Sartrean dehumanizing and objectifying “Look of the Other” is difficult, but not impossible to surmount. Regarding the protective styling argument, I demonstrated that black women’s hair consciousness is situated at the nexus of the relation between freedom and facticity, and the latter need not cause them to succumb to justifications for their purported hair choice failures. Finally, I found that the options-choice argument appears to be driven by the challenges that ensue from the survival strategy and the protective styling arguments and can lead to bad faith. In other words, the hair styling options that black women explore across the range from natural to artificial ultimately inform the concrete choices that they make and defend. My interrogation of the three arguments reveals what appears to be a dire state of black women’s hair consciousness, which I have described at the ontological (what-is) dimension. I conclude that the teleological, political, or ethical (what-ought-to-be) dimension is a perpetual project of becoming in the pursuit of freedom. Freedom of hair consciousness can be achieved by correctly diagnosing the dialectical relationship between the interracial and intra-racial “Look” and transcending it; giving meaning to facticity instead of evading it; and avoiding bad faith, through a fusion between the capacity to (power to) bring about changes in the world, while acknowledging the limitations (power over) that require continuous confrontation.

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