

# **RISK AND PLEASURE IN ROMANTIC DISCOURSES: PROBLEMATIZING THE PHENOMENON OF GLOBAL YOUTH MARKETING IN KENYA**

Mitenga Peter Otieno  
I Choose Life- Africa NGO Nairobi, Kenya

Email: mitengapeterm@yahoo.com

*The youth sexual relationships in urban Africa are being socially constructed as an appropriate expression of intimacy, but also as a statement about a particular kind of modern identity. Kenya burgeoning commercial and the public sector have been embraced by global changes and today have reached the highest point of capitalism and has become a preserve or marketplace of sexual information, enticing eager audiences with expert radio programs, newspaper gossip columns, foreign romance novels. Western pornographic films and bikini-clad cover girls staring the soap operas on television and smuggled DVDs tend to expand the sexual marketplace which in turn serves to further codify the category of youth, as development agents and commercial advertisement seek to appeal and to shape its young audience. I argue that the new shape of social and economic cohesion emerging in Africa now must be understood within the context of the consumer culture and trends moderated by technology based on commodities rather than physical ventures. New forms of romance mediated by the internet and global economy tend to emerge and alter non-heteronormative sexualities in diverse locales; short-change the diasporic cultures and intimacies; triggered commoditized sex and romance in tourist circuits; and transformed and transgressed family relationships. Consequently, the results of what we have in urban Kenya, is the youth suffering with what I call 'deranged cosmology'. By reviewing literature from multiple works, this paper intends to delve into what it means to be male and female in modern Kenyan contexts; assess different ways in which sexualities have been constructed, performed, and resisted by the youth.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Not long ago, in his seminal presentation made in Riverwood': (dis)locating identities and power through Kenyan pop music, Mbugua Wa Mungai argued that there is a vast popular cultural industry boiling up in Nairobi's prominent street River road. That a dominant cultural form found in the metropolises in form of hip hop is hybridizing and localizing, producing new cultural matrices in urban Kenya (Mbugua, 2008: 10). Mobile phones, cyber cafes, sleek cars, women and sex are all imbued in the hip hop ethos that give voice to the subcultures that are producing and circulating it. As shown in the a new and democratizing cultural force, rap levels the playing field, opening doors to new cultural players, circumventing the old guard and corporate sharks ready to pounce on and exploit all new alternative cultures.

In Nairobi, bill-board and television advertisements for western commodities have increased and enlarged marketplace and whetted appetite for youth consumption. As the speed of consumption increases, so does the lack of satisfaction, and thus the level of consumption (Howe and Strauss 1993: 14). The consumption is endless, while the restlessness with what is actually being consumed is growing. Food is eaten quickly. "Buy and toss" is turned into a consumption ideology. Everything is actually being consumed: lovers, marriages, friendships, foods, toys, clothing, furniture, homes, cities, towns and villages – everything (Wekesa, 1999:19). In the midst of this rapid-fire consumption, respect and tradition are being forgotten. The youth are being pushed into a lifestyle that resembles a horse race. Life's tempo and speed are constantly being increased, while life itself

becomes more and more of a competition: reckless youth, pelvic display, push-up bras, Gosford miniskirts, spray-on jeans, low-cut tops, bare legs, bare arms, bare ankles, G-strings or even buttock cleavage, providing the displayer is young enough to get away with it. Consequently, such an obsession self is sold today as semaphoring liberated female sexuality and thus brings the "new" debate about raunch culture and its bed partner, a sexualised consumerism apparently determined to turn tots into spendthrift tarts. See (Toop 1984; George 1988 and 1998; Gilroy 1991 and 1994; Dyson 1993 and 1996; Rose 1994; Lipsitz 1994; and Kellner 1995).

