**COLORISM AND IT’S PROBLEMS IN NIGERIA**

Racism has existed in this world, racism still exists in this world, and Colorism is not an exception. Colorism which is also known as shadeism is the discrimination of persons based on their complexion or shades of skin. Colorism is something that is known to exist among the same race of people, that’s why you don’t hear people from white nation’s discriminating their race or in this case their kind. They think that we are animals, and we use our mindset to classify the type of animals that we are.

It was Richard Wright that introduced me to racism when I was in Ss1 in his book titled 'Native Son' which made me known to my surrounding. Though I was raised in an African nation, I began to understand the pain Africans in white nation suffered. And most importantly, I began to understand what people in African nation’s go through without knowing it. This brings us to Colorism – the prejudice based on skin tone, usually with a marked preference for lighter-skinned people. People walked this road of discrimination based on their skin . It is a road many dark-skinned Nigerians have experienced. I’ll be discussing the problems of Colorism in Nigeria.

Firstly, It is said to have started long ago in the pre-colonial times, when the whites colonized African nation’s, blacks. They were used as slaves and household servants. What brought Colorism into this was when the whites decided to separate the dark skinned Africans from the light skinned Africans. The former were used in wars and hard labour, while the latter were used in households of the whites. Years later, this made blacks see themselves as different people, we still see ourselves as different people. If not for marriage which made our generation mixed, we probably would have divided ourselves.

Secondly, another problem with Shadeism has to deal with Families. I’ve heard different stories of Families in Nigeria, how they treat their dark skinned children with disgust. “***My family made me realize my Skin Color***” this was said by someone who knew nothing about colorism, but her family treated her in a way that she need not to read any book to know that she’s being discriminated. There is always a saying that ‘Charity starts from home', what you teach your children is what they’ll show to the world. So if you teach your children that their skin color has a say in they lives, their marital lives, their unemployment, and many more. Then I tell you, that’s not the right way to go.

Thirdly, one of our main problems of Colorism is bleaching product and other skin enhancement. It is said that seventy percent(73%) of Nigerian citizens, bleach their skin. Some of them do it because of their family members, just so they have a sense of belonging. Some people do it to have closer shades of skin to the whites, while others do it just so they could look beautiful, not minding the fact that they’re beautiful irrespective of their skin color. I wouldn’t really blame them, rather I blame the industries supplying all these products, advertising fair skins instead of equalizing them, by consistently pushing the rhetoric that fair skin is better. They have led many to bleach.

Bleaching products are easy to get and their sales are not regulated, unlike in the United States where they are banned. Because of this, people feel inferior, then they buy their products. Most product nowadays lay emphasis on making the skin lighter, which discourages other dark skin people. You see people using makeup that doesn’t fit their skin, they use foundations that is too light, just so they could feel like they are beautiful. Even on social media, people use filter to brighten their skin. It is really not surprising that a significant number of Nigerian women turn to bleaching creams so that they too can experience fair-skin privilege. Literate women control the means of production in large West African markets including the popular Lagos market, Eko Idumota, and are agencies unto themselves. It is not uncommon to see Mama Ekos, or Lagos Mothers as they are fondly called, heavily made up, whether at events or at their stores, with their faces glowing yellow and their knuckles and feet burning black. To them, bleaching is only a way to highlight their beauty and is not much different from using hair extensions or enlarging your boobs, and they actively seek out new skin bleachers to try. All this needs to stop in Nigeria.

Another problem we have in Colorism, is the problem of Awareness, or Lack of Awareness to be precise. People in Nigeria don’t pay attention to problems like this, they don’t teach it in school, they don’t educate their children on it, why? Because they believe that there’s no problem there, just a way of life. But being a colorist is worst than being a racist. Though everyone is supposed to get along, but we can’t change the fact that we’re Africans. So if the whites decide to discriminate us blacks it’s our job to be the bigger person and not to do worst by discriminating ourselves. There are other views to colorism by scholars which is what I’m going to discuss below with their solutions.

Colorism is something known mostly in America but exists all over the world including Nigeria.

