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Young Protagonists in the Contemporary London Novel: Hanif Kureishi and Rupert Thomson.

Claire Allen

<1> This article investigates the work of Hanif Kureishi and Rupert Thomson in their pre- and post-millennial writings and suggests that a subtle development can be discerned in the manner in which both authors depict youth and the young protagonist within their texts. Attempting to identify defining characteristics of any period of literary history, and in this case the specifics of periodising an author's work, is hugely problematic, especially when the period under examination is so contemporary. The possible personal, as well as cultural, reasons for the shifts that can be discerned in an authors work are too many and too various to deal with in the space of this article. However there is something of a discernible development in the way that both writers approach the subject of the young protagonist. Both Kureishi and Thomson have revelled in the depictions of hedonistic youth culture in the early parts of their careers, but both have subsequently provided the reader with more introspective, challenged, burdened and sympathetic young protagonists; who, are themselves to some extent deprived of an adolescence.

<2> London features as a significant setting in both of these authors' works. The prominence of youth and youth culture within and for London literature has not escaped key figures within the literary critical establishment. Kureishi himself overtly explains the direct, and important, relationship the capital has with its younger inhabitants and youth culture at the end of the twentieth century:

> It is well known that at different times, in different cities, certain arts are primary or central, and at this time it was pop, with London being as important as anywhere in the USA. Britain's cornucopia of music prevented the country from becoming a third-rate cultural outpost, the complete victim of US cultural power. Britain couldn't be entirely Americanised while it continued to generate its own identity through music, fashion and the political culture and activism of youth. (*Outskirts* xii)

Lawrence Phillips succinctly notes the long held association of youth culture with the capital: "The draw to central London is familiar enough to be a cliché, being well established as long ago as the picaresque novels of the eighteenth century" (2006 60). [1]

<3> The end of the twentieth century saw again a particular alliance between young characters and the attraction of the capital city. Ian Jack (1999) offers a possible explanation for the expansion of youth centred cultures. He suggests that the 1990s 'Cool Britannia' marketing employed by the Labour Party during the 1997 general election campaign utilised youthfulness as a marketing tool, implying a positive link between the capital's rejuvenation and the 'youthfulness' of Tony Blair. 'Youthfulness' becomes a publicity device that intrinsically suggests and becomes almost synonymous with rejuvenation and renewal in an attempt to suggest that the latter has occurred within the capital city's most neglected areas:

> Large stretches of the inner city have been colonized by the young, abandoned warehouses have been knocked into flats, anything without a job (an old brewery, a disused power station) gets one as an art gallery, the streets are fuller for longer into the night, there is a lively, enterprising sense about the place (even if people do seem to drink too much). (6-7)

<4> Jenny Bavidge and Andrew Gibson in their article "The Metropolitan Playground: London's Children" (2003) extend this analysis to suggest that the markers of youth have become an intrinsic part of both London and millennial society, they state: "For some time now, urban fashion has been appropriating toys, games and other accoutrements of the child. We live in a culture of 'infantile chic'" (45).

<5> Developing beyond the bildungsroman tradition, so typically involving the journey of a young man to the city, reaching maturity and establishing his place in life along the way, for instance the path trod by Henry Fielding's Tom Jones, a resurgence of concerns about the extension of childhood into adult years (the young protagonist failing to reach a level of maturity in their actions) in particular relation to the London novel can be identified. Nick Bentley locates the climax of these concerns within the last decade of the century, according to Bentley:

> The 1990s also saw a number of novels that were concerned with youth culture and subcultures, the most visible of which was Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993). Anxieties

somethings, as seen in the popularity of the extended *Bildungsroman* of the type produced by Helen Fielding and Nick Hornby (2005 11).

The earlier texts under investigation in this article seem to concur with Bentley's concerns about representations of youth, Karim and Moses enjoy the trappings of a hedonistic lifestyle, that of 'liberal' attitudes to alcohol, drugs and sex, however is Bentley's summary of 90s youthful protagonists applicable to 00's youthful protagonists? This is what I hope to investigate within this article.

