



## ORIGINAL PAPER

# Youth Subculture and “Postmodern Axiology”

Ali Pajaziti\*

*“If it was not for internet,  
I’m sure half of Macedonia  
would go mad”.*

Note from Facebook

*“Knowledge without wisdom is a fire one lights only to burn one’s self.”*  
Fatmir Muja

### Abstract

Youth is a social category that marks a very dynamic entity, especially nowadays in the era of global transformations, when we face a large scale of changes, even in the sphere of the culture and values. So today's social anthropology cannot be written without consistent and deep analysis of interaction between different kinds of culture, produced by economic actors and media, and their impact to mentality and lifestyle of the young.

One of the products of the post-modern society is popular or youth culture, which is linked to cultural economy, pleasures, idleness, style and identity forms, relationships, meanings and social and cultural texts. Some of the question that we face in the beginning of the 21st century are: Why the traditional values day by day are being relativized and new values are being affirmed by different TV, IT and social network tools? How they create a new profile of consumerist, hedonist and individual(ist) young and ignorant parallel society? Why the youth is attracted by computopia and what are its moral reflections? Is pop culture a new (pseudo)religion?

This paper, that uses different research methods, especially ethnography and content analysis, is about the triangle of youth, consumerist culture and postmodernism as a stimulating condition for life variety and a relativizer of social values.

**Keywords:** *youth, pop culture, consumerism, hedonism, postmodernism, facebookmania*

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\* Full Professor, SEE University, Tetovo, Macedonia, Phone: +389 44 356 188, Email: a.pajaziti@seeu.edu.mk

## Youth Subculture and “Postmodern Axiology”

### Fore-explication

Youth constitutes the most vital part of any society, the future and positive horizons of the healthy social environment or that category which makes societies foresee a turbulent future, even the state of many mutilations in all vital dimensions. It is the bearer and realize of community's vision and mission. Youth is a term that indicates physiological, demographic and sociological dimensions of a social group and category, generally including individuals who attend the education process, economically dependent, sensitive towards social issues and demographically including the age range 15-25, with some taking the limit to 30, even 35 years. Youth is the most dynamic and complex phase in life. Its main characteristics are physical and psychological development, dynamism, emotionality, entrepreneur spirit, impatience, search for identity, rebelliousness, crisis, anxieties, sorrow, reactions, conflicts, dreams, passions, endless demands, lack of correspondence between psycho-physical and social development, etc. It is a preparation phase in which personality traits are earned that are necessary for bearing professional and family duties, when the young starts behaving more independently and more responsibly (Pajaziti, 2009: 553-554).

Pop culture or youth culture, also called as consumerist culture implies a culture accepted without control by people as a homogeneous body, a culture created and distributed through commerce, “an industrialized culture produced and distributed by an industry motive by profit and which pursues its economic interests only” (J. Fiske). In the empirical aspect popular culture can also be described as spare time practices and texts, while ideologically it is treated from the aspect of being exploited or controlled in the framework of “creativity” or resistance (Rowe, 1996: 20).

### Pop culture: Consumerism, youth identity and hedonism as *modus vivendi*

“Popular culture” is an expression that sociologists have not reached a consensus upon. Because of the “popular”, some link popular culture with “people”. According to them popular culture implies everything produced by those who are not part of and stand above the people but “create” for the people which constitute the majority. So it is a culture of majority. Some has called it a culture of the labor class and since the latter is poor, relatively uneducated, ignorant and of a low level, the culture that stems from it is low, unworthy and vulgar too. Some have treated it from the aspect of quantity and quality, asserting that since it is a culture of majority, it is a culture without real quality. This link popular culture with mass culture, widely created and distributed by the cultural industry, possessed by power holders and used by them to lead the crowds (Güngör, 1999: 10, 11). The consumerist culture that is part of culture industry and which has been transformed into an activity of new relevance and in rise since the end of the last century (Viesand et. al., 2002: 7), is not about consumption only, but about culture as well, an active process of creation and bearing of significances and tastes in the framework of the social system. This culture is widely discussed about as a result of the dazzling development of audio-visual and media technologies. Advertisements, pop music, cinema, fashion, sport, etc. are objects of discussion in this context. The study of consumerist culture has been contributed to by structuralism, semiology, semantics and many other disciplines. This culture is the fruit of modernization and change, of culture industry and is considered to be part of mass manipulation. According to some, the consumerist culture undermines the bridges that link the past of the people with their present, a “drug” offered to people in the

form of fashion and what is trendy or “in”. This because it takes them away from personal culture, from authentic values, from national authentic culture. This culture sows in people the instinct of acting according to the consumerist logic, making them lose true objectives and transforming them into goods. People’s culture differs from the culture of consume (or pop culture) in the creative role of the people and the tradition as an important element with the first. People’s culture is identified with national culture and identity. Consumerist culture is the antipode of the most exclusive culture, like the elitist or high culture, an antipode of the culture of the dominant social groups (Emiroğlu & Aydın, 2003: 694-695; Fisk, 2001: 31).

