

## **The Impact of Mass Media on Culture: Analytical Study of Alija Izetbegovic's Concept of Man-Mass and Individuality**

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### **Abstract**

With an overview of media communication theories, the sociological perspectives of media's impact on society and religious responses to media, this study focuses one of great Muslim thinker Alija Ali Izetbegovic's views of media. Investigating within his whole framework of two antagonistic aspects of man's life; the culture and civilization, the study analyzes his views of man-mass to be much similar with postmodern critique of technology on the behalf of the "self" instead of these sociologists and religious thinkers.

### **Introduction**

The impact of Mass Media on the society is remained under the discussions of various academic fields. The history of its support and critique goes back to its very beginning, when a German goldsmith Johannes Gutenberg succeeded in the invention of first printing press device in around 1440. The occurrence of human communication from society to society and state to state for the religious and political propagation is much older, which Denis McQuil terms as process to the invention of actual media.†

McQuil sees media in medieval ages as a sacred or at least political activity of the church dependent on her will. The birth of actual media in the form of printing press according to him was an independent revolt. The authority of church and state as Mcquil narrates "reacted with alarm at the potential loss of control that this represented and at the opportunities opened up for disseminating new and deviant ideas."‡ The newly invented print media if could not be considered as the basic cause cause of the first religious communal war in Europe but it played a significant role in

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† Denis McQuil, *McQuil's Mass Communication Theory Sixth Edition* (London: SAGE Publication Ltd, 2010), 28.

‡ Ibid.

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the circulation of such deviant ideas which compelled the Church to lose her authority.

After the rise of national states, industrialization and technological advancement, many researchers considered media an influential instrument of the state for manipulation and indoctrination of the public.\* The indoctrination of the people in the way that media had brainwashed the public during World War One and caused the rise of fascism in Europe, was an agreed point of the writers at that time.† Before 1940, both the writers from left and right considered media as all powerful.‡ Their approach is often termed as “hypodermic theory” or “magic bullet theory.” Considering the media all powerful, “like a bullet and a needle, if the message reached its target, its impact would be immediate and evident.”§ But after 1940 to 1960, a new approach of the “limited effects theory” emerged in the communication studies. A popular advocate of this notion was Joseph T. Klapper.

According to Klapper’s limited effects theory or which is often named as “reinforcement theory”, the primary influence of media is to reinforce (not change) the existing norms, values, attitudes and behaviors. For Klapper the audiences to media are not atomized and passive by nature as Harold Lasswell and other advocates of “Hypodermic theory” believed, but active and sometime causing it to reflect them.\*\*

The latter development in the communication theories could be reduced to these two approaches, where the researchers through improved methodologies conduct various empirical and analytical studies for the justification of one of the above mentioned approaches.†† In 2011, Russell Neuman and Lauren Guggenheim while reviewing most important works from 1956 to 2005 on media effects theories in the field of communication extended the history of communication theories into the mentioned below six stages.

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\* Michael Gurevitch, Tony Bennett, James Curran and Janet Woollacott, Edit., *Culture Society and the Media* (London, New York: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005), 06

† Ibid.

‡ Ibid., 07

§ W. Russell Neuman and Lauren Guggenheim, “The Evolution of Media Effects Theory: A Six-Stage Stage Model of Cumulative Research” *Communication Theory* 21, (2001), 171.

\*\* Stanley Baran and Dennis Davis, *Mass Communication Theory: Foundation, Ferment and Future* (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009), 155.

†† W. Russell Neuman and Lauren Guggenheim, “The Evolution of Media Effects Theory: A Six-Stage Model of Cumulative Research” *Communication Theory* 21, (2001), 172.

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Persuasion theories.

Active Audience Theories.

Social Context Theories

Societal and Media Theories

Interpretive Media Theories

New Media Theories

Our aim here is not to go in depth of these theories but the point what we see in the story of the history of evolution of the communication theories as Russell Neuman and Lauren Guggenheim narrate is that, the nature of information in media is not mere informative. It is more complex than what is being commonly observed. Many communication theorists, sociologists, anthropologists and religious thinkers had tried to explain this complexity of mass media.