<6> In order to chart the development of Thomson and Kureishi's engagement with the young central character it is necessary to begin with an exposition of the pre-millennial depiction of young protagonists that Kureishi and Thomson provide for the reader. The early novels of both authors originate in the last two decades of the twentieth century; and the work of both writers depict and to some extent embody a youth culture that fits the model that Bentley identifies. Although both authors attempt to avoid giving a purely positive reading of self-indulgent lifestyles, both depict protagonists who engage with a youth culture that is dominated by hedonism and liberal values. Thomson's *Dreams of Leaving* finds its protagonist, Moses, touring London's underworld living a life that fulfils the hedonist's dream. Moses is almost always occupied with sex, alcohol, drugs, popular music, and socializing with friends. One such friend, Eddie, is a womaniser. Moses estimates that Eddie has slept with in excess of 1000 women. Vince, another of his friends, is always high on a potent cocktail of powerful drugs, and alcohol, getting into a variety of nasty, violent scrapes. Moses has to: "scrape the remains of Vince off the floor after a fight or stop him jumping out of a tower-block window. Driving Vince to St Stephen's at four in the morning with a six-inch gash in the back of his head and his blood pumped full of drugs" (60) this becomes an almost normalised event for this group of friends, a consequence, perhaps, of their lifestyle.

<7> Moses finances his drug habit with his unemployment benefit. 'The state' acts as a virtual, absent parent who provides financial assistance but little spiritual or emotional sustenance.   The state takes responsibility for providing Moses with household essentials, such as money for bed sheets (129). These young characters ostensibly need parenting, a duty that falls not only to the State, but also by logical extension to the local community. After a drunken night out, and being abandoned by his friends, Moses, found: "in a skip on the main road" (39), with only one shoe on, becomes the responsibility of a taxi driver, as Moses is so inebriated he is unable to care for himself.

<8> The infantile status of Thomson's character is further enhanced through the seemingly contradictory combination of an 'adult' underworld of sex, drugs and alcohol, with a childlike obsession with confectionary. An inventory of what Moses spends his unemployment benefit on includes: "5 packets of Increda Bubble -- the popping bubble-gum"(64).   Such infantile behaviour reflects a more general mode within *Dreams of Leaving* which depicts grown-up characters continuing their youthful tastes and adjacent immaturity into adulthood. Bavidge and Gibson (2003) comment that such childishness represents late twentieth-century culture in the capital:

The 'sound and vision' department on the fourth floor of Harvey Nichols has started to call itself "The Playground". Besuited businessmen pedal silver scooters to work. Outsized boys and girls career through the city on rollerblades, wearing Shaun-the-Sheep backpacks and Winnie-the-Pooh pouches. ... Mobile phones are the walkie-talkies that children always wanted." (45)

<9> For Moses and his friends London resembles such a playground, in which not only do they have child like obsessions, but they can also act and create identities for themselves. Moses and his friends don't seem to be living in the 'real' adult world, but one of simulacrum, an almost fake, pretend adult hood, as they haven't actually left their childhood: "[Moses] watched a supersized poster glide past. It was a picture of a man sitting in a desert. The man had clean-cut features, neat black hair and a firm jaw. He was wearing a dinner jacket. He was smiling. It was nice in the advert. Moses smiled back. He knew how the man felt. He was in an advert too" (216). Moses is obviously aware that his life in the city is a performance as he recognises his own life within the advert, perhaps reflecting a postmodern playfulness with identity. For Moses in London his life has become almost a parody, a pastiche of a pastiche, in that it starts, even for him, to look like an advert, which is selling a product through a lifestyle. For Moses the symbol has become entwined with the reality of his life, to the extent that he is unable to distinguish between the two.

<10> The second author's work I will consider closely in this article is that of Kureishi.   Karim, the protagonist of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, also engages in a culture dominated by youth and hedonism. Sukhdev Sandhu (2000) comments in "Pop goes the Centre" upon the importance of London as a place in which youth can break the rules and live the hedonistic life which they desire: "The city became in their collective imagination, the only place where they could, as Karim says, 'live always this intensely: [with] mysticism, alcohol, sexual promise, clever people and drugs'" (147).   London is constructed in the characters' imaginations; from the suburbs Karim is excited to travel to the

adolescence.

