Longing for the West. Youth Fashion in the 1980s Warsaw[1]

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ABSTRACT:
In the 1980s in Poland, many young people dreamed of having western clothes. They were considered the most fashionable, created/signified the social position and allowed teenagers to *"feel cool"*. On the basis of the ethnographic research, the paper presents the sources of inspiration for the clothing choices and the deeper meaning of fashion in those times. Thus, this text is not only a description of teenage clothing choices, but most of all, it is a story of resistance and cultural changes among teens which led to the collapse of socialistic culture. By referring to postcolonial theories, it is shown how international influences impacted everyday decisions and how they enabled the success of consumerism in Poland.

KEY WORDS
Fashion; subcultures; youth; socialism; postcolonialism; anthropology

Overcrowded open air markets such as *Bazar Różyckiego* in the heart of Warsaw's Praga-North district or exchange organised on *RKS Skra* Stadium were sanctuaries of petty trading. Loud sellers perusing to buy from them, frauds palming copycats of Levi's jeans off on confused and careless passersby who were looking for their dreamt clothes, shoes or foreign currency (to pay on grey market or in special states stores called *Pewex* which were not accepting polish Złoty). Bazaars were one of the main supply chains for many Varsovians in the 1980s — the decade of a big economic crisis in Poland, remembered through the images of empty store shelves — with just vinegar on them — and long queues in front of every shop. When official distribution failed to provide goods, people were forced to develop certain tactics[2] that al-

1 Article is based on my master's thesis *„Hit jak z żurnala!", czyli moda młodzieżowa w latach 80. w Warszawie. Między wielką polityką a prywatną historią*, Warszawa: Instytut Etnologii i Antropologii Kulturowej UW, 2020.

2 I understand term *tactics* in relation to *strategies* as it was proposed by Michel de Certeau. *Strategies* refer to situations in which it is known who has the power and makes the rules and who must obey them. *Strategy* is therefore an activity within certain predetermined norms. *Tactics*, on the other hand, concern more everyday situations when there are no clearly established rules, procedures and hierarchies. The individual must demonstrate

lowed them to independently stock up on the items which were necessary to survive. Common practices include going from one store to another in search of fashionable clothes, standing in long queues and right before the shop's doors to find out that everything was out of stock. If these attempts were unsuccessful, people chose to sew dresses and skirts by themselves, knit their own sweaters or trade T-shirts with their friends and relatives. Many Polish families experienced the same situations as those that my parents used to tell me about. My mother sometimes recalled skipping school to go to drugstores because she had heard that there could be a delivery of very trendy perfumes[3]; my father told me once with pride in his voice that he managed to "catch" a pair of yellow Dr. Martens boots on one of the bazaars for a great sum of money. It was always surreal for me, a child born in the middle of 90s, why people had to put so much effort in shopping. That is why I decided to explore the topic of youth fashion in the 1980s Warsaw. I investigated why teens felt the need to make such sacrifices just to be fashionable and what it exactly meant for them.

It should be noted that in the 1980s consumerism settled for good in the hearts of Poles only after the 1970s. In this decade Poland became more open to the consumer goods from the West due to Edward Gierek's[4] policy which led to international credits. These years of prosperity had woken up consumeristic desires that could not be achieved in the time of crisis of the early 1980s[5]. As a result, young people were often torn in some way between what they wanted and what they could buy. This difficult situation forced them to develop a series of tactics which could enable them to satisfy their needs.

This notwithstanding, the aim of this paper is not to present the aforementioned tactics but to present what was desired and why. The sources of fashion inspirations of teenagers demonstrate that capitalistic countries and youth culture rooted in the West served as the main point of reference for young people. Thus, I analyze how the West was understood by my interlocutors and how they were gaining access to these foreign sources of inspiration. Owing to the fact that this article is based on ethnographic research, interviews with people growing up in the 80s serve as the main source of knowledge for me. I conducted 14 in-depth 90-minute interviews with people in their 50s. All of them had associations with Warsaw — some of them were born and raised there, some of them were living in the suburbs and traveling to the schools there. Therefore, this paper is partly a synthesis of memories of 80s youth living in (or near) the capital city of Poland in regards to fashion and consumerism at that time. What is worth mentioning, referring to the interlocutor's memory is

a certain creativity that allows him/her to go beyond a certain *strategy* and achieve an outcome that does not result from the officially proposed practices. M. DE CERTEAU, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley, 1984.

3 More about how personal connection were important in shortage economy can be found in: J. WEDEL, *The Private Poland. An Anthropologist's Look at Everyday Life,* New York and Oxford: 1986; M. MAZUREK, *Społeczeństwo kolejki*, Warszawa, 2010; N. MAKOVICKY *'Kombinowanie': Agency, Informality, and the Poetics of Self in Highland Poland'*, in: Journal of the Royal Anthropological Society, vol.24(3), 2018, pp. 493–511.

