Elisabetta Costa

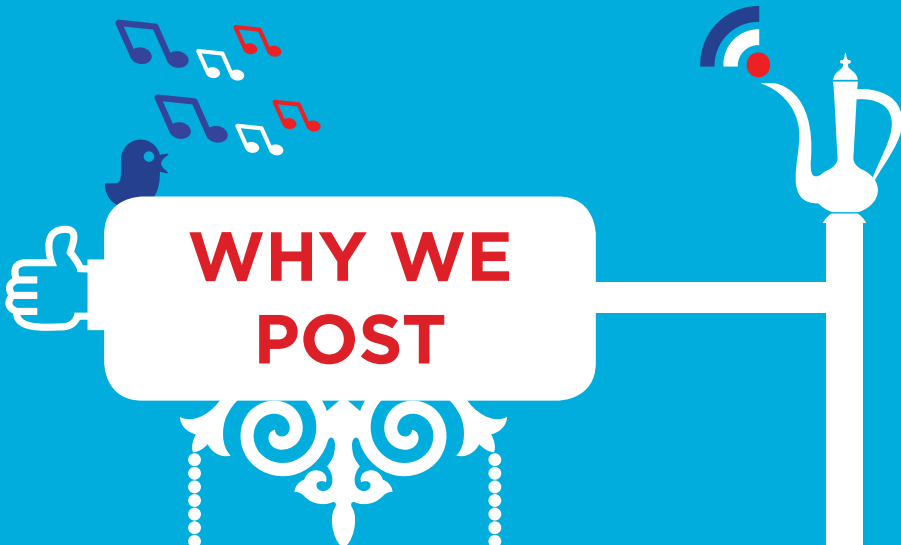# SOCIAL MEDIA
IN
SOUTHEAST
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Social Media in Southeast Turkey

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Why We Post

Social Media in Southeast Turkey

Love, Kinship and Politics

Elisabetta Costa

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Introduction to the series Why We Post

This book is one of a series of 11 titles. Nine are monographs devoted to specific field sites (including this one) in Brazil, Chile, China, England, India, Italy, Trinidad and Turkey – they will be published in 2016–17. The series also includes a comparative book about all our findings, published to accompany this title, and a final book which contrasts the visuals that people post on Facebook in the English field site with those on our Trinidadian field site.

When we tell people that we have written nine monographs about social media around the world, all using the same chapter headings (apart from Chapter 5), they are concerned about potential repetition. However, if you decide to read several of these books (and we very much hope you do), you will see that this device has been helpful in showing the precise opposite. Each book is as individual and distinct as if it were on an entirely different topic.

This is perhaps our single most important finding. Most studies of the internet and social media are based on research methods that assume we can generalise across different groups. We look at tweets in one place and write about 'Twitter'. We conduct tests about social media and friendship in one population, and then write on this topic as if friendship means the same thing for all populations. By presenting nine books with the same chapter headings, you can judge for yourselves what kinds of generalisations are, or are not, possible.

Our intention is not to evaluate social media, either positively or negatively. Instead the purpose is educational, providing detailed evidence of what social media has become in each place and the local consequences, including local evaluations.

Each book is based on 15 months of research during which time the anthropologists lived, worked and interacted with people in the local language. Yet they differ from the dominant tradition of writing social science books. Firstly they do not engage with the academic literatures on social media. It would be highly repetitive to have the same discussions in all nine books. Instead discussions of these literatures are to be found

in our comparative book, *How the World Changed Social Media*. Secondly these monographs are not comparative, which again is the primary function of this other volume. Thirdly, given the immense interest in social media from the general public, we have tried to write in an accessible and open style. This means we have adopted a mode more common in historical writing of keeping all citations and the discussion of all wider academic issues to endnotes. If you prefer to read above the line, each text offers a simple narrative about our findings. If you want to read a more conventional academic book that relates the material to its academic context, this can be done through engaging with the endnotes.

We hope you enjoy the results and that you will also read our comparative book – and perhaps some of the other monographs – in addition to this one.

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Introduction: Welcome to Mardin

One evening in late Spring, as on many other weekday evenings, Yağmur[1] went to visit her aunt and three cousins, together with her mother and younger sister. The seven Arab women sat in the sitting room of a well-furnished house for more than five hours. They spoke about clothes, make-up and food. They gossiped, drank tea and ate fruit and sweets. Throughout the whole evening the young women of the family sat on the sofa, constantly using their smartphones to speak with their secret boyfriends (*sevgili*) right in front of their mothers and aunts, who were apparently ignoring what was going on. The two mothers may have imagined that their daughters might be flirting with boys, but they didn't really care about this, as long as the relationship was kept private and silent and nobody talked about it.

Yağmur, aged 23, is an exuberant and friendly Arab woman from Mardin. She has a white Samsung Galaxy S5 that is always covered by fancy cases of different colours which she has bought in the course of her trips around Turkey. On her phone she uses Facebook for several hours every day, but she also uses Tango and, more rarely, Instagram. She uses Facebook as a very private channel of communication, mainly to communicate secretly with her boyfriend, but also as a box of hidden treasures where she stores many pictures of herself hugging her boyfriend, pictures that were taken on one of the very few times they were able to meet privately face to face. These photos are visible only to her. She used to share them with her boyfriend until a few months before, when she stopped trusting him. Yağmur also uses Facebook to communicate with cousins and other family friends of her age, although she has unfriended most of her older relatives because they gossip too much. On social

media she portrays herself as a modern woman who, however, carefully behaves in accordance with the principles and morality of Islam: she has never used an image portraying her face as a public profile picture visible to strangers; she prefers religious or moral memes, verses from the Koran or political pictures supporting the AK political party[2] and her beloved Prime Minister Erdoğan. Like the majority of her peers, she uses Facebook to show off and to be praised and appreciated by friends and relatives. For this reason she shares a lot of images portraying holiday trips and rich banquets with relatives and family friends. Yağmur is also quite politically and religiously active online: she often shares material supporting the AKP and Islamic memes. Every week she wishes 'Happy Friday' (*Hayırlı Cumalar*)[3] to her Facebook friends, as do many other inhabitants of Mardin. Like all of her relatives, Yağmur is an active AKP supporter. She is devoted to Prime Minister Erdoğan: 'I love him because he brought economic development and wealth in the region and in Mardin, and also because I am Turk and Muslim, and I want to feel free to wear the veil in public spaces.' Being an AKP supporter is a very important aspect of her character and identity. Whenever a particular national or international event becomes the topic of discussion, like the Gezi Park protests, the local election or the Israeli war against Gaza, she posts on Facebook many pro-Erdoğan and nationalist pictures and memes. Yağmur conforms to the dominant expectations of her society in public-facing social media while simultaneously enjoying the liberties offered by the more private online spaces.

This book is about social media use in Mardin, a medium-sized town in southeast Turkey, inhabited by a majority of Kurdish and Arab peoples. Mardin lies within sight of the Syrian border and the region has thereby been much in the news recently because of its proximity to the civil war, the advance of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) and the Kurdish struggle against it. More generally, the topic of social media in Turkey will probably conjure up two different images for the reader: the Gezi Park protests of summer 2013, where social media was used as an efficient tool for political activism and became the focus for government suppression of that activism; and the YouTube and Twitter ban of March 2014, following the corruption scandal that undermined then-Prime Minister Erdoğan's reputation a few weeks before the local election. These two stories have circulated widely in the international news. However, for reasons given in Chapter 6, this town was not affected by the Gezi Park protest, and the ban on Twitter and YouTube only remotely affected the lives of its inhabitants. Ordinary uses of social media of the form found

in Mardin and which make up most of the content of this book have rarely been in the spotlight.

I have been asked several times why I chose Mardin as a field site for my research. Local inhabitants of Mardin, Turks from western Turkey and foreigners were all surprised to discover that research about the use of social media was to be based in such a small place in a peripheral area. Studies about social media have traditionally focused on the large metropolitan centres such as Cairo, Tehran, Istanbul or New York, where 'important things', such as mass demonstrations or new forms of advanced capitalism, happen; much less has been said about the use of digital technologies in places that are not at the centre of global networks of culture and economy. There is often a tendency to imagine that the diffusion of the same digital technologies brings cultural homogenisation and leads to social transformations in the direction of a more modern, developed or democratic society.

Technological determinism often comes with a vision of modernity and development as a single trajectory. Given these premises, there is probably no need to study the use of social media in Mardin, as it will just follow after a time lag from what we know about metropolitan use, and will therefore be less interesting than these other sites which represent the vanguard of modern life.

However, this book is based on different assumptions. Anthropological studies have shown that the same technologies are used in quite different ways in different contexts and have different cultural and social consequences; there is no unique model of change or only one way of being modern. This study is indeed about social media and social change, and it investigates whether and to what extent social media has brought transformation, or whether it has rather reproduced social patterns already existing in the offline world. The following pages are about continuities and transformations. This chapter is largely dedicated to the description of the field site, a town that has been transformed under the pressures of economic neoliberalism and urbanisation, especially those fostered by the AKP government of Turkey since 2002. Chapter 2 introduces the media ecology of Mardin and argues that social media, the internet and mobile phones have led to a partial break with traditional family-bond sociality, whereas other media, such as TV and radio, have strengthened family ties. This chapter focuses on the materiality of the internet and mobile phones as contributing to new forms of individualism and individual-based social relations. Chapter 3 analyses what people post on Facebook, which is the most used social media platform in Mardin. Here the results are somewhat less predictable. Social media has

created a new form of public space that in many ways is more conservative and traditional than offline worlds and reinforces groups such as family and lineages as well as the individual. Nevertheless, showing off and achieving fame and popularity is so important that, despite resistance, people have ended up re-creating new norms that regulate the boundaries between the private and the public in the offline world. The shifting of these boundaries has produced a new idea of 'public', characterised by a more visible presence of women, new images of private spaces and intimate domains, alongside these new public performances of conservative and religious values. Chapter 4 describes how social media has been used to maintain traditional kinship and family relations in the face of migration and urbanisation. This chapter portrays social media as a very important and useful communication tool to retain traditional kin relationships that have otherwise been undermined by the political and social changes of the last few decades. Chapter 5 can be seen as the opposite of the previous one, since it focuses on the consequences of the new private forms of communication opened up by social media, which have resulted in the creation of new kinds of premarital love and friendship relations that were less common in the past. In a highly gender-segregated society, digital technologies constitute one of the few places where women and men can interact, flirt and experience romance. In this respect digital technologies in Mardin have altered relationships between genders, ideas of love and institutions of family and marriage. Chapter 6 deals with the topic of politics, in a region of Turkey that has a long history of conflict and political violence, and where social media and the internet are under State control. Social media are largely experienced as places under the surveillance of the State and of society, and self-censorship is an important force shaping its political use. Consequently online content regarded as political emerges and is expressed only under certain conditions.

These chapters focus on the role of social media in social transformations (Chapters 2 and 5) and continuities (Chapter 4), or on both these opposing processes at the same time (Chapters 3 and 6). A central theme linking all these chapters and constituting the perspective through which this volume examines social change is the relationship between the private and the public. Social media consists at the same time of both very private and very public environments, along with the many spaces that stand between the two. This is one of the reasons why the social change brought by social media is not a linear and uniform process, but is rather the combination of conflictual and opposite transformations. This book will indeed show that more public social media, like Facebook walls, are very conservative spaces where the traditional norms ruling offline life

are reinforced and strengthened. This is because public-facing social media are constantly under the gaze of family, neighbours and friends, more so than offline public spaces such as streets or cafes, whereas more private online spaces are often used to create and maintain new types of social relationship that break with existing social norms and traditional family ties.

For example, private social media has led to new, individual-based forms of socialisation and has facilitated forbidden love and romance. On social media women and men can create and maintain their own relationships as individuals, free from the constraints of family and society ruling the offline world. Offline these same individuals tend to exist as members of kin groups, and their role, identity and behaviour are mainly prescribed by attributes such as gender and age. In the offline world, women especially tend not to have much autonomy, and their choices are highly dependent on those of their older male family members. To a lesser extent and in different ways, this is also true for young men. Smartphones have become places of secrets where young adults such as Yağmur store private photos and conversations, memes and memories, outside of family control. All these elements could support the argument that social media are liberating tools that have facilitated the expression of repressed desires and the creation of more individual-based social relations. Berry Wellman and Lee Rainie called these transformations a movement towards 'networked individualism' in their recent book and other articles.[4] Some of the examples in this book will support their arguments. In Mardin, social media has brought about just these kinds of transformation towards a society where people are 'networked as individuals rather than embedded in groups',[5] and where groups have less power in defining the identities and behaviours of individuals. In the context of modern Muslim Turkey, these elements are understood as 'Western', secular and modern. To this extent, the findings seem to sustain a linear vision of social change.

However, these transformations towards more individualised forms of sociality happen mainly on a secret and hidden level. People do not recognise these new relations and individualities as legitimate, and they do not display them in public. In Mardin, as in many other places of the Muslim Middle East, the boundaries between public and private have always been carefully policed. For example, the intimate and domestic spaces of the house have always been well delimited and protected from the gaze of outsiders. On Facebook, people have started to display in public pictures from their everyday lives that have traditionally belonged to private domains: dinners with family members and gatherings in private

spaces, for example, or the new visibility of women, whose public presence has always been limited and controlled. Yet the most significant finding is that even in these new online public spaces characterised by the intrusion of the intimate and the domestic, people perform selves, social relations and values that have traditional legitimacy in their society. Women and men on Facebook display and exhibit only that which confers on them honour, respectability, fame and popularity. In order to do so they conform to conservative and traditional social norms. Thus a social change towards a more individual-based society and an individualised self in private comes simultaneously with the performance of highly conservative and traditional norms in the new online public space, which has progressively incorporated scenes from the domestic and intimate domains. Furthermore, social media has also been used extensively to maintain contacts with family members dispersed around Turkey and abroad, leading to a strengthening of family and tribal ties that would have been threatened by this dispersal. So, in direct contrast to the movement from a group-bond society towards individualism, we find a public reaffirmation of the importance of groups such as family, tribe and ethnicity, which become viable again partly thanks to social media. We also see a reaffirmation of Muslim values of female purity and modesty and traditional ideals of male honour.

The social change brought by social media in Mardin is clearly contradictory, but, in that, it also reflects the transformations that were already going on in the historical and political moment of the research. Social media provides part of a solution to the disruptive impacts of modernisation, urbanisation and migration, enabling the reproduction and the continuation of traditional social forms, and at the same time, it creates new kinds of social relations. Southeast Turkey has recently gone through significant urbanisation, an expansion of the neoliberal economy and an extension of women's education and access to the job market. Then, especially during the 1980s and '90s, the region was affected by extensive, sometimes forced, migration from villages to metropolitan areas. This context helps to explain the contradictions in the consequences of social media use.

This ethnographical study based in a medium-sized town in southeast Turkey aims to highlight the distinctiveness of social media in this region of the world. Most scholarship on digital media has focused on European and North American contexts, whereas studies about social media in Turkey or the Middle East have mainly been limited to politics, organisation of protests or surveillance.[6] Very little is known of the everyday ordinary experience of social media users in this part of the world.[7]

This book is intended to fill this gap, contributing to our understanding of the consequences of social media and digital technologies as culturally and historically grounded.

This is the second monograph to appear in a series of nine. It is important to note that the conclusions of this book are almost the opposite of those of the first monograph about an English village.[8] In our comparative book, *How the World Changed Social Media*,[9] we offer a definition of social media as scalable sociality. This reflects the development of social media as the colonisation of the space between a prior duality of public broadcast media and private conversation. In the case of the English village this raised important issues, because the English population used this new facility to create gradations of closeness and intimacy along these scales. In this book, we shall see that people in Mardin also create different gradations and groups, but, by contrast, they use social media mostly for 'very private' and 'very public' online communication, and this in turn extends the distinction between private and public. This is not at all what one might have guessed would be the response to social media as scalable sociality, and it once again demonstrates that we cannot predict how a new set of technologies will be appropriated locally.

Mardin

The city of Mardin is an unusual and unique place within Turkey. It is a multi-ethnic and multi-religion city located 30 km away from the border with Syria and around 250 km from the border with Iraq, in the middle of the Kurdish region of Turkey.

Fig. 1.1 Location of Mardin in Turkey

Fig. 1.2   View of the Mesopotamian valley from the old city of Mardin

Located on the top and at the bottom of a hill in front of the Mesopotamian plain, Mardin is an enclave of an Arabic-speaking minority within a largely Kurdish region. This means that, far from being just a 'Turkish' field site, many of my ethnographic observations are likely also to be relevant to other 'Middle Eastern' societies.

The primary population is split between Arabs and Kurds,[10] but there are also Syriac Orthodox, Catholic Armenians, Turks and, more recently, a considerable number of Syrian and Yezidi refugees. The city has around 87,000 inhabitants and is divided into three parts: the old city (*Eski Mardin*), the slum (*Gecekondu*) and the new city (*Yenişehir*). The old city is the historical part of the town, with historical buildings, mosques and churches, and is inhabited mainly by Arabs, along with a smaller number of Syriac families and Kurds; with the expansion of the new city, this has mainly become the low-income residential area and it now includes a number of Syrian refugees.

The poorest neighbourhood (*Gecekondu*) surrounds the old city and is occupied mainly by Kurdish migrants. They escaped from the violence afflicting villages in the 1980s and 90s during the conflict between the State and the Kurdish nationalist group struggling for greater Kurdish rights and self-determination within Turkey – the PKK.[11]

Fig. 1.3 Partial view of the old city

Fig. 1.4 The suburban area

The new city (*Yenişehir*), where most of the research was based, is the wealthiest part. Building started around 20 years ago and has expanded mostly in the last 10 years.

Fig. 1.5   Mardin, the new city

(a)   (b)

Fig. 1.6   Construction sites in the new city of Mardin

In Mardin, Kurdish and Arabic are commonly spoken, along with Turkish, which in the new city has become increasingly common in public spaces, especially among the youth. Arriving in Mardin from the nearby cities, the uniqueness of the city clearly stands out in contrast to the rest of Turkey and the region. To the east, the poorer provinces of Siirt, Şırnak and Hakkari are the heart of the Kurdish region of Turkey: people wear traditional Kurdish clothes more often and speak Kurdish more frequently, and buildings, streets and infrastructures are visibly less developed. To the north, Diyarbakır is a large urban centre considered the capital of the Kurdish region of Turkey, which has expanded enormously in the last 20 years as a result of migration from the surrounding rural areas. To the west, the large city of Urfa is also an important Kurdish centre with a majority Kurdish population. In Mardin, historical influences of Arab, Syriac and Artuklu[12] are very evident, not only in the local architecture, which has also made it a tourist attraction, but also in the language and the lifestyles of its inhabitants. But just as in the rest of southeast Turkey, the Turks in Mardin are largely confined to a small minority of public employees.

The image of the city portrayed by the State, local institutions, tourist agencies, the media and some of its own inhabitants refers to the ideal of cosmopolitanism and happy coexistence of different ethnic and religious groups. However, the city has experienced numerous conflicts and political violence in its history, especially after the foundation of the Turkish Republic, with the development of the Turkish nationalistic project based on the notion of 'Turkishness' and the denial of religious, ethnic and language minorities.[13] Different ethnic and religious groups have built different relations with the State, producing diverse forms of political identity. During the Ottoman Empire, the Sunni Muslim Arabs were the local representatives of the Ottoman authorities, and during the Turkish Republic they continued to be loyal to the State and to support it, thus maintaining their privileges. In contrast, the Sunni Muslim Kurds, organised in nomadic tribes, have always been more reluctant to be subjected to governmental authorities.[14] The Catholic Armenians were killed or deported during the genocide in 1915, and only a very few families remain in the city. The Syriac Christian Orthodox, who were also victims of genocide have generally migrated abroad, after the foundation of the Republic and especially since the 1950s, and they now constitute a small minority. The most severe conflicts were experienced in the 1980s and 90s, when the struggle between the Turkish State and the PKK exploded. During the 2000s different truces were declared, and in 2012 a peace process was started, but was interrupted in the summer of 2015, the time of writing this book.

I chose Mardin because I felt that the study of social media usage in a place characterised by the coexistence of different groups in a (post)-conflict area might disclose important discoveries regarding the political implications of social media. It also followed my own interest in politics and political anthropology, having previously written a PhD on the topic of online journalism and foreign correspondents in Lebanon. However, the project did not proceed according to this plan. In the light of 15 months' ethnographic research, it seems that the most interesting outcomes were related not to the outstanding peculiarity of Mardin and the current relationships between its ethnic minorities, but to what the city has in common with many other places in this geographic area. These are the impacts of social media on gender differences that can be found in many Muslim societies, and how social media is entangled with processes of urbanisation and economic development. In Mardin, both Arabs and Kurds are Sunni Muslims and live according to social norms of gender segregation that are similar to those of many other Middle Eastern Muslim countries and provincial areas across Turkey. In the last 10 years, in conjunction with the economic growth of the country, the city of Mardin has expanded rapidly. The Turkish economic boom has brought more wealth to those cities within the Kurdish region of Turkey that have been loyal to the government. This has resulted in the expansion of the building and industrial sectors. The extension of the State bureaucracy has brought new job opportunities and has created a new 'middle class' of State employees. My research has therefore focused on this growing young generation of more affluent Kurds and Arabs who live in the new part of the expanding city. For the sake of simplicity, I purposely decided not to include the old and the new minorities that inhabit the city, and I apologise for their absence from this book. The Christian population would have required a different analysis, as would the many Turkish public employees that have come to Mardin from other areas of Turkey. The recent Syrian refugees,[15] who mainly dwell in the oldest crumbling buildings of the town, have not been included in the research either, although they have increasingly come to be part of the city, many of them exploited as construction workers, dishwashers or sex workers. Syrians were generally seen by the inhabitants of Mardin as backward Arabs, derided for their lack of style, blamed for the increased cost of houses, tolerated as poor victims of war or more often ignored and made invisible.[16] Clearly this situation would have required its own engagement rather than merely becoming an add-on to my established research.

History, politics and the Kurdish ascent

Mardin has always been at the crossroads of trades, different peoples and different religions. Prior to the invasion of the Arabs and the Turks, the region was inhabited by Armenians, Jews, Arabs, Kurds and Syriacs.[17] At the end of the Umayyad dynasty in the eleventh century, a Turkish population, the Artuklu, arrived in Mardin and governed for a few centuries before the arrival of the Ottomans. In those years, the city became an important trade centre and developed extensively.[18] The Artuklu architecture has also created some of the finest buildings within the old city and has made Mardin an important tourist site. In 1514, the Ottomans conquered the region and, under their rule, Mardin continued to remain an important political and economic centre whose economy was based on trade and agriculture.[19] The city started to decline after the end of the Ottoman Empire, with the foundation of the Turkish Republic and the drawing of the borders with Syria and Iraq.[20] In 1915 the Armenian massacre that took place throughout the whole region was particularly cruel in Mardin, which had a large Armenian population, and it was followed by the mass migration of Syriac and Armenians to Europe and other countries in the Middle East.[21] Kurds in Mardin have memories of this massacre and they are quite ready to recognise their responsibilities.

The Arabs, having consolidated their power during the Ottoman Empire by supporting the Ottoman authorities, continued in the same vein during the first period of the Turkish Republic, implementing the new State laws and rules, and helping transform Mardin into a secular and modern place which reflected the politics of Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic. In this way, they kept their economic and political privileges.[22] By contrast, the Kurds found themselves in a new nation where religious and language minorities did not have a legitimate space and became even more marginalised and suppressed. The conflict between the Kurds and State forces has had lasting effects on people's lives, for example in the general mistrust people have towards others in their everyday relationships. In the last decade, the Arabs of Mardin have started to lose their power and privileges in the face of a new, more influential role for the Kurds at the national and local level. The governing AK party began negotiations with the Kurdish population that continued during the time of my field work, but stopped in summer 2015 when Ankara decided to end the peace process.[23] The reforms of the last decade temporarily calmed the tense relations and

resulted in increased opportunities to improve the economic conditions and the political role of the Kurds. In the 1980s and '90s in Mardin the Kurds typically settled in the poorest neighbourhoods surrounding the city centre, while in the last decade they have started to become regular inhabitants of the developed and rich part of the town. 'The Arabs are afraid of us now. They had the power for so many years, but now it's different. They are afraid of us because we are more powerful' was a statement I was told by numerous Kurdish friends in the city of Mardin. The Kurdish ascent in Mardin reached its height and cathartic moment at the end of March 2014, when the Kurdish political party BDP (*Barış ve demokrasi Partisi* – Peace and Democracy Party) won the local election for the first time in the history of the city. Up to that point, Mardin had always been ruled by the pro-government parties supported by the Arabs. That day, thousands of Kurds and BDP supporters were out in the streets expressing their happiness at the result of the local elections, while the Arabs remained closed in their houses mourning such a humiliating defeat. This happened when the peace process was still alive and people felt that non-violence and peaceful relations would characterise future relations between Kurds and Arabs. But at the time of writing this book, the new political course may have started a new phase in the life of the city.

Despite all this, at first glance Mardin appeared a peaceful place; every time I started a conversation with new people, I was told: 'Mardin is a unique place where Kurds, Arabs and Syriacs, Muslims and Christians happily live together.' In public spaces, people do not talk about politics in order to make this cohabitation possible and peaceful. Things are very different in the private spaces of their houses, where Arabs, Kurds and Syriac Christians are free to express their disdain, or even occasionally hatred, for the other groups. So the sharp distinctions between private and public social media that dominate this volume have clear precedents in these prior offline contrasts. During the first months in the field, talking about politics was almost impossible for me, and political conversation only became possible when I became much closer to people and conversations were clearly confidential. The silence surrounding politics paused only with the beginning of the political campaign for the local election of March 2014, when most of the public spaces were used for heated political propaganda.

Stereotypes and prejudices about Arabs and Kurds are many. Arabs are usually described by Kurds as rich people interested in power and money, without their own political ideas. They are seen as lazy opportunists who do not like hard work: 'Look, for example, at the bakers. Until 10 years ago, before the town was populated by the Kurds, the bakeries closed very early in the afternoon because they don't like working! Now because the Kurdish bakeries are open until the evening, they had to do

the same.' Arab men and women are also described as obsessively passionate about food and meat, and they are sometimes derogatorily referred to using the Arab expression *lahme* (meat). In these derogatory portraits and stereotypes, food represents the approach Arabs have towards power and possession, characterised by greediness and voracity. Arab women are portrayed as modern and beautiful, interested in clothes, make-up and food. On the other side, Kurds are described by Arabs as backward rural migrants, retrograde, ignorant, not developed, obstinate like sheep, poor, aggressive, always ready to fight, and only recently developing in the direction of a more modern lifestyle.

However, it's by no means the case that every relationship and interaction between Arabs and Kurds is dominated by dislike, antipathy and divisions. Different forms of sociality and friendship between Arabs and Kurds do exist, and cases of intermarriages and friendships are common, even if always characterised by some difficulties. My Kurdish and Arab friends told me several times: 'I have both Arab and Kurdish friends, but friendships with them are always characterised by a sort of barrier. We talk and we drink tea together, but there is something between us that keeps the distance, we never become really close.' Moreover, the border between these two contrasting social and political forces cohabiting in Mardin is more blurred than is commonly thought: some Arab families support the Kurdish movement and the Kurdish party BDP,[24] and some Kurdish families back the government party AKP. In the 1980s and '90s, a few Arab families joined the Kurdish cause, motivated by leftist and Marxist ideas and desires for social justice. Other Arab families, for their own economic interests, started to support the BDP a few months before the local elections in 2014, when they knew that the BDP had a good chance of winning, whereas some Kurdish families in Mardin have backed the AKP, especially after the beginning of the peace process.

The few academic articles about Mardin have focused on issues of contested representations. Kerem Oktem[25] examines the struggles over different discourses, symbols and images: the State, tourist agencies and some of its inhabitants have produced a 'poetic vision of the city'. Several Turkish TV serials and films produced in the last decades have given an Orientalist view of the city that portrays the image of Mardin as a 'traditional' place with 'feudal' violence, as opposed to the developed and modern west of Turkey. Human rights organisations have defined the city as traumatised as a result of the conflict between the State and the PKK. Zerrin Özel Biner[26] examined the reaction to the candidacy of Mardin as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. However, what these have in common is a view focused only on the 'old city', because the 'new city' was demographically irrelevant until a decade ago, and also less appealing

to tourists and TV producers. By contrast, my research was carried out precisely in this new and modern part of the city, locally called *Yenişehir*, which has developed over the last 15 years.

The new city of Mardin

The new city of Mardin, located at the foot of the Mardin hill, is a fast-growing and largely uncontrolled modern development, with high-rise buildings and new construction sites everywhere, and full of dust and sand.

Fig. 1.7   Views of the new city

There is one main polluted and dusty road connecting the two cities of Diyarbakır and Midyat. For eight months of the year, the smaller streets are crowded and full of shops and life. The summer months are simply too hot, reaching over 40°C, while in midwinter the area can be covered in snow.

People are attracted to the modern shops, markets, schools, cafes and restaurants. Women in particular are searching for comforts like proper running water and heating systems, and indoor kitchens and bathrooms. This was also the dream of modernity and middle-class living standards that emerged in the metropolitan areas of (western) Turkey in the 1990s.

The new city is inhabited by the inhabitants of the old city who started to arrive in the late 1990s, by people who moved from the nearby towns of the province, and by Turkish and Kurdish civil servants (*memur*) and university students. By the end of my field work in August 2014, there were also Syrian and Yezidi refugees. Unlike the old city, here different ethnic groups generally share the same buildings and the same streets, and this is unique within a province where towns have always been formed in ethnically homogeneous neighbourhoods. There are no official census reports, but Kurds are more common here than in the old city, where Arabs are the majority. In the new city, Arab culture is not hegemonic; people speak Turkish more than Arabic or Kurdish, and the choice of Turkish by the new generation often expresses a desire of modernity.

Middle-aged women and men describe the expansion of the new modern city through the nostalgic opposition between the previous stable family and community and a new, more fragmented society. Certainly, in the new city, social relations have changed faster than in the rest of the province, especially in relation to the possibilities for women and the consumer aspirations of both genders. In the less urbanised and poorer areas of the province and region, as well as in the old city of Mardin, women spend most of their time at home; most do not use the internet, and social media is associated with men looking for women. Selecting the modern new city as the principal field site allowed for a greater focus on these ongoing social transformations.

The city of Mardin stands out as the modern provincial capital with three hospitals, 23 bank offices, 14 insurance offices and 19 high schools used by people from all around the province. The whole province has experienced demographic[27] and economic growth in recent years. This includes a new airport terminal, and a new intercity bus terminal is under construction. In 2007/2008 a new state university was inaugurated, and

since 2011 a large shopping mall has attracted customers from the whole region. Agriculture produces 70 per cent of provincial income. It is based on a large landowner system and produces wheat, barley, corn, red lentils and cotton.[28] Industrialisation in Mardin started in the 1990s, and mainly concerns agricultural production, such as the production of flour, bulgur and animal feed.[29] Depending on political circumstances, Iraq and Syria are both potentially important markets. Agriculture-based enterprises in Mardin are typically small and medium-sized family-based outfits, and the whole economic field is built on family structure.[30]

Behind this lies the economic development of Turkey as a whole, and the AKP's attempt to strengthen its position in the southeast by developing the region and extending public services and infrastructure. A commonly heard expression is that 'Mardin is a city of civil servants! Everybody is a public employee in this building!' This reflects the large number of public employees such as teachers, accountants, nurses, vets, doctors and policemen who work in the small centres and towns of the province but live in the new city. This group also constitutes the main presence of Turkish people within the town.

Yağmur, Leyla and Seçkin, the inhabitants of the new city

I will now introduce three characters who, of course, cannot be representative, but may help to humanise this rather abstract introduction to the new city of Mardin.

