

Playing with Fire: On the Domestication of the Mobile Phone
among Palestinian Teenage Girls in Israel

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The paper offers an analysis of mobile phone practices among Palestinian Israeli teenage girls, framed within a discussion about the domestication of communication technologies, women and the telephone, and Palestinian teenage girls in Israel. The paper constructs a detailed account of mobile phone use among Palestinian Israeli girls who, at the time of the fieldwork (2003-6), used mobile phones given to them by their illicit boyfriends, unbeknownst to their parents. The analysis explores the ways in which the phone use dialectically reaffirmed and challenged intergenerational and cross-gender relationships; and reflects on the notion of "domestication" as a framework for analyzing mobile communication media.

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Our starting point for this discussion is a field trip in 2003, in which the first author participated as an assistant teacher. Around midnight, as she was making her round in the hostel in which the group spent the night, she was surprised to learn that in the privacy of their sleeping bags behind closed doors, her teenage girl students were busy talking over mobile phones whose presence was unbeknownst to the teachers. These phones, she later learned in conversations with the girls, were hidden from their parents as well; they were given to them by their boyfriends as a symbol of and a practical means for sustaining their romantic relationships; and inasmuch as these were forbidden, this gift (which turned out to be a loan once the relationship ended) required an intricate system of concealment and collaboration.

These relationships between the teenage girls and their boyfriends and parents; their friends and teachers; and their mobile phones, may be interpreted as an encounter between a traditional, patriarchal society and a technology that is conceived in the literature as "emancipating" (Ling, 2004). In studying teenage girls receiving mobile phones from their boyfriends and hiding them from their fathers, brothers and schoolteachers, we can explore the role of technology in the construction of gender, age and ethnicity among teenagers in Palestinian villages and small towns in northern Israel. These girls' moves are constrained by men, by their parents, and by community's conservative reaction to the seemingly liberal Jewish hegemony. In this context, the mobile phone both reestablishes these teenage girls' layered subordinations and tampers with them, allowing the girls to develop a mediated and

face-to-face community that provides them with essential practical and emotional support. By analyzing these multi-faceted, occasionally contradictory practices, we hope to illustrate that the meaning of media—i.e., whether they are "emancipating" and how—lies not in their technological features but rather in the gendered practices of their use within particular cultural settings.

1. Domestication of technology

Perhaps more than previous media, the mobile phone lends itself easily to before-and-after observations on how life had changed following its adoption. The suggestion that technology is conceived and created independently of human action and then affects it from the outside is common in both utopic and dystopic accounts, which construct individuals and societies as fundamentally shaped by the technologies that penetrate their worlds. As Raymond Williams has argued, however, the construction of technology as an isolated, self-acting force is misleading (1990, p. 14); indeed, the current case makes it evident that the mobile phone means different things when used for different purposes in different social contexts. In this spirit, Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley (1992) conceived of the human-machine encounter as dialectic, on-going processes which they termed "domestication." From this perspective, technology continually defines, but is at the same time defined by, the communities that adopt or resists it, the cultures that practice it, and the relationships in which it is intertwined (see also, Horst and Miller, 2006, Ling, 2004).

Silverstone and his colleagues distinguished four phases or elements in the process of domestication, namely, *appropriation*, relating to practices of ownership and possession; *objectification*, focusing on the object and its display in the geography of

the home; *incorporation*, highlighting uses and functions of the object in and over time, thereby foregrounding issues of power; and *conversion*, referring to the ways in which the object is employed as currency for indicating memberships in relations with the outside. Together, the phases express "the moral economy of the household," the deliberations, decisions and practices of family members as they shape and are shaped by communication technologies.