4 First Secretary of the ruling Polish United Workers' Party form 1970 to 1980.

5 J. KOCHANOWSKI, *Tylnymi drzwiami. „Czarny rynek" w Polsce 1944–1989*, Warszawa, 2010.

associated with certain limitations. It would be impossible for people to remember, after more than 40 years, in which year exactly they bought jeans in *Pewex* or exchanged pages of *"Bravo"*, a popular teenagers' magazine, with a friend. Thus, instead of presenting an accurate chronology of events, I present a certain social atmosphere of the era that lasted among young people who attended high schools or universities in the 1980s. Limiting myself only to the youth of Warsaw was dictated by practical reasons — I was recruiting my interlocutors through private contacts, they were my friends' parents and friends of their friends. In this way, I was able to collect numerous memories of people, who can generally be classified as middle class[6]. Besides, I supplemented the interview material with an analysis of three of the most popular magazines containing fashion sections: *„Przyjaciółka"*, *„Przekrój"* and *„Filipinka"*, the latter of which was addressed directly to young people. However, the analysis of the content of these sections is not an essential part of my paper, but it rather serves as illustrations to the memories of the respondents. For this reason, I decided to look at the issues of these magazines published in 1985. I considered this year a perfect illustration of the situation of the 1980s — after the end of martial law in mid-1983 Poland was still in a crisis but gradually products from abroad began to appear on the market thanks to resourceful citizens who were practicing short trade trips to the western countries and other socialists republics with better access to the consumers goods. Consequently, it is crucial to understand that fashion is much more than just clothes. Fashion can be also used as a way to regard economy, social situation, transnational flows and relations, both in economic and cultural sense.

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When I first talked with Wanda, a 51 years old woman, I had already known from her daughter that she had special notebooks where she was collecting pictures from magazines with her idols or with fashionable outfits. She used this technique to create her own book of inspiration, filled with clippings from popular journals, for example *„Przyjaciółka"* ("Female Friend") which was the most popular weekly paper in Poland that was addressed to women from rural areas and factory workers[7]. Owing to its widespread availability and low price, Wanda did not hesitate to cut pictures and pieces out of it. In contrast, there was also another category of journals on the market, too valuable to be destroyed — magazines from the West. One of the most popular was the West German *"Burda"* containing sewing patterns — a necessity for someone who wanted to sew clothes. Wanda was one of many Polish teenagers who was making her own outfits and for her, *"Burda"* was a kind of holiness, so she treated it with notable respect. This special status resulted from limited availability of such magazines on the Polish market, therefore access to them was difficult. Ilona recalled how, with her sisters, they spent lots of time in a bookstore's queue just to buy *"Burda"*. Few times they even asked the shop assistant when there will be a delivery to be the first in the long queue, but even then they did not always manage to get it — it was selling like hot cakes. This example demonstrates how, in the times of shortage

6 M. GDULA, P. SADURA, *Style życia i porządek klasowy w Polsce*, Warszawa 2012.

7 Z. SOKÓŁ, *Prasa kobieca w Polsce w latach 1945–1995*, Rzeszów 1998, p. 85.

economy, the redistribution of knowledge is often based on human kindness. As Janine Wedel pointed out: *"Although information is usually obtained from people in the circle of family and friends, people sometimes also look for it in public places, among strangers. »Everyone asks everyone«"*[8]. *"Burda"* became an important part of social practices, not only in the private, but also in the public sphere. Thus, what was symptomatic of the socialist era, it was easy to privatise something which belonged predominantly to the public domain of everyday life.

The key point in the concept of the magazine's *holiness* was the fact that it was picturing fashion from West Germany. Gosia called *"Burda" "a window to the world"*. It was a real opportunity for anyone who knew how to sew and where to find the proper material. Since using patterns did not require any special manual skills such as designing or inventing the entire outfit from scratch, *"Burda"* greatly simplified the process of creating unique clothes. Thus, they were easy to make by yourself or like Ela did — with the help of her father, who was a professional tailor.

Apart from *"Burda"*, Wanda mentioned *„Przyjaciółka"* as one of the newspapers from which she drew her inspiration. It was a magazine full of advice for adult women where fashion topics were included at the back pages. In the section called *"Something good for everyone"*, next to recipes for herbal masks or homemade remedies, there was plenty of practical information on sewing and modifying clothes such as, for example, instructions on how to make a black and white pullover reprinted from *"Burda"*[9]. Nonetheless, it was only the last coloured page of this magazine which was entirely devoted to fashion. In the photos from the Western magazines such as *"Elle"* or *"Femmes d'Aujourd'hui"*, models presented *"the hottest trends"*. Conversely, *„Przyjaciółka"* adjusted its message to the situation on the Polish market. When foreign magazines presented the return of the 1950s fashion for full skirts, Jadwiga Komorowska wrote in her column: *"A full, pleated skirt is still an unfulfilled dream of many girls and women who want to be fashionable. »There is no other choice but to sew such a skirt or buy it in a boutique« — a saleswoman in a large clothing store said yesterday in my presence. »We have never had them, and I have been working for twenty years. It's just that large factories don't have pleating machines. It's a such pity.«"*[10]

Similar strategy that was adapting fashion trends to the economic situation in the country was also carried out by *„Filipinka"* — a monthly magazine addressed to teenagers. The fashion section was also included on the last page printed in colour. All of the tips were written by the author under the pseudonym Marianna and, just like in *„Przyjaciółka"*, they were accompanied by the reprints from foreign magazines. My favourite example of a creative approach to Western trends is the article *"Locksmith jewels"*, in which the author showed how to create fashionable jewellery using items available in every home such as buttons, rubber seals, pieces of leather and screws. *"I'm not really kidding — now you should wear very large, heavy jewellery with thick oversized sweaters and sweatshirts, oftentimes made of elements serving completely different purposes. This creates eye-catching and stylish items. It is strange that neither the craftsmen*

8 J. WEDEL, op. cit., p. 93.

9 *Pulower czarno-biały*, in: Przyjaciółka, vol. 1, 1985, p. 13.

