



# CyberOrient

*Online Journal of the Virtual Middle East*

**Vol. 8, Iss. 2, 2014**

ISSN 1804-3194

# CyberOrient

Online Journal of the Virtual Middle East

© American Anthropological Association 2014

CyberOrient is a peer-reviewed online journal published by the American Anthropological Association in collaboration with the Faculty of Arts of Charles University in Prague.

Editor-in-Chief: Daniel Martin Varisco

Managing Editor: Vit Sisler

ISSN 1804-3194

<http://www.cyberorient.net>

# Index

## - Editorial

**Burçe Çelik** – The History of Telephony in the Non-West  
*Page 4*

## - Articles

**Gülengül Altıntaş** – The Introduction of Telephone into Turkish Houses: Private Space, Borders of the Neighborhoods and Solidarity  
*Page 6*

**Burçe Çelik** – The Telephone and the Social Struggles in Turkey: An Overview of a Social History of a Communication Technology  
*Page 26*

**Kira C. Allmann** – Mobile Revolution: Toward a History of Technology, Telephony and Political Activism in Egypt  
*Page 46*

## - Comments

**Burçe Çelik, Derya Gurses Tarbuck** – Reflections on Oral History: Four Cities on the Social History of Telephone Technology in Turkey  
*Page 72*

## - Reviews

**Petr Kučera** – Review: Technology and National Identity in Turkey. Mobile Communications and the Evolution of a Post-Ottoman Nation  
*Page 89*

# The History of Telephony in the Non-West

Burçe Çelik

Bahcesehir University

Keywords:

*Egypt, public sphere, information and communication technology, identity, Turkey, communication studies*

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.

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

Gülengül Altıntaş

Bahcesehir University

## 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

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 dual 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 re-organization 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 reorganization 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 *Bourdieuian* 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 were 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 dual 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 dual 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"<sup>2</sup> 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 dual 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 “Occidental 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’s 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.

## References

Aksoy, Asu and Kevin Robins 1995. “Istanbul Rising: Returning the Repressed to the Urban Culture.” *European Urban and Regional Studies* 2(3): 223-235.

Ahıska, Meltem 2010. *Occidentalism in Turkey: Questions of Modernity and Nationality Identity in Turkish Radio Broadcasting*. London and NewYork: Tauris Academic Studies.

Bozdoğan, Sibel 1997. *The Predicament of Modernism in Turkish Architectural Culture: An Overview In Re-thinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, Reşat Kasaba and Sibel Bozdoğan, eds. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press.

Bora, Tanıl, ed. 2006 Taşraya Bakmak [Understanding the Province]. İstanbul: İletişim.

Bora, Tanıl and Murat Gültekin 2007. Introduction *In* Modernleşme ve Batıcılık [Modernization and Westernism], Tanıl Bora and Murat Gültekin, eds. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.

Buğra, Ayşe 2010. Toplumsal Cinsiyet, İşgücü Piyasaları ve Refah Rejimleri: Türkiye’de Kadın İstihdamı [Social Gender, Labor Market and Regimes of Wealth]. 108K524 TÜBİTAK SOBAG Research Project Final Report.

Daver, Abidin 1934. Hem Nalina Hem Mihına, Cumhuriyet, April 12: 3.

Demir, Tanju 2005. Türkiye’de Posta Telgraf ve Telefon Teşkilatının Tarihsel Gelişimi (1840- 1920). Ankara: PTT GenelMüdürlüğü.

Clifford, James and George, Marcus, eds. 1986. Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography. London: University of California Press.

Gürbilek, Nurdan 2011. The New Cultural Climate in Turkey: Living in a Shop Window. New York: Zed Books.

Gökalp, Ziya 1994. Türkçülüğün Esasları, İstanbul: İnkılap Yayınları.

Göle, Nilüfer 2000. Modern Mahrem: Medeniyet ve Örtünme, İstanbul: Metis.

Esmer, Yılmaz 2012. Türkiye Değerler Atlası [Atlas of Cultural Values in Turkey], İstanbul: Bahçeşehir Üniversite Yayınları.

Fischer, Claude 1994. America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone to 1940. University of Los Angeles: California Press.

Kasaba, Reşat and Sibel Bozdoğan, eds. 1997 Re-thinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press.

Kuhn, Annette 2002. Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination. London and NY: Verso.

Lewis, Bernard 1997. The Future of the Middle East. London: Phoenix.

Mardin, Şerif 1990. Türkiye’de Toplum ve Siyaset [Society and Politics in Turkey]. İstanbul: İletişim.



Marvin, Carol 1990. When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking About The Electric.

Communication in The Late Nineteenth Century. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mumford, Lewis 2010. Technics and Civilization. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Önay, Aliye 1995. Türkiye’de Telefon Teşkilatının Kuruluşu *In Çağın Yakalayan Osmanlı*, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu and Mustafa Kaçar, eds. İstanbul: IRCICA.

Ritchie, A. Donald 2003. Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide. Oxford: Osgord University Press.

Sterne, Jonathan 2003a. The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction. Durham: Duke University Press.

Sterne, Jonathan 2003b. Bourdieu, Technique and Technology. *Cultural Studies* 17(3/4):367-389.

Yow, V. Raleigh 2005. Recording Oral History: A Guide For The Humanities And Social Sciences. Oxford: Alta Mira Press.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> 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-İ 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*.

<sup>2</sup> My translation.

# The Telephone and the Social Struggles in Turkey: An Overview of a Social History of a Communication Technology

Burçe Çelik

Bahcesehir University

## Abstract:

*This essay presents an overview of social history of telephone technology in Turkey, by taking the user-perspective to its center. As part of the set of essays in this special issue dealing with the history of telephony in the non-west, this essay seeks to explore how the telephone has become part of social practices of people, how it has integrated into the social struggles of people and how it has been appropriated to convey the users' struggle to alter their positions in the social structure, assert their agencies and participate in the making of the modern throughout the history of modern Turkey. Rather than offering a detailed categorization, periodization and related narration of the life of the telephone technology in Turkey/Ottoman Empire, this article specifically focuses on some moments where the meanings and the uses of telephone in daily life practices and imaginations of people reflected and contributed to the mobilization of the social struggle in the form of class and/or ethnic and gender struggle.*

## Keywords:

*public sphere, Turkey, sociology, information and communication technology, communication studies*

This essay presents an overview of social history of telephone technology in Turkey, by taking the user-perspective to its center. As part of the set of essays in this special issue dealing with the history of telephony in the non-west, this essay seeks to explore how the telephone has become part of social practices of people, how it has integrated into the social struggles of people and how it has been appropriated to convey the users' struggle to alter their positions in the social structure, assert their agencies and participate in the making of the modern throughout the history of modern Turkey. Rather than offering a detailed categorization, periodization and related narration of the life of the telephone technology in Turkey/Ottoman Empire, this

article specifically focuses on some moments where the meanings and the uses of telephone in daily life practices and imaginations of people reflected and contributed to the mobilization of the social struggle in the form of class and/or ethnic and gender struggle.

The telephone is among the least studied modern communication technologies in Turkey as well as in other non-western countries. Although the social history of technologies, such as the telephone, has received significant scholarly attention in various disciplines within the fields of social sciences and humanities, the focus of the researches has largely been on the western territories, mostly due to the fact that the design, innovation and the production of these technologies took place in the US and central Europe. Yet, the use of these technologies were never limited to places where they were initially designed or invented but spread to different places, generating multiplicities, diversities and differences within the production of multiple modernities. Arguing that technologies become what they are as they become sites for social practices, by responding and reproducing the wills, desires, anticipations and inclinations of people, this project aims to produce an understanding of what is wrapped in the Turkish telephony. The telephone has long been a technology whose ownership and utilization in private spaces were limited to the privileged segments of society. Thus, this study attempts to give a glimpse of how the presence or absence of the telephone in people's homes affected social relations and contributed to the social dispositions in Turkey. The telephone was first introduced as a commercial service provided by an internationally owned company and then nationalized after the foundation of the Turkish Republic and remained as a state service until the mid 2000s. In this article, I sketch an overview of the history of the telephony as unevenly distributed state service and the resentments it created on the part of the larger unprivileged public. This dynamic, I suggest, also informs the collective appetite for technological novelties such as the cell phone that has become extremely popular shortly after it was introduced in the mid-1990s as a technology of communication whose use or ownership did not require the approval of the state authorities.

The research project that this article is based on approaches the history of the telephone with a view that strives to put forward a social history example,

which sustains itself from different sources and hence difference viewpoints (state-user, owner and non-owner). The findings of the oral history research which we have conducted with more than a hundred people living in four different cities in Turkey (Ankara, İstanbul, Kayseri, Diyarbakır) and the archival research, including the analysis of national newspapers, popular journals and Telecom institutional magazines will be used as the grounds of the analysis of the Turkish telephony. All of these sources, and especially the interviews with people, 40 percent of whom were over 60 years of age, belonging to the different social classes, owning differing social and political stands (Secularists, Islamists, Kurdish nationalists etc.) provide valuable hints about how telephony has been imagined and what was bound up in its performance in terms of collective desires, responses, purposes and wishes. However, this material on its own does not fully reveal the intricacy of telephony. As such, this paper only uses some of the examples gathered from the oral history and archival research, while it more focuses on the general analysis of how the telephone has attained its meanings within the social imaginary and collective practices in Turkey.

### Discussions of History of Modernity and Technology in Turkey

Although the history of modernity in Turkey has been of great scholarly interest and although the modernization ideals and projects of Turkey and Ottoman Empire have been constellated technologically particularly in the sense that the adoption of techniques and technologies have always been integral to the modernization processes in Turkey, the study of technology has received little attention of the scholars. In works where the intrinsic link between the programs of modernity and the presumed and desired adoption of western technologies and techniques is underlined, technology has mostly been considered as a tool, machine or a symbol. Technology as tools, machines or devices have been said to be “transferred” to the Ottoman/Turkish territory as unfamiliar, novel and external things that would repair the failing and collapsing system of economic and political landscape along with the institutions that were in need of reforms and recovery (Lewis 2002, İhsanoğlu 1992, 1995). In that respect, communication and transportation technologies such as the postal system, the telegraph and railways of the

19th century were seen as the futile attempts of the Ottomans to repair its failing and collapsing institutions, economic and political systems. Thus in that sense the telegraph was a machine of network that would centralize and unify the country of the Ottomans; the railways would bring new means of commerce and new connections with the European economic center; because they were imagined as such by the state rulers or represented as such in the rulers' and elites' discourses (Davison 1990).

Accordingly historians of Turkish modernity, science and technology have taken these technologies as tools that have functioned always in ways that were planned and imagined by the state rulers and the adoption of these techniques and technologies by the Ottoman state revealed the changes in institutions of the Ottoman Empire or the Turkish Republic. The real functions of these technologies, such as the ways in which they were used by different agents, including ordinary people, businessmen, traders and state people were never of so much concern. Technology in general was what the rulers imagined them to be. Yet, the comprehensive and wider understanding of technologies show us that techniques and technologies have usually grown different from the expectations of their inventors and/or technocrats. For instance, the telegraph was adopted almost without a hesitation by the Ottoman sultan, which is a very atypical case, for it was thought to bring the means of control and centralization and yet it turned out to be of help for the dissolution of the Empire and the foundation of the new Republic as the successor of the Ottoman Empire.

In a similar manner, technologies have also become part of discussions in these works where as a general and abstract concept it is used as a symbol of westernization ideals in which the presumed time lag between the European and Ottoman/Turkish present is imagined to be filled with the speed and movement that is brought by modern technologies and science. After all technology was an applied science and had the capacity to bring what is missing to the landscape. Therefore whenever it is mentioned within the discourses of modernization projects, it symbolized the absolute ideal of westernization, and accordingly revealed desire for similarities with the western nation particularly in terms of the use of techniques and technologies. Historians considered technologies in that sense as symbols because

techniques and technologies were in general understood as symbols for westernization, Occidentalism and/or self-Orientalism of the modernizing state rulers and elites of Ottoman/Turkey. However as the literature on multiple modernities suggest, “modernity and westernization are not identical; Western patterns of modernity are not the only ‘authentic’ modernities, though they enjoy historical precedence and continue to be a basic reference point for others” (2000:2-3). Thus, although the use and domestication of “western” technologies contributed to the production of the modern in Turkey, the collective use of or desire for those technologies on the part of people should not be reduced to the discussions of westernization.

Although there are few works within critical Turkish studies that treat technologies as serious objects of cultural analysis such as Meltem Ahiska’s (2005) work on early Turkish radio, media technologies in these studies remain to be analyzed only by focusing how they were imagined and put in operation for propaganda of Kemalist nationalism, secularism and modernization processes. In this regard, the way radio was used for spreading the Kemalist ideology by the rulers of the time provided the only explanation how Turkish society has been forced to incorporate the modernity ideals via the mediation of radio which functioned like an embodiment of the west that is paradoxically seen both as a model and a threat for Turkish identity. Or in literary criticism, the role of technology such as cars, clocks, engines in Turkish novels was analyzed and said to have paradoxical roles which reveal the imaginations of technology both as part of self, familiarity, desire, self-expression and also of other, unfamiliarity, fear and loss of self-presence. Even though these works were and are very instructive to understand how technologies have been imagined and obtained meaning in the modernizing elite’s imaginary and the state’s projects, they do not tell us much about how these technologies have been perceived, received and appropriated by the larger public. In the absence of this link of users of these technologies, we cannot fully understand the functions and meanings of these technologies and accordingly we miss the understanding of crucial components of everyday imaginations and experiences of modernity. Cultural studies of media and technology show us that each media text can be read and interpreted in various different ways though the methods of reading are always limited by historical conventions to a certain extent.

A technology is never only shaped by power structures but also not independent from it. Just as its use and meanings are determined both by the agency of users and also by the physical infrastructures, economic, social and cultural conditions that it is put to use in. In other words, neither modernity nor technologies are reducible to the projects and programs of the state or state elites' discourses. The fact that origins of modernity and modern technological inventions are not products of any particular country does not necessarily mean that technology and modernity are not generated in those people's life experiences through their agency and conditions they live in. As Jonathan Sterne (2003) remarks, technology is always at a given moment a social practice and implemented in social struggle. Technology finds its own meaning and use in practice, in rituals of people whose agency and intentions are in play much as the strategies and policies of the state are. Understood as such the study of technology enables us to come closer to a comprehension of how modernity is produced by ordinary people in their practices, by the state in their operations and projects, by physical and material conditions, and affectivities that are wrapped in intentions, desires, wills and purposes, and in social relations and through social struggles that may be manifested as cultural struggles, class struggles or identity politics. Taken as such analysis of social history of a technology might make us see the continuities and change, sameness and difference, unities and paradoxes in experiences of people and in discourses of the state and the state elites.

