The Introduction of Telephone into Turkish Houses: Private Space, Borders of the Neighborhoods and Solidarity

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Abstract:

This essay is based on the data collected in a two-year research project (between 2010–2012), under the title Telephony And Turkish Modernization: Social History of Telephone Since The Ottoman Era (1881–2010), which was primarily concerned with the social history of telephone in Turkey during its peculiarly long history of implementation and dispersal. The project was conducted as oral history and archive research, and a comparative approach was adopted to identify and analyze the divergent nature of their findings.

According to the findings of the researched archive materials (newspapers, comic and popular magazines), the implementation of telephone into the Turkish houses created complex feelings, which found its expression as both "emulation" and "intimidation" attached to the experience of telephone in a double system of representation. Whereas the oral history research findings are discordant in the sense that telephone is remembered as a symbol of "solidarity" and "sharing" in the narratives of telephone memories, and was accommodated into the traditional everyday life of the neighborhood.

Through the case of telephone technology, this essay aims at pointing out the gap between the discursive construction of the elements of the experience of modernity and the actual experience of the historical subjects; and argues that this gap should be disclosed with more ethnographic studies for it also points a feeling of 'lack' that pervasively infuses itself into our present and finds its expression in the self-narratives of the oral history as a nostalgia for the past.

Keywords:

information and communication technology, communication studies, mobile phones, public sphere, social networks, Turkey

"Technics and civilization as a whole are the result of human choices and aptitudes and strivings, deliberate as well as unconscious, often

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irrational when apparently they are most objective and scientific: but even when they are uncontrollable they are not external." (Mumford 1934/2010:6)

This essay is based on the data collected in a two-year research project conducted between 2010-2012, under the title *Telephony And Turkish Modernization: Social History of Telephone Since The Ottoman Era (1881–2010)* which aims to provide a social history of the telephone in Turkey accounting for the ways in which telephone technology is experienced within practices of everyday life. The history of the telephone in Turkey has always been written as the history of institutions, which controlled and provided the service of communication; or else, written as the history of policies, which designated the implementation of telephone as instrumental for progression and modernization (Demir 2005; Önay 1995). In framing this research project we adopted a different point of view in order to understand the ways in which actual people - the historical subjects - were affected by the introduction of the telephone into their lives.

Such an understanding renders the home as one of the primary sites of our interest in two respects. First, it is a space of production where part of the daily practices and experiences are produced as well as a space of comfort where the ambiguities and anxieties of the outside world are resolved, a space of renovation and regeneration of self. Second, the home is a space where the modern claims of privacy are constituted and the boundaries between the private and public are drawn, challenged and negotiated continuously.

Jonathan Sterne, in his book *The Audible Past* (2003a), draws attention to the duel intensity which is inherent to the telephone as a simultaneously public and private medium. Sterne indicates that the most salient feature of the telephone as a sound technology is its potential to disperse sound over space which is one of the central features of modern sound culture. As telephone technology was shaped into media, this piercing quality of the telephone annihilated the boundaries between the private and the public that were formerly built to preserve privacy of the home, and imposed a reorganization of the socializing practices in order to integrate the telephone into the flow of domestic middle-class social life (Sterne 2003a:208).

The aim of this essay is to evaluate different reflections of the telephone's introduction to the Turkish household, both in terms of the necessary re-organization of daily practices and the attached sentiments that are produced from these imposed changes. What kinds of habits, social relations and meanings were produced as the telephone became a part of the daily life? What kinds of sentiments were produced as a result of the presence and absence of the telephone in the private space? Did the telephone as a technology and social practice partake in the process of constructing and expressing their collective and individual identities, and if so, how? Such an understanding requires using a theoretical framework that conceptualizes technology beyond its mere technological utility and adopting a more sociological approach.

The Methodological and Theoretical Framework of the Study

Starting from the 1990s, technology became a prevailing study area within human sciences. In his article, *Bourdieu, Technique and Technology* (2003b:368), Sterne articulates this growing interest as the 'technological turn' that human sciences took and argues that this prevalence challenges anyone who would like to study technology with "pre-constructed" weights, "since the choice of a technological object of study is already itself shaped by a socially organized field of choices." In order to overcome this challenge Sterne proposes an "epistemological break" with the 'common sense' of technology in its *Bourdieusian* sense. This is to have a "new gaze," "a sociological eye," and to think of technology as "a strategic research site," which reveals the ways in which "the embodied experience, organized movement and the organization of society" are related to each other (p. 370). Bourdieu uses the notion of *habitus* in order to refer to the embodied social knowledge which formalizes these sets of relations. As Sterne (2003b:371) explicates, this is a "practical knowledge" that is "itself stratified across the society." According to Sterne, the strategic value of every technology as a research site, comes from it being a "little crystallized part of habitus," since every technology is "a repeatable social, cultural and material process (which is to say that it is all three at once) crystallized into a mechanism or set of related mechanisms" (p. 376).

