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**Mass culture in light of the ideas of Malek Bennabi
and Ali Azet Begović**

الثقافة الجماهيرية في ضوء أفكار مالك بن نبي وعلي عزت بيغوفيتش

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Abstract:

This research paper aims to analyze the connection between the ideas of Malek Bennabi and the manifestations of mass culture through various media outlets, which often draw criticism from scholars. It also sheds light on the role of media and the influence of mass culture based on the perspective of the Bosnian thinker Ali Izetbegović, who observed the spread of mass culture in public spaces and its impact on psychological and social fields. The importance of this topic lies in combining two different viewpoints: the first represents the "Eastern" perspective, addressing the issue of "mass culture" from a civilizational lens and considering it an additional burden on the cultural crisis in Arab and Islamic societies. The second reflects the "Western" perspective, revealing the intellectual and functional dimensions behind the wide promotion of mass culture

Keywords: Mass Culture, Malek Bennabi, Ali Izet Bigovitsh

الملخص:

تسعى هذه الورقة البحثية إلى تقديم تحليل للعلاقة بين أفكار مالك بن نبي وتجليات الثقافة الجماهيرية من خلال وسائل الإعلام المختلفة، التي غالبًا ما تُثير انتقاد النقاد، كما تسلط الضوء على دور الإعلام وتأثير الثقافة الجماهيرية بناءً على رؤية المفكر البوسني "علي عزت بيغوفيتش" الذي شهد انتشار الثقافة الجماهيرية في المجال العام، ورصد امتدادها في المجالات النفسية والاجتماعية. تكمن أهمية هذا الموضوع في الدمج بين وجهتي نظر مختلفتين: الأولى تمثل الرؤية 'الشرقية' التي تناقش إشكالية "الثقافة الجماهيرية" من منظور حضاري، معتبرة إياها عبئًا إضافيًا على الأزمة الثقافية في المجتمعات العربية والإسلامية. أما الثانية، فتعكس الرؤية من داخل 'الغرب'، حيث تكشف عن الأبعاد الفكرية والوظيفية وراء الترويج الواسع للثقافة الجماهيرية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الثقافة الجماهيرية، مالك بن نبي، علي عزت بيغوفيتش

thinkers from the Arab and Islamic world: the Algerian thinker Malek Bennabi and the Bosnian thinker Alija Izetbegović.

Malek Bennabi's ideas (1905–1973) were ahead of their time. His thoughts remain relevant in diagnosing cultural and civilizational crises and in showing the path toward the necessary cultural changes.

This paper begins with an inductive analysis of the hidden link between Malek Bennabi's ideas and the influence of mass culture. This culture, spread through media outlets, often lowers public taste, prioritizes profit over cultural improvement, and provokes criticism.

Next, the paper provides an analytical reading of the media's role and the impact of mass culture, based on Alija Izetbegović's ideas (1925–2003). He explored how mass culture infiltrates public spaces, influences personal lives, and controls psychological and social aspects.

The importance of this topic lies in combining two perspectives. The first represents an "Eastern" view of the issue of mass culture and its civilizational effects, which add to the cultural crisis in Arab and Islamic societies. The second reflects a "Western" perspective, uncovering the knowledge and functional reasons behind the widespread influence of mass culture.

2. Mass Culture in Light of Malek Bennabi's Ideas

2.1 Culture Between "What Is" and "What ought to be"

Many of the commonly used academic definitions of culture suggest a range of elements, issues, and goals in a way that focuses on "what is" in a particular culture, descriptively implying that all cultures are similar while retaining their distinct characteristics. However, this approach does not help us understand why some societies progress while others lag behind, even when

1. INTRODUCTION

Different media platforms take up a large amount of people's time and dominate conversations. This has drawn the attention of various institutions that aim to promote their messages and encourage audiences to engage with their ideas and offers.

Because the media system overlaps with other societal systems like politics and economics, confusion often arises about media practices. This overlap sometimes leads to hiding facts, ignoring important issues, and losing the connection between events. As a result, audiences may feel overwhelmed by the flood of news, and the media can become a tool for avoiding real journalism.

The way media performance is viewed critically varies among thinkers and researchers, ranging from optimistic to pessimistic perspectives. While academic researchers provide valuable insights into the roles and impacts of the media in different social and cultural contexts, it is equally important to consider the views of thinkers who critically analyze the current cultural and civilizational reality in the Arab and Islamic world. This is crucial for identifying problems and outlining steps for reform.