### The State and the Public

The early history of the telephone in Ottoman/Turkish landscape which goes back to the 1880s is illustrative to see how the life of this technology were to be structured with the struggles in Turkey. The struggle for the telephone use has largely started with the initiatives of businessmen and traders' who wanted to install lines between their residences and work places despite the strict governmental control of Sultan Abdulhamid II over public communications and communication technologies. Actually, the first appearance of telephony in Turkey appears to have taken place as early as 1877 when the Production Director of the Directorate of Telegraphy, Emil Lakvan, experimented with communicating over a telephone line of 500

meters length. The Istanbul press reported that the experiment was successful and a telephone line between a telegraph factory and a telegraph office would be established soon. Of note is the fact that, if the news is to be believed, Lakvan had himself “manufactured the telephone machine (used in the experiment) based on the invention of the American Graham Bell (Vakit 1877).”

Nevertheless, the establishment of telephone lines in Istanbul would not be realized until 1881. The first telephone line in the Ottoman capital Istanbul was established between the Ministry of Postal Services and a post office and the next one between a bank and one of its branches and a third one between two coastal ports of the city. However, all the lines except the one between the two ports were disbanded five years later. It is widely believed that the reason for this action was the deep suspicions of the ruling Sultan Abdulhamid II on new communication technologies, which could be utilized for subversive purposes. During the remaining years of the rule of the highly authoritarian Sultan Abdulhamid II, no new initiatives were taken to set up new telephone lines (Bektaş 2000, Onay 1995, Demir 2005). The Telephone Systems of the Continent of Europe (1895) notes that the proposals of French and other investors to establish telephone services in the Ottoman Empire were all rejected and speculates “political prejudices” in the ruling circles against telephony to be the reason for the blocking of penetration of this technology to the Ottoman lands.

Various records from the Ottoman Archives indeed provide documentation on the persistent stand of the authorities to prevent such a penetration. On the other hand, these documents also testify to a history of efforts to appropriate this technology despite the authorities’ position, such as a communiqué addressed to the Interior Ministry, relaying information on the presence of telephones in the Black Sea coastal town of Samsun and calling for their seizures and prevention of telephone communications. There are also several records regarding seizures at the customs of telephone equipment to be imported into the country. The despotic Sultan Abdulhamid II would be deposed by the so-called Young Turks’ revolution of 1908 and the revolutionary regime would soon initiate re-establishment of telephone services in Turkey. Tellingly, the Mail and Telegraph Ministry would be renamed



as Mail, Telegraph and Telephone Ministry in 1911. In 1911, the British engineer and entrepreneur, Herbert Laws Webbe, was given the right to run the telephone company - *Dersaadet Telefon İşletmesi* - for 30 years. Yet after the First World War, this company was appropriated by the government and almost all foreign workers and managers working in this company were sacked (Alşan 1990).

It was only after the 1930s that the telephone service became a state service that aimed to connect different parts of the nation to each other in accordance with the policies of the nationalization and modernization of the infrastructure as well as the everyday life culture of the country. Despite the state endeavors to increase the penetration of the telephone system and the policies that regard the technological development a necessary counterpart of modernization, progress and economic development, the total telephone lines in İstanbul (the biggest city of Turkey), İzmir (the third biggest city of Turkey) and Ankara (the capital city) were not more than 20 thousand lines by 1935 (see Bezaz undated), while there were more than 3 million telephone stations, 48 thousand telephone kiosks were actively in use in the UK by 1938 (see UK Telephone History 2010).

Starting from the early 1940s till the mid 1980s, the Turkish telephony as a state service was structured with the ownership of some and non-ownership of others. From the 1940s onwards, the political system has changed from a single party system to a multiparty system, from statist economy politics to liberal and neoliberal market economy. While statistics show that Turkey's telephone infrastructure did indeed develop somewhat from the 1960s onwards, (after the first economic development plan of the state), they unmistakably reveal that the actual gap between demand and supply nevertheless increased at a higher rate than the increase in supply. Clearly, the introduction of the telephone to more households was creating an appetite for telephony and resentment towards the state as the service provider in households without the telephone. Although Turkey adopted many technologies almost simultaneously with Europe, the feeling of being late to technological development and progress has never left the affective and cultural landscape of Turkey. This sense of belatedness also draws upon desires, aspirations and fears, envies and resentments toward the governments,

which failed to bring the means of progress and economic stability to the country. Perhaps motivated by the fear and anxiety of being latecomers and by a desire to own the newest modern object, any adoptable technology has entered some people's lives at a high speed. While technologies were fascinating to many, their actual uses and possessions were limited to a small segment of society for so long (until the mid-1980s). Telephone technology, in this regard, has been the object of collective fascination and frustration, joy and fear, determinacy and hesitancy. On the one hand, the increase of the telephone penetration level was in the state programs especially after the 1960s; the intelligentsia and business circles also supported these economic programs to institute higher connectivity as a means to better trade and the public (particularly urban people) demanded and accepted to pay the taxes, prices and fees for telephone connection. On the other hand, the telephony as a state service could not fulfill the demand of the public (thousands of people's names were on the waiting lists for years) and even when the state instituted the telephone system in particular areas, the telephone connection was often so expensive, not high quality and forcibly short (telephone calls were limited to three minutes until the mid-1980s due to the few available telephone lines for an overcrowded population of telephone users). By 1962, there were 192 thousand subscribers while there were 183 thousand on the waiting list, by 1977 the numbers reached to 851 thousand subscribers and 1.3 million people were on the waiting list (DPT Development Plans 1996). Some of the headline examples from different years of the daily newspapers read as follows: "The telephone company still ignores the people's complaints" (Milliyet 1953); "60 thousand people are still waiting to get a telephone line" (Hürriyet 1959), "Turkey ranks among the least telephonic nation" (Hürriyet 1960), "All are complaining about the high fees of telephone connection" (Hürriyet 1972); "The unspeaking telephone" (Hürriyet 1973).

Within this period where the non-ownership of the telephone has determined the very practices and feelings for the telephony system for the large public, people who were waiting for a telephone subscription for years were inclined to find some acquaintances working in the state organizations to accelerate the subscription processes, with a belief that favoritism

plays a crucial role in the state management of subscriptions. Our oral history research has revealed that the telephone has been seen as an object of privileged ones who differ from the rest of the society on the basis of their financial capabilities (economic capital), their educational qualifications (intellectual/cultural capital) and through their hegemonic power over others (symbolic capital). In other words, the use of state telephony has historically been limited to the small segment of society who held the means of social, symbolic, economic and cultural capital.

Roughly starting from the 1980s, as the structure of social space has altered due to the increased integral migrations from rural areas to big cities, due to the newly adopted neo-liberal market economic system, and due to the fact that the third military intervention generated a new rationale for the state to surveil the citizens (particularly the dissidents) more effectively, the telephone has become more of a “useful and instrumental” technology for the state and for wider, larger public. The motto of the 1980s, “Turkey is opening to the world,” was implying the role of technologies in this ambition. The organization of a national technoscape was seen as crucial for achieving the dream of making Turkey a body that could communicate and be compatible with its western counterparts. “Highways are liberty” announced Turgut Özal, the prime minister at the time, who was a crucial figure in the transition to a neo-liberal development model in the 1980s. He promised new highways, high penetration telephone lines and electricity and water to areas that have always economically, socially and politically marginalized. Transforming the technoscape was a necessary part of imagining and idealizing a civilized, modernized and unified Turkey. In an interview with the former Communication and Transportation Minister of Özal’s government in the 1980s, the minister told us that “the telephone along with all telecommunication systems were crucial to institute a unified, safe and equal Turkey. The government was eager to establish this unified and modern technological landscape.” This ambition has also implied the aim of the state to monitor and control the citizens’ daily communications as well as to open the Turkish market to the global consumer and trade culture in the 1980s. Our oral history research findings also prove that the majority of users in Turkey consider the 1980s and Özal’s government as the milestone

for the Turkish technological development where the rapid increase of the telephone system was seen as the most evident example of the progress. The headlines of the popular national newspapers also demonstrate that the approval of the ambition to connect the national telecommunication system to the “civilized” and “progressive” world. Some of the examples are: “How do we compete with Europe in our telecommunications?” (Milliyet 1982), “We’re catching up with the civilized age in telephone systems” (Milliyet 1986). The liberalization and commodification of the cultural landscape of the 1980s were also caricatured and ridiculed through the representation of telephone in daily cartoons where the telephone was depicted as an object of the corrupted, dirty and yet seemingly fancy lifestyle.

### Class, Ethnic and Gender Struggles via Telephony

As embodied practices and also as possessions, technologies serve to distinguish one group from another and to produce commonalities between different people or groups in the same social space. A technology may well function as cultural and social capital, becoming a form of agency, prestige and control. The main idea of being in social space according to Pierre Bourdieu (1990) is to be different from others. The position one occupies, by possessing different kinds of capital, is integral to conserve or transform representations of social space. Although each technology refers to different bodily practices and social dispositions, technologies are in general integral to the habitus in the sense that they generate practices, are made up by these practices, and become means for positioning oneself in the world. The telephone in Turkey as a technology that has been unevenly distributed to the nation functioned like a cultural and symbolic capital differing the owners from others and generating envy and appetite for the property of telephone on others.

The uneven distribution of direct access to telephony has also given way to social practices of allowing others to make use of one’s household telephony. Thus the telephone that was privately owned and placed in a private household was also a semi-public tool that generated its own practices where the task of the telephone owner was structured with the practice of sharing the

property with others. The telephone in that sense has come with its own ethics and responsibility: the ones that had the means to have this technology needed to be responsible, good citizens and good neighbors willingly or unwillingly, happily or unhappily sharing the telephone with others. In this regard, the telephone whose status as private technology and a public one is blurred gave way to the practices where traditional (brotherhood, solidarity, communal life) and the modern (technology, a personalized technology) are negotiated. The telephone functioned like a “gift” as one of our interviewees has told us, that is happily offered to the guests; it has also been considered a unwanted “burden” as another interviewee has expressed which created unnecessary traffic of neighbors in one’s private place. The ones who owned a telephone when many others did not were in the position of offering the share of what they had and accordingly differed themselves from others in the very practice of social relations. The question of who used to own a telephone when many did not have was often answered in our oral history research with statements such as:

“The privileged ones [...] For instance, there was something called state-privileged lines. It is like very privileged. Like you are VIP [...] Not everyone had a telephone. The state gave it to the people that it wanted to. That was it [...] But the resonation of this on the part of public was like class discrimination. Some were always imitating others, jealous of others who owned it. Admiration is a good thing, but envy, detest, jealousy [...] these are all very poisoning. And we lived this in those years” (a retired bank officer male informant in his sixties).

While the possession of the telephone has certainly associated with the economic capital of the owner, more importantly the telephone (like many other household technologies in Turkish context) has come to signify the cultural and symbolic capital of the possessor and her/his family. An example from a taxi driver from Kayseri in his fifties remembers those days as:

Q: Do you remember the telephone from your years in Kayseri?

A: Only my uncle had it. The ones who had the telephone were mostly seen as rich people. We used to say “he even has a telephone.”

Q: So it was an issue of conversation?

A: Yes, of course. My uncle for example was a state officer in Kayseri.

A: Was he rich?

A: No, actually. But we used to think that he was an important person.

Q: Why?

A: Well, because he had a telephone in his flat. And we came to Kayseri from a little village. His clothes, his family etc. were all reflecting his status. He had daughters and they were going to school and actually those girls helped me with my homework. We kind of looked up to them. The whole family I mean.

Thus, the “significance” and the social power that the telephone brought to the household was not necessarily related to the wealth or economic capital of the possessors, but rather with the urban and modern lifestyle, education and taste which we could categorize in accordance with Bourdieu’s (1990) theory as cultural capital. The telephone was a symbol and representation of cultural and symbolic capital within the understanding of the public and yet the same sort of representations were also common in popular publications, including the newspapers, film posters, journals etc. It is so common to see the photographs of politicians in print news, or artists in celebrity magazines, or people in ads of toothpaste, banks or any other unrelated businesses with a telephony system all of whom were represented with the telephone although the contents of the news, ads or story are completely unrelated to the telephone. This also shows that the telephone was truly a cultural artifact that has fully integrated into the national imaginary, symbolizing modern and urban values, lifestyle and thereby cultural capital. Thus the appetite and desire for telephony was not only based in practical and instrumental incentives for the use of “necessary technology” for everyday life practices but also conditioned with motivations and desire for social mobility.

Other than class struggle and differences, the telephone has historically been integrated into identity-based struggles such as gender and ethnic identities. As other studies in different national contexts show, the telepho-

ny has historically been associated with the voice of the operators working in the centrals (Karakışla 2008). Operators in Turkey, like many other countries, were mostly women, for whom the telephone companies initially of European based firms and then of the state meant the opportunity to work in non-domestic places. The history of Turkish telephony within the context of feminist struggles has also a special significance: while the telephone service was introduced to the Ottoman society by European telephone companies, the managers of the company preferred to hire non-Muslim women as central operators probably due to the seeming impossibility of hiring Muslim women as workers at the turn of the 20th century Ottoman society (Karakışla 2008). However, some Muslim, modernist and elite women protested the policies of this western company with a complain that a company serving for Ottoman people in the Ottoman soils must produce opportunities of jobs for women without a discrimination based on their religious and ethnic identities. Although, this protest was more nationalist oriented in essence, resonating the period's popular nationalist ideology of the Turkish elites, it is considered as one of the first protests of Muslim women in the history of Ottoman and modern Turkey (Karakışla 2008). After the second initiation of the telephone service in Turkey following the suspension of the ban on telephone service in the 1920s, the operators have become like extensions of the state telephony in the eyes of the users till the establishment of the automatized central system in the mid 1990s of Turkey. The operators were there to connect the local and the international calls, functioning like constant eavesdroppers as they connect two ends via cables. Throughout the most of the history of telephony in Turkey as an object possessed by only limited people, the operators were also there to interrupt the telephonic connection when the talk exceeded three-minute limits. The operator, as the voice and human extension of the state telephony system, was also forced to give an ear to the furious complaints, resentful speech, or even the curses of the customers who had to wait for hours or days to make the connection with others due to the deteriorated telecommunication infrastructure. The oral history research with the former central operators showed us that working in the central required a psychological strength and resilience to bear the constant complaints of the users who could not find any other agent to voice their resentment and frustration about the lack of good telephonic

interaction system. On the other hand, the research that we have done in the archives of Turkish Telekom (previously PTT) journals also showed that almost each issue of this journal (namely PosTel) contained articles in which the operators were either presented as the face, voice, body of the telephone system and accordingly as the ones who must act politely and be caring to make the customers happy. In other words, the work of female operator in Turkey has truly been defined as an affective labor which required the production of the “state of being” - as caring, soothing and polite female beings - of the state-run telephony system.