10 J. KOMOROWSKA, *Stare pomysły w nowym wydaniu*, in: Przyjaciółka, vol. 11, 1985, p. 16. All translations from polish texts are my own.

nor the artists have dealt with the production of this type of jewellery on a larger scale, the boutiques offered only some golden tin stars strung on silk strings. »Prywaciarze« (private entrepreneurs) have always loved and will love kitsch."[11] I would like to emphasize here how the owners of private shops were presented in the quote. The official attitude towards them was negative and the word *prywaciarz* has a pejorative overtone. Private entrepreneurs were charged with an additional tax, which was imposed on a discretionary basis. They also had to take into account the jealous opinions about the legality of their activities and the suggestions of theft, which were spread not only in the official media, but also in the everyday language[12].

A very important figure who influenced the tastes of many Poles was Barbara Hoff, a designer who regularly wrote fashion columns in *„Przekrój"*. Her phenomenon was mainly based on the availability of designs — she created them from commonly available materials that were easy to sew by means of which she managed to smuggle several Western trends to Poland[13]. Her tips were written in a characteristic, razor-sharp style. Hoff was not afraid to openly criticize the supply situation in the country. In her columns, however, she did not leave the readers alone with finding the right clothes. She gave advice on how to creatively use what they already had — she encouraged women to borrow clothes from their fathers or husbands, in some way promoting second hand use and circulation of clothes. Tim Dant called this phenomenon *"familial-sartorial world-view"* — the informal exchange which defines what is actually worn[14].

Hoff presented fashion in an inclusive way. She believed that earlier trends clearly defined what should be worn. As David Muggelton noted, since the 1960s the *"style of the season"* was no longer so important, fashion began to be more varied and in the 1980s this variety was changing rapidly[15]. Nevertheless, Hoff's columns openly expressed what she perceived as inappropriate or worth praising. For example, in the article in which she tries to persuade Polish women to wear wide pants, she wrote in very emotional manner that she was tired of all attempts to convince her readers to accept the new trends: *"I go to the most important fashion centres for the last money I have wrenched from my family, I fly there — on water and dry bread, sleeping at my friends' place under the table — to watch fashion shows and have the freshest, in advance, before the season, not too late, just right time, news. And you don't give a hang about it, because you know better that it won't be accepted, that it isn't for you, because we are simply »too elegant« women to wear global fashion, dress like London, Paris, New York. Only when someone puts her nose abroad does she admit that I am right and she is surprised that the world looks like this and dresses this way"*[16]. Hoff presented Western trends as something explicitly

11 MARIANNA, *Ślusarskie klejnoty*, in: „Filipinka", vol. 2, 1985, p. 16.

12 M. MAZUREK, op. cit; J. KOCHANOWSKI, *Tylnymi drzwiami. „Czarny rynek" w Polsce 1944–1989*, Warszawa 2010.

13 B. CZYŻEWSKA, *Barbara Hoff: Moda poza systemem*, Vouge, July 2019, https://www.vogue.pl/g/3761/barbara-hoff-moda-poza-systemem.

14 T. DANT, *Material Culture in Social World. Values, Activities, Lifestyle*, Buckingham, Philadelphia, 1999, p. 102.

15 D. MUGGLETON, *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style (Dress, Body, Culture)*, Oxford, 2002.

16 B. HOFF, *Moda. Za duże*, in: „Przekrój", vol. 8, 1985, p. 21.

better. Polish women should believe her that this is what must be worn. Fashion must constantly develop, if they hold on to old trends for too long, they will never live up to Western women. By writing this, she showed how the world was valued back then. Her approach to fashion — diligently following all Western trends in some way — suggests that Polish fashion could be considered as a sort of mimicry, which Homi K. Bhabha[17] understood as becoming similar to a colonizer by emphasizing common features, while simultaneously adjusting the copied elements to the surrounding reality.

Recalling postcolonial theory in this case requires some explanation. Some Eastern European scholars noticed that after the fall of communism this region had become an interesting study area for the western academics who, due to their language skills, were able to reach a larger audience[18]. The *"Anthropology of East Europe Review"* published discussion between the anthropologists Chris Hann[19] from UK and Michał Buchowski[20] from Poland, in which the main core arguments concerned different ways of practising anthropology. Hann suggested that the only proper way to do it is to conduct long research in faraway places like it was adopted in British tradition, while Buchowski, aware that Polish academia is not in funds for such field trips, was wondering what anthropologist from Eastern Europe should do then to be consider as equals. As we can see, at the beginning of the 21st century, academia was still thinking that the East should catch up with the West. Anthropologist Hana Červinková[21] recalled this discussion to show that the research on postsocialism could be considered as an example of orientalism, which in turn Edward Said[22] described as a way of thinking that, on an epistemological and ontological level, there are significant differences between East and West. Said believed that this opinion was the basis of the Western domination, and its reproduction only strengthened the relations of power. The Orient can be understood here similarly to the *idea of Europe* — the collective image of juxtaposing *us* Europeans with *others*, non-Europeans. However, this concept can be used much more broadly, also to describe relations within the European continent. Červinková drew attention to the history of post-socialist studies, which were initiated by the Western researchers who sought to describe society after the fall of the Berlin Wall. This approach can be compared to the oriental studies practiced by the colonizers. Červinková pointed out that it is worth turning to postcolonial theory, mainly because its source is the academic activity of the indigenous people who gain the opportunity to create their own language and deal with new research areas themselves.