Yağmur, who we already met in the opening of the chapter, is one of the many original inhabitants of Mardin. She was born in the region of Hatay, where her family had migrated in the 1970s. They moved to the new city of Mardin in the mid 1990s when she was a baby and the new city was first being developed. Her grandfather was a tailor who had decided to move to Hatay with his family to look for better job opportunities as he didn't have enough work to support his family in Mardin. He ended up being a factory worker in the metal sector for more than 20 years until the age of 50, when he retired and returned to Mardin with the whole family. Yağmur is employed in the small office of an insurance company. She is proud of the fact that she found this job thanks to the patronage network of her family (*torpil*), which showed that her family was well connected in the town. Arabs in Mardin can usually find jobs in the private sector more easily than Kurds, thanks to their family networks. Immediately after

high school Yağmur started to work as a shop assistant (one of the worst-paid jobs in town and in all of Turkey), but after a few years she found this better-paid job. Like many other young Arab women from Mardin, she didn't go to university, which was not seen as effective in finding a job: social capital can provide better job opportunities and a higher salary than a university degree. And anyway, as a woman, she does not have the responsibility of earning good money to maintain a family; a decent job with regular income is the best way to fund her daily living expenses while waiting to get married. Yağmur is a modern woman with modern 'middle-class' living standards. She likes hanging out in cafes and eating meals in restaurants; in summer she goes on holiday to a relative's house by the sea, and she is always well dressed. After her 9-to-5 job, she often meets some of her numerous cousins or relatives at their houses or sometimes in cafes. With two aunts and two uncles on her mother's side, and four uncles on her father's side, she is always surrounded by many cousins and cousins' children, with whom she spends a long time chatting. She has only a few friends from school with whom she is still in touch, but she rarely meets them, and friends from work she meets only at work. She knows many people in Mardin and whenever she walks in the streets of *Yenişehir* she always says hello to everybody.

She defines herself as a good Muslim, but not too religious, as she does not pray five times a day. Before the beginning of Ramadan she decided to wear the veil: 'I feel ready for this now. It's my personal choice, I feel more mature now and I want to better observe God's wish.' Because she thinks the quality of clothes in Mardin is not as good as that in Istanbul, she spent a few days looking for a nice veil on some fashionable shops' websites, and then she bought an expensive and beautiful one. A malicious friend suggested that she had decided to cover herself to find a husband more easily: 'That is the reason why young women start wearing the veil in Mardin, there aren't other reasons!' Like the majority of young women in Mardin, Yağmur has a secret boyfriend who is hidden to her male relatives but not to her mother and sisters. She was waiting for him to find a job and ask her to get married, but her boyfriend's older brother and uncle, who knew about the relationship, have not accepted it because Yağmur was not pious and religious enough.

Yağmur does not like Kurds and she does not have Kurdish friends: 'When I meet some Kurdish school friends in the street I say hello, of course! But we never hang out together, we never call each other on the phone, we never eat together. And on Facebook it is the same. I have Kurdish friends on Facebook but we never talk! I do not like them; they are dirty!' She does not like Syrian refugees and she avoids restaurants

with Syrian waitresses and cooks, which have become common in Mardin since the beginning of the war. She does not like the Arabs living in Arab countries, and she started to hate black people after she met one African man who was selling sunglasses in Mardin. She also does not like 'Western Christian Europeans' or North Americans because they are not Muslims. But she made an exception for Italians like myself, because they are Mediterranean and thus more similar to Turks.

Leyla is a newcomer into Mardin *Yenişehir*. She is a 26-year-old unmarried Arab woman who has lived in Mardin with her family for three years, having grown up in Kızıltepe, a town 30 km away from Mardin. Her father has two wives, two houses and ten children. His first wife lives in a flat in Mardin *Yenişehir* with Leyla and her brothers and sisters, while his second wife lives with three more children in their village, where they own a small piece of land. The two wives had been living with all their children in the same house in Kızıltepe, but eventually they could no longer manage the cohabitation and decided to separate. Leyla only completed education to elementary school level. In the 1990s, women living in rural areas rarely completed formal schooling: in fact, her two older sisters did not even finish primary school, though her two younger sisters have completed high school, and the youngest is preparing for the admission exam to enter university. When I first met Leyla she was walking around Mardin *Yenişehir* with her sister after visiting some relatives. In those days she was extremely bored because she was spending most of her time at home, making food for the family, sometimes visiting relatives, and waiting for some decent man to ask for her hand in marriage. She did not feel well integrated into the city and, although she had many relatives there, becoming friends with other local women was almost impossible for her, because they were too snobbish. For Leyla and her family it was not appropriate for women to have a job; it was shameful. But at the same time, being at home all day was really frustrating. So after being exposed to the modern life of the city and to a different model of femininity, and also because they were in need of money, Leyla started to work, first as a shop assistant and later as a cleaning lady. Her life started to change: she discovered a new world beyond that of the extended family. She started to have new local friends, to hang out in cafes, to use social media and to (secretly) flirt with a boy. Before working, Leyla and her sisters had considered social media immoral and inappropriate for respectable women. When I first tried to talk about social media with them while sitting in a cafe (*çay bahçesi*), they silenced me and they felt completely embarrassed. 'Talking about social media in public is shameful (*ayıp*) for women', she murmured to me. Later, she

changed her mind and opened a Facebook and a WhatsApp account. The reason for this transformation in Leyla's life will be explained in Chapter 5, where we'll discover that love has been the driving force that has vanquished any moral and religious concerns and made her a social media user.

Seçkin is a Kurdish mathematics teacher in his early 30s, who has lived in Mardin for eight years. Although the public employees living in Mardin come from many different regions around Turkey, my research focused only on the Kurdish population, since it was felt that working with both Kurds and Arabs was sufficiently complex. Seçkin is one of these Kurdish public servants. He is from a small town in the province of Diyarbakır, one hour away from Mardin. Like many other Kurds of his generation, he grew up in a large and poor family with nine siblings, a housewife mother and a father employed as a construction worker. Yet, out of ten children, eight have a university degree or are university students; three became civil servants after passing the dreaded examination that grants a job for life as a public employee in Turkey. Seçkin, like many other Kurds in their 20s and 30s, has benefited from the economic growth of Turkey and its free education system to improve his social conditions. He now has a decent salary, a second job as a football teacher and a third job as a musician, as he plays guitar for tourists in the touristic restaurants of Mardin. He has now saved enough money to get married as soon as he finds the right woman.

Seçkin proudly defines himself as a Kurd. Like many other people of his age who grew up in the Kurdish region of Turkey in the 1980s and '90s, he has been exposed to many forms of political violence. Many of his friends and relatives have been killed by Turkish soldiers or *gendarme*, or have been arrested and tortured in jails. Many others decided to go to the mountains and fight with the PKK. He reads a lot and he has clear ideas about the Kurdish issue in Turkey and in the region, but he is not actively involved in politics. As a civil servant, he is not free to express his political ideas publicly, either on or offline. Political activism might result in him losing his job. He looks at western Turkish society in a very contradictory way: he consistently presents himself as a modern person, free from the backward restrictions of Kurdish society, like obeying his parents' will in terms of marriage choices, or maintaining connections with the extended family. In summer he likes to go clubbing in Antalya and Istanbul. Yet, at the same time, he continuously manifests the need to be recognised as a Kurd; he keeps pointing out his Kurdish identity, and he often expresses his desires for an independent Kurdistan. Seçkin uses Facebook quite a lot on his new iPhone, mainly to promote himself as a musician and football coach, but

also to discreetly flirt with girls. He very rarely refers to politics in his public postings. He considers social media a very useful tool to expand his social network and popularity, something that in this case immediately translates into more opportunities for earning money. The case of Seçkin illustrates the way social media is effectively used to fulfil aspirations for individual success. He is a popular figure among young educated 'middle-class' adults in Mardin, and social media partly contributed to this. Seçkin represents the way Turkish State policies, economic development and social control in the southeastern region have contributed to the assimilation of the Kurdish population into Turkish society and Turkish State administration, but have not diminished their identification as Kurds.

This plurality will be a major feature of this book because social media has often drawn lines by increasing political and ethnic inequalities, and providing a stage where some Mardinites can publicly perform their political and religious identities more than others. Yet, at the same time, social media represents a new shared experience in the growth of new private communicative practices that have emerged in similar ways across this spectrum of different groups. Courtship, flirting, romance and love are not especially different among young Kurds, Arabs, religious and secular individuals. Potentially, then, this provides common ground, and an 'assurance of shared sociality'.[31]

Household, family and gender roles in the new city

The expansion of the new city and education brought significant transformations to the family, the household and the role of women. In the new city, households are nuclear and neatly divided from each other, while people in the old buildings of the old city used to live in proximity to their extended family. In the new city, houses are impressively uniform with the same dimensions and shape: a big lounge, a kitchen, two bedrooms, a second sitting room that can be used as a third bedroom and two toilets. The only distinction is age, with low-income families living in the oldest properties. New houses can cost up to TRY 400,000 (Turkish lira, around GBP 100,000), which is quite high for this region. The Arab word *el-beit* (the house) in the old city referred to the house of a family and, at the same time, to the lineage (families descended from the same ancestors) living in that neighbourhood. In the new city, where relatives very rarely live close to each other, the loss of communal and inter-family solidarities is often the subject of nostalgia amongst the middle-aged and older. Despite some resistance,

overall this shift from extended family to nuclear households has occurred smoothly through the relocation of young people into the new city.

At the same time, traditional kin affiliations remain important among Arabs and Kurds, and social media have played an important role in the maintenance of these family ties.[32] The Kurds have traditionally been organised into nomadic tribes (*aşiret*), which in a few cases are still vital and operative; their members recognise the power of their chieftain (*ağa*), and they are ready to support each other in the case of conflicts and problems. Where the tribe has lost political authority, Kurds still maintain strong ties with distant relatives, like great-aunts and great-uncles, second or third cousins, and their children. The Arabs from Mardin are organised in lineages (*sülale*), groups descended through the paternal line[33] that include families with common male ancestries; but these maintain more autonomy from each other than is the case with Kurdish tribes, as they are not under the authority of any one leader, nor do they share common obligations as members of the same lineage. The Arabs from Mardin have also been more assimilated by the modernisation processes that started with the founding of the Turkish Republic. For them, modern nuclear families tend to be seen as the ideal model. Arabs tend to maintain close relationships with first-degree relatives (cousins, uncles, aunts, nephews and nieces), but less so with more distant relatives. Urban Arab families usually have between two and four children, in contrast to Kurdish families that traditionally had up to 10 or 12 children, though the new generation of Kurds living in the new city has fewer children. Although households in the new city are nuclear, most people continue to remain close to their extended family, which is their most important social network. Social life is based on family rather than between individuals. So teenagers and young adults spend more time with siblings and cousins than with friends. Friends are never seen as completely trustworthy and they always constitute a potential threat; men are much more likely to have large networks of male friends beyond the family than are women.

In the new city, men and women are more educated, and the number of women with a university degree is rapidly increasing. In 2012 only 99 women aged 50–54 from the urban areas of Mardin had a university degree, but 3,057 of those aged 25–29 did.[34] While gender relations in the old city, with its lower levels of income and education, remain traditional, women in the new city mix more freely in public spaces. There remains, however, a powerful sense of male domination and a fear of women causing shame (*ayıp*) that will impact on the family, through inappropriate dress or relationships with males. Men also retain a conformist model of masculinity based on honour, strength, dominion and bravery. Marriage

is also changing: the traditional system of arranged marriage (*Görücü usulü evlilik*) that dominated until recently is now less frequent than marriages for love, even if families often publicly present the latter as though they were arranged. Educated young women and men actively refuse arranged marriages, which they regard as a sign of backwardness.

Methodology

This book is based on traditional ethnographic methods. I spent 15 months in Mardin between April 2013 and August 2014, including two month-long breaks. The research started a few months before the rise of the Gezi Park protests in June 2013 that led to governmental propaganda against social media and reinforced the government's conspiracy theory, according to which many European countries were backing and supporting the protesters in order to damage Turkey's economy and political stability. This anti-social media propaganda intensified during the political campaign before the administrative election in March 2014, when YouTube and Twitter were used to discredit the reputation of Prime Minister Erdoğan. In this political climate, as a European researcher working on social media in the Kurdish region of Turkey, I was often accused by locals of being a spy working for the UK secret services. In some cases this prevented me from creating relationships of trust. Even some of my closest friends, after 15 months, were sure that I was an agent of some European government collecting information about social media that would be used in some future involvement within Turkish and Middle Eastern politics. Despite this, I was able to forge many good relationships. When I arrived in Mardin a couple of people I already knew introduced me to new people and helped me to extend my social network. Thanks to the hospitality and generosity of many individuals and families, I could in turn meet others who would help me collect further observations and information. I introduced myself as an Italian researcher working for a university in London. This provided for an alternative association, this time with the foreign professors working in the new local university that had opened a few years earlier. This made everything smoother. As a foreigner, without any local affiliation, I was able to gain access to all the different ethnic and political groups living in the town. When asked about my political views, I tried to avoid such issues when with people who would not have approved of my views. As a woman, I also had the opportunity to have access to the worlds of both men and women, which would not have been possible for a man. Obviously, I had more confidential and close relationships with

women, and this is clearly visible in the outcomes of the research that highlight and portray women's experience. In order to have better access to the masculine domain, I recruited three male research assistants who assisted me during the first few months of field work. Living in Mardin as a European single woman was not easy. I lived on my own and shared the house with a woman who was teaching English at a local university. This had the advantage that I was not associated with any specific family, but I was thereby seen as fair game for male harassment, as I was not visibly protected by any older men.

Mardin is such a peculiar place in Turkey that I could not keep it anonymous. However, I hope that the city is big enough not to reveal the identities of the individual people I talk about. For purpose of anonymity, I have changed people's names and swapped around some of their features. I developed my most intimate and close relationships with around 10 families and about a hundred individuals, though I met and talked to thousands of people. Beyond this participant observation, I carried out around 100 in-depth interviews and issued two different questionnaires, amounting to 250 people surveyed. I have also conducted an online analysis of images and conversation on around 200 Facebook profiles of my local friends, and on a few Instagram and Twitter accounts.

I believe the value of this research lies in this combination of online and offline analysis, something that is rarely realised in the study of the internet and social media. The combination is essential to an anthropological commitment to holism and the study of human beings in their totality.[35] The study of culture by anthropologists is based on the detailed accounts of the particulars and minutiae of people living in small and circumscribed areas. While contributing to a better understanding of the many ways social media are used in Mardin, I aim to challenge the essentialising assumptions of media and internet scholars as to the universality of digital technologies. It is only through the analysis of specific practices of usage, and the comparison between them, that we can examine the wider implications without inappropriate generalisations. I hope that this book will contribute to the understanding of the effects of social media in Mardin, but also to a better comprehension of the social transformation in contemporary southeast Turkey and to the study of social media more generally.

2
The social media landscape: Individuals and groups in the local media ecology[1]

'Sometimes married men (on Facebook) meet other women, they cheat on their wives and they go to live with the women they met on Facebook. My husband cheated on me with another woman, and went to live with the woman he met on Facebook.'[2] This is the message a young woman from a rural background wrote in my notebook when she was so overcome with tears that she could not speak any more. A few days after my arrival in Mardin, when I told her I was doing research about social media, the expression on her face changed, she started crying and told me her story. Two years before, her husband found a woman on Facebook. They secretly started to meet each other and then he suddenly left his wife and went to live with the new woman, taking their three children with him. She went back to her parents' house, and for the last two years she has not been able to see her children or even talk with them on the phone because their father won't allow it. And she blamed Facebook for all the pain she was living through. She had never opened a Facebook account, and she stated that she never would.

Another married Muslim woman in her early 30s, who was wearing the veil, reacted with a shocked face when I submitted a questionnaire to her while she was waiting for her child in the hall of a school: 'What do you think? I am a married woman and I have three kids. Of course I don't use Facebook. I look after my kids, and I make food for them and for my husband. Then we go to visit relatives and family's friends or they come to visit me. This is my life. Why do I need to use Facebook? I don't need it.'

In another case, a man in his 50s reacted to me with a great surprise, while miming his wife cutting his throat: 'Are you crazy? No, I don't use Facebook. If I use it my wife will kill me.' Another time, a group of

seven men between their 20s and 40s, in the office of an accountant, bluntly lied to me and denied they were social media users.

In the following 15 months I heard many negative comments about social media, or I came across many individuals who were lying and using social media secretly. Many people, especially women, tend to cover and play down their usage of social media and the internet in general. Social media are surrounded by discourses which often portray their use as immoral, dishonourable and shameful, and only rarely as positive and beneficial. These claims originated from the actual kinds of social media use in Mardin. The evidence suggests that social media has contributed to the proliferation of courtship, flirting, friendships and romances that have challenged the most important principles organising society, in particular gender segregation and gender hierarchies, arranged marriages, and the unity of the family, leading to serious consequences in people's lives. Try to imagine a place where communication between men and women has largely been forbidden, where marriages have been arranged by families and where love is a sense of attachment towards a person you didn't choose but ended up sharing your life with. Imagine that these social relations have been sustained by an organisation of space designed specifically to maintain gender segregation and intra-household-based communication. Now try to picture what could happen if a completely new and different architecture is put on top of the previous one and, probably for the first time in centuries, people start living in new material conditions of existence. Men and women start spending hours every day in communication with people of the opposite sex, women have relationships with friends outside their family network and men flirt and harass women even more, while at the same time others try to resist all this, going on living the same traditional life. It's the beginning of a social change that is not free of conflicts, adaptations, resistance, new sufferings and new happiness. To paraphrase the words of some Mardinites, it is the beginning of a 'new revolution'.

If we want to understand the extent to which smartphones and social media have created a break with the previous social forms, then first we need to examine how the material organisation of space and the materiality of the media prior to the internet helped to control and explain people's behaviour and relationships in the town. For example, the protection of domestic spaces from the gaze of (male) outsiders in the old city traditionally formed part of the male control over women.[3] In the new city of Mardin, these spatial rules have been partially reproduced, despite the transformation of architecture described in the last chapter. In the modern buildings of the new city, the goal of 'protecting the visual

privacy'[4] of women and domestic space is achieved by a complex system of curtains. They have to maximise the light in the dark hours of the day, while protecting from the sun in the hot hours, but always guard against the neighbours being able to see inside the home. Windows even slightly uncovered by curtains are considered completely unacceptable.

Women will cross spaces such as streets, cafes, markets and shops, but only men inhabit them in more permanent ways. While walking in the street, the protection of women's reputation is maintained through different strategies: women always have to protect themselves from men by trying to never meet their gaze; and only women that never look around while walking in the street are considered respectable. Young women going to the *dershane*[5] always keep their notebooks visible in their hands to clearly show that they are going to school and not somewhere else; and when they go somewhere else they tend to walk together with other women of the family or, more rarely, alone. What mostly preserves women's respectability in the streets of the new 'modern' city of Mardin is the lack of anonymity made possible by the size of the town. While I was strolling around with them, locals would claim to know the identity of roughly 70 per cent of the people (the remaining 30 per cent were civil servants and people from different towns). In Mardin *Yenişehir*, the streets are not anonymous places where individuals ignore each other. Women may not be recognised as specific individuals, but they are known as members of specific families or belonging to specific towns of the province, and this is important for maintaining their respectability. One day I was walking in the streets with my research assistant Sonnur, a single woman in her late 20s, with her younger, well-built brother following us as a sort of bodyguard. Two young men sitting on the corner of the street saw me and Sonnur and started to make some stupid jokes, thinking we were both tourists; Sonnur shouted and the younger brother, who was only a few metres from us, immediately arrived, argued and fought with the two boys, who started apologising and justifying themselves, saying that we both looked like strangers (*yabancı*)[6] from Western Turkey, otherwise they would never have made those kinds of comments. In this patriarchal society, women are not seen as individuals with their own autonomy and independence, and their movements and their social relations are often kept under control.[7]

Within the house, the living room is the most important place where people spend most of their time. People talk with other family members and guests, always sitting in a circle and orienting their attention towards the others. Individual bedrooms have only recently been introduced and rural families living in the new city still share the same room at night. So

even though the change in architecture could provide people with the opportunity to spend more time alone, in practice, family members continue to share common spaces for much of the time.

The lack of individualism and the idea that individuals are determined by the group they are part of are reflected in many other cultural forms. The local line dances, *delilo* and *halay*, performed at weddings or other ceremonies, are never an expression of individual bodies, but always the sum of more figures moving in the same way and reiterating the same steps for a long time. Food is traditionally consumed by everyone taking their turn from the same big dishes located in the middle of the floor (or table), and sometimes even the same piece of meat is passed from one mouth to another. This was common for Rojda, a thin 18-year-old girl who was always hungry and in search of food; during meals she enjoyed nibbling her sisters' chicken and goat meat bones. The limits to individual autonomy are also visible among groups of young male friends, where friendship is the tie that bonds members of the same group rather than the result of a connection between two individuals: when Cihan had an argument with Mehmed, who had a prominent role in the group, he automatically loosened his friendship with the whole group. Individual autonomy is rarely taken into account in interpersonal relationships: friends can call each other up to 10 times an hour, and no matter whether they are busy, they have to answer the phone. Or again, knocking at a person's door creates the obligation to open and offer tea and food, at any time of the day or evening, otherwise the whole family would not make a good impression. The well-known sense of hospitality generally characterising Muslim Middle Eastern society can also be seen as a consequence of this lack of individualism, as people always feel in some way responsible for others.

Television, which arrived in the city of Mardin in the late 1970s and in the villages in the mid-1980s, did not challenge this family-based sociality, but rather reinforced it. Television is now in everybody's house and it is usually watched by the whole family together. Less than 50 per cent of the respondents to the first questionnaire said they had two or more sets at home. Television tends to be watched in the living room and it is also often kept on as background when people talk. Television has been perfectly embedded into this model of household-centred communication, and has contributed to the sacralisation of the family and its unity. TV is often watched with the extended family, too, when cousins, uncles and aunts make family visits at the weekend or on midweek evenings, and it often inspires different topics of conversation. Watching news re-creates and reproduces traditional hierarchies within the family: the older male

members usually decide channels and times of the news, and manage the conversations. Depending on social class and level of education, women may or may not participate in the discussions, but they always maintain a subordinate role. Watching news on the television is one of those moments where men become the lead players within the house in the co-presence of their female relatives, while during meals, the scene is dominated by women, who lead the action in a quite silent environment, as people don't like talking while eating. Reading newspapers, an individual activity that promotes autonomous thinking, is not a common habit, especially among the less educated population, but it is increasing with major access to education and the diffusion of the internet and newspapers online. Radio is also present in the majority of people's houses (80 per cent of Q1 respondents), but it's rarely listened to, mainly being on while housewives are cooking or cleaning.

Computers tend to be used collectively by the family and controlled by men, who sometimes exclude women and younger family members. Women often exclude themselves from having their own personal computers. Büşra, a single woman in her late 30s who lives in a house with her older parents, used a laptop with an internet connection mainly to make calls on Skype with her relatives living in other cities in Turkey, but she was concerned to show that the password to gain access to the PC was completely public and, although her parents did not use the laptop, her nephews and brothers used the PC whenever they came to visit her.

Mobile phones have started to break this dominance of family-based communication and to increase the autonomy of individuals. Even now, in those rural families where women are excluded from access to the internet and are not smartphone users, it's common for them to spend time alone in some rooms of the house talking on the phone in the absence of their family members. And this constitutes one of the very few opportunities they have to maintain relationships beyond the family network and without the mediation of the whole family. Mobile phones were owned by everybody over 18 and by the majority of teenagers; only illiterate old people were excluded from using them. It is significant that people do not talk on the phone in public spaces very much, especially women. Women may have short conversations, but being seen by others communicating on the phone for hours can be seriously detrimental to their reputation. And this became even truer with the use of smartphones. In contrast to other societies, here it is rare to see women and men chatting on their phone in a densely populated space such as a bus or a bus station where others can look at you. People prefer to send messages in more protected spaces, far from the gaze of others.

The main drive towards individual-based communication came with smartphones, which started to spread among the young population in 2011 and 2012. Smartphones are individual devices that facilitate individual usage, and they are also containers of personal memories and personal relationships that are kept private and confidential. Women do not usually need to justify themselves because they use their smartphones at home alone and in private, and they tend not to give other people their phone even after developing a good friendship and reciprocal trust. People use passwords to secure information and shield their social relationships. Despite some rare forms of collective usage, for example among young siblings in low-income families, or teenagers at school, smartphones are individual devices and they quickly became incredibly important for young women's access to the internet and social media in a society dominated by restriction of women's social relations. Most people are eager to show off their new phones. It's quite common for those with a salary of TRY 1,000 (GBP 250) a month to own an expensive smartphone costing TRY 1,500 (GBP 375). While cars and houses are affordable only by a restricted section of the population – well-off men – smartphones have become the most ordinary and popular object of consumption that almost everybody is willing to own: 'If you have a small phone in Mardin, you are nobody! People will not even talk to you … showing off your new smartphone is so important here.' Whenever wealthy young men go to restaurants, they cover the table with their iPhones, not leaving space for dishes and courses. Smartphones have become the most common consumer good to show off social status, more than clothes or food. Young women like to adorn their phones with nice covers coloured in different ways, and to change them on different days of the week. In some cases, smartphones are never connected to the internet because owning a smartphone and showing it to your friends is sometimes more important than the functions of the phone itself. Samsung was the most popular brand, followed by iPhones, which were used by a smaller elite. Smuggled (*kacak*) phones were quite common too. Phones are the most smuggled goods after weapons, drugs and cigarettes.[8] Most shops, except those belonging to the big phone companies, sell smuggled phones for less than half of the official price. Because of its proximity to the border with Syria, Iraq and Iran, smuggling is a very important source of income in southeast and east Turkey, which has developed still further after the beginning of the Syrian war and the closure of the border.

Zehra is a 21-year-old woman who recently moved to *Yenişehir* from old Mardin together with her father, mother and younger brother. Her family belongs to the community of *Mahalmi*, Arab speakers who arrived

in the city from the rural area of the province in the 1950s. The Arab elite of the city – *Bajarili* – consider them as lacking noble origins (*asil*) and also more ignorant (*cahil*). *Mahalmi* are usually more conservative than other Arabs from Mardin, and indeed Zehra is less free and autonomous than other women of her age. She finished high school two years before I met her, and since then she has been studying for the university entrance examination. When she was accepted at the University of Antalya, her father would not allow her to live so far from home, and she spent the whole year working 12 hours a day as a shop assistant in a nice boutique next to her house and her father's shop. Her life was lived inside the walls of the shop and the house, under the gaze of her father and in the company of her mother and guests who occasionally visited and for whom she had to prepare food, teas and coffees. She was not allowed to hang out in cafes, nor to meet friends in the park, and even going shopping at the supermarket needed her parents' authorisation. Beyond the family network, she was only sporadically meeting one friend, a girl she had known from the age of eight, and a secret boyfriend who lived in the same building. Beyond them, she had no offline relationships that were not mediated by the family. However, Zehra was an incredibly active user of social media: on her Samsung Galaxy X3 she was constantly using Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and WhatsApp at work or at home. She had three different Facebook accounts, though only one of these was currently in use, or at least this is what she constantly repeated to me. She had around 300 Facebook friends, out of which 60 were people she met on Facebook, mostly women and men from western Turkey, and a few from Europe. Like many other young women from Mardin, she was using social media mainly to meet strangers and become their friends. She really enjoyed it. These relationships were not limited to the space of Facebook, and when two Facebook friends came from western Turkey to Mardin for a holiday they met face to face. Through Facebook Zehra has met new people from Mardin as well, like Sinan, a photographer with whom she made a personal photo album portraying her well dressed and with carefully chosen make-up. On WhatsApp she mainly communicated with Fatih, her secret boyfriend, by sending him up to 500 messages a day. Fatih was very jealous of her Facebook account and he often obliged her to close it. For this reason, the profile was being turned on and off every couple of weeks.

Zehra didn't have a computer in the house, nor an internet connection. All her social networking was limited to her smartphone. One day, she quit her job in the shop and, after arguing with her, her father confiscated her phone as a punishment and gave it to her younger brother. Zehra, who was then spending her days sitting at home, immediately

bought a new white shiny Samsung Galaxy X3 that she used hidden from her father and brother, by carefully keeping it in her pocket. She would have died without a smartphone, as she told me: 'I am so lucky to not have an older brother. A father and a boyfriend are enough! One forbids me to have a phone, the other to have a Facebook account. It's really enough!' And she was laughing because, despite the restrictions imposed by the two men, she was able to buy a new smartphone and to reopen her Facebook account anyway. While I was back in London we had a private chat on Facebook and she proudly showed me the picture of her new official fiancé, not Fatih, but a new one. They had met on Facebook two months previously, and they chatted there every day before meeting secretly a couple of times, until he went to her house to ask her father for her hand in marriage. While writing this book, I can follow them on Facebook and see the pictures of their wedding that was publicly presented as sanctifying an arranged marriage.

Zehra's story is one of the many examples of the way smartphones and social media have increased individual connectivity and have challenged family-based communications, producing new conflicts and changes. But this story also shows that social media and these new forms of communication and romance have not eliminated 'ideal' forms of traditional arranged marriage, which continue to remain rooted and strong. The love-match made possible by social media has rather been absorbed into traditional and legitimate family idioms, to be presented in this case as a traditional arranged marriage. Although experiences of premarital romantic love existed well before social media, as many stories I heard from middle-aged and old people made clear, social media made these significantly more frequent. And just like in the past, most of these new kinds of intimate friendships have been experienced privately and only with absolute discretion.

Past and present internet usage in Mardin

As elsewhere, early access to the internet in Mardin was often through internet cafes. The first cafes opened in Mardin in 2000 and they reached their largest expansion in 2003 and 2004. After that people started buying computers and using them in their houses, while internet cafes were increasingly frequented mainly by male teenagers to play games online, which is their main use today. Sometimes adult men would go to cafes in short breaks from work to check their Facebook page and to chat with friends; and a few university students, women included, would

go there too to do online research. The use of the internet on personal computers in the private spaces of the house developed over a decade, peaking in 2010 and 2011, when smartphone usage started to spread.[9] In 2013 and 2014 the number of people opening internet contracts in their private houses decreased, as pointed out by the owners of shops selling broadband services.

Despite the increased usage of smartphones, almost every house in the new city has a computer, and the majority have an internet broadband connection, or access to a neighbour's internet service.[10] For example, a shop based on the ground floor of an apartment block had a fibre optic broadband that was used by six more shops and surrounding apartments. The owner was continually being asked to provide his password, and to maintain good relationships with his neighbours he had to do so. It is also quite common for young girls, not allowed to use the internet by their parents, to use the neighbours' connections instead; many of them have a clear mental map of wireless connections in the buildings and the times of day they can access them, or they use friends' and cousins' laptops or phones if they don't have one. Like many other things in Mardin, internet connection was shared and used collectively, in such a way that those with more resources were expected to help others in exchange for social prestige and power.

People in their 20s and below tend to identify the internet with Facebook, but those a bit older were using the internet well before the arrival of social media. Chatting has always been the main form of internet usage. Instant messaging programs, especially MSN Messenger and IRC before it, have largely been adopted to meet and talk with people of the opposite sex, especially strangers. As soon as they met someone new online, people used to type 'ASL?', the abbreviation for 'age, sex and location', in order to get some general information about him or her. The internet was used to meet new people and flirt with them well before the diffusion of social media, but social media made courtship less anonymous. A 40-year-old man noted: 'MSN was not used so differently from Facebook, but now on Facebook you don't need to type "ASL?" any more. If you have a look at people's profiles you can understand so many things about them … Now getting in touch with girls is much easier than 10 years ago!' On Facebook, men flirt with women already knowing a lot of information about them. Synchronous communication has always been the favourite online habit in Mardin and in the region before and after social media. Today, Facebook users tend to keep the chat open to talk with friends and meet new people, to the point that Facebook often comes to be identified as a chat service:

> I have to prepare my exams and I can't use Facebook any more. It's time consuming. When I went online I had to answer to all my friends' messages 'Selam', 'Merhaba, nasılsın?' (Hello, how are you?) … And this took me at least a couple of hours. If they saw me online I had to answer all of them, otherwise they'd get offended.