As the operator functioned as the necessary third party to sound connection of telephony, she was also forced to take up the monitoring function of the state at times. Particularly during the militarist history of Turkey, where the leftist dissidence and the Kurdish nationalist political struggle were strictly repressed by the Turkish governments (during the 1970s and 1980s), the operator was also given the role of a spy, informing the state organs where the users speak Kurdish (when the use of Kurdish even in private spheres and communication was prohibited under the rule of militarist government) or the “suspicious” ones make or receive a call from other ends. One former operator working in Diyarbakır in the late 1980s under the rule of Emergency State Policies recounted her professional experiences with a striking story as follows:

“A woman, a mother from a village of Diyarbakır wanted to call her son who was doing his military service somewhere else. The woman, just as many other elder women in the region, did not know Turkish. She had waited for days to get a line to call her son. Finally, I connected the line, but the woman of course spoke Kurdish to her son. My job was to cut the talk, but I couldn’t. How could I? I am a mother myself... then I translated everything she said to Turkish and then from Turkish to Kurdish as her son spoke. It was one of my sad memories of the time.”

## Conclusion

This paper argues for the need to contextualize the study of telephony within the local and historical social struggles of owners and non-owners of the telephone which manifested itself through the meanings given to the



telephone as a political, social and cultural artifact that integrated into people's struggle to assert their identities, and alter the social structure where they desire to change their social positions and status. As a sound technology, which enables point-to-point communication, the telephone has been of interest of many in modern Turkey. Even though many have not gained the means of owning a telephone in their private spaces, regardless of the class, gender, ethnic and political identities, the telephone has always been an object of desire for different groups. In that sense it aligned different groups and individuals having different demographic characteristics and different political and social stands into a collective of potential or actual telephone subscribers. The wounded social structure, which has been fragmented into enclaves of differences, based on religious, political and ethnic self-expression has been unified in the desire of the telephone ownership. As more people and users, coming from different groups are integrated into the telephone service, they have become more and more transparent and controllable bodies for the state organs. The telephone has always functioned as the umbilical cord of the state that connects the security forces to the people and the necessary third party that eavesdrops all telephonic connections through operators and other systems of surveillance. On the other hand, the telephone system of Turkey as one of the modernizing, unifying and controlling machine of the state has historically generated collective resentment, frustration and anger on the part of the people who could not have an access to the use or possession of the telephone, whose telephonic connections were interrupted, broken or distorted due to the lack of qualified telecommunications infrastructure and who were left to feel that they lived outside the history of modern and globalized present that had presciently implemented the means of daily telephonic communication widely across different contexts.

Introduced in the mid 1990s, the cell phone has become an object of collective attachment in Turkey. The instrumental and display value of this mobile technology whose ownership or utility does not require an approval of state authorities were crucial to explain its popularity and ubiquity. However, it is not possible to explain why and how millions of people have become attached and addicted to this technology very easily and quickly by touching merely on the instrumentality and practical meanings of the cell phones.

My previous research on the popular use of cell phone technology in Turkey shows that particularly the middle class and lower class users of the cellular telephony appropriate this technology to present a different cultural model of modernity and a new definition of self-identities, including the political Kurdishness (Çelik 2011, 2012). The cell phone in Turkey describes a social practice where the culturally specific use of technology crystallizes the dispersed individual and collective struggles for altering the existing social structure, including the given class conditions, and for generating self-produced modernity. In this regard, the cell phone as the “new” global and modern technology took up the role of former technologies such as the telephone to function like a social agent that would ideally help the users to carry out their individual and collective struggles in daily life practices and imaginations.

In this special issue as well as in this paper, we make the case for the need to expand debates on the history of technologies in the non-West in order to capture the heterogeneity of use and meanings given to technologies such as the telephone. This allows a more rigorous analysis of the relationship between technologies and places where “foreign” machines, tools, or devices are domesticated and integrated into the local daily practices and imaginations of people across different social contexts. The history of technologies is never limited with the spaces where the technologies are designed, invented or produced. The very essence of technology as a social and cultural artifact rises from within the ways in which they are put in use by people as technologies respond and become responses to people’s wills, purposes, desires and needs. In this regard, further research on the social history of technologies within the modernization processes of the non-West is crucially needed. Researches with a perspective that takes the users’ practices and imaginations evolve through the engagement with technologies at the center of analysis would definitely enrich the understanding of the heterogeneous social relationships with technologies.

## References

- Ahıska, Meltem 2005. Radyonun Sihirli Kapısı: Garbiyatçılık ve Politik Öznellik. [Occidentalism and Political Subjectivity: The history of radio in Turkey] İstanbul: Metis.
- Alaşan, Reşat. 1990. Cumhuriyetin Kuruluşu ve PTT [The Foundation of The Republic and PTT]. Atartürk Araştırma Merkezi VI(17):409-420.
- Bektaş, Yakup 2000. The Sultan's Messenger: Cultural Constructions of Ottoman Telegraphy 1847-1880. *Technology and Culture* 91(4):669-696.
- Bennett, Alfred Rosling 1895. The telephone systems of the continent of Europe. London: Longmans, Green.
- Bezaz, Yurda Güven N.d. Geçmişten Günümüze Haberleşme ve PTT Tarihi [The History of Communications and PTT]. Ankara: Türkiye Haber-İş Sendikası.
- Bijker, Wiebe and Trevor Pinch 2012. The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology. Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre 1990. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. London: Routledge.
- Bull, Michael 2006. Sound Connections: an aural epistemology of proximity and distance in urban culture. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 22(1):103-116.
- Chakravarty, Paula 2004. Telecom, national development and the Indian State: a postcolonial critique. *Media, Culture and Society* 26(2):227-249.
- Çelik, Burçe 2011. Cellular Telephony in Turkey: A technology of self-produced modernity. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 14(2):147-161.
- Çelik, Burçe 2012. Appropriation of Cell Phones by Kurds: Ringtones, Menus and the Struggle for Kurdish Identity in Turkey. *The Mobile Media Reader*, Noah Arceneaux and Anandam Kavoori, eds. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Davison, Robert 1990. The Advent of the Electric Telegraph in the Ottoman Empire. In *Essays in Ottoman Turks and Turkish History, 1773-1923*. Texas: University of Texas Press.

- Demir, Tanju 2005. Türkiye'de Posta Telgraf ve Telefon Teşkilatının Tarihsel Gelişimi (1840-1920) [The Historical Development of Turkish Postal, Telegraph and Telephone Company (1840-1929)]. Ankara: PTT Genel Müdürlüğü.
- Gitelman, Lisa and Geoffrey Pingree 2003. *New Media 1740-1915*. Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- İhsanoğlu, Ekmeleddin 1992. *Transfer of Modern Science and Technology to the Muslim World*. İstanbul: IRCICA.
- İhsanoğlu, Ekmeleddin 1995. *Çağını Yakalayan Osmanlı* [The Civilized Ottomans]. İstanbul: IRCICA.
- Karakışla, Yavuz Selim 2008. *Dersaadet Telefon Anonim Şirketi Osmaniyesi ve Müslüman Osmanlı Kadın Telefon Memureleri (1913)*. İstanbul: Türk Telekom.
- Larkin, Brian 2004. Degraded Images, Distorted Sounds: Nigerian Video and the Infrastructure of Piracy. *Public Culture* 16(2):289-314.
- Latour, Bruno 2002. *Aramis or the Love of Technology*. London: Harvard University Press.
- Lewis, Bernard 2002. *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Onay, Aliye 1995. Türkiye'de Telefon Teşkilatının Kuruluşu [The Establishment of Turkish Telephony]. In *Çağını Yakalayan Osmanlı*. E. İhsanoğlu and M. Kaçar, eds. İstanbul: IRCICA.
- Rafael, Vicente 2003. *The Promise of the Foreign: Nationalism and the Technics of Translation in the Spanish Philippines*, Durham: Duke University Press.
- Ronell, Avital 1989. *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech*. Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press.
- Mumford, Lewis 1963. *Technics and Civilization*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Navaro-Yashin, Yael 2002. *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Sterne, Jonathan 2003. *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Stone, Allucquere Rosanne 2001. *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age*. Massachusetts: MIT Press.

The 7th The State Development Plans (1996). <http://ekutup.dpt.gov.tr/plan/vii/plan7.pdf>, accessed December 1, 2013.

UK Telephone History 2010. <http://www.britishtelephones.com/histuk.htm>, accessed December 1, 2013.

## Newspapers (Daily)

60 Bin Kişi Hala Telefon Kuyruklarında Bekliyor [60 Thousand People Are Still Waiting to Get a Telephone Line] 1959. *Hürriyet*, May 22:3.

Türkler Telefonu En Az kullanan Millet 1960 [Turkey ranks among the least telephonic nation]. *Hürriyet*, May 28:3.

Herkes Telefonun Yüksek Ücretlerinden Şikayetçi [All are complaining about the high fees of telephone connection] 1972. *Hürriyet*, April 3:3.

Konuşamayan Telefon [Unspeaking Telephone] 1973. *Hürriyet*, March 1:7.

Telefon Şirketi Vatandaşın Şikayetine Hala Görmezden Geliyor [The telephone company still ignores the people's complaints] 1953. *Milliyet*, September 10.

Bu Telekomünikasyon Sistemiyle Nasıl Avrupa ile Rekabet Edeceğiz? [How do we compete with Europe in our telecommunications?] 1982. *Milliyet*, October 1.

Muassır Medeniyetler Seviyesine Telefonla Erişiyoruz [We're catching up with the civilized age in telephone systems] 1986. *Milliyet*, April 24.

Telefon [The Telephone] 1877. *Vakit*. 21 December 1877.

# Mobile Revolution: Toward a History of Technology, Telephony and Political Activism in Egypt

Kira C. Allmann

University of Oxford

## Abstract:

*This article examines the use of everyday mobile technologies, and mobile telephony in particular, in political activism and protest during the 2011 Egyptian uprisings and throughout its continuing aftermath. The Arab revolutions have their own, now familiar, nomenclature, derived from the semantics of revolution and the digital age. Much of the language used to describe and analyze events in the Middle East has emphasized the “newness” of the technologies of protest and coordination and the uniquely 2.0 characteristics of these political movements. This article confronts this narrative, exploring the role of mobile telephony in Egypt during an ongoing period of political upheaval by moving away from the question of what is “new” or “revolutionary” toward what is ordinary put toward revolutionary ends. The article argues that the Arab Spring presents a crucial opportunity to interrogate and deconstruct the hybrid ecology of people and technological tools. By exploring several specific ways in which mobile telephony has played a role in the Egyptian revolution, this article demonstrates how a fixation on newness not only tells an incomplete story of this technologically mediated revolution but also undermines the ongoing practices of historicizing it.*

## Keywords:

*public sphere, democracy, activism, Egypt, Arab Spring, information and communication technology, communication studies, social media, mobile phones*

Revolutions are so often conceptualized as moments of political upheaval, ruptures with politics-as-normal. They make and become history in such rapid succession that they paradoxically defy historicizing; the chronological and structural anatomies of a revolutionary moment remain elusive and highly contested. Where to delineate the *before*, *during*, and *after*? For *whom*, by *whom*, and *how* is revolution realized? The revolutions of the so-called Arab Spring resurrected these questions and challenges. They loom large in our attempts to make sense of unfolding events. We need only consider

the nomenclature adopted to address the revolutionary moment: awakening, spring, renewal - all terms denoting newness, rebirth, a break with the past. Since 2011, the newness narrative has gained even greater significance due to the prominence of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and new media in the mobilization in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, and elsewhere. Publications, including some authored by activists themselves, such as Wael Ghonim's *Revolution 2.0*, helped to perpetuate it (Ghonim 2012), and newspapers and TV reports placed social media at the center of their coverage (Campbell and Hawk 2012). The technological idiom of the "new," in contrast to history and "politics as usual," uncritically connects these contemporary revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa to a technologically mediated modernity in which the digital revolution converges with political revolutions to create democratic change.

This article explores the use of mobile phones by protesters throughout the 2011 Egyptian revolution. I challenge the technological narrative of the Arab Spring, but I specifically parse how mobile phone technology in particular can potentially serve as a lens for reading resistance from below as a hybrid mobilization of people and technology. The uses of mobile telephony during the Egyptian revolution reveals how focusing on an everyday technology and the multiplex mobilities it enables can bring analysis back down onto the street.

The research, observation and interviews used for this article come from fieldwork and surveys conducted in Cairo, Egypt, between 2011 and 2012, along with some electronic communication and VoIP conversations with activists during that time. Interviews typically lasted 1-2 hours and were semi-structured to allow informants some flexibility in directing the conversation to relevant issues of personal interest.

## The Challenges Of Positioning Technology Within Revolutionary History

Almost as instantaneously as the diverse constituent mobilizations of the Arab Spring were labeled the “Twitter” and “Facebook” revolutions, the Internet became the much-publicized answer to the who, what, when, and how of revolution in the Middle East. In many ways, this should not be surprising. The challenge of making sense of the Arab Spring is fundamentally one of *active* historicizing: how to contextualize events whose project is to fundamentally remake the political, historical, and social context. In searching for explanations for the revolutionary moment, it makes sense to look for *what is different this time*. And throughout history, technological innovations not only provide new tools for mobilization, but they also serve as historical markers. This is the Internet age, so these are, however problematically, Internet revolutions.

To resist the easy conflation of the new with digital media, Peters urges us to “push beyond the commonsense fact that history is past and that new media is now. Consider instead that new media once made the historical record possible and that ever since, history writing takes place importantly in the present” (2009:15). As the revolutions continue, a growing body of literature has attempted to destabilize the isolation of the present, recalling that “[e]very moment has a history, including the Tahrir Square. The Arab uprisings were built on years of civil society movements in the region, online and offline” (Lim 2012:232). Many authors have powerfully and reflectively critiqued the more reactionary and aggrandizing accounts of the role of ICTs (Hofheinz 2011; Aouragh and Alexander 2011; Tawil-Souri 2012a; Mejias 2011; Aouragh 2011), and this article is a contribution toward this important body of critical literature that seeks to ground the Arab Spring in historical time, empirical observations and analysis.

The techno-centric narratives of the Arab Spring risk perpetuating and deepening certain dominant empirical approaches to media, modernity, and the Middle East. A popular fetishization of social media, not only for political liberalization but also for economic development, sometimes conflates the usage of new media and with the presence of democratic participation



and non-hierarchical network structures. In this way, the Arab Spring has become entangled in the processes of digital or Internet orientalism, a concept outlined by Howard in his work on technology and dictatorship (Howard 2010:29). Although he focuses specifically on the much-speculated causative relationship between the rise of digital technology and political Islam, drawing on research related to terrorism networks (Stohl and Stohl 2007), the concept of digital orientalism could be expanded to encompass any ahistorical reading of technologically mediated activity that treats the “network” as a de-contextualized representation of political relationships. Rather, “[t]he network form of organization is held together by historically constructed-and limited-relations that allow for dynamic, emergent, adaptive, and flexible associations” (Howard 2010:30).