The notion of "domestication" that captures this dialectical process invites two comments. First, an emphasis on the domestic as a focal site for interaction with the media seems specifically suitable for studying traditional teenage girls; the household appears to be the "natural" and most appropriate choice for contextualizing women and girls in their most immediate and meaningful environment of media consumption (see, for example, McRobby and Garber, 1976). Clearly, however, the traditional meaning of the household itself evolves as its walls become potentially permeable. The household, then, is a cultural starting point (Morley, 2000) that we need to both acknowledge and transcend:

"biographies of information and communication technologies are not exhausted at the point at which objects or meanings cross the various material and symbolic households of the domestic sphere. Pursuing those biographies also provides, in another register, the basis for an historical and anthropological account of social and technological change on the one hand, and of both large- and small-scale cultural variations on the other" (Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley, 1992, p. 27).

Second, in pursuing domestication as a dialectical process, Silverstone and his

colleagues (1992) redress both the prominence of the medium and trivialization of the material object in the study of media, which has been preoccupied with the effects of technology on the one hand and those of texts on the other. The notion of domestication calls attention to the material object and requires that we ask how it enables and enhances human action; and how it derives its meaning, as an object, from cultural practice. Silverstone and his colleagues, however, do not prioritize matter; for them, communication technologies (in contrast to technologies more generally) are *doubly articulated* such that domestication takes place in relation to both *media objects* and *texts*. Thus in the case of the mobile phone, we are invited to explore both the significance of secretly owning a medium of communication that can ring, that requires charging, that has a memory that can be transferred from one machine to the next, etc; at the same time, we are invited to study its evolving uses and the practices that are involved in ensuring its availability; the meanings of unprecedented long cross-gender conversations; and the negotiations over gender and cultural identities that are occasioned by the use of the mobile phone.

2. Women and the telephone

In an intriguing contrast to the centrality of the telephone in contemporary life, recent academic research has all but ignored this medium (Frissen, 1995; Moyal, 1992; van Zoonen, 1992). In this context, the focus on gender in those works that do study the phone (e.g., Fischer, 1992; Marvin, 1988; Moyal, 1992; Rakow, 1992) is remarkable. Specifically, studies noted male dominance in the use of television (Morley, 1986), the remote control device (Walker, 1996), the video cassette recorder (Gray, 1992) and the computer (van Zoonen, 1992) well into the 1980's and 90's, after decades of mass marketing (Spigel, 1989). By contrast, the phone, which was initially conceived

as an elitist, male, business-oriented medium of communication (Fischer, 1992; Marvin, 1988) was soon appropriated by women for domestic, sociable "frivolous and unnecessary" (Frissen, 1995 p. 80) uses; Ann Moyal found "a pervasive, deeply rooted, dynamic feminine culture of the telephone in which kinkeeping, caring, mutual support, friendship, volunteer and community activity" contributes substantially to "women's sense of autonomy, security, participation and well-being" (Moyal, 1992, p. 67). Similarly, the mobile phone, which was also developed and intended for businessmen, was almost immediately adopted by women (Rakow and Navarro, 1993), who used it "in a creative way to carry out their geographically complicated responsibilities for home, family members, and paid labor" (1993, p. 154-5; Shade, 2007).

As David Morley pointed out, the empirical differences he noted between women and men's relationship with the television set, the programs and the remote control device were not attributable to some essential biological characteristics; rather, they were "the effects of the particular social roles that these man and women occupy within the home" (1986, p. 146). Rakow and Navarro make a similar argument in relation to the mobile phone; however, they use the technology as their starting point to shift the discussion from social roles to gender ideology. Thus, they conclude: "There is nothing inherent in the technology that requires women and men to use it differently. It is gender ideology, operating within a particular political and economic context, that leads to women and men living different lives and using technology differently" (1993, p. 155). Van Zoonen (1992) takes this point further to suggest that both gender and technology are discursively, culturally produced, continually "written" and re-written in and through cultural practices that constitute, sustain and challenge them. It

is in this cultural sense of the encounter between women and the telephone, that Rakow (1992) distinguished gendered work—work delegated to women—from gender work—work that confirms the community's beliefs about what are women's natural tendencies and abilities.

Though the two are intertwined in practice, it is analytically helpful to separate uses of the phone which are part of the productive activity assigned to women, from those uses that are embedded in a set of ideas and practices, and thus express and construct what it means to be a woman (or a man) in contemporary society (Frissen, 1995).