Popular culture is considered as an instrument of domination, especially of American domination (Mel van Elteren) (Güngör, 1999: 17), so it can be linked to the global McDonald, to americanization and westernization. The representatives of the Frankfurt School employ popular culture as a synonym of mass culture and entertain a negative idea about it. For example Adorno says music alienates people and expresses very pessimistic feelings about this. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, popular culture which spreads through means of mass communication, creates a homogeneous cultural environment that makes the functioning of productivity and consume easier in relation to the market functioning of such culture (Güngör, 1999: 14-15) But in this context, of culture and market and economy, a number of thinkers raise their voice in asserting that culture is a public capital that cannot be sacrificed to monetary economy. Whereas the producers of entertaining culture maintain that besides the educative dimension, culture must have the entertaining aspect as well (Viesand et al., 2002: 8), as it is reasonable and natural.

### **Case study**

From among 125 students of mine, the day a made the survey 118 had worn jeans, probably the only American contribution to fashion industry. The other seven “renegades” also possessed jeans but had not worn them that day. My question is whether is there any other cultural product – movie, TV program, CD, lipstick – as popularized?

I asked them to write shortly what jeans meant for them personally and had a discussion about it. A coherent network of significances grouped around some central points stemmed from that debate. One of those focuses was essentially unifying and rejected social differences. It considered jeans as informal clothes, with no class, no gender; suitable to city and village and wearing jeans was seen as a sign of freedom against definitions that social categories impose to behavior and identity. The mostly used adjective was “free”, often as “being free to be who I am”, followed by “natural”. In fact, that dress is psychologically repressive, more often conveying social meanings than individual sentiments and spiritual state (Fisk, 2001: 8-10).

Popular or youth culture is linked to cultural economy, pleasures, idleness, style and identity forms, to many relationships, meanings and social and cultural texts generated in different forms (Rowe, 1996: 22). Some have also linked it to the laissez-faire philosophy, to freedom, to social differentiation and distinction, to the bottom-up social movement towards the city, sophistication, fashion and the special (Fisk, 2001: 13). In some countries however, until the end of 70’s, all products of popular culture were labeled as garbage and kitsch and were marginalized. Austrian culture value high culture only: Wiener Festwochen and Salzburger Festspiele put Austria at the epicenter of global high culture (Viesand et al., 2002: 92).

## Youth Subculture and “Postmodern Axiology”

Seventy years ago, in his novel *The Island*, Aldous Huxley drew a pessimistic view of a new world that does not recognize any purpose beyond body pleasures and doesn't choose methods to reach this goal, or interferes with human development since the embryonic phase through scientific means. He describes such an order as a system imposed by a despotic dominant minority. Huxley talks about infants that are made to never touch books by means of electroshock, about children who blush when family, father, mother, brother, uncle, aunt are mentioned, about “twins” whose intellectual level is petrified because of the possibility to engage them in crude work, crowd that hate countryside and mountainous areas but love open sports, savages with heads poisoned with Shakespeare. Today the picture equivalent to that drawn by Huxley would be that of World Cup, Spanish, Turkish or Indian soap operas, videogames and movies, hormone tomatoes, national lottery, online studies, e-library... This is a period when the individual is lost within the crowd and we are living hyperdemocracy and don't find people like Erasmus of Kant anymore to rebel against individual passions in the name of humanity and justice (Avci, 1999: 8-18). Popular culture is linked to the hedonistic trinity of the 60's: sex, drugs and rock & roll. During the 60's songs called for enjoying the moment, like “But I Might Die Tonight”, “Someday never comes”, “Get it While You Can” (Janis Joplin), “Let Live for Today” (The Grass Roots). The time has even been labeled as the time of rampant hedonism, of uncontrolled abandonment to all kinds of passions. (Harris, 1994: 103-104) The vocabulary of Albanian youth music contains low, aggressive, anti-cultural expressions, like “I don't give a damn”, “I'm an outlaw, I respect my laws”, “Bloody Boyz”, “My spirit's like an hurricane”, “My nerves are breaking”, “make it hot”, “Alcohol, whatever you want, any color you want, however you want”, “You are a junky, you keep a knife to mess with me”, etc. (teksteshqip.com) This is anti-art itself, lexical and language bastardization, immorality in action.