At the time of my research, differences in internet access by age, gender and social class were quite significant. The generational gap was the most important, as people over 60 were very rarely internet users, irrespective of whether they were men or women, rich and educated or poor and illiterate. In Mardin, the elderly (people over 60 were usually already retired and considered old) may be illiterate, and they are often strongly attached to traditions and express dislike towards new technologies and novelties. 'Technologies were created by the devil!' was a frequent claim made by grandfathers. However, sometimes men of a more advanced age used computers together with other family members to communicate with relatives on Skype. Mehmed, a 61-year-old man who works in the bazaar of the old city, spends two hours every evening talking with four of his five sons living in other cities of Turkey. He can't turn the computer on himself, and he has to rely on his son living next to him to do that. He goes to his son's house every evening and they Skype together. Because of the high level of illiteracy, only a few men over 70 and women over 50 can use mobile phones: they either use their sons' and daughters' phones, or they have learned to somehow recognise their relatives' names on the screen. Elderly people strongly rely on the support of their younger relatives in many matters of daily life, not least their access to communication technologies. In Mardin *Yenişehir*, the old population are strongly attached to prior genres of social relations and habits which continue to remain in practice in the old city. Old men often commute from the old to the new city; they sit in the bazaar and talk with those people they have known all their lives. Women sit at home or visit their relatives.

Among middle-aged people (between 35 and 60) the digital gender gap is really significant. In this age group, men usually have access to the internet, women don't. This has to do with the fact that most women in this age group are housewives, and as such are excluded from relationships and connections with other human beings beyond family members and female neighbours. Housewives are devoted to raising children, feeding their husband and cleaning the house, while the internet is associated with the world outside the domestic sphere, dangers and threats to their modesty and honour.

Zeynep is a 23-year-old woman who daily spent hours on Facebook and WhatsApp. When asked if her 42-year-old housewife mother used the internet, she replied with a shocked expression on her face: 'Are you crazy? Why does my mum have to use the internet? What for? Of course she doesn't.' A few housewives do use the internet to talk with relatives on Skype and shop online, but not for social media, and always collectively with other family members. Very few others do use social media very discreetly, mainly to peek at relatives' and acquaintances' profiles. The situation of educated middle-aged women with a job outside the house is a different situation, as society recognises that their position in the 'public' world gives them the legitimacy to access the internet, to own a smartphone and to have a social media account. But this is the case of a small upper-class minority. Within this age group, men have access to the internet and use it in significantly different ways according to their level of education: uneducated middle-aged men tend to use the internet and social media mainly to flirt, harass girls, cheat on their wives, watch pornographic films, share religious *memes* and sometimes talk with friends. However, getting information about this group was difficult, given that many of these practices can't be discussed with a woman. In contrast, educated middle-aged men were enthusiastic in explaining the advantages and the benefits of digital technologies, such as reading news, talking with old friends from school and university, and widening their knowledge of the world.

It can be said that those under the age of 35 constitute the internet generation. Everybody in this age group uses the internet; even a 20-year-old uneducated housewife from a conservative rural family has the chance to have a look at a Facebook page or a YouTube video a few times. My research has focused on this age group and they dominate the descriptive material of this volume. Although the digital generation gap is probably more significant in the southeast than elsewhere in the country, this trend is likely to be common all around Turkey. Vodafone, one of the few mobile phone companies in Turkey, has based its campaign on youth and uses the slogan 'Youth is lived only once, live it free!' (*Gençlik bir kere yaşanır özgürce yaşa!*). In Mardin, the most widespread Vodafone mobile package sold to people under 25 is called *özgür genç*, which means 'free youth' and it gives 12,000 SMS messages, 500GB of internet data and 2,000 minutes' talk (only on the weekend) for TRY 15 (around GBP 3.50) a month. The other popular package among teenagers and students was the 'Facebook packet' that allows customers to use Facebook and Twitter for TRY 5 a month (around GBP 1.20). In contrast, the most popular package sold to people over 25 does not include internet data. In a local

Vodafone shop, out of 80 mobile contracts created for people over 25 in that current week, only 10 included internet data.

Social media uses in Mardin

This section provides an overview of the current uses of the different social media platforms in Mardin.

Facebook

Facebook is easily the most popular social media in Mardin, and for this reason it has dominated the research behind this book. Eighty-six per cent of the respondents to Q1 use Facebook more than any other social platform, and 60 per cent claimed to have been active on Facebook for between four and seven years. 72 per cent look at their Facebook profiles every day; 15 per cent keep Facebook always on, and only the remaining 13 per cent look at their profiles fewer than seven times a week. The average number of friends people have on Facebook is 338.

In the new city, children at elementary school, and occasionally even those as young as four or five, open their first accounts. At this age, Facebook is more widespread among middle-class families with educated parents that have a positive attitude towards digital technologies and education, and they also want to show off to the families of other children that they can afford computers and smartphones, whereas in low-income families with a lower level of education children use Facebook less. Children use Facebook mainly to play games with school friends, among which the most popular is *Candy Crush Saga*. For example, Hülya is an eight-year-old girl who opened 40 different Facebook accounts to send herself more gifts so that she could win the game more easily. Among teenagers and young adults, almost everybody has now had a Facebook account for some time, and the main significant differences are between rural and urban families, where the former tend more often to exclude young female members from using it. People are largely aware of Facebook privacy settings and master them well. 80 per cent of the Q1 respondents regularly change their privacy settings. People usually make their Facebook profile visible only to a group of friends and invisible to strangers. It is also quite common to create different groups within the same account and make different posts visible to different circles of people. Sometimes Facebook is also used to upload pictures that are visible exclusively to the owner of the page. In general, a user's Facebook status is not updated frequently (63 per cent

of respondents do it less than once a day, and 27 per cent had not done this in the last month), as people engage more with private chat (around 60 per cent of respondents had sent at least 30 private messages in the last month) and look at other people's profiles.

In Mardin it is not uncommon to have more than one Facebook profile. This evidence would not have been clear from a formal questionnaire because having more than one profile is seen as dubious and people tend not to talk about it. The topic is rather treated and debated with irony and jokes among friends, or embarrassment with strangers. However, a 35-year-old man, married with two children and owner of a small shop, proudly admitted that he was simultaneously active on 12 different Facebook accounts: one used with the extended family, one with work friends, one with 'ordinary' friends, one with female friends that are simply friends, one with female friends that could become more intimate, one with foreign girls, one for business (under the name of his shop), one for online gaming, one under the name of his four-year-old daughter, one under the name of his six-year-old son, and two more accounts he didn't want to tell me about, which were perhaps used for political purposes. Beyond this extreme case, both women and men sometimes have two or three profiles, in order to keep different spheres of their lives separate. When men and women in a premarital relationship want to speak with other people of the opposite sex, they may open a new Facebook profile to avoid the partner's jealousy. When people break up with a partner, they may open a new Facebook account to socialise with the new partner and the new partner's friends. Men also sometimes have a different account to be in touch with friends from their military service, and occasionally women have two profiles to keep family separated from friends. Another common pattern of usage has to do with the transience of these Facebook profiles, as at times people close old accounts and open new ones. When this is the case, Facebook is not used to maintain people's fundamental social relations, but rather to create an alternative social network of friends, or to have an additional channel of communication with them. It is also common to have fake profiles under false and invented names: women mainly aiming to escape their family's prohibition and control, men wishing to get in touch with women and harass them without being recognised. Alternatively, fake profiles are used for political purposes, as will be examined in Chapter 6.

WhatsApp

WhatsApp spread significantly during the 15 months of my field work. When I carried out the first questionnaire in summer 2013 WhatsApp

was rarely used, but it had become widespread by the end of my research. The success of WhatsApp is also explained by people's passion for private chats. People increasingly opt for WhatsApp because the chat on Facebook is not very much appreciated on smartphones, and SMS messages are more expensive. WhatsApp has come to be the most used application for intimate communication with close friends, close relatives, lovers, and also between small groups of people. WhatsApp is often used as an additional communication channel that amplifies the frequency of inter-actions with close family members, friends or partners, and diversifies the genre of communication thanks to the presence of visual and verbal content. Unlike spoken communication on the phone, WhatsApp can be used at any moment of the day, during work and between one break and the next, allowing more privacy and secrecy in communication with 'forbidden' friends. Alternatively, young adults living far from their home town use WhatsApp to increase proximity and intimacy with their favourite family members. One 26-year-old woman living on her own in Mardin has five brothers and sisters. She regularly speaks on the phone with all of them, but she uses WhatsApp only with her two favourite sisters. One sister regularly sends her pictures of her niece, and she replies by sending her pictures of herself at work and during ordinary moments of daily life. Another 32-year-old man regularly speaks on the phone with his brother and sister living in other towns, but he chats, shares pictures and cartoons on WhatsApp only with his brother, and very rarely uses WhatsApp with his sister. And one 35-year-old man uses WhatsApp above all to communicate with his two brothers living in two different cities of Turkey. They send texts to each other many times a day. Another man uses WhatsApp only with his girlfriend and with his best friend, to whom he sends at least 100 messages a day. A woman uses WhatsApp only with her three best friends and her younger sister to whom she sends a lot of pictures from everyday life. Sending photos through WhatsApp is a very common practice. In contrast to pictures posted on Facebook, which tend to be more formal and ceremonial, those posted on WhatsApp are usually more informal and intimate, portraying moments from ordinary life: 'I would love that my sister living far away could take part in my daily life. For this reason I always send her pictures of what I do during the day!'

In Mardin and in the whole region intra-family relationships are usually quite intense, and people use the phone many times a day to com-municate with their close family members, such as parents to sons and between siblings. People are often quite distressed by the distance sepa-rating them from their parents or sons, an example being a 40-year-old mother who cried her heart out because her daughter had left a couple

of weeks previously to start university in another city in Turkey five hours away by bus. A woman in her early 20s also started to have tears in her eyes because, for the first time in her life, she was living one hour away by bus from her family and she could visit them only on weekends. Women may call their sisters up to eight or 10 times a day if they are out of the house for different reasons, and they send many messages and images on WhatsApp. WhatsApp is used mainly for intra-family relationships to increase immediacy and proximity, but also for communication between lovers in premarital relationships, who may send each other up to 700 WhatsApp messages every day. Broadly speaking WhatsApp has been received and accepted with less concern, anxiety and excitement than Facebook, because it is mainly a 'private' medium that does not challenge traditional boundaries between the private and the public. It cannot reveal secrets and intimate confidences in public and, above all, it cannot put people in touch with strangers.

Instagram

Instagram also spread during the time of my field work, mainly among educated young adults, who enjoy showing their most beautiful and creative pictures. Teenagers are not using Instagram very much, also because it needs a phone with a camera that can take clear photos. Instagram, like Twitter, is the social media used by a small elite of more educated youth, and not by the majority of the population. On Instagram they mainly show off exciting experiences, such as holiday trips and dinners, or cool commodities, such as fancy clothes or new cars. In a different way from Facebook, however, here they experiment with new visual codes and languages together with smaller groups of peers. On Instagram young people are more creative, original and interested in aesthetics. A contribution to the diffusion of Instagram also came from the fashion industry based in Istanbul and Ankara, which has recently started to use this social media as an online showcase, and middle-class women have started to use this social media to shop online.

Twitter

Twitter is not used as much as in other metropolitan areas of Turkey. Like Instagram, the main Twitter users are educated young adults who have attended university and have friends in other towns of Turkey. They use Twitter to read news and follow politicians. In Mardin, Twitter is considered the social media for the educated elite: the best *dershane* of Mardin – a

private school that prepares students for state examinations and is affiliated to the Gülen movement[11] – decided to post their advertisements only on Twitter and not on Facebook, to distinguish themselves from the others, because, as the director of the school told me, 'Facebook is for everybody!' Teenagers also use Twitter, mainly to follow stars, international pop singers and actors. They prefer Twitter to Facebook where it's easier to find many inauthentic profiles. It was also common to have a Twitter profile and not use it: only 36 per cent of the respondents to Q1 have tweeted at least once in the last month, and 70 per cent have never retweeted.

Viber, WeChat, Line and Tango

These are smartphone applications used by a few adults and teenagers, for text messaging, free voice calls, picture sharing and video calls. People enjoy making video calls, especially to relatives living far away. Tango also has a function of geolocation that is used by hundreds of men in an attempt to meet and harass girls. Nobody mentioned this to me during the interviews, but within half an hour of downloading the application on my own smartphone, I received around 70 messages from men located within a kilometre who were writing to me using terms like 'sweet angel', 'dear sweet' or 'lovely'. I had to change my account's name from Elisa Costa to Ali Costa and act as a man in order not to be bothered.

YouTube

YouTube is used a lot to listen to music and watch video clips, but not to upload self-produced materials. Young adults and university students could spend entire evenings with their friends listening to YouTube videos. For Kurds especially, YouTube was a wonderful source of Kurdish music and artistic products that had been forbidden for many years in Turkey. During the period of field work the ban on Kurdish language, music and arts was no longer active, but Kurdish cultural products were distributed only on the internet and on Kurdish satellite TV channels, and not on mainstream Turkish television.

Skype

Skype is used especially by middle-aged people to communicate with relatives living far away, as young people prefer to use video-call services on their smartphones.

Online games

Games are very important components of social media. They are often played with old friends, or with the purpose of meeting new people, to chat with them, and eventually also meet them face to face. The most popular games, indeed, are those which give the opportunity to meet new friends and also communicate while playing. For example, Sidar, a 21-year-old man, met his ex-girlfriend while playing *İstanbul Kıyamet Vakti*. For the first few days they communicated on the game, then they started to talk on MSN and then on Skype in front of a camera, and finally on Facebook. It is common for both young and older men from Mardin to use online gaming to seek out women from western Turkey who are seen as more sexually available. Women from the southeast generally do not have premarital sexual intercourse, and if they do they expect it to lead to marriage. Sidar's ex-girlfriend was from Antalya, and they were able to see each other there for three summers, against the wishes of her family, who didn't want to have their daughter engaged to a man from the southeast. For this reason, her parents frequently confiscated her phone. He bought her three mobile phones one after the other, after which the relationship finished. Games such as *Okey*, *Tavla* and *Poker* are very popular, and they are played mainly to meet new people; other common games are *Candy Crush Saga*, *Criminal Case*, *City Ville*, and *Farmville*.

Commerce and Facebook

Facebook is of considerable importance among small businesses in Mardin: hairdressers, shops, musicians, estate agents, cafes, restaurants and private schools use Facebook pages to promote and advertise their activities. In this domain as well, the generation gap is highly significant, as only people under 35 or 40 use social media for business, with the result that all those kinds of economic activities run by middle-aged men (or, more rarely, women) do not have an online presence, except in those few cases where the owners are progressive enough to let their children do it on their behalf. In some cases, Facebook has been much more than just one more channel for advertising, but has allowed the creation of a business that otherwise would not have been possible. This is, for example, the case with *Ev Arıyorum*, an estate agency opened by a man in his early 30s, who uses Facebook to put buyers and sellers in touch, largely benefiting from the expansion of the most profitable economic sector of Mardin. The main advantage brought by the use of Facebook is

the opportunity to create connections with people not living in Mardin. Here a major component of the flourishing property market are Mardinites who migrated to Europe or other parts of Turkey and decided to invest their money in Mardin, as well as civil servants who come to work in Mardin and are looking for houses to rent.

The transnational dimension of Facebook also allows local musicians and artists to get in touch with people in Europe, to ask questions and buy musical instruments and technical equipment or simply to exchange impressions on the best way to play songs. In addition, men with particular skills or qualifications to promote take great advantage of Facebook: athletes, English teachers, artists and graphic designers use Facebook to develop and promote their own image and brand. A painter has created his own public character thanks to an effective use of his Facebook page, and has started to receive further requests for his paintings from shops selling souvenirs to tourists. As one person put it: 'Facebook is used for two main reasons in Mardin: to find girls and to show off. So if you have something you would like to be noticed for, Facebook can be really helpful.' The use of Facebook to advertise and promote small private businesses is often not so different from the common practices of personal use by individuals, to the point where the boundaries between advertising and showing off are obscured.

Polymedia and different social circles in southeast Turkey

Madianou and Miller's theory of polymedia[12] was intended to 'describe, but also to understand, the emerging environment of proliferating communication opportunities and its consequences for interpersonal communication'. Instead of treating each platform individually, each is defined in relation to all the others. This perspective emphasises a movement towards moral, social and emotional concerns reflected in the choice between these platforms, rather than the more technical and economic reasons previously given for these choices. Three preconditions are necessary to apply this theory: availability, affordability and media literacy. In Mardin these conditions were not met all the time, as teenagers and young adults have media literacy, but not always affordability and access to the media. The choice of one medium instead of another, for example WhatsApp instead of SMS, was often led by the need to save money; and limitations to access were frequent, due to social restrictions more than to lack of infrastructure. Women are from time to

time excluded from social media use and they end up preferring those media that can keep the communications secret and private. On the other hand middle-aged people, who have more economic opportunities, were often illiterate in digital terms if not literally so.

However, the theory of polymedia can be really useful in Mardin to understand how different mediated spaces are integrated with each other. The ethnographical research shows how different social settings online are defined by reference to the people who inhabit them, more than by the platform's affordances or an individual's emotional concerns. It is not important which social media is used in generating a specific genre of usage, but rather what social circle is associated with that genre of usage.[13] In other words, the appropriate units of analysis to take into account are the different social groups people create on the same platform or on different platforms, rather than the different social media platforms in themselves.

In Mardin, teenagers and young adults actively create different online social environments and behave differently according to the people who inhabit them. When it helps them to retain these defined social groups and genres of use, they switch easily from one platform to another, or between different spaces of the same platform. For example, people share the same kinds of photographic materials (funny and confidential pictures) and have the same kinds of talk within small groups of school friends on Facebook and on WhatsApp. But these may contrast with what they share on the 'public' wall of both Facebook and Instagram, which consists of images whose contents are quite similar to each other. Married couples share their intimate photos in the private spaces of Facebook or WhatsApp equally. So it is not the different platforms that matter; it is the particular types of usage and the groups associated with them. People actively change Facebook privacy settings to create different social groups, such as general public, large family, small family, general friends, school friends, flirting. In Mardin, social media has not produced social convergence of the type described in European and North America contexts.[14] Instead, they retain discrete and disparate social groups on social media which are kept carefully separated from each other through the tight control of privacy settings and maintenance of different accounts.

Halil works as an English teacher in a private school. Like many other young Kurdish men, he was raised in a large family with many siblings. His family moved to the new city of Mardin from a village to escape the war between the PKK and the Turkish State 20 years ago, when Halil was a child. His parents have always been tied to their tribe,

whose members inhabited a few villages in the area between Mardin and Diyarbakır. As Halil grew up in Mardin and has lived in different Turkish cities, he has distant relationships with the members of his extended family. He claimed to be able to name around 300 relatives, distributed between his home village, Mardin and other towns in Turkey, while his tribe includes a few thousand people, most of whom he has never met. Halil has one Facebook account with around 600 friends, of which 200 are relatives (cousins, aunts, uncles, father's and mother's cousins and second cousins). He has divided his Facebook friends into four different groups: the generic public includes all his 600 friends; the close family group has 11 members, brothers and sisters and a couple of nephews (whereas mother and father, uncles and aunts belong to the generation of non-internet users); the large family group includes around 100 relatives living in Mardin, in his village and other towns in Turkey; the fourth group is used with colleagues and students to share materials, organise activities and arrange appointments. On the public Facebook he shares songs, news, pictures and generic information that may be of interest to everybody, such as the news on the invasion of Sinjar and the massacre of the Yezidi population by ISIS, which happened a few days before Halil and I met for the interview, or news and comments about the presidential elections of a few months before. In the close family group he communicates practical and ordinary needs, such as 'Don't call me on the phone at this time because I am working!' or 'I am travelling to Urfa, do you need anything from there?' In his large family group they discuss trivial matters such as the night before when he could not sleep and asked who was awake and available for a chat. Alternatively they support each other when they need something, such as when Halil went to Diyarbakır for a medical exam and was in need of a bed for a night; or they share job vacancies when they see an interesting one; they also invite each other on trips together on bank holidays. In this more private group he also shares news strictly related to Kurdish issues that can't be posted on the public wall because it might not be appreciated by Arab and Turkish friends with different political views.

Facebook, the most used social media, is ruled by different norms according to the different social circles it is used by. Creating different groups inside the same Facebook profile is a common practice: for example, it is possible to have a public profile seen by a large group of friends and relatives, with three different closed groups with school friends, friends from work and relatives, and one private space shared with one's girlfriend. As we have seen, for the same reason it's common to have several Facebook profiles: one for the family, a second to flirt with

girls or boys, a third to speak with friends, and a fourth for politics. So in Mardin there is not one Facebook but many different Facebooks. What I call 'public' Facebook profiles are the most commonly used. They are shown to a wide group of family members and friends, and are usually used to increase personal visibility and honour, and to generate approval and recognition by others. More private uses of Facebook may have the opposite purpose, that is of reducing visibility and secretly taking advantage of the opportunities opened up by this new 'revolutionary' architecture that can put you in touch with a large number of people all around the world. The public Facebook wall is the site of what could be termed the 'normative individual'. No matter what gender, age or social class an individual belongs to, he or she is mainly concerned to show off his or her best qualities and to receive the highest number of likes. Here people reproduce traditional social norms, based on male honour, female modesty and gender segregation, that are even stricter than those in the offline world. If urbanisation has widened spaces with a certain level of anonymity that allows more flexible behaviours, on the public Facebook wall people are constantly under the gaze of others. The public Facebook reproduces the same social context previously only found at weddings, which for centuries have been the only social events where a few hundred relatives and friends, women and men, gathered together in the same space under the gaze of these others. On the public Facebook wall, as at weddings, people aim to perform their best public self by sharing their best images and carefully controlling the comments of their relatives and friends. At wedding ceremonies, participants enjoy looking at other people's behaviour and clothes and discreetly commenting about them. Similarly, people spend hours looking at other people's Facebook profiles and gossiping about them. On the 'public' Facebook people perform the most conventional and formal self, much as they imagine this should be at wedding ceremonies.

All of this is in stark contrast to the use of WhatsApp, WeChat, Viber, SMS and private uses of Facebook as described above. It is hard to exaggerate the degree to which social media has at this very same time become integral to the construction and experience of love and intimate relationships. Teenagers and young people send their lovers up to 600 private messages a day and spend up to 10 hours a day on different social media platforms to communicate with 'prohibited' partners and lovers. Young couples in secret relationships usually use all the media at their disposal to communicate with secret partners without being seen by others, thus challenging the social rules that cannot be publicly broken and subverted.

Ayşe and İzzettin are a young couple in their early 20s. She works as a shop assistant 12 hours a day in a supermarket, and he is officially enrolled at the local university, but spends most of his time helping a friend in a grocery shop. Nobody in the family knows about their relationship. As they both have a new Samsung phone and the money to top up their internet credit, they spend hours sending messages and pictures to each other on WhatsApp. They each send the other around 400 messages a day, including pictures of themselves and what they are doing during the day. When she is at work, WhatsApp is the best platform because it doesn't take up too much time. WhatsApp is also the best application for the nights when she is at home and she wants to communicate with him far from the gaze of their parents. When she has breaks at work and she is at home alone, they speak on the phone for up to one or two hours a day. When they have used up their internet and phone credit, they send each other SMS messages. They never communicate on Facebook because it might publicly disclose something about their relationship. They rarely see each other face to face, around once or twice a month for a very short time when they can go to sit in a hidden corner of a park or meet at one of their houses when nobody else is there.

Society as the premise

This chapter has focused on how the range of social media understood as polymedia confirms the creation of different online spaces whose size and degree of privacy vary. However, in Mardin, the most common and ordinary uses of social media are split between the very public, wedding-like situation of the Facebook wall and the uses by individuals for intimate and private communication. In Mardin, communication technologies have facilitated new forms of interpersonal communication that add to existing ones based on group solidarity. These new types of relationships include strangers, in clear contrast with European and North American contexts, where research showed that social media are used for maintaining already existing offline relationships, mainly with a small group of intimate friends, family members or partners.[15] These new relationships take several forms and all produce significant changes in the production of the self towards heightened individuality. In any case, a disposition to individualism, now accentuated by social media, already existed in southeast Turkey,[16] where the primacy of the family over the individual has always coexisted with more individualistic notions of the self.[17] In this patriarchal society, the initiatives of males and elders often

direct the lives of females and the young, and men often view their wives, sisters, junior siblings and children as extensions of themselves.[18] Social media has opened up new opportunities for women and young people to act as individuals autonomous from the wishes and desires of their older male relatives. However, these new opportunities for them to act autonomously, as separate from their families, have not been followed by new ideologies of modernity that accept these individual-based relations, friendship and romantic love as legitimate cultural forms.[19] Social media has enabled practices that are quite different from what continue to be the 'ideal' social relations and the 'ideal' self.

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated something that is central to the whole book. In accordance with the other books in this series, this chapter was formally supposed to be about the landscape of the social media itself, the different platforms, and the way they relate together as polymedia. By contrast, Chapters 4 and 5 were supposed to be more about the relationships themselves and the ways they changed in relation to the spread of social media. But in practice this division doesn't really work for a place such as Mardin. As the evidence of this chapter has made clear, all the main categories of social media usage, including those basic differences in platforms such as Facebook compared with WhatsApp, turn out to consist of contrasts that are fundamentally social. What is actually being researched here soon turns out not to be Facebook, but particular genres of content associated with particular parts of that platform, which may be identical to a section of another social media application. This is because what people care about is not keeping the platforms separate but keeping the different social groups and even different aspects of themselves separate, since when these come in sight of each other all sorts of problems arise.

3
Visual posting: Showing off and shifting boundaries between private and public

On Saturday afternoon, three 23-year-old Arab female friends had lunch together in the house of one of them in the modern Toki[1] building at the entrance of the new city. The housewife mother of one of them had cooked delicious traditional food from the region – *çiğ köfte* (raw meat balls served on lettuce leaves), *Mercimek Çorbası* (lentil soup) and *İşkembe dolması* (tripe stuffed with meat and rice) – and served this savoury, rich meal in the spacious empty floor in the middle of the lounge. The three women took innumerable pictures of the feast and themselves sitting together, and posted the best on Facebook. Just after finishing the meal, they went out into the garden right next to the building and started posing in front of the camera while I was given the task of taking pictures of them together. In order to make the afternoon more exciting, one of them suggested taking a photo as if they were in the shopping mall of Diyarbakır, the coolest and biggest mall in the whole of southeast Turkey, located one hour away from Mardin. The other two women were excited about this idea. They asked me to take a picture of them on the bench and not to include the details in the background. I took several photos and they chose the best one and shared it on Facebook under the caption 'trip to Diyarbakır mall'. I was surprised and asked: 'Why did you this? Do people really believe that you went to the shopping mall in Diyarbakır?' One of them said: 'I don't know, but we want others to be envious of us!' They didn't seem concerned about people's suspicions, but they were excitedly eager to display to friends and relatives that they were spending a happy, cool and enviable afternoon. Fame and popularity were worth lying for. Photographs, after all, fit this purpose as images that convey a sense of reality and disarm other people's suspicions of their veracity.[2]

Showing off is recognised by Mardinites themselves as one of their cultural traits. A friend described their eagerness for displaying new commodities in this way:

> Mardin is a different city. In Mardin people love new things, new cars, and new clothes. Mardinites are different, they love fashion and luxurious life. Earning money and being able to consume is the most important thing here. It's not important the work you do, but the clothes, the phones, and the cars you have. If you have a small phone, you are nobody … I know a landowner who decided to sell his land to buy an Audi A4. Another man was the owner of six flats, he sold three of them to buy a BMW5 25. Having a car is more important than having a house. The car gives you social status, just like fancy smartphones. This is Mardin.

Behaving ostentatiously with the intention of impressing others is a common and shared habit in Mardin, and social media has multiplied the opportunities for doing so. The following pages investigate how young adults construct and present online selves and their personal relationships, taking advantage of the new visibility offered by social media. The desire to achieve fame, status and popularity has led them to break traditional boundaries between private and public that have always been strictly controlled and monitored. They want to achieve admiration and respectability, and the public display of their personal life is the only way to do it. However, in this new 'public' space, individuals still have to present their 'self' according to socially acceptable standards that are even more traditional and conservative than those existing in the offline world. On social media, more than offline, people are always being checked up on by their family members, relatives and friends, and for this reason they conform even more strictly to traditional and conservative social norms.

Public Facebook and wedding ceremonies

As seen in the previous chapter, in Mardin, social media have produced different kinds of spaces whose discourses, practices and performances change according to the number and the types of people that inhabit them. This chapter presents the visual material of what I call the 'public' Facebook wall, which is the place that is visible to the general category of Facebook friends. The analysis is not extended to Instagram or Twitter, as

the purpose was to examine and compare images posted by the majority of the people living in Mardin. All the material is taken from the Facebook pages of those who have friended and added me to the general public of friends during the course of my research, after having met me face to face. Images shared in private Facebook groups and in most of the fake and anonymous profiles will not be considered here, nor will the images included in more private Facebook profiles addressed to specific groups of people, because the same owner had more than one account.[3] Clearly, the 'public' Facebook is a place where people post what they know is going to be constantly under the gaze of others, and is where they perform a self that is imagined as continuously monitored, controlled and judged. In other words, this is a place under surveillance. The best analogy for this 'public' Facebook in prior offline settings is probably the wedding ceremony. Weddings are the main, and until recently the only, public social events where women and men meet, and where different extended families and networks of friends gather together. At weddings, just as on 'public' Facebook, people present their best public 'self' in front of the gaze of others. Weddings were one of the very few occasions when women showed themselves in public to be chosen as brides by men or men's mothers, aunts or older sisters; similarly, on Facebook, women are seen and gazed upon by others, not least men and men's female relatives who are looking for brides. In both sites, women and men precisely compose their public appearance, and the presentation of the self is very competitive: men and women aim at impressing others while defending their honour and reputation. And in both sites, public presentations of the self are likely to be highly discussed and to create gossip and comments. Interestingly, the reproduction of the wedding environment in these online spaces has been happening just when weddings are losing their social role in the offline world, due to the spread of urban social spaces such as cafes and restaurants, which are ordinarily occupied by a variety of women and men who are not necessarily relatives or friends. Weddings are now only one among many public or semi-public events with gender-mix sociality. Urbanisation produces more anonymous public spaces, while Facebook re-creates traditional social contexts where people attempt to present selves that fit in with the expectations of the extended family and family friends.

Users of the public Facebook imagine that they are also tracked and scrutinised by the State. Mardinites feel themselves to be under political surveillance, and they are. This is a consequence of the real internet censorship existing in Turkey,[4] but it's also deeply implicated in the history of the Turkish State, long before the arrival of social media and digital

technologies. The region has experienced decades of State violence and inter-ethnic conflict and, as a result, people's traumatic experiences of life have shaped a feeling of fear and suspicion towards the 'other', whether this other is the State or a particular social group and whether the threat is real or not. Concerns about the surveillance of the State and surveillance of one's own friends and relatives blend into and reinforce each other. This produces conformity and normativity on the one hand, and competition for social prestige and success on the other.[5] For example, young people with more than one Facebook profile tend to share more pictures in the 'public' one, precisely to achieve social recognition and celebrity. But these photos are normative, conventional and not particularly daring: in a lot of self-portraits they aim to portray themselves looking handsome, beautiful, happy, well dressed, and sometimes surrounded by many good friends. The following pages will examine how people present idealised versions of themselves through visual images that fit in with accepted norms of conduct and good standards of wealth, education and social success, and how these differ from self-presentations in public spaces of the offline domain.