Digital orientalism can implicate other flattened analyses of technology use as well. A glorification of the technical, at the expense of the social, results in a redistribution of agency away from individual users to the technologies themselves. Facebook and Twitter are often invoked to highlight the networked, grassroots, non-elite nature of digital age mobilizations, but in focusing on the platforms rather than the people, this approach only reinforces a particular historical perspective from the vantage point of the powerful, and in this particular case, the technocratic. It places technology - and all that it represents in progress, politics, and society - at the center of the revolutions, rather than other, alternative units of analysis. Without grappling with the shortcomings of this particular historical project, we cannot meaningfully engage with the hybrid terrain of the human and the non-human (Whatmore 2002), the people, technology, and spaces that formed the backdrop for the Egyptian revolution, among others.

As the concept of digital orientalism suggests, the Arab revolutions have presented a unique opportunity to interrogate various interconnected exceptionalist theoretical approaches that pervade coverage of the Middle East and new media. There is exceptionalism that treats politics in the Middle East as a theoretical and empirical isolate and an exceptionalist framework that treats “new media” in the digital age as somehow ahistorical. In reality, mediated politics are deeply embedded in the specific contexts and

places in which activists, protesters and ordinary people live out their daily experiences. But they are also, paradoxically, transcendent; ICTs exist within contextually contingent media ecologies and material spaces, but they also allow communication that subverts the immutable importance of place, a characteristic conceptualized as “connected presence” (Licoppe 2004) or “absent presence” (Gergen 2002). ICTs are widely acknowledged to facilitate traversals and transgressions across different material and virtual, local and global spaces (Leitner, Sheppard, and Sziarto 2008; Cresswell 2010). In parsing these technologically mediated movements within the revolutionary moment, we can better understand the transient boundaries between the virtual and the real, the human and the technological, the static and the mobile.

As discussed above, analysis on the Arab Spring has suffered, in part, because of a fixation on the *new*. By 2011, telephony in Egypt was hardly new, and mobile telephony was becoming ubiquitous, and therefore, commonplace. However, in revolution as in times of political stability, it is when technology becomes part of ordinary, everyday life that it is most consequential. Although the Internet captured global imaginations about the revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa, mobile telephony played a more pervasive role. History already shows signs of remembering the Internet at the expense of mobile phones. It is an oversight that risks misreading the technological and political moment through a dominant, Western lens that places the Internet at the pinnacle of ICT potential. Although the term “Facebook revolution” is intended as a nod to the user-generated mobilization-from-below strategies that fomented the revolutions on the ground, Facebook is a global company built on digital technology, so the label - which is itself an act of historicizing - effectively disguises the discourses of corporate power and technological determinism behind social network metaphor.

This article aims to challenge this Internet-centric narrative by focusing specifically on mobile telephony in the Egyptian revolution. Mobile telephony serves here as an avenue through which to challenge the tendency toward digital orientalism, or an almost exclusive focus on technology in the Middle East as a political force rather than a part of everyday life

(Howard 2010:29). The Egyptian revolution provides a critical opportunity to reflect on the ways in which the Arab Spring is being historicized as a technologically mediated event. In this process of historicizing, the history of mobile telephony and the role of mobile phones in the revolution have been largely overlooked. Mobile phones, as a communicative technology of everyday life are significant to the revolutionary moment *because* of their ordinariness, pervasiveness, and mobility. An exploration of mobile telephony in the Egyptian revolution must be a *social* as well as *technological* analysis, and it can highlight new hybrid agencies between people and their technological tools.

I take inspiration and find my theoretical moorings at the intersection of the mobilities paradigm and media studies that emphasize the important role of spatiality to technology use. Research on mobile telephony can benefit greatly from considering the mobile phone within the context of *movement* - how this communicative device operates in, through, between and against various overlapping virtual, material and interstitial spaces. The mobilities paradigm treats movement itself as an object of study and analysis (Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006; Urry 2007), and as ICTs engender multilayered mobilities between the present and the absent, the virtual and the physical, they necessarily complicate the spaces and geographies in which people live out their daily lives.

Mobility and the experience of movement is ever more relevant to the study and politics of space (Sheller and Urry 2006; Cresswell 2010; Sheller 2008). The close relationship between space and (im)mobility highlights the need for context-specific and historical analyses of communication technologies, such as mobile phones. I have suggested that active historicizing characterizes our attempts to analyze the ongoing revolutions in Egypt and elsewhere. It implies a process of making sense of rapidly moving people, technologies and events; it is a *mobile* methodology with mobile subjects. "By immersing themselves in the fleeting, multi-sensory, distributed, mobile and multiple, yet local, practical and ordered making of social and material realities, researchers come to understand movement not only as governed by rules but as methodically generative" (Buscher, Urry, and Witchger 2011). The spatial dimensions of technologically mediated movement require localized,

contextual analyses that recognize the importance of place. Thus, the Egyptian context is of paramount importance to an understanding of mobile phone practices during the 2011 revolution and beyond. Indeed, “[t]he uprising in Egypt was not the revolution of a network, but a network of revolutions across media platforms, across time, and across spatialities” (Tawil-Souri 2012b:165).

### Mobile Telephony In Egypt

Mobile phones are arguably the technology of everyday life in Egypt. At first glance, the significance of mobile phones is made evident in their sheer ubiquity. Within Egypt, where this ethnographic research took place in 2011 and 2012, Internet penetration was roughly 33-39 percent (International Telecommunications Union 2012a), with Facebook penetration at only 6 percent and Twitter at a tiny 1.5 percent of the total population (Dubai School of Government 2011). Meanwhile, mobile phone penetration reached somewhere between 80 and 100 percent (International Telecommunications Union 2013). Statistics also suggest that most Internet users, by a small but important margin, accessed the Internet using their mobile phones or a USB modem (Egyptian Ministry of Communication and Information Technology 2011).

In the historical trajectory of ICT development, “while theoretically the IT revolution allows for two-way communication, in practice, communication flows are often one-directional, originating from industrialized economies and flowing into the industrialized and the Third World” (Saleh 2010:2). Egypt’s telecommunication sector, though advanced in the region and growing, bears the unmistakable hallmark of foreign influence and centralized state authority. Egypt adopted the telegraph as early as 1856 due to colonial interests in communicating with Europe, but by 1918, the Egyptian government purchased all telephone and telegraph lines (Mitchell 1991). The colonial management of telecommunications laid the groundwork for monopolized state control of the developing networks, an ownership model that helped to cement the diplomatic and communicative relationship between British colonial administration and Egyptian leadership.

The modern telecommunications sector emerged during Gamal Abdel Nasser's presidency, resulting in the 1957 establishment of the Wired and Wireless Telecommunications Authority. Infrastructural advancements continued with the laying of the first coaxial cable for radio frequency transmission in 1961, and wireless telephony was available in cars by 1975 (Rachty 1995). In 1982, the Arab Republic of Egypt National Telecommunications Organization (ARENTO) was established, to be replaced later by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) under President Mubarak in 1999 (Saleh 2010). Telecom Egypt (TE), the country's primary telecom provider, was founded with the laying of the first telegraph line in the mid-19th century and has continued to dominate Egypt's telecom sector. It is 80 percent government-owned, and the MCIT has extensive oversight over its operation. In addition, TE has enjoyed monopolistic control over the fixed-line telephone industry, majority control of Internet services and infrastructure since the launch of TE Data, and has maintained roughly a 44 percent share in Vodafone Egypt (Middle East Rating and Investors Service 2009). As a result, the Egyptian government has traditionally held the most control over fixed-line telephone and wired Internet access.

Until this year, TE had failed to open bidding to other operators for its fixed line service (The Economist 2010; Ministry of Communications and Information Technology 2014a). In April 2014, TE announced in a press release that it would be launching a mobile phone service in direct competition with Egypt's existing mobile providers, Vodafone Egypt, Etisalat, and Mobinil (Ministry of Communications and Information Technology 2014a). In exchange for using their competitor's mobile networks, TE is allowing the other mobile providers to lease their land lines, though reportedly only their older, copper cable network rather than their high-speed fiber-optic lines (Elyan 2014). The move indicates recognition by TE of the immense importance and value of mobile telephony to Egypt's future and the global telecom market. Importantly, it is also an active acknowledgment of the role that mobile technologies have played in expanding ICT access in the developing world.

As a convergence technology, mobile phones constitute multi-media devices that can perform multiple communicative functions once limited to

the separate services of landlines or cable broadband. The concept of convergence refers to “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want” (Jenkins 2006:2). ICT devices no longer serve a unitary purpose, but rather “[o]ur cell phones are not simply telecommunications devices also allow us to play games, download information from the Internet, and take and send photographs” (Jenkins 2006:16). Convergence captures an intricate collection of interrelated technological and social processes, and it has revolutionized ICT usage and access in the developing world. Where countries like Egypt have struggled to provide wired data networks, mobile phones have begun aggressively filling the gap, connecting users to the Internet wirelessly. TE has relied heavily on its data services to compensate for the slumping demand for landline telephones in response to the popularity of cell phones. With 4G coverage on the horizon for Egyptian mobile operators, mobile data represents a rapidly accelerating threat to fixed cable services. Mobile data has become a more accessible means of connecting to the Internet for most people in the developing world (International Telecommunications Union 2012b). In addition, the role of mobile communication before, during, and in the ongoing aftermath of Egypt’s 2011 revolution has almost certainly peaked the interest of TE in acquiring mobile services, not only to claim its share of the burgeoning mobile market but also to assert a government presence in a communicative technology that has come to dominate not only everyday life but a subversive culture of popular resistance.

Since its arrival, mobile telephony substantially altered not only the telecommunications sector, but also the balance of power between the government, private companies, and individual users. Mobile telephony was the only branch of the Egyptian ICT sector open for competition in 1998 and one of the earliest industries to be liberalized (El-Shinnawy and Handoussa 2004). State-owned operators were outpaced and usurped by the market drive (Saleh 2010). As a result, there are currently three mobile phone networks in Egypt: Vodafone Egypt, Etisalat, and Mobinil, which was formerly known as the state-owned Egyptian Company for Mobile Services

until it was purchased by a consortium of private telecom providers in 2007 (The Economist 2010). Although these companies are thoroughly integrated into an international web of foreign investment and market interests, and therefore cannot claim to operate entirely in the public interest, they do represent a deviation from the traditionally exclusive state control of the telecommunications sector. The government exerts oversight in the form of the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), but because mobile communication has so rapidly outpaced other ICT industries in Egypt that the government's practical influence in the sector has been effectively crippled. As a result, the interaction between Egyptian ICT users and government telecom services, perhaps with the exception of state-run television broadcasts, has decreased dramatically. TE's bid for space in the mobile communications sector is a recent step toward reclaiming lost ground.

Cellular networks bypass the necessity for expensive fixed-line infrastructure to some degree, allowing more widespread and faster access to information transmission as mobile phones increasingly offer data services along with call-and-text functions. Mobile phone penetration in Egypt quickly outpaced fixed-line telephones, and while broadband and dial-up Internet penetration continues to edge upward, mobile telephony is rapidly connecting Egyptians to the Internet through their mobile devices to 3G networks. This historical development of mobile telephony explains why mobile phones are ubiquitous where other new media technologies are not; mobile phones are not only replacing state-owned fixed line services, but also increasingly providing an opportunity to connect to the Internet for individuals without access at home.

Mobile phones occupy a distinctive place in the media landscape for three crucial reasons: they have provided connectivity where communities and individuals were unable to access it, they have permeated nearly all segments and divisions of society, and they are uniquely mobile. Unlike satellite television of the late 1990s, or the printing press of the early 20th century, mobile telephony is interactive, connective, and unconstrained by "old media" limitations of space and time. Further, mobile telephony undermines, to some extent, the control and surveillance function of the government in

telecommunications and information-sharing in its privatization and diversification, even though it is fundamentally contingent on the institutional structures of the state regulations and the global economy.

I will highlight some of the ways in which mobile phones have been used during and in the continuing aftermath of revolution in Egypt in an effort to illustrate how the historical trajectory of the mobile telecom sector, mobile phone adoption, and everyday use culminated in the practices of organization, mobilization and resistance that coalesced in the revolutionary moment. Many of the ways that activists have used mobile telephony have transformed the meaning and use of the technology to accommodate the exigencies of the revolutionary moment. Protesters, drawing on lessons learned in their everyday experiences, used mobile phones to transmit information and to coordinate activity, to enhance personal safety and accountability, and to document events. In the build up to large-scale protests, mobile phones helped to bridge the increasingly gaping digital divide by connecting huge numbers of people with varying levels of access to online social media and sharing critical information between the online and the offline.

### Coordinating Across Spaces, Technologies And Platforms

Egypt is certainly not the first country to witness the connective and mobilizing power of the mobile phone. So called “smart mobs” (Rheingold 2007) contributed to the ouster of President Joseph Estrada in the Philippines in 2001 (Rafael 2003; Rich Ling and Donner 2009), mobile phones played important roles in the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (Lysenko and Desouza 2010), and they have even been symbolically turned off en masse in Nigeria in response to exploitative policies of local mobile phone companies (Obadare 2006). All of these movements used the mobile phone as an organizational tool, building on its popularity in everyday communication.

One of the primary uses of mobile phones in the revolutionary moment and in subsequent protests has been for sharing information and coordinating action. Mobile phones had carved out their place in everyday life and political movements long before the Egyptian Revolution. Perhaps most recognizable in the pre-2011 wave of manifest political mobilizations was



*Kifaya* [Enough!], which organized semi-formally in a silent demonstration in 2004. *Kifaya* made use of fixed-line and telephony and mobile telephony alongside nascent blogs and chat rooms to coordinate demonstrations (Meital 2013). In 2008, workers at the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company in Mahalla al-Kubra declared a strike for April 6th. The date became the namesake of the April 6th Youth Movement, a headliner in the news coverage of the Egyptian Revolution in 2011. The 2008 event resulted in widespread workers' strikes, protests, and rioting and prompted a firm government response, including hundreds of arrests. The strike had taken full advantage of new media in its organization, including blogs and other websites as well as SMS. But the outcome had been disappointing; it illustrated the limits of online organizing in street protests, and it had an important strategic result: activists realized that organizing the offline effectively would not be as simple as instigating online communication (Rosenberg 2011).

Mobile telephony is the quotidian medium through which people socialized, coordinated and communicated prior to the revolution, so there is no great revelation in its mere presence or prominence within the media ecology during or after the revolution. As a technology used for what Ling calls the "micro-coordination" of everyday life (Ling 2004), it becomes the natural tool of macro-mobilization. Most of the activists I interviewed considered their phones an essential accessory, an ever-present and mundane piece of wearable hardware. They did not call them revolutionary. Rather, the role of mobile phones was made particularly compelling in how mobile telephony and human agency in the Egyptian political sphere have co-evolved to meet the demands of political unrest. The mobile phone's accessibility "at-hand" proved central during the days of the revolution.

Although maps, routes and plans could be made and disseminated online before protests even began in January, they could only at best approximate the actual physical terrain that protesters would encounter on the day of action. Routes were made and altered to respond to changing conditions, and they were texted on mobile devices to individuals' contacts. Maps of entry and escape were carefully updated and disseminated via SMS and forwarded extensively in order to reach the widest possible audience, which

meant reaching individuals who did not have regular Internet access. This particular usage of mobile telephony is very context-specific, requiring users to be present in the places and spaces where the geographic information will be relevant. Thus, activists and protesters could be highly responsive to changing conditions; they were physical mobile in public space, and the information they gathered in the streets could be transmitted to countless other places by way of various ICT functions and platforms - SMS, Twitter, Facebook. This dual mobility of the activist and her information occurred instantaneously and simultaneously.