This paper therefore, intends to establish the connection between consumerism, marketplace and the creation of youth subcultures. I seek to answer questions such as: how are the urban youths in a globalised environment challenging and re-interpreting existing social imageries about them as irresponsible, vulgar, rebellious and dangerous social entities, and how are these imageries shaping their expectations and the social realities they encounter on daily basis via the media advertising and the internet? How are youths using the borrowed marketplace to reconstruct alternative social and political frameworks that can 'liberate' them from the infinite contradictions of underdevelopment? How is the marketplace altering notions and manifestations of intergenerational relationships characterized by indifference, differences, disagreements and conflict in urban spaces in Nairobi?

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE YOUTH AND YOUTH SUBCULTURES IN AFRICA**

There is a pressing need for scholarship to look closely at the challenges and opportunities facing young people in urban Africa, and the different ways they are engaging with western media and lifestyles. Ostensibly, tis a yawning gap in the emerging literature on Africa the fascinating ways in which urban African youths interpreting and responding to the opportunities confronting them through the instrumentality of the World Wide Web (www), media and the cyber-cafes. (Wekesa, 1999) A large percentage of research in the field of youth culture focuses on the multiple ways in which youth are marginalized, and exploring their identities within the borders, and cracks of society. In contrast, there is comparatively less research which focuses on youth agency – how youth move forward to create new cultural and social worlds despite their marginalization. We need more studies both of how youth act as agents in their own lives, but also of innovative programs designed to serve urban and marginalized youth.

it is clear that every nooks and ,ugh least favoured in the global digital revolutionAltho ,cafes-crannies of the urban African space is witnessing an amazing proliferation of cyber playing cafès are-There is no doubt that cyber .patronized almost exclusively by youths -creating and re-significant but unacknowledged transformative functions in terms of re ,perhaps also radical and alternative paradigms and visions of development ,inventing new .for youths accessing a variety of global cultural forms and contents<sup>1</sup>

All around the world -- and in Kenya -- we are experiencing globalization. An important anchor of this globalization process is the culture of consumption. Today, Nairobi has become the focus of America/European desire and fantasy. This time it is the turn of the media, advertising and youth culture to imagine in New York, London, Paris and Amsterdam.

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<sup>1</sup> Youth culture can be defined in different ways: ranging from cultural expressions in a more narrow sense which are actively being created by young people, to a broader concept which encompasses also cultural forms such as behaviour which is being created and upheld by the young. (cf. Wulff 1995: 10) Definitions of the term youth are equally complex, but in the social sciences youth is commonly understood as a social category which is constructed in discourse and which does not adhere to strict biological age limits. (Bourdieu 1993, cf. Bayart 1993)

These imagery has become more and more prominent in youth culture. American things and European faces have filtered into the chilly arena of the super- cool. Increasing numbers of magazine and fashion models have American and European features.

What this globalized lifestyle culture of consumption really means is this “the embracing of an American lifestyle by the entire world through the vehicle of international companies.” America’s economic power, having been transformed into political and cultural strength, has an influence over the entire world. And what we are seeing is societies becoming dependent on “brands.” All over the world now people drink the same sodas, eat the same hamburgers and consume the same kind of pizzas. They wear the same clothing and shoes. They listen to the same music and dance the same way. Children play with the same toys, grow up listening to the same fairy tales and identify with the same heroes. It is a globalized culture of consumption of single variety. But the culture of consumption emerges not only when it comes to goods. It is also visible in the speeding up of lifestyles. Life in the cities of the world is speeding up. From cars to computers, we see it everywhere; it is as though an endless panic and restlessness is being conceived and created everywhere we look. The philosophy of living for the day and forgetting about tomorrow seems to have become the philosophy of societies everywhere. We are turning into a society of people who speak in careless, short, rapidly consumed sentences, a society constantly running after something, but never attained it. Perhaps it is because the elderly move more slowly that we even seem to evaluate them less these days

Scholars from various fields have written about the powerful impact of popular and consumer cultures on youth identities and cultures (Appadurai, 1990; Giroux, 1992, 1994; Pyke, 2000; Silverstone, 1994). For youth from immigrant families, popular and consumer cultures are significant sources of information about "America" and being "American" (Olsen, 1997; Pyke, 2000). First- and second-generation youth of color, in general, are affected by the dominant messages of Whiteness, which pervade popular and consumer culture (Olsen, 1997; Pyke, 2000). Young women, in particular, are vulnerable to racialized images of gender and sexuality as reflected in and promoted by dominant forms of popular and consumer cultures. Gender, race, and class inform the process of Americanization, including racialized sexualization, for first- and second-generation Asian American young women. This paper examines the way first- and second-generation Asian American women interpret and reinterpret popular representations of their positions in the United States. It includes a review of the literature, a brief description of two qualitative studies, data from a sample of Asian American high school girls and a sample of college students, and discussion of the implications of the findings.

