

Conflicting Tensions in Decolonising Proscribed Afrocentric Hair Beauty Culture Standards in Ghanaian Senior High Schools

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Abstract: Africans have suffered stigmatisation and discrimination at the hands of the colonialists. The hair of the Black African has been negatively labelled as reclusive, elusive and shrinking kinks by the colonialists. This mentality of the colonialists equally manifested in Ghanaian colonial schools established by the early missionaries and the colonialists' governments. They bastardised and proscribed some Afrocentric hairstyles and beauty culture practices in schools in the name of good grooming and hygiene. This negative remnant of mental enslavement and the colonial legacy of anti-Afrocentric hairstyles in Ghanaian schools lingers on and is still perpetuated by some Ghanaian school authorities in Senior High Schools in contemporary times. In the effort to decolonise the bastardised and proscribed Afrocentric hairstyle practices in Ghanaian schools, this article explored the contradictions and or conflicting tensions in the process. The study found that the Ghanaian public schools proscribe Afrocentric hairstyles with no substantial scientific evidence that wearing afro and rasta inhibits the acquisition of creative and innovative thinking, and academic performance or progress of the students. Neither have the schools established from their arguments that wearing Afrocentric hairstyles negatively impacts on the socio-moral and cultural wellbeing of the Ghanaian society or indigenous culture. It recommends that the Ghana Education Service and the Conference of Heads of Assisted Senior High Schools (CHASS) must work together to review the hair policies for students, so that it will not be a bottleneck for students to have access to education, which is their fundamental right enshrined in the 1992 constitution.

Keywords: Afrocentric hairstyle, Beauty culture, Decolonising, Ghanaian schools, Stigmatisation

I. INTRODUCTION

Africans, including Ghanaians, had their peculiar way of life long before they encountered the colonialists. They had a robust governance structure (kinship system), laws and standards of beauty inherent in their beauty culture practices. The African society was orderly organised to the extent that there were minimal deviants. They had built no prisons for offenders, rather, their sense of communalistic living and religious practices shaped their modest way of life. Based on their customary laws and taboos, offenders atoned for their wrongdoings through rites and rituals which were enough corrective measures. In some cases, the corrective stigma associated with particular wrongdoing was enough deterrent to possible offenders. For example, someone who stole a

bunch of plantains was made to carry the plantain on the head, and matched by multitudes through the streets of the community, announcing the offenses s/he has committed. Sometimes, offenders were sent to the chief palace for settlement of the case. The society was so organised and cultured to the extent that when the community became aware of the wrongdoing of an offender, s/he may not find a spouse or suitor in that community. Before arranging for marriage, the families of both parties engaged in serious investigation about the socio-moral backgrounds of both suitors regarding their behaviours in and outside the community. When a suitor had criminal records, the family of the suitors disallowed such a marriage. In personal communication with M. Opoku-Mensah (12th June 2020), he referred to a purported address of Lord Macaulay to the British Parliament on 2nd February 1835 which confirmed what pertained in precolonial Africa. Lord Macaulay reportedly said:

"I have travelled across the length and breadth of Africa and I have not seen one person who is a beggar, who is a thief such wealth I have seen in this country, such high moral values, people of such calibre, that I do not think we would ever conquer this country, unless we break the very backbone of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage..."

Just as any society, this statement suggests that Africans also had the way of life, including the standard of beauty and makeover practices.

Precolonial Ghana, as in the case of other Africans, held in high esteem their indigenous beauty culture standards. They held a complex standard of beauty embodied in their 'Afrocultural aesthetics' (Essel, 2017, p.25). Afrocultural aesthetics has to do with the conceptual and contextual hybridity of aesthetics that celebrate ideas expressed in artworks (Essel & Acquah, 2016) and the intended purpose of art, be it functional, symbolic or decorative. A work of art is considered good or beautiful once it served the purpose for which it was done. This implies that beauty is judged in context as well as the concept. The Afrocultural aesthetics also apply to the beauty culture practices of the people. One of the beauty culture practices precolonial Ghana held high was hair grooming aesthetic ideals. Hair occupied a central position in the scheme of social standing to the extent that it

sent a message about the status of its wearer to the audience who understand such a language. One could differentiate a married woman from the others based on her hairdo in Ghanaian society. Hair was treated with natural hair softeners, conditioners, colourants, and accessories such as comb. Special combs that helped the people to keep the hair in good shape were fashioned by sculptors from wood, bones and metal. The combs were artistically shaped with symbolical essence just as the hair itself. What the precolonial African society did not do was to stigmatise the hair type and texture of their fellow Blacks.