17 H. K. BHABHA, *Of mimicry and man: the ambivalence of colonial discourse*, in: *Modern literary theory: a reader*, ed. W. Philip, P. Rice, 2nd ed., London, New York, 1992.

18 L. DZIĘGIEL, *Życie codzienne i historia najnowsza — nowe pole badań Etnologa*, in: „Etnografia Polska", vol. XL (1–2), 1996, pp. 11–18.

19 Ch. HANN, *Correspondence: Reply to Michał Buchowski*, in: „The Anthropology of East Europe Review", vol. 23, no. 1, 2005.

20 M. BUCHOWSKI, *Correspondence: Reply to Chris Hann*, in: „The Anthropology of East Europe Review", vol. 23, no. 1, 2005.

21 H. ČERVINKOVÁ, *Postcolonialism, postsocialism and the anthropology of east-central Europe*, in: „Journal of Postcolonial Writing", no. 48:2, 2012, pp. 155–163.

22 E. W. SAID, *Orientalism*, New York, 1978.

Polish literary theorist Maria Janion[23] showed that from the times of Christianization in the lands of Central Europe, it could be observed that Christian missionaries had a contemptuous attitude towards pagan Slavs and their culture. Incorporating Western Slavs to the Latin world equaled with abolishing their own mythology, which is always an important bonding element of local imagination. As a result, the sense of inferiority of one's own culture towards Western culture, cultivated for years, was at the same time accompanied by a sense of superiority over the East, the colonization of which was sought by subsequent generations of Polish commanders. Janion called this phenomenon the *"Polish postcolonial mentality"* — a closed circle of stories about the superiority and inferiority of our culture, accompanied by a feeling of powerlessness and defeat, but also of messianic pride in suffering and merits.

As Ewa Domańska[24] demonstrated, in the first post-war decades USSR was a cultural point of reference for the official Polish culture. However, 1970s' changes in the political sphere made Polish economy more open to the consumerist goods from the other side of the Wall and thus the cultural orientation started turning toward western, capitalistic standards. In this way, the broadly understood West, despite the lack of direct political power over the country, gained an influence on the everyday choices of young Poles at that time.

This theoretical background gives us the context for a deeper understanding of youth fashion. It was not only about what to wear, but also what it meant to wear something. Many of my respondents remembered their favourite clothes very well, most of which came from abroad. As Tomek explained to me: *"clothes made in Poland, they were very decently made and of good quality, it was only the style which was often not like the ones from the West, so longed for and desired. We imagined that everything was better there".*

With no doubt, jeans were the most prominent symbol of the primacy of western clothes. All of the people with whom I conducted interviews remembered their first pair of labelled denim pants. For many of them, it was connected with important memories. Ela got her Wrangler's jeans as a gift from her parents when she started university. Unfortunately, when she first put them on, she burned a hole in them during the biochemistry lab. She was afraid to tell her parents about it because they bought them in *Pewex*. *Pewexes* (this term can be translated as 'Internal Export Company') were founded in 1972. The stores sold goods from abroad which weren't available on the domestic market. They offered a wide variety of products, including clothes, CDs, cosmetics, alcohol and cars[25]. The luxury and exceptional position of *Pewex* resulted not only in its broad offer but mostly from the fact that the store accepted only foreign currencies such as American dollars or Deutsche marks, and PeKaO (state-own bank) checks — an equivalent for dollars was used to control the circulation of foreign currencies. As Jerzy Kochanowski pointed out, at the times of Polish People's Republic there existed a systematic permission to use Polish Złoty

23 M. JANION, *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna. Fanatyzmy literatury*, Kraków, 2006.

24 E. DOMAŃSKA, *Obrazy PRL w perspektywie postkolonialnej. Studium przypadku*, [in:] *Obrazy PRL. Konceptualizacja realnego socjalizmu w Polsce*, red. K. Brzechczyn, Poznań 2008, pp. 167–186.

25 A. BOĆKOWSKA, *Księżyc z Peweksu: o luksusie w PRL*, Wołowiec, 2017.

and American Dollars[26] simultaneously, which had (and probably still has) a strong symbolic meaning. For young people, the easiest way to obtain foreign currency was through a family working abroad who was sending money to the relatives in Poland or was exchanging it during their visits. Tomek visited his family in the eastern Poland a few times to buy dollars from his *"uncle Stach from America"*. As he explained it to me, he did it not because of the affordable prices but because it was much safer to make a transaction with relatives than by buying currency on the streets from strangers, because of the unclear legal status of the latter source. Gosia clarified this to me: *"Oh, and in Pewex, you could pay just with Western currencies, but primarily you had to exchange them to so-called vouchers [PeKaO checks]. It was nonsense! It was prohibited under penalty, it was a crime to trade currencies such as dollars. [...] So firstly, you had to find dollars: buy it secretly from some friends or at the bazaar, and then nobody asked any questions of how you get dollars even though it was politically forbidden — it was the hypocrisy of this system."*

Goods bought in the *Pewexes* had their own luxurious status. Even while buying the cheapest face cream there — Pond's — Gosia felt like it was something special, although its quality was worse than that of Polish creams. It was also possible to buy sweets there, such as Milka chocolate (for about 75 cents) or Coca Cola. Wanda mentioned that as a child she received a PeKaO check as a gift and decided to spend it in *Pewex* on a Snickers. Its taste was so amazing to her that she decided not to eat it right away but to divide it into small pieces and savor it for a few days.