## **THE YOUTH AND MCDONALDIZATION OF NAIROBI: FM, TELEVISIONS, NEWSPAPERS AND THE INTERNET**

The cultural conditions which constructed and promoted a consumer ethos in Nairobi during the mid nineties included at least four broad trends: 1) the saturation of the United States products and other non-utilitarian commodities. 2) Democratization of consumption and increased encapsulation of teens and children by marketers and advertisers. 3) The salience of publicity and promotion, including ideologies of self- promotion. 4) Liberalisation of airwaves and emergence of new private owned FM and television stations. The liberalization of airwaves in the early 1990s also led to the explosion of FM radio stations. There are about 21- one FM stations with four of these owned by religious groups, especially those of the Pentecostal/ charismatic variety. The media expansion in Kenya that has seen

growth in the print and electronic media outlets can be last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The 1990s besides being associated with the opening of the political and democratic space in the country also gave impetus to the media industry to diversity and grow. Part of this growth was aided by globalization which ensured that information and communication technology penetrated even those societies that had otherwise been closed to the rest of the world. Kenya was no exception to the exponential expansion of the cell- phone, the internet and other forms of wireless communication revolutionized how people interacted and transacted social and economic relations. The liberalization of the airwaves in the later years of the 1990s reached a climax in the early year of the new century with the exponential growth of the frequency modulation (FM) radio stations. There is no doubt that these FM radio stations have improved both the quality and quantity of news available to Kenyans. These are family FM which reaches about 85% of Kenyans throughout the country, Jesus Kenya has vibrant print media and numerous newspapers, magazines and tabloids, religious and secular, are available. The print media now have local celebrity corners a gossip in many newspapers and magazines that are popular with youth and young children, teens and pre- teens, for example, Buzz, tickles, pulse and young nation, to mention just but a few. Religious papers and magazines have also grown greatly. Gang music is claiming its place in the print media as gospel music ratings are given significant coverage.

## **OF NOKIA/COCA COLA AND ALVARO: ADVERTISING AND THE YOUTH COSMOLOGY IN NAIROBI**

Almost ninety percent of advertisements in Nairobi have women in them, even a recent car tire promotion featured an almost nude dark girl depicted to originate from a rough side of the country only traversed by ‘good tires? Nudity, sex and relationships especially involving the youth has been the theme of many advertisers in Kenya. Since its introduction, advertising to young people has been regarded by many as unethical. This is because youths are seen to be highly impressionable to advertising influence. Furthermore they are at an age where they are forming their identity, attempting to make sense of cultural meanings and wanting to form social groupings. Academics have argued that these social groupings are strongly formed by what the media and advertising portray as the accepted norm. And this is where the problem lies.

Advertising often portrays images that are unobtainable and puts value on characteristics, which are undesirable. Critics argue that advertising is responsible for a new breed of youth culture, characterized by materialism, money and the social status they bring. Consequently this places pressure on young people to conform to these..... but not necessarily realistic norms (Stransburber and Wilson, 2002, pg 58). Advertising and promotion professionals have openly admitted that young people are one of their most lucrative markets (Belch and Belch, 2004 pg 675). As their buying power has increased they have warmed to advertising more so they previous generations. Even as early as 1997 a study of 800 adolescents found that watching considerable amounts of television is directly