The advent of the slave trade, colonialism and Western education began to sew the inferior seed of black hair stigmatisation and discrimination. Gradually, this 'inferior seed' (Morrow, 2014) sewn has entered the educational institutions which should be the agent of change, centre of Black consciousness, character reformation centre and panacea of pan-Africanism has rather turned into Afrosaxons colonialist surrogates perpetuating Afrocentric hair stigmatisation against their educands (Essel, in press). In the effort to decolonise the bastardised and proscribed Afrocentric hairstyle practices in Ghanaian schools, this article explores the conflicting tensions in the process on the part of the school authorities, students and the parents.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Conceptual framework

Decolonisation theories is central to this study. There exists different perspective on the subject matter of decolonisation. Some have looked at it from Euro-American perspective while others argued that the process remains incomplete when it is one-sided instead of two-sided, that is, looking at it from the perspective of the colonised and the coloniser. On this path, Wenzel (2017) examined the multiple objects and aspects of decolonisation namely, political economy, epistemology, culture, language and nature, and theorised that there exists unevenness and incompleteness of the decolonisation process. By studying the various roles played by the colonisers, anti-colonial nationalists, and Cold War superpowers in decolonisation, Wenzel (2017) observed that postcolonial independence did not necessarily bring national liberation. This liberation in my view includes mental emancipation, and redefinition of *Africanness*, believing in ourselves.

In the encounter of the colonialists with the colonised, the former has painted monstrous and negative perceptual image about the latter which has affected the way of life of the latter. The colonialist projected their standards of beauty and art to the colonised and spoke ill of that the colonised to retard social progress and prolong colonial domination of the latter (Nkrumah, 1963). By so doing the colonialists' beauty culture standards have been ingrained and practised in academic institutions and everyday life and has seeming override indigenous beauty culture standard of the colonised. In line with this, the decolonisation concepts that guides this study is

that, the African needs to be measured by his/her cultural beauty standards that does not breach the fundamental laws of his nation or state. The African must gain national cultural consciousness and must not be necessarily be measured with the standards of the colonialist (Nkrumah, 1963; 1964).

Before the Black Hair Stigma in Precolonial Ghana

There are different types of hair ranging from type 1(a, b, c), 2(a,b,c), 3 (a, b, c) and 4 (a, b, c). The types were classified according to the straightness, waviness, curl patterns and kinky look. Hair may also be described in terms of its texture, density, porosity and colour. These characteristics of hair differences may manifest in individuals, groups, society or race. Despite the differences in hair type, all people of the world belong to one race, that is the human race (Elliot, 2016). Even among Blacks, there are differences in hair type.

Precolonial Ghana was made of different ethnic groups of which the Akan were the majority. Though they were of different ethnicities, they did not discriminate against each other on the basis of their hair type or hairstyle. The people wore different hairstyles based on their ethnic affiliations, beliefs and practices, social status, and to celebrate events such as festivities and or funerals. Sometimes the hairstyles were worn for art sake. The hairdos had performative importance, semiotic power, and engendered identity. For example, queen mothers wore a kind of hairdo named *dansinkran* (Figure 1) known for its iconic stature amongst the chieftdom.

The hairstyles of the people ranged from natural dreadlocks popularly called rasta (known in Akan language as *mpesempese*), Afro, braiding, plaiting, shaving and African wigs. Though the word rasta is regarded more as a Jamaican phenomenon, *mpesempese* (which was named rasta) existed in some parts of Africa including Ghana in precolonial times. Some were born with the rasta. People born with rasta were considered by society as special beings, for that matter sacred. Apart from that, some priests and priestesses wore dreadlocks or afro. Cowries were placed in the rasta or afro hair of some priests and priestesses for symbolic, decorative, religious and ritual purposes. In this article, the term rasta is used in the context of both natural and artificial dreadlocks in precolonial, colonial, postcolonial and contemporary times. Again, the term *Afro* was introduced in the 1960s in reference to African American grown hair. From this word came *Afrocentric*. It is worthy of note that the enslaved Africans who were taken ashore had relatively long and grown hair. This was one of the hairstyles associated with males in precolonial Africa. The colonialists negatively described that hairstyle as *bushy*. Meanwhile, the long hair of the colonialists did not merit such a negative description. Till now, the term *bushy hair* connotes an offensive description of overgrown African hair. Many young Ghanaian people would prefer the term *Afro* to mean fully-grown hair than to describe their hair as *bushy*. Though the term *Afro* emanated from the US, the hairstyle was long in practice in many parts of Africa.