Being a socio-political activist on one side, a religious leader of Bosnian Muslims on other, one can think of Alija Izetbegovic to be approaching that issue from the same perspectives of his political and religious fellows. But the case seems much different when one tries to explain his views of media in the light of his whole framework of two antagonistic aspects of man's life; the culture and civilization. The hypothesis of his uniqueness in relation to other theorists of media seems to be more evident when we encounter to his term of man-mass in his distinction of man in civilization from the man in culture. So going through some sociological perspectives and religious responses to media, we would be able to find out his place within these thinkers of media.

### **Sociological Perspectives**

If we ask people a simple question that, "how he or she looks at media", each answer to this question would be already discussed in a systematic sociological study. For example, if he or she is conservative, he/she would consider the media and its contents liberal, damaging the traditional values. On contrary for the liberal progressive it would be a tool in the hands of state for manipulating public. For someone it would be the source of change towards global mass culture but for other it could be the only effective tool through which the class system, socio-racial discrimination, gender and political injustices are sustained.

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To categorize the various sociological perspectives in a larger theoretical framework of functionalism, symbolic interactionism and conflict theory, the functionalists would see the media useful for the society. For functionalism, which's beginning could be traced to Huber, Durkheim, Radcliffe Brown and Malenowski each aspect of society has its own function. Being interdependent with each other, all of these aspects contribute in society to function as a whole. More implicitly, according to functionalists, if something in society does not fulfill a useful purpose would not endure to the next generation. Media thus being surviving has a useful function in society. But the question about actual function of media in society is still properly unanswered. The current studies show four functions of mass media surveillance, correlation, transmission of culture and entertainment to be generally accepted.\*

Functionalism focuses on the function of media in social order and stability; on contrary the conflict theorists see this positive function of media as negative one. Focusing on the ever-changing nature of society in light of conflict of ideas, social norms, cultures, individuals and groups these theorists seek for social change. The role of media in keeping social order and status quo as functionalist believed is therefore criticized. The media for them like political Marxist economists is in the hands of some powerful people, through which they keep society in order to sustain their power over the public.†

The third major framework of sociologically describing media is that of “symbolic interactionism.”The human consciousness according to symbolic interactionists, interact to material world through various symbols. These symbols either linguistic or cultural are the most important contents of study for interactionists sociologist. American sociologist C. Wright Mills describes this relationship between human mind and material world in the following words.

“The consciousness of human beings does not determine their existence; nor does their existence determine their consciousness. Between the human consciousness and material existence stand communications, and designs, patterns, and values which influence decisively such consciousness as they have.”‡

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\* James A. Anderson and Timothy P. Meyer, “Functionalism and the Mass Media” *Journal of Broad Casting* 19:1 (1975), 11-13.

† Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick, *Cultural Theory: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2008), 59.

‡ Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler, Edit., *the Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014), 76-75.

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Media therefore remains as a subject of studies for interactionists to evaluate the role of media in the creation and interpretation of such symbols through which the individuals interact with each other. Not like functionalists and conflict theorists to look at society on a large scale, the interactionists rather interpret it at micro level. As a nature of meaning of symbols through which people interacts with each other is subjective, the study of interactionist approach would therefore look at the effects which these symbols have on people.

Moreover, here if we want to combine both the mass communication theories which were mentioned earlier and these sociological approaches, the best way to this combination would be the McQuail's categorization. McQuail distinguishes the theoretical approaches into two Media-Centric and Society-Centric variation. Then, each of them is further divided into two categories of culturist and materialist as the below table describes.

<b>Media-Centric</b>	<b>Society-Centric</b>
<b>Media-Culturist</b>	<b>Socio-Culturist</b>
<b>Media-Materialist</b>	<b>Socio-Materialist</b>

According to McQuil's Media-Centric theory, mass media is the center and prime mover of society.\* On contrary, for Society-Centric approach, society is the center while media only reflects or perhaps reinforce the already existing values. The second distinction between culturist and materialist is of those theorists whose convictions lie in values, culture, ideas and those whose interest is in material forces.†

Before coming to the second part of our study, to describe Alija's approach in the light of these theories, a glance to some religious reactions to media of other religious fellows will make us more capable to analyze the resemblances of his approach as well as to know how he differs from these reactions.