LINKED TO PURCHASING PRODUCTS THAT RESULT IN SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE (STRANSBURGER AND WILSON, 2002, PG. 58). RESEARCH HAS FOUND THAT ADVERTISING HAS ALSO CONTRIBUTED TO GLOBALISATION. COMPANY MERGERS HAVE SEEN ORGANISATIONS BECOME TRANSNATIONAL AND CONSEQUENTLY ADVERTISING NOW HAS AN INCREASED CAPACITY TO REACH A GLOBAL AUDIENCE. CORPORATIONS SUCH AS McDONALDS, COCA-COLA AND LEVI HAVE ALL DEVELOPED A GLOBAL BRAND. IN 1999 McDONALDS SPENT \$60-65 MILLION ON ADVERTISING ALONE, WHICH WAS UP ON THE PREVIOUS YEAR’S SPENDING (CUNNINGHAM AND TURNER, 2002 PG 204-205). THIS SHOWS JUST HOW MUCH FUNDS ARE PUT INTO ADVERTISING AND THE VALUE CORPORATIONS PLACE ON IT. FURTHERMORE ALL OF THESE THREE COMPANIES ACTIVELY TARGET YOUTH. FOR THIS REASON MANY CRITICS ARE SCEPTICAL OF GLOBALISATION AND GLOBAL MARKETING.

As has been mentioned, there is a predominance of advertisements in the media that

young people are exposed to. This is because of the free market economy, which is based on the principle that each individual in the society is free to choose his or her own economic activity (Cronje et. al: 2004). This is typical of a capitalist state in which the manufacture of goods is superseded by branding. Advertisements tend to influence youth in the formation of a culture that is based, among other things, on consumption. Although advertisements share many similarities regardless of the media in which they appear, this research is concerned with magazine advertisements. Print advertisements are made up of various elements, including logos, images and words, these elements provide analogies that are linked to the product being advertised. Shields (1994: 1) states that as a result:

*Adverts' pervasiveness has called forth popular and academic discourses about how these images are implicated in the on-going construction and maintenance of gender identities and social relationships between women and men. Shields observes that the media construct gendered identities through advertising images. She is not alone in the investigation of gender and advertisements.*

Several scholars, e.g Goffman (1979), Schroeder and Borgerson (1998; 2005), Waters and Ellis (1996) Overland (2003), among others, have also analysed the nature of gendered representations in advertisements. Schroeder and Borgerson (2005: 15) point out that:

*Marketing representations remain embodied and embedded within a myriad of historical, cultural, and social situations, contexts, and discourses. At times this image creation draws upon .... representations of cultural difference, group identity, and geographic specificity.*

This assertion would mean that for many people advertisements depict recognisable moments from society's ways of life. The question arises whether the advertisements reflect societies' 'realities' or hypothesized/ 'imagined' reality. It is one of the aims of the study to examine the relationship between audiences and the 'reality' presented by advertisements. It is useful to investigate the maps of meaning that are depicted by advertisements and how these are interpreted by their audiences. Some studies, including the one that I conducted in 2003, are based on an interpretative textual analysis of advertisements with the intention of finding out techniques of appeal (e.g Ndlangamandla, 2003). The present study builds on this by attempting to find out the actual interpretation of advertisements by a youth audience. Audience research takes into consideration the interpretation of a group or groups of audiences. This is partly based on the assumption that advertisements are prescriptive and that the audience will agree or disagree with the message given by the advertisement's discourse.

To echo this notion, Shields (1994) advocates that the examination of the interplay between individual interpretive freedom (agency) and textual (structural) messages is necessary for the text/audience relationship to be understood. Previous research has often emphasized that 'ads make identities available to consumers as raw materials for identity construction' (Elliot, 1997 quoted in Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005). Such an approach seems to imply that there is a 'correct' interpretation of the advertisements, and that this meaning flows from the advertisements to the consumer (Puntoni & Ritson, 2005).