Figure 1: A woman wearing the *dansinkran* hairstyle. (Image courtesy: Godhit, 2017).

One could differentiate between a maiden and a married woman just by looking at the hairstyles they wore. The people also used natural hair treatments that conditioned and softened it to keep it in good shape. The Akan often said *ɔbaa n'enyimyan nye ne tsirhwin* which literally means 'The glory of a woman is her hair.' This expression underscored why women in precolonial Ghana cared so much about their hair. They spent a great deal of their time in pursuance of their hair beauty culture practices. During puberty rites, female adolescents are given special education on hygiene, good grooming and hair beauty culture practices and treatments because of the premium society placed on the hair. Consequently, hair became a significant communicative symbol used to express moods such as bereavement, joy; and in some cases, power and authority. For example, a male child who lost his father, mother or close relation cut the hair down to the skin (Figure 3). He appeared hairless on the head as a sign of bereavement. Some Akan female adults wore a hairstyle called *takua*, done by holding the hairs together atop the head and with thread to stand upright. To them, such a hairstyle is design-less and simple in paying homage to the dead.



Figure 3: Man with hair cut to the skin as a signal of bereavement. (Image courtesy: Godhit, 2017).

Slave Trade, Colonialism and Western Education in Black Hair Stigmatisation

Precolonial Ghana had its own well-established form of education, evolved by the people themselves (Sampson, 1932; Essel, 2019) before their encounter with the colonialists. They trained the young ones through a rigorous enculturation process and apprenticeship system. They passed on the artistic culture and way of life from generation to generation through the robust apprenticeship system which is formal education and training (Essel, 2019). Training of the young ones was the duty of the immediate and extended families as well as other people in the community. It was for this reason that the precolonial society was described as living a communalistic life. In personal communication with M. Opoku-Mensah (12th June 2020), he referred to a purported address by Lord Macaulay's to the British Parliament on 2nd February 1835. Macaulay had found that the people had strong cultural institutions that rule their socio-moral lives. In the said statement as pointed out by M. Opoku-Mensah (12th June 2020, personal communication), Lord Macaulay said to the British parliament:

I propose that we replace her [Africa's] old and ancient education system, her culture, for if the Africans think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose self-esteem, their native culture and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation.

Macaulay's statement was recognition of the plausibility and relevance of the precolonial form of education that catered for

the good socio-moral upbringing of the people which seemed impervious. As he suggested, the way forward was to introduce their culture including the language and beauty standards which they did, and used the slave trade, colonialism and Western education as a weapon to achieve their malevolent ideological and social-imperialism agenda.

With the advent of Western education in the 1500s, learners with afro and rasta were asked to cut their hair before they were permitted to enrol. Afro and rasta hairstyles were considered unkempt and cutting them signalled cleanliness. The Euro-Christian churches planted in precolonial Ghana also asked new Black converts with rasta or afro to cut them as a sign of *born again*. The mission schools also proscribed these hairstyles. In the name of religion, this practice continuously ate into the social-moral fabric of the society, especially, amongst the so-called Christian elite. In effect, this gradually contributed to afro and rasta hairstyles' stigmatisation (Alhassan, 2020; Whiteman, 2010, Whiteman, 2007)). Those who wore these hairstyles, especially, the middle-class males and adolescents, were perceived as rascals, vagabonds, smokers, and unclean.

III. METHODOLOGY

Based on rereading of scholarly information and archival sources on Black hair, interviews and focus group discussion as a method of data collection, the study provided insight into the hair decolonisation process in Ghanaian Senior High Schools and the conflicting tensions associated with the process. The focus group consisted of Senior High School teachers with more than five years of teaching experience at that Senior High School level. Descriptive and explanatory case study designs constituted the research design for the study. The descriptive aspect was for the purpose of describing the phenomenon (the 'case') in its real-world context while the explanatory case study aimed at explaining how or why some condition came to be (Yin, 2018). A sample of twenty-eight (28) participants consisting of heads (2), teachers (20), and students (6) were purposively sampled from the accessible population of fifty (50). Simple descriptive analysis formed the method of analysis. To ensure the confidentiality of participants, pseudonyms were used to conceal their identity.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Conflicting Tensions in Black Hairstyles Decolonisation