The climate created by economic globalization and intellectual vulgarization and mediocrity has been the target of many different circles. During a ceremony in Brazil in 2007, Pope Benedict XVI blamed popular culture for the spread of immoral sexuality while praising modesty and honesty at the time of extreme hedonism. He blamed media for deriding marriage and virginity and expressed thoughts against drugs, violence, corruption and enticement to wealth and power. Since the 90's he had criticized Bob Dylan's performance about Pope John Paul II (msnbc.msn.com).

The influence of consumerist culture is also seen in economized sport transformed into a kind of neo-paganism, a quasi-religion and generator of hooliganism and fan violence. While sport should connect people, today it has become a scene where hate against the other, in terms of club or nation and race, explodes. The social identity of sport fanaticism has now taken the form of a subculture, becoming a subidentity that protects itself through any means, even aggressive and hooligan ones. Youth aggressiveness is a matter touching the conscience of contemporary society and this field of concentric circles is widening by everyday with the number of intolerant pupils rising. A considerable part of them cannot even bear their families and parents, let alone opponents of any kind. They express nuances of violence against people with different views, from sport to ideological, ethnical and religious adherence. The causes of such a state are many. The society in general is not a stable one but a society of much turbulence and tensions, of cultural and especially political aggressiveness and this generates violent youngsters who show their superiority not with values but with anti-values, not through the power of reason and intelligence but through muscles and sticks. Analysis show that the means of mass communication too increase the level of violence through their

broadcasts full of guns, rifles, swords, punches, tanks... Low education and deethicization of society also play a role. Moral values are in their lowest. Nobody cares about morals and ethic. All are inclined towards utilitarianism and hedonism, towards moment's profit and pleasure (which can be the stealing of a purse, adultery or beating the opponent sport fan). Modern society in general is in crisis and the greatest thinkers of the time, like Rene Guenon, Ivan Kropke, etc. speak about this.

A study made this year in Macedonia by UNICEF with students of 7-th, 8-th and high school 1-st and 2-nd degrees (with 2114 from 30 schools) shows that children from 11 to 15 years old not rarely are consumers of alcohol and tobacco. According to sociologists, "consumption of alcohol among young population, especially among school youth, is a reflection of pop culture, of the weakening of family and traditional culture, of the fading of parent authority and the acceptance of influences by mental globalization. The global secular culture attempts to break the taboos and prohibitions. Helped by TV and internet, movies and especially sport, it targets youth as the "worthiest consumer" (kohaere.eu) Data about drug usage are terrifying, in the country as well as in global framework. According to J. H. Gatto, the industrial project that destroys personality, personal freedom and traditional morals, separated children from the real world, by advancing the authority of business and of the political state against tradition, family and religion, brought about the state in which people have problems with themselves as well as others (psychological and social problems). According to Al Gore (2000) 55 % of Americans are mentally disturbed and need therapy (Gatto et.al., 2008: 41).

We can say that the hedonism of the time continually creates icons "adored" by the crowd, Popular culture adores some of them like Hugh Hefner, Richard Branson, Merlin Monroe, Kennedy, Paris Hilton, Christiano Ronaldo, Eminem, Brad Pitt... (moreintelligentlife.com) The fame pushed by media and missionaries of superficial culture, increase the number of followers of the machine that produces hedonism of forms like Big Brother, Macedonian Idol, Golden Cage, etc.

### **Postmodernism, information ignorance, *alias* Facebook mania**

As it is known, the great narrative of modern philosophy or the totalizing narrative includes the discourse on progress, emancipation and freedom which affirm universality. All these grand myths that contain historical messianism have to do with the future, the idea expected to get realized. The essence of modernism is the idea that history has a progressive significance; that it advances towards a final perfection (*endism*). Some dramatic events that have shaken the 20-th century (like Chernobyl, Berlin Wall, the dissolution of communism) have been perceived as the drowning of the ideals and goals of illumination spirit, as the dissolution of the great emancipation projects (Kullashi). (Salihu, 2009: foreword). A crisis of these narratives is going on recently, conditioned by scientific developments and ending in disbelief in great narratives: the postmodern. Habermas says the modern is a project destroyed or done with. Lyotard says that after the dissolution of meta-narratives we are in a state of the immeasurability of the heterogeneousness of discourse games irreducible to each other (Salihu, 341-342).