## **THE G-STRING AND SEX MADNESS: THE DRESSING CODE AND YOUTH DESIGNS**

Clothing research has attracted renewed interest in anthropology over the past two decades, experiencing a florescence that had been kept within bounds by reigning theoretical paradigms. The works have been influenced by general explanatory shifts in anthropology,

which inform disparate bodies of clothing research that otherwise have little unity. The most noticeable trend is a preoccupation with agency, practice, and performance that considers the dressed body as both subject in, and object of, dress practice. The turn to consumption as a site and process of meaning making is evident also in clothing research. Dress has been analyzed, by and large, as representing something else rather than something in its own right, although new efforts to reengage materiality suggest that this approach is changing. Little work has been done on clothing production issues, though some scholars examine the significance of dress in the context of the entire economic circuit and the unequal relationships between its actors. In Nairobi, the type of clothes the youth wear sends signals to the bystanders of a particular meaning. The obvious being 'we are youth'

Attitudes of the youth in Nairobi wearing G-strings vary, as usual with revealing clothing, often on the same lines as anything showing buttocks, cleavage, breasts and other sexually-associated parts of the body. Some find it acceptable while others find it offensive. By the late 1980s, the design had made its way into most of the Western world, and G-string underwear became more and more popular through the 1990s. As of 2003, thong underwear is one of the fastest-selling styles among women and currently gaining popularity among men. One advantage attributed to the wearing of thong underwear is that no visible panty line can be seen even under a thin, light-colored or skin-tight garment, which makes for a more attractive appearance.

Although the popularity of wearing thong underwear in America has taken off only in the last decade, in Eastern and Northern Europe it has been common for many more years, and is considered commonplace today. In recent years the hip hop and R&B music industry has also helped to promote the G-string, mostly under its American nomenclature of 'thong' by composing songs about it and featuring artists clad in them. Artists include Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera and Lil' Kim. One example of music that popularized this undergarment is the "Thong Song" by Sisq which was released in 2000. G-strings have become icons of pop culture, often with pop female artists wearing clothing that is revealing enough that their wearing of a thong is obvious, and thus the younger generation of American females following suit has increased the popularity of wearing thong underwear.

As is the case with many icons of pop culture, G-string underwear is not without its own controversies. In 2002 when the G-string made its entry into the Kenya market, supermarket and a certain shopping mall along the Muindi Mbingu street, in Nairobi got into trouble with Christian Churches who objected to marketing of the G-string, claiming they are too sexually suggestive. In April 2002, G-string underwear was at the centre of a media uproar after a headmistress of a school in Kakamega in western Kenya forced female students to lift their skirts before entering a school hall, in a so-called crackdown on G-string underwear. In May 2003, the head teachers Association meeting in Mombasa voiced concern that girl pupils as young as 10 were wearing thong underwear to school. This incident led to a media debate about the appropriateness of G-string underwear and the sexualization of children. These actions are believed to have been prompted by both the deliberate and inadvertent exposure by young women of their G-string as well as a current trend at the time of men wearing their pants so low down that the pubis was exposed. While this type of swimsuit is quite common for European women, more and more youth in Nairobi are beginning to wear them not only as underwear but as swimwear in public. Although it is likely that this is a consequence of an increasing liberal society in Urban Kenya, the expansion of marketplace and media advertisements has tended to relativise the cloth among

the youth. According to the youth, G-strings have emerged in as one of the ultimate symbols of "cool" among Kenya's increasingly sophisticated youngsters, "G-strings are cool," "They empower sexual freedom and choice."

## **OF BIG BROTHER AFRICA, TUSKER FAME AND STREET DANCE IN NAIROBI: CANNIBALIZING WESTERN POP AND GHETTOIZING URBAN KENYA**

Today the marketplace in Kenya is segmented into very precise products. There is "pop" music, "electro-funk", "heavy metal", "death metal" etc. Nightclubs, which are increasingly aimed at the under-18 population, play different types of music on different nights. The nights have different names and attract different groups with different clothes and sub-cultural mores. Nevertheless the bands, the music and their attendant sub-cultures can be sorted according to one criterion: degree of rebelliousness. On average, the Kenyan youth listen to music and watch music videos four to five hours a day, which is more time than they spend with their friends outside of school or watching television. Many scholars have viewed television as the central media influence on adolescents, they use music most to control mood and enhance emotional states.