Thus as women are traditionally in charge of maintaining social relationships, studies noted that women used the phone to help them take care of, and stay in touch with, family and friends to the point of establishing and nurturing a "psychological neighborhood" (Moyal, 1992, p. 59). The phone allowed women to expand social relationships and assisted them in managing their family and business obligations (as well as their husbands', e.g. Moyal, 1992; Rakow, 1992) as well as community work. The face to face "gossip," "chats" and "visits" that traditionally accompanied the latter were transferred to the phone (Rakow, 1992). Mothering similarly became easier to manage, though more demanding (Vestby, 1994); the mobile phone, especially, seemed an extension of the private world, employed by women in order "to take their family lives with them wherever they go" (Rakow and Navarro, 1993, p. 155).

At the same time, women's use of the phone constructed them as women—their work was less valuable, their conversation less important, their social life inconsequential, and their public appearance was incompetent. Thus women's talk was customarily trivialized and frowned upon: Both the amount—"I got yelled at one time for talking

more than half an hour to my cousin" (Rakow, 1992, p. 50)—and its content—"He got mad if anybody called me up to visit" (Rakow, 1992, p. 50)—were subject to criticism from husbands (as in the examples above), fathers, telephone companies and social critics (Marvin, 1988). Even the sense of a "psychological neighborhood" (Moyal, 1992) that nurtures women through their phone use, constructs their social network as a solution to individual problems rather than an imagined community that consists of a political alternative. Finally, early phones were purchased by husbands and fathers, who thus not only covered the charges, but set the rules as well. Later on, "for safety reasons," they were the ones to insist on buying mobile phones for their wives, who both drove alone and left the kids alone: "My husband said, that's it. You need a phone in the car" (Rakow and Navarro, 1993, p. 151).

The notion of gendered work draws attention to the ways in which gender is articulated in the use of technology throughout women's life cycle. Teenage girls and young women are of particular interest here as they are presumably preoccupied with negotiating their gender identity and arguably exceptionally receptive to new technologies. Marvin (1988) offered an account of this developmental moment in a particular cultural historical moment, namely the introduction of the telephone in American society at the turn of the 20th century. In this context, she listed the threats posed by "irregular courtship" to traditional class practices:

New forms of communication created unprecedented opportunities not only for courting and infidelity, but for romancing unacceptable persons outside one's own class, and even one's own race, in circumstances that went unobserved by the regular community. The potential for illicit sexual behavior had obvious disquieting power to undermine unaccustomed centers of moral

authority and social order (Marvin, 1988, p. 70)

The use of the newly-adopted telephone threatened to compromise young women's position as daughters and as recipients of respectable male courting: "The doors may be barred and a rejected suitor kept out, but how is the telephone to be guarded?" (*Telephony*, 1905, in Marvin, 1988, p. 70). Clearly the phone meant different things to young men and women; newsletters and journals of that period described the rise of the "brasher and more resilient" telephone girl, who improvised new ways to protect herself from unwanted attentions in the absence of traditional safeguards; and the "enterprising suitor" who proposed marriage over the phone while his outdated rival was waiting in the room for an answer. Ironically then, the new medium served to both challenge and reaffirm traditional gender practices, reconfiguring romantic courtship in a way that left conventional gendered work ironically stable. As we shall show, a century later and in a markedly different cultural context, the encounter between young women and the telephone is again a site for the intricate work of gender.

3. Palestinian teenage girls in Israel

Palestinian citizens consist of roughly one fifth of Israeli population (1.2 million people). Concentrated in cities and villages in northern Israel, this is a heterogeneous group with diverse and complicated relationships with the Jewish mainstream. Israeli Palestinians are mostly Moslem; as such, they are committed to and implicated in conflicting global and local shifts toward westernized modernization and traditional religiosity, higher education for both sexes (Seginer and Mahajna, 2004), and notable Palestinization (Rekhes, 2002). These intertwined currents are translated into such

daily practices as parenting, schooling, growing up and engaging in consumer culture, which are reflective and hybrid, both receptive and resistant to various outer and internal sentiments (see Abu-Asba, 1998; Al-Haj, 1995).