It is also clear that colorism is very much a part of the wider racism from which it stems. According to Shirlee Taylor Haizlip, “People who practiced colorism were casualties of the deeper racial oppression embedded in U.S. society. By internalizing oppression, victims of racism themselves became perpetrators of a divisive and pernicious system”. The broader point here is that, as a logical by-product, one cannot truly engage in a discussion about colorism without addressing racism. Not only does colorism in the Black community stem from White racism, it is also a specific form of racism that is highly intertwined with White racist ideology and practice. As such, it is not surprising that inter and intra-group prejudice take similar forms, especially evident in this study with respect to the idea of privilege and preconceived notions.

Some say that it is easy for White people to promote a colorblind society. This idea is driven by the notion that the privilege of Whites allows them to make claims of colorblindness in such a way that racism is ignored, not eradicated. This claim includes dismissing or remaining ignorant about the ways in which they have benefited from societal racism. This seems to be applicable here as well, in the context of intra-group color distinctions, keeping in mind that White privilege prevails in U.S. society as a whole. As addressed in the literature review, Hunter (2002) argues that lighter-skinned African American women are more privileged in the areas of education, income and spousal status than darker-skinned women are. I know that we’re looking at colorism in Nigeria, but it’s important to note this. And I believe it’s true because in movies, you hardly see dark skinned people, rather the beautiful ones are the ones that are light skinned. Even in beauty contests, light skinned people have more chance of winning than the dark skinned people. Former Miss Nigeria was very fair. Walker suggests that “there is probably as much difference between the life of a dark skinned woman and a ‘high yellow’ black woman as between a ‘high yellow’ woman and a white woman” (1983). Although they are not necessarily all “high yellow,” the participants in this study who are lighter skinned are more likely to make claims about how complexion does not matter. I believe that this is very accurate, because of those with lighter skin make comments to suggest this, but none of those with darker skin offer this idea.

The women might have held stereotypes about people who are of a lighter or darker complexion, only to change this thinking upon meaningful exposure. This thinking is that interpersonal contact under appropriate conditions can effectively lead to decreased prejudice between minority and majority group members. One woman, who is “fairly light-skinned,” but whose friends are mostly dark-skinned, feels offended when people discriminate against darker-skinned people. She knows that in the past, she “used to be racist to say really hurtful comments and like really bring down people’s self esteem.” It makes sense that these friendships, developed in college, changed the beliefs that she held in high school because of the poor treatment she received from darker-skinned girls during those years. The following comment is about race *and* color, but it is exemplary of a number of experiences offered by the women. It suggests that acceptance increases with personal interaction. More or less it’s a color thing and just a mindset. If somebody is different from you, then it’s bad and unless we see that they’re like us, It’s going to stay bad. Unless we educate our students on colorism, their mentality might never change.

Lastly, most striking to me is the pain on both sides of the spectrum, so to speak.

Although most of the participants agree or at least imply that lighter skin and straight, “good” hair is privilege in African society, those who have these features are not necessarily free from prejudgment and prejudice either. These individuals often deal with hurtful stereotypes and feel the need to prove a Black identity. Highlighting again the related natures of racism and colorism, each may be conceived of as societal waste. Feagin, Vera and Batur use this concept to describe White racism as: “a tremendously wasteful set of practices, legitimated by deeply imbedded myths, that deprives its victims, its perpetrators, and U.S. Society as a whole of much valuable human talent and energy and many social, economic, and political resources” (2001). Thus, as a by-product of White racism that has become a powerful divider in the Black community in general, and among Black women in particular, colorism serves no productive or meaningful purpose. Perhaps one of the participants says it best: there is just “no winning with light skin and dark skin”. This mentality has to change, and with better awareness, it will.

In conclusion, we can see that Colorism has long been a common issue in Nigeria, one that is hardly addressed or looked into, probably because people are distracted by a lot of other things but it is something that should be looked into as it affects everyone. And I hope that with my essay, I was able to do justice to Colorism and it’s problems in Nigeria.