## **Religious Responses to Media and its Impact on Culture**

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\*McQuil, *McQuil's Mass Communication Theory*,19.

† Ibid.,

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While interviewing to BBC on a passed recommendation that, “a man can beat his wife”, when the BBC anchor Shaimaa Khalil asked the chairman of Pakistan’s Islamic Ideology Council, Mawlana Muhammad Khan Sherani that, “this particular recommendation has created a huge controversy within the Pakistani society, if he could change his mind?” Mawlana Sherani simply replied, “The media is not society”.\*

For Mawlana Sherani as well as many other religious fellows the contents of media are actually biased by liberal or secular means. In India, for the Hindu rightists of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Rashtria Swayamsevak Sang (RSS) the media is the agent of pseudo-secularism. While criticizing the dual policy approach of Indian media and secularism to the expulsion of Hindu pundits from Kashmir and Gujrat riots, Indian Air Marshal RK Nehru writes; “Expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Kashmiri pundits is projected as sign of vibrancy of Indian secularism. It is non-event for the media, which like to serve a monthly fare to Gujrat riots.”†Nehru further criticizes media and writes, “The onslaught is generally led by media mughals, who are all high priests of secularism.”‡

Similar voices could be heard from Jewish religious side of criticism of media. It was not just a political statement that, “the anti-Semitism lay at the heart of the media,”§ given by a Non-Jewish author and speaker David Wyman but reveals a significant truth about common Jewish attitude towards media. On Wednesday, 24th of August in 2016, Israel Today news paper published an article under the title, “Anti-Semitism in the Media”, considering the anti-Israel agenda as politically correct attempt covering up anti-Semitism and the hatred of Jewish people and their existence.\*\*

As the Jews consider anti-Semitism to be at the heart of the media, same is the case with many Muslims about Islamphobia. Along with being heterogeneous communities with having different ethnicity and races, a new type of racism is being emerging against Muslims in the West. Describing the representation of Muslims as

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\* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OXFTIikz8AQ>, Accessed on, 06-11-2016.

† Air Marshal RK Nehru, *Hinduism and its Military Ethos* (New Delhi: Lancer Publication & Distribution, 2013), 141.

‡ Ibid.

§ Mark Silk, *Unsecular Media: Making News of Religion in America* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 110.

\*\* Israel Today Stop, “Anti-Semitism in Media,” *Israel Today* August 24, 2016.

<http://www.israeltoday.co.il/NewsItem/tabid/178/nid/29913/Default.aspx>, Accessed on, 07-11-2016.



“alien other”, Amir Saeed considers the notion of Islamophobia to be deeply rooted in British media.\*

However to look at the very nature of these kinds of criticism, it actually looks to be the critique of the contents of media not media itself. That is because we see the various uses of media for religious means. Not even such anti-media views of the above mentioned critics are reached us through media but they used media for it. The famous sample of using media for religious means could be considered the famous saying of Swiss Christian theologian and preacher Karl Brath. Stressing on the use of newspaper in an advice to a young theologian Brath told in interview with the Time magazine, “take your Bible and take newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspaper with your Bible.”†

Here in the light of Brath’s saying, we can say that not only religious minded people like Brath but also the critics of media would consider media by its very nature neutral. It is its contents which commonly determine the fate of media to be good or bad. But definitely, it is not the case with everyone. Some culturists and religious thinker do not see the technological objects of media as soulless and neutral as the other objects like rocks and mountains are. Criticizing religious approaches considering the material of media objects and to be neutral Robbert H. Woods Jr. and Paul D. Patton assert these objects to be biased by the very biased and subjective nature of its human inventors.‡ According to them, not only the contents of media or or the language used by their human operators, the very language of technology itself has a unique way of capturing and presenting reality to the audience. For instance, radios have a specific way capturing attention then of what a television has. “Theater requires a different kind of acting than film or television does.”§

Moreover, televisions value images and pictures over hearing and reading, which make us think sometime to believe that “seeing more than reading and hearing is believing”\*\* This “faithful criticism of popular media” of Woods and Patton seems to be more spiritual than the above mentioned religious approaches towards media.

