Race till the End

BY SHAYERA MOULA

The word "race" is used when a person or a group of people aim to reach the finish line where the superior of them all wins. Not only is the winner the strongest and the most powerful but his position also earns him respect from everyone else. Even the person coming second is forgotten within minutes.

Race is also a determinant of human traits or a distinction of a group of people from one another based on their characteristics and abilities. If we inter-merge the two definitions along with our world history of violence and dominance, we find that a great deal of civilisation, then, has been and will always be about a race between the races around the world all aiming to be number one, to be the superior.

From Shylock's humane speech in The Merchant of Venice to Marlowe's self-discovery of his connections to Congo in The Heart of Darkness, from Antoinette's madness related to the rejections of her Creole heritage in Wide Sargasso Sea to Pecola's search for purity through whiteness in The Bluest Eye, fiction along time has depicted men's struggle against racism. Franz Fenon too in his Black Skin White Mask clearly shows us the discriminations placed upon society based on skin colour.

The problem is however as national as it is international. While Colonialism and Nazism will replay its brutal images through history books till the end of time, most fail to discuss or even look into what one can call national-racism. It's an irony really since many theorists believe that the purpose of new nations had been to earn an independent state away from racism, and yet the idea of nation itself has been to form distinction within societies, thus being responsible for racism to start off with.

To clarify conventional ideas of race, the US Government's Human Genome Project has already announced that there isn't any distinct genetic basis to racial types, meaning no "racial characteristics" can exist based on anything biological (like skin colour and facial features.) So Josiah C. Nott and George Gliddon's ranking of white people, black people and chimpanzees in descending order means squat. Therefore, it all goes back to how racism is simply an attitude inbuilt within and co-existing among us despite education and development. Sociologist Trepagnier likes to call this "silent racism."

Race is then a system of group privilege, it has always been about one group of people dominated by others and deprived of many rights.

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"Racism is a highly organised system of 'race'-based group privilege that operates at every level of society and is held together by a sophisticated ideology of colour/'race' supremacy," write sociologists Noel A. Cazenave and Darlene Alvarez Maddern.

Race is not just an idea though; it has been institutionalised very well too. Institutional racism, a term brought about in the 1960s, has been defined as a failure of organisations to provide "professional service" to people based on colour and culture. Just the way any African name on a resume would get the director of the organisation in US to have second thoughts about the applicant's