New boundaries between private and public

On Facebook, people post hundreds of photos of themselves that were previously kept strictly outside of the public gaze, and some of these images portray moments from their intimate, personal and domestic lives. This practice had been frequently criticised and contested by many Mardinites, and some of them refuse to open a social media account for exactly this reason. Guarding privacy and protecting intimate spaces from the gaze of outsiders is indeed a very important component of Muslim cultures. Boundaries between 'public' and 'private' are very normative and reflect local understanding of sexuality and relations between the genders. Although Facebook users adopt different strategies to limit and contain the display of their personal and private life, the overall outcome has been the entry of the private into the new online public space. Ordinary family events such as lunch and dinner have become much more important as visible events, as have images of engaged and married couples holding hands or hugging each other and photos portraying the bodies and faces of women. These photos have become quite common, especially among secular and modern Arabs and Kurds, but are considered inappropriate by more conservative and religious people. Photos of couples mainly aim at showing off the happiness and success of their engagement or marriage.
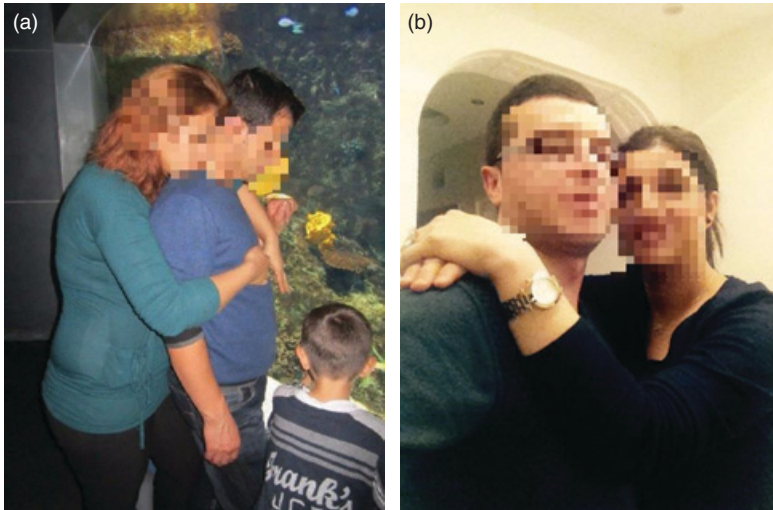
Fig. 3.1   Married couples

Fig. 3.2   Engaged couple

Portraits of family gatherings inside domestic spaces have also been displayed from time to time. These images reproduce the formality of posed photography, but informality, spontaneity and casualness also appear, though more rarely. Pictures of children portrayed in ordinary moments of domestic life are also quite common.

Fig. 3.3 Formal family photo (a), informal family photos (b, c)

Fig. 3.4 Children

These images include 'semi-private' spaces of the house, such as sitting rooms, where families usually receive guests, or kitchens, but they don't reveal completely private spaces such as bedrooms or toilets. On Facebook, people make more 'public' those 'semi-private' spaces

designated for receiving house guests, but they never reveal the domestic and intimate core of the home.

Another example of a 'semi-public' space that has become more 'public' is the high-school or university classroom. Students often post pictures with their classmates to proudly show that they attend university.

Fig. 3.5   Students

Not only have 'semi-private' or 'semi-public' spaces become more public, but women have increased their presence in 'public', something that has broken traditional boundaries and has given rise to issues of female reputation and respectability. The background to this is an offline world where women have always had a narrow presence in public space, and where the range of acceptable public exhibitions of the self was extremely narrow. The next section examines what strategies have been developed by women and men to preserve their privacy while publicly sharing personal images and information to achieve fame and popularity.

Preserving reputation / pursuing popularity
More individual portraits, fewer relationships

People tend to share many pictures portraying the individual alone. These images are significantly more common than pictures portraying a person with friends or relatives. People tend not to display their personal relationships as they are often worried about showing images of other people without their consent. When the photo does depict the person in company, they tend not to tag them. The number of photographic images posted by

any one person, indeed, is significantly higher than those posted and tagged by their Facebook friends. Being tagged in someone else's picture is not desirable, and 48 per cent of the respondents to Q1 declared that they had untagged themselves in some photos at least once in the last month. While the practice of tagging someone on a Facebook picture can be seen as a gift or a courtesy between two or more people since it expresses attachment and sentiments of friendship and intimacy, people may not feel that this has to be expressed explicitly in the public space of the Facebook wall.

Young men and women enjoy posting a lot of individual portraits, and they like to change their profile pictures many times every month; such images often elicit more than 50 'likes' from friends. Groups of young male and female friends more often share their pictures privately on Facebook or WhatsApp, but this is less common on the public Facebook.

As a result, postings are dominated by the most appealing or impressive self-portraits clearly aimed to attract the most 'likes'. This is done very differently in the case of men and women. The dominant ideal of masculinity reflects values of male independence and power, along with values of economic and professional success. Many pictures portray men standing next to a car or a motorbike, or participating in hobbies, sports or holiday trips.
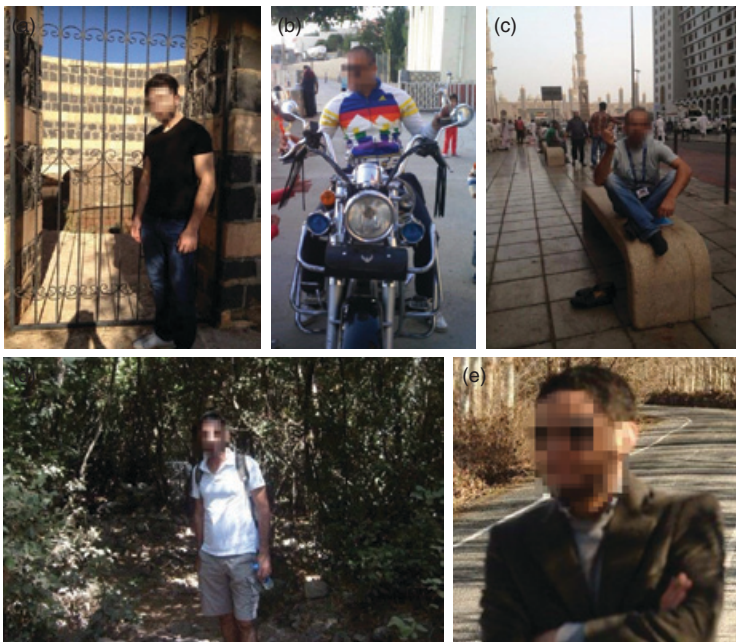
Fig. 3.6   Male individual portraits

The images chosen as profile pictures often portray young men dressed in sober, elegant or professional clothes even when they do not normally adopt this dress code in their daily lives – as in the case of university students, men with ordinary work such as civil servants in state offices, teachers or small private business owners. This emphasis on future career achievement and economic success means there is a sharp discrepancy between the self as portrayed in the online and how it is displayed in the offline world.
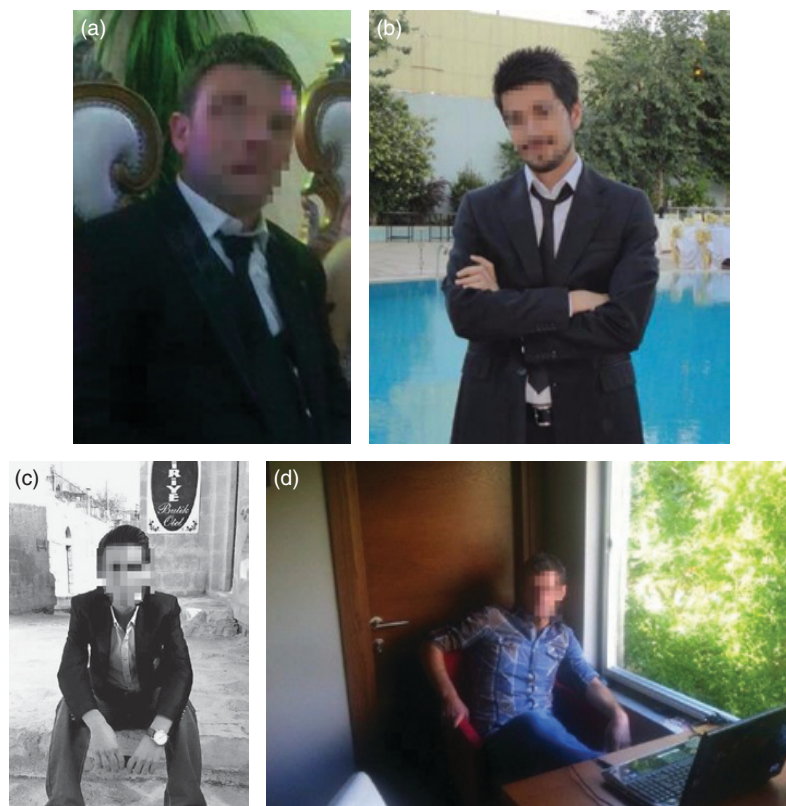
Fig. 3.7a–d   Male profile pictures

Models of femininity are more variable and contradictory and change dramatically according to the woman's age and social background. However, it is possible to identify two main ideals. Some women define their public selves through a publicly stated affirmation of modesty and piety. In this case, photos portraying their face and body are

completely or partially absent from the public-facing Facebook, and sometimes this anonymity in public is contrasted with the shared images of themselves with their chosen Facebook friends. Images of babies expressing tenderness and sweetness, or pictures of landscapes are often used as profile pictures.

Figs. 3.7e–h   Female anonymous profile pictures

Anonymous profile pictures are more common among young women and teenagers from rural backgrounds of high-school age, who have to play with different kinds of images not to be found by older male relatives. In this case, they are not deliberately choosing anonymity, but this is rather the only option they have if they want to use Facebook in the social surroundings they live in. The case is different for religious Arab urban women who decide to post religious images as profile pictures, in order to express modesty and piety. In this case, they are intentionally deciding to publicly perform their adherence to specific forms of modern Turkish Islam, as it is advocated by the AK party or Muslim brotherhood communities.

Figs. 3.7i–j   Female anonymous profile pictures

The second kind of ideal woman is presented in those photos of young women from urban backgrounds, who pay more attention to dress and appearance, and frequently post self-portraits that emphasise aesthetic style, beauty, attractiveness and their ability to choose and wear interesting clothes. This is especially the case of university students or women working outside the house. They may be secular but this category may also include other women who are more religious and covered. Women from Mardin, especially Arabs, are interested in clothes, make-up and appearance, and Facebook has become the place where they display modern aesthetic qualities and fashionable beauty and appearance. Again, this may mark a clear discrepancy between these portraits and their offline appearance, where in daily life they wear more sober and ordinary clothes. But even those images, which are carefully selected with regard to dress and flashy make-up, still always follow norms of respectability and decorum, and they never attempt to pose with original, strange or weird expressions or display alternative aesthetics.

Figs. 3.7k–n   Female profile pictures

Over the 15 months of my ethnographic research, there was only one report of a woman from Mardin who was not behaving properly on Facebook. She was described as 'crazy' (*deli*) by other female young Mardinites because she was continually posting pictures showing grimaces, smirks and messy hair intentionally to create sensation and gossip. However, this was an isolated case.

Alternatively, women often present themselves together with important family members, which might include nephews, nieces or sisters in the case of unmarried women, or their husband and children in the case of married women.
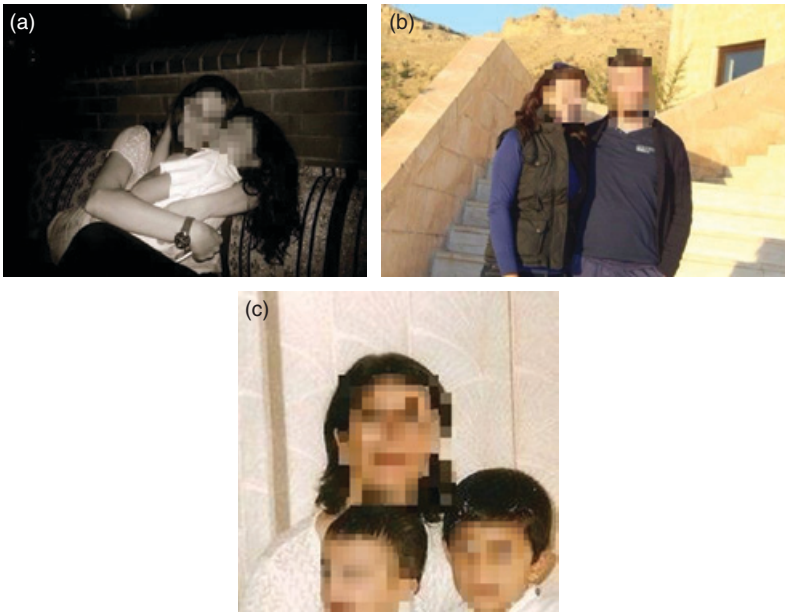
Fig. 3.8a–c   Female portraits with family members

This is a reproduction of the ideal of the woman devoted to her family members, but it is also a reaction to the fear of having the image stolen and used for inappropriate or malicious jokes by stalkers. The fear of image misappropriation constitutes a deep-rooted social anxiety. At one phase during my field work, the town seemed full of hacking applications that allowed spiteful people to enter Facebook pages and make unpleasant jokes dishonouring the pages' owners: several people had their Facebook profiles stolen and filled with shameful imagery and text. The anxiety related to social media photography was also fuelled by the

then-Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan, who, since the Gezi Park protests in June 2013, has demonised social media, actively describing it as a threat to Turkish family values. The main legal case that constituted the basis for the Twitter ban in March 2014 concerned a person who opened a social media account under the name of a housewife to distribute pornographic material. For this reason, some young women did not use pictures of themselves alone as profile pictures visible to the general public.

Family, gender segregation and formality in group photography

Although the dominance of individual portraits stands out as the characteristic of public Facebook photography, group portraits are also present and they share some distinctive qualities. First, they portray relationships that have social legitimacy, such as those between family members, male friends and, more rarely, female friends. Second, all the images have similar aesthetic qualities: subjects stand erect and motionless in front of the camera and gaze straight into the lens. The style is usually very homogeneous: people sit around a table or on the floor before a spread of delicious food, or during a holiday scene they invariably stand stiffly lined up next to one other in front of the camera. Group portraits on Facebook are very formal and posed expressly for that photograph.

(a)

Fig. 3.9a   Group portraits

Fig. 3.9b–c   Group portraits

Most of these images depict people in public places, such as restaurants, parks or tourist destinations. Photos portraying members of the same family within domestic spaces are less common, but they do exist, as noted above.

Group portraits disclose no clues about the relationships that exist between the pictures' subjects, and expressions of sentiment are usually absent. This photographic material validates an individual as part of a socially accepted set of relationships, such as between family members or same-sex friends, who are involved in socially accepted and worthy activities, mostly eating special meals and going on holidays. Pictures showing whole extended families are quite rare, with the exception of wedding pictures. Since these unfailingly depict an

ideal image of the collective self, this may discourage people from publicly sharing any image of the extended family which falls short of this ideal.

Facebook photography partially reproduces the formality of analogue framed photography. Yet the degree of change is evident when we compare these Facebook portraits with the many family photographs taken and printed before the arrival and the diffusion of digital photography and stored in drawers or ordinary photo albums. Analogue photos which were shown exclusively to close friends and relatives within the protected place of the house were characterised by more informality and casualness, while the few formal pictures deemed suitable for display on walls and shelves of the house were of wedding ceremonies and ancestors. However, digital photos of ordinary moments of daily life that are taken to be publicly shown to others on social media are much more formal. Social media photography has expanded formality to those moments of the ordinary daily life that were previously immortalised through informality. In effect, this is a reverse of the historical trend towards informality. Moreover, the advent of social media photography has had the effect of 'democratising' the opportunity for image creation. This has resulted in a major transformation: pre-digital photography in most honour-based societies created a formal and solemn image of the family and made it eternal,[6] whereas social media photography does the same for the individual and his/her predetermined role in society. Young women and young men who were traditionally excluded from the chance of expressing themselves now have the opportunity to construct and perform their personhood in public. They use Facebook to publicly display themselves as individuals, as in the offline world the opportunities to do so are narrower.

Food, objects and holiday trips

Photos with food are very common because this is a perfect visual sign to express a rich sociality without having to show pictures of people. People prefer to post a picture of the meal, sweets or coffee. Especially when special breakfasts, lunches or dinners are organised in private houses, pictures of the guests tend not to be displayed. When friends or relatives meet to have special meals, young members of the family often take a picture of the food as soon as this is ready and before it is eaten. Exhibiting abundance, opulence or refinement, the ability to cook good food and a happy social life is the main aim.

Fig. 3.10a–d Food

There seemed to be a consensus that, similar to other genres, the exhibition of special feasts has the goal of impressing others and getting their admiration and envy. If taking pictures of particular feasts is a must, ordinary meals are rarely displayed on the public Facebook.

Another common genre of visual posting includes those objects that express the aspired-to modernity and wealth; these may be cars for men or different accessories bought in large towns in western Turkey or abroad for women. Showing off material possession is a common practice both offline and online in a town that stands out as the richest city in the poorer province and region.

Fig. 3.11 Objects

Fig. 3.12 Cars

For the same reasons, people post many pictures portraying holiday trips. Out of 1,000 posts of 200 profiles I examined, 140 are photos of holiday trips. These are ways to show off to friends and relatives that the person is enjoying life and can afford to do so. Pictures of trips and journeys are forms of individual self-expression and self-promotion, as family members are rarely portrayed. The majority of photos portraying trips are uploaded by the same person or, more rarely, by someone else who added the tag. Similarly, geolocation systems are commonly used to display where someone had dinner or a holiday. These practices are also debated and criticised: 'People always want to show off. Why do they have to write on their wall that they had dinner in this or that restaurant? Or that they went to Istanbul to have fun … I am not interested, I don't like it at all.' When I asked my respondents why their friends had posted that particular kind of picture, the first answer they gave me was always the same: 'They want to show off how beautiful, rich and happy they are!' Once again, the majority of images are of individuals alone, for reasons already noted. This is particularly true in the case of unmarried women, who are more easily victims of gossip and rumours, whereas married people with children more often show pictures of them together on holiday.
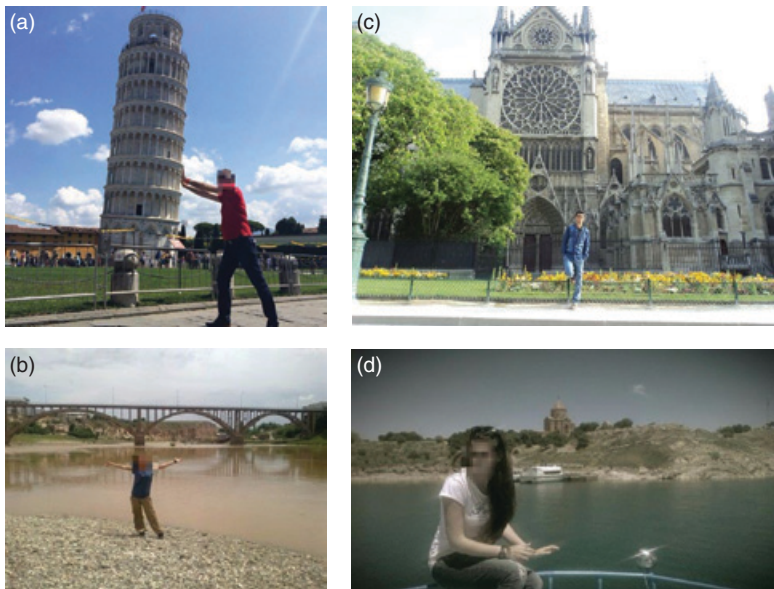
Fig. 3.13 Holidays

The public Facebook is a conservative place

Abundance of individual portraits, scarcity of friendship relationships (especially between women), lack of mixed-gender groups of friends, monitored and controlled displays of women's bodies, formality of postures, great quantities of food, memorialising the family and the presence of objects representing traditional feminine and masculine models are all elements that contribute to the creation of a public space where people appear to conform to traditional norms and values. This becomes even more evident when comparing the photographic materials of different social groups, which turn out to be quite similar, despite the observable differences between them in the offline world. As a result of migration from both villages and larger metropolitan areas, Mardin is inhabited by a mixture of rural and urban people. For those women and men with urban and secular lifestyles, the discrepancy between their offline lives and their public images online is quite significant. In semi-public and more anonymous spaces such as cafes and restaurants they behave and maintain social relations that are rarely portrayed on the public-facing social media that is constantly under the gaze of relatives and family friends.

Drinking alcohol and hanging out with a mixed-gender group of friends are common practices in the offline world that are very rarely portrayed in the visual Facebook material of either men or women. Young adults rarely post pictures of themselves smoking cigarettes or having fun with their peers; women rarely upload pictures portraying themselves sitting in cafes, even when they are chaperoned by family members, just in case observers think they are sitting with men who are not family members. Men attending the disco nights sometimes organised by one restaurant do not post pictures of themselves dancing with scantily dressed women; among secular middle-class people, premarital relationships are occasionally possible and they are sometimes conducted freely in the public space of the town, but images of such partnerships are never shown on the public walls of social media. Gender segregation is even stricter in the images posted online than in behaviour offline. On Facebook, people create representations of the self and construct specific forms of personhood that fit with the expectations of relatives and family friends. In this sense, we can again see how Facebook recalls the wedding ceremony. Young adults don't drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, entertain with lovers and mixed-gender groups of friends at weddings or on Facebook; but they do these things in 'semi-private' or 'semi-public' offline spaces. As a result, the photographic content posted by people

from rural and urban backgrounds is quite similar, since the ultra-conformity of online obliterates the differences in behaviour offline. However, unlike at wedding ceremonies, where participants can perform a limited number of public actions (e.g. sitting, eating and dancing), the public visual material on Facebook represents a larger variety of activities, social relations and objects. Indeed, personal life, domestic spaces and women's bodies have entered the online public space, despite resistance and strategies to protect privacy and intimacy. Display of individual portraits, married couples and families, images of meals and food, objects and some interiors of the house constitute a public display of the personal daily life that does not have any precedent offline.

Memes: education, morality and religion

Whereas the range of photographic images posted on Facebook is quite limited due to the social constraints ruling the public appearance of individuals and groups, people post many memes, video clips and news items. Photographic images on the public Facebook mainly have the goal of presenting affluent and moral selves, while memes are mostly oriented to publicly performing an educated, literate, civilised person. Being knowledgeable and committed to the main principles of Muslim morality is a very important value in Mardin: for example '*Cahil*' (uneducated) or '*şerefsiz*' (dishonourable) are among the most common derogative terms used to criticise those who don't confirm to these ideals.

The public display of memes citing famous writers, poets and philosophers constitutes the best way to perform a commitment to values of high virtue, scholarship and wisdom, and to show engagement in intellectual activities. Sharing authorised discourses of writers, political parties, Greek philosophers or Iranian poets gives the opportunity to perform an erudite self in a highly normative way, not running the risk of being criticised by others. There was no evidence that this expression of enlightenment and knowledge contributes to the shaping of individuals who think autonomously or contrary to established authorities, as claimed by some scholars of digital media in the Muslim Middle East.[7]

We can differentiate different kinds of memes posted on the public Facebook. The first group includes poems and writings by ancient Muslim poets or the contemporary mystic guru Osho. They address topics of ethics, morality and philosophy.

Fig. 3.14a Philosophical meme. Translation: 'He who knows what he is won't be affected by what is said of him by those who don't know themselves.' *Ibni Sina* (a Persian Islamic philosopher who lived between the tenth and eleventh centuries)


Fig. 3.14b Philosophical meme. Translation: 'Don't do politics with whom you love. Politics damages friendships. Politicians go their own way; you will be left without friends.' *Aristotle*

Fig. 3.14c   Translation: 'Only tenderness can heal because all the illnesses inside human beings originate from the lack of love.' *Osho*

A second category includes religious memes: some memes celebrate religious festivals such as Bayram and Friday prayer day. Alternatively, people share verses from the Koran or prayers. Writing '*Hayırlı cumalar*' (Happy Friday) on Facebook, SMS and WhatsApp was also a common practice among Mardinites.
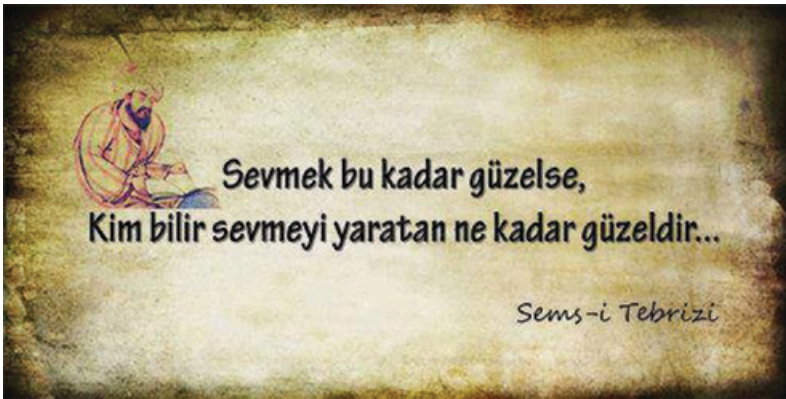
Fig. 3.15a   Translation: 'If love is so beautiful, who knows how beautiful the creator (of this love) is…' *Sems-I Tebrizi* (a Persian Muslim poet and philosopher, an important figure of Sufism who lived between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries)

Fig. 3.15b Translation: 'Thanks, God. We are the servants of every word with a scent of rose in it. Happy night and happy Friday.' *Yorgun 34*

Fig. 3.15c Translation: Happy Bayram/May your festival of sacrifice be holy,/ holy God permit,/we shall see many more festivals. Happy Bayram.'

Fig. 3.15d Translation: 'Mum is fasting, so I have to deal with all the housework ☺'

Fig. 3.15e Translation: 'And after I said; glory to God for having created me as a Muslim.'

Fig. 3.15f Verses from the Koran. Translation: 'Do not exult. Indeed Allah does not like the exultant. But seek through that which Allah has given you, the home of the Hereafter; and (yet), do not forget your share of the world. And do good as Allah had done good to you. And desire not corruption in the land. Indeed, Allah does not like corrupters.' (Translation taken from: http://quran.com/28/76-77)

A third kind of meme expresses commitment to morality and general values of loyalty towards family members, husbands or wives and correct behaviours with others.

Fig. 3.16a Translation: 'Elder sister!/Elder sister means life./ Sometimes you can say sister in the breath you take,/sometimes when you are sad you can find her there…/when you're out of breath she gives you breath,/when you're out of courage, she gives you courage…/elder sister is your soul/is by you,/is in your blood..!'

NE YAPARSAN YAP
NE YAŞARSAN YAŞA
AMA
GÜLEBİLMEK İÇİN
BİRİNİ AĞLATMA
VE CIKARLARIN İÇİN
HİÇ KİMSEYİ
SATMA

Fig. 3.16b   Translation: 'Do what you want to do/Live how you want to live. But to laugh don't make anybody cry./ And don't sell anyone to take advantage of them.'

Fig. 3.16c   Translation: 'I don't share my thoughts so as to convince anyone that I am right./I share my thoughts so that people who think alike know they are not alone.'

A fourth category includes memes about love, romance and relations between women and men.

Fig. 3.17a Translation: 'To love is so wonderful, when you are the one who is loved.'

Fig. 3.17b Translation: 'Women don't like good men.' *Nejat İşler* (a Turkish cinema and theatre actor)

Fig. 3.17c Translation: 'Don't be among those who live with those they don't love and who die with those they cannot forget.'
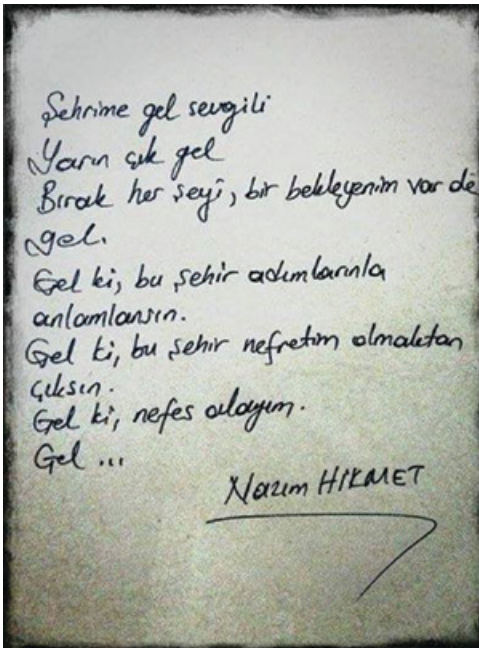
Fig. 3.17d Translation: 'Come to my city my love/Come tomorrow/ Leave everything. Say: "there is someone waiting on me" and come/ Come, so that your steps will give meaning to this city./Come, so that this city will stop being my hate/Come, so that I can breathe/Come…' *Nazim Hikmet* (a Turkish poet and writer and Communist activist)
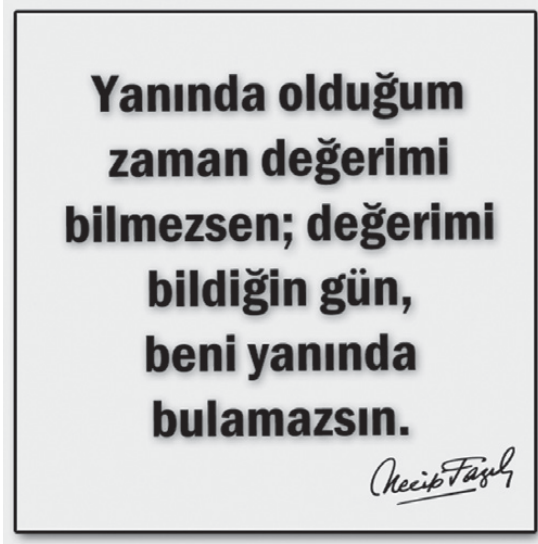
Fig. 3.17e Translation: 'If you don't know my worth when I am by you; then the day you will know my worth, you won't find me by you.' *Necip Fasil* (Turkish poet and novelist)

A fifth common kind of meme includes cartoons.

Fig. 3.18 Cartoon meme. Translation: 'I said to the banker: I refer you to God, He asked me for a referral fee! I had to run away, Humanity has died for sure.'

Finally, there are memes about politics whose content is split between supporters of the government and supporters of the Kurdish movement. These memes reflected the political events happened over the 15 months of my field work: the Gezi Park protests, the local election in March 2014, the Israeli war against Gaza, autonomy of *Rojava* (Siryan Kurdistan), the rise of Islamic State (ISIS) and consequent crisis in Iraq and Syria. People also posted quite a lot of political posters and memes on the occasion of ordinary anniversaries, such as the foundation of the Republic or the Kurdish new year's eve. As result of surveillance, images supporting the State, the government and the Turkish nationalist project were definitely more frequent than images supporting the Kurdish cause. But this point will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 6.

Fig. 3.19   Political memes

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the visual material posted on the public-facing Facebook walls, and argued that people in Mardin manage to find ways to retain a highly conservative online appearance that is not so much a reflection of offline behaviour but an exaggerated version of it, while at the same time finding opportunities to display and show off their claims to wealth and status. It was suggested that the best way to understand this simultaneity is by analogy with the traditional wedding, which is also a kind of hyper-visible space where people look very different from their ordinary appearance and where they are not only more careful about how they appear in public, but also see it as an opportunity to display their aspirations and claims to status.

The premise for both of these developments is that the characterisation of online as a space of surveillance provides opportunities as well as constraints.[8] People carefully construct and display their desired qualities because they know that this self-presentation will be observed and monitored by others. This was particularly evident in the case of those women who spent hours looking at images on the Facebook profiles of cousins, aunts and uncles living far away to discover more about their lives. People in Mardin have always placed great importance on public events and public appearances, and for this reason they have always dedicated a lot of effort to crafting a public image of individual and collective self at ceremonies or in the ordinary moments of their daily lives.

'The online public space' is not a mere representation of something already existing in the offline world; it rather constitutes a new form of current visual presence, a kind of additional reality to the offline world. As noted in this chapter, the hyper-conservatism of public appearance online is not a reflection of the offline world. In fact, it is so extreme in its avoidance of anything that might lead to a loss of reputation that it has eliminated the primary social differences that exist in this society, for example between people from rural and urban backgrounds. The point of the analogy with the wedding is also to demonstrate that general offline public sociality in Mardin was used to produce visual realities well before the arrival of social media. Here it matters less what people really do, but more what people are seen to be doing. In this context, social media has multiplied the opportunities for producing new realities, but at the same time it has intensified people's vulnerability – something that has in turn given rise to many concerns over morality, including the morality of using these new online spaces.