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\*\* Amir Saeed, “Media, Racism and Islamophobia: The Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Media,” *Sociology Campus* 1/2, (2007), 444-456.

† Derek J. Tidball, Brian S. Harris, Jason S. Sexton, Edit., *Revisioning, Renewing, Rediscovering the Triune Center: Essays in Honor of Stanley J. Grenz* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 383.

‡ Robbert H. Woods Jr. and Paul D. Patton, “Faithful Criticism of Popular Media and Technologies” *Virtual Lives*, (Waco: The Center for Christian Ethics, 2011), 30.

§ Ibid.,31.

\*\* Ibid.,32.

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As it is not just a critique of media but the very tune of the contents of their views goes in the depth of analyses of technology. From this point of “spiritual analysis of media and technology” we would move to the second part of our study to describe Alija Izetbegovic’s position in the light of communication and sociological theories mentioned earlier.

### **Culture and Civilization**

To describe media and its impact on society from the perspective of Izetbegovic, it is necessary to have a glimpse of his distinction between culture and civilization. The distinction of these two antagonistic facts as he defines lies in the different usages of roughly shaped stone by man. The first use of a stone for example as a tool for smashing hard fruits or to hit animal, gives birth to human civilization, while the use of the same stone for some spiritual means by seeing a spirit in it, raises culture.\* Following an animal’s footprint on sand by a primitive man for hunting is the story of his civilization. But seeing his shadow and drawing it on the same sand relates to the history of his culture.†

Moreover, civilization for Izetbegovic is the continuation of zoological dimension of man’s life. The very substance of civilization is the material exchange between man and nature, but the culture is his history of himself, which begins from his heavenly prologue. Art, ethics, religion, and philosophy are the contents of culture, which are deeply rooted in the affirmation, rejection, a doubt and reminiscence of man’s heavenly origin, the “prologue of heaven.”‡

The culture is therefore man’s contemplation on his space in the nature, while civilization is the product of his intelligence over nature. Religion, rituals, creed, poetry, mythologies, fear and love to nature are thus the result of that contemplation which value man and therefore develops certain ethical, moral and legal codes in his respect to create human. The intelligence of man over nature rather fulfills his bodily desires and needs. That difference between intelligence and contemplation is just like the difference between education and meditation. Attained through learning, education is the feature of civilization. Civilization educates people, making them able for understanding nature and overcoming her to change the condition of

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\* Alija Ali Izetbegovic, *Islam between East and West* (Oak Brook: American Trust Publication, 2012), 2012), 43.

† Ibid.,

‡ Ibid., 44.

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existence. Science being a systematic study of nature, based on observation, experiments, examination of the received data and its analysis is the product of civilization, which relates to the external man or his bodily existence in the world.

The contemplation on contrary is meditation, “the internal effort to know one’s self and one’s place in the world.” \* The difference between the achievements of education and contemplation is of the difference between prosperity and happiness. The former is the good fortune relates to the material goods in financial and economic means while the latter to the man in internal and spiritual respects. Hence Izetbegovic considers civilization to be “the effect of intelligence on nature and culture as the influence of man’s influence on himself.” † That is this dualistic flex of of human life in material and spiritual of civilization and culture, where for former society is bearer and man as bearer for the latter, Izetbegovic views mass culture from quiet a different perspective.

### **Culture, Mass Culture and Man-Mass**

The term mass-culture is confusing one. Its common use in socio-anthropological context means the modern technological culture, the popular and dominant one. Sometime it is used for the distinction of popular modern and scientific culture from the primitive, tribal and traditional one. But sometime it borrows in itself the concept of social as well as biological evolution considering the modern culture to be an evolved form of the primitive and tribal one. In the light of his distinction of civilization and culture in line of materialism and spiritualism, Izetbegovic considers the so-called mass culture as an aspect of civilization rather than to be culture itself.