The media, as a key tool of power, plays a major role in preserving the current state of affairs. It often serves the interests and privileges of powerful groups in control of public matters.

If we view the problem as primarily cultural, its effects spread across many areas, including politics, economics, education, social issues, and the media.

This paper focuses on the issue of media because it acts as a broad window to different cultures and occupies a significant part of our social time. Questioning the cultural role of the media is, therefore, essential.

Our focus is on the ideas of two prominent

souls is in a critical situation. This reminds us of the importance of a comprehensive review, similar to what was done in the "A Nation at Risk" report.

If Malek Bennabi were able to observe what is happening in the context of globalized media and communication, with the proliferation of media tools and their unprecedented control over the social and psychological space of individuals, he would say: "The content presented to our children through various media does not serve the purpose of culture." This means it does not elevate morals, strengthen relationships, promote manners, or spread aesthetic and creative senses among individuals. It seems intentionally designed to destroy what remains of the inherited cultural structure, replacing it with imported cultural waste that competes, confuses, and distracts, ultimately achieving the desired cultural change.

2.2 The Functional Aspect in Culture

Malek Bennabi says: "Culture is like blood in the body of society. It nourishes civilization and carries the ideas of both the elite and the common people. Each of these ideas blends into one fluid, made up of similar dispositions, unified directions, and appropriate tastes." ⁱⁱThe comparison of culture to blood can have both positive and negative meanings. Positively, when culture is properly nourished, it plays an active role in the nation's body, providing it with the air and nourishment carefully chosen from the environment it thrives in. For example, moral values like honesty, integrity, selflessness, and courage can be unintentionally instilled in children through a curriculum or media program. These values will benefit the children and later spread throughout society. On the other hand, blood may play a negative role if its purity is tainted by impurities or toxins, spreading them throughout the body. This could harm the nation's cells, impairing its function, limiting its abilities, spoiling its tastes, corrupting its social interactions, and turning it into a burden on other nations

they have better resources for advancement. Malek Bennabi, in his analysis of the factors behind cultural decline and revival, uses a comparative approach between the local culture prevailing in our society and the cultures of others. This comparison distinguishes between weak cultures and strong cultures. As such, his comparative approach falls under "what should be" our culture based on our core values and our bright historical and civilizational heritage.

Malek Bennabi defines culture as: "A set of moral traits and social values that affect the individual from birth, becoming the unconscious relationship between their behavior and the lifestyle of the environment they were born into" ⁱ

This definition implicitly points to the phase that should be focused on when building a new culture that ensures harmony among individuals, preparing for a civilizational revival. This can only be achieved through a sincere will adopted by the leadership of society, delegating its vision to institutions and bodies responsible for this task, with a practical approach focused on achieving the required quality and effectiveness.

There is no doubt that educational institutions and media institutions are well-positioned to play this expected role for several reasons. Both attract wide social groups, consume significant amounts of our time, and draw much of our attention, in addition to the cultural role they play, either positively or negatively.

Malek Bennabi identified the problem and pinpointed the source of the issue that reproduces mediocrity in various forms across all sectors. He summarized the entire situation in one phrase: "The knowledge we provide to our children in schools and universities does not serve the purpose of culture." In other words, it does not align with the needs of shaping the cultural dimension of our children—linguistically, morally, socially, aesthetically, and creatively.

If cultural deficiency originates in the educational space, this means that the primary source shaping minds and refining

terms of its creation methods paved the way for practical effectiveness in reality, which reflected on meeting needs, flourishing, and spreading cultural radiance across various regions, according to the existing circumstances and prevailing norms of the time.

Given the cultural role of media, especially with the rise of "mass culture," even though Bennabi did not witness the developments we know today, his writings contained profound references to the vast gap between what exists in media and what should exist. For example, he criticized media performance, particularly Egyptian media, which also applies to the broader Arab media scene.

He further criticizes Egyptian films for offering nothing of value to society, saying: "What has this Egyptian film offered us? What has it proposed? I refuse to believe that the Egyptian people have lost the ability to distinguish between seriousness and silliness. How do such absurdities and films come to exist?"ⁱⁱⁱ

It is clear that Bennabi's objection to Egyptian films stems from the negative values they contain and the cultural taboos they promote—despite rare exceptions—which lead to the spread of negative ideas and behaviors in society. Respect disappears, moral violations become widespread, and social relationships become poisoned.

It seems that the practical benefit expected for society is almost non-existent, leading to the question: why are all these material and human resources being utilized to produce media content that serves no purpose except degrading public taste? The insistence on reproducing such media content serves hidden agendas by parties aiming to achieve specific goals gradually.