There have been reports of discrimination against the hairstyle of Black students in and outside Africa. During the 2015 West African Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), three students of the St John's Wesley Grammar School, Accra, Ghana were disallowed to write because they were wearing afro hair (Citifmonline.com 2015). In 2016, there were students protest in South Africa that questioned discrimination against African natural hair in class (Mwaura, 2016). Perry (2019) also reported Black hair stigmatisation which she sees as a vestige of segregated past that deemed

blackness inferior and the emulation of whites as the route towards assimilation. This discriminative happening tells that black hair stigma persists in Africa even after colonialism.

With the school as an agent of enforcing colonialists' legacy of anti-Afrocentric hairstyle practices in primary, junior and senior high schools, specifically, rasta and afro, the practice has become deep-rooted to the extent that attempt by parents and learners to question it proves futile. Students are not happy with the enforcement, and at some point in time prove adamant to school authorities. Mirekua narrated her story:

'I attended primary and Junior High School at Opah Municipal Assembly School from 2009 to 2012. There was a time I had to hide under my desk to avoid being sacked by the headmistress. I was given a warning at the assembly grounds to go and barb my entire hair.'

'In my second year in Junior High School, I was told to go home and barb my hair because it would hinder me from taking part in the Basic Education Certificate Examination. I stayed home for a week because [after I cut my hair for] the fear of being mocked by friends seeing, as it was my first time of having a down cut.'

Mirekua's accounts reveal the feeling of uneasiness and low self-esteem she developed as a result of being reprimanded to cut her long hair. Her hair was cut because she must be in school or face sacking sanctions. Students who go contrary were labelled as bad or stubborn. Maame Esi, was a student in a Senior High School in the Western Region of Ghana. She completed in 2014. She confessed that she complied with the rules and regulations governing hair beauty practices in her school because she feared being suspended, sacked or disgraced at the assembly grounds of the school.

Not complying with the dictates of school authorities on hair in itself is a stigma. The enforcement of these anti-Afrocentric hairstyles has been internalised to the extent that some members of the society may cast aspersion on those who wear such hairstyles. A male participant said his best friend was advised by the parent to Part Company with him because he left his hair to grow long.

'My grandmum told me to keep my hair... One of my friends developed a cold attitude towards me afterward. When I asked, he told me that the parents have asked him to keep his distance from me because... I have become a bad boy. Only bad boys leave their hair without cutting it', he said.

These vignettes of the students revealed that students kowtow to the hairstyle enforcement to avoid negative labelling by the school authorities and their own colleagues. There were others who also left the public school to attend a private school who were lenient with Afrocentric hairstyle restrictions.

In a focus group discussion among 20 Senior High School teachers drawn across eight regions of Ghana, the issues that emerged were that students who wore afro and rasta are

perceived as deviants and ill-mannered people who do not abide by the rules and regulations of the school. This is because the school proscribes wearing of these hairstyles. To the teachers, students appear as adults when they wear afro and rasta hairstyles which do not distinguish them from the teachers. Succinctly put, ‘They appear like mothers and fathers’ than students in those hairstyles. In addition, they argued that wearing such hairstyles in school generates competition amongst the students as they may strive to put up flashy hairstyles and put little or no concentration on their academic work. As a result, they only permit students to wear rasta or afro on health and religious grounds. As explained earlier, hairstyles have religious implications in Ghanaian society. For example, afro and rasta have a strong affinity with African Traditional Religion, which is the authentic religion in precolonial Africa. A teacher explained that:

Well, from my little knowledge, I know that ... priest and priestesses do not barber. Secondly, some students have soft scalps making it easy for them to catch cold anytime their hair is down. These categories of students could be allowed to wear dreadlocks or afro to school.

A teacher who aligned to the Christian faith perceived these hairstyles as unacceptable. He said, ‘My religious background wants us to have a close [hair] cut as a Christian man.’ The teachers said the culture of the school does not allow afro and rasta. So, they normally use scissors on students’ hair. They also admitted asking students to go and shave their hair but when the students refuse, they sacked them from the examination hall or class, since they were not ready to shave their hair without any tangible reason. Students who wear afro are perceived as ‘weed smokers’. On the contrary, four of the teachers argued that wearing afro or rasta is normal since it borders on individual differences, and generally accepted in Ghanaian society. The issue is that these hairstyles become unacceptable when worn by students at the primary, junior and high school levels.