Our conceptualization of technology took its point of departure from the position Sterne had proposed. It was pivotal for us to understand the ways in which the telephone as a technology was accommodated into the "repeatable social, cultural and material processes" of the time it was first contacted, how - if at all - it transformed these processes, and how its preset meanings were transformed within these processes.

We adopted an interdisciplinary approach combining methods of interpretive sociology, ethnography and oral history. In four different cities 127 semi-structured and in-depth interviews were conducted that took place at the time/location interviewees chose in order to ensure the convenient circumstances for the interviewees to express themselves under the least possible influence (Ritchie 2003; Yow 2005). In this 40 percent of the interviewees were older than 60-year-old and none were younger than 30-year-old. The interviewees were selected to represent the different classes, ethnicities, religions and worldviews that characterize the selected cities.

The four cities were Ankara, Istanbul, Kayseri and Diyarbakır. Ankara is the capital of the Republic of Turkey and the center of the state. Istanbul, the cultural and financial capital of the country, is the most crowded, demographically most diverse city of Turkey and also the city where the telephone stations where first established. As Tanıl Bora (2006:42) puts it, Istanbul is a city which has always been "the metropolis of the country." Kayseri is located in the middle of Turkey. It is a city of commerce which always had pivotal importance in the long history of Anatolia, and also a city that is known for its relatively conservative culture (Buğra 2010). Diyarbakır is the political and cultural capital of the Kurdish population living in Turkey; this became the center of the Kurdish resistance based on identity politics especially after the 1980s. The sampling of these cities is in accordance with the two essential axes which were identified in Yılmaz Esmer's (2012) study, *Atlas of Cultural Values in Turkey*. The first axis is the population settled in the areas with secular versus conservative life styles; the second axis defined by areas settled by the population who express discontent with identifying themselves as "Turk," as opposed to the ones who are proud to do so. The fact that the majority of the interviewees had at least spent a decade of their

life in a different city gave us the opportunity to capture experience that extends beyond these cities.

The oral history research is complemented with archival research of government plans, official documents, institutional publishing, newspapers, film posters, popular and comic magazines from different periods, between the years of 1881 and 2010.[1] In analyzing the data, a comparative approach was adopted in order to examine the gaps between the discursive construction of the encounter with the telephone on a representative level and the first person narratives of lived experience gathered via oral research interviews.

A double system of representation

In her acclaimed book *When Old Technologies Were New* (1990), Carol Marvin examines the phenomenon of electric communication in the late 19th century and indicates:

> New electric media were sources of endless fascination and fear, and provided constant fodder for social experimentation. All debates about electronic media in the twentieth century begin here, in fact. For if it is the case, as it is fashionable to assert, the media give shape to the imaginative boundaries of modern communities... (Marvin 1990:4)

Turkey is not a special case in this respect. The introduction of the telephone in Turkey was received with the double sentiments of fear and fascination, producing feelings of "emulation" and "intimidation" which are the feelings that mark the different poles of imaginative boundaries of the experience of modernity in Turkey. The telephone technology arrived in Turkey during the Ottoman era as early as 1881, against the effort of the Ottoman state to prevent the penetration of this technology into the imperial land. The government documents located in the Office of the Prime Minister Ottoman Archives show that the state's efforts to limit and control the use of the telephone in order to strengthen the centralized structure of state power were challenged by civil efforts to privatize and democratize telephone communication services. Thus, the early period of the telephone opened up a space of struggle and contradiction between the state power and the social forces that demand renewal and change.

With the beginning of the 2nd Constitutional Era in the 1908, the revolutionaries started to re-establish the status quo in accordance with their ideals of modernization and Westernization. In this early period of the 20th Century, the telephone content increased remarkably. During this period newspaper articles advocate the dissemination of telephone usage among the civil population, by representing the establishment of telephony in the Western countries as the identifier of progression and civilization. Yet articles and official government reports which express anxiety about the uncontrollable consequences of direct and immediate communication among civil population also co-exist with this view.