<11> London in The *Buddha of Suburbia* is full of young people descending onto the streets, rejecting the confines of their bedrooms absorbing the capital's consumer based cultures. They attempt to challenge the boundaries laid down by their families, and (by extension) society, as they inhabit the fringes of the respectable wishing to experience the perceived freedom the capital holds.   The protagonists of these novels (perhaps following negative stereotypes of young people) become embroiled in pop culture, marijuana, clubs, parties, and participate in 'guiltless' casual sex, creating generational conflict. The protagonists in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and The Black Album seek not to be defined by their parents, and their beliefs and values;[2] instead London entices them due to the possibilities of creating their own and multiple identities:

> Kureishi sees the capital as being about *aggregation*, a happy realm where he can wear as many masks, create as many personae, explore as many new avenues as he wishes ....   The freedom from homes, from families, from 'bourgeois' constraints allows Omar, Shahid and Karim a limitless palette of intellectual, social and sexual possibilities. (Original emphasis Sandhu 2003, 250-1)

It is in the potential for the 'many masks', and in the possibilities for self-fashioning and constant re-shaping of the self that Kureishi's youngsters such as Karim and Shahid are interested. The vital role of pop music is foregrounded through the depictions of Shahid's music heroes: Prince and David Bowie are key role models for Shahid. These celebrities incorporate the very ideology of transience in terms of musical and identity creation. In Bowie's career "nearly every album of his sees him assume a new persona" (Sandhu 2003, 252). Prince alters his music, style, and his name, as well as adopting deliberately androgynous dress codes: "Prince is a satyr, an androgyny, a symbol –– the latter, along with 'The Artist Formerly Known as Prince', being one of the numerous handles by which he has insisted on being catalogued"(Sandhu 2003, 252).

<12> In *Buddha of Suburbia* Karim's aspiration to become an actor reflects a desire for constant self-transformation. It is the perversion of rules that both Karim and Shahid strive for.   They love the disorderliness and unpredictability of the city: "Cherishing the opportunity the city allows for sloughing off one's old 'square', socially-constricted self, it doesn't care very much for office culture, the weekly wage or for the life of the commuter. It privileges randomness, appetency, and sexual hedonism" (Sandhu 2000:147).

<13> The present concentration of depictions of the young is the culmination of a long period of intense trans-national discussion of the concept. Youth culture has long been associated with a hedonistic lifestyle, particularly in relation to London youth,[3] as an account of eighteenth century London by Peter Earle suggests:

> [E]arly eighteenth-century London 'offered many enticements' for young people.   In particular the city offered 'the lure of bad company, gambling, drink, idleness, petty theft and "lewd women" .... In the spirit-shops lurked 'children who drink with so much enjoyment that they find it difficult to walk on going away.' In the engravings of Hogarth, too, children are often characterised as malevolent or mischievous tokens of the city; their faces are puckered up in misery or derision, and they tend to mock or imitate the conduct and appearance of their elders. (Ackroyd 651-2)

As such it can be seen that it is not simply the pre-millennial youthful protagonists of Thomson and Kureishi that hold associations with hedonism.

<14> However, if the association of hedonism with youth becomes a marker of contemporary culture due to the dominance of youth within that culture, as stated earlier, what happens to the next generation, the generation of teenagers who grow up with parents who continue to act like teenagers themselves? Thomson and Kureishi in recent works create young protagonists who have not enjoyed a protracted, hedonistic adolescence. These young protagonists have taken on the responsibilities of the adult world at a very early age.

<15> In the post-millennial novels of Thomson and Kureishi the young protagonist experiences a greater sense of responsibility and are less able to access the hedonism of their pre-millennial predecessors. Gabriel in Kureishi's *Gabriel's Gift* is an example of this trend; he is too busy 'looking after' his immature parents to explore his own identity. Thomas Parry in Thomson's *Divided Kingdom* has been prepped since the age of eight to carry out governmental work to ensure the smooth running of the country's new political experiment which attempts to cure the ills of society, and is prescribed an identity by the government rather than being able to explore the postmodern myriad of possibilities that are open to characters such as Moses in *Dreams of Leaving*. One of the problems that Kureishi address's in his post-millennial fiction is that of what happens to a generation of children whose parents have not relinquished the markers of youth.

suggests, seem to be the aim of a previous generation of Kureishi youth. After his Dad Rex, leaves, his mother fails to cope or to adequately fulfil her responsibilities towards her son: "Dad had gone and was living somewhere else. If the world hadn't quite been turned upside down, it was at an unusual and perilous angle, and certainly not still" (3). Gabriel's mother and father are ineffective as parents, and so the child-parent dichotomy becomes reversed. It is Gabriel's responsibility to support his parents, who, as Jays suggests are: "bewildered and fitful, weary of fending off blows to the heart." This can be seen through Gabriel's actions with his mother when she is having relationship difficulties with her new lover George; Gabriel comforts her as they "put their pyjamas on" and "ate chocolates from their 'emergency' supply" (147).