Brother Africa and Tusker Fame project A good example could be seen in the Big the youth emerged clearly as being part of a ,Here .hosted by a beer company in Nairobi sex and other unconventional manners not seen on television ,culture that is borrowed .occurred for the first timeComments on the show varied from moral outrage, over discussions of the program's intrinsic features, to discussions of the show's cultural resonance. In general, these comments followed a trajectory similar to John Corner's description of a move from use value (social significance) to exchange value (a consumer's product), while at the same time differing from it by still trying to hang onto a separate notion of moral value (what the show should and shouldn't do). Specifically, the reception of Big Brother Nairobi consists of three changes: a shift in critical attitude, a shift in the mode of criticism, and a shift in relationship toward the show's format. Together these three changes reflect the critics' move from a focus on moral value to one on the use/exchange value of the show, while also reflecting differences in the use of moral arguments as a link between critics' cultural concerns and their professional attitude. The locus is the interrelation between the reality television genre, as represented by the *Big Brother Africa* series, and broader social, economic and political developments on the African continent. The series has had profound impacts and consequences on the African continent and its people, particularly, though not exclusively, in those countries where it was broadcast. These effects were unpredictable and sometimes contradictory. They shed light on a range of complex issues all too often cast aside or altogether ignored in discussions of cultural phenomena

This suggests that, contemporary discourse on global cultural flows and related outcomes has moved to the centre-stage in scholarly research and activist realms. It is a discourse that implores scholars to focus on some of the fundamental worldviews on globalisation and the links among different communities in the world as well as ramifications of such links. The space that music occupies in this trajectory is a very central one. Music has subverted the notion of national boundaries and transformed existing spaces and contexts to allow for the emergence of new identifies. For young people in a country like Kenya, music has become the genre that liberates, allows self-assertion and generates the money to finance their imaginations.

An example of a love letter written by a boy to a girl in high school shows clearly how the global discourse on music are captured into the imaginations of these young people.

*....truly can't recall how I suddenly bumped unto you bombastically- your love for me is incomparable as you are the most precious thing I ever wished to have. I just wanna leave you with a song that drives me crazy that of Christina Millan which goes " I look into your eyes and then I know you'll be waiting for me and no matter how long that may be I know you are always there for me...."*<sup>2</sup>

Stuart Hall speaks to this discussion when he argues that the contemporary times like in no other time in history, have witnessed the emergence of voicing of the marginal. This he attributed, not only to the movement of the marginal discourses into the mainstream, but also to the production of a cultural politics of difference, struggles around difference, production of new identities and the appearance of new subjects.<sup>2</sup>

Again, look critically at some of the African-American musical genres and how they are being reused in Kenya. I look at some of the ways in which young people have articulated their identities as urban and modern personae. This articulation has been effected in ways that they reconfigure and re use not just African-American, but also Jamaican and Congolese musical genres. Young people in Kenyan urban centers are sometimes referred to as rootless because they have embraced Western musical genres. Yet young people do explore and recycle identities as they produce outlooks in life that draw on the local and the global, traditional and modern cultural realms. As cultural brokers, they negotiate diverse cultural streams as mix and match ideas from a wide range of images, objects and practices from Kenyan folklore to global fashion. Again an example here is of a letter which captures both the local music genre with excessive borrowing from the western music and expressed in that form of:

*Be peaceful my fiancé, think about me and kiss your right hand on my behalf. Remember to put more effort in your studies. Let us be guided by the immortal principles of true love not lust. I know why this love is untouchable, I feel that my heart just can't deny, each time I look in your eyes, Oh baby, I know why this love is unbreakable...this love is unbreakable .Through fire and flame, when all this over our love still remains....*<sup>3</sup>

Within the globalized culture of consumption, violence and sexuality are two important factors. The society we live in is becoming accustomed to both violence and sexuality. In fact, children and youth in particular are being left to face a life that contains much violence and sexuality. Violence and sexuality are being turned from parts of life into the central aspects of life. We see this in many children's toys, which are often based on the concepts of destruction and violence. The same can be said of films, television series and media news, which so often has themes of either violence or sexuality.