So although, in common with other areas of the world, young adults show images from their daily life on social media that never had such public visibility before, they do so in a very different way from many 'Western' societies. The results of my research reveal stark differences from the results of studies based in Europe and North America, where social media users publicly display connections, intimate social relations and friendships.[9] In Mardin, this kind of public display shows no sign of developing as an important component of social media for two reasons: people reproduce online the traditional boundaries that have always delimited the domestic private and intimate sphere offline, and they also fear that this newly produced visibility may reveal what has to be kept hidden.

4
Relationships: Kinship, family and friends

Although the policies put in place by the Turkish State since the foundation of the Republic in 1923 were aimed at modernising Turkish culture and society and assimilating ethnic minorities, Kurdish and Arab kinship systems continue to be quite different from those of the Turks. The Turkish nation-building project was based on the idea of a civilising mission that included a transformation of the masses from southeastern and eastern Anatolia; discussion of the kinship organisation of the population living in the southeast has been part of a wider 'Orientalist' representation sustained by the Turkish nationalist elite, who stigmatised ethnic minorities as backward, tribal and primitive.[1] The kinship systems of the population inhabiting the Middle East were a central theme of investigation within anthropology during the 1950s and '60s,[2] while more recent studies have investigated the transformation of Kurdish kinship under the assimilation policies of the Turkish government.[3] In order to comprehend the impact of social media on family relationships in Mardin, it is necessary to have some understanding of how kinship networks are organised. Moreover, shedding light on the connections enabled by social media provides valuable insights into what kinship is and what it means for many young people living in Mardin at the time of my research.

Generally speaking, we can say that traditionally Turks were organised into villages:[4] 'people belong to their village in a way they belong to no other social groups. On any definition of community, the village is a community – a social group with many functions, not all of them explicit, and to which people are committed by birth or marriage, and bound by many ties',[5] whereas Arabs and Kurds were organised into different types

Fig. 4.1 An Arab man with his grandchild holding the genealogical tree of the family. As with many other Arab families in Mardin, they claim to have noble origins and to be direct descendants of the Prophet Mohammad

of lineage (groups of people who see themselves as relatives because of their descent from a common ancestor). These preferred endogamy (people should marry within their group), especially marriages between patrilineal cousins (descended from the same male ancestor). They also followed the principle of segmentary alliances and oppositions.[6] Despite the transformations of recent decades, lineages continue to be important elements in the society of Kurds and Arabs living in Mardin, with significant differences between the two. For the urban Arab population of Mardin, lineages (*sülale*) include descendants from a particular ancestor. The best lineages are seen as old and noble (*asil*) in origin. People have considerable regard for these as well as for the claim to direct descent from the Prophet Mohammad. Arab families within the same lineage have always preserved a certain level of autonomy, not recognising the authority of any leader, while among the Kurds lineages are usually incorporated into tribes that have a hierarchical structure. Their members are usually loyal to a chief, and they may include extended families whose genealogical relation to the core group is sometimes dubious.[7]

In the old city, members of the same Arab lineage tended to live in the same neighbourhood and to use the Arabic expression *el-beit* (the house) to name both the neighbourhood and their extended family. In the new city, by contrast, households are inhabited by nuclear families who no longer share the same quarter, street or building with their relatives, and have thus become increasingly autonomous from each other. The situation is different in the case of the Arab-speaking groups called *Mahalmi* who migrated into Mardin from the nearby villages and towns in the 1950s and claim to be organised into tribes (*aşiret*). Most of these still live in the old city.

With the exception of poor peasants, the Kurds have traditionally been organised into tribes, which vary significantly in form, organisation and size from a few thousand to more than a hundred thousand. Many of these tribes continue to maintain their importance despite the influence of external factors such as the assimilation policies of the Turkish State, the war between the PKK and the Turkish army, forced migration, urbanisation and the neoliberal economy. Instead, Martin van Bruinessen argues that in the 1980s and '90s Kurdish tribes in southeast Turkey retained their authority, as a consequence of the establishment of village militia by the State, the electoral process and smuggling across borders.[8] In Mardin at the time of my research, the word *aşiret* continued to be used by most of the Kurdish population to define their kinship organisation, but Kurds agreed that tribes have progressively lost their importance as a source of allegiance, authority and support. Evidence from my research, however, shows that tribal affiliations and loyalties to the chieftain continue to be a reality among many Kurds living in Mardin, though with significant differences between them. For example, Kurds who migrated to the city centre decades ago are more assimilated into the urban (Arab) lifestyle and have loosened their contacts with the members of their lineage/tribe who still live in villages or nearby towns. Also occupation, social class, level of education and provenance of the family played an important role in strengthening or weakening kinship ties. Having said that, compared to Arabs, Kurds continue to be in touch with a higher number of distant relatives such as first, second or third cousins.

Certainly, everybody in Mardin, whether they are Kurds, Arabs or Syriacs, share strong bonds to members of their extended family. This powerful connection with family members is also expressed in the spoken language that classifies the social world as divided between kin (*akraba*) and non-kin/strangers (*yabancı*). This chapter describes the use of social media to maintain connections with members of the extended family,

lineage and tribe, in the face of geographic mobility, migration, forced migration and urbanisation that have affected, to different degrees, all the inhabitants of the town. The first part of the chapter examines how social media is used to connect with members of the same lineage and tribe, while the second part considers relationships between members of the same nuclear family and friends.

Social media, lineages and tribes[9]

The first finding of this research is that social media has facilitated the maintenance and the strengthening of 'weak' connections with up to 400 relatives, including siblings, uncles, aunts, great-uncles and great-aunts, nephews, nieces, first, second and also third cousins. If we consider that in many Kurdish families the average number of siblings is between five and 12, one person's first cousins – children of uncles and aunts – could easily reach 100. With sons and daughters, and grandsons and grand-daughters of brothers and the sisters of grandfathers and grandmothers, one person's relatives connected on Facebook might number a few hundred. The in-depth interviews with Kurdish and Arab teenagers and young adults living in Mardin, and more general ethnographic observations, confirm that social media plays a major role in maintaining contacts between those members of the extended family, lineage and tribe who live far away from each other.

People generally agreed that tribal and lineage affiliations have weakened, while still preserving an important role in voting behaviour and political alliances. Mardinites' narratives portrayed a happy past characterised by strong kin solidarity, as opposed to a present marked by individualism, selfishness and an emphasis instead on labour in search of money. Extension of formal education among youth and women was seen as responsible for the decline in tribal authority, because it has granted increased autonomy to young people, and especially women, who increasingly see themselves as critical individuals who less easily accept the power of traditional authorities and rules. For example, I heard of several cases of young adults who disobeyed the wishes of their older male relatives in terms of voting behaviour, resulting in unexpected electoral results. The move from rural areas and the old city to the new city has also contributed to the weakening of kinship solidarity, as well as migration to other cities in Turkey.

In this context, social media has been adopted to keep alive and repair relationships with members of the extended family dispersed

around the region and the country, or in different neighbourhoods of the same town. These networks of relatives may be very different in size, but the strongest and most frequent connections are between youth and middle-aged people of the same sex. Among young adults in their 20s and 30s it was common to use social media to keep in touch with distant relatives: not only cousins, nieces, nephews, young uncles and aunts, but also second and third cousins[10] and their parents and children. Gender and generational differences were evident: young women tended to 'friend' fewer relatives, as they often saw them as a source of control and a threat to their freedom, while men tended to do this more; teenagers and the very young tended to have more friends from school and neighbourhood and fewer relatives, compared to older people. Finally social media reflected the different kinship organisation of Arabs and Kurds; Kurds, but also rural Arabs and *Mahalmi*, were keener to friend more relatives than the Arabs of the city. This was especially true of those Kurds who had moved to the new city more recently and were less assimilated into the modern urban lifestyle. Urban Arabs, indeed, more often had online social networks that consisted more of friends with fewer relatives. However, despite these differences, most Mardinites used social media as an attempt to bring their kinship network, spread around the country and the region, back into the same online place.

Abdurrahman is a 19-year-old Kurdish student attending a *dershane* in Mardin. He moved from Kızıltepe[11] to the new city to prepare for the university entrance examination as the quality of private schools is higher in Mardin. He shares a flat in a modern building of the new city with a school friend, while his father, mother and eight siblings still live in Kızıltepe. His father owns a medium-sized piece of land located in the plain between Kızıltepe and Mardin, and lived all his life in the village with his family, until a few years earlier when they all moved to Kızıltepe. Abdurrahman is a smart and ambitious student who is looking forward to gaining high marks in the state examination, which will allow him to start a good university course somewhere in Turkey. He doesn't really enjoy life in the new city, and spends most of his free time at home with his flatmate, in Kızıltepe with the family and family friends, or rather on social media. Abdurrahman is a regular user of Facebook, Tango, WhatsApp and WeChat. On Facebook he has 200 friends, of whom around 180 are male relatives and 20 male friends from school and the neighbourhood. Out of these 180 relatives, around 50 live in Kızıltepe, 40 in Mardin, 30 in Cyprus, 20 in Istanbul and 40 in his home village. His family is part of a small tribe made up of 1,500 members, all of whom he claims to personally know quite well. Considering that half of these 1,500 people are

women, and thus unlikely to be in touch with him on social media, and presumably more than half of the remaining male kin are too old or too young to use the internet, on Facebook he is connected with the majority of his tribe's young male members. The people he mostly interacts with on Facebook are the 10 male first cousins who attend university either in Cyprus or in Istanbul. These are also the closest people beyond his nuclear family, since they all grew up together in the village and used to meet each other every day. He uses all the social media at his disposal to communicate with them: Tango for video calls with each of them a few times a month, WeChat and WhatsApp for text messages many times a week, and Facebook for sharing memes and comments. Relationships between cousins of the same sex and age are very important and involve many traits that may recall relationships between close young friends in European and Mediterranean contexts: cousins are those with whom young people spend a lot of time to chat, have fun and share daily-life experiences beyond the domestic space of the nuclear family. Relationships with cousins last long, often for a lifetime, as may happen between good friends. Online communications and interactions with cousins of a similar age and the same sex are very frequent in the region, and largely constitute the online youth networks that in some 'Western contexts' are mainly made up of school or neighbourhood friends. Social media, indeed, play a focal role in maintaining contact between cousins when face-to-face contact is limited. Online cousins gather in the same way they gathered in the streets of the village where they grew up together. In short, Facebook marks an attempted return to traditional group sociality.

Abdurrahman does not actively communicate with the remaining Facebook 'friends'. He would only 'like' some status updates and posts, and more rarely write a few comments, but he is happy to have all of them there, so as to be updated about their lives. Facebook is an extremely important tool for having information about relatives with whom people otherwise wouldn't communicate, and it creates the feeling of having them closer. It also facilitates gossip and rumour that in the past were mainly based on word of mouth. As noted in Chapter 3, Facebook is largely used to observe, monitor and spy on other people's lives; in the case of relatives who live far from each other, this practice contributes to the creation of a sense of proximity, closeness and belonging to the same kin group. Furthermore, being aware of news and developments in the lives of a few hundred young male relatives expands the opportunities to know more about all the members of the tribe.

The use of social media by Katibe is pretty similar. She is a 22-year-old unmarried woman who was born in a village in the Province

of Mardin to an Arabic-speaking family, which then moved to Kızıltepe, and then moved again to Konya after she finished high school. Katibe didn't really like Konya, both because she was discriminated as a migrant originally from the southeast and also because she couldn't find a job there. For this reason, she decided to come back to Mardin to live with her paternal uncle's family, who resided in a flat in the new city. She looked for a job as a nurse in a nursery school, but ended up working as a dishwasher in a *lokanta*. But still she prefers living in Mardin to Konya.

Katibe has one Facebook account that she checks only a few times a week when linked to someone else's wireless connection, because she doesn't have a connection at home or an internet contract on her small smartphone. On Facebook she has around 110 friends, out of whom 90 are relatives and 20 school friends from Kızıltepe living in the Province of Mardin. The 90 relatives all live in different towns of Turkey as they all migrated from the home village at different times, mainly following the worsening of the conflict between the PKK and the Turkish army in the 1990s. While she communicates usually via phone and SMS with her mother, three sisters, four female first cousins and three aunts, she uses Facebook to keep in touch with more distant relatives. The 10 people with whom she communicates most often on Facebook are nine first cousins (eight female and one male), the four she was talking with on the phone and another four, and also one school friend from Kızıltepe. She communicates with them through private chat and only very rarely on the public wall. Katibe's family belongs to an Arabic-speaking tribe with around 2,000 members; they have been in touch only sporadically over the last 20 years, mainly between old family members. Katibe, like the other relatives of the same generation, is not ordinarily connected with them face to face or on the phone, except when she visits the village every few years. However, on Facebook she is following the lives of 90 of her first and second cousins, nieces, nephews, young uncles and aunts by looking at their profile updates and public displays of pictures and personal information.

Even more than Abdurrahman, Katibe is using Facebook to observe the lives of her relatives. She has weekly interactions only with a small proportion of them, but, thanks to Facebook, she is able to remain updated about the lives of many more. In Mardin, Facebook is used to peek at other people's lives, especially by women. Female friends will spend hours examining and commenting upon the lives of their first or second cousins, uncles, aunts or nephews living somewhere else in Turkey or in the world: 'Look! He got engaged to that beautiful woman.' Or: 'He has three kids, the youngest is so cute' or 'Look at her husband! He is so rich.

Look at his car, it's so expensive!' People readily admitted that gossiping about distant family members was one of the reasons for being on social media. As soon as a person 'friends' someone new on Facebook, they spend a good deal of time examining his/her wall and pictures, and this is not something to hide or to be shy about. It is a socially accepted practice. People carefully study the minutiae of relatives' Facebook walls, and at the same time construct their Facebook pages to affect the content of other people's gossiping. Gossiping engenders and expresses a powerful sense of belonging to a kin group, where connections between young members are increasingly more mediated by social media. It also facilitates participation in other people's lives, and Facebook is the platform that makes this possible. It brings back to the same online place family members that have scattered around the country who wouldn't have many other opportunities to meet, beyond weddings or sporadic visits to their home village or town. So while kinship networks are weakened in some respects, the impact of social media has been to strengthen such ties.

Not only is Facebook used to maintain contacts between relatives when they can no longer meet face to face, but it plays an important role by putting in touch distant family members who have never met or talked before. Cihan, a 26-year-old Kurdish man who was born and grew up in Mardin, one day started to receive several Facebook friend requests from people he didn't know. When he saw that he had many 'Facebook friends' in common with them, he accepted the requests and started to chat with them. He was extremely happy to discover and meet these new relatives he hadn't known anything about. Most of them had left their home village during the conflict between the PKK and the Turkish army, while others had migrated at different times in search of better jobs and never went back. They were now living in the big cities of western Turkey. He said:

> I found 40 relatives in this way. It's so important for me. They live in Istanbul, Antalya or Izmir. They don't come back to our village any more, but my father does not need Facebook, he already knows everybody. I am always surprised to discover how many relatives he knows. But we (the young generation) are forgetting our blood, we don't know where we come from. For example one month ago one of my relatives from the village died. One of his brothers called my aunt on the phone, who called my uncle who called my father, and my father went to the village and prayed for him. I don't even know the names of these relatives. We (the young generation) wouldn't be able to be reached on the phone if someone dies. But now, because of Facebook, we are becoming more connected with each other. We

(the youth) use Facebook and Twitter, they (the old) use the phone. For the Kurds, the extended family is so important. For example, last year, the wife of my mother's uncle who lived in Diyarbakır died. When we got the news, we all went there to visit his family. I have not seen this uncle for almost 20 years, I was a child when I saw him last time, and we were so close to each other. I remember he used to give me a lot of presents, cakes and chocolate; he really loved me. When I saw him again after almost 20 years we were so happy. Even after 50 years without seeing each other, the respect and affection for our relatives never end. Relatives are so important for us … The most distant relative I have on Facebook is the son of the daughter of the uncle of the uncle of my mother. He found me on Facebook, and we met once when I went to Antalya last summer. We spent one day together, we went to the sea, we smoked narghile and we talked all day. It's not important whether we have met before or not, being aware of our common ancestry is enough. For example, if my father tells me that someone is a relative, I can then sit and talk with them, even if we have never met before. We respect each other. We are Kurds and for Kurds ties with our relatives are so important. For Arabs it is different. Look! My girlfriend is Arab, and she has just blocked her older brother on Facebook. This would be inadmissible for us.

Social media was defined as a tool against assimilation by some Kurdish friends. One told me:

> For us Kurds, Facebook is a weapon against assimilation! Look at my brother! Most of his friends on Facebook are relatives living all around Turkey. During the '90s life was so terrible here that most of our relatives had to escape from the villages and from Kızıltepe to somewhere else in Turkey. And Facebook is now the only way we have to remain in touch with them. Social media allows us to continue our bond with them and thus exist as Kurds.[12]

Policies of the Turkish State since the foundation of the Republic have aimed at denying the existence of Kurdish minorities and assimilating them into 'modern' Turkish society. The project to assimilate the Kurds was also pursued by a politics of displacement. Although Kurdish migration to the big cities in Turkey has been a long-term process, this intensified in the 1980s and '90s.[13] The State deliberately started a politics of removal of the Kurdish population from their traditional homelands, as part of a

strategy to expand its control over the southeast region. Migration was also created by conflict and the search for better economic opportunities. Yet weaving these social networks of dispersed relatives has become a form of Kurdish resistance to assimilation, in which social media has played a key role. Many young Kurds in Mardin, including students from other towns of the southeast, villagers recently migrated to the new city or Kurdish Mardinites who have lived there for a few generations, are now using social media to extend or strengthen connections and relationships with distant relatives living far away. For example, chatting and playing games on Facebook with first or second cousins who still live in the village and whom they meet face to face only occasionally is a very common practice among young male Kurds.

Social media is also used to connect with relatives by those Kurds who don't belong to any tribe. In Mardin not all Kurds belong to a tribe.[14] In Kurdistan there is a 'wide range of forms of social and political organisation',[15] and 'distinction between tribal and non-tribal Kurds is generally made by the Kurds themselves'.[16] Then, beyond the 'traditionally' non-tribal Kurds, who are typically peasants who do not own any land, there can be found a large number of people whose tribal affiliation existed in the past, but has become very weak with time, to the point that it doesn't count any more. In the case of peasants with non-tribal origins, social media is not used to keep in touch with a large number of distant relatives, but it rather has great importance in maintaining contact with siblings, first cousins, nephews and nieces who have also spread across the country. For example, Bariş grew up in a village in the Province of Mardin in a poor peasant family that migrated to Istanbul in the early 1990s. He then got married and came back to live in the new city of Mardin where he has a good job as a computer technician and a 'middle-class' living standard. He no longer has relatives in Mardin and thus regularly uses Facebook to interact with his five nephews and two brothers who still live in Istanbul, and three first cousins living in Izmir.

Facebook was not the only social media platform used to preserve ties with members of the extended family. WhatsApp, too, has come to be used to communicate with close and distant relatives. Rojda's father is the leader of an important Kurdish tribe from Mardin Province, which is well respected by other Kurds of the region. He is a big land owner who more recently has started to work in the construction sector, and he is a firm supporter of the Kurdish nationalist movement and the BDP. Rojda is a 29-year-old married woman, the second of 10 siblings, who works as a teacher in a private school while preparing for the exam to become a state-employed teacher. As is often the case among big Kurdish families,

after getting married she continued to be closely in touch with her family of origin. She visits her beautiful paternal house in the new city at least two or three times a week and spends time there with her numerous sisters, first cousins and aunts.

Rojda and her brothers and sisters grew up in the old city of Mardin in a neighbourhood that was inhabited mostly by close and distant relatives and members of the same tribe, which numbers around 4,000–5,000 members, divided into five different lineages with five different family names. Until the age of 18 Rojda and her sisters had relationships mainly with members of their tribe. They went to school with relatives, as the primary and secondary schools located in the neighbourhood were mostly attended by members of the tribe, they played in the yard with relatives and they had meals with relatives. The few children not belonging to the family were included and accepted when playing together. Only with their attendance at university have they started to develop relationships with strangers (*yabancı*) and to create friendships outside the family network. However, Rojda and her sisters continue to spend most of their time with (female) members of the family. From their father's side alone they have more than 100 first cousins. At her sister's hen party, which was intentionally kept small and sober out of respect for the grandmother who had died a few days before, the participants were 60 female relatives and only three of the bride's university friends. Throughout the party, they kept praising very proudly: 'Look! They are all relatives! Here are all relatives.'

When young adults come from a prestigious family of an important tribe they usually have more social restrictions because there is a lot at stake: their family authority within the tribe and the prestige of the whole tribe to the outside. The behaviour of daughters and sons of the tribe's leader can directly affect the power and the reputation of their fathers. For this reason, young Kurds who belong to leading families generally have to follow more traditional habits and customs: marriages between patrilineal cousins continue to be quite frequent; a woman's marriage with an outsider tends to be more accepted if she is educated to a university level; and inheritance is more often divided according to traditional customs that mean unequal divisions between daughters and sons. On the other hand, many Kurds living in the urban space of the new city who are not affiliated to any tribe tend to be more assimilated to the 'modern' family system: arranged marriages with cousins are significantly less frequent, young women tend to be freer from family restrictions and young men are more independent of their relatives.

In this context, Rojda and her sisters do not use Facebook, despite the fact that they are all aged between 16 and 32 and were all educated to secondary-school or graduate level. They explained this choice as a form of resistance to the public exhibition of private life, to women's harassment and to the immoral flirting and courtship between strangers of the opposite sex. As was often the case in Mardin, the whole family used to express one singular and uncontroversial 'official' opinion, and behave according to it. None of them, indeed, have ever had a Facebook account. Yet they have new smartphones where they use Viber, Tango and mostly WhatsApp. They opened a WhatsApp account at the beginning of 2014, and soon after that they created a WhatsApp group with around 60 female members: sisters, first cousins and aunts and nieces of similar age. The members of the group were all relatives who lived next to each other in the old city and were now dispersed around the new city of Mardin, other cities in southeast Turkey, and (in one instance) abroad. The group has been very active since its creation. Every day someone writes and shares pictures from her daily life: photos of new dresses and requests for suggestions whenever someone wants to buy new clothes; images with food as soon as it is ready; and comments and jokes about other relatives. The women also used WhatsApp to organise meetings and gatherings: one day they arranged an *iftar*[17] dinner for Ramadan in the garden of their family building in the old city, and they used WhatsApp to decide the menu and balance different courses, as everybody was cooking different dishes. This organisation took more than two weeks, during which everybody was sending WhatsApp messages. After this prolonged organisation they finally had a sumptuous *iftar* dinner with roughly 30 people, the female relatives participating in the WhatsApp group and one of their several uncles with his sons. As Rojda put it: 'On WhatsApp we re-created the neighbourhood where we lived when we were children!'

The case of Rojda's family illustrates how social media has been appropriated to reproduce the social organisation of their offline world, characterised by endogamy and tribal affiliation. As they mainly had contacts with members of their lineage in the offline world, so they did on social media. Friendships with people who were not members of the lineage (*yabancı*) were rare, both online and offline. In this case, social media has not led to any significant transformation of their social universe but has rather reinforced traditional social formations, countering the impact of geographic mobility and urbanisation that has pulled relatives apart. Also, by refusing to use Facebook to avoid its detrimental effects on women's reputations, Rojda's family enacted a form of spontaneous resistance; only a more 'private' social media platform such as

WhatsApp allowed them to be in touch with each other, but at the same time protected from the indiscreet gazes of voyeur strangers. As a result, through the guarding of their private lives, they also reproduced on social media their status as the traditional elite of the town.

The significance of social media in re-creating the kinship network is also proved by the extent to which some young Kurdish women and men experienced the online presence of older relatives as a burden. Whereas Abdurrahman, Katibe, Cihan, Bariş and Rojda all happily used social media to re-create the network of the extended family, other young adults did not. Young teenagers, university students and well-educated young people were especially keen to use Facebook to extend their social network beyond their kin group, whose presence was experienced as oppressive and constraining. An unmarried Kurdish woman in her mid 20s and part of another important tribe of Mardin affirmed:

> My uncle on Facebook controls me and my cousins many hours every day. If he sees something inappropriate, like a picture of me sitting next to a boy, he takes the phone and calls me! It happened already a couple of times. I unfriended him, as well as my older relatives. I don't want them on my Facebook. I now have only cousins and relatives of my age.

This oppressive sense of being under control is not experienced only by women, but by young men too. An unmarried Kurdish man in his late 20s reported having received phone calls from different uncles making fun of him, asking which women in the pictures posted on Facebook were his girlfriends. He also ended up unfriending three uncles. Although for him and his university-educated friends of the same generation hanging out with female friends was a normal and common practice, it was not for his older relatives. Generally speaking, young, university-educated adults from middle- to upper-class families who spend a few years living on their own in large metropolitan areas enter into a new social world of relationships beyond the kinship network. And in these cases they more often prefer to use Facebook to maintain these new relationships, and the presence of so many family members is experienced as oppressive and burdensome.

Kinship networks and traditional marriage systems affect social media use in other various and unexpected ways. Among Kurds affiliated to a tribe, endogamy and marriage between patrilineal cousins continues to be very common, as in the family of Gülsüm, a young woman from a big tribe from the Mardin Province. She is a university student at

Mardin Artuklu University and a keen Facebook user. As a member of an important family within the tribe, she proudly describes herself as more subject to strict social constraints than her peers. In order to protect the honour and the prestige of her family and tribe, she also has to follow more rigid social rules online: she can't post pictures of herself in class standing or sitting near male university students, whereas her female classmates can do so more easily; she can't even post photos of herself wearing ordinary clothes, as she always has to appear well dressed with smart clothes. However, the interesting thing here is that endogamy and attitudes towards it have led her to unfriend from Facebook several of her male first cousins. On Facebook she had many relatives who thought that she was flirting with her cousins whenever they interacted with her on the public Facebook wall. She was also feeling courted whenever her male first cousins wrote to her, and thus she stopped answering their messages. A simple dialogue with them was seen by her and her family as a sign of courtship or romance. Everybody knew that she would have to get married to a first cousin or at least a relative, and for this reason she tried not to make Facebook a place where potential suitors could legitimately start the courtship. On the other hand, she was more comfortable in receiving public comments and messages from her male school and university friends, because this was not necessarily considered a sign of flirtation or a declaration of love.

Among the Arabs, family relationships and migrations from and to Mardin have been quite different from those of the Kurds. As we saw at the beginning of the chapter, Arabs tend to be less attached to their distant relatives. They have been more easily assimilated into the 'modern' Turkish model of society; migrations towards western Turkey started mainly in the 1950s and continued in the following years, and were motivated more by the search for better job opportunities. Many urban Arabs now live in different Turkish cities and Europe, and they tend to be better integrated into urban life than the majority of Kurds.

Generally speaking, Arabs on social media have fewer relatives than the Kurds. However, many urban Arabs, especially men, use Facebook to keep in touch with members of the same kin group when they have one. For example Ozan, a 33-year-old Arab friend from one of the most prominent Arab lineages of Mardin with 60,000 members all around Turkey, had 500 relatives on Facebook. Around 350 of these lived in other towns in Turkey and 150 in Mardin. Most of them were university-educated people who enjoyed a 'middle-class' urban standard of living, but who equally wished to remain connected with distant relatives. He was also very careful in specifying that his kinship network is a family (*aile*) or a lineage (*sülale*)

and not a tribe (*aşiret*), as they don't recognise the authority of any leader, and relationships between family members are motivated by disinterested affection rather than political goals or alliances for power. Yet, at the same time, many female urban Arabs in their 20s had very few relatives on Facebook, as a strategy to protect themselves from their gossip and rumours. They tried to make Facebook a place where they could live a life less subject to the social constraints of the offline world. But despite different stratagems and regardless of the many older relatives who were unfriended, Facebook continued to be a space inhabited and watched by family members, similarly to the case of many young Kurdish women. Therefore, age, gender and level of education play a significant role in shaping the kinds of social network that people have online, as much as did the differences between Kurds and Arabs.

To conclude, this section of the chapter has shown how social media has been used to maintain connections with a large network of relatives who live in different parts of the country. Keeping distant relationships with a large number of kin, strengthening ties and facilitating communications with first cousins and close relatives, or starting new connections with family members never met before, have all contributed to reproducing traditional kinship forms in the face of larger processes of social change and geographic mobility. This finding stands out as peculiar to this specific region of the world, where kin relations continue to be so important both offline and online, despite migration – whereas in some 'Western countries' studies show that social media has been mainly used to communicate with a small number of intimate friends.[18] The next section will examine the uses of social media in the communication between members of the same nuclear family and between friends. Even in these cases, the findings are quite different from those of many other studies carried out in other regions.

Social media and personal communications between family members

Even though the phone continues to be the most used medium in conversations between middle-aged people and between parents and offspring, social media has become an important tool of communication in the daily contacts between young members of the same family. Facebook, Tango, Viber, WeChat and especially WhatsApp are regularly used by siblings: video calls on Tango, audio calls on Viber, text messages and images on WeChat and WhatsApp. Social media are used to reproduce

the immediacy, the intensity and the connectivity of face-to-face communication when this is not possible. In Mardin, relations between family members are made up of constant, endless interactions, and spending time alone is not considered desirable. People tend to be constantly surrounded by a large number of relatives and guests, and individuals understand themselves more as part of a relationship or as a member of a family. Young women who moved to Mardin for work from nearby towns can cry for hours because they miss their mothers and sisters and can meet them only at weekends. Other women were so full of guilt and shame because they had left their parents alone in another town that they had to renounce their work projects in order to go back to their home town. Mothers can become totally desperate because their grown-up children have moved to other cities in the region to attend university. Relationships between family members are intense, emotional and profound, and people can spend several hours a day interacting with their kin. Being cut off from their own family is one of the worst things that can ever happen to a person: for example, there were rumours about a Muslim man who was repudiated by the whole family after converting to Christianity and who became completely mad. This story was narrated as an example of the most horrible thing that can ever happen to a person in life. Family has also become the main source of security in the face of the political violence that has gone on for a long time in the region, and is experienced as the only source of safety from the threatening external world. Whilst relationships with non-kin are often ruled by a high level of mistrust, relationships between family members are frequent and based on immediacy and obligation always and everywhere in Mardin.

Social media has facilitated continuous interaction when this was no longer possible in the offline world. Social media, indeed, has not replaced the phone, but it is used in addition to it when some family member goes to live in a different city after getting married or when starting university or a new job. For example, it is common for two sisters in their 20s who live in different towns to send up to 10 messages and 10 photos of food and clothes every day on WhatsApp. People share their ordinary daily life, and conversations are rarely interesting and deep. Making the presence of the other visible is more important than saying something markedly interesting, funny or smart. Mobile phones remain the favourite medium and are used with great intensity and frequency, even when everybody is on social media. Young sisters can call each other up to seven or eight times a day when one of them is outside the house, or fathers can call their sons many times an hour if they have to explain something to them.

Social media is often used in addition to the phone only with the favourite family members. Sibel is a 26-year-old woman living on her own in Mardin. She has five siblings and she regularly speaks on the phone with all of them, but she uses WhatsApp only with her favourite oldest sister, with whom she shares pictures and memes many times every day. Mehmet is a 32-year-old man who regularly speaks on the phone with his seven brothers and sisters living in other towns, but he communicates on Facebook only with his favourite younger brother. They chat, share pictures, cartoons and comics in private, and more rarely on the public Facebook. During the course of my research, WhatsApp came to be used more often than Facebook in communications between siblings, as it was preferred as a smartphone chat application. WhatsApp conveys a sense of immediacy and privacy that is not provided by Facebook.