As we discussed earlier the subject of culture is “man as individual”, being an aspect of civilization the mass-culture is itself the impact of technology on society, which by its very nature the supply of needs. The subject of mass culture is hence mass or man-mass. The culture for Izetbegovic “trends to individualization; mass culture leads in the opposite direction, to spiritual uniformity.” ‡ Here mass culture diverges from culture and its necessities of ethics, art and religion. He further considers the production of spiritual goods in mass culture “the copies, the tawdry and worthless literature,” which leads to uniformity.

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\* Ibid., 47.

† Izetbegovic, *Islam between East and West*, 45.

‡ Ibid., 53.

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Culture as defined by its very nature represents individualization and individual freedom. Mass culture on other hand leads to impersonalization and uniformity. Individual freedom which is the core of culture resists that uniformity on which the mass culture depends. Moreover, Izetbegovic also differentiates between popular and mass culture. “One widespread mistake is the identification of mass culture with popular culture”, as he says. “This is injurious to the latter, for popular culture, distinguished from mass culture, is authentic, active, and immediate.”\* Popular culture as Izetbegovic defines “is based on consensus and participations,” the mass culture on other is manipulation. According to him, in a popular culture individuals are participants, they equally share their individualistic contribution in a cultural production, while in mass culture most of the individuals are passive attendants.

In every cultural event like rite, dance and ritual the spectators are the performers and vice versa. But in mass culture Izetbegovic believes, “the people are strictly separated into producers and consumers of cultural goods.”† Here the spectators are the consumers. Being manipulated by the mass cultural norms the spectators are in complete passive position. They have no ability to change these norms or at least to contribute something different to them. It is either the tools and instruments of mass culture that are limited to some specific numbers of people or the people are already manipulated, so their contribution could be considered the effect of that manipulation.

In light of these contributions, Izetbegovic believes mass media in forms of press, radio and television to be the means of mass manipulation, i.e. the means of mass culture. Now looking at nature of this so-called media and the so-called mass culture produced by the media, the people are separated into two groups. On one side there are a small number of the people, the operators of the media; on another is the passive audience of millions. The culture produced by the small number of media agencies is called the mass culture, as it is consumed by the passive manipulated masses. Investigating in the studies about media, Izetbegovic asserts that the cultural activity is replaced by media into watching TV. Average Englishman spends 16 to 18 hours a week watching TV. Every third French man does not read the book. Same is the case with Japan. The studies also indicate as Izetbegovic writes that, for more than 87 percent population “cultural pastime” is watching TV.‡ Quoting Professor

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\* Ibid.

† Izetbegovic, *Islam between East and West*, 54.

‡ Ibid., 54.

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Horikava, Izetbegovic writes, “In a simple way, television has replaced literature and thinking.” He considers the solutions for all problems in life offered by media to be ready-made. He further writes,

“Our time offers examples of how mass culture media, being a government monopoly can be used for a mass delusion of worst kind. There is no need for brutal force to rule people against their will. That can now be attained in a legal way by paralyzing the people’s will, by offering them cut-and-dried truths, and by preventing them thinking and arriving at their opinions of men and events.”\*

Izetbegovic further argues the paralyzing of people’s free will to be also proved by the mass studies of psychology. As psychological studies show that the persistent repetition of something mythical makes it possible to be believed as real. These studies also carry arguments about the media as being subordinating not only conscious, but the instincts and emotions of the people; hence the people begin thinking about the contents of media as their own opinions.† Explaining the use of TV and its impact on people’s thinking in totalitarian societies, he considers media as a threat to freedom more dangerous than what states use for controlling people in form of police, prisons, and gendarmes and so on.