One of the characteristics of the postmodern is doubt about everything. In this time, relativity is the norm (Sardar, 2010: 263). Postmodernism constitutes a view that was developed as an answer to the crisis caused by modernity, a worldview with evident reflections on the thought of the last 20 years. This polysemic notion is now widely used in art and social sciences literature and it contains elements like game, chaos, partiality,

## Youth Subculture and “Postmodern Axiology”

schizophrenia, polymorphism, dissolution, surface, collage, lack of identity, anarchy, intertextuality... (Dibra, 2007: 24-25). Some other designations about it are: “disbelief in meta-narrations”, “rebellion against human monotony imposed by the modern way of life which melts all distinctions in its boiler,” “a break of ties with the aesthetic space of modernism”, “core of post-criticism and policy of interpreting today”, “schizophrenic period of consumer society”. Postmodernism which holds a valuable place in the critics towards the western way of life and thought, has become an important point of interest by intellectuals in the west and beyond. Since the 70’s it has been judging all values and institutions sanctified by the modern period.

The well-known scholar Z. Sardar says that postmodernism is “a logic of late capitalism”, a part of the linear trajectory that starts with colonialism, continues with modernism and ends with postmodernism. He asserts that something like the Truth does not exist at postmodern times. Everything that attempts to offer us the truth is nothing but a deceiving legerdemain. Postmodernism suggests that an ultimate reality does not exist. Instead of it we have an ocean of images, a world where the distinction between the image and material reality has dissolved. Postmodernism describes the world as a videogame, in which we administer our movements around, make battles in cyberspace and make love with the flow of digital information. We swim in an endless sea of images and stories that form our perceptions and individual “reality” (Sardar, 2010: 234).

The reality of our time is that of the information highway, of information society, when post-industrial technologies are one of the most influential factors in human’s and society’s life. The society of the beginnings of the 3-rd millennia lives with the postmodern and futurological concept of the information society which suggests that the essential factor of social development is the exploitation of scientific, technical information, all in the framework of the so-called “the fourth sector” of economy. Theoreticians like Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Manuel Castells assert that since the 70’s the passage from the industrial society into the information society has been realizing globally. On the theoretical plan, information society is closely tied to post-industrial production (D. Bell, A. Toffler). The main protagonist of this theory is the Japanese E. Masuda. The Spanish sociologist of information society Castells, uses the term “internet galaxy” regarding this society, which replaces that of Gutenberg. The young population is especially “organically” tied to this galaxy. The juvenile culture has generated a parallel society (*Parallelgesellschaften*), that of the youth world which breathes with the internet, the magic web. It is the *computopia* (Y. Masuda), a surreal world that has computer in its epicenter. This is verified by a note I encountered some days before while surfing on the internet: “If it was not for internet, I’m sure half of Macedonia would go mad” (facebook.com/16.03.2011).

Facts show that a good part of people today, especially young people, are victims of social networks, especially of Facebook, one of the greatest superpowers of the web. It is like a virtual “state” with more than 500 million citizens, most of whom are under 34 years old (72%). Every fourth person who surfs on the web has a Facebook account. The last year 742.400 people in Macedonia were connected to Facebook. It is suggested that Microsoft has made usage of computers easier. Google helps in looking for information. Youtube entertains. Facebook has the advantage of emotional investment by its users, making us laugh, shiver, contract in front of our photos we look at later, worry when nobody answers our sharp notes, wonder when we see somebody fattened after high school, change our status to “married” after marriage and to “single” again after divorce. Facebook has changes our social DNA, making us much more open. As the inventor of

Facebook (Zuckerberg) says, company's mission is to make the world more open and connected (Fletcher, 2010).

People attached to this network have been called as *facebookaholics* by some, a category of people who take a look at the network as soon as they wake up or have some spare time, or get back from school, after dinner, while making homework, before going to sleep. Other designations about FB are *facebook addicts*, *facebookers anonymous*, *facebookacy*: a disease that has appeared in Norway and implies being too much attached to the "king of internet". A wise man of our times says internet is a way to spend the time that nobody gives us back. Others have expressed complaints like "How Facebook Stole my Life". A study from Switzerland (Eidenbenz, 2001) has established that internet addicts spend averagely 35 hours a week on the internet, out of profession engagement. However, less than 35 hours a week on the internet might cause negative effects or be about addiction symptoms (el-hikmeh.net). Computopia, the utopia world of computer is also linked with sectors of popular culture. It promotes pop-images, has to do with the process of disneyfication (Viesand et al., 2002: 143), with music and fashion industry, with the mythology of being young (Rowe, 1996: 17). The first edition of the Albanian magazine *Facebookmania*, features the main actors of Albanian pop culture, like Blero, Agnesa Vuthaj, Rozi, Hueyda el Saied, Bojken Lako, Kaltrina Selimi, Genta Ismajli, etc.