The prevailing public culture in Egyptian society, and in other Arab societies, does not align with these "media absurdities," especially since these societies are still holding onto family and societal values

when it loses connections and justification. In the same context, the Algerian thinker Malek Bennabi highlights our expectations from culture, saying that it "creates a network of social relations among individuals, ensuring both individual care and community protection from deviation." He adds that we are facing a loss of justification in our society, meaning that the social bonds that hold society together are either weak or absent. A group of people living in the same city or country doesn't necessarily form a community.

2.3 Mass Culture and the Fragmentation of Social Unity

Malek Bennabi repeatedly emphasizes the importance of cohesion, unity, and harmony that culture seeks to achieve among individuals within a society. Undoubtedly, the ethical factor provides the basic justifications that frame and direct social interaction in a unified manner. The historical model Bennabi presents as proof of the role of organic solidarity, where culture plays an effective part, is the "brotherhood between the Ansar and the Muhajirun" in Medina, 14 centuries ago, and earlier, the "brotherhood between the Aws and Khazraj" who formed a unified social framework represented by "the Ansar." This social outcome is embodied practically in the prophetic hadith: "The example of the believers in their love, mercy, and compassion is like the body; when one part of it hurts, the rest of the body responds with sleeplessness and fever".

The meanings Bennabi refers to in the role of culture have a biological basis confirmed by modern science, as social cohesion is a result of an individual feeling respect, appreciation, and love towards others in society. This has a remarkable impact on the individual's cells, affecting their behavioral effectiveness, in contrast to feelings of hatred towards others.

This historically unique social formation in

For example, one of these values is "competition," which hides behind education, sports, politics, and has even extended into the religious field. It encourages dividing people into different groups aligned with this team or that, with a clear winner and loser, which fosters fanaticism and fragmentation, nurturing hatred and grudges among individuals for reasons that are often trivial.

To confirm the consequences of activating a culture of competition in every available opportunity, one can visit football stadiums, where the media hype leads to animosity and hatred among fans, throwing stones at each other, and possibly even fatalities from clashes that exceed the capacity of hospital beds.

2.6 Mass Culture and the Exclusion of the Arabic Language

It is certain that using the Arabic language in all areas and spaces is one of the factors contributing to achieving unity within a country and between Arab countries, especially since the constitutions of Arab countries state that Arabic is the official language of the state.

It seems that there is a hidden force that has quietly, and continues to, turn this legal provision into mere ink on paper, with only limited implementation. Meanwhile, the use of colloquial Arabic has spread widely in various platforms and speeches, becoming the main language in media. Each Arab country now has its own media dialect, and within a single country, each region has its own distinct colloquial form with specific vocabulary and pronunciation.

While this situation reflects a social reality with its historical context, its shift into the media has reinforced social divisions in a discriminatory way. Not only has Modern Standard Arabic been excluded from most programs, but we also see a specific colloquial dialect dominating media content,

despite the setbacks that have occurred in various areas.

2.4 Mass Culture and the Drawbacks of Observational Learning

Albert Bandura's theory of observational learning suggests that humans have the ability to acquire symbolic representations of external events, including linguistic systems, mental images, and non-verbal symbols^{iv}. Bennabi points out the importance of role models in educational curricula, a point that applies even more strongly to the media, given the amount of time people spend consuming media compared to the time spent in classrooms. He gives the example of an image in a textbook for Egyptian children before the revolution, which depicted a child and his sister on their way to school, with a servant carrying their bags. This image, according to Bennabi, instills a sense of dependence and disdain for work, reflecting the mindset of the elite (the "pashas") who held power over the common people.^v The media uses many symbols and signs that carry multiple meanings, which seep into minds and souls, shaping values of compliance in those targeted to carry out different agendas. This creates a consumer society tailored to the needs of large economic companies. To address this dysfunction, we must critically examine the cultural "food" that the media, education, and literature provide, revealing how poor models and base behaviors are marketed under the guise of beauty, creativity, and global fame.

2.5 Mass media culture and the spread of negative values

Bennabi highlights the importance of values when discussing the religious values behind some Western social and charitable projects, which may not be immediately apparent. A critical reading of the hidden dimensions behind the apparent in mass culture leads us to the presence of values embedded in the fabric of media programs.

the way people think, perceive reality, and deal with it—not in the positive sense of diversity in ideas and opinions, but in the sense of ideological pluralism, which leads to major groups within the same country aligning with each other, ultimately causing societal division. In such a scenario, each party seeks to hinder the efforts of the other. It is like a ship with passengers holding different beliefs and ideas, where each one chooses a different captain for the ship. One may prefer a path toward the East, while another favors a direction toward the West, leading to a standstill. Ultimately, the ship may sink with all aboard.

