

The History of Telephony in the Non-West

Burçe Çelik

Bahcesehir University

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This special issue of CyberOrient deals with the history of telephony in the non-west. Although the comprehensive histories of different media technologies in the west have been well covered in the existing media and history literature, the roles that these imported technologies played in the non-west have not been elaborated in detail. The telephone as a technology of communication took up differing roles in private and public spaces. The socio-political changes it fostered both in private and professional relations should be regarded as a significant object of historical analysis.

In this issue, by paying particular attention to the user-perspective, we tried to tackle with the processes that both the telephone and the mobile phone have adopted in the non-western social landscapes. The focus is on the ways in which people of these relatively marginalized regions transformed this “foreign” technology into a familiar and a local one that has become part of their daily practices and imaginations. The use of these technologies in everyday practices, the integration of these gadgets into people’s cultural, social and even political struggles and the meanings that were attributed to the technological practices have been the main issues that the essays of this issue address. While the three essays present the findings of the research on the social history of telephony in Ottoman Empire and Turkey, other essay deals with the role of mobile phones in Egypt.

This issue, in our view, demonstrates that technologies always transcend their mechanical and instrumental functions as they respond and reproduce

the users' wills, purposes, desires, anticipations and inclinations. In this regard, they become social, political and cultural artifacts that are loaded with varying meanings and functions depending on the users' lifeworlds and needs.