In response to the question of rules and regulations regarding hair beauty culture standards of students in public schools, a teacher said:

What happens is that the housemasters, housemistresses, and some teachers on duty often send scissors to the various classes or examination halls to give students awkward hair cut against the will of the students to force them to shave their grown hair. This is a kind of punishment given to the students for leaving their hair to grow. Some students, out of pain and dislike for such treatment, leave their hair in its awkward form as done by the teachers. Such students are often refused access to classes or examination halls; canned, suspended or asked to weed as punishment. Students comply in order to take classes or examinations.

One of the participants has taught in five schools covering primary, Junior High School and Senior High Schools, with

twenty-four years of teaching experience. She has taught in Ashanti and Central regions of Ghana, and currently a headmistress of a Senior High School. She opined that:

With twenty-four years of teaching, what the schools consider a neat haircut is down cut. Rasta isn’t allowed. Any child who came to school with grown hair is either driven home or the parents are invited to the school and advised to shave the hair of the ward. Some parents come to explain to the school authorities that cutting the hair of their children has spiritual implications that may cause sickness to the child, so, the hair should not be cut. If the authorities disagree with them, it occasionally brings quarrels. Parents who disagree are told that their children could not fit in the school...

Personally, I think those who smoke marijuana wear rasta [dreadlock]. Once they come into the school with this hairstyle, their mannerism, their characters are influenced. They might not be smoking, but other students, sometimes, see them as marijuana smokers... Actually, for my long years in teaching, most of our recalcitrant students, most of our problematic students, when you look at them from head to toe, you realise that the sort of dressing speaks to their characters too.

The views of the headmistress-participant confirmed the thoughts of the teachers. The school expects learners to wear down-cut hairstyles as institutionalised by the colonialists. The school has done little or nothing to question the etymology of this self-discriminating and self-stigmatising act they enforce hook, line and sinker. This negative enforcement has been instituted through a complex network of colonial apparatus namely Euro-Christianity, Slavery, colonialism and Eurocentric education making it difficult in decolonising the process. Any attempts to decolonise are faced with vehement opposition from Blacks to their fellow Blacks. Educated Blacks (Negroes) as pointed out by Woodson (1933, p. 7) ‘hope to make the fellow negroes ‘conform quickly to the standards of the whites and thus remove the pretext for the barriers between the races.’ Caucasians who attend Ghanaian public schools are exempted from this rule. Myjoyonline.com (2019, para 2, line 2 &3) reports of a leading member of a teacher union in Ghana who said: “what I gathered was that when Caucasians [Caucasians] students cut their hair to the level of black ladies, it makes them look very ugly and it can even affect their looks so Caucasian students are not allowed to cut their hair. There is no rule in the Ghana Education Service concerning Caucasians in Ghana because we are not Caucasians, we are negroes.”

Some teachers also argue that when students are allowed to leave the hair to grow long, it attracts lice, eczema and dandruff. These comments demonstrate the anchored conflicting tensions in the decolonising process. Diseases associated with hair are curtailed when students are properly groomed by the school to follow body and hair hygiene

protocols. Their hair does not attract hair and skin-related diseases because it is black or not good. Hair and skin diseases are no respecter of colour or race. Good hair has nothing to do with its texture, density, porosity or colour. It is a hair of any type that is well maintained and kept healthy. The position of the school teachers and authorities brings to mind Carter Woodson's (1933, p. xiii) assertion that:

When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his 'proper place' and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary.

With this, Woodson looked at how the Negro has been miseducated to the extent that s/he exhibited 'attitude of contempt to their own people' (p.1). He also focused on the minds of Black people giving the right kind of education that would contribute to high self-esteem to their people. There are tensions and conflicts that ensue between school authorities and students on one hand, and school authorities and parents on the other hand. Students feel that such negative enforcement deprives them of their self-esteem, self-confidence and uniqueness as individuals. Yet, they must abide by the colonialist monolithic mentality of wearing down-cut hair as a signal for obedience, neatness and smartness as required by the school to have access to education since noncompliance attracts harsh sanctions.