As a case in point, Hassan (1993) describes "growing up female and Palestinian in Israel" in those words: "The success of a Palestinian girl is determined by her ability to measure up to the social expectations transmitted to her through her family... Strive as she may, however, she will never receive the appreciation displayed toward a son... any man, even her retarded young brother, *is superior to her by virtue of his masculinity alone*" (p. 66-7, emphasis in original). According to Hassan, the preparation of the adolescent girl for her role as a "merchandise to be sold on the marriage market" (p. 69) is crucial; thus physical maturity means that the daughter has become "a danger to the family and society, a walking explosive charge whose every movement is observed and criticized or even condemned" (Hassan, 1993, p. 68). However, young women's resistances to the practices that this entails appear riddled with contradictions, since the alternative, modernistic discourses of romantic love and self actualization brand the national collective as primitive and low class, and endorse, albeit on local terms, bourgeois consumer culture (Illouz, 1997) and liberal Zionist ideology (Erdreich, 2006).

These dialectical moves are intertwined in more general cultural tensions. Notably, the significance of the broader family has decreased with time, yet Moslem families in Israel are still patriarchal and authoritative, and the division of labor remains relatively stable (Florian, Mikulincer and Weller, 1993). Similarly, whereas women are well educated and earning, men still tend to be the breadwinners; and whereas

children are expected to respect and obey their parents, hierarchy and discipline are associated with the father (Barakat, 1993; Khazan, 1993, Shokeid, 1993). By the same token, whereas college education is non-gendered, leaving home in order to attend school consists of a very different experience for young men and women, as pre-marital cross-gender encounters are strongly discouraged (Erdreich, 2006, Hassan, 1993, Khazan, 1993). Thus, though most parents claimed their kids could freely choose their mates (Habbash, 1977), parents were intensively involved in this process. Planned marriages, especially for young women, appear so deep-rooted that even today most young people respect their parents' marital preferences for themselves (Hassan, 2004). What then are the practices that are associated with the mobile phone in this context—how does it derive its meaning from these cultural gendered family practices, and how does it mediate and shape them, in turn?

Method

To study the use of the mobile phone among Palestinian teenage girls in Israel, the first author observed and interviewed 15-18 year old, ten to twelve graders, over a period of two years: from the initial, quite secretive moments of early appropriation in 2003, when ownership was unbeknownst to the parents; through the explicit incorporation of the mobile phone into gendered inter-generational family relationships two years later (2005)—some thirty informants in all. Observations and interviews were conducted in school classrooms and yards, private bedrooms, and shopping malls in several Arab towns and villages in the north of Israel. The first author, who worked as an informal English teacher, became acquainted with the informants as their tutor, friend and occasionally as their relative. A Moslem young woman herself, she was only slightly older than they were, and reasonably familiar

with their teachers, parents, families and boyfriends. She concluded interviewing when the information elicited in the interviews became redundant. Additional materials were collected throughout that period from local Arabic newspapers and especially Arab language websites, which touched upon mobile phone practices among teenagers and young women, and were often mentioned by the informants.

Owning a post modern medium in a traditional society

1. Appropriation: Having a mobile phone

"It isn't so complicated: There are many social events that allow for transferring the mobile, along with other things like photos, letters etc. In case we are talking about a guy from school, matters are really easy and simple; boys and girls naturally meet in school and sometimes there are couples that prefer to meet in more hidden places like the school back yard or behind the library shelves. In case this is not a guy from school, they can transfer things on the way back from school through one of the close friends or one of the relatives [both in female form], and sometimes there are events that can be used, like weddings and holidays, in which boys and girls meet more freely."

(Mona, April 2003)

In 2003, having a mobile phone meant having a boyfriend. "Appropriation" never consisted of a teenage girl purchasing a mobile phone, having her parents purchase one for her, or literally owning it. Rather, she would receive it as a post-modern engagement ring—one, however, that is doubly articulated, and can not only mark the relationship (though discreetly), but enable and sustain it as well. The couple had to "accidentally" meet unsupervised in some public place (the local McDonald's

branch—both a symbolic challenge and practical means for bypassing traditional restrictions—played a leading role here), or rely on a friend or a family member to act as a liaison and convey the gift of the phone, the charger, and occasionally the calling cards.