This duel sentiment of emulation and fear triggered by the introduction of telephone technology is in line with the general sentiment that is shared by the modernization advocates in Turkey who are against the adaptation of Western values and life style. In fact, it is possible to say that Turkish national identity is founded on the conflict of this duel sentiment, which finds its early and strongest expression in Ziya Gökalp's' discursive dichotomy of "civilization vs. culture." Ziya Gökalp (1918/1994:28), who is considered to have a strong influence among the founding fathers of Pan-Turkism movement, defines "civilization" as the "sum total of concepts and technics which are produced by method and transferred from one nation to another through emulation." According to Gökalp, in order to seize the contemporary civilization these concepts and technics should be adopted, but 'culture', which is the sum total of "the sentiments [that] cannot be produced through a method and that cannot be transferred through emulation"[2] should be preserved and protected against the moral degeneration of Western values and life style. Meltem Ahıska (2010:184) indicates that this contradiction is the product of "a period when the concern to join the Western civilization and, at the same time, to create a distinct Turkish identity was most intense."

Our archival research shows that, concerning the telephone, this duel sentiment produced a double system of representation, which constructs the telephone as a contradictory site in the collective imagination. The telephone became identified with everything that represents the "modern West." Its absence creates a sense of deprivation; its presence is perceived as a threat to the established values of the traditional society. The archival content on

telephone dramatically increases beginning from the 1930s, which was also the beginning of an era where the modernist, nationalist, Kemalist rhetoric's widespread implementations in a broad area from education to economy, architecture to social practices had accelerated (see Bozdoğan 1997). Thus, the telephone becomes the symbol of "civilization" and the "civilized citizen." More than 80 percent of the news content is about the insufficiency of the available lines and underdeveloped infrastructure, which generates a sense of deprivation, even anger that is in most of the cases expressed through comparing Turkey with "developed, civilized, modern, Western countries." The lack of telephone technology and spread were seen as a drawback for Turkish modernization and its proliferation was considered essential for building a unified modern nation.

Abidin Daver, a columnist in *Cumhuriyet* newspaper wrote in 1934, pointing out the excessive numbers of fires that was resulted from the plenty of wooden buildings in Istanbul: "...not to mention that there is a telephone in every house in the European countries, all the buildings are also concrete (Cumhuriyet, 1934, 12 April)" This example is particularly interesting for it shows that the "existence of telephone in the every house" was considered a sign of civilization. However, even in the United States where the telephone spread most rapidly during the 1930s, it was not as widespread at homes (see Fisher 1994). As claimed in the Turkish press, the telephone technology was also not working as flawless as it was in the European countries, at least not until 1940s (Sterne 2003a). This also shows that the compared and contrasted "West" was a constructed ideal, and not necessarily based on historical facts in most of the cases.

The complaints about Turkey's "backwardness" as compared to Western countries (which is always imagined as being ahead in a linearly progressing time), find their expression over the belatedness and defiance of the implementation of telephone technology. Although vocalized considerably less over time, these complaints persisted until the 1980s, when the government launched a widespread campaign across the country for the installation of digital telephone lines in every house. Yet the complaints on backwardness were not only directed at the state authorities but also at the civil population who

was often ridiculed for their inability and ignorance about how to use a telephone. Especially in the comic strips of *Cumhuriyet* newspaper (surveyed between 1923-1948) and *Akbaba* comic magazine (surveyed between 1922-1977) there were many caricatures and humor stories that portrait common people struggling with telephone and ridiculing them for not having the manner and knowledge to use it. These representations are interesting as they show that the telephone had not only been instrumental for the demand of a "modern national identity," but also instrumental for the cultural elites to reassure their privileged status over common people, by ridiculing their lack of cultural capital to "become modern." In her study of radio in a similar context, Meltem Ahıska (2010:186) indicates that "the employment of Western artifacts" had always been instrumental "in imagining a modern form of government, as well as defining the identity of the elite and masses." These images of "ridiculous common man" are the product of a biased look adopted by the elites, not only against the people from the lower stratum, but also against themselves. This gaze directed toward itself from an imagined perspective of the "Western subject" holds the authority of the 'acceptable.' Ahıska (2010:186) refers to this "Western gaze" as an internalized, hegemonic power maintained within the "Occidentalist fantasy" which appoints the gap between the "desirable inward and problematic outward modernization" as Bernard Lewis (1997:46) puts it.