<17> Gabriel has to coax his Dad out of his perpetual dreaming of a rock 'n' roll lifestyle, and get him to 'grow up' and accept the responsibilities of the adult world, forcing him to go to work, showing Rex that his current lifestyle isn't going to provide the security that his family needs. Gabriel holds the voice of the pragmatist, informing Rex: "What kind of future will I have watching you sit on your arse and drink all day?" (101)

<18> Not only is Gabriel instrumental in finding employment for his father, but he also has to take care of the practicalities of looking after him, for instance making sure Rex is safely on the bus to work, in a true reversal of parent/child roles. The lexicon used by Kureishi emphasizes this role reversal; describing Rex in a very child like manner whilst Gabriel occupies the more responsible adult/parental position: "Ensuring that his father was hopping and tripping behind him"(56). Gabriel is far too busy 'looking after' his immature parents to explore his own identity, and although he is very close to the characters of Shahid and Karim in age, his life is far removed from the hedonistic life they indulge in.

<19> A lot of responsibility falls to this young protagonist. Gabriel alone has to care for his parents: "Gabriel wanted to go to Mum's bar and ask her to try to get Dad out of bed. But she wouldn't be prepared to do it; she'd given up on him. Everyone had, now"(100). The responsibility proves to be a great strain for Gabriel in what is already a difficult time, that of his own adolescence: "He saw now how bored he'd been recently, at home; he'd just about had enough of being alone and worrying about his parents"(155). Stephanie Zacharek (2002) highlights what a challenge this is for the young protagonist: "What Kureishi is most interested in, though, is the formidable challenge that Gabriel has to stand up to. Forget man vs. man, man vs. nature and all that rot: The most fearsome enemy a boy can face is his parents' past."

<20> Akin to the responsibility felt by Kureishi's Gabriel, Thomson similarly offers the reader an altruistic young protagonist in *Divided Kingdom*, who is the antithesis of Thomson's earlier hedonistic young character, Moses. The premise of this dystopian fantasy is that the government of an increasingly socially fragmented and conflicted Britain, takes the drastic action of dividing the country, and the population into four separate "quarters" attempting to create four homogenous zones divided along personality types. The novel opens with what seems to be the abduction in the middle of the night of eight-year-old Mathew Micklewright.

<21> It is revealed that Mathew hasn't been abducted but is subject to the government's "re-arrangement" process, which sets out to create a "divided kingdom" in the hope of creating a series of more harmonious societies. Mathew is removed from his family, and re-named Thomas Parry. He is sent to a government school in the quarter that the government have decided best suits his personality type. Thereby Thomas is prescribed an identity and cannot explore the postmodern myriad of possibilities of identity creation or hedonistic lifestyles that is open to Moses in *Dreams of Leaving*. Thomas is to carry out governmental work whilst still in his childhood.

<22> Post-rearrangment, and once settled in his new school an official from the newly formed government visits Thomas and his classmates in order to emphasise to the young people the seriousness of their role: "The future depends on the example you set to others. One might even say that the fate of the entire nation rests in your hands'"(6). Children are given the responsibility of monitoring the new system. The children are told: "'If you should see any behaviour, ... which doesn't fit in with your notion of the sanguine disposition, it's your duty- your *duty*- to report it to the authorities"(17) revealing the burden and responsibility these youngsters face.

<23> After finishing his initial education at the boarding school, Thomas is placed with a new family. He is seemingly positioned there to do governmental work; it is his job to make sure that everyone is abiding by, and becoming accustomed to the new system:

> I sometimes wonder if there wasn't a sense in which they looked on me as some sort of substitute for Jean, a kind of reimbursement. But perhaps that's overstating it. Distraction might be a better word. I was something that would take their minds off the violence that had been done to them, something that would alter the shape of their sorrow ... my arrival had a beneficial effect, since it forced them to pull together and begin to function as a unit again. (22-3)

<24> Thomas carries on working for the Ministry as an adult, and it is through this work that he is able to escapes the confines of the system (slipping away during a bomb explosion in the yellow quarter which he is visiting on governmental business). Thomas experiences all the four quarters which is against the rules of the new system as people are confined within their zones, forbidden to mix at all. Eventually Thomas joins a community known as the White people; these people are mutes, who communicate telepathically, permanently travelling, as they operate outside the official system.