Thus Sou'ad met a guy who worked in the local computer store when she was in 11th grade. He came to fix their home computer several times before asking her to be "in touch." After she consented, he sent her a mobile via the neighbors' daughter. Hiba fell in love with a relative from her village, who was six years her senior. Since her mother knew and approved of this relationship, and since, as a relative, he was permitted to visit Hiba's house, he gave her a mobile phone when she was in 9th grade. Samira fell in love with one of the boys in her class when she was in 8th grade. Since 9th grade he has been calling her home landline phone when her parents were not around; two years later, he bought her a mobile phone. Similarly, Samira's mobile was waiting for her at the cemetery she used to cross on her way home; Siham received it when she went with her friends to a festive meal in a local restaurant; and Mona's boyfriend threw the mobile into her front yard late one night; she also left it there, near the garbage dump when it broke, so that he could pick it up and fix it.

Though the teenage girls did not realize this initially, the nature of the particular phone they received was of considerable importance. First and foremost, the girls learned that the phone signified the state of their romance; thus Tamar explained: "At first my boyfriend bought me a mobile phone that needed a calling card; but of course when the relationship became serious and we started talking about a wedding, he bought me a new, upgraded line." Similarly, Hiba's boyfriend declined to give her the

number of the phone so that she could not get in touch with others; she had to call her boyfriend collect and he would call back. After three months, she insisted that if he trusted her he would let her know her number, at which point he did.

While cheaper phones allowed some of the guys to restrict their girlfriends' calls, more often than not they were the direct outcome of their owner's economic status; often the boys' income and romance went hand in hand. It is interesting to note, then, that calling cards, more than the private line, allowed the girls to financially contribute to sustaining the relationship, as they would occasionally use their pocket money to buy calling cards. Thus Samira had to call her boyfriend, hang up and wait for him to call her back; once a month she would buy a calling card, which she would often use up in a day, herself. Similarly, Rihab would usually ring her boyfriend and he would call her back, but more often than not she preferred to pay (indeed, have her well-off parents pay) for the calls, since he could barely afford them. Sou'ad also shared the burden of phone card costs by occasionally purchasing one herself.

These signs of agency may be contrasted with both the amounts of money boyfriends were required to pay to cover the calls, and the way this burden was interpreted the girls' discourse as appropriate. Thus Rasha: "It is customary that in the case of romantic relationship, the guy is the one who pays. Some girls don't really care how the guy gets the money or how much he pays. Guys can manage as far as finances are concerned, and they need to make sure they have the means for talking with their girlfriends." Hiba shifted the discussion from romantic ideals to the practicalities of family budgeting: "Sometimes there are girls who pay for calling, but this leads to family trouble. If the girl has to pay a lot, whether for the landline or the mobile

phone, she is requested to name her conversation partners, and occasionally her parents would even ask for an itemized bill. Guys are usually more independent in financial matters, and manage to get the money they need and to solve the problem." Overall, bills reached between \$75 and \$250; but whereas the girls would chip in from their pocket money—Ikhlās, for instance, purchased two calling cards a month, \$25 each—the boys used money they earned; and some fathers would provide their sons with money specifically for this purpose.

2. Objectification: Placing the mobile phone

"I hid the mobile in my drawer, between the old cloths, and I hid the charger in the box of the window shades. I would take the charger out in the middle of the night in the weekend and return it there immediately." (Khulud, January 2004)

Much has been written about ways in which young people in advanced capitalist societies make meaning and define selves through their consumer choices and practices of personalizing mass-produced objects. Thus young people create interfaces that presumably bespeak of their particular tastes and adorn their mobile phones with fashion items that are designed to create an individualized collage of ready-mades (see Katz and Aakhus, 2002, Horst and Miller, 2006). By contrast, and particularly in the early stages of the fieldwork, the girls refrained from these practices and did not possess the phone through personalization. Instead, they related to the mobile in a very functional way, seeking devices that had "send" and "end" keys that they could handle, that were not seen as technologically advanced or too sophisticated, and that did not require attending to. Hiba's phone, for example, was "ordinary, face-less and

identity-less" and the only important thing as far as she was concerned was that she could use it for talking. Rather than display their mobile phones, then, the girls were preoccupied with hiding this object, which they were not supposed to own—and with denying the relationships it signified.