Some parents who disagreed with the school authorities on the position of hairstyles, pick quarrels with the school authorities. Parents have the option of kowtowing or taking their wards from the school. One particular instance of a parent taking the school on is what happened in Achimota School on March 19, 2021, which became a national debate for more two weeks, and took a centre stage on social media, Ghanaian print (newspapers) and electronic media (radio, television, internet). One parent named Raswad Menkrabea took to his Facebook page to pour out his frustration about his son being denied admission on the basis of his rasta hairstyle. Raswad Menkrabea wrote:

This morning, the school authorities of Achimota School claimed that their rules do not allow students with dreadlocks to be admitted. The school authorities denied two brilliant dreadlock students from being admitted after having been posted there by the Computer School Placement System [Computerised School Selection & Placement System]. My son was one of the affected children and the other student was also refused on the same grounds. We have no option but to battle against this gross human right violation.

As a child he has every right to his culture in so far as such culture do not breach the 1992 Constitution. He equally deserves the right to access education within his culture just like other cultural believers. As a

Rastafarian, I think that dreadlock do no way cause any harm which should even be a basis to be asserted by the school authorities.

The fundamental questions to ask is what does our law say about right to one's culture? Do you deny a child access to education based on his/her culture? Do public school rules override the supreme law of the land?

This issue which became a national debate in public transports, markets. It attracted the attention of Ghana's parliament in March 25 2021, based on which the Education Minister, Dr Yaw Osei Adutwum assured the house that the Ghana Education Service (GES) will soon issue policy guidelines on students' admission to all Heads of Senior High Schools in Ghana to bring finality to the issue.

Wearing long or short hair plays no role in distracting students to focus on their academics. There are many renowned private schools in Ghana that do not proscribe students from wearing rasta or Afrocentric hairstyles. The school whether public or private has the primary role of grooming students to be creative thinkers with good time management skills. The hair students keep has nothing to do with their academic performance and socio-moral conduct.

V. CONCLUSIONS

From the discussion, it has emerged that the public schools proscribe Afrocentric hairstyles with no substantial scientific evidence that wearing afro and rasta inhibits the acquisition of creative and innovative thinking, and academic performance or progress of the students. Neither have the schools established from their arguments that wearing Afrocentric hairstyles negatively impacts the socio-moral and cultural wellbeing of the Ghanaian society or indigenous culture. They point to no sound research that establishes the relationship between academic performance and hairstyle worn, and the relationship between hairstyle and social conducts of students. The conflicting tensions around the hairstyles cut across pre-colonial, colonial and part of global fashion, and create multiple conflicting meanings within the many-sided existence of Ghanaian hairstyles. This helps to show how unstable, changing, and multiple the meanings of the hairstyles can be. Yet the Ghanaian public schools enforce the colonialists' discriminative legacy of stigmatising Afrocentric hairstyles in Ghanaian schools with monolithic mentality without questioning the roots of such segregative practices.

Teachers have challenges with students because when they wear rasta, afro and other Afrocentric hairstyles, they do so to show seniority. In other words, do so to signal that they have come of age. Therefore, wearing afro or rasta by the public-school students becomes a sign of rebellion and badness, while for the teachers they are signs of authority and respectability while this is not the case in the private school students. The difference between the public and private school policies creates a class division in the meaning of the

hairstyles, where the Rasta and Afro styles become a sign of privilege.

Again, the teachers also deprived students of their Afrocentric hairstyles because they think it makes students susceptible to skin and hair diseases. These reasons deduced from the argument of the teachers and school authorities are not convincing to parents and students which leads to student-teacher and parent-teacher conflicts. Students gained continued access to education only when they shave their hair. Their education is threatened when they refuse to conform to the rules and regulations on hair.

Students wear rasta. Afro or long hair for several different reasons. Some wear it for spiritual/religious obligations, aesthetics and for fashionability purposes. This interesting practice challenges the so-called tradition and modernity opposition since a pre-colonial religious meaning and a fashion meaning can coexist in the same style and space.

It is discouraging that six decades after independence from the colonialists, there are pitfalls in an attempt to decolonise the Afrocentric hair stigma created by the colonialists through the churches and schools they established. Surprisingly, the public-school authorities in Ghana have tended to be colonialists' agents enforcing the discriminative Afrocentric hairstyles in schools. It is recommended that the Ghana Education Service and the Conference of Heads of Assisted Senior High Schools (CHASS) must work together to review the hair policies for students, so that it will not be a bottleneck for students to have access to education, which is their fundamental right enshrined in the 1992 constitution of Ghana.

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