The role of mobile phones in protest activity reveals the importance of *spatiality* to media studies. Theories about digital ICTs, namely the Internet, often emphasize their transcendental properties: their *placelessness*, fluidity and virtuality. But mobile phones represent a key nexus, the intersection of moving people, mobile hardware, and data in motion. Looking at their uses in political activism in Cairo highlights how the Egyptian context exerts certain influences on the “spaces of flows” (Castells 1996), and how those virtual spaces are deeply embedded in the physicality of protest. The mobile phone is a prosthetic technology, always at hand, and “physically coterminous with [our] bodies” (Urry 2007:45). The mobility of this prosthetic communicative device gives activists and protesters unprecedented ability to traverse and transgress in physical and virtual space, and it imbues the technology with new, revolutionary significance.

Mobile phones also maintain particular *kinds* of close-knit networks that proved essential to mobilization. Mobile phones support “strong ties,” but they also allow users to maintain a wider network of close ties because communication is not contingent on face-to-face interaction (Rettie 2008). In contrast, online platforms uphold weaker ties, where opportunities for coordination arise out of collectively sharing individual goals (Cardon and Aguiton 2007). Cell phones connect people with “friends and family” in part because in order to access someone via cell phone, a user must have a very specific reference for them - their phone number - which must be exchanged in order to make contact (Ling 2004; Ling and Donner 2009). Ties via cell phone are closer and their communication more personally relevant.

In an article for *The New Yorker*, Malcolm Gladwell argues that high-risk activism is a “strong tie” phenomenon (Gladwell 2010). Indeed, activists I interviewed at protests in Tahrir Square a few months after deposition of President Mubarak indicated that they had received personal messages from friends via SMS urging them to come to the square during the height of the protests in January and February 2011. The personal messages, sent on the go, served a mobilizing function beyond the conversations and calls to action online. It materialized the mobilization as networks of friends encouraged one another to take to the streets. Given the high level of mobile phone penetration, this kind of interpersonal communication could reach far more people than Facebook alone, and it carried a kind of urgency or immediacy. This information also carried a certain additional degree of reliability, which stemmed from the strong-tie networks maintained by mobile phone use. Information transmitted by phone could be trusted because it came from people who were established, close contacts. To this end, mobile phones were used to bolster existing strong ties and activate them, capitalizing on their technological strengths - connecting the present spaces and actions with numerous absent parties and potential participants. These revolutionary mobilizations exemplified how “[t]he mobile can facilitate the emergence of a new private world, a virtual community that can be pulled together in a matter of moments” (Plant 2002:61).

## Digital Geographies Of Safety And Security

*“Yeah, it sounds crazy to you, maybe. But if someone doesn’t answer their phone, we have to assume they are dead, or at best, arrested. And then we go to a new strategy to deal with that possibility.” - Hanaa, a member of the April 6th Youth Movement (interviewed by author, September 13, 2011)*

Mobile phones take on new meanings and engender new practices in emergencies and natural disasters. Emergencies refer to the unexpected, however mundane, but they can equally include moments of traumatic upheaval. Through its integration into daily life, the mobile phone has become a key resource in emergency situations, from last-minute scheduling changes to disaster notification (Ling 2004; Katz 2009; Gordon 2007). The revolutionary

difference for mobile telephony lies in both its responsiveness to unexpected conditions but also in its provision of new assurances and practices of safety and security. A mobile signal means a live connection to other people, a reassurance that you are not alone. Regular check-ins with friends, family, protest organizers, and fellow activists became (and continue to be) commonplace in the tense political climate surrounding the revolution.

Like a heartbeat, mobile phone communication during periods of mass protest represented the life status of the device's owner. A call or a text meant things were okay, for now. Apart from during the government-orchestrated ICT blackout initiated on January 27th and 28th, 2011, if someone did not answer his or her phone, the possible reasons were likely very grim. Using the mobile phone connection as a proxy for real, face-to-face confirmation that friends, family and fellow protesters were safe, helped activists respond to disappearances, arrests, and other emergencies more quickly (see also El-tantawy and Wiest 2011).

Many first-time protesters indicated in personal interviews that they were initially apprehensive about joining their friends in the street. Public spaces in Egypt are heavily policed and monitored, and large crowds are often daunting without experience of evasive techniques and police tactics. Having friends call or text with directions and encouragement brought more people to the street. Having a mobile phone at-hand mitigated against some of the risks of going out "alone" to join an unfamiliar social movement. Facebook pages for political organizations and individual activists posted phone numbers to call. During the buildup to the January 2011 protests, April 6th Youth Movement activist Asmaa Mahfouz invites viewers to meet up with her, and she her phone number for anyone interested to contact her personally (Wall and Zahed 2011). More contact, perpetual contact, meant more confidence.

In order to ensure an additional degree of safety, misinformation was often disseminated through online social networks, which were presumably monitored by the state. Accurate information could later be communicated via mobile phones, land-lines and word-of-mouth (El-Ghobashy 2011). These

multifaceted strategies to enhance safety and security during the revolution built upon existing, familiar mobile phone uses for quick planning and emergency responses.

### Present Presence And Mobile Documentation

The photo-taking function of mobile phones had long been used by activists to document instances of police abuse, and these images and videos helped to incite anger toward the regime (El-Ghobashy 2011). Even after SMS was blocked on January 27th, protesters and activists continued using phones, but instead of communication, they became mobile recording devices. As discussed above, the convergence characteristics of mobile phones make them particularly versatile; they are simultaneously portable and relatively inexpensive communication devices, music players, cameras, flashlights, and even miniature computers. In the absence of one of these functions, others might take prime position. Protesters put their mobile phones to use as documentary devices, photographing and filming the protests, brutal attacks, and collective resistance of people camping in Tahrir Square. This tactic has continued to play a prominent role in ongoing protests since 2011, resulting in efforts toward aggregating and disseminating the huge amount of user-generated content in meaningful ways, such as the *Askar Kazeboon* group's multi-media displays of police violence. These documentary practices are meaningful because they imply the *presence* of the photographer or videographer. Being present in the moment, in the physical spaces of protests and crackdowns, lends credibility and urgency to the visual documentation. In seeming contrast to the present absence afforded by mobile phones, their function in the protest space is to confirm a present *presence* - a convergence of the physical place and the mobile technology.

During the ICT blackout in 2011, experienced and technically skilled activists regularly collected media content from other protesters to disseminate via back channels and electronic back doors. Mobile phones helped protesters observe events and store them in digital as well as personal memory. It allowed them to preserve a recollection of events in the "offline" spaces of protest with the possibility of distributing them in online spaces.

Recording events that the activists themselves witnessed became a way to assert ownership over transient experiences. The communications blackout effected a rerouting of information flows. Unable to share information with fellow protesters, activists' attention turned to sharing content with international audiences by posting as much mobile phone-aggregated content on the Internet as possible when any open connection could be found. Ramy, an activist with the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights who worked tirelessly with other tech experts to find ways to break through the blackout, said, "We felt like the only people online because no one else had access in Egypt. Everything was focused on getting the information beyond Egypt" (interviewed by author, September 19, 2011). The unintended consequence of the complete strangulation of ICT channels was a concentration of content directed toward the international community, who could read, download and share what limited content emerged from Egypt. Protesters used any means necessary to get information out, seeking expertise from fellow protesters, like Ramy, and "hactivist" guides, created by groups like Anonymous (Anonymous 2011; Rhoads and Fowler 2011).

In the absence of its communicative functionality, mobile phones became useful for their other features, namely photo-taking and storage. The intermittent stream of images and information smuggled out of Egypt's ICT blackout helped to reinforce a popular perception that the Internet and social media platforms were the primary (if not exclusive) tools of the revolution. An international audience became the default consumers of this content pushed online. Without considering the contextually contingent media environment in which this content was being produced, the mobile phone fell away in the background as Facebook and Twitter took center stage. The mobility, versatility and ubiquity of mobile phones meant that they had faded into the fabric of everyday life. Thus obscured, it became the natural tool to aid a revolution

### Mass Mobilization Across The Digital Divide

As a convergence technology, mobile phones have the unique technical capability of providing several overlapping levels of connectivity. The diverse range of mobile phone hardware, ranging from the most basic call-and-text phone to touch-screen "smart phones," means that users who connect to

one another may, in fact, have very different experiences of the connectivity afforded by these devices. A smart phone user could access the Internet, use Facebook, and watch movies, while call-and-text users cannot. Convergence occurs unevenly within technologies and societies, and as such, there are many coinciding “digital divides” that influence access to ICTs and participation in the virtual communities and spaces they enable. At the time of this research, roughly nine percent of Egyptian mobile phone subscribers had Internet access on their mobile devices (Business Monitor International 2012). Today, the number is closer to 20 percent by official estimates (Ministry of Communications and Information Technology 2014b). Internet access and Facebook and Twitter usage alone cannot account for the vast participation in the 2011 revolution. Instead, mobilization across and in spite of divides in Internet access fomented the mass protests.

Crucially, mobile phones helped to bridge the divide. The ubiquity of mobile phones proved one of their greatest assets in the revolutionary context, as people called and texted one another with information gleaned from various technologically mediated sources. Internet users communicated Facebook updates via SMS to their friends without Internet access, and the content of phone calls and text messages could be posted online by Internet users using smart phones and computers. In this way, the mobile phone created hybrid spaces, “mobile spaces, created by the constant movement of users who carry portable devices continuously connected to the Internet and to other users” (de Souza e Silva 2006). This hybridity connected users to one another and to both physical and virtual spaces. As a pervasive convergence technology, the mobile phone seamlessly blurred the lines between online and offline content, making any and all information available between users who might otherwise have been communicatively isolated by the digital divide.

The result was the mobilization of new sectors of the Egyptian public, who had not be politically active in the past and had been excluded from activism in some cases due to lack of access to online spaces for dissent. Indeed,

„for a number of years, the Arab media landscape has been witnessing a perplexing paradox, namely: a gap between the vibrant and active media arena, where many resistant and oppositional voices could be heard, on one hand, and on the other hand the dormant and stagnant political

arena, which did not exhibit any serious signs of active change [...]” (Khamis and Vaughn 2011).

The harnessing of the mobile phone for mobilization was a significant factor in reaching new political actors and bringing online activism fully into offline spaces and communities. Mobilization occurred across socioeconomic strata and between urban cities and rural towns and communities. Tahrir Square was hardly the only site of popular protests during the peak of the revolution in January and February 2011, and it remains only one of many locations that have continued to see protests, marches, sit-ins, strikes and violence. Protesters took to the streets in the port city of Suez (Dziedzic 2011), Alexandria, Asyut, Minya, and others (Weaver et al. 2011), and support poured out of communities as far-flung as the Bedouin of the Sinai peninsula (Omer 2011; Arabawy 2011). Many cities other than Cairo witnessed severe crackdowns, police brutality, and violent resistance, which have continued - and even escalated - since the June 30th, 2013, ouster of President Mohammed Morsi (Rose and Kortam 2014). However, these geographically dispersed mobilizations have been consistently obscured by the prominence of Cairo and Tahrir Square in analyses of the Egyptian revolution. The geographic and political prominence of Cairo is one factor in this omission, but it is facilitated by the technological narrative that has emerged from the Arab Spring. Capital cities and footage of protests there dominate news coverage because they are the most digitally connected and therefore the greatest producers of documentary content. Cairo's disproportionate *online* presence coupled with their geopolitical significance has cemented its historical prestige in the active process of memorializing the revolution. While the Internet has more limited reach beyond urban centers, mobile phones have penetrated all levels of society. Their inclusion in any technological analysis of the revolution helps to tell a more complete story and opens the door to more inclusive accounts of the mass mobilizations that connected people across neighborhoods, cities and even national borders.

These lessons in mobilizing across the divide have clearly had an impact in the aftermath of 2011. During subsequent fieldwork in Cairo and Alexandria in June of 2013, it was apparent that the *Tamarrod* (“Rebel”) campaign,



which organized against the presidency of Mohammed Morsi, recognized the critical importance of the *offline* in organizing popular support. In order to reach as many people as possible, *Tamarrod* opted for a paper-based petition campaign, where organizers and volunteers would pass out petition pamphlets in the streets of many Egyptian cities. The campaign had a website and a social media presence, but their mobilization strategy focused on the street level, the face-to-face, in contrast to the emphasis that had so recently been placed on social media during 2011.

### The Mobile Revolution In History

“By themselves, mobile phones are not a revolutionising, independent tool, but they do influence the way citizens understand and organise democracy” (Hermanns 2008:79). It is not the goal of this article to replace the trope of Internet revolutions with a narrative that treats cell phones as a causative explanation for the Egyptian revolution. However, mobile telephony plays a crucial and underrepresented role in its technological story. This article has attempted to historically situate ICT development and use in Egypt in order to better understand the role of ICTs, and mobile phones in particular, in the 2011 Egyptian revolution. I have also presented observations on the role of mobile phones during protest activity from fieldwork, interviews, and my own experience in Egypt. The significance of mobile phones to political activism can be directly traced to their functionality in everyday life, their pervasiveness and popularity, and their unique mobility between and through physical and virtual spaces.

The Egyptian revolution, like the other revolutions of the Arab Spring, was unprecedentedly mediated by communication technologies. Going forward, it is increasingly important to consider the contextually contingent development of the telecom sector as politically, socially and historically relevant to moments of political rupture. To ignore the historical evolution of new media alongside political and social history is to risk replicating a kind of digital orientalism that collapses multidimensional mediated relationships into familiar techno-centric explanations. A more user- or actor-oriented perspective is needed, which focuses on how people and technologies jointly encounter and create physical spaces and forms of resistance within them.

The political terrain in Egypt implicates geographies that are both human and technological because these mobile technologies have become part of the media ecology of everyday life.

We must also recognize the role that active historicizing plays in defining how we *read* revolutions. Revolutionary moments do not lend themselves facily to contextualization or historical analyses due to their explosive, and often ephemeral, nature. The everyday is easily obscured by the revolutionary flashpoint. In the digital age, active historicizing is complicated by the pervasiveness of communications technologies. We are presented with an overwhelming quantity of real-time digital documentation, such that the technologies of documentation themselves have a tendency to captivate and monopolize our attention and analyses. Thus, we must *actively* contextualize and historicize unfolding events. Historical perspective is subject to the impermanence of technological mobilities. We have seen this process play out in analyses of the Arab Spring, where a contemporary celebration of the Internet has already obscured the tremendous and continuing importance of the mobile phone, particularly in the developing world.

