

AFRICAN-DESCENDED WOMENS' HAIR: “WOULDN'T-BE-CAUGHT-DEAD” (as seen at Obama’s Inauguration Party)/ AnEgypt of Elvis Adoration by Mutamassik aka G. Loli

Aretha Franklin, Alicia Keys, Beyonce’, Michelle Obama and her mom Marian Robinson and the Obama girls Malia and Sasha, Santogold , most of Bruce Springsteen’s backing Gospel Choir, Oprah Winfrey, Mary J. Blige, Rihanna, Queen Latifah...

All present at Obama’s Inauguration. All processed.

{Disclaimer: I know there are lots of African-descended women out there representing with their real hair. The vicious cycle about it is that who the photographers are paid to capture and what the editors decide to put out in the world leans heavily toward the women with the processed hair. Also, no disrespect to Mrs. Robinson because my own beloved grandmother and mother and aunts and cousins did and do process their hair). So, we have a (half) black president (with natural hair and undyed greys {as expected from a powerful man--whole other essay}), so why is he surrounded by black women with processes!?! Given the fact that I have never seen a picture of the most ‘powerful’ black women currently (Michelle Obama, Oprah...) with ‘natural’ hair (only God, their men, maids and hairdressers know what their natural hair really looks like), I’m assuming that they’re operating out of the very familiar “wouldn’t-be-caught-dead” philosophy/mental illness.

We’re all well aware of the options for fitting in: For the woman who wants to look ‘professional’, the Barbara Walters hairstyle is the standard, as is the long, glossy Eurasian style for the woman who wants to be seductive/”beautiful”. Women with kinky hair complain that they ‘have’ to straighten it to avoid discrimination in the workplace. Conventional people need to stick to conventional things I guess, but there are plenty of women who have had the courage to bend convention. THIS IS THE ONLY WAY TO SET A NEW STANDARD. (God bless the ‘60’s and ‘70’s, but a 5 ft- circumference Afro isn’t the only way to show you're black and proud).

Unfortunately, celebrities have a higher platform for societal impact/change and squander it on status quo. What seems to be an inconsequential, girly- fancy of hairstyle choice actually poisons the cultural stream. Of course, not every one agrees that there’s a problem with this gross lie of ubiquitously processed hair.

It wouldn’t be a big deal if it weren’t for the “wouldn’t-be-caught-dead” virus. I know I will be lashed for misogyny for criticizing the aesthetic freedom of women. Changing hairstyles is a woman’s prerogative in this ‘free’ society, as elemental as ‘tampons or pads?’. But we all know that this goes beyond simply the myriad of expressions of feminine vanity. Given the recent shifts of power (even if Symbolic), we cannot keep blaming it on C.J. Walker or whitey or even

the ancient wig-wearing Egyptians anymore. This is brainwashing and cultural oppression that has gripped the heads in Africa too. (i.e., anyone who was born with non-straight hair but believes that silky and straight is simply more beautiful is BRAINWASHED!)

This is such an old and tedious discussion (because it's an old and tedious reality), but what I need to point out is that this is not strictly limited to African-American women or African-descended women in the Diaspora. In fact, I felt prompted to write this opinion largely to show how vast and far-reaching this problem is. Blame it on colonialism (and the British truly did a number on the heads in Egypt, among other places... guilty, nappy heads on ironing boards, Elvis adoration...), but what did people sacrifice their lives to 'free' their people for?

Visit my family in Egypt on any given day. None of the women will be caught dead opening the door with their natural hair. There was a great collective embarrassment over my hair, despite it being 'smoother' than theirs, and continuous pressure by the women to take me to the salon for a straightening to make me marriageable and derision and disgust from the men. You would not believe the amount of negative attention placed on my (in my mind) innocuous, natural hair (often squeezed down into a braid (unassuming, but kinda country, Fellaha-ish, 'namean?') to avoid aforementioned attention), e.g., like when I was coming out of the St. Teresa metro stop in Shobra and this guy sneered, 'Meen a'amelt sha'arik?' (Who did your hair?...God how I should have said, 'Ommik!' {meaning 'Your mama!' ,but also the second and last word in one of the most heinous insults in colloquial Egyptian}).

Pick just about any country in Africa today and you will find profuse advertisement for hair-straightening products like it's the norm, as opposed to some whimsical fashion 'alternative'. Like the veil which is not forced in moderate Islamic countries (e.g., Egypt), unspoken pressure from the community bends women to the collective will. When the convention of the day (mind you, in a time and place when/where personal 'freedom' is so greatly valued) tells you that you and millions of other people were born with features that are 'uncivilized', 'ugly' or 'bad', it must be addressed and inverted.

I have disgusted myself over spending this much time on such a superficial topic as hair. Yet below the follicle is a deep-rooted illness. So that's it! Effennuff said.

Women (from Michelle Obama in D.C. to my cousin Amel in Cairo) please, just have some more nuts!

p.s. for an explanation of womens' nuts, please view my previous essay called, "breaking my nuts about 'breaking my nuts'". (see below)