The significance of the object comes here to the fore, since the girls had to hide not only their conversations but the physical means through which these were conducted—that doubly-articulated engagement ring. Thus making place for the mobile phone consisted of not only of finding safe places for use, but, importantly, safe hiding places for *non-use*. At home, this would typically be in the private or shared room—the closet, under the bed, the shades box (above the window), behind the books on the shelf, among the dolls and stuffed animals; and occasionally in the basement or the attic. When outside, the girls would hide their mobiles in their bags, shoes, or cloths, in their coats or back pockets. When feeling unsafe, they would ask their friends, neighbors or relatives to hide their mobile and chargers in their temporarily safer hiding place.

Sou'ad, who shared a room with her 5 year old brother, would speak from there when her parents were working in the family business and late at night, after her brother was asleep. Throughout that period, she would rely on her older neighbor for delivering calling cards from her boyfriend, and for charging the phone in her private bedroom, where she also hid the charger. After six months, Sou'ad's father found her mobile and, furious over his daughter's relationships with an unapproved boyfriend, broke the phone and ordered she must never do this again. A couple of months later, Sou'ad's mother found the new phone she received from the same boyfriend, and her

father broke this one, too, and then the third.

Thus the mobile phone, as an object, consisted of incriminating evidence, a constant threat from within that, due to either charging or talking, could not be let alone. When idle, it had to be placed and re-placed in a variety of hiding places. By contrast, when in use, the girl herself had to hide, tucked in her bed under pillows and blankets. This ultimate womb-like hiding place is particularly suggestive of the moral economy of the mobile phone in this cultural context. For these teenage girls, the mobile phone connoted not mobility and movement in space, but rather intimacy and person-to-person communication. It were the boyfriends who were mobile and who, notably, resided now outside their girlfriends' towns and villages to an extent that challenged traditional marital conventions; whereas the girls remained at home—and used the phone under their pillows.

3. Incorporation: Times for talking over the phone

"My boyfriend used to call me during the day in order to make sure I wasn't talking to someone else. We had arguments over conversations I made without his permission. I had to turn the mobile off and use it only if I wanted to call him." (Dahlia, August 2005)

Since the pillows offered the most protected space for talking, it is not surprising that the night was the most common time for phone conversations between the lovers. The girls would have to wait until their parents and brothers were asleep before uncovering the mobile phone and talking to their lovers: "Our conversations lasted into the middle of the nights; there were nights in which I didn't sleep and I went to

school in the morning without sleeping for a second," said Lubna. The girls would also talk while their parents were at work or on school recesses, but these occasions were particularly risky; thus Samira called from her father's mobile to signal her boyfriend to return her call; but her father returned home minutes later, answered the boyfriend's call, and then went to his home and demanded that the boy refrained from calling Samira again.

The girls had to follow two separate, though intertwined, sets of unwritten rules. To begin with, the gift came with instructions which were partly inscribed in the technology—who with and how much they could use it—and partly explicated. The boyfriend would decree that his girlfriend would only call him and never speak to other men (or women) and that she must not divulge the phone number to any one. On rare occasions boyfriends would permit short conversations with one's best friend or a small group of friends. Sometimes the boys would insist that the mobile be turned off during the day and is only used for the nightly call; on other times, it was to be kept in silent mode and the girl was requested to answer only their pre-arranged conversations. The teenage girls, who greatly appreciated the gift of the phone, would normally follow these rules, which were interpreted as reasonable, masculine and romantic, and in line with the many other rules they had to follow. Some, however, objected to these dictates; they would arrange to have a second SIM card which they would replace in order to conceal their doubly-illicit usage; or would use the phone to talk to other boys and even develop new romantic ties. Like Miyada pointed out: "I did not escape prison only to find myself another prison."