Intra-family communications on social media are more commonly displayed on the public Facebook because they are more socially accepted than friendship relations. Tagging family members and sharing images, videos and news on Facebook is more common between siblings, cousins, wives and husbands, while images and pictures with friends and strangers are more often shared in the private chats of Facebook. In a society where the public display of private relationships has always been limited to a few controlled offline events and ceremonies, this constitutes one of the transformative effects of Facebook. For example, as we saw in the previous chapter, marital relationships are often displayed publicly to prove to others that one's personal life is happy and lived accordingly to moral codes. This is also the case in those situations where these codes are not followed in 'real' life. A 27-year-old woman who came to work in Mardin from a nearby city told me this story. Murat, her friend and landlord, started to flirt with her although he had already a wife and three children and one secret lover whom he regularly saw at the weekend when his wife was too busy looking after the children. The love of these two women was not enough and the man started to court my friend and send her messages via SMS and WhatsApp late at night. After three days of his harassing invitations and refusals on her part, she blocked his phone number. Murat started to call her from anonymous phone numbers; the girl stopped the second number too and he stopped harassing her. After a couple of weeks, Murat called my friend and ordered her to leave the house without giving her any explanation. In one week, she had to find a new flat and move all her furniture and belongings into a new place. She was evicted from her house because she didn't want to have an affair with the landlord. During those weeks, I followed Murat's Facebook postings (he is my friend on Facebook), and I was surprised

to see that he completely changed his online behaviour. All year long he had posted pictures of holiday trips with friends, food and politics, but he suddenly started to post pictures of him with his wife and to write romantic and sweet words about his relationship with her. For the whole month he shared pictures and poetry proving his happy marriage. Men who cheat on their wives and harass girls are defined as *şerefsiz* (men without honour), which is one of the most common and worst derogatory epithets for a man. After my friend refused to have an affair with him, Murat's main concern was to protect his reputation and protect the relationship with his wife, and Facebook was a good tool for achieving this. The photographic material on Facebook was an effective way to produce a new desired and ideal reality where people are more happy, moral and honourable.

If the story of Murat is an extreme example of the existing gap between the online and the offline, social media often facilitates the public presentation of ideal intra-family relations: photos portraying women hugging baby nieces and nephews, men with groups of male cousins, female teenagers standing close to their mother or the nuclear family sitting around a table before lunch. Social media is very important in intra-family relations, both as a tool in one-to-one communication and as a form of public interconnectivity, where publicly shared narratives of happy relations contribute to a strengthening of the relationship itself.

Friendship

As is often the case in anthropology, geographic areas have always been associated with the study of specific topics, such as witchcraft in Africa, hierarchies in India, carnivals in the Caribbean, sometimes to the neglect of other subjects. Anthropological attention to the Middle East has traditionally been focused on kinship, gender and religion, and studies of friendships are relatively sparse.[19] Yet, from the very beginning of my research, friendship emerged as a key theme requiring further examination, one reason being that Facebook was designed in North America to address a particular idea of friendship that is quite different from the one present in Mardin. In Mardin, as we have seen, Facebook is used more often with relatives than with friends. At the same time, relationships with local kin have many traits in common with North American relationships with friends. For example, relationships between cousins of the same sex would be comparable with typical friendships in the USA, as same-sex

cousins hang out together, sit in cafes, talk and spend time together. But a local friendship includes different feelings and expectations, and such a sense of obligation that can lead to distrust and fear of deceit if it is not reciprocated.

In Mardin, friendship was traditionally at least connected to kinship. Both in the case of a relationship between two different families or households, or in the case of a relationship between two individuals, friendship was usually mediated by the family, with the few exceptions of friendships mediated by groups, such as bands of boys or groups of university and school friends. In Turkish there are two words for friends: *arkadaş* and *dost*. The expression *arkadaş* refers to the common friend, and *dost* to the intimate and good friend that lasts longer or for life. But in Mardin the expression *dost* was mainly used for good friends of the whole family, and more rarely for friends of a single individual.

Women tend to have more friends while they are at school, but after marriage their social network changes and mainly consists of family members. Only one or two best friends last longer, but ordinary friendships from school and the neighbourhood will likely finish after marriage. The situation is slightly different for those women who attend university, as they usually continue to have more friends after becoming wives and mothers. With the exception of their best friend(s), friendship relationships between women tend to be based on lack of trust: young women don't usually confide private and intimate details of their personal life to their friends because they might use this information against them. Friends may discover secrets and could be motivated by jealousy and envy. Stories of romances and flirtation with secret lovers are rather confided to sisters or female first cousins, who are more trustworthy, also because gossip about members of the family would immediately affect the reputation of the whole family and themselves too. Friendship between young unmarried Arab women is based on sporadic meetings at someone's house or in local cafes, where they can show off that they can afford coffee and tea there; meetings on a daily basis are rarer and something that pertains more to relationships between cousins. Other forms of friendships include colleagues who share the same office, who do not usually see each other again after changing job, or neighbours (*komşu*). Women usually have good relationships with neighbours of similar political affiliation and they visit each other when they are bored at home. On such visits they exchange food, and they gossip about other inhabitants of the buildings.

On social media all these kinds of relationships are quite faithfully reproduced. Young women usually have their school or work friends on social media, especially if they live in other cities. They use Facebook for

chatting, entertainment, to share images and have fun, and to provide information about their lives. Facebook is very important to maintain weekly contact with them. More intense relationships with the closest friends are more often lived face to face and on the phone, and only in second instance on social media. Indeed, relationships between best friends resemble those between family members and are lived with the same intensity. However, the most interesting change brought by social media is the new opportunity for women to meet new people and make new friends. Especially when teenagers come from a poor and conservative background and their movements and relationships are highly restricted by the family, Facebook expands their network of friends. Girls often add strangers to their Facebook profile and have private conversations with them; they smartly change the privacy settings to avoid being seen by other friends and relatives or they create fake profiles, because being seen to be in touch with strangers is considered morally reprehensible, even though this is not courtship and does not involve romance. Even though educated and more independent women more often share public pictures with their best female friend(s), or write comments to each other on their Facebook profiles, friendship relations are usually kept more private than relationships between relatives. This happens mainly because friendships between women do not constitute an important form of social capital to be shown off in public: husband, family, kinship and family friends secure more benefit, social support and well-being than friendship. To conclude, we can argue that social media has increased the number and the types of friends for women, by widening their social network online and offline, but it has not changed the nature of already existing offline friendship in any substantial way.

Social media has had a similar impact on friendship ties among men. Traditionally young men have more friends than women. They spend time together enjoying activities such as sports, hanging around, playing games, or sitting in cafes or *çay bahçesi*. Friendships among men are mainly transient relationships ruled by obligations and reciprocity, which do not last beyond the time and space of school, neighbourhood or work office. An exception is the best friend, who has usually been known since primary school or early childhood and is trusted and thus treated like a member of the family. The expression *Akraba gibi* (like a relative) was often used to describe this type of relationship. People often remark that 'Friends come and go, but relatives remain for all your life. They never go away'.

For men, Facebook is largely used to maintain looser ties with friends (*arkadaşlar*) met at school, university, military service or in the

neighbourhood, who have since moved to other areas in Mardin or other places in Turkey. Facebook has lifted the transience of these relations and has transformed them into more distant, long-term connections. Online interactions are not limited to written communication in private chat, but also include games and video calls. As with women, such interactions often reproduce the practices of sociality that existed offline.

Halil described his usage of Facebook in this way:

> I tell you this funny story! One of my university flatmates moved to Gaziantep, and I came to Mardin. We couldn't meet any more, it was too difficult. We were both too busy. But on Facebook we used to meet, chat, and made video calls. On day we got bored and I told him: 'Come! Let's play some games.' We started to play *Okey*,[20] and during it we kept drinking tea, because on *Okey* there is the option to drink and offer tea. Then he started to send me one beer, two beers, three beers. It was funny, because he knows that I drink alcohol, and he offered me beers. But I know that he does not drink alcohol, and I didn't send him any beer. On Facebook you can continue your own normal life, also in these small and nice things.

WhatsApp is used more among those groups of young male friends who also meet face to face, and they enjoy the presence of a further protected space where they can have fun and share funny images and jokes, far from the gaze and constraints of family and older relatives, and free from the formality of the public Facebook. Young men can spend many hours a day having fun on WhatsApp with their friends, especially at night, when they sit at home and are bored. WhatsApp is also used to organise meetings with friends at cafes or cinemas. Internet points are important places of sociality for teenagers and young boys, who meet to play games and enjoy their time; one WhatsApp group included more than 50 young men in their early 20s who used to meet in an internet cafe, but they used WhatsApp to organise meetings in other places in the town or holiday trips. The size of a WhatsApp male group may vary between five and 80.

Facebook is also used to increase the number of friends and acquaintances. In contrast to women's friendships, these comprise important social capital that is more often displayed in public to increase fame and popularity. It is quite common for male teenagers and less educated young men in their 20s to add on Facebook people they have never met before. In most of these cases, the friendship remains limited to the online space. They meet online, become Facebook friends, chat and play games on Facebook, but when they meet in the streets of Mardin they do

not say hello to each other, and they act as if they don't know who these people are. Young unmarried men take advantage of Facebook to create an alternative social space inhabited by alternative networks of friends that do not necessarily coincide with the ties existing in the offline world. Online they can more freely choose with whom to be friends and they are less constrained by the norms ruling social relations in the offline world, which are built on hierarchies around ethnicity, social class, political affiliations and alliances between families. On Facebook, young men are more eager to act as individuals unbound from the constraints that limit them offline.

Conclusion

In this chapter, as indeed throughout this book, we have seen how social media is used simultaneously as a conservative force to repair the ruptures of modern life and migration with respect to kinship, as a reflection of offline life, as in most kinds of friendship, and also as a means to extend or develop other ties, such as new friendships with strangers or turning transient connections into longer-term weak relationships. As such, this chapter falls quite neatly into its place within the volume as a whole, between the earlier chapter, which focused on the more conservative aspect of social media in creating a new conservative public space which denies much of what happens offline (though there is also evidence for the counter rise of individualism), and the next chapter, which turns to an examination of the way social media has opened up unprecedented opportunities for friendship and flirting. Here we have not seen the impact noted earlier in the extension of conservatism or in what we are about to encounter as a form of radical transformation. Instead we have seen how social media and mobile phones have been integrated and are integral to most ordinary and everyday relationships; many of the details of this chapter have concerned the fundamental relationships that people care about. Yet even in this case, the consequences are quite significant: the maintenance and strengthening of kin ties that have become looser with the migration and geographic mobility of the last few decades, but also the use of social media for daily life relationships between parents and children, siblings or cousins, which has had deep emotional and poignant impacts on people's everyday lives.

5
Hidden romance and love

The impact of social media in the field of premarital romance among young adults living in Mardin is extraordinary. The previous two chapters focused on the reproduction of traditional social formations and hyper-conservative public social norms. By contrast, this chapter investigates the new practices of courtship, flirting, dating and inter-gender communication that have been enabled by social media. I emphasise here the transformative role of social media and the extent to which it has expanded the opportunities to satisfy pre-existing desires for premarital romantic love, which were traditionally limited to rare encounters in the few available and suitable offline spaces. New forms of romance first appeared with the arrival of the internet in the region: many people in their 30s and 40s noted that internet chatting and MSN were used to meet, communicate and flirt with people of the opposite sex. These practices have also been the subject of academic studies in other regions of the Middle East.[1] However, the diffusion of social media and smartphones has made online premarital romance, love and friendship among young people more frequent and ordinary, less anonymous, and thus more integrated into their daily lives. The scalable sociality[2] that characterises social media has made this possible, as users constantly navigate between a public space where they can meet new people, while at the same time presenting a self that conforms to moral expectations, and a private space where they can maintain secret communications with lovers and friends.

In Mardin, online courtship and flirting was often a source of public discussion and debate. Pretty much everybody, women and men, young and old, was aware that social media were commonly used to start

and experience romance. Young men were not reluctant to announce it loudly: 'Social media is all about flirting and meeting women. It's so obvious, you don't need to do research. Why? Is it different in Europe?' Women recognised it more discreetly, and some of them blushed on hearing the word Facebook. Social media was naturalised as a match-making medium and flirting was seen as its obvious and essential purpose. This raised obvious issues of morality. The anthropological literature on Islamic moral discourses is rich, and different studies have tried to understand how Muslim moralities can coexist with romantic forms of love within the same settings and also the same individuals.[3] Since the publication of the key work of Lila Abu-Lughod on poetry in a Bedouin society,[4] scholars have stopped seeing the expression of sentiment and practices of premarital romance and sex as a simple 'challenge to "traditional" values based on publicly held conceptions of honour and reputation, or Islamic constraints on premarital sex'.[5] This chapter aims to contribute to these discussions by documenting how social media platforms have created new private and secret public spaces which give rise to live premarital romances that were previously limited to a very few secret offline spots.

The inhabitants of Mardin practise their Muslim religion in many different ways: Arabs and Kurds are both Sunni Muslim, but with differences related to their different schools of Islamic jurisprudence[6] and to their different involvement in the past processes of secularisation and modernisation undertaken by the Turkish State. In addition, Islamic and Sufi congregations (*cemaat*) are quite powerful, and Mardinites commonly differentiate between 'less religious people' and 'more religious people', where the latter term usually refers to active members of these orders. Mardin has also been affected by transformations at a national level. The 'Islamification' of the society following the policies of the AKP government has moulded a dynamic religious conservatism that does not maintain the status quo, but rather reinvents the religious customs and traditions of the pre-Republic times.[7] A general Islamification in Mardin was evident, for example, when comparing photos of Arab women in the 1970s wearing miniskirts (even in the streets, but they spent very little time outside the home) with images of the many veiled women walking in the streets of Mardin now. However, many secular Kurds are resisting these wider processes of 'Islamification' in favour of Kurdish secularism.

Despite all these differences, there was a general agreement on what behaviour should be viewed as inappropriate by Muslims. Islam is a religion that has norms defining appropriate public behaviour for people and focuses less on internal thoughts than Christianity, for example.[8] Words such as *günah* (sin) and *ayıp* (shameful) were often

used indiscriminately by almost every inhabitant of the town to condemn those practices that contradicted accepted norms, among which were premarital romance and premarital sex. Yet people agreed that the limits of acceptable behaviour were changing: they described a move away from 'traditional' social forms dominated by kin relationships, observance of tradition and a well-defined 'code' of male honour and female modesty towards the emergence of new forms of modern lifestyles with mixed-gender friendships and new values. Elders described youth as lacking shame and shyness (*utanma yok*) and eager to experience premarital love and relationships, while youth described the elders as outmoded, backward and conservative (*antika, geri kafalı*). Other narratives emphasised a new role of women: 'Women couldn't leave their house until 10 years ago. You couldn't see any single woman walking in the street. Now, look! Women are everywhere.' People acknowledge changes in the inheritance system and dowry too: in the past, they were more keen to divide an inheritance unequally between daughters and sons, while now they tend to divide it equally; traditionally, the groom had to give money to the bride's family, while now he pays for only the dowry, the house and its furniture and the wedding ceremony. Other stories emphasised the diffusion of a new idea of love and new forms of marriage. A married female friend in her early 40s, mother of three children, explained to me:

> Young people don't know what real love is. When I was young I didn't touch the hand of my husband until the night after our wedding. And for years I desired and dreamt about love. Love is dreaming about it. Now young people walk hand in hand a few days after meeting each other, and they will never understand what love is!

People in their 30s emphasised the emergence of a new generation of teenagers and people in their early 20s who were living completely different lives from them, due to the spread of social media A male high-school teacher in his mid 30s noted: 'We are living an epochal revolution! Social media are like an explosion that is changing everything! Teenagers and young adults are living completely different lives from the previous generation!'

All these stories replicate a narrative of social change, as a movement from tradition to modernity, from arranged marriages to marriages for love, from extended to nuclear family, from a family-bond society to individualism. But, in many cases, traditional forms, such as arranged marriages, remained the established convention even if the practices

were quite different. Whereas in western Turkey the policies of modernisation proposed by the Turkish State led people to see arranged marriages as a sign of backwardness and lack of modernity,[9] this was not the case in Mardin, where arranged marriages continued to represent the ideal. The ethnographical study, indeed, revealed several cases of marriages that were officially presented as arranged, but were in fact the result of premarital relationships. Only in a few cases would people openly and publicly declare the presence of a love-match.

In this new, modern, urban social context, people reacted in different ways to the ongoing transformation, and supported different secular or Islamic ideologies. A stance towards social media was often used within conversations to express a position towards modernity, religion and morality: some women proudly claimed not to use social media, as they wanted to affirm their modesty and purity and their desire to resist an implied decadence, while other more educated and wealthy women openly and proudly declared their skills in using social media as a way to express their literacy, secularism, modernity and social status. Other women admitted to using social media, but noted that this was only in a moral and appropriate way. While some men boastfully showed how their wives were free to have a Facebook account and communicate with whoever they wanted as a way to perform the role of the progressive and secular man, others claimed that they chose not to use social media themselves in order to avoid the temptation posed by other women, expressing in this way their honour and principles. People constantly discussed social media's positive and negative effects. Looking back at the 100 questionnaires conducted at the beginning of our research, people's comments always focused on the issue of morality. Adult women's comments were: 'Social media is shameful' or 'Social media is not shameful', 'Internet is moral' or 'Internet is not immoral'. Yet, as the ethnographical research progressed, it also became clear that some women and men commonly lied about their use of the internet in order to conform to public discourses in which morality follows values of male honour and female modesty. In the innumerable conversations I had with the inhabitants of Mardin, the description of someone's social media usage was often linked with his/her degree of backwardness or modernisation. The expressions varied from *geri kafalı* (backward), *cahil* (uneducated) and *gundî* (villagers in Kurmanji Kurdish) to *medeni* (civilised) and *ileri* (advanced). Social differences were commonly represented through the rural/urban dichotomy, which in turn refers to the division between Kurds and Arabs. In contrast, people do not usually talk in terms of class or poverty as such. To conclude, there was considerable evidence that, for people in Mardin,

irrespective of their use of social media, the topic had become an important mode by which they could represent their specific moral stance in a town that is undergoing major social changes.

The intention here is not to write a history of the actual transformations of marriage, family and love in Mardin. Instead it is to reflect on what the narratives about social media themselves tell us about people's responses to social change. The next section examines how the employment of social media for intimate relationships is differentiated by social class and different levels of education. The discussion then turns to the lack of trust and the role of jealousy as a constitutive element of premarital relationships in the age of the internet. The second part of the chapter focuses on the common patterns of social media use among teenagers and young adults involved in courtship and premarital relationships. Overall, the chapter portrays female characters for two main reasons: as a woman I obviously had easier access to women than men, and also because women have been affected more than men by the diffusion of social media, education and urbanisation.

Social differences

Many inhabitants of the poorer old city of Mardin like to describe themselves as attached to traditional lifestyles, old values and habits, and they often define themselves in opposition to the modern inhabitants of the new city. The low-income Arab population of the old city tends to follow traditional norms of arranged marriages and the exclusion of women from public life, as is also often the case of the low-income Kurdish population living in the poor suburbs of the town. Many men from low-income families reported that they prefer arranged marriages to love marriages:

> Marriages for love are dangerous. If you fall in love with a woman and then you decide to marry her, you will surely end up deluded. Because love will finish at a certain point, and you will suffer. While if you get married with a women you don't love and you have never met before, you don't have expectations and you will be happier. When you have a girlfriend you start to promise things that can't be satisfied. Then there is disillusion and people get upset. While if you get married with a woman that you have never met before, you will never be upset! You do not mislead and deceive. The role of the husband and that of the wife will be better defined and everybody will

be happier. I got married with an arranged marriage. My mother saw my wife first, and I met her only once before getting married. I liked her, and then we got married. She is a housewife and cooks delicious food for me and of course she doesn't use Facebook. I didn't really prohibit her from using it, but she is not interested. She doesn't want it. And we are very happy together.

Another man in his late 20s stated:

My mother showed me the pictures of different women, I chose the one I liked most, we then got engaged and married. We met only twice before our engagement party. I was not interested in women, and I thought that it was easier for me if my mother could have chosen for me … Now I beat my wife, like they were doing in the past. For us it's normal! I don't think there is anything wrong in that. It has always been like this in Mardin. Why do we have to change now? My wife is a housewife, she doesn't work, she didn't go to high school. I prefer her to be ignorant! If women study and work outside the house they can't work properly inside the house. If she doesn't iron my t-shirts, so why did I get married? If she doesn't cook for me, so why did I get married? I could have stayed at my mother's house. … Of course my wife doesn't use the internet. It's forbidden! Until a few months ago she did not use a mobile phone either, but now I gave her one, so I can control her better. She never leaves the house without me. If she needs to go out and buy some groceries, she calls me and asks my permission.

While he was telling me this, his wife called him on the phone and asked permission to go out to buy some milk. He said yes and then shut his phone.

These two people, like other low-income, less educated and more conservative men I talked with, didn't tell me directly what they did on social media. I was a woman and they didn't want to share such information with me. But on other occasions, other low-income and uneducated men confessed to me how they use Facebook and Tango to flirt with women, whether married or not. Revealing was the case of a 32-year-old man, married with two children, who confessed to me to having four different Facebook accounts, out of which three were used with girls, one with his real name and picture, one with a fake male name and anonymous profile, and one with the identity and profile picture of a woman. I myself also received Facebook friendship requests from

thousands of unknown men who were looking for women. Other young and middle-aged men told me how they spent hours every day sending friend requests to young women, as the simple presence of a profile picture with a face looks to them like a sign of availability.

More educated female friends agreed in telling me that 'these kinds of men' only use social media to meet women, talk with them and cheat on their wives:

> Men who prefer arranged marriage will end up beating their wives and cheating on them. These kinds of men use social media only to meet new women, maybe from Russia, or East Europe, or also some local divorced woman that nobody else wants. Educated people use social media also to read news and share comics, but those semi-illiterate men only want to have sex. Nothing more!

In conservative and less educated families, access to the internet is often prohibited to wives and daughters. Also, in the old city of Mardin, houses with an internet connection are rare. Here female teenagers tend to use the internet secretly in a relative's house or through a school friend's mobile phone. Not even educational purposes motivate parents to allow their daughters to use the internet, as higher education is not considered a priority:

> Education is important, but it is less important than social connections. If my kids want, they will attend the university. But if my sons have a university degree and they don't have connections, they will never find a job. In Mardin people find jobs because they know people. Being well educated is not really so important. What gives you job is social connections.

In other cases, women refuse to use social media themselves to conform to Muslim moral values of modesty, enacting in this way a form of resistance to the spread of digital technologies. They themselves considered social media a threat to a pious lifestyle, and were more than happy to not have a Facebook or WhatsApp account. Among less educated Arab families from the old city, as well as poor rural Kurdish families living in other areas of the town, social media tends to be used differently from the more modern, educated and relatively wealthier inhabitants of the new city where most of my research was carried out. The following story can be seen as an example of the experiences of women with rural origins who have recently migrated to the city. Previously

excluded from the internet and from any presence in public space, when she began to work outside the house Leyla started to use social media and entered into a premarital romance with a man. Although she used to criticise other women from Mardin for their immoral behaviour, she ended up acting like them: using the internet to live her romance and at the same time preserving her reputation based on Muslim values of female modesty.

Leyla

Leyla is a young unmarried woman in her mid 20s who recently moved from Kızıltepe to Mardin with her family. We introduced her in Chapter 1, when we presented the inhabitants of the town. Leyla likes to describe people from Kızıltepe as bearers of morality, in contrast to the inhabitants of Mardin:

> In Kızıltepe life is different. People have more honour. Women there may have secret premarital romance with men, but only because they want to get married. But in Mardin it's different: women don't want to get married, they just want to enjoy, they want men to buy them gifts, and take them out to restaurants and cafes. That's why women flirt with men in Mardin. Also men in Mardin have less honour because they have more money and they can have women. People in Kızıltepe have more honour.

When Leyla moved into the city of Mardin, neither she nor any of her sisters were working or studying, with the exception of the youngest, who was preparing for the university entrance examination. In line with the times, the two oldest sisters in their 30s hadn't even finished elementary school, but the 18-year-old sister planned to study at the university. These sisters were sitting at home, making food, looking after relatives' children and getting bored, in the hope that a man would ask to marry them. None of them used social media on a daily basis, nor did they have an internet connection in the house. Because they were in need of money, and bored of sitting at home, Leyla started to look for a job, and found one, first as a shop assistant and then as a cleaning lady. After a few months of work, Leyla fell in love with a colleague who was working in the same shop, and this was her first relationship with a man. Her face started to shine and she told me how extremely happy she now felt, in a way that had never previously been the case. She downloaded WhatsApp

and started to spend many hours every day on the phone to communicate with the man, who had changed his job in the meantime.

Although Leyla owned a beautiful Samsung phone, she had never used the internet or social media on it before. She only sporadically used her sister's smartphone to discreetly access her Facebook account. My questions about social media always created a lot of embarrassment, especially when made in front of her older brother, male relatives or strangers in public spaces. However, like many other people of her age, the romance between Leyla and Halil unfolded online and on the phone. Opportunities to meet face to face were very rare, as they both worked between 10 and 12 hours a day, with only two days off every month. On these days they met each other in cafes at the entrance of the city, where they ran less risk of being seen by friends or relatives. The communication between the two happened mainly through WhatsApp and SMS messages. They were sending each other many messages every day and evening. Yet Leyla used her younger sister's small smartphone – a Samsung Galaxy Pocket – and her Facebook account to get 'information' about her new boyfriend, and to look at pictures of him. She also showed the photos of him to her sisters and to me, seeking approval from us. Her boyfriend's Facebook wall, and the Facebook photos portraying him alone or with his relatives, provided the most significant information she could get about him, and offered the only way of presenting him to her female family members. They minutely observed every single picture and made many comments about his physical appearance and tried to imagine what he would look like dressed in certain clothes instead of others. In those moments, Leyla was dreaming about him and about love. The concerns and worries she had about Facebook seemed to vanish. She fell in love, and Facebook was the only way to have information about her beloved, his life, his friends and his family. And, above all, it was the main way to feel close to him.

All the female members of the family knew about this (secret) relationship, and they started to feel that they knew the man through his Facebook pictures. The men of the family didn't know anything about the relationship, nor about the use of Facebook to look at the man's pictures. When the father unexpectedly came into the room, the girls would instantly shut their phone so he could not see what they were looking at. But as soon as he left the room, Leyla would start looking at the photos on Facebook with her sisters once again, and she would continue to dream about her sweetheart. The photos of the young man always showed him well dressed, assuming charming postures and looking candidly straight into the camera lens.

Once I asked her: 'You described with negative terms those Mardinite women who spend hours on their smartphones to flirt with guys, but you are doing the same now on SMS, WhatsApp and Facebook. Why?' She replied: 'I love him, I communicate with Halil because I love him! And I wouldn't talk with any other man in the world. And then we don't even speak on the phone because we don't have time. We only text each other.'

Love was presented as a perfect motivation that could justify her constant messaging and gazing at Facebook pictures. Like Leyla, many other women mentioned love as a powerful motive in their lives and in their use of social media. Leyla also believed that text messages, which don't involve sound and images, were more compatible with her ideals of modesty and morality. In addition, romantic text messages and viewing Halil's pictures on Facebook facilitated a process of imagination and a dream of love in line with local notions of love as desire rather than the results of a relationship based on face-to-face daily interaction. Facebook and text messages, indeed, served both to fulfil a need for a romantic imagination and to create an actual communication between the couple.

I had the opportunity to meet Leyla and Halil together first in the restaurant where Halil worked, and then in my house to drink tea. (As a European I was often asked to 'cover' meetings between young partners who didn't have any other place to meet.) What struck me most in these encounters was the lack of verbal communication between them. They were not talking, they were not sharing ideas or exchanging points of view about something. They didn't know what to say. In those moments, the silence in the room created so much embarrassment for me that I felt obliged to talk, while they were listening to me and winking at each other with their eyes and smiles. The text-message conversations showed some similarity with these face-to-face encounters, and included mainly two kinds of expressions: romantic idioms and ordinary questions like 'What are you doing?' or 'How are you?' followed by ordinary answers 'I am at work' or 'I am fine'. In these conversations, affirming and making visible the presence of the other was often more important than the content of the communication itself. Yet social media has also enriched the communication, because such romantic partners felt safer and more secure expressing themselves online. On social media they additionally expressed emotional attraction and feelings of love that they could not express offline.

In conformity with the idea of love expressed in the *Arabesk*[10] songs, where the lover is unattainable and love will likely produce suffering and pain, the love story between Leyla and Halil didn't have a happy

ending: one day Halil sent a text message to Leyla to tell her that his family obliged him to get married to a cousin, and he couldn't oppose this decision. He wrote to her that he was really mortified, but they couldn't continue their relationship, and they couldn't continue to text each other. After a few days, and for the first time in her life, Leyla opened her own Facebook account to be able to monitor Halil's wall to understand exactly what was going on. However, in the meantime Halil had changed his privacy settings, unfriended Leyla's sister and started to share his status updates and pictures only with chosen Facebook friends. So Leyla started to look at Halil's sister's Facebook profile. There she could see the photos of Halil's engagement party, and she discovered that the official girlfriend was not a relative, but rather a girl who was working in the same shop where Leyla and Halil had met. Leyla discovered that Halil had been lying to her since the beginning of their relationship. She started to peek at him through the Facebook profiles of Halil's sisters, brothers and friends, and any other person who could reveal any clue about him. To prevent any revenge from Leyla, Halil then closed his previous Facebook account and opened a new private one that was visible only to his new friends. Leyla was really desperate to discover why Halil had lied to her since they started to flirt with each other. For several weeks, whenever we met, she kept saying: 'I don't trust men. They are without honour.'

This story is revealing for several reasons. Leyla is a young woman with a low level of education from a low-income family who recently moved to Mardin. In accordance with her idea of morality and modesty she refused to use the internet, although she owned a fancy smartphone and could afford an internet connection. And she constantly described Facebook and WhatsApp as immoral tools used by immoral and sinful Mardinite girls to flirt with boys. However, her entrance into the job market put her in the completely new situation of meeting men and falling in love with one of them. She started having a romance that was lived mainly via SMS, WhatsApp, and indirectly through Facebook, rarely face-to-face; so she ended up behaving as the other girls living in the new city who she had been criticising since her arrival in the town. While Leyla's claims to a conservative morality were entirely true to her beliefs, so was her belief in the ideal of romantic love. Love explained this contrast with her principles and was described as the main driving force in life, and thus able to justify everything. Simultaneous affirmation of arranged marriage along with actual romantic relationships was something that older people, especially from urban backgrounds, practised, but in the case of Leyla the discrepancy between her moral ideals and her actual behaviour was even more powerful, although she was clearly sincere in both. The rapid social

change created genuine dilemmas and internal conflicts with which she had to struggle.

Urban women, education and social media

Leyla's social and cultural universe is quite different from the majority of other young women living in the new city. No matter whether they are Kurds, Arabs or Syriac Christians, in the new city young women tend to have more contact with men, both online and offline. New modern spaces and increased levels of education, as well as social media, have eased mixed-gender forms of social relations and friendships. The traditional male-only coffee houses, the *Kahvehaneler*, are attended only by male elders, whereas youths hang out in new, gender-mixed public spaces, such as 'modern' cafes, shops and restaurants.[11] In the new city women tend to study, work, walk in the streets and sit out. They spend money and consume, and this creates friction with the older generation that does not understand this new lifestyle. The level of education among women has increased radically, particularly among the Kurdish population. Kurds invest a lot of energy and effort in providing a good education to young people, as they see it to be the only available means to improve their social conditions, and also to take back their Kurdish culture and identity denied by the Turkish State. For young women, university constitutes one of the few ways to escape a miserable life oppressed by fathers or husbands in a patriarchal family. A Kurdish female friend in her late 20s, employed as a teacher while living with her family in Mardin, reported:

> In my life I had only two options to escape from a miserable life: going to the mountains and fighting with PKK, or going to the university. I convinced my father to send me to the university, otherwise I would have become a guerrilla. I didn't want to live as a housewife, preparing foods for some cousin I had to marry, and raising kids. Now, thanks to my university degree, I will marry the man I want and I can have the life I want!