However, for Izetbegovic the man in mass culture loses his individual freedom. Being manipulated in the uniformity of mass culture the very action of a mass man fulfills the needs of uniformity. Moreover, he considers mass culture the state of mind and defines it with the term “puerility”, where a man behaves childishly in a negative sense. The mass man thus according to Izetbegovic is the product of a society in which the machines manipulate the men. It is the stage where the creative and intuitive inner abilities are being demolished or at least hijacked by external forces of technology.

## **Analysis**

Here in the light of above discussion if we want to put his views in a communication theoretical framework that would be obviously the “Hypodermic theory”, where the media is considered to be the most effective tool for manipulation as well as for indoctrinating people. The functionalist and interactionist approaches though do not support his views properly, but being an activist and the victim of communist

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\* Izetbegovic, *Islam between East and West*, 54.

† Ibid., 55.

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government policies his views must support the point of conflict theorists, considering media to be an effective tool for powerful small group of the people.

In religious responses, the faithful criticism of media by Robbert H. Woods Jr. and Paul D. Patton has much resemblance with Izetbegovic's criticism. As Woods and Patton analyze the very nature of the technological devices of media, his views are also concerned with technology and its use in media for transmission. But we see his views much inclined in post-modern critique of the modern uniformity and its assertion on self. To explain that, first we like here to mention the story of Kevin Carter as an example related to our topic.

In March 1993, a picture of starving Sudanese captured by a South African journalist Kevin Carter sold to the New York Times published in the news paper on 26th of the March raised a bunch of questions to its photographer. The photo was of a weakened Sudanese little girl striving to approach to the nearby food center set by the United Nations during Second Sudanese Civil War. Leaving their child behind, her parents were already there for food. At the moment when the bodily weakness stopped the child to continue her struggle towards the camp, a vulture landed behind her. To capture both the vulture and the starved child in one picture Carter waited twenty minutes for vulture to spread its wings or to attack the child without scaring the vulture. At last though Carter succeeded to capture them both in one picture, for which he won Pulitzer Prize, but as the picture published in New York Times and several other news papers, hundreds of people started to contact to media officials to ask about the fate of the child. The people when used to ask Carter for the answers of such questions that, why he did not scare the vulture? Why he did not save the child? Was one of the causes which led him to the depression, hence he committed suicide on 27th of July in 1994.\*

Now, we have various answers to the question to which Carter was subjected, why did he not save the child? But if we want to look from Izetbegovic perspective the answer though is simple but very different than the given answers. In the light of above discussion Carter thus would be considered as the product of technological society, where mass media had already paralyzed his inner-self, the self which was a subject to spiritual and emotional response in such circumstances. If there had been a

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\* Scott Macleod, "The Life and Death of Kevin Carter", *Time* Sunday, June 24, 2001.  
<http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,165071,00.html> accessed on 10-11-2016.

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tribal man instead, he would have scared the vulture either or at least narrated the story in a poetic tragic way to his fellows rather than to contribute an astonishing picture to the media for material means.

This difference of responses to such a tragic event relies on the distinctive nature of tribal man and man-mass. Being affected by television and technological devices, man-mass as Woods Jr. and Patton assert, believes in images to be more effective and impressive than hearing and reading. The behavior in aesthetics therefore changes with the advancement in technology. The emotional attachment and emotional experience of nature is now expressed in taking picture by cameras than feeling, thinking, writing and drawing. Not only by McDonaldization of cultures, or what Canadian anthropologist Edmund Carpenter believed that, “media swallow cultures,” Izetbegovic rather considers the very essence of technology to be a serious threat to the “self” of man, the source of thought, free will, art and humanity.

## **Conclusion**

To go back to our hypothesis the above discussion thus evidently shows Izetbegovic’s critique of technology in his concept of man-mass to be much similar with the postmodern critics of the uniformity of modernism. Like postmodern philosophical tradition, Izetbegovic also emphasized on self and emotions on one side while considers intelligence as the zoological aspect of man. Moreover, when we encounter to the mass-man of Izetbegovic, paralyzed by technology and media, we find him much similar to the picture of modern man in postmodernism and existentialism.

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