The second set of rules complemented and partially overlapped with the first, and

consisted of the family and community norms for appropriate female behavior. These derived from the prohibition on any communication between men and women who were not officially related to one another, and found expression in various explicit and implicit requirements and restrictions. As parents sensed that they were fighting a losing battle, so they became desperate; thus Sou'ad's father violently broke three mobile phones she had; and after learning that Samira used her mother's mobile phone, her father ignored her for weeks. The girls' brothers, who were more available than their fathers and more vigilant, played a crucial role in this campaign. Thus Hiba was talking with her new boyfriend one night, buried in blankets and cushions that gave her the false impression that no one could eavesdrop; but her younger brother heard her whispering and rushed to wake up her father. Outraged, the two went to search for their own mobiles, never suspecting that Hiba may be using one of her own. Taking Hiba's side, the mother diverted them, took the phone, wrapped it in toilet paper and dumped it in the trashcan; when the father grew tired of searching, the mother soothed him by saying that Hiba must have been talking in her sleep.

In this layered division of labor, mothers and daughters were torn between what was right in terms of traditional norms and practices, and what was right in their vision of the romantic utopia (Illouz, 1997). Both mothers and daughters knew that in admitting the mobile phone into their lives they violated the community's norms; they then had to decide which side they were taking—the righteous or the immoral. Men, on the other hand, could have it both ways. Fathers could look the other way when their sons spent their earnings on their girlfriends' phones, and brothers could give phones to their girlfriends, while both adamantly prohibited their own daughters or sisters from receiving this satanic device.

4. Conversion: The social value of the mobile phone

"I would stand across from Siham's room and I would signal her if someone was approaching and might hear her talking. So I guarded for her and she would give me the mobile to talk to my boyfriend, since I couldn't hide mine in my room because my older sister was suspicious and would search my stuff to make sure I didn't have a mobile I was hiding." (Ahlam, March 2003)

Having a mobile phone allowed the teenage girls to develop romantic relationships with boys and to expand the community of potential boyfriends in ways they could not have imagined before. This intricate system crucially depended, however, on the girl friendship networks that enabled and sustained it. It was practically impossible to have a mobile phone in the absence of a friend-co-conspirator who would act as liaison with the boyfriend and would assist in hiding the mobile and in covering its actual whereabouts. In this context, friends were more trustworthy than mothers, and the mobile phone became the secret that bound the group together.

The girls would lend each other phones and hide them for one other, transfer SIM and calling cards, and collectively, secretly purchase used phones as a birthday presents for friends who were unable to obtain them from boyfriends. Some girls would buy a phone together and use it according to a schedule they would fix. Others would partake in more loose collectives, like the one formed around the phone of Leila's older sister; as Miyada explained: "It's for all of us—me and Leila and her two sisters; whoever needs it can take it." Similarly, while waiting to receive a phone from her boyfriend, Hiba used her cousin's phone, since "she doesn't really need it." Thus using

a mobile phone connoted both involvement in romantic relationships—and membership in a loyal network, which paradoxically both resisted and perpetuated the patriarchal order from which it derived its *raison d'être*.

Concluding comments

Much had changed since that field trip in 2003, when we first noted the teenage girls' covert use of mobile phones. Though Arabic language family magazines and web sites are still preoccupied with the moral decay that the mobile phone portends, in late 2005 parents hesitatingly began purchasing mobile phones for their daughters, and our informants—on their ways to colleges and universities—gradually bought their own mobile phones or received ones from their parents.