The modern experience of being - technologically and physically - mobile is a central feature of the Egyptian revolution and the politics of the everyday. In fact, the communicative and technological mobility afforded by mobile phones has become such a ubiquitous aspect of daily life that it is often treated as wholly unremarkable. "This mobile logic affects the way that we organize our daily lives, the way that we gather information and the way that we do our work. It is increasingly taken for granted, to the degree that we only see it when it is not there" (Ling and Donner 2009). Viewing the Egyptian revolution through the narrow lens of social media limits any conclusions we might make about the relationship between new media and protest politics. Undoubtedly, digital technologies made a great contribution to the revolution and its unfolding aftermath, but their role must be historically and spatially contextualized, and it must consider how the mediated politics of revolution emerge from the mediated practices of everyday life.

## References

3Arabawy 2011. Sinai Bedouins Support the #Jan25 Revolution. *3Arabawy Blog*. <http://www.arabawy.org/2011/02/16/bedouins/>, accessed May, 1, 2014.

Anonymous 2011. 20 Ways to Circumvent Egyptian Government Internet Block. <http://pastebin.com/9jJUku77>, accessed May, 1, 2014.

Aouragh, Miriyam 2011. Framing the Internet in the Arab Revolutions: Myth Meets Modernity. *Cinema Journal* 51(4):1-9.

Aouragh, Miriyam, and Anne Alexander 2011. The Egyptian Experience: Sense and Nonsense of the Internet Revolution. *International Journal of Communication* 5.

Buscher, Monika, John Urry, and Katian Witchger, eds 2011. *Mobile Methods*. London: Routledge.

Business Monitor International 2012. Egypt: Telecommunications Report Q1 - 2012. Business. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/916646845?accountid=13042>, accessed May, 1, 2014.

Campbell, Heidi A. and Diana Hawk 2012. Al Jazeera's Framing of Social Media During the Arab Spring. *CyberOrient* 6(1). <http://www.cyberorient.net/article.do?articleId=7758>, accessed May, 1, 2014.

Cardon, Dominique and Christophe Aguiton 2007. The Strength of Weak Cooperation: An Attempt to Understand the Meaning of Web 2.0. *Communications and Strategies*.

Castells, Manuel 1996. *The Rise of the Network Society: Economy, Society, and Culture*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Cresswell, Tim 2010. Towards a Politics of Mobility. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28(1):17-31.

De Souza e Silva, Adriana 2006. From Cyber to Hybrid: Mobile Technologies as Interfaces of Hybrid Spaces. *Space and Culture* 9(3):261-278.

Dubai School of Government 2011. *Arab Social Media Report: Civil Movements: The Impact of Facebook and Twitter*. Dubai, UAE.

Dziadosz, Alexander 2011. Could Suez Be Egypt's Sidi Bouzid? Reuters, January 27. <http://af.reuters.com/article/egyptNews/idAFLDE70Q1KZ20110127?pageNumber=2&virtualBrandChannel=0&sp=true>, accessed May, 1, 2014.

Egyptian Ministry of Communication and Information Technology 2011. ICT Indicators in Brief. Cairo.

El-Ghobashy, Mona 2011. The Praxis of the Egyptian Revolution. Middle East Research and Information Project 258.

El-Shinnawy, A. and H. Handoussa 2004. Egyptian Case Studies. *In* Investment Strategies in Emerging Markets, K. E. Meyer and S. Estrin, eds. Pp. 88-125. Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.

Eltantawy, Nahed and Julie B. Wiest 2011. Social Media in the Egyptian Revolution : Reconsidering Resource Mobilization Theory. *International Journal of Communication* 5:1207-1224.

Elyan, Tamim 2014. Telecom Egypt to Get Mobile License for \$359 Million. Bloomberg, April 3. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/print/2014-04-02/telecom-egypt-to-get-mobile-access-license-for-359-million.html>, accessed May, 1, 2014.

Gergen, Kenneth J. 2002. The Challenge of Absent Presence. *In* Perpetual Contact: Mobile Communication, Private Talk, Public Performance, James E. Katz and Mark A Aakhus, eds. Pp. 227-241. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ghonim, Wael 2012. Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People Is Greater Than the People in Power: A Memoir. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Gladwell, Malcolm 2010. Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted. *The New Yorker*.

Gordon, J. 2007. The Mobile Phone and the Public Sphere: Mobile Phone Usage in Three Critical Situations. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 13:(3):307-319. <http://con.sagepub.com/cgi/doi/10.1177/1354856507079181>, accessed May, 1, 2014.

Hannam, Kevin, Mimi Sheller, and John Urry 2006. Editorial: Mobilities, Immobilities and Moorings. *Mobilities* 1(1):1-22.

Hermanns, Heike 2008. Mobile Democracy: Mobile Phones as Democratic Tools. *Politics* 28(2):74-82.

Hofheinz, Albrecht 2011. Nextopia? Beyond Revolution 2.0. *International Journal of Communication* 5.

Howard, Philip 2010. *The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

International Telecommunications Union 2012a. ICT Adoption and Prospects in the Arab Region. Geneva.

International Telecommunications Union 2012b. Measuring the Information Society. Geneva.

International Telecommunications Union 2013. ICT Statistics for the World.

Jenkins, Henry 2006. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.

Katz, James E. 2009. *Machines That Become Us: The Social Context of Personal Communication Technology*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Khamis, Sahar and Katherine Vaughn 2011. *Cyberactivism in the Egyptian Revolution: How Civic Engagement and Citizen Journalism Tilted the Balance*. Arab Media and Society 13.

Leitner, Helga, Eric Sheppard and Kristin M Sziarto 2008. The Spatialities of Contentious Politics. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 33(2):157-172.

Licoppe, Christian 2004. "Connected" Presence: The Emergence of a New Repertoire for Managing Social Relationships in a Changing Communication Technoscape. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 22(1):135-156.

Lim, Merlyna 2012. Clicks, Cabs, and Coffee Houses: Social Media and Oppositional Movements in Egypt, 2004-2011. *Journal of Communication* 62(2):231-248.

Ling, Richard and Jonathan Donner 2009. *Mobile Communication*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Ling, Richard 2004. *The Mobile Connection: The Cell Phone's Impact on Society*. Burlington: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers Inc.

Lysenko, Volodymyr V. and Kevin C. Desouza 2010. Role of Internet-Based Information Flows and Technologies in Electoral Revolutions: The Case of Ukraine's Orange Revolution. *First Monday* 15(9):1-24. <http://uncommonculture.org/ojs/index.php/fm/rt/priniterFriendly/2992/2599>, accessed May, 1, 2014.

Meital, Yoram 2013. The Struggle Over Political Order in Egypt: The 2005 Elections. *The Middle East Journal* 60:1-18.

- Mejias, Ulises A. 2011. The Twitter Revolution Must Die. Ulises Mejias Blog. <http://blog.ulisesmejias.com/2011/01/30/the-twitter-revolution-must-die/>, accessed May, 1, 2014.
- Middle East Rating and Investors Service 2009. Telecom Egypt, S.A.E. (TE). Cairo.
- Ministry of Communications and Information Technology 2014a. Unified License System Approval. Cairo. [http://www.mcit.gov.eg/Media\\_Center/Press\\_Room/Press\\_Releases/3010](http://www.mcit.gov.eg/Media_Center/Press_Room/Press_Releases/3010), accessed May, 1, 2014.
- Ministry of Communications and Information Technology 2014b. ICT Indicators in Brief (Arabic). Cairo.
- Mitchell, Timothy 1991. *Colonizing Egypt*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Obadare, Ebenezer 2006. Playing Politics with the Mobile Phone in Nigeria: Civil Society, Big Business and the State. *Review of African Political Economy* 33(107):93-111. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4007114>, accessed May, 1, 2014.
- Omer, Mohammed 2011. Revolution Spreads to Egypt's Deprived Sina. *The Electronic Intifada*, February 1.
- Peters, Benjamin 2009. And Lead Us Not Into Thinking the New Is New. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 11:(13).
- Plant, Sadie 2002. *On the Mobile: The Effects of Mobile Telephones on Social and Individual Life*. Motorola.
- Rachty, Gehan 1995. *Telecommunications in Egypt*. <http://www.vii.org/papers/egypt.htm>, accessed May, 1, 2014.
- Rafael, Vicente L. 2003. The Cell Phone and the Crowd: Messianic Politics in the Contemporary Philippines. *Philippine Political Science Journal* 24:(47):3-36.
- Rettie, Ruth 2008. Mobile Phones as Network Capital: Facilitating Connections. *Mobilities* 3(2):291-311. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17450100802095346>, accessed May, 1, 2014.
- Rheingold, Howard 2007. *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution*. New York: Basic Books.
- Rhoads, Christopher and Geoffrey A. Fowler 2011. Egypt Shuts Down Internet, Cellphone Services. *The Wall Street Journal*, January 29. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703956604576110453371369740.html>, accessed May, 1, 2014.

Rose, Aaron T. and Hend Kortam 2014. One Year of Crackdowns. Daily News Egypt, June 30.

Rosenberg, Tina 2011. Revolution U. Foreign Policy (February).

Saleh, Nivien 2010. Third World Citizens and the Information Technology Revolution. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Sheller, Mimi 2008. Mobility, Freedom and Public Space. *In* The Ethics of Mobilities: Rethinking Place, Exclusion, Freedom and Environment, Sigurd Bergmann and Tore Sager, eds. Pp. 25-38. Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Sheller, Mimi and John Urry 2006. The New Mobilities Paradigm. *Environment and Planning* 38(2):207-226.

Stohl, Cynthia and Michael Stohl 2007. Networks of Terror: Theoretical Assumptions and Pragmatic Consequences. *Communication Theory* 17:(2). <http://doi.wiley.com/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2007.00289.x>, accessed May, 1, 2014.

Tawil-Souri, Helga 2012a. It's Still About the Power of Place. *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 5 (January 2011):86-95.

Tawil-Souri, Helga 2012b. Egypt's Uprising and the Shifting Spatialities of Politics. *Cinema Journal* 52(1).

The Economist 2010. Egypt: Telecoms and Technology Report. [http://www.eiu.com/index.asp?layout=ib3Article&article\\_id=1847315969&pubtypeid=1162462501&country\\_id=1640000164&category\\_id=775133077&crf=0](http://www.eiu.com/index.asp?layout=ib3Article&article_id=1847315969&pubtypeid=1162462501&country_id=1640000164&category_id=775133077&crf=0), accessed May, 1, 2014.

Urry, John 2007. *Mobilities*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Wall, Melissa and Sahar El Zahed 2011. I'll Be Waiting for You Guys: A YouTube Call to Action in the Egyptian Revolution. *Journal of Communication* 5:1333-1343.

Weaver, Matthew, Haroon Siddique, Richard Adams and Tim Hill 2011. Protests in Egypt - as They Happened. *The Guardian*, January 28. <http://www.theguardian.com/news/blog/2011/jan/28/egypt-protests-live-updates>, accessed May, 1, 2014.

Whatmore, S. 2002. *Hybrid Geographies: Natures Cultures Spaces*. Human Geography Today. London: Sage.

# Reflections on Oral History: Four Cities on the Social History of Telephone Technology in Turkey

Burçe Çelik, Derya Gurses Tarbuck

Bahcesehir University

## Abstract:

*Throughout the history of the Turkish Republic, the telephone has collectively been perceived as a technology of modernity, progress, wealth and cultural capital. Yet due to a deteriorated infrastructure, which has hindered penetration of the telephone to the entire country, only a small segment of society was able to install a telephone in their private dwellings as well as in their place of business. This article discusses the results of an oral history research, based on in-depth interviews with telephone users (and non-users) in Istanbul, Ankara, Kayseri and Diyarbakir, conducted during 2011–2012. Essentially, this article argues, that technology transfer does not necessarily translate itself into modes of social life as modernity, at least not uniformly so. On the contrary, our oral history study displays a variety of “modernities”, which existed side by side.*

## Keywords:

*public sphere, Turkey, Kurds, information and communication technology, communication studies, identity, mobile phones*

## Introduction

Throughout the history of the Turkish Republic, the telephone has collectively been perceived as a technology of modernity, progress, wealth and cultural capital. Yet due to a deteriorated infrastructure, which has hindered penetration of the telephone to the entire country, only a small segment of society was able to install a telephone in their private dwellings as well as in their place of business. Particularly throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, the social practice of the telephone was marked by the resentment, frustration and envy of those who could not possess a telephone line due to various factors such as location, lack of social relations with the relevant authorities, or lack of financial capital to purchase a line and a telephone. While a small segment of society enjoyed the ownership and use of the telephone in their



daily lives and businesses, many people remained on the waiting lists of the related state department for long periods to acquire a telephone line (5-20 years), even in the major cities of Istanbul and Ankara.

Our two-year project funded by TUBITAK in 2011 is entitled: “Telephony and Turkish Modernization: The Social History of the Telephone since the Ottoman Era (1881-2010).” As researchers, we were interested in the ways in which the telephone has been represented in popular media, how it has become part of the state-run modernization process, and how Turkish people have experienced this technology in their everyday lives. To investigate these issues, we analyzed primary sources (archives of the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic, science and technology journals, popular newspapers and magazines, and lobby cards and film posters where the telephone is represented), and compared and contrasted the statistical data of telephone ownership from different periods. We also looked at the oral history by interviewing telephone users, collecting their memories of using and owning a telephone, as well as their recollections of how it felt not owning a telephone line, and of waiting for years to get a telephone, especially during the 1960s and 1970s.

Our approach is interdisciplinary, bringing the project in line with the general tendency in cultural studies and communications research. In this context, historical documents were analyzed, quantitative and qualitative data, which display changes in the social structure were studied together with our findings from in-depth oral interviews of individuals. The project incorporated history-based research by utilizing concrete data for analyzing past events in their concrete settings, as well as using a sociological approach by gathering general data, which could display the characteristics of social structure. Our approach could also be called anthropological, as we gathered and analyzed specific data in order to understand the world of the individual as well as that of the collective. Our project made use of the research methodologies of these three disciplines.

Our findings compiled from the oral history of the telephone presents the telephone variously as a status symbol, a necessity, and sometimes as a nuisance. Some of the interviewees said that there was no need for a telephone

before the technology was introduced - the lifestyles they were leading easily accommodated communication without a telephone. Some argued that even when it was introduced, they did not feel the need to use it. Migration to the big cities crops up as a general stimulus to purchase a telephone. In big cities like Istanbul or Ankara, the need to communicate with family who remained back home in the village or provincial town forced some of our interviewees to purchase or use telephone technology. However, another problem was that there was no telephone at home in the village. Furthermore, the introduction of the telephone did not immediately excite the general population, as for many it was an alien technology and time was needed to appropriate it into the everyday lives of people in Turkey.

In this article, we will discuss the outcome of the oral history research, based on in-depth interviews with users/non-users in Istanbul, Ankara, Kayseri and Diyarbakir, conducted during 2011-2012. In each section, the reasons for our choice of these particular cities will be presented. However, our main aim was to follow the rule of representativeness criteria, which changed according to each city.

