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SEGREGATION IN NIGERIA

Segregation, according to the oxford dictionary, "is the act or policy of separating people of different races, religions, or sexes and treating them in a different way".

Segregation in Nigeria can be found in almost all sectors from the workplace right down to the homes, right from sexism to ethnicism, racism and the likes. In Yoruba land (as saddening as it is) a Yoruba man is more likely to get work or promotion than a man of another ethnicity or a woman of any ethnicity including Yoruba, but the questions that linger are: Where did it begin? How has it affected this country?

If we look back at the history of Nigeria, the problem was expected to have been solved on January 1, 1914, when Lord Frederick Lugard amalgamated the Northern and Southern protectorates of Nigeria. Notwithstanding, the problem was deeply rooted when there was a divide between the North and South to begin with. Taking countries like Ireland and Korea as case studies, I believe it is safe to assume that it is difficult for divided countries to be united.

It was in 1960 when Nigeria finally gained independence, however, that I believe the problems kicked off. The struggle between the North and the South was the start of many problems involving ethnicity in Nigeria. On January in 1966, Nigeria's first military coup took place. At first, it was welcomed by a portion of the populace who had hoped it would bring about equality among the major ethnic groups. But their optimistic views were quickly abolished when it became clear that the majority of the coup leaders were Igbo and the casualties were mainly Hausa. This kindled the flames for the civil war of Nigeria on May 30, 1967, and cast a shadow on ethnic relations between Nigerians which can be seen to this day, specifically between the Igbo and Hausa tribes.

Although the war occurred many years ago, the tension can still be felt. You might be compelled to ask why? The reason is simple, ethnocentrism. Most Nigerians I know would say, hands down, that theirs is the best ethnic group, more so than others. While I also believe that it is great for one to be proud of their ethnicity but I draw the line at allowing it to interfere with relationships. If a man were to show off his culture by wearing his traditional attire and share some of his cultural food then I would say that is perfectly fine however if the same person were to chose to work with someone less qualified since they are of the same background, or if they give them more opportunities for the same reasons, I would be less impressed.

This egocentric mentality has deprived many a company of the finest workers and many a person of a stable well paying job. Stigmatization of many people can reduce the overall employment rate and, as a result of that, cheat Nigeria of speedy development as less knowledgeable people are put in power simply because they check the requirement of preferred gender, preferred ethnicity or even preferred religion. Even in schools, a certain level of segregation can be seen. This does not happen often neither will it easily be accepted but two students, offering the same subjects during the same year may have different school fees due to a difference in ethnicity.

To a certain degree, I have personally been segregated against. I have a British accent and, on my first day in school, I was made fun of by my form teacher and told to change the way I talk. Since then I have been uncomfortable speaking out in class or even talking to people in general because I have heard people talk behind my back saying I just fake it for attention.

In conclusion, I view segregation as one of the problems holding Nigeria back from becoming a first world country. I people have access to the positions they deserve without fear of being discriminated against, they will be able to put forward ideas that can project the country forward and develop Nigeria faster than it has ever been developed before.

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