This gap creates another peculiarity when the elites themselves become the subject of humorous representation. In all of the caricatures and comic stories we have found, the telephone is represented as being owned or used by women subjects in the private space of the home. These women are all represented as unfaithful wives who use the telephone as a tool for cheating, or *mistresses* who receive material benefits from men in exchange for their sexual favors. Again, when we look at their outfits, body language and expressions, they represent the stereotypical image of the modern-Westernized women which belong to a high class social stratum. On the other hand, when the telephone is represented in the public space, it is, without an exception, used or owned by men. These are mostly either by government employees who use telephone as a tool for malpractice of their duties, or by men who call government employees in order to demand unethical

privileges. Again by looking at the way these men are represented (their outfits, manners and the way they speak), the figures also repeat the stereotypical images of "Western men," which are often ridiculed for being snobbish or even "feminine" in a *dandyish* style. It is remarkable that public and private spaces are strictly divided through gender and in both cases the telephone is perceived as a threat which subverts the traditional gender roles (feminizing men, causing moral breakdown of women), a tool that is identified with deception and corruption.

There is another category where the telephone is represented as a "broken/not properly working" technology along with some other emblematic tools and aspects of modern life, as for instance, the clock, public transportation or water mains. This last category is different from the former examples in the sense that, here in this category, the telephone is not represented as an "alien/threatening" technology, but as a technology which we fail to "imitate" and thus which makes visible the sense of deprivation that stems from the lack of a modern way of life.

Looking at representations of the telephone (from 1922 to the 1980s) it is possible to detect that the telephone became the symbol of conflicting feelings against the idealized image of West and the adaptation of modern life through its imitation. The absence of the telephone produces envy, emulation, deprivation, whereas its presence and penetration in the practices of daily life become a threat which brings corruption. The confusion which creates this double system of representation is an outcome of what Nilüfer Göle designates as "a discordant modernism":

The historical line of transition in the non-Western societies is determined by the will to imitate modernity and the desire for progression instead of their own history modernity. (...) In other words, non-Western modernity can be defined as a *discordant modernity* where, the field of intellect and the field of action do not integrate with each other; social transformations and political enforcements do not intertwine; modernity do not grow from the local, cultural organization and different fields co-exist together without corresponding to each other. (Göle 2008:11-12, emphasis added)

The findings of the popular magazines (*Ses*, *Hayat*, *Hürriyet* and *Milliyet Pazar*) from the 1960s to 1980s are in line with the earlier findings in terms of the relationship between gender roles and telephone, but here the telephone is used for promoting the desired gender roles instead of ridiculing them. In these popular magazines the telephone appears almost as a fetishistic accessory which provides sexual appeal for modern women, a more "civilized" look for modern, urban men and power attributed to business men and politicians. It is as if the presence of the telephone in the frame brings out the privileged social status of the subjects, embellishing them with intellectual and economical assets. The widespread use of the telephone in the pictures of popular figures (movie stars, pop icons, politicians, etc.), irrelevant of the context, or in the advertisements of different products which has nothing to do with telephone (nail polish, sewing machine, etc.) proves that the telephone remained the symbol of desired modern life and functioned as a social marker indicating the layers of social stratification. This system of representations slowly fades out throughout the 1980s and disappears completely with the dissemination of telephone into the majority of the Turkish houses in the 1990s.

Telephone as Solidarity

"Sound is a little piece of the vibrating world." (Sterne 2003a:11)

Tanıl Bora and Murat Gültekin (2007), in their foreword to the extensive study on *Modernization and Westernism*, remark that the process of modernization in Turkey has a very long history although it is a quite belated one. For them this long history has always been the stage for debates on "how to overcome this belatedness; how 'the local' and 'the modern' would be reconciled; how the things that belong to 'them' and 'us' will be synthesized; how the private spaces and public spaces will be conciliated?" (Bora and Gültekin 2007:13-14).

The findings of the archive research show that the introduction of telephone into the technological imaginary opened up a vigorous site for the ongoing debates on modernization in Turkey, which are determined by Bora and Gültekin in the above quoted extract. One of our primary goals in the oral

history research was to understand how these debates, which became a site of contradictory feelings and contested meanings in the surveyed archive material, found its response in the experience of daily life. How did these duel sentiments of "emulation" and "fear" that were expressed as a reaction to the presence and absence of telephone find their counterpart in the domain where collective and personal memories meet?