These special feelings towards Western products may have resulted from several things. On the one hand, the quality of foreign goods was higher in comparison to those available on the domestic market. On the other hand, some foreign items were often in the realm of dreams. Coca-Cola in the 1970s *"became a product fully available to the citizens of the Polish People's Republic, for whom holding a can of a Western drink in the hand meant getting closer to freedom, liberty and democracy"*[27]. In the 1980s however it was difficult to access, so finding it was a kind of an achievement which was worth memorising by collecting empty cans and exposing them at the top of the wall units. This approach also applied to clothes — the difficulty which was posed by obtaining a pair of jeans resulted in a much more unique status of this piece of clothing. Thus, clothes can be also associated with a specific symbolism. John Fiske in his book *"Understanding Popular Culture"* regarded jeans as the most popular product of culture, which initially connected almost all age groups, eliminated gender differences and gave people freedom to be themselves. Over time, however, this phenomenon and the extraordinary popularity of these pants turned them into an object of marketing. As a result, in order to generate more profits, the jeans began to be distinguished between the common, regular ones and the brand ones: *"Wearing designer jeans is an act of distinction, of using a socially locatable accent to speak a common language. It is a move upscale socially, to the city and its sophistication, to the trendy and the socially distinctive."*[28]

26 J. KOCHANOWSKI, op. cit., p. 17.

27 W. JASIENIAK, *„Kapitalistyczne podziemie kulinarne", czyli o obecności Coca-Coli w PRL*, 29.11.2015, https://histmag.org/kapitalistyczne-podziemie-kulinarne-czyli-o-obecnosci-coca-coli-w-prl-12302 [accessed on 16.05.2020].

28 J. FISKE, *Understanding Popular Culture*, London and New York, 1994, p. 7.

According to Fiske, American culture is focused on the massification and unification of people, which has contributed to the emergence of the need for the development of individuality and social differentiation. Companies take advantage of this fact by carefully profiling their advertisements to create the impression the jeans are a product which was made especially for you[29] and thus as a result, striving for profit, they impose prices that are much higher the item's production cost[30]. However, in the realities of the People's Republic of Poland, the symbolic aspect of brand clothes was more important than the marketing activities. Contrary to what I thought at the beginning, the phenomenon of western brands was not about the higher quality, but about the fact that it was a specific brand for which they were ready to pay the equivalent of an average monthly salary. Janusz, who bought his first iconic Levis 501 in *Pewex*, recalled that jeans were *"a symbol of Western culture, which everyone admired here, because everyone wanted to have everything just like in the West"*.

My interlocutors pointed out that it was one thing to wear "no-name" jeans or Polish brands and yet something else to wear western Wraglers or Levi's. Janusz gave an example of the native Odra jeans — although they were of good quality and imitated foreign brands by using similar thread colours in the lockstitch machine — were easy to be distinguished from the western one due to the colour of the fabric (not the original indigo shade) and thus they never looked the right way. *"And the sooner jeans washed out, the better they were. As for the first time, I treated them with such devotion that I didn't really want to wash them for few weeks so that they wouldn't get damaged!"*. Therefore, jeans can serve as an excellent example of the fact that objects can turn into symbolic goods which create the image that displays the status of their owner[31].

Inspirations of what was considered to be the evidence of higher social status were taken primarily from the Western popular culture though musicians and subcultures. These images reached the youth also through local press. Janusz mentioned the weekly *"Razem"*, which *"nicely smuggled"* inspirations in the form of posters of the stars attached in the middle. He mentioned that sometimes he managed to get the West German *"Bravo"*, which was hardly available at the time. For Wojtek, this newspaper was the main source of inspiration. It reached him thanks to a friend whose father was a truck driver. He always brought *"Bravo"* with him from his trips to the other side of the Elbe River. After getting the magazine, the friend was selling single pages. Thus, Wojtek could buy only the interesting ones. The most expensive were the posters. Since Wojtek did not care about understanding the text written in German, something else was important for him: *"Finally I could see all of the bands that I was listening to on the radio all the time. It was obligatory to record all of it. And »Bravo« gave me the opportunity to finally see what they looked like so we could imitate them. That's why I started to wear studs, chains, various bandanas [...], in the waist I wore some metal chains instead of a belt."*

Another major Western source of inspiration came from the music videos. Ewa mentioned that one of her friends had the colour TV and the access to MTV, which

29 J. FISKE, op. cit., p. 10.

30 J. FISKE, op. cit., p 14.

31 M. ŻAKOWSKI, *Życie społeczne przedmiotów w kulturze popularnej*, in: *Gadżety popkultury. Społeczne życie przedmiotów*, Warszawa, 2007, p. 9.

was really unusual back then. She used to gather with her friends in front of the TV and together they watched music videos and performances. Once Ewa spotted a video of Tina Turner wearing a short leather skirt. She did not remember the title, but it was probably the clip of *"What's Love Got To Do With It"*. She immediately fell in love with this skirt. Unfortunately, in Warsaw, it was only available at *Różycki's Bazaar* for *"horrendous money"*. Ewa got lucky because her aunts were living in the Western Germany, and they sent her a very similar skirt, though unfortunately in the wrong colour. However, she was too shy to wear it on an everyday basis because it was too striking for the streets of Warsaw.

But not everyone had the access to MTV and the music videos reached them through other channels — mainly via VHS taped illegally from friends. It was an extremely popular phenomenon due to which teenagers did not have to limit themselves only to the music presented on the radio. Some even managed to make some money on it — Bartek whose acquaintance was a VHS producer, could get them very cheaply and then sell them with a profit.