At the same time, you might observe that the characteristics that actually humanize us are constantly being torpedoed by this globalized culture of consumption. "Drink, eat, have lots of sex, travel, fight, be open to violence, be strong, don't feel sorry for the weak -- in fact, drive over the weak. Just don't question the system; don't think too much. Live for today; don't be worried about what tomorrow will bring," we are told by the tools of mass communication, like newspapers, magazines, books, television and radio. These ideas are thereby injected into our cultures over and over.

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<sup>2</sup> Weinstein, D. 1994. "Expendable Youth: The Rise and Fall of Youth Culture." In J. S. Epstein, ed., *Adolescents and Their Music: If it's Too Loud, You're Too Old*, 67-86. New York: Garland.

<sup>3</sup> This song originally known as 'unbreakable' by Westlife ,has been adapted and sang in a local lyric and sang by 'prezzo'



## **CONCLUSION: THE NAIROBI URBAN SPACE AND THE NEW OPORTUNITIES AND NEW CHALLENGES FOR THE YOUTH**

The collective identities of urban youth are shaped by – and expressed through – music, dance, fashion, art, and other cultural forms. Music genres<sup>4</sup> such as hip hop, which originated in poor urban African American neighbourhoods in the United States and represents the lifestyles of impoverished youth, have provided young people with a new form of expression and have influenced their clothing, language, and outlook on life. Other aspects of youth culture are reflected in certain risk behaviours that are especially prevalent among young men in urban areas, including alcohol and drug consumption and engagement in violence.

Globalization has enabled youth culture to become a global phenomenon. Young people are growing up in a world in which goods, capital, technology, information, ideas, and people move swiftly across borders. With the rapid expansion of fast food restaurants, homogenous shopping malls, and young people who dress alike and listen to the same music, city centres throughout the world increasingly resemble each other. Mass media are especially influential in imparting knowledge to young people and socializing them to particular aspirations, values and attitudes, often in contradiction to the traditions of their culture. Watching television, listening to the radio, or surfing the Internet are important not only for the effects they have on a young person's attitudes and behaviours, but also for signifying inclusion and access to knowledge in an increasingly interconnected world.

These realities should pose quite demanding questions to parents, teachers, guardians and policy-makers about 'what to do' about the youth. For instance, what should the society do about the proliferation and intrusion of media – such as the Television, the Internet, mobile telephony, and such others – in our daily lives? How are these media contesting the traditional authority of institutions and cultures, such as churches, schools, communities, family and such others? What can be done to moderate or counter-contest the 'new' and often pseudo-moralities peddled on a daily basis in the print and electronic media? Is it possible to inculcate a culture of a critical engagement with the content of the media that our youth consume daily, in order to help them attain acceptable moral standards? Is it possible to create an environment in which our youth would be able to create a counter-culture to the potent and invasive Euro-American cultures? Related to this question is: who owns these publications, or rather, who sponsors them and what ideological or moral intentions do they have? For instance, an issue of Nare has the Pilsner logo (special edition) on each of its pages? What appears as an editorial subtly endorses the beer 'brand' by proclaiming its producer's support for hip hop. Is this simply an innocuous statement of a benefactor or an ingeniously stated relationship between 'a youth culture' and alcohol? It is probably time that we started to examine seriously the cultural products that our youth are consuming if we wish to properly understand their identities.

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<sup>4</sup> As we note below, hip hop is a broader cultural matrix that includes dance, performance, visual art, style, fashion, and a mode of life; rap is the form of musical idiom that articulates the ethos of hip hop culture. On the relationship between hip hop and rap and for various accounts of their historical genesis and significance, see Toop 1984; George 1988 and 1998; Gilroy 1991 and 1994; Dyson 1993 and 1996; Rose 1994; Lipsitz 1994; and Kellner 1995. This study was carried out as part our forthcoming The Postmodern Adventure, which follows Best and Kellner 1991 and 1997.

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