University, modern urban spaces and social media have had similar impacts on young women's lives: they have all contributed to their entrance into a new set of relationships beyond those of the extended family, and they have put them in touch with a new, extended, public world. More-over, no differently from Leyla, these new, modern, gender-mixed places have led women to open their first social media accounts. Some started

to use the internet and mobile phones when they were high-school or university students, and started to flirt with boys and communicate with friends; others use it to remain in touch with ex-university friends who live in other towns around the country. This new generation of young women who live in the new city share the experiences of being part of an extended network of social relations – online and offline – that significantly differ from those of their mothers and older sisters.

However, important institutions such as women being virgins before marriage, discretion and secrecy in flirting with men, as well as the pretence of arranged marriages, continue to be quite firm among Arabs and Kurds. Modernisation has produced new social relations, but also new conservative ideologies and new strategies to protect women's respectability and reputation. On social media, indeed, new friendships and romances came along with a new, conservative presentation of the self.

Zozan

Zozan was a 30-year-old Kurdish woman from a nearby town, who moved into Mardin when she was employed as a veterinary nurse in a public office. She was living on her own in a house supplied by the State, she had her own car and she was living autonomously from her family, whom she used to visit only twice a month. As a single educated woman with her own job, she used to hang out with both female and male friends, and to take part in different cultural activities in the town. She considered the majority of her older relatives, most of them well-off owners of medium-sized businesses, as uneducated and backward. She didn't have any of them as Facebook friends, because they would have considered her a shameful woman as she was living on her own and driving a car, and she was not yet married. But Zozan was able to carry on her independent life because she had a university degree and her own job.

Zozan was looking forward to finding the right man to get married to; she was becoming a bit too old and afraid that no one wanted her any more. She had had a few relationships with men in the past, none of which fulfilled her expectations. Whenever we met, we talked about love. Finding the right partner was her main concern at that moment of her life. One day she even went to Diyarbakır to meet a woman known as a good fortune teller able to read Turkish coffee grounds; she wanted to gain some information about her romantic prospects. Zozan's dream was to get married to a man she loved: arranged marriages looked completely

awkward, backward and absolutely inappropriate to the way she imagined private life and family. Her father also hoped that she would find a man she loved. Before he married her mother through an arranged marriage, he had been in love with another woman he couldn't marry because the two families didn't agree to it. He and his wife learned to take care and support each other, but 'love is another thing', her father repeatedly told her.

The clairvoyant told Zozan that in three months, in June, she would meet a man she would fall in love with. She spent the following three months waiting for this to happen, and when talking with me about him she ended up calling him 'the man of June'. When I came back to Mardin in June after a month in London, I found Zozan incredibly happy, excited and blinded by love: she had met the 'man of June' and he was wonderful. And of course she started to date him, thanks to Facebook.

Zozan was driving her car to attend a state examination for a Master's course at the local university; when she had nearly reached the building, she almost crashed her car against that of another attendee, who had come from another town of Mardin Province. They got out of their cars, and then started, rather amusingly, to have fun with each other, reassured that nothing bad had happened to them or their vehicles. They walked and talked until they reached the examination office. At the security control they left the keys of their cars in the same little box, and said goodbye to each other, imagining they would meet again at the end of the examination. But 'the man of June' discovered he had left his ID at home and had to leave without being able to take the exam, while Zozan was already inside the examination room. So he left her a message with his phone number in the little box at the entrance of the examination room where they left the keys together. But the message got lost and it seemed that they didn't have any other way to get in touch with each other. So the man started to look insistently for her on Facebook, without being able to find her because she had a private profile. Then he eventually went onto the Facebook page of her work and could see her name, send her a friendship request and write her a message. Zozan, who had liked him when they first met, accepted the friendship request and started to communicate on Facebook, and after a few days they exchanged their phone numbers and started talking on WhatsApp. Social media facilitated the courtship and made it possible for them to meet again and start the relationship; but it continued to constitute an important element of their romance. Because he was living two hours away from Mardin, the couple met each other face to face only once every couple of weeks, but they talked regularly on the phone and chatted a lot on WhatsApp every day. Each also had the habit of taking a selfie

every day and sending it to the other on WhatsApp; this was a way to feel closer to each other. Zozan carefully stored all these pictures on her laptop and looked at them whenever she felt the need to feel connected to him. After the first few days, they stopped using Facebook chat, but Facebook became important in showing loyalty and honesty. Zozan was monitoring his profile to understand who his friends were and whether he had too close relationships with other women. Because they couldn't meet as friends together and live their romance in public spaces, Facebook became their public context. Because of Facebook they often had long arguments too. Once his password was stolen and hacked;[12] messages asking for money were sent to his male friends and messages with sex jokes to his female friends. He immediately unfriended all his Facebook contacts and explained to them that his password had been stolen, as he wanted to prevent them from receiving stupid messages and jokes. He also called Zozan to tell her that she was going to be unfriended. She thought that he wanted to hide something from her, and so she called him on his phone looking for further explanations, but he didn't reply for the whole afternoon. Zozan's fears became bigger and she seriously thought that he was hiding something important, such as a relationship with another woman that could have become visible on the public Facebook wall against his will. They could communicate only the following day when Zozan was completely angry. He told her that he couldn't answer the phone because he was busy in calling his friends to explain to them what had happened, and he was not hiding any other relationship with other girls. After this episode, they also had a serious argument when she asked him why he had two Facebook accounts, and he didn't want to reply because the reason had to do with alliances and fights between his family and another, and was nothing related to love and girls. But she thought that he was using the second account to flirt with girls or to have a parallel relationship. They also had arguments whenever he did not reply to her WhatsApp messages as soon as he saw them.

In their romantic relationship, social media clearly had a major role: first Facebook and then WhatsApp, though Facebook remained important as a public space, as they were not publicly acknowledged as a couple with anybody except me and Zozan's best friend. It is this co-presence of very public and very private spaces that makes social media a cause of dangerous jealousy. Like Zozan, many other women and men live in fear that their partner could cheat on them, helped by this new online architecture that enables them to create, display and hide relationships. This topic therefore requires a section to itself.

Lack of trust and jealousy

In Mardin, lack of trust characterises relationships between people in general, but especially between both unmarried and married partners. Doubting the other's honesty and fidelity is a constitutive aspect of romantic relationships – one in which social media plays an important role, as it puts people in touch with innumerable others, creating many opportunities for infidelity that can always be kept completely hidden and secret. This lack of trust is also a consequence of the rapid transformations of recent years, when relationships are now more frequently built on individual choices and agreement between partners, and women have more autonomy and opportunities to get in touch with men and to express their disagreement. Jealousy is probably one of the most widespread feelings among young women and men in Mardin, and social media and mobile phones are seen as both the cause and the solution to it.

When I asked the reason for sending 500 WhatsApp messages every day to his girlfriend, an 18-year-old man replied in this way:

> Everybody is so jealous in Mardin. People send each other many messages every day, continuously, non-stop. In Mardin people don't trust each other, there is no trust. For example, people imagine that if you simply sit near a person of another sex, you might be thinking of having sex. If a girl goes out, her boyfriend would start asking her on the phone 'Where are you going? Who are you spending time with?' He will start calling her on the phone and sending her messages. There is always lack of trust. But it's not just among young people, it's among married adults too. For example, my cousin's wife does not trust him and always calls him on the phone to control him. She even opened a Facebook account to control what he does and with whom he spends time. In Mardin, whether you are teen, an adult or an elderly, you don't trust your partner … Look at me, for example! I was behaving in the same way. I was sending hundreds of messages to my girlfriend. But then I changed after I saw how people in the west [of Turkey] behave. In Mardin people are not developed, and they will never develop!

As a proof of devotion and commitment to the relationship, several young adults involved in premarital romances asked their partners to share their Facebook password or to unfriend people of the opposite sex. Many young women had only female friends as Facebook contacts, especially when they had met their current boyfriend there. Whereas

demonstrations of love among married and officially engaged couples had to do more with the display of a profile picture portraying the couple together, in this case, the goal was to keep away people of the other sex.

Deniz

One afternoon I went to visit Deniz, who became one of my best friends in Mardin. She was an architect originally from Batman who moved to Mardin to work. Deniz was 26, smart, well educated, beautiful and from a 'middle-class' family. She was courted and flattered by a young Kurdish man who was popular in Mardin because of his success in painting and maintaining good social relationships with different kinds of people in the town. He first saw her in a cafe, discovered that she was the friend of a friend, and then he started to court her on Facebook. They then met once, twice, fell in love and they started to have a romantic relationship that was lived also offline face to face, and on the phone several times a day. Because they were both living far away from their respective home towns, they had more opportunities to meet each other and were less concerned about her respectability. Unlike single women originally from Mardin who live with their family, Deniz could more easily live her premarital relationship in the semi-private spaces of the town. She only had to be discreet and prudent. She often told me: 'I wouldn't be able to live this relationship if I was in Batman, but luckily I am in another town now and I can live it more freely.'

Deniz and I had been meeting at least three or four times a week before the relationship started, but afterwards our encounters became rarer. She started to hang out with the man and the man's friends, and to have fewer interactions with her female friends, me included. Their romance was intense, their interactions very frequent, and Deniz's autonomy gradually started to disappear. She changed her behaviour in public, she became more self-confident and she began to wear more elegant clothes that were more suitable for a 'woman'. One afternoon I went to visit her at her house because she had an urgent desire to talk with a friend, and when I arrived there she was crying, desperately crying. When the phone rang, she left the room and talked on the phone for half an hour, shouting and crying. She had had a fight with the boyfriend after he became completely mad at the sight of some male strangers 'liking' the pictures she posted on Instagram, even if only one of those photos portrayed her face. He wanted her to close her Instagram account or make it

completely private. He didn't accept that other male strangers could 'like' her photos out of his control. 'Why do you want other men to look at your pictures and like them? Why? I can't understand why you have the need to be 'liked' by other men!' he shouted at her on the phone. While crying and in tears, she moaned about him being always jealous: 'He is always jealous. All men are always jealous. Why do they behave in this way? He has a Facebook account, and his female friends "like" what he posts, and I am fine with that. Why doesn't he allow me to have an Instagram account? I can't deal with that.'

I found myself in the middle of a tragedy: the man's phone calls came one after the other, and finished with shouts and screams. The conflict reached his family too: his mother called Deniz and apologised for her son's grumpy behaviour. I then became aware that in the past the man had been cheated on by his ex-girlfriend, who had a relationship with another man she met on Facebook; he discovered this through her Facebook chat when she left the room with the computer on to go to the bathroom. So now Instagram was feared as the cause of another possible betrayal.

Social media and secret premarital relationships

So far, this chapter has explored some cases of young women's engagement with social media and premarital romances. However, none of these portraits correspond to the stories of teenagers and young adults who completely rely on social media to communicate with people of the opposite sex while hiding from families and relatives. During the ethnographical research there were many such stories of considerable variety, some of them quite extraordinary, so that it is impossible to incorporate them properly into this text. Instead the chapter will provide some more general portraits of the ways social media are currently used during the different stages of premarital romances, from courtship to breaking up. These stories of teenagers and very young adults are supplemented more rarely by those from middle-aged informants.

Courtship

Facebook is the platform more commonly used by men to court women, whether they met offline and knew each other before or not. In the previous stories of Leyla, Zozan and Deniz, we saw that Facebook was used by men to start communicating with women they had previously met

offline in different circumstances. In this case, Facebook has increased the opportunities and frequency of courtships and accelerated the evolution of a first contact into regular conversations. On the other hand, among young people from conservative families where gender segregation is more pervasive and youngsters don't have opportunities to get in touch with people of the opposite sex in the offline world, it was common to use Facebook to meet strangers and start flirting with them. Interviews in high schools revealed that female teenagers from religious and conservative backgrounds often had several strangers as Facebook friends. After school they sat at home, and to stave off boredom they spent long hours on their smartphones or computers, if they had one, trying to get in touch with people living in different parts of Turkey or abroad. For example, one teenager loved to practise her English talking with Korean boys, because she was a keen fan of Korean soap operas. Another was using Facebook to find a boyfriend in western Turkey, as she didn't like boys from the southeast. Another 20-year-old girl who was not working or attending university loved to chat with boys from Mardin she met on Facebook and to flirt with them, until she found one who fitted her tastes and those of the family, and he asked to marry her. I also came across a few married women trapped in unhappy marriages with violent and conservative men, who were using social media to communicate with the external world, as their husbands didn't allow them to have interactions with other people out of their control. One of them found a man with whom to carry on a secret affair and cheat on her husband.

A common way to meet new people was also through online gaming. Some games, such as *Okey*, *Criminal Case* and *Tavla*, were often played specifically with this purpose. People could start conversations with other players, offer teas and make gifts online. Other games, such as *Candy Crush Saga*, could facilitate flirting between people who were already Facebook friends. Occasionally women from lineages with a lower status and bad reputation, who for this reason couldn't easily find men out of the family to marry, used social media to meet their future husbands. This was also the case of women who were becoming 'too old' to get married. Facebook was used like a dating website, which were also quite common in the region. In some other cases, Facebook facilitated the encounters and courtship between friends of friends who then ended up being together; they were not strangers, nor friends, but something in between. They could probably also have met without Facebook, but Facebook facilitated the process.

Some male teenagers tried to achieve fame by friending a lot of women on Facebook. Others used Twitter only to interact with women.

For example, one 17-year-old boy was following 1,750 women, mainly from other cities in Turkey, and only 10 men. Other young men had long, romantic relationships with girls from Mardin that were lived only online, and when they met in the street they did not even say hello to each other.

During the first few months of my field work, I came across so many couples who had met on social media that I wanted to discover whether these relationships turned into serious involvements or not. I also met a middle-aged woman who, more than 15 years previously, had met a man on MSN and then got married to him. So I added a new question to our questionnaire: 'Do you directly know engaged or married couples who met on social media?' Around 50 per cent of the answers were yes, but all respondents knew many couples who had met online whose relationships had not evolved into marriage. In addition, as far I could understand from the ethnographical research, a lot of people met on social media and then got married, but the marriage was not publicly presented as the outcome of a social media encounter. It was also difficult to distinguish courtships on social media, offline or arranged by relatives, as these were often three different stages in the establishment of a relationship. Young couples would meet on Facebook and start secretly and sporadically to meet face to face in the park, until the boy's family went to the girl's house and asked for her hand. They could get engaged and then married, and officially present the relationship as an arranged marriage. We can argue that social media has multiplied the opportunities for premarital romances, but it has also diversified the way young people of the opposite sex meet and get to know each other before choosing their future spouse.

Traditionally, couples met through match-making: the groom's mother or older female relative would be in charge of finding a suitable bride for him and then ask his opinion, which was often taken into account, other times less so. This was also the case for the woman. Then, in order to get to know each other, suitors used to meet in the presence of other relatives, and they would ask for information about them from relatives and friends in common. Social media has changed match-making, as it has become a wonderful tool to access information about the proposed person. An uneducated 25-year-old woman was looking for a husband, and a neighbour gave her the name of a man who was searching for a wife and might be interested in marrying her. As soon as she knew his name, she immediately went to study and examine his Facebook profile, his friends, his 'liked' pages, but above all his pictures and appearance. Because she liked him on the public Facebook, she sent him a private message and started talking before anybody else knew about it. Facebook was used to gain knowledge about potential partners. If in the past match-making

occurred mainly between relatives or family friends, with the bride and groom getting information about the other person through word of mouth, now it more often occurs between strangers, and Facebook is used to supply all the information that can't be obtained from others.

For many young, unmarried women and men, Facebook was a public showcase for performing a self appropriate to being liked by people of the opposite sex. In courtship, as in other areas already discussed, Facebook worked simultaneously on two different levels: the very public and the very private. It is the ability to shift instantly between these two that has revolutionised the way young people now meet, date and start love relationships. A male friend in his mid 30s explained to me:

> Before Facebook courting a girl was more complicated. You had to first meet her face to face, being nice, ask her phone number, and in most cases they were refusing to give it to you. Now this process is easier and smoother. If I like someone, I just look for her on Facebook, I look at the pages she likes, at the pictures she posts, and in this way I can understand many things about her political views and her social background. If I like it, I write her a private message in the private chat. It's very easy to start a conversation with a woman whether you knew her before or not! Before Facebook it took months. Now we can do it in one hour.

Courtships can start with very simple words. Men write: 'Hello, How are you?' (*Merhaba nasılsın?*), or 'What are you doing?' (*Ne yapıyorsun?*). Using simple words for starting a normal conversation with a friend is considered the best strategy so as not to look like a stalker or too pushy. The women can either decide to answer and continue the conversation or instead unfriend or block the person.

Social media has become so ordinary among courting people that a 19-year-old man started writing letters on paper to impress and charm his sweetheart. He told me: 'Social media is for everybody. It's ordinary. Girls don't care any more. I now write one letter every day and I give it to her every morning as soon as I meet her at school.'

Premarital relationships: Love is... sending 600 messages to your girlfriend every day

Social media also constitutes a very important space where young couples who are neither married nor officially engaged can secretly

or semi-secretly live their romance. In this case, it is the private space of communication that becomes pivotal. Young couples spend many hours every day chatting on their smartphones. They can send up to 600 WhatsApp messages a day, and they make daily video calls on Tango or Viber; on Facebook private chat they share and comment on pictures portraying them together during the few times they meet face to face. Facebook was central in the beginning of these relationships, but SMS, WhatsApp, Tango and Viber become more important during the romance. Sending text messages in the night, and staying up all night to chat with the object of one's love, was considered a heroic and brave declaration of love and a proof of commitment. 'This is love', I was told several times. People could choose the platform that best fits their need for money, discretion, secrecy and the connections available. Phone calls were mainly used when people didn't have to hide themselves from parents or other people, but texts were favoured to keep secrecy.

> I use messages because they are more immediate. Even when she sits at home with her parents she can reply, but this is not possible with phone calls. She can't always answer the phone, but she can always send a message. And this is true with me as well. My parents know that I have a girlfriend, but they don't know who she is and I don't want them to discover it.

Teenagers and university students switched from WhatsApp or Viber to SMS after they had used up their internet credit. Alternatively, moving the other way round, they switched from SMS to WhatsApp or Viber as soon as they found a free wireless. They always tended to use the cheapest media available.

Romantic relationships were built on continuous and incessant communications between the two partners. A general inclination to have intense relationships with others (as with family members), but also jealousy and lack of trust (see above) contributed to this unending exchange of messages. Also, in as much as they were not recognised by society, romantic partners needed ever more constant and endless demonstrations of love.

Given the prevalence of jealousy that was discussed in the previous section, some teenagers were convinced that they needed to stop using Facebook after starting a relationship. Others had to delete all their friends of the other sex. I was told by an Arab girl: 'My boyfriend obliged me to delete all my male friends from Facebook. He did well. I only have female friends now. We are Turks and we don't want to lose morality. This is our tradition.'

Aylin had to negotiate with her boyfriend the kind of pictures she could post on Facebook. She was from a *bajarili* family,[13] and thus more modern and liberal than Hasan, who was originally from Kabala, a more conservative and less modern town in the Province of Mardin. So as not to disappoint Hasan's relatives, she couldn't post pictures of herself taken at a wedding where she wore a low-necked dress. She wanted to gain the respect of his family, as she knew that they would be looking at her Facebook wall. As a result, she made public those images in which she appeared more modest and decorous, but kept completely private those photos that could have damaged her reputation in Hasan's circle. She did her best to appear beautiful and be appreciated by her boyfriend and his family. She was well aware of all Facebook privacy settings, and she accurately changed them in every different circumstance. Her intricate uses of Facebook's privacy settings were probably much more elaborate than those envisaged in Palo Alto in California.

The break-up

When premarital relationships are in crisis, social media is often involved, either as a cause of the difficulties, as a tool for revenge or to calm down the situation. Many people discovered that they were being cheated on by their partners on Facebook and as a result decided to break up. Others, such as Hüner and her boyfriend, used Facebook to hurt each other, until they reached the point of breaking up. The couple had started to have problems and had struggled a lot since she came to study at Mardin University from another town of the region. He didn't want her to leave the town. He preferred a less educated woman that could live next to him. As jealousy was the main problem between the two, and because they knew each other's Facebook password, one day Hüner deleted all his female friends from his Facebook account and changed his name on his profile. Two days later, he did a similar thing to her account: he removed from Facebook all her pictures, he changed her name and blocked all her male friends. When the Facebook pages were restored after a few days, he gave her notice that he didn't want to talk with her any more. As revenge, she published on his Facebook wall one photo with her face, something that made him annoyed because other people could now discover his private life and make comments about her and her appearance. He then changed her Facebook password for the second time, and her email password too. When she could open

her Facebook again, she saw that all her male friends were unfriended, including two cousins he was very jealous of. In the end they broke up, they unfriended each other from Facebook and decided not to talk and interact any more.

After breaking up, everybody usually unfriends their ex-partner from Facebook or Twitter. Keeping them there is considered extremely shameful. The presence of ex-partners on social media can be seen as reflecting the desire to gaze at them, but it also leads to fears that that they might take some stupid revenge. Also, new sweethearts might think that the two ex-partners desire the continuation of the old romance, with the creation of new jealousies and difficulties. In some cases, after the end of a relationship, people decide to close their old social media profile and open a new one with new friends and get rid of common friends, without explaining the reason for doing this.

Conclusion

> In Mardin the life of women is not easy. We can't go out in the evening and we can't go to cafes freely like men. This is the reason why we spend a lot of time on social media; it's the only way we can communicate with the world. On Facebook I am freer. I don't add my relatives there because I want it to be a free space. But for men it's a different story…

In this chapter I have shown how social media has been used to satisfy desires and wishes for romantic relationships[14] in a society undergoing significant social transformation. Social media, along with new schools, universities, cafes, shops and malls, is a new, mixed-gender space where women and men can meet and communicate more frequently than in the past. All spaces above have facilitated the diffusion of new, mixed-gender friendships, romantic love and premarital relationships. It could be argued that the ongoing social change is a movement away from a traditional, kin-centred society based on arranged marriages and Muslim morality towards a more modern and secular social organisation. However, the contrasts between the secret social relationships enabled by social media and the public presentation of the online self suggest that alongside these new, modern forms, new conservative values and public social norms have emerged. The broad awareness of what happens secretly and privately has led people even more carefully to perform relations and selves that conform to public discourses of honour and

Islam. And this happens in a period of Turkish history characterised by the increased visibility and influence of Islam in shaping public culture and public life.

As soon as I arrived in Mardin, I was told by a 20-year-old male friend:

> In Mardin everything happens secretly. There are so many things going on here, but they happen secretly. For example, unmarried young couples usually meet to have sex,[15] or they kiss each other, but everybody pretends that this has never happened. Young couples go to the cinema in the mall, they sit on the back corners and when nobody is looking at them they do what they have to do. They also go to the mosque. I know you will never believe it, but I have friends who went to the courtyard of the mosque in the evening to spend time with their girlfriends. Young couples may also meet in their houses, whenever parents and relatives are away.

This shows that also in the past premarital couples could meet secretly, but they had very few options: the cave, the courtyard of the mosque, and the castle (now closed to the public and used as a military zone). More recently, there is also the shopping mall, and the many modern cafes in the periphery of the expanding city – areas which still demand discretion and caution. By contrast Facebook, WhatsApp, SMS, Viber, Tango and the phone are highly accessible alternatives, and the result is unprecedented. Social media has created a unique and pliable architecture moulded by its users secretly to live, and not just imagine, their love stories, and yet keep them strictly hidden.

6
The wider world: Politics, the visible and the invisible

What are the political implications of social media? Does social media have any political effect? This chapter will discuss whether and how social media has transformed everyday political life in Mardin. Most accounts of the internet and politics have been informed by Western models of the democratic state, public sphere and civil society, which have often neglected cultural differences and proposed reductionist models.[1] On the other hand, anthropology has never taken for granted the meaning of the word 'political'. Since the 1970s anthropologists have tended to include within the category of the 'political' aspects of everyday and ordinary life that were not traditionally included by earlier anthropologists and political scientists.[2] For example, this included power relations between genders, classes, cultures or ethnic groups, whereas more recently anthropologists of politics have proposed grounding their analyses ethnographically, and starting from what people imagine and describe as 'political'.[3] My research draws on these last contributions and discusses whether social media has changed the way Mardinites experience politics and what they regard as their political domain. The analysis starts from the close observation of what people posted on their public social media over the 15 months of my research and contrasts these materials with the several comments and conversations I had with them and with the way 'politics' is experienced in the offline world.

My central argument is that social media has introduced new ways to imagine and conceive the political domain in Mardin. Social media has promoted notions of the political as expressive and performative action that is always under the threat of State and social surveillance. Social media has facilitated the public expressions of political identities

and ideas, but at the same time it has heightened the risks and dangers that come with it. As a consequence, some topics, themes and political ideologies have had more visibility, while others have been completely concealed. On the public social media, boundaries between the visible and the invisible have been redrawn; some discourses have become more prominent, while others are kept even more hidden.

In Mardin, politics is traditionally discussed mainly in private houses, while political references are often absent from public spaces. People were reluctant to talk about politics in public spaces because this would disturb their coexistence with inhabitants from different ethnic, social and religious backgrounds, which had different roles in the conflicts that afflicted the town. The anthropologist Biner borrowed the concept of 'public secrecy' from Taussig[4] to describe the public silence surrounding public life in Mardin. 'Know[ing] what not to know' and 'know[ing] when not to speak'[5] is necessary to the coexistence of the inhabitants in a divided town where State violence has created opposing social forces. In the new city where Kurds and Arabs live in even closer proximity and share the same buildings and streets, social interactions in public spaces are ruled by politeness, respect and indifference. The long history of political violence has resulted in experiencing politics with fear and terror. This has also contributed to producing a new generation of youth that is more disengaged from the political, and more often desires an ordinary life free from politics.[6] When I directly asked teenagers and young adults to tell me their opinions about politics, their reactions were complete silence and indifference or spontaneous exclamations such as: 'Are you crazy? Do you want me to die young? I am not interested in politics because I do not want to die young.'

As discussed in Chapter 1, Mardin is situated in the Kurdish region of Turkey, which has experienced a long history of conflict between the Turkish State and the Kurdish minority. The conflict escalated in the 1980s and '90s, developing into an ongoing war between the PKK and the State. In those years, State forces evacuated, burned and destroyed thousands of villages, as part of a strategy to break relations between villagers and PKK guerrillas.[7] Villagers had to choose between fighting against the PKK or leaving. In Kurdish cities such as Diyarbakır the situation was no easier, because the detention, violence and murder of civilians by the police were part of ordinary life. As a consequence, many of my Kurdish friends in Mardin have family members who were killed or tortured by State forces. The situation in the city of Mardin is also complicated by the presence of the Arab population, which has always been loyal to the government and opposed any form of Kurdish nationalist movement.

The effects of the political violence of those years and the persistence of a collective trauma[8] has played an important role in shaping the political domain in Mardin, which is made up of contradictory images and discourses. Politics is represented as the possible actualisation of higher values, coming either from State discourses of Turkish Muslim nationalism or from discourses of social justice, equality and human rights of the Kurdish movement. On the other hand, the political domain is also defined as dirty (*pis*), immoral and ruled by personal interests and opportunism, violence and corruption. These negative connotations are spread both among government supporters and Kurdish nationalists. A follower of the BDP, who publicly portrays himself as a Kurd motivated by values of equality and social justice, claimed in a more confidential situation:

> Do you think that everybody is motivated by high ideals? People also do their own individual interests. Look at me. I am helping the party during the electoral campaign also because I hope that they will give me a job once they win. Of course, I am Kurd, but this is not the only reason why I support BDP.

The political domain in Mardin is complex and contradictory. Corruption, networks of alliances and influential contacts are entangled with moral discourses and political ideologies. As we will see, social media has facilitated the public expression of the latter, but contacts and social relations have played their role too, along with State surveillance.

The Turkish State's efforts to control the internet are continuous and consistent. Turkey is ranked 154th out of 180 countries in the 2014 Reports Without Borders World Press Freedom Index.[9] In January 2010 the OCSE (the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) reported that in Turkey 3,700 internet websites were blocked,[10] and in October 2014 engelliweb.com stated that 53,542 internet websites were inaccessible.[11] Law No. 5651, 'Regulation of Publications on the Internet and Suppression of Crimes Committed by means of Such Publication', was approved in 2007 to address the problems of pornography and drugs,[12] but over these years it has been widely used to block websites and social media pages, especially those supporting the Kurdish nationalist movement. In March 2014, during the municipal election, Twitter and YouTube were banned to stop the leaks of audiotapes showing proof of the corruption of the Prime Minister Erdoğan and other ministers. Furthermore, the ruling party has been trying to pass a bill that authorises the government to block the internet without court permission.

Most recent scholarship on social media and politics has transcended the approaches of both media optimists[13] and media pessimists.[14] Researchers have investigated the role played by digital and social media in the mobilisation and organisation of protests, such as the Arab Spring in 2011, Occupy Wall Street in 2012 or Gezi Park in Turkey in 2013, or in digital campaigning, governance and digital democracy.[15] What all these works have in common is the investigation of the effects of digital media in relation to specific events, and the negation of their role in everyday life. My research was situated within 15 months of ethnographical study and took into account what is regarded as political by the inhabitants of the town to the extent that this surfaced in their lives. This depth has made possible a broader understanding of the role of the State in the moulding and limiting of online political participation.

Surveillance, control and political violence

> Internet and communication technology are a new form of torture. In the 1980s and in the '90s they were using physical torture. Now they use communication technologies. Twenty years ago they were torturing us to have information, now they can simply use the phone and the internet. Between 2009 and 2013, almost 8,000 people involved in KCK[16] have been arrested after having been followed on the phone and on the internet.

With these words Bilal, a man in his early 50s and an active member of the local section of the BDP, started to describe the internet and social media. We sat at the end of a tea room (*çay bahçesi*), far from everybody else, and we had a long conversation that I couldn't record. He was at first reluctant to talk to me, although I had been introduced to him by my research assistant who knew I was doing research for the university, but then he started to tell many stories about his life. In the 1990s Bilal was arrested three times and sent to prison in Diyarbakır[17] and Mardin. Each time he was tortured by the prison guards. Compared to other men I met who had been victims of torture in Turkish prisons at that time, Bilal was extremely lucid: he described digital media as a new advanced stage in the technology of surveillance at the service of states and governments, which in Turkey has been used to track the activities of BDP and KCK members and supporters. Some 8,000 KCK members were charged under the Anti-Terror Act of 'being a member of an illegal organisation', and the proofs were thousands and thousands of communications

recorded on phone calls, SMS messages and emails, which in many cases were completely fabricated. He also mentioned to me the case of the lawyers of Abdullah Ocalan, whose conversations with Ocalan were unlawfully recorded by Turkish authorities during their meetings, phone calls, emails and by 'bugging' of the defendant's offices and homes. This evidence was obtained by breaching the confidentiality of the communication between lawyers and their defendants.

From the long conversation we had together, it was immediately clear how self-censorship was influencing the way Bilal used social media. The effect of the political violence he had suffered in the past and that he was still experiencing in new forms even then was an attitude of suspicion and distrust towards any kind of mediated public presence. He did not send emails to arrange meetings. He didn't use Facebook to discuss politics, nor to support a political candidate, nor to openly criticise the government. He felt as if he was under the continuous watch of the State.[18] His Facebook account was used under a fake name that was a creative combination of the name of Che Guevara and Deniz Gezmiş.[19] This was the only strictly political reference publicly shared with others. Before his current Facebook account, Bilal had had another one with his real name, the password of which was stolen by members of the Turkish nationalist party (MHP), who started to post MHP emblems to ridicule him in front his network of friends. Public derision was a threat to his honour, a weapon often used in Mardin after the arrival of social media to damage people's reputation. After this episode, he decided to use Facebook only with an anonymous account, with no pictures and no real names. He knew that this (partial) anonymity would not prevent a State agency from identifying the owner of the page, but it mainly protected him from the nasty jokes of other people with malicious intentions. The fake profile allowed him to be recognised by his Facebook friends as a left wing Kurdish activist and at the same time remain anonymous in front of the majority of Facebook users and potential authorities. The choice of a fake account was not only the result of a coherent and rational political evaluation, but also the consequence of a deep sense of distrust towards others and State institutions.