While speaking about their musical inspirations, my interlocutors oftentimes mentioned concerts, both live and recorded on the VHS tapes. In the 1980s, more and more foreign musicians were coming to Poland, for example, Janusz recalled the Iron Maiden concerts. He also noticed that Polish musicians, such as Grzegorz Markowski from one of the most popular bands in Poland — Perfect — were inspired by the Western style, because they could go abroad to do shopping[32]. Conversely, Gosia, who sometimes sold clothes at the Skra bazaar, told me that Polish celebrities bought their clothes there, just like the other citizens, and had to struggle like everybody else.

Such inspirations coming from the outfits of popular musicians can be associated with the phenomenon of the subcultures which became more and more popular in the 1980s. People with whom I have spoken constitute an extremely colourful and diverse group. Their different origins and social background gave me an opportunity to learn about different clothing styles and images. Among them, there were people who considered themselves a part of a subculture, people who were interested in fashion and were actively looking for new ideas and people who simply dressed a bit *intuitively*. With no doubt, those of them who remembered the most stories were the ones who identified themselves with some group, although none of them was able to explicitly call herself or himself a member of just one subculture. Janusz, when I asked him if was a punk after he described to me one of his outfits, replied that *"it had nothing to do with this real punk, more like a rock style, you know. When it comes to music, I was closer to people who were interested in some kind of metal"*. Yet another important style inspiration for Janusz were *poppers* and *depeszowcy* — the fans of the band Depeche Mode. For *poppers,* the most important thing was to look fashionable, to wear original clothes and to smoke expensive western cigarettes. What is interesting, both of these subcultures didn't have any ideology, they only cared about their image. Janusz, who was mixing different styles, can be regarded as an epitome of the phenomenon that David Muggleton associated with postmodernity — the progres-

32 It was a popular phenomenon to travel abroad for shopping, there were organized special trips which main purpose was illegal trade. Its rising popularity caused that polish market was slowly filled with consumer goods, available to buy e.g. on open air markets.

sive blurring of cultural differences which was the result of the weakening ability to resists the inexorable globalization of styles due to the growing media's activity and influence on people's lives[33].

The fashion inspired by popular music, mostly rock, can serve as an interesting perspective to analyze these global flows. While investigating the rock culture, it is important to focus on the social dimension of fashion: clothes, behaviours and customs that created a universal youth language. As Idzikowska-Czubaj[34] noted, this language is mostly visible in the moments of cultural crisis, when the old order is no longer valid. With no doubt 1980s was a decade of big social changes, with *Karnawał Solidarności* in 1980–1981 and rapid developments which were caused by the declaration of the martial law in December 1981. The younger generation became somehow trapped between the collapsing socialism and the economic crisis on the one side and the important influences coming from the western capitalistic culture on the other. As a result, on the one hand, there was a desire to imitate idols, wear original clothes, drink Coca-Cola and smoke Marlboro or Pall Mall cigarettes, on the other hand, everyday life back then was characterized by the empty shops and lack of purchasing power.

As Krzysztof Kosiński[35] claimed, one of the most important elements of the collapsing socialistic order in Poland was the assertive attitude of teenagers to the existing rules. Youth fashion was a sphere of resistance which gave young people an opportunity to create some kind of private sphere in official situations such as schools. An interesting example of balancing on the border between what is acceptable and what can cause a scandal by contesting the social norms is an image of British artist Limahl, a pop singer from the band Kajagoogoo. The key to his success and popularity was his androgynous style which was easy to copy both by boys and girls. Ewa's favourite outfit was a string vest which she first saw on Limahl. Wanda had just one poster in her room — Kajagoogoo — because, as she told me, *"they were so cool and colourful"*. Janusz dreamed of having the same haircut as the members of this band but it was not so easy to find a hairdresser who would be able to cut it that way. Ada was brave enough to cut her hair like the British singer and the result was *"tragic"*. After that, she was wearing a hat all the time to hide it but anyway her teacher was making mean comments about the way she looked. It can be assumed that Limahl's appearance interfered with the gender order in Poland[36], where the standards of behaviour and image of a man were also determined by the state and cultural norms. Perhaps this is why the teachers, fearing this new individualistic trend, had to express their dissatisfaction with some of their students' choices. One of such stories was told to me by my father many times because as a child I used to love listening to it. At the

33 D. MUGGLETON, op. cit., p. 58.

34 A. IDZIKOWSKA-CZUBAJ, *Funkcje kulturowe i historyczne znaczenie polskiego rocka*, Poznań 2006.

35 K. KOSIŃSKI, *Oficjalne i prywatne życie młodzieży w czasach PRL*, Warszawa 2006.

36 More about gender order in Poland in A. KOŚCIAŃSKA, *Gender, Pleasure, and Violence. The Construction of Expert Knowledge of Sexuality in Poland*, Indiana 2020, about queer during socialism: K. TOMASIK, *Gejerel*, Warszawa 2018; B. WARKOCKI, *Różowy język*, Warszawa 2013.

end of the elementary school, he and his friends identified with the punk style, but they couldn't go to school dressed that way — messy clothes and hair raised up were unacceptable. That is why one day they decided to dress in elegant suits, ties and nicely styled hair. This, however, was also disliked by their teachers. The next day, they continued their fun by wearing well-polished glossy boots, breeches, and their hair in, as my father called it, the *Hitlerjugend style*. This, for obvious reasons, also was not approved by the adults. By playing with the form, balancing on the border between what was acceptable and what caused scandals, they questioned social norms. Anna Pelka believed that was how the youth fashion created space for the opposition towards systematic oppression[37]. This opposition took place in the sphere of the so-called third level of culture circulation.