Although telephone technology had been introduced in the Ottoman era as early as 1881, up until the late 1980s the telephone remained a technology that was available but not yet prevalently penetrated to the majority of the middle-class houses. During this extended process of dispersal the telephone became a technology remembered mostly by its absence. Many people remember the long periods of waiting, in some cases almost about a decade, for their pending applications; others remember that they had to pay extra amounts to get a ahead in the waiting list. The answers to the question "what kind of people did own telephone in their houses back then?" is often answered as "the rich," and "important people," which are listed as higher-grade officials, government employees, or privileged people with certain occupations like doctors, lawyers, soldiers, etc. Although none of the informants uttered the word "modern" in order to define people who owned telephone, in some of the cases "wealth" is explained not by economics but cultural capital finds its expression in "a modern way of life."

A taxi driver who was born in a nearby village to Kayseri in 1950 remembers that his uncle, a government employee working in the city center, did own telephone:

> T.D: Not every house had a telephone back then (1960s)... My uncle did. A family with a telephone did seem rich. They would say: the man had a telephone!

> *Int*: Was your uncle rich?

> T.D: No. But we saw him as rich. Everyone did.

> *Int*: Why?

> T.D: Because he had a telephone! And also we were looking at the way he lived, well we were from the village, you know, the way he dressed

and all... also he had daughters; they were always helping me with my homework... well, we were villagers I mean, of course we were longing for some certain things.

Another interview with a housewife from Kayseri is also a good example to show how the telephone is also remembered as a marker of the social stratification:

E.H: Our village was the first to have a telephone. (late 1970s)

Int: How did that make you feel?

E.H: It made me feel very well of course.

Int: Did you feel different... I mean from the houses which did not have a telephone.

E.H: Well of course, it felt different; look for example (she shows the upper flats of a distant building with her hand) in that building some live on the top, and some live on the ground. Isn't the distance between the top and the ground apparent?

When the telephone was first encountered in a public space, not in the childhood but as an adult, the memory of the encounter in most of the cases recalls a feeling of shame resulted by the lack of knowledge to use the technology. A retired female teacher who was born in 1924 in Konya (an established, historical town in the middle of Anatolia) and came to Istanbul to live in the mid-1950s remembers herself trying to make a call for the first time:

V.H: We didn't know how to speak with a telephone. Why didn't we? Because there was no telephone around! Then one day I needed to make a call from a booth. Do you want me to tell you the story?

Int: Yes I do.

V.H: (...) There were telephone booths. I went there with a friend. They said you will get into there, you will open that and you will talk. I said okay. It was my first time almost. I went into the booth slowly, opened the door, as I put my step in, the lights went on. I closed the door and got out. They asked me 'what happened'? I said I did it wrong, the lights

went on. They said no, you will go in there, there is a handset, you will take it and you will talk to it. Okay. I went back in. I took the receiver, but probably the cable of the headset was too short or I don't know, but I lost my balance and it hit my face. I almost perished to make a call *(She laughs)*. I felt so ashamed.

Although the feelings of envy, longing and shame in the narrative of the memories about the first encounter with the telephone are in accordance with the findings of our archive research, not all the interviewees recall these feelings. Some of the interviewees, who especially lived in the city centers, do not recall any of these feelings attached to their memories about telephone. Instead many of them remained quite unresponsive to our questions about their feelings on the absence and presence of telephone in their homes. Many explained their indifference with the fact that they didn't need a telephone, because either the city was already too small (in the case of Kayseri and Diyarbakır), or that their private life and social circle were mostly limited within the neighborhood (mostly in Ankara and Istanbul) where they can always access to a phone in a nearby neighbor's house. A 63-year-old journalist from Diyarbakır explains why a telephone was not necessary in the 1970s:

N.B: Diyarbakır was not very big in those years. Because it wasn't too big a telephone was not much needed. The whole city was as big as the region we are in now. People already had the opportunity to get in touch with each other anyway, I mean if you need to find someone you could meet with them like in ten minutes. I believe neither people nor families saw it as a necessary communication device which they had to have in their homes. If you need to make a call you could have found one anyway.