Network mania also causes problems about education. Most children pass their winter holidays in front of the magic screen of computer or TV, because these two components of contemporary life exert much more attraction than the classical tools of culture and information like books, magazines, newspapers, etc. The colored world of the screen is more easily consumed and more attractive on first sight because it offers everything as ready and is present in every house. All of us are hooked up in a virtual world that feeds us awry information, bombards us with needed and unneeded things and treats us like slaves of consumerist society. The man of today, especially the young, is not socialized with books. In fact he barely knows it. It is residuary and boring to him. Many finish the school without opening a book, an absurdity of the time we are living in. While book has been the closest friend for man during the past, today it is put for décor on ultramodern shelves, just like a vase, glass or painting. A few days before I saw on TV a kind of furniture which included a simulation of books, a library with encyclopedias and thick books from outside and empty inside. This is the reality of our time when book is vulgarized and killed, when the rich scoundrel deceives other with his false library. This is the time when PC is the technological master of the house excluding reading, talking, traditional hours, stories, tales... For the teenager world of our time, the book is *out*; it engages with iPad, iPhone, Facebook, walkman, etc. There's no time for the book which is considered as *démodé*. Unfortunately this is the state of the globalized, technologic new generation, of the e-society or e-misery I would say. A generation that doesn't even know the elementary terms of communication, that has a poor language full of lingual idiocies and barbarisms, without taste or tact. Internet mania of youth is addicting people everyday who express their creativity by communicating through distance with the world, by writing and rewriting mutilated words and sentences and reading very little. We should emphasize that unfortunately internet is very little used for information in our country but for entertainment and spending time mostly, whereas in developed countries it is mostly used for research and study. Some have described internet as better than mother's milk, whereas in general it produces ignoramuses, offering deformation as much as information so that no distinction remains between the Golden Book and a voluminous classical work. The postmodern in alliance with the magic network are narrowing the world every day,

## Youth Subculture and “Postmodern Axiology”

metamorphosing many dimensions of human development and of our daily order. The ignoramus in action can be seen in the constellation of the idols of the time who do not have elementary information about things but are taken as referential persons by teenagers, as “secular icons”. A famous singer (Ch. Aguilera) was asked where the Cannes Film Festival was to be held this year. Another (B. Spears) doesn't like fish from Japan, a country she thinks is in Africa. A basketball player (Sh. O'Neal) who was asked by journalists whether he had visited the Pantheon in Athens, answered that “he doesn't remember the names of clubs he had visited”.

### Conclusions

A considerable part of our youth, unfortunately live in palaces of cartoon (Bashgil), in a postmodern utopia, without looking life in the eye. The consumerist culture makes them hip-hop generation, screenagers and addicts to time's manias, follower of the postmodern religion (Lady Gaga: “Pop culture is my religion!”) (delo.si/zgodbe) They lack guidance about the way of learning and spiritual support, this being the main cause of desperation, pessimism and spiritual destruction (Bashgil, 2009: 16-17). Many people reach success and get to positions in the society they don't deserve, but this doesn't mean they are happy too. The search for happiness somewhere outside us, in fame, wealth and power, is an optical illusion in the dry, thirsty desert. Students as apprentices of life must learn the art of living. Education institutions are obliged to sow in young people good manners through which they will attain to success and happiness, and protect them from ugly manners. The *ethic will* must be aroused in them and they must be made possessors of the spiritual power that will enable them to choose and realize good deeds and get away from ugly models (Bashgil, 2009: 38), from slavery to beastly instincts and passions. An education far from the heart and spirit is deficient and cannot reach fruitful results. Unfortunately, elementary schools, high schools and universities in our time pursue economic goals instead of intellectual and spiritual ones. They tell new generations they need such knowledge that would open the doors of success for them, the latter being measured by monetary achievements. Whereas the main goal of education must be the education of mind, the balance between the inspired soul, the irascible soul and the reasonable soul, moral and intellectual perfection. To conclude: The ignoramus and the consumer of superficial culture must leave the scene and be replaced by those who know how to live and hold in their hands the sails of the ship in the postmodern ocean of globalism.

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## Ali Pajaziti

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