When describing the culture of the People's Republic of Poland, social researchers often refer to the levels of culture circulation[38]. The first level was the official culture, which was broadcasted through the state media, the second was the culture formed by *Solidarność* and spread in *samizdat*. Initially, young people were interested in this movement, but when they noticed that opposition did not want to change the social rules or taste, the third level began to emerge. It was an area of creativity and freedom. Anna Idzikowska-Czubaj enumerated negation, distance and extraordinary dynamics as its main features. The basic assumption was to focus on the problems neglected by the *adult society,* also on the second level[39]. The third level was a sphere of youth culture, freedom of behaviour and expression which is why punk was developing there because there were no limits or rules. The above-mentioned story of my father shows that when the school (a representative of the official culture) rejected punk, young people were able to dynamically find new forms of negation of the system.

The conflict and the misunderstanding between the authorities and the representatives of the punk subculture can be seen perfectly in the short TV reportage about one of the punk rock bands — *"Kryzys?"* ('Crisis?') directed by M. Filipek in 1980. The video begins with the words *"no, no, no, wrong!"* to the accompaniment of slightly chaotic and disturbing music, edited in such a way to shock the viewer with its from the very beginning. The voice of the narrator presents the band and says: *"Listening to their productions and looking at the success of a group of teenagers made us seriously aware of how much damage has been done by the disrespectful attitude of the educational authorities to the issues of the musical and aesthetics education in the Polish schooling system"*. The punk aesthetics went beyond the framework of what was welcomed in the socialist state, as it was an artistic and aesthetic counter-proposal to the boring and unattractive reality of the People's Republic[40]. In the state television, of course, it was necessary to identify who was responsible for the demoralization of the teenagers and this time it was the education system which had failed. If the youth had received a good socialist upbringing, they would have not felt the need to identify with such style. The ideological education failed because the band Kryzys'

37 A. PELKA, *Z [politycznym] fasonem: moda młodzieżowa w PRL i w NRD*, Gdańsk 2013, p. 228.

38 S. PĘCZAK, *O wybranych formach komunikowania alternatywnego w Polsce (wstępne rozpoznanie problematyki)*, in: „Kultura i społeczeństwo", no. 3, p. 172, 1988.

39 A. IDZIKOWSKA-CZUBAJ, op. cit., p. 287.

40 W. WRZESIEŃ, *Krótka historia młodzieżowej subkulturowości*, Warszawa 2013, p. 302.

worldview was based upon the negation of social principles, as the frontman Robert Brylewski said: "*We are against whatever is against us. Against everything that in any way restricts our freedom. How can we not talk about pessimism when so many strange things are happening in the world, strange politicians rule the world? A man forgets about his humanity and is driven only by ambitions, and uses other people for this purpose. A man takes advantage of another man.*"

After these words, the song "*Ambicja*" resounds in the video — the melody matches the image of the visual representations of Western culture: gambling machines, on one of which there is a large inscription *Playboy* which presents silhouettes of half-naked women hugged by a man with a suspicious smile and pipe in the mouth. All of this is watched by impressed teenagers with their eyes wide open. Polish punk rock at the beginning contained many stylistic elements typical of the American new wave[41]. It is not surprising then that Filipek's reportage on the visual level seeks to show the connection between this genre of music and Western culture, even though the lyrics present a negation of both socialist and capitalist society: "*Your ambition is killing you, ambition is your god. I don't play, I won't lose, because I have no ambition. Ambition is your lost religion, [...] your ambition is killing you*."

It seems that the aim of this report, along the ideological line, is to present young people as the *Other* or referring to Barbara Fatyga — *Savage*[42]. The sociologist wrote that by watching a representative of a subculture on television, viewers would not get to know that particular person, but rather, the media creation of her or his image. Fatyga claimed that this was an intentional act of journalists who wanted "*to give a thrill to the normal audience*"[43]. The same method of presenting young people can be observed in Filipek's reportage when Robert Brylewski talks about his fatigue with the social situation. "*What do we want to change? This is a difficult question, a very difficult one*" — this statement, combined with a slightly embarrassed smile of the musician, seems to present the incompetence of young people shouting about change but not knowing what kind of change they aim at. The negation of the system was shown as simply sowing confusion by young and immature people.

In the next fragment there is the song "*Mam dość*" (*I have had enough*) accompanied by the visuals of teenagers having fun, singing and dancing in an *uncontrolled* manner, twirling their bodies and waving their arms in a gesture of imitation playing instruments. At one point, one of them shows his tongue to the camera and continues to dance. The camera rolls over his bouncing feet and shows a pair of navy blue Adidas with white stripes and jeans. Could this be another clue for the viewer that this music is related to Western culture, or is it just an innocent scene presenting the dancing feet of a young man? The whole thing ends with the narrator's words: "*However, there must be something in this music and words, in the atmosphere that the band enjoys such a great popularity among teenagers, because they themselves do not strive for at least elementary musical or linguistic correctness. This rough form seems to be simply an element of negation of the existing world, and therefore also of the cultural heritage. We dedicate this topic to sociologists who should find the causes of the total frustration of our youth.*"