<25> The White people come under attack, and are eventually massacred but Odell Burfoot, who possesses the ability to become invisible, rescues Thomas. Odell, born on the day of Thomas's rearrangement, is eight years younger than him, and she exhibits heroic qualities in that she protects Thomas. Odell acts as a 'Virgil' figure; she guides Thomas through the different quarters, and eventually leads him back home to the red quarter. The young rescue and protect their elders in a role reversal.

<26> For these young characters depicted by Thomson and Kureishi there is a perceived future that although in jeopardy and must be fought for, these characters are not permitted to simply revel in a hedonistic present. Gabriel looks forward to a career as a film director in London. Thomas looks forward to a life with Odell, as these young people work hard to conquer the challenges they encounter in order to achieve their goals, and look forward. Such endings are in sharp contrast to those in Kureishi's and Thomson's pre-millennial texts.

<27> The conclusion to *The Black Album* highlights the impermanent characteristics of the protagonist's existence. Rather than a traditional 'happy ending' with a plan to 'all live happily ever after', as a more archetypal 'fairy tale' like narrative would perhaps have, the plan is to continue: "Until it stops being fun" (276). Evidently not a permanent plan for the rest of their lives, but instead a continuation of the type of hedonistic lifestyle that Deedee and Shahid have been living throughout the novel. Shahid does not want to plan beyond the immediate future, considering only as far as the end of their weekend away, and Monday's return to a Prince concert.

<28> The continued appreciation of Prince, which was first exhibited at the beginning of the novel during Shahid's interview for college, firmly cements Shahid's identity preference within the postmodern and transitional, it also gives the narrative a cyclical feel, ending on a similar note to which it began. This narrative strategy furthers the suggestion that Shahid has not undergone a transformation from youth to adult, but instead is perhaps more akin to a picaro in that he has not changed, developed or learnt from his experiences, but continues in the same vain. Bart Moore-Gilbert locates Kureishi's protagonists in *The Black Album* and *The Buddha of Suburbia* within the picaresque: "Karim, especially, can be read as an example of the flawed but loveable rouge who is the genre's characteristic protagonist" (109). Seema Jena also locates Karim's character within the identity of a picaro: "Like a picaro, Karim doesn't want to conform, has the desire to be different, the desire to be elsewhere" (4).

<29> Karim follows his dreams, and his friend Charlie, to New York. When he returns to London, he remains discontented, as the very end of the novel reflects: "And so I sat in the centre of this old city that I loved, which itself sat at the bottom of a tiny island. I was surrounded by people I loved, and I felt happy and miserable at the same time." (284). Karim is left wanting, and still hoping for change. His big ideas of what London is, and the potential it has, seem to have eluded him. He refers to the "old city" and "tiny island" descriptions far removed from the grand statements Karim used to use to describe London when he dreamt about it from his home in the suburbs, where he saw London as "bottomless in its temptations" (8).

<30> Gabriel has not experienced the same hedonistic London Karim has, but the end of the novel is a much more positive one. There is greater possibility for change. Gabriel has a career in film making awaiting him. Unlike Karim, Gabriel's parents are back together, in which Gabriel, and his drawing talent, played an instrumental part, (as opposed to the end of *The Buddha of Suburbia* which ends with the marriage of Karim's father to Eva, his lover, not Karim's mother).

<31> Performance is an important part of the attraction of, and interaction with, London for both Karim and Gabriel. Yet Gabriel's career is firmly behind the camera. Whilst being pre-occupied with looking after his parents, Gabriel has been denied access to a more performative experience of hedonistic London, as experienced by his father Rex, and a previous generation of Kureishi's youthful protagonist, such as Karim. Gabriel is a director; Karim is an actor; the distinction is clear. Karim has access to the city as a stage and is directly involved with the city as performance, where he can experience a hedonistic lifestyle of excess, drink, and drugs.   Gabriel is one step removed from this. As with most directors, he quite literally does not enter the stage due to his chosen profession, just as he does not have access to London as a stage during his adolescence. As a film director Gabriel is removed from participating in the action, instead he is an external force controlling it, a similar role to that which he partakes in facilitating his parents' reconciliation.