This uneasy incorporation of the mobile phone into Palestinian-Israeli society and the approval—albeit reluctant—of its use among teenage girls may indeed be seen as "emancipation" (Ling, 2004) though not in the common Western sense. In the relatively traditional society we studied, the sense of freedom the girls gained from their clandestine mediated relationships was illusory. Further, in the absence of any long term responsibility, ownership and use of the mobile phone could spell anything from disgrace to danger (to independence and empowerment). Boyfriends would monitor incoming and outgoing calls and would have power over their girlfriends in ways they would not have allowed others, as we noted, to have over their own sisters. Termination of the relationships was particularly distressful, connoting not only the conclusion of the romance but the loss of the mobile connection and the risk of real or suspected "infidelity" or "immoral behavior" being exposed. It appears then that as more parents began buying mobile phones for their daughters, and as more young

women bought one for themselves when they went to college, parents have regained some of their authority over their daughters—for better and for worse.

Though arguably not amounting to a "short revolution," we clearly witnessed the domestication of a communication technology—a dialogic encounter between cultural practices and a technological object. In 2003, teenage girl mobile phone ownership was a sign of romantic relationships, and upgrades were indicators of growing mutual commitment. By 2005-6, ownership and upgrades were recast as familial, marking a developmental process of separation and individuation and parents' acknowledging their unwillingness (or inability) to hermetically seal their daughters. But the meaning of ownership did not change alone; rather, it corresponded with larger cultural processes, most notably young women's university attendance, which not only legitimated their use of mobile phones but has, at least to some extent, reshaped the practices involved in "growing up female and Palestinian in Israel" (Hassan, 1993). As often happens in cases of cultural resistance to technology (Kline, 2005, Ribak and Rosenthal, 2006), by the time the technology is adopted it is no longer "new" (as in "When old technologies were *new*," Marvin, 1988), it is implicated in other moves and shifts, and the threat is tamed, diluted or co-opted. Thus the return from boyfriend to parental authority should not be interpreted as simply regressive or reactionary—not only because the romance was not fundamentally "emancipating" in the first place, but because the more traditional authority figures were now in a better position to incorporate this not-so-new medium, and even to justify it as a necessary protection device during that ill-defined period of college education, betwixt and between father and husband care.

The study of the domestication of the mobile phone by Palestinian Israeli teenagers has shown that the nature or the effect of technology is not inherent in the medium and cannot be presupposed. Whereas in the West the mobile phone captures the mobile spirit of post-modern youth culture (e.g. Katz and Aakhus, 2002, Ling, 2004), for our teenage girl informants the phone was both literally and metaphorically "cellular," as their use was mostly restricted to their rooms and their beds. While allowing them limited arenas of agency (from developing romantic ties and meeting boys living in other towns to paying for their own calls and replacing SIM cards) and cultural critique ("replacing one prison with another"), it at the same time reaffirmed their fragile status while exposing the double standard of some of the men around them. Thus this analysis reminds us that the mobile phone, while obviously a piece of technology, is at the same time a cultural object that acquires its meanings through the biographies of its users. Drawing on Marvin's observations in relation to 19th century electricity, we may conclude that the mobile phone was "given shape and meaning by being grafted onto existing rules and expectations about the structure of social relations." Like the electric light, the mobile phone

"offers a keenly focused view of the process of social adjustment around new technology, which is an occasion for introducing new rules and procedures around unaccustomed artifacts to bring them within the matrix of social knowledge and disposition" (Marvin, 1988, p. 232-3).

Finally, a note about method; the study of the domestication of a mobile medium required that we introduce new meanings into the components of the moral economy of the household. Developed in the early 1990s, the notion of "domestication" refers first and foremost to television: its ownership, location (in the living room etc.),

temporal patterns, and the value of viewing as currency in interactions with others. Mobile technologies and mobile phones in particular, call into question the spatial alignment that is implied in "domestication." All the more so, when the mobile phone is adopted by teenage boys and girls who are relative strangers; and its use is enabled through the intensive efforts of friends, relatives and neighbors—people who are by definition from the *outside*. Thus in exploring the meaning of mobile phone use in terms of "domestication," we need to take account of the ways in which theories of the adoption of new communication technologies derive from and inform cultural practice; at the same time, we need to reflect on the ways in which cultural and technological changes call into question the terminology we use in our analyses and accounts.

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