3. Mass Culture from the Perspective of Ali İzzet Begović:

Among the writers who clearly distinguished between authentic culture, which aligns with values, and mass culture, which prioritizes quantity over values, is Ali İzzetbegovic. He states: "The subject of any culture is the human being: an individual or a personality, the unique individual who does not repeat. The subject and goal of mass culture, however, is the public or the 'audience.' A human has a soul, while the public has nothing but needs. Therefore, every culture is a development of the human being, while mass culture is merely the satisfaction of needs^{vii}".

We can present these differences in the following table:

Comparison Criteria	Culture	Mass Culture
Subject	Human	Public
Area of Development or satisfaction	Soul	Needs

such as the dialect of the capital overshadowing others. This could be because of the selection of media programs or the journalists employed.

For example, consider the advertising phrase "Konnecti wal hadra batil," which means "Connect via the internet, and the phone conversation is free." The first phrase is grammatically incorrect: it contains a foreign word, an inappropriate term, and is culturally unsuitable because the word "batil" does not mean "free" to everyone in Algeria. It is mainly understood by people from central Algeria, but not by others.

2.7 Mass Culture and Bilingualism in Media

Bennabi states, "In Algeria, for example, even after independence, Bilingualism is not just an issue but a dynamite that exploded in the cultural world. If it hasn't destroyed everything, it has caused the strangest divisions."^{vi}

It is clear that the presence of bilingualism in economic, social, and administrative fields will be strongly supported if it is established in education and media, as both sectors reinforce each other in promoting this dual reality. The education sector provides a fertile ground for the growth of this bilingualism, which results in linguistic poverty and, consequently, knowledge poverty. On the other hand, bilingualism in media gives official legitimacy and widespread public support to bilingualism across different sectors, with supporters in every area who raise its banner and defend it vigorously, while being very careful to avoid comparisons with other cultures that have strongly resisted bilingualism.

Bennabi further adds, "The division caused by linguistic duality in the cultural world of the Islamic country is not only aesthetic but also ethical and philosophical." This means that linguistic duality has cast a shadow over

appropriate alternatives.

3.1 Media as Tools for Manipulating the Masses:

Ali İzzet Begović says: "What are called mass media (such as newspapers, radio, and television) are, in fact, tools for manipulating the masses." ^{viii} This is a direct accusation against the media, claiming it serves hidden agendas rather than the myth of objectivity, neutrality, or societal service. Such practices reinforce the status quo on both local and global levels.

Language, as an essential tool in existence, becomes a controlled function in the media. It demonstrates its power over the audience by shaping how they perceive things—whether truthfully or deceptively. For example, media often uses terms like “a defeat with the taste of victory” or “an honorable defeat,” which manipulate words to influence the audience’s emotions. These expressions encourage acceptance of situations without striving for change or provoke passivity. The media also mislabels concepts, calling “aggression” self-defense, “retreat” redeployment, ,” interest-based loans “benefits,” and unjust occupation “colonization.”

An example of growing media corruption is illustrated in this story about media framing techniques, selecting specific angles to distort the audience's awareness:

3.2 Satisfying needs instead of human development

Izetbegovic emphasizes the spiritual dimension of humans, which is the core focus of authentic culture. True culture nurtures and cares for this aspect throughout a person’s life, preparing them for a new existence shaped by their efforts to improve

Goal	Human Development	Satisfaction of Needs
Focus	Individuality	Similarity ("Pouring souls into similar molds")
Results	Resistance to Similarity	Limiting Human Freedom

A table showing the difference between culture and mass culture.

Culture recognizes the uniqueness of each individual, so the process of education takes into account the differences and abilities of each person. However, mass culture does not take this approach seriously, as it aims to put everyone into the same mold, encouraging everyone to act similarly. This makes it easier to achieve political and economic goals. In other words, it works to eliminate critical thinking, limit individual freedoms, and lead everyone with a herd mentality.

Ali Izat Begović explains the difference between popular culture and mass culture, as shown in the following table.

Type of Culture	Popular Culture	Mass Culture
Quality	Authentic, Living, Direct	Low-quality Literary and Artistic Works
Principle	Consensus and Participation	Manipulation and Division into Producers and Consumers

A table showing the difference between popular culture and mass culture.