Everyday life is a crust of earth over the tunnels and caves of the unconscious and against a skyline of uncertainty and illusion that we call Modernity, while overhead stretch the Heavens of Permanence; among the greater planets are Scientificness, clear, cold and somewhat shadowy, and the twin planets Virility and Femininity; there are stars, constellations and nebulae; high over the polar horizon we have Technology and elsewhere Youthfulness (vii).

Youthfulness exists alongside technology for Lefebvre as an ideal that can only actually be aspired to and has become commodified; the term becomes a means of describing an abstract (and remote) desire rather than simply a stage in the physical development of a human being. The end of *Divided Kingdom* forms an example of this attitude towards the young, as Thomas is waiting for Odell, a symbol of youth, at an arranged meeting place. He waits for her arrival, which will enable him to start his new life: "To live with her, that's all that interests me" (395). However, as the novel closes he is still waiting for her, and the physical existence of Odell remains questionable, as Odell only ever interacts with Thomas, and has the magical ability to be 'invisible', is she therefore simply a construct within Thomas's imagination? The ending of Thomson's text perhaps embodies Lefebvre's suggestion that youth is always "elsewhere", a desirable force, which is forever unobtainable (analogous, perhaps to the character of Odell). For a generation of teenagers whose parents never progressed from being a teenager is the 'exotic desirability' of youth, but simultaneously its ultimate unobtainable nature, particularly emphasised? Instead the young take on accoutrements of adulthood in opposition to their parents, adults who live the life of the young.

<33> Bentley notes a unique aspect to the decade ending the twentieth century: "The 1990s ... can be seen as the only decade in the twentieth century, except perhaps the Edwardian decade (1900-10), that the possibility of global war has not had a significant effect on the cultural imagination" (3). Writers such as Kureishi and Thomson, who create young protagonists both around the 90s; a time perhaps for more hedonistic adolescences'; as well as writing into the new, contemplative, and fearful millennium,[5] offer an interesting point for consideration. It is perhaps fruitful to consider how representations of young people change as we enter into a new millennium, a period which seems to have become intrinsically linked with re-assessment and change, as the millennium has provided a symbolic "opportunity to pause and attempt to reassess the role of reason, philosophy and the sciences" (Potter and López 3).

<34> My consideration of the work of Kureishi and Thomson leads me to conclude that Bentley's summary of 1990s depictions of young protagonists (quoted at the beginning of this article), seems an apt analysis at the close of the twentieth century of literary depiction of young central characters, but perhaps some further consideration is required in relation to how; or if; writers are offering an alternative young protagonist for the twenty-first century London novel.

Endnotes

[1] Phillips extends this commentary: "a character like Mark Underwood [the protagonist in David Lodge's novel *The Picturegoers* (1960)] is a modern echo of Henry Fielding's Tom Jones; the young man from the provinces finding himself, his place in life and his fortune through a journey narrative that culminates in the city" (2006 60). [^]

[2] For further discussion see Sandhu (2000 142) [^]

[3] The concept of the child and youth having a long association with the literature of London and the city itself is widely expressed throughout Peter Ackroyd's *London: The Biography* (2000), in which he states "the children of London are faithful images of the city itself." (641). Integral to Ackroyd's discussion of London is the idea that youth and the young are a major factor in shaping the city, it's characteristics and it's culture. [^]

[4] "The desire to blow the house down and move on has always been the mainspring of Hanif Kureishi's fiction. From the exhilarating youngsters of 'My Beautiful Laundrette' and *The Buddha of Suburbia* to the lachrymose adulterers who walk out of the door in chilly recent stories and novels, his protagonists will themselves to move on towards the lives they believe they deserve" (David Jays). [^]

[5] The millennium, though an artificial construct, has afforded an opportunity for reflection and contemplation of both the present and the future. Garry Potter and José López assert such with regards to the year two thousand "It is a year similar to many, but yet unlike any that has come before ... the gateway to a new millennium" (3). They utilise the words of the famous London writer Dickens, to sum up the era and express what it means to them: "It is the best of times. It is the worst of times. It is a time for the celebration of diversity. It is a time of fear of the Other who is different. It is a time of technological marvel and a time of fear and distrust of science. It is a time of unprecedented affluence and a time of the direst poverty. It is a time of nostalgia for

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