On his Facebook he had friends from Mardin and from other towns in Turkey with different political ideas, and they very rarely talked about politics. He repeated to me that he used Facebook to maintain and preserve social relations with people, no matter what their political views were. He had good relations with friends and relatives from Mardin who supported the AKP and other political parties. On social media he talked with them about everything, but not about politics: 'Politically I am with

BDP, but socially I am with everybody. And Facebook is a space for social life, not for politics.' Discussions about politics in such a divided context would have damaged his social relations. In Mardin, just as in the rest of southeast Turkey, family connections and relations of patronage and friendships are central to access to resources, jobs and favours. Facebook was used to extend and maintain these local networks of social support, and this limited the expression of political ideas.

The story of Bilal shows that social media is and is experienced by Kurdish dissidents as a place of fear under the control of the State, and as containing a potential threat from political enemies. In the end, this has not prevented Bilal from using the media, but rather has forced him to develop a particular style of usage: the political component was limited to his fake profile picture and name. In this way he expresses his political identity, but at the same time he limits the repercussions that might come with it.

The second story is about Savaş, a 55-year-old man employed as a state teacher in a high school. Despite his age he uses Facebook a lot, mainly to read and share news and to keep in touch with old students. So he was using a Facebook account with his real name and picture. He is also a sympathiser of the BDP and the Kurdish movement: in the 1990s he lost his job in the public schools because of his political views, and he had to work in his father's shop for 10 years before being able to go back to work at school again. Public employees in Turkey were and continue to be constrained in their freedom of expression. One day in 2013 Savaş received a call from the local police officer, who accused him of defamation for having published on Facebook a negative comment about Adnan Oktar. Oktar is a controversial and powerful public figure in Turkey. Author and showman, he is known for being the propagator of theories of Islamic creationism, a promoter of Holocaust denial and the founder of Islamist groups that were politically close to the AK party and Erdoğan. Oktar is also known as the 'Islamist sex cult' as he was accused of sexual abuse and was widely talked about and criticised for showing images of sexualised, half-naked women in his programmes on TV channel A9. Savaş wrote '*Namussuz*' (immoral, without principles) as a comment on a video circulating on YouTube and Facebook, where Oktar was surrounded by sexy blonde women. He told me: 'He portrays himself as the perfect pious Muslim, but he is always close to these naked TV showgirls. I only wrote that he was "*Namussuz*". Look at what happened! Facebook is not a safe space in Turkey and Turkey is not a free country!' Savaş was prosecuted for defamation and had to pay TRY 600 (GBP 150). Several critical voices rose up on social media and the internet to deride Adnan Oktar as

Fig. 6.1 Meme with Adnan Oktar. Translation: 'Versace Muslims! Times met the 'pussies' of Adnan Oktar!'

immoral and disgusting. Oktar, on the other hand, in collaboration with the government, had already been responsible for the blocking of several websites that were critical about him, including WordPress.com, the sites of the newspaper *Vatan* and that of the left-wing trade union of teachers and education workers *Eğitim-Sen*.

The story of Savaş is one of many examples showing the degree to which social media and the internet are under governmental control in Turkey, and how people do not feel safe to express their own opinion there.

The third story is about Şukru, a 21-year-old Kurdish university student enrolled at Mardin Artuklu University. He was born and grew up in Adana,[20] after his parents moved there from their village in the Kurdish Province of Bitlis to escape the violence that afflicted the region in the 1980s. He chose to attend Mardin Artuklu University as he wanted to live some years of his life in the Kurdish region of Turkey. He was sharing a flat with other university students, but he stated that they were not politicised enough and were too unconcerned about important topics. Şukru had an old Nokia smartphone that he was using 24 hours a day to check his Facebook page, send email, talk on Skype, read news and do some research about various issues on Google. He was using his phone as a laptop because he couldn't afford a real one. He had one Twitter and three Facebook profiles: two with a fake names and no photos, where he mainly had friends with fake profiles, and one with his real name and profile picture, where he mainly had friends with real profiles. He had opened his

first Facebook account when he was a high-school student, mostly to have access to political news that was not broadcast on mainstream media. He was a loyal reader of *RedHack*,[21] *Aleyhtar*,[22] *Sosyalist Beşiktaş*[23] and *Haber Enstitüsü*.[24] He used Facebook and Twitter as a source of alternative news that was not available on television or in the newspapers. But he could take part in this 'counter public sphere' only by using an anonymous profile under a false name. This choice seemed so obvious and normal to him that in the interview he frequently exclaimed: 'Are you joking? Do you mean that in Italy and UK nobody uses fake profile? Really? Seriously I can't believe that!' Şukru also used Facebook to write and share poems in Kurdish,[25] his native language that he spoke with his family, but which he was not able to write properly because in Turkey it was banned from schools; nor, until a few years ago was it allowed to speak the language in public spaces. Writing and publishing on Facebook in Kurdish, indeed, was claimed as a very important political act. In addition, he was using Facebook to keep in touch with three cousins living in his home village in Bitlis, which he used to visit only once every three years, and a dozen other cousins living in Ankara and Istanbul, most of whom he has never met face to face. For Şukru, social media constituted a very important political tool: it was used as a source of alternative news, as a channel to disseminate the Kurdish language and as a way to keep in touch with his extended family that was dispersed around the country. Just like Bilal, Şukru also used anonymous fake Facebook accounts as a way to escape State surveillance. But unlike Bilal, he was less concerned about the potential derision of social media friends with different political ideas, as he was not originally from Mardin.

The fourth story is about Hamdye, Esra, Okan and Berat, four Kurdish teachers who work in different schools around the Province of Mardin. They are all Kurds in their early 30s, unmarried and without children. They are all originally from the Province of Mardin, Diyarbakır or Batman, who now live in the new city like many other state employees. All of them, like thousands of other *memur* (civil servants) all around the country, cannot publicly express their political ideas because they could lose their jobs. My four friends lived their childhood during the 1980s and '90s when the conflict in the region was characterised by violence and terror. They had all experienced having parents, uncles, cousins or friends arrested, killed and tortured by State forces. For example, Esra was always talking about her mother, sisters and brothers, but she never mentioned her father to me. One night, after drinking a bottle of wine together in the terrace of her house, she started to tell me the traumatic

story of her family. Her father was a school teacher, and back in the 1980s when she was a child they all lived together in a village in the Province of Mardin where he was assigned to a school. One day, with no warning or notice, the Turkish *gendarmes* entered the village, killed animals and people and burned everything, houses, fields and schools. The only option for the villagers, and Esra's family as well, was to run away. On the way the *gendarmes* arrested her father and took him to the prison in Diyarbakır, where he was detained for a few weeks and also tortured. Esra, her mother, brothers and sisters arrived in their home town alone, and had no news about the father. They asked a rich uncle for help, who then paid the police in Diyarbakır to release him. When the father left the prison he appeared a completely different person, as the torture had disfigured him physically and psychologically. He remained jobless for a while, but was eventually employed again as a state school teacher and sent to work in a town in the Black Sea region which was famous for the high density of Turkish right-wing nationalists, also called 'Grey Wolves', known for their involvement in violent attacks against the Kurds. And indeed, he began to be constantly threatened by three men who used to go to his house to destroy everything and intimidate him with guns. He decided to go back to his home town, get his gun and take it to his new house in the Black Sea region to use for self-defence. When the group of men came back again to his house, he took the gun and he killed them. He was sent again to the prison in Diyarbakır, where he spent eight years. When he left prison none of his sons, daughters and relatives could recognise him. He had become insane and extremely violent with his wife and daughters. At that point Esra's mother decided to divorce him and move with the children to another house. They have never seen him again, nor have they had any news about him.

These kinds of stories are very common in the Kurdish region of Turkey, and those who were in their 20s and 30s at the time of my research had had a childhood marked by these episodes of violence and tragedy. For Hamdye, Esra, Okan and Berat, like many other people I became friends with, bad memories surfaced whenever they heard the sounds of police sirens or people arguing in the street. They don't talk too easily about these traumatic experiences, but they are a constitutive part of their way of being in the world, and on social media too. The State continues to be their main object of fear,[26] both offline and online, and this often prevents them from easily creating relationships of trust with others. On social media this sense of fear reaches even further because control is more widespread and diffuse than offline. They all now have decent jobs guaranteed for life, the money to get married,

to have children and to build a family, but they are not free to express their political ideas and feelings, and their Facebook walls reflect these limitations: they don't post anything overtly political, nor ever criticise the government nor post anything related to the Kurdish issue in Turkey. On the public social media, they fluctuate between their desire to be seen and recognised as Kurds and the fear that comes with the public display of that identity. In the offline world, people move between different spaces inhabited by different people and can modify their performances according to those they are interacting with, but on public social media any form of political expression is potentially visible to everybody and can become evidence to be used against them.

These four cases showed different ways of using social media by Kurdish people that have been affected by the violence of the State and continue to be subject to its control. Although past and present political violence has produced suffering, pain and fear that reinforce the effects caused by the actual governmental control of the internet, many Kurdish dissidents find strategies to express themselves in one way or another.

The networked mediated public

Having considered the effects of State surveillance, it is important to also investigate the role of social relations in shaping political expression on social media. As noted in the introduction of the chapter, public life in Mardin is characterised by lack of political discussion and reference to sensitive issues. Peaceful coexistence in the streets and other public spaces is guaranteed by silence around delicate topics and the respect of ordinary norms of education such as ritual greetings. On the more public social media the situation is pretty similar and people follow a list of rules to avoid conflicts with others: they often do not post images and news that might attract negative comments and reactions from other people with different political views, and when this does happen Facebook friends often try not to reply. Being contradicted in public can be seen as a serious insult, and people are cautious about doing so. People are concerned about 'not losing face', which also leads them not to share material in support of their favoured political candidates, because if that candidate loses the election the person would be publicly recognised as a loser by everybody. Challenges and responses are often avoided on the public Facebook, as these might have deeper effects and become serious issues because they are indelible. When someone contradicts another person, the argument may easily lead to unfriending someone. Seventy

per cent of Q1 respondents claimed to have unfriended someone on Facebook because of a political posting they made. Facebook is ruled by reciprocal acts of pleasing others and gaining their explicit support, sustained through 'likes' or positive comments of approval. Probably more than in the offline world, any comment or post that creates conflict is potentially detrimental to a person's reputation. The political silence that characterises public spaces offline is reproduced on social media, but with some important differences. Visibility and invisibility are not equally distributed between those who support the government and those who do not. Political material backing Prime Minister Erdoğan and the ruling AK party is more visible than pro-Kurdish content.

A left-wing and atheist[27] Kurdish teacher was using an anonymous Facebook account to follow atheist, agnostic and Marxist Facebook groups. She explained the reason for this in this way:

> I had a problem with a colleague who was jealous of my success with the students. She was Arab and I am Kurd. One day we had an argument about work, she took her revenge and went to talk with the local officer of education to tell him that I was doing Kurdish propaganda with the students. I was called by the public officer to justify myself. Luckily he was smart enough not to give too much importance to the event. If that man was more nationalist and disliked the Kurds, he could have used this excuse to fire me. As a Kurd and atheist I feel continuously threatened by the Arabs. Can you imagine what could happen if I openly share atheist or pro-Kurdish posts on Facebook? I would live under threat even more!

On the other hand, the Arabs and those who adhere to the ideological and religious project of the ruling AK party take advantage of the new opportunities and become even more visible than in the offline world. Arabs do not usually display Turkish flags in the streets, but they do this on Facebook. Government supporters do not proclaim their political beliefs in the cafes, but they often share pro-government images and memes on Facebook. On social media they feel protected and powerful, and they can express their political ideas even more easily than offline. Social media not only reproduces existing political inequalities, but also reinforces them.

The next section will examine how visibility and secrecy are played out in political events with different spatial and geographic dimensions. On social media people tend to express their points of view more through events of international and national politics than through local politics,

but again with significant differences between government supporters and opponents. The former more overtly express their ideas and take part in discussions on issues of national interest to support the ruling AK party and the then-Prime Minister Erdoğan, but Kurds are limited in the public expression of political ideas that support the Kurdish cause in Turkey. However, Kurds will express their support for Kurds living in Syria and Iraq under the attack of the Islamic State, and the Arabs for the Palestinians in Gaza under the attack of Israel.

Other studies on the political effects of social media and the internet have shown how these have transformed local politics.[28] Here I rather highlight that social media is mainly used to express local political aspirations through reference to issues and events outside of the local area. This argument will be supported by three different case studies: the local election of March 2014; the Gezi Park demonstrations and the protests that exploded in Turkey after the death of Berkin Elvan, a 15-year-old boy hit by the police while he was going to buy some bread during the anti-government demonstrations in Istanbul; and the occupation of the cities of Sinjar and Kobane by the Islamic State and the Israeli attack on Gaza, both of which happened in summer 2014.

The local election 2014

The local elections held on 30 March 2014 came after months of national protests started in Gezi Park in June 2013, and for this reason they were seen as a test of popularity for the government. The local campaign was very heated at both local and national levels. In December 2013 ministers and their family members were arrested by the police after the eruption of corruption scandals. The alliance between the government of Prime Minister Erdoğan and the clan of Fethullah Gülen,[29] on which was built the success of the AKP government, was broken for the first time. This series of corruption scandals also led to the ban of Twitter and YouTube that was claimed as necessary for reasons of national security, and served to stop the circulation of videos that were damaging Erdoğan's integrity and popularity. In southeast Turkey and Mardin as well, the elections were strongly contested. It was felt that the results might affect the peace process as well as the development of the relationship between the BDP and the government. Participation in the presidential election in August 2014 was minimal compared to that in the local election. In many towns in the Kurdish region the results were partially predictable, but in the city of Mardin they were not. With the recent migration of

Kurdish people and the split of the Arab support between two different political parties (AKP and Saadet),[30] the results were uncertain until the last moment. The three parties competing for the majority of the votes were the AKP, BDP and Saadet, and the campaign was particularly heated.

From the beginning of February 2014 flags of the political parties covered streets and the walls of houses and buildings.

Fig. 6.2   Flags flying in the old city

Fig. 6.3   Flags flying in the new city

And the town was full of political posters.

Fig. 6.4 AKP poster

Fig. 6.5 BDP poster

Fig. 6.6 Saadet poster

New party offices (*seçim bürosu*) were opened, and from late afternoon until night people sat there to talk, gossip, dance and listen to music. I could hear *halay* music coming from the offices of the BDP, nationalist Turkish music from the offices of Saadet and AKP songs from the offices of the AKP.

Fig. 6.7   AKP party office

Fig. 6.8   BDP party office

All day long political parties' cars and vans were going around the streets of the town to announce the names of the competitors and invite people to vote for them, with music in the background.

Fig. 6.9 Van supporting Ahmet Türk

Almost every day candidates and members of the parties met potential voters, visited public and private offices, shops, streets, neighbourhoods and villages surrounding the city. The political campaign was built on face-to-face communication between the candidates and their voters, as this is traditionally the favourite communicative channel in the creation of relationships of trust between the people and their political representatives.

During almost two months of political campaigning, the lack of political discussions that characterised the public domain over the rest of the year was suddenly broken. Spaces and sounds in every single moment of the day referred to the aggressive competitions between the candidates, their political parties and their supporters. What had been kept private and out of people's sight and mind until that moment suddenly came out and dominated the public life of the town. Thousands of people gathered in the party offices to express their support to their candidates and parties, and people indulged in spontaneous acts of anger or happiness. I saw middle-aged, religious Arab women aggressively pulling BDP posters from

the walls of the town, and young BDP supporters jumping on the roofs of cars and shouting from happiness once they knew they had won the elections. Kurds took part in the celebration of Newroz[31] 10 days before the elections, and danced to Kurdish *halay* music with a level of passion and excitement that had never happened before in Mardin. The public life of the city was suddenly transformed: Mardin was not the same place I had seen in the previous 12 months. What was normally suppressed blew out with such intensity and force that I finally could understand the rich world of feelings and emotions that are usually kept hidden. The tension reached its climax on the last evening before the election, when thousands of people gathered in the parties' offices to express passionate and enthusiastic support for their political parties and leaders.

Throughout those two months, the public space continued to be divided between areas that were used for politics, mainly streets and party offices, and those that were not, such as shops and cafes. Here people continued to meet and talk like any other day of the year, apparently heedless of what was happening. But in the party offices and in private houses, talks and rumours about the results of elections and the political campaign were frequent and attracted people's attention: 'This family will vote for this party, that family for that party … This candidate will win in this neighbourhood, that candidate in that neighbourhood … Saadet party buys votes for $1000 a family, AKP buys votes with coal …'

What happened on social media? Just like the rest of the year, the 'public' Facebook continued to be a place where local politics was not discussed and not debated. With only a few exceptions, people tended to follow their party's and candidate's page, to 'like' it, but not to share any political material, news or memes on their walls. People's Facebook page could reveal their political affiliation, but not how active they were in supporting one party or the other. This was true equally for AKP, BDP and Saadet supporters. Facebook continued to be the place to maintain and preserve good relationships with others and not pursue political goals or overtly express political ideas. People also did not want to expose themselves because, in the case of defeat of their candidate, the damage to their reputation would have been too significant. A Facebook page full of posts and images supporting the defeated party would have been inadmissible for the local norms of honour and presentation of the self, and it would have exposed the individual to the mockery and derision of the winners. For this reason, social media users who were not originally from Mardin (such as students or public employees) tended to be more politically active, as they did not have to maintain relationships with other Mardinites, and they were more likely to have people with similar political views on Facebook.

Up to 10 March, 20 days before the elections, only 10 of my 200 Facebook friends living in Mardin had publicly posted any content regarding the local elections:

- One photo portrayed different parties' flags twisted one over the other after a storm. The image received 100 'likes' and more than 30 comments.

Fig. 6.10   Photo posted on Facebook during the political campaign. The caption under the images said: 'In Mardin this time also the flags are so beautiful. You will endure them. You will respect them. You will not ruin them, you will not break them.' (*Mardin'de Bayraklarda bir arada çok güzel. Tahammül edeceksiniz. Saygılı olacaksınız. Yıkmayacaksınız, kırmayacaksınız*)

The following comments made fun of the abilities of Mardinites to be close to and support each other.

- Three memes were funny and ironic about the electoral process, politics and politicians, as in Fig. 6.11.

Fig. 6.11 Electoral process meme. Translation: 'ATTENTION… Before voting. After voting.'

- Three memes announced the arrival of Prime Minister Erdoğan in Mardin, while there were no memes portraying the local AK party candidates.

Fig. 6.12 Meme announcing the arrival of Prime Minister Erdoğan in Mardin. Translation: 'Wait for 9 March! Prime Minister Erdoğan will give a talk!'

- One picture portrayed a candidate for the head of the neighbourhood (*Muhtar*), who was never officially affiliated to any party. The picture had around 50 tags, most of whom were relatives of the candidate living in the same quarter.
- Two pictures posted by two university students depicted them with the candidates of the BDP, one during a political gathering, the other during a tour in the old city.

Fig. 6.13 BDP candidates talking to Mardinites in the old city

Fig. 6.14 BDP candidate with university students

Political posts about the campaign and the election didn't increase in the following days. The heated and passionate participation offline didn't have an equivalent online. Social media were used for one-to-many communication by the political candidates. Yet this attempt by candidates to foster an online presence was not too successful either. Their posts were a mere description of what they were doing in the offline campaign, and were not updated regularly. On their Facebook and Twitter pages, and in those of their parties, there were very few comments or discussions and no references to any political programme. Some candidates had only one Facebook account and others had both Facebook and Twitter, but they never had more than a few hundred followers and there were no significant differences between the political parties. The only exception was Ahmed Türk, an important Kurdish political figure in Turkey; he was already a member of the parliament, and was then elected as mayor of the Mardin Metropolitan municipality (*Büyükşehir Belediyesi*).[32] His social media presence was rich and meaningful and his Twitter and Facebook profiles were carefully updated every few hours, and followed by supporters all around Turkey and not only Mardinites.

Why didn't candidates use social media actively and successfully? In Mardin, local elections are a matter of families; votes are often decided by older male members of the family, and then followed by women and younger members. People believed that in the last few years young men and women were voting more autonomously, mainly as a consequence of a higher level of education, but this was certainly not the norm, and traditional practices continued until the 2014 elections: older family members sit, discuss, make decisions and the rest of the family follows. One day I went to visit a friend living in a Kurdish neighbourhood with a majority of BDP supporters. Streets and walls were full of BDP flags, but from the balcony of a building that was inhabited by the same extended family was hanging a big and shining orange and white AKP flag. I was surprised and I asked my friend for clarification. She explained that two brothers had had a big fight for reasons related to trade and business. One of them got very angry with the rest of the family and, to take revenge, he had taken down the BDP flag and hung up the AKP one. The display of this flag was so shameful for the whole family and the neighbourhood that they all tried to persuade him to take the flag down, and eventually he did. Voting behaviour in Mardin continues to be based on alliances between old members of the family, patronage and patron–client relations. For example, on another day, a ceremony celebrated a new alliance between the BDP and a large Arab family that had previously been loyal to the governmental party. The ceremony took place in the BDP party's

office with the participation of some party members and around 40–50 male members of the family. The event was even tweeted and posted on the party's official Facebook page. This was not an isolated case, as several Arab families started to support the BDP when they knew it might have more chance of winning this election.

Fig. 6.15 Arab extended family in BDP office

In Mardin, local elections are a game played by middle-aged and old men, who are not usually keen internet users and see social media as a tool for young men to have fun, play games and flirt with women, and not suitable for politics. Local politicians aim to communicate with them more than with the young population. In addition, some party members, both in AKP and BDP, did not see social media in a positive way; they associated it with the loss of traditions, and with the image of the small nuclear family, where people spend time in different, adequately heated rooms of the house, in front of the television. And they regretted that the large family of the past, where every member spends the night in the same small room of the house, was disappearing: 'Social media stops social communication and social relations!' Another reason for the limited use of social media by local politicians was the lack of internet connections in the villages around the city of Mardin, whose inhabitants constituted a good percentage of the voters for the Metropolitan municipality. Also, the creation of trust relationships continues to be based on face-to-face communication and rituals

of hospitality, to such an extent that the duty of hosting and receiving guests in their party offices was felt as too demanding by some young party politicians. The few materials posted on social media gave visibility to this offline practice, and most of the Facebook and Twitter posts showed offline public gatherings that were going on during the day.

During the political campaign, many inhabitants of the town took part in the competition very enthusiastically. They gave free rein to their feelings that couldn't be expressed during the rest of the year, and they did so in the space and in the time assigned for it. But social media was not part of this. At the end of the election, a Kurdish woman, a 'mother of martyrs', whose son was killed by the Turkish army a few years earlier during a battle between Turkish soldiers and PKK, told me: 'BDP won, but my life will start to be so boring again. The elections are over and my life will become meaningless!' For the first time in the history of Mardin, the elections were won by the BDP. The Arabs, who have always considered themselves the older inhabitants and the custodians of the city, found themselves without control and with less power. The night after the results of the elections became public, AKP supporters didn't leave their houses as they started to digest their big defeat. The political campaign for the local elections had a transformative role in the life of the town and of its inhabitants, but social media was excluded from this process.

National politics: Gezi Park and beyond

On social media, Mardinites tend to avoid the public display of content on issues of local politics, but the situation was quite different regarding matters of national interest, such as the Gezi Park protests in June 2013, and the protests that erupted 10 months later after the death of a boy shot by a policeman while he was going to buy some bread in the middle of the Gezi protests.

The Gezi Park protests, which started in Istanbul and spread around the country, didn't reach Mardin and the southeast region. I found out about the beginning of the demonstrations from the alarmed and worried emails and messages from friends living in Europe. I had been spending a few days in the home village of a family who had migrated into the new city, but there was no internet and only a bad phone connection there. I looked at my phone on my way back to Mardin while I was still digesting the lamb's liver they offered me, and only at that point did I find out what was happening in Istanbul and in other Turkish cities. I had a look outside to see if anything was going on, but I saw the

usual peaceful, hot, dry sandy rocks with no people around, because the extreme hot weather prevented human beings from standing or sitting in the sun.

Kurds living in the southeast didn't participate actively in the wave of protests. They saw it as a struggle of middle-class urban Turks, who were rebelling against the status quo and finally experiencing the violence and the brutality of the State that the Kurds had been suffering for so many decades. Some of them even admitted to being happy to learn that Turkish activists in the west were being hit by gas and bullets, as it meant that Turks too were finally becoming aware of what State forces can do. In addition, the peace process between the PKK and the ruling AK party, which had started a few months earlier, prevented political leaders of the BDP from officially taking part in the demonstration. In Mardin, like in the rest of the Kurdish region of Turkey, many Kurds didn't identify with the protesters' cause. The visibility that Turkish activists had within Turkey and at international level also produced a widespread sense of further frustration. A common comment was:

> When in December 2011 a Turkish airstrike killed a group of civilians, mostly teenagers and children, who were smuggling cigarettes on the border with Iraq, nobody within Turkey and in the world reacted. Nobody knew about the Roboski massacre.[33] Now because of some tear gas, the international community and everybody in Turkey is criticising the government.

Social media were perceived as contributing to this unfair situation, as they were used to give visibility to 'wealthy urban Turks', visibility that the Kurds had never achieved, even when the State murdered dozens of children and civilians. During the protests, the majority of the Kurds were looking at the events without being emotionally and practically involved, with the exception of a few university students. A Kurdish female friend in her late 20s told me:

> During the protest I have been following a lot the news on Facebook. Because of social media I was very well informed and I knew every detail of the protests and of the police repression in western Turkey,[34] but I was not sharing anything. I use Facebook for politics only when I am very angry and I feel that I have to do something. But definitely this was not the case. Turkish protests already have too much visibility.

On the other hand, several Arab Mardinites supported the government and actively shared and distributed contents on Facebook that opposed the protests, reproduced government propaganda and preserved police fairness. Figure 6.16 is an example of the anti-Western conspiracy theory propagated by the government during the Gezi Park protests.

Fig. 6.16 Meme propagating anti-Western conspiracy theory. Translation: 'You will be shocked. The places where most of the tweets about Gezi Park originated from! According to this map, ENGLAND is the country that sent the majority of tweets; GERMANY is number two?? Thus, those who are directing the activists in Taksim are not Turkish, they are all foreign. What do they have to do IN TURKEY? Did they come for the environment?:))) DON'T YOU SEE THIS CURRENT DARK SCENARIO?'

The sources of pro-government posts and memes were various, and included the pages of the AK party, the Turkish police and informal Facebook groups of government supporters. Although the government started to demonise social media and later also banned it, governmental and state institutions engaged with social media pretty actively and used it as a tool of propaganda.

On 12 March 2014 a new wave of protests erupted all around Turkey: huge demonstrations started in many Turkish cities after the death of Berkin Elvan, a child who had been shot by the police while he was going to buy bread during the Gezi protests in Istanbul some months before, and had lived in a coma until then. All around Turkey, social media became a very important channel to commemorate the death of the child and protest against police brutality. In Mardin there were no demonstrations, though, and that same day the then-Prime Minister Erdoğan visited the city as part of his pre-election tour. The city was militarised and thousands of people attended the Prime Minister's speech. In the streets of Mardin, nobody expressed solidarity with the child killed by the State, but a few people did so on Facebook by posting his photo as a profile picture.

Fig. 6.17 Meme used as profile picture to commemorate the death of Berkin Elvan

On the other side, pro-government supporters employed social media to criticise once more the population of Gezi Park and to welcome the visit of their beloved Prime Minister Erdoğan (see Figures 6.18 and 6.19).

Fig. 6.18 Pro-government meme. Translation: 'People don't buy bread in this way / This is the way.'

Fig. 6.19 Pro-government meme. Translation: 'Great master, welcome to Mardin.'

In both the protests of Gezi Park and those following the death of Berkin Elvan, in Mardin, government supporters used social media quite actively to express their ideas and spread governmental propaganda. This was the result of the strategy of the ruling party at a national level actively to use social media, which also led to the recruitment of a few thousand volunteers and to the opening of social media teams and offices.[35] State institutions, government offices and the AKP used social media more frequently and more efficiently on the national than on the local level. This also explains to some extent why supporters of the government were quite active on social media on the occasion of events of national interest. But the expression of ideas on issues of national politics was also possible since it did not compromise relationships with other inhabitants so much. Public support to the government does not involve a direct attack or defence of any person living in Mardin, nor does it challenge local norms of honour. In addition, on Facebook Mardinites more often discuss political issues with 'friends' from other towns in Turkey. For example, a Kurdish friend, Apo, once exchanged his ideas on compulsory military service on the Facebook wall of a Turkish nationalist man he had met a few years before on holiday on the western coast of Turkey. They enjoyed the conversation for a while until they both got disappointed and unfriended each other. Apo criticised the friend's views, but he would never have had the same kind of discussion with someone from Mardin. Mardinites more often chat about politics with people who live far away, because even if the conversation becomes problematic the consequences will be less compromising.

Regional and international politics

Mardin is close to the border with Syria and Iraq, and around half of its inhabitants are Kurds, an ethnic group that is divided between Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq and does not have its own state. The events involving the Kurds in these countries have significant repercussions in the lives of the Kurds in Turkey and in Mardin as well – especially at the time of my research, which saw the rise of the Islamic State (ISIS) and its continuous attacks on the Kurdish populations of Syria and Iraq.

When the Syrian war erupted in spring 2011, the government of Assad, in order to have more energy and resources to fight in the rest

of the country, decided to close down the military front with the Kurds that had initially taken part in the uprising. In July 2012 the Kurdish Supreme Committee was established as the governing institution of the Kurdish region, which in Kurdish is called *Rojava* (this means west and stands for 'Western Kurdistan'). For the Kurds living in Mardin and in the rest of Turkey, the autonomy of Western Kurdistan meant a lot in the context of the Kurdish struggle for independence. The autonomous governorship also had a significant impact in the geopolitics of the region and has been much feared by the Turkish government. The political forces at the head of Rojava are ideologically and politically close to the Kurdish movement in Turkey, and the PYD (Democratic Union Party), the Kurdish party ruling the new government of Rojava, is an affiliated group of the PKK. Events in Rojava became better known internationally when ISIS attacked and occupied the city of Kobane. The city was then liberated thanks to the Kurdish resistance, while Turkey refused to attack the ISIS positions and did not allow Turkish Kurds to cross the border to support the resistance.

Before the attack on Kobane by ISIS, another tragic event filled the front pages of international newspapers and mobilised people in Mardin and in the Kurdish region of Turkey: in July 2014 ISIS attacked the town of Sinjar and killed thousands of civilians belonging to a Kurdish religious minority called the Yezidi, while many others fled into Turkey and some arrived in Mardin too. The formation of the autonomous government of Rojava, the occupation of Sinjar by ISIS and the arrival of the Yezidi refugees and the occupation of Kobane were the three most-discussed events on social media by the Kurds living in Mardin. Compared to the lack of political posts about the Kurdish cause in Turkey, the peace process and relations between the AKP and BDP, expressions of solidarity with the Kurds living in the nearby countries were quite common on Facebook.

During 2013 and 2014, before the rise of ISIS, a lot of Kurds in Mardin used a meme with the word *Rojava* as a Facebook profile picture or background. For many, this was the only political content of their public Facebook page. When ISIS attacked Sinjar and many Yezidi refuges arrived in Mardin and the nearby villages, different organisations started a campaign to collect money and clothes (Figure 6.21). Facebook was one of the most important channels of communication used to organise the collection, mobilise public opinion against ISIS and spread news that didn't have enough visibility in mainstream Turkish media.

Fig. 6.20 Rojava

Fig. 6.21 Campaign to help Yezidi refugees

Also, when ISIS occupied Kobane, the Kurds from Mardin used social media to express their opposition to it. On Facebook they shared pictures, articles and memes to support the Kurdish population under occupation, and some started to use the image of Kobane as their Facebook profile picture.

(a)

(b)