In the case of the big cities like Istanbul neighborhood relations became something which substitutes for the absence of a telephone. 62-year-old businessman from Istanbul tells:

B.H: (...) we didn't need it really. Because we already had one or two telephone in our apartment building and the neighborhood relations back in those days is nothing like today, like, you wouldn't wince to knock a door and ask can I make a call? There wasn't anything like that!

> If there is telephone in one of the flats, then it is the telephone of the whole building, because the doors were open.

"The doors were open back than" is one of the most repeated phrases we heard throughout the oral history research. During the extended process of dispersal and integration of the telephone, a certain "culture of sharing" was established in the neighborhoods. It was usual for people to make and receive phone calls from their neighbors' house. We listened to many cases where the whole neighborhood was sharing only a couple of telephones. A 60-year-old woman from Kayseri recalls a day from mid-1970s, when she had to accept someone she did not know at all to receive a phone call from her house:

> N.O: I was just married. The telephone rang, the operator asked me to call someone from a nearby building, someone I didn't know! Can you imagine? Someone' mother was sick, so they were trying to get in touch. My house was the closest house nearby so they called me. I got out to the balcony and randomly called out to the street, telling the passersby people the name of the building, and the name of the person, I told that they have to come and receive their call in ten minutes. Then someone I didn't know at all came to my house, made a phone call and left. I couldn't say, 'but I don't know that person!' Because you have a telephone, you can answer to someone else's need.

Within the memories conveyed in the oral history research, telephone sharing memories are the most common. Almost all of the informants used a telephone from someone else's house or their telephone was used by a neighbor at least once in their life time, and in many of the cases, more than once. Some of the informants found this to be annoying, especially when people had to wait in their houses for long hours while waiting for their call to be connected. Some felt abused because it was excessively used and interrupted their daily routine, as well as when the bill started to become a heavy cost for the family budget. Yet very few people said that they accepted payment in return of their favor. In a couple of cases it was told that finally they had decided to place a coin box next to the telephone so that people could contribute for the telephone bill if they were able to; but the majority stated to find asking for money "quite inappropriate" in those days.

When they were asked if they felt their privacy was violated while someone else was making their calls from their house, or vice versa, many of the informants stated that they were already not accustomed to talk about private things on the phone. In fact many people said they needed less privacy back then because life was more "collective." A 54-year-old female accountant from Ankara gives quite a lucid explanation on the subject:

> M.A: Privacy back then was not one of our primary considerations, we had a collective life which we shared together with our neighbors. The doors were always open, everything was done collectively. We were going to the cinema together, there wasn't television... When we stayed alone at home even for a night, we were bored and started to think about who to visit or who to invite the day after. Today I drive a couple of colleagues of mine to work every morning, but I really don't want to do. Because it is my private time as well as my private space. For example I cannot listen to the music I want, or I have to socialize even when I don't want to.

> *Int*: What is different now?

> M.A: Life is different now!

Like M.A., when interviewees asked about how they would feel if they had to make a phone call from someone else's house now, or if someone would like to make a phone call from their house, almost all of the informants repeated that they would find it quite annoying now, because "now" is quite different from "back then." The difference between "now" and "back then" was repeatedly expressed with the phrases "there was solidarity back then," "life was collective back then," "Turkey was a poor country we had to share back then," "there wasn't commodity culture back then," "we didn't need privacy as we needed today back then." The most interesting finding of the oral history research for us was to figure out, quite unexpectedly, that the most common feeling attached to the memory of a telephone is the nostalgia for a lost "culture of sharing" and "solidarity."

Thus the double system of representation that appears in the findings of archive research about the telephone with the attached feelings of "emulation"

and "intimidation" finds a counterpart in the narratives of telephone memories only partially. When the telephone was recalled as the sign of "wealth" which sometimes became the capital of a social class or a cultural group of elite. Its absence could create feelings of envy and destitute, but at other times it was recalled with completely indifferent feelings. Yet none of the informants recall being threatened or intimidated by the penetration of telephone into the privacy of their houses, since privacy "back then" was not assured with the walls of the house but the borders of the neighborhood. Thus, the telephone which belongs to a world of moral corruption, subversion of gender roles, collapse of traditional values in the representational level, is recalled in the oral history research as a symbol of "solidarity" and "sharing" as it was accommodated into the traditional everyday life of the neighborhood.

Conclusion

In *Writing Culture: Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, James Clifford (1986:10) writes that "*cultures* do not hold still for their portraits." He explicates:

> Attempts to make them so always involve simplification and exclusion, selection of a temporal focus, the construction of a particular self-other relationship, and the imposition or negotiation of power relationships.