There is no doubt that mass culture is suitable for achieving political, economic, and civilizational agendas. Promoting and expanding it through available media and technological spaces helps create a foundation for individuals to adapt to the existing situation in various fields, reinforcing the dominance of vested interests and preventing the consideration of

seeking to dominate the world individually.

The heavy immersion of the audience in the media space has detached them from experiencing social reality. As a result, these media have become the main gateway for fostering a sense of collective belonging.

3.4 Mass culture and the distinction between producer and consumers.

Mass media seems to intentionally focus on certain models in various fields, presenting them as possessing exceptional abilities, which are then exaggerated and elevated in the eyes of the general public, despite promoting negative behaviors and breaking the cultural taboos.

Virtual scenes are transmitted to the audience, filmed within the media's time frame, to be received by the audience as part of their social time. This means expanding the scope of mediocrity quantitatively, especially when the prevailing media content does not serve culture functionally. In this context, the actor first falls into cultural taboo by portraying scenes according to prepared scripts, and then the audience is asked to consume a significant portion of their social time following and paying attention to them, even emulating them.

4. Conclusion:

Calling upon the ideas of thinkers concerned with the situation of the Arab and Islamic world is of great importance, as it helps us identify the areas of weakness, predict their consequences, and find ways to address them.

Since the crisis is mostly civilizational and fundamentally cultural, the media plays a key role in its continuation and is an

their morals in their current life.

However, the media's focus is directed toward satisfying and exhausting psychological needs. It bombards people with diverse programs, creating a constant demand for more and offering varied content to keep them engaged. Instead of fulfilling them, this approach traps people in an endless cycle of consumption.

Additionally, mass culture drains emotional energy by immersing individuals in symbolic or false realities disconnected from actual life. This causes them to invest their feelings in artificial scenes while growing indifferent toward their real surroundings.

Ali İzzet Begović states: "The psychology of mass media, especially television, views it as a tool not only to control the conscious side of humans but also the instinctive and emotional sides, creating in them the feeling that the opinions imposed upon them are their own^{ix}".

3.3 The Collective Individual vs. the Unique Personality

Mass culture aims to treat large groups of people as a single, molded block, making it easier to lead and direct them in any direction desired by the politically, economically, and culturally powerful entities.

The human tendency toward social conformity is the fundamental starting point through which the media achieves its goal of creating a unified collective mindset, based on a single pattern whose features are carefully designed in laboratories that work for political and economic powers with ideological and profit-driven agendas,

Yusuf Addas, Dar Al-Shorouk, , Cairo, Egypt.

5.Mohamed Abdel Hamid, Media Theories and Trends of Influence, Alam Al-Kutub, Cairo. Egypt.

ⁱMalek Bennabi,(2015), Conditions for Renaissance, Dar Al-Fikr Al-Mu'asir, Beirut. Libanon, p. 74.

ⁱⁱ Malek Bennabi,(2015), The Problem of Ideas, Beirut, Dar Al-Fikr Al-Mu'asir, Beirut. Libanon., p. 78)

ⁱⁱⁱMalek Bennabi,(2015), The Problem of Culture Dar Al-Fikr Al-Mu'asir, Beirut. Libanon. p. 137

^{iv}Mohamed Abdel Hamid, Media Theories and Trends of Influence, Alam Al-Kutub, Cairo. Egypt., p. 323

^v Bennabi, p. 137)

^{vi} Bennabi, 2015, p. 139)

^{vii}.Ali Azzet Begovic (2019), Islam Between East and West, Translated by Muhammad Yusuf Addas, Dar Al-Shorouk, , Cairo, Egypt., p 117

^{viii} Ali izt Bigovitch, p 118

^{ix} Ali izt Bigovitch, p 119

obstacle to its solution if it insists on mimicking roles and functions borrowed from countries where these have succeeded in ways that haven't worked elsewhere.

The ideas of thinker Malek Bennabi are very important because they help us understand the role of media within its civilizational context, and thus the need to review its content and performance to meet the current intellectual and behavioral expectations of society, whether on an individual or collective level.

The work of thinker Alija Izetbegović, particularly in the field of mass culture, is also very important because it is clear and comes from a deep understanding of the Western intellectual backgrounds that shape human practices in general.

What connects the contributions of both thinkers, Bennabi and Izetbegović, in the context of the dominance of what is called mass culture, is the restoration of the link between ethical values and media practice. These values should act as a compass that guides the media, preventing it from engaging in cultural taboos and instead helping to raise societal awareness.

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