41 W. WRZESIEŃ, op. cit.

42 B. FATYGA, *Dzicy z naszej ulicy. Antropologia kultury młodzieżowej*, Warszawa, 2005.

43 B. FATYGA, op. cit., p. 135.

The last shot shows a partying crowd with a teenager in a T-shirt with large letters *EA* which mean *element antysocjalistyczny* ("anti-socialist element"). Such outfits were really popular in the early 1980s, during the "*vogue for conspiracy*"[44]. Anna Pelka claims that "*the rejection of social and cultural norms in a politicized and controlled reality was, for young people, an intuitive reaction to systemic oppression (not only in the understanding of dictatorship but also of the imposed social and moral principles)*"[45]. Fashion became a space for the political manifestation and, in the case of punk rock culture, for the criticism of the society. Thus, the main reason for the emergence of alternative youth movements was the adults' lack of understanding of young people and disrespectful attitude towards teenagers' imposed by the first and the second level of the culture circulation. Initially, the second level, which was related to *Solidarność*, was attractive for young people, because it seemed to be equally opposed to the system by sharing the criticism of the official culture. However, the simple and homogenous message of this level made its recipients indolent and thoughtless[46]. Thus, after some time, there was a split between them because, as Barbara Fatyga wrote, "*young people understood this model too literally and drew too radical consequences from it*"[47]. Teenagers who did not fit into the first or the second level, decided to abandon the necessity of choice and rejected these systems as equally oppressive and thus limiting their creative freedom.

Małgorzata Jacyno claimed that subjectivity of the individualism could be realized in the freedom of choice[48]. She believed that the values connected with choice — that is agency, authenticity, sense of freedom and dignity — are the main values of the culture of individualism. For her, individualism is primarily a form of socialization, a cultural project of "*being in the world*"[49]. David Muggleton combined "*hyper-individualism*" with postmodernity, which flourished in the 1960s[50]. The sociologist, however, analyzed the situation in Great Britain and the United States. In the Polish context, the sources of individualism can be found rather in the 1970s when the reforms of Edward Gierek changed the consumption patterns of Poles and expectations towards the state[51].

It is worth paying attention to a certain contradiction characteristic to postmodernism that arises from the memories of the interviewees. On the one hand, they strongly emphasized how important individualism was for them as it was a manifestation of freedom. Maja told me that her unusual outfits were an act of rebellion against her teachers. Her amaranth dress, worn in the "*time of dullness*", was for her a way of contestation and a representation of a nonconformist approach to the reality. On the other hand, Wojtek, sympathetic to the punk and metal subculture, told

44 A. PELKA, op. cit., p. 225.
45 A. PELKA, op. cit., p. 228.
46 B. FATYGA, op. cit., p. 111.
47 B. FATYGA, op. cit.
48 M. JACYNO, *Kultura indywidualizmu*, Warszawa, 2007, p. 23.
49 M. JACYNO, op. cit., p. 8.
50 D. MUGGLETON, op. cit., p. 15.
51 M. GDULA, M. SUTOWSKI, *Co nam zostało z lat 70.?*, „Krytyka Polityczna", 04.06.2016, https://krytykapolityczna.pl/kraj/gdula-co-nam-zostalo-z-lat-70/ [accessed on 09.06.20].

me about the conflicts between punks and skinheads by recalling his theory based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. "*Physiological needs were somehow fulfilled by the state, safety needs — in some way — but not so much. Then you have belongingness needs — you have to be a part of something, because an individual can't live out of any system, right? Back then individualism was combated, they were promoting collectivism, but generally it is important for a person to belong. [...] So, if you were not identifying with some ideological organization, you had to be a scout or go to some church groups. But if you didn't like them, the only thing left to do was to gather around music or some fashion style*."

David Muggleton believed that some groups are mostly concerned about the struggle for their social capital and thus their lifestyle becomes an important part of their identity[52]. This can be done through differentiation from the other groups. For this purpose an *ideal type* is created, which simplifies the reality and helps to adapt to the group, by providing a set of simple rules on how to distinguish yourself from other people. Subcultures, serving as a kind of guide, provide space for individual choices because freedom of choice is the essence of individualism. This relationship between the common style and individually worn clothes is described by the sociologist as a typical part of postmodern reality, where the boundaries are set loosely and the heterogeneity of the style dominates its homogeneous character.

Is it possible to combine the postmodern shift towards the culture of individualism with the fall of socialism in Poland? After all, socialism was mainly based on the principle of collectivism and the common good. According to my research, for the Warsaw's middle-class youth, the values related to socialism gave way for individualistic desires to create their own style or identify with a group. This is why stories about fashion in the 1980s are not just stories about clothes, music and idols. The youth fashion of that era was strongly connected with the political and economic situation. The transnational flows caused the wide spread of the Western popular culture among young generation and as a result, it was present on many levels of everyday life — in schools where teenagers were breaking rules of proper dress code; on the streets where long queues were lining to buy desired goods with dollars; among peer groups where teens were exchanging clothes, music tapes and posters; in the families where relatives were sending packages filled with goods unavailable in Poland. Therefore, individual choices of teenagers weren't just based on the personal taste — they were strongly inscribed in the social reality. What is more, it is possible that these cultural changes connected with globalisation, commercialization and, of course, with the postcolonial relations contributed to the collapse of socialism in this part of Europe. As I presented, for my interlocutors the capitalistic influences were far more important than the communist values. The socialist reality was simply limiting their desires. Young people were longing for the West — its culture, freedom and diversity. As a consequence, these feelings constituted a crucial part of the political transformation.

52 D. MUGGLETON, op. cit., p. 83.