Thus, driving the conclusion from the findings of the oral history research that "there was solidarity back then" would not only be an over-simplification but would be confusing historical facts with context-based narratives of memory. Annette Kuhn (2002:3-4) in *Family Secrets*, which is a genuine study on how to analyze memory texts - "memory work" in Kuhn's own words, remarks that:

> ...my memory work that make the telling of my stories possible is in many ways more important, and certainly of greater practical use in the present, than their actual content.

Thus the feeling of nostalgia for a lost culture of sharing and solidarity which finds its expression in the memories of the telephone should be considered

within the context of mutual relations where the experience of past and present are woven together. A useful assumption to start building that context would be to say that what separates "now" from "back then," at least temporally, is the era of 1980s. All of the interviewees had a telephone line were established across the country through the implementation of an active government program: "A telephone to every house campaign" as it was recalled by almost every informant.

The 1980s also indicates "a stark choice between the old and the new" in the recent history of Turkey as Reşat Kasaba (1997:15) describes a break with "the continuing influence of pre-republican political, economic and social institutions and attitudes." The year of 1980 in Turkey marks the beginning of an era in which almost every aspect of life was hit by a pervasive change. The progression of leftist politics which reached its peak in the late 1970s was repressed by the severity of the 1980 military intervention, not only in terms of political action but also in terms of its ability to shape a political discourse. The void opened up by the *coup d'état* paved the way for a rapid transformation of the society in order to meet the requirements of a competitive market economy and neo-liberal policies. As a result of this "stark" change, everything had started to be re-constructed: the system of economy, the organization of the state, the political discourse. Of course, social values and practices had followed as a new *habitus* began to be established.

One of the idiosyncrasies of the 1980s was that it was an overwhelmingly oppressive era which also triggered a pervasive "freedom of speech" on the part of the silenced 'Others' of the modern Turkish-self (Gürbilek 2011). This led to a confrontation with the past and throughout the 1990s a critical history of the Turkish modernity began to be re-written. Within this literature Turkish modernity was criticized as being a statist, technocratic project which imposed from above social values, belief systems and life styles that are discordant and not adaptable for the society. The transition to a liberal economy was greeted as a social stimulator which brings forth the long been repressed "true" identity of the Turkish public and the necessary climate for civil politics (Göle 2000; Aksoy and Robins 1995).

Yet an often missed aspect of these discussions is that "the public" in question had always been imagined as a unified mass which is subjected to a

project that was designed and implemented by an isolated group of Republican elites. The narrations of how actually the process of modernization was experienced by the subjects of this project and the ways in which this experience is constructed and preserved in the collective memory are largely overlooked. Şerif Mardin (1990) criticizes critical studies in Turkey for focusing on the macro discourses and projects of change while studying in the fields of history and sociology, and ignoring the continuities and disparities which find their expressions in the micro experiences. This is particularly true when it comes to the social impact of technology within the context of "Turkish experience of modernity" (Ahıska 2010:12).

As Sterne (2003b:377) reminds us, "technology is not simply a 'thing' that 'fills' a predetermined social purpose;" in fact, technology is "associated with habits and practices, sometimes crystallizing them and sometimes promoting them." The gap between the "telephone as threat" and "telephone as solidarity" is waiting to be filled. Other gaps between the discursive construction of the elements of the experience of modernity and the actual experience of the historical subjects should be disclosed with more ethnographic studies. This is particularly essential because the feeling of nostalgia for whatever we had lost also points a feeling of 'lack' that pervasively infuses itself into our present. Such research on the ground could provide us with an essential knowledge to articulate the *habitus* of today in Turkish use of social media.

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Notes

[1] The survey of archival material from press includes the most prominent newspapers of their period, *Tanin* (1908-1918) and *Tasviri Efkâr* (1861-1920); and, for the early republic era (1923-1948), *Hâkimiyet-I Milliye* (from 1934 published under the title *Ulus*) and *Cumhuriyet*; from 1948 to 2010, popular newspapers *Hürriyet* and *Milliyet*; along with, *Akbaba* comic magazine (1922-1977), *Gırgır* comic magazine (1977-1989) and popular magazines of *Ses*, *Hayat* and *Hürriyet* and *Milliyet Pazar*.

[2] My translation.