Oral history requires an approach that recognizes technology as a social experience. Answers to questions posed during interviews, or in a conversation, is limited to the individuals' own perception of history. Therefore, the social structure of the respondents plays an important role in constructing the narrative of the past, which is dominant today. The people who were interviewed have a political stance, an opinion of the telephone services provided by the state, and a narrative of how they perceive their relationship with this technology.

Indeed, the narratives of people from different classes can be completely at odds with each other. In the context of experienced cultural values, a study conducted by Wilma Esmer, called the *Cultural Values Survey* (2012), illustrates quantitative divisions, and provides a basis for the population geography of Turkey which emphasizes the fragmented nature of such an axis made up of secular versus conservative (religious) lifestyles, and others who find it difficult to describe themselves as "Turkish." It was important for our research that we chose cities and respondents who reflected this diversity.

Oral history study consists of a compilation of data based on verbal narratives about people's lives. The researchers, members of a particular situation or event, in order to understand what they experienced as individuals attribute meaning to the particular situation or event and help to save these experiences and meanings (Starr 1973, Grille 2003, Popular Memory Group 2003). In other words, oral history is built around the people, incorporating life into history, so researchers delve into new areas of reality, which expand the scope of the research history (Thompson 1999). The historical study of human social experience recognizes technology for its own historical narrative, and this narrative is also obliged to examine the relationship between social conditions (Fischer 1994).

The oral history interviews we conducted provide historical information that is retold today (i.e interviewees are here with us today and they recall their memories of their experiences with the telephone in Turkey). While such recollection is always the basis of oral history, it is the job of the historian to extract information about past times and values with a measured dose of scepticism. This is not to say that oral history cannot provide relevant clues about telephone usage in Turkey, but it often comes bathed in a nostalgia about the past; at least in our case, it certainly did. Our interviewees talked about sharing a telephone, about a telephone as something shared among other things like the television.

Oral history research is effective when open-ended questions are asked rather than conducted through semi-structured surveys because people have their own world which they relate with as little prejudice as possible (Ritchie 2003, Yow 2005). Therefore, we interviewed the people in the cities in which they live, at a location and time they themselves chose. In-depth interviews were conducted using a voice recorder. In the four cities we selected (Istanbul, Ankara, Diyarbakir and Kayseri), 127 people were interviewed who were at least thirty years of age. We met with them at locations they themselves selected in these cities.

Of the cities surveyed, several factors played a role in the selection of Istanbul. Istanbul is Turkey's most populous city, the most diverse in terms of socio-economic values, and recognized as an international center of commerce

and culture. Over the years, Istanbul has been immersed in social, economic, political and cultural change, becoming both a passage for immigration and a stable residence. The first telephone exchanges and lines in the country were established in Istanbul. Furthermore, the most important of the relevant factors are social class, gender and ethnic differences which provide a stratification of phone use with regard to ownership, and these factors can clearly be seen in Istanbul.

Our reasons for choosing the city of Kayseri were the following: as well as being geographically located in the center of Turkey, its social, political and especially economic life which helped to transform it into a city were key factors. Kayseri is also perceived as a culturally and religiously conservative city, another factor in our selection.

Diyarbakir is Turkey's largest city in terms of population in the east as well as one of the largest. Throughout the history of the Republic, the city has been scene of migration to and from upper and lower income groups of the regional population, which has created a city of deep socio-economic differences. The identity politics that were established in Turkey after 1980 and the discourse on ethnicity, which developed around the actors that make up the city were other reasons to choose Diyarbakir.

Ankara was chosen for this project in accordance with the recommendations made by the panel of TUBITAK, considering its importance as the capital of the Republic.

The extent of phone use in these four cities was examined in accordance with prevalence, meaning and value given, and a total of 127 people were interviewed using the snowball technique. The distribution of the 127 individuals was: 41 in Istanbul, 26 in Kayseri, 34 in Diyarbakir and 26 in Ankara. The number of people interviewed in Istanbul was more than those interviewed in the other cities partly due to its population size, as well as demographic characteristics (age, gender, socio-economic class), and in terms of its diversity factor. At least forty percent of the respondents were sixty years of age. In terms of gender distribution we aimed for an equal

distribution (half of the people interviewed were women, half were men). We designed and carried out our sampling, keeping the key issue of religious and ethnic diversity in mind in order to allow for income group and world view (religiously or culturally conservative, secular, liberal, nationalist, or leftist) as variables.

## Istanbul

Istanbul was the subject of our most comprehensive oral history research project. The reason for this is that as well as being Turkey's largest metropolis, it is the center of gravity for internal and external migration. Out of the people we interviewed, at least a portion of them spent their childhood outside Istanbul. Thus, Turkey's largest city can be perceived as a city of migration, a notion which helps us not only to understand an Istanbuli's relationship to the phone, but also that of people from different regions of Turkey. Several points should be made about the choice of Istanbul as a location for oral history. Istanbul provides demographic variety which no other city in Turkey can provide. The interviewees that we chose came from a range of ethnic, financial and social backgrounds. The rich demographic structure of Istanbul enabled us to reach to a variety of users of telephone technology as well as those who were deprived of it.

On the other hand, life experiences related to telephones show a diversity of cases in Istanbul due to this migration. As we discovered when we researched the archives, the phone was not evenly distributed throughout the various districts of Istanbul, and the prevalence ratio was not the same. We listened to the oral history interviews, which capture a spirit of population diversity inherited from the Ottoman Empire to the Republican era. One could say, for example, that in 1970s Istanbul one would experience neighborhoods living in close quarters, but dissimilar in practical terms, that is in different levels of material wealth. In the best examples, Sisli and Beyoglu districts, electricity and telephone services had reached a certain saturation point, but in some parts of neighboring Mecidiyeköy, telephone, electricity and water infrastructure was not yet provided. As part of our interviews, we talked to two people who were roughly the same age (over sixty), one

woman and one man, and their telephone stories are quite different from each other. Here is L.V's story (a businessman born and raised in Istanbul):

L.V.: "I was born in Tepebasi. The name of the street in Tepebasi where I was born was Minare Street. But there was no minaret. It was just the street of the U.S. consulate. At that time not many people had a telephone in the house as you know. Certain houses had a phone. [The number of] our first house phone was 495 746."

A: "Can you remember the year?"

L.V.: "It probably was 55 or something. Was 55."

A lady who moved from the village of Sivas to Mecidiyeköy in the early 1960s and preferred to wear the hijab is K.C.:

K.C.: "What phone in houses! Was there a telephone in every house in Istanbul?"

A: "No, wasn't there?"

K.C.: "Of course not."

A: "When did you come here?"

K.C.: "We do not know - has it been 45 years? It is also history. It was 45 years ago. In 1963, 62 we arrived here. I suppose salt was five cents. We moved to Mecideyeköy. There was no electricity, we were carrying water. If you are not in need of others that is enough [...] From then on, we think about this. The world's goods, how to get by, what we will do as such in shortage and stress."

A: "When did you have your first phone then?"

K.C.: "We had it when it first arrived, we got it immediately. Infidels have made it, but God blesses. Nevertheless, I say God bless."

A: "What was the year you received the phone?"

K.C.: "How do I know, I do not know how many years it has been. It arrived early. I know that. Bedriye got it and then we got it. That was 1980 or 85, I suppose. We were in Ümraniye, the connection was established there."

The absence of the telephone was felt, as can be seen in the following interview, but felt as long as the people were in their own environment. In

other words, if a person's social and physical surroundings did not have a phone facility, if popular culture products are not generally followed such as periodicals, newspapers, movies and so on, the absence of phone technology was not felt acutely. On the other hand, if a home in the neighborhood has a phone, the absence of a phone can produce a sense of deprivation. Most of those interviewed in this city provide an enthusiastic narrative of the existence of the phone; the absence of the phone was described with sadness and longing.

In our study we interviewed many people who have come to Istanbul as part of a process of internal migration which emerged as a factor determining their relationship with the phone. People living on the periphery of the city did not view their location as an urban district. Rather, they saw their neighborhood as a town in its own right; hence, they did not feel the absence of the phone. Putting aside the feeling of deprivation, people who migrated to the city did not put phone ownership on their priority list simply because of the economic difficulties they experienced. Even an attempt to inquire into the place of the phone in their personal histories seems ridiculous to these people. Born in 1960, a mobile *kokorec* vendor (S.S.) who has lived in Istanbul for twenty-five years, explains:

S.S.: "I do not remember in my childhood a phone or something. I saw the TV through the windows of the coffee place, I thought how did people get into it? I was working in a coffee place in Izmir the first time I spoke by telephone. 'The devil's work,' I thought. How did the sound come from the cable? My story is unlike any other [...] My dad used to spread straw beneath us, we used to sleep in the barn with donkeys [...] I do not know about childhood. I did not know what money was useful for, let alone the phone. If you have someone on the inside, we used to wait outside. Nylon shoes until the age of 14, I could not ask my father to get me shoes. Our childhood was to work endlessly carrying goods with five donkeys. When we played in front of the door, we were afraid that my father would see us play. I went to school for a few days. That is why the questions you are asking seem so strange. Forget it, brother, what phone? Some would say."

People who lived in the city's periphery and were born and raised in one neighborhood for life or in the business environment locally did not necessarily feel the need for a phone. In one of the interviews, Y.K. started to work in 1976 as a laborer, organized in unions, and lived in the neighborhood of Paşabahçe. Y.K. talks about neighborhood relations and communications:

Y.K.: "We talked to people when there were people we needed to get in contact with, or in case of emergency, or we sent messengers. We met at the Union outside certain hours, moreover in this region, people of certain local identity live together, which is also the case for the factory. For example, 3 thousand people in the factory, for example 800 people from Giresun, 500 people from Kastamonu, and there were 300 people from Thrace. And the neighborhoods where people lived were also congregated, and this was evident; so for example, Giresun a collective neighborhood, Kastamonu bulk unit. These people lived so, for example there were certain coffeehouses, everybody knew who went to which coffeehouse, and news was sent to those coffeehouses or people congregated there, this is how we did it."

The spirit of the past came across in our interviews, and which was admittedly not always remembered with happiness and solidarity. In this respect, the presence of non-Muslims in the early phone stories is very interesting. For example E.A., a 63-year-old retired soldier told us about his childhood in the district of:

E.A.: "Now my daughter, let me give my earliest memories of the phone to you, I was born in Balat. Do you know Balat?"

A: "I know."

E.A.: "It was a neighborhood with the Greeks of old Istanbul, Jews, Armenians being the majority. In fact, on our one street, eighty percent of the Greeks, Armenians and Jews were citizens, twenty percent were Albanians. We were also Albanians. Aunt Ester in our street had one. There was one phone in the house of Aunt Ester."

A: "What year is this?"

E.A.: "What I've said was 1962-63. The whole neighborhood would go to Aunt Ester's home, in case of an emergency or if there was a need to



call someone. Her phone was just a phone like that burgundy color. You turn the keys as follows, a sound, then turn it again blah blah blah.”

## Kayseri

As stated above, we included the city of Kayseri in our study largely due to the economic development of this city in Turkey, and its central role in the representation of conservative culture. In Kayseri during the 1920s and 1930s, public investment was made in the Sumer Textile Factory, and the Kayseri Aircraft Factory was founded as a trading center. Many rich business-oriented families are from Kayseri including the first representatives of the national *bourgeoisie* (i.e. the Koc family). Kayseri industrialists and traders emerged after 1980 as the city managed to keep pace with the liberalization policies of the 1990s, when neo-liberalization policies were adapted.

We interviewed M.O. in this city, who is one of the city’s oldest industrialists:

M.O.: “[...] so, Kayseri businessmen. Why businessman? As if Allah does not have any other occupation, here in the heart of Anatolian province of Kayseri and gave people business intelligence [...] There’s no such thing. There are two kinds of places in this world: one where bird goose grass becomes reeds, one for the herb thyme, where birds are partridges [...] Now what is Kayseri? There are no earnings that come from nature. Now let’s look at the environment. Black Sea has honey and nuts, even now they grow citrus. State of Cukurova is known. What does Kayseri have? Nothing. Barley is sown once a year. If Almighty Allah gives you a bit of rain it will grow. Ah, then we did not have the technology, when we set up our Union Textile, three and a half meters below water came flowing rivers such as we listened to the sound that I remember. That water has flowed there for years, for centuries, and on most of the time in a field of barley, dry, burned, gone. It’s a matter of opportunity.”

Kayseri was one of the city’s commercial centers throughout the history of the Republic. In terms of the telephone, Kayseri was also one of the places where the first expansion took place. M.O., the industrialist quoted above, commented on this subject:

M.O.: “I think ... now it’s a matter of opinion. So we just said the communication and transportation. I put it down to the awareness of Kayseri people on the importance of communication in commercial life. Because even the most affluent wealthy families had a shop phone, but later, probably five years, eight years, ten years later, it came [into the home]. Why they are not at home but in the shop? They were aware of the pros that it will bring business to life. So at home, I suppose it arrived twenty or something years later than our shop phone.”

The rapid development of the phone in between 1970s up to the early 2000s in Kayseri was explained by a retiring employee (R.T.) who worked at Kayseri and Telecom PTT, who was also involved in management, explained:

R.T.: “Look, we’ve considered strategies in Kayseri. Istanbul for instance, has from time to time cables the size of the human body [...] We could not do it in Kayseri [...] we’ve kept a lot of the number of plants. Thirteen to twenty-three units in the Kayseri plant made by charitable people. Building, because it was having building work [...] building was done. So when I did not make it to Kayseri, the building was handed over all underground [...] You were forced to allocate a place to underground stations when you were building plants. Less network, keeping it brought relief from plant to service both economically because the most expensive items are cables, cable rates have attracted less people, we accelerate the flow of business. Look, let us say that one of the provinces was a precedent: Izmit. Turkey’s industrial sector has two in the province which are feeding stations where we nourish our twenty-three plants.”

Another significant characteristic of Kayseri as far as social studies research is concerned is the fact that it is a hub of conservative culture. Starting from 1990, Kayseri has been seen as one of the centers of conservatism in the area of economics as well as in the political sphere. In this regard, one of the city’s few female industrialists (G.Z.) gave her insight into the city which was quite enlightening:

A: “What’s it like to be a woman working in Kayseri?”

G.Z.: “A native of Kayseri would not like a working woman. I first came here in 1975 or something, women’ place was for going to the market

or the shop, there were not many women working, but now there is immigration. The local population of Kayseri is reduced. Migration much from the outside.”

A: “How did you start your business, did you meet with a reaction?”

G.Z.: “They [women] cannot do it, men already thought, what can she understand about work? I give the sheet order, the materials we use, I phone the company that sold sheet, ‘ma’am did you call the wrong place? This is not a hairdresser,’ he tells me. So the simplest example of this [...]”

We also gained information about the then-existing non-Muslim minorities of Kayseri through our interviews, C.M. explained:

A: “Talas, if I learned right, was inhabited by non-Muslim minorities. Were they there during your childhood?”

Ç.M.: “Top of our neighborhood the Armenians had families. They were occupied with tailoring or something. They were poor people, some of them also raised livestock. Within the city there was a group of Armenians in our neighborhood. All in all fifteen to twenty or thirty to forty families or so.”

A: “Were there Greeks?”

Ç.M.: “No, there were none. In the fight, completely gone.”

## Diyarbakir

One of the four provinces in which we conducted our research was Diyarbakir. We chose Diyarbakir because of the major role it plays in the context of identity politics in Turkey, especially over the last thirty years. Furthermore, we wanted to understand the relationship of the Kurds as an ethnic minority with the telephone. Throughout the history of Diyarbakir, it has been multicultural and multi-lingual, and for our research, this was one of the features most frequently encountered. In particular, until the end of the 1970s the city was a hub of ethnic diversity, hosting extensive Syriac, Armenian, and Jewish populations, Kurdish and Turkish population living intertwined. A business man (H.B.) living in Diyarbakir, explained:

H.B.: “Urfa, Diyarbakir has a culture very different from the culture of Elazig.”

A: “What is it that makes Diyarbakir different in this sense?”

H.B.: “That is, so I remember. For example, people from Diyarbakır are more democratic, more social as a people. Behold, when we look at it, like I’m giving my own opinion. We are in the same neighborhood, Muslims and Christians, Assyrian, Armenian, with these families and their children who grew up together. Also from our Syrians, Armenians also, the fact that all of them were our masters.”

In one of the interviews with an engineer from the NET-AS factory about the difference of distribution of telephone technology in Turkey, N.K. explained

A: “Diyarbakir?”

N.K.: “Diyarbakır obviated or too.”

A: “How obviated?”

N.K.: “For example, let’s just say I had a lot of labor in the application of first of these village-type plants in Turkey, the village power plants [...] it began in 1987 already, I was there with my very serious effort [...] I’ve worked hard to make their communications. Unfortunately, Ankara has done such a thing. Did something negative. I know that. For example, in the district of Diyarbakir, which in one place, there was a large village. There were villages. Isik village they say. I forget the Kurdish name. One plant would be set up in the village, it did not come.”

What is especially important in Diyarbakir, is the problem of language which relates to phone usage. Particularly following the 1980 coup (in 1983), a prohibition on the Kurdish spoken language was introduced, ongoing for decades in the area of Emergency applications. This issue highlighted the problem of which language would be used in phone conversations.

In our interviews with cleaning worker women in Diyarbakir (K.İ.), we

learned that their village was burned down in 1995-1996 so they moved to Diyarbakir:

K.İ.: “My brother had gone out (to the mountains) [...] so [...] my father got the line. He said that so maybe I hear his voice.”

## Ankara

Ankara, the capital of Turkey has also been the capital of modernization programs. While Ankara is demographically more homogenous, it has one advantage that no other city has: it is the city of public servants. The civil servants of the city can and did provide information about the governmental projects on telephone technology, which helped us analyze the modernization paradigm in relationship to the state.

The nature of our oral history interviews in Ankara in particular was slightly different from the other cities, as the city is and was a hub of governmental workers, and we had our fair share of interviews. In these interviews, several aspects about the state’s attitude towards the telephone are revealed. One interviewee who worked in the communications and transportation ministry at one time argued that “[c]ommunication services of a nation’s overall structure are manifested as a major force in the basic structure. Progress in terms of developing the country in terms of communication is gaining weight.”

This quotation has some points to discuss, for one it vividly displays the state assumed role as the implementer of modernization in Turkey. This view has shown itself in practice starting with the 1960s in Turkey and it is well documented. The implementation of telephone technology all over Turkey fits in perfectly with this paradigm. What we found during our interviews in Istanbul and Ankara was the fact that some of our interviewees who owned a telephone felt like they were providing some sort of service to the rest of the neighborhood by letting others use it every now and then. It felt as though they thought of themselves as agents of modernization. However, cultural and religious differences (i.e. chasms in society) prevented this being a more involving service or experience. One Alawite interviewee said

that when they did not own a phone, they never went to other peoples houses for fear of 'otherization,' but when they owned one, they let the non-Alawites in the neighborhood use their phone. One can also read this as a reverse attempt at cultural otherization rather than a modernization effect. That is why it would be wrong to assume that all layers of society were united around a goal of modernization - it was not as straightforward as it is often assumed to be.

Another example is that of an academic who was involved with the student movements of his day. He mentions that they frequently used the telephone to organize their demonstrations. This also runs against the state's intention to control its citizens with the help of telephone technology, i.e. assimilation in the form of modernization. Telephone technology can be and indeed was used for reasons that the state did not anticipate, which ran counter to its own projects. Practices of telephone use do not display the picture-perfect modernity that was anticipated or presented as such. Rather, it was a fragmented, multi layered and sometimes non-existent modernity. One should perhaps raise the issue that cultural identities more often than not showed some resentment towards modernizing projects, and time was needed to normalize what was introduced as new and modern in the shape of this new technology.

In other words, regarding the capital Ankara, Turkey's economic difficulties such as poverty, lack and deprivation should be taken into account. In Ankara, paying attention to these features, and to reflect the diversity of class and identity, we mainly talked with people who have worked in the state bureaucracy. Our respondents in the Ministry of Transport, General Directorate of PTT and in institutions such as the upper or mid-level management included individuals who have come to our attention. However, as Ankara's bureaucracy is central to our study, it is important to take the profession of journalism into account, which our sample from Ankara contained. But we also interviewed education and health sector workers, who in the past have been involved in active politics, some becoming MPs or party administrators, as well as those working in state security institutions and intelligence, as directors and officers and workers, housewives and the unemployed.

## Conclusion

When the government took the initiative in the 1950s to generally develop Turkey, the telephone became a vehicle for the modernization projects for the state. Even then, our research has shown that the telephone has been perceived less as a technological device and more like a piece of expensive furniture. The first reaction to the telephone was hesitance towards something unfamiliar. When we asked about where the telephone was located, the answer was invariably: in the living room, covered with lace doilies. People who had a telephone said that they did not use it very often, and even if they did, they kept the conversations short. Instead, letter writing was an important element in communication, and people suggested to each other to keep the phone conversations short and put important information in a letter instead.

One of our interviewees said that when she was away for her studies, whenever she phoned the house, her parents kept the conversations short and told her to write everything down instead. This also shows some kind of resentment towards “excessive” use of the telephone in the past, and whatever this excess meant, it should be analyzed. But what is clear about this example is that people did not perceive the telephone as a conversational tool, rather, it was still alien to them, something they had to get used to over time. The question to ask here is: did the practice of everyday life telephone usage go hand in hand or in sync with the project of modernization? Technology transfer does not necessarily translate itself into modes of social life as modernity, as our project illustrates, at least not uniformly so. Hence we put the mainstream discourse to one side, and dealt with experiences. So far, this method revealed to us a picture of modernity that is beyond the theoretical framework that has been provided to date. Our oral history study displays a variety of modernities, which existed side by side.

## References

Esmer, Yılmaz 2012. Türkiye Değerler Atlası. İstanbul: Bahçeşehir Üniversite Yayınları.

Fischer, Claude 1994. *America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone to 1940*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Grele, R. J. 2003. *Movement Without Aim: Methodological and Theoretical Problems in Oral History*. In *The Oral History Reader*, Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds. Pp. 38-52. London: Routledge.

Popular Memory Group 2003. *Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method*. In *The Oral History Reader*, Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds. Pp. 75-86. London: Routledge.

Ritchie, D. A. 2003. *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Starr, Louise 1973. *The Oral History Collection of Columbia University*. <http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/record/Details/detailmini.jsp>, accessed February 14, 2015.

Thompson, Paul 2000. *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Yow, V. R. 2005. *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press.



## Review: Technology and National Identity in Turkey. Mobile Communications and the Evolution of a Post-Ottoman Nation

Petr Kučera

Charles University in Prague

### Keywords:

*Turkey, public sphere, mobile phones, globalisation, identity, communication studies*

*Burçe Çelik. Technology and National Identity in Turkey. Mobile Communications and the Evolution of a Post-Ottoman Nation. I.B.Tauris: London / New York, 2011. ISBN 9781848854291. 224 pages.*

*Technology and National Identity in Turkey* is a social study of technology or, more precisely, of the cultural, historical, social, psychological and individual contexts, attitudes, and practices connected to and resulting from the use of mobile phones in Turkey. It also looks into the ways this technology has been ‘domesticated’ or ‘nationalized’ and links it to the shaping of national identity.

With its huge and rapidly expanding market in mobile technologies, comprising 67 million users and 100 million machines in use as of 2010, one can only wonder why this issue has attracted little attention by scholars so far. Çelik’s excellent work successfully undertakes the task of filling this gap and offers a solid theoretical framework for the study of this phenomenon, while also supplying the reader with fascinating details about every-day practices of cell phone users in today’s Turkey.

In contrast to previous studies, the book tries to go beyond the instrumental and symbolic value of mobile communication. It analyzes cellular telephony as a social practice, as an object of collective attachment and addiction in Turkey, which should be situated also “via desires, imaginations, inclinations, wishes, purposes and sensations that it responds to and reproduces” (p. 9).

The study is very well researched and solidly rooted in a wide variety of theoretical approaches. The author's primary sources include print media research, blogs, websites, ads, interviews with cell phone users of different social, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. The sheer extend of scholarly studies quoted and drawn on - from philosophy of technology to sociology, from literature studies to cultural analysis and psychoanalysis - is just impressive, at times maybe even having a tinge of over-theorization. However, once the reader has digested a heavy load of theoretical concepts, contemplations, and references to other scholarly works dealing with technologies, they will be rewarded with a highly sophisticated reflection on the relation between technology and society in Turkey, not matched by any other work written on a similar topic.

Çelik is totally right by claiming that the bulk of research on Turkish modernity does not take into account the technology's role in the formation of national ideals and that it does not view it as integral to the dreaming of modernity in Turkey. Technology was both part of the nation's imagination and also a memento of its 'historical guilt': in the reformist rhetoric, the disintegration and backwardness of the empire were caused by the lack of technology. Reversely, technological progress, or successful adoption of new technologies was seen as a proof of the nation's 'modernization credentials' and served as a source of national pride. The failure to appropriate and/or produce technology only lead to further bitterness, resentment and embarrassment of not being able to close the technological and temporal gap between Turkey and the most advanced nations of the West.

The origins of Turkish people's affective attachment to cellular telephony are, according to Çelik, to be found in historical melancholia. She argues that melancholia determines the way people engage with technologies. Referring mainly to Sigmund Freud and Judith Butler's definitions, she understands 'the melancholia of bodies' in Turkey as both an affirmation and denial of the loss of the ideality of empire, as the "very product of the historical organization of hegemonic power" which has not allowed for the presence of socio-political conditions for mourning over this loss (p. 19). It was only after 1980, with the end of military state power's interference with public life and the ensuing de-politicization of society, the advancement of

economic liberalism of the Özalıan era, the opening of Turkey to the wider world, and, more importantly, the extremely rapid rise of consumerism that “historical melancholia became conscious and turned into a cultural institution, which affects people of Turkey in different ways across all aspects of life” (p. 40). The eager embracement of mobile phones, products of a global technology, was according to Çelik preconditioned by this penetration of nostalgia and collective melancholia into the public space and its commoditization. Cellular telephony, introduced to Turkey in the mid-1990s, enables one to “experience imaginative movement or departure from where the body is” (responding to the yearning of especially the Turkish youth to be ‘somewhere else’), and “as a communication technology whose well-known promise is ‘connecting to people’” it speaks to melancholia (p. 48).

Though very well anchored in theoretical literature, especially psychoanalytical conceptualizations, the idea of melancholia being instrumental in the creation of the ‘post-Ottoman nation’ would have deserved a little bit more explanation. The concept of the ‘melancholic’ nature of modern Turkish nation seems to be supported mainly by Orhan Pamuk’s reflections on *hüzün*, or collective melancholia, which Pamuk situates in and limits to Istanbul, and Taner Akçam’s references to historical amnesia / history of traumas. Yet if *hüzün* was conditioned by the loss of the ideality of the (eastern) empire and the inaptitude to reach the (western) level of progress (mourning for the lost past and lost future), it would be possible to argue that all collapsed (non-western) empires would be stricken by such a melancholia. How much is it possible to generalize about a ‘collective melancholia’ in a society so diverse and even polarized - ethnically, religiously, socially, politically - as Turkey? Or is it something applicable only to urban middle and upper classes of Western Turkey? It is not easy to answer these questions, as no conclusive psychological research about melancholia in the Turkish society has been done.

Çelik aptly observes that it would be misleading to claim that the expansion of the technoscape - and cellular telephony as its part - once and for all reduced distances between people and regions and ‘connected people,’ to use the mobile advertisers’ slogan. The rise of the technoscape has been accompanied by the creation of new global asymmetries, by the recreation

of distances and insertion of new boundaries and barriers. Moreover, the quality of the technospace and “the degree of its absence or presence marks differences between regions, countries, or even collectives” (p. 52). The global imbalance in the production, distribution and consumption of the technospace might help to explain the stunning success of cell phones in less developed countries, fuelled by the desire of the population of these countries to become part of the global community and avoid being excluded from the networked world and global history. The inability of adopting newest technologies brings about the stigma of belatedness, of being too local in a globalized world, being left on the peripheries of modernity.

The social meanings of mobile phones, grounded in popularity, in its image as a cool and fashionable object symbolically representing desirable western and mobile lifestyles, its association with a modern-urban lifestyle might partially explain why cell phone became an object of collective attachment in Turkey. Through mobile phones, the peripheral “third worlds” of Turkey, as Çelik terms them in reference to Nurdan Gürbilek, can become “agents capable of asserting and claiming their share from the technospace” (p. 88). It gives these people a feeling of movement, departure, migration to another time and space. Since technological progress in the less-developed part of the world is inevitably measured against the ‘standards’ of the developed world (‘the West’), the keen adoption of mobile technology in Turkey can work two ways. It can have an impact both in the direction of empowerment and a means of national pride (when ‘domesticated’ or ‘nationalized’ and/or approved and applauded by the imagined western gaze), yet at the same time, knowing that cellular technology is part of the global network “whose felt and perceived center is not Turkey,” it can further historical resentment, inferiority complex, anger, or melancholia (p. 147).

The last chapter concludes with the very apt remark that cellular telephony has become

“a specific social practice and collective attachment in Turkey in particular because it opens up a site where the imagination, sensation and experience of a crowd is possible. In this crowd (...) each body feels connected to others and so part of the same large force; these bodies sense

and even see progress towards an illusionary self-proper - in which the people of Turkey become a felt collective inhabiting the space of global cellular telephony where movement and mobility are ideally open to all” (p. 164).

The book under review is an original and elaborate contribution to the study of Turkey’s modernity, the dynamics of its ‘post-Ottoman’ society in the 2000s, and the relationship between society and technology. It has the potential to open a wider discussion on the role of technologies in today’s Turkey, and by its firm grounding in cultural theory and solid research, it can serve also as a reference work for scholars reflecting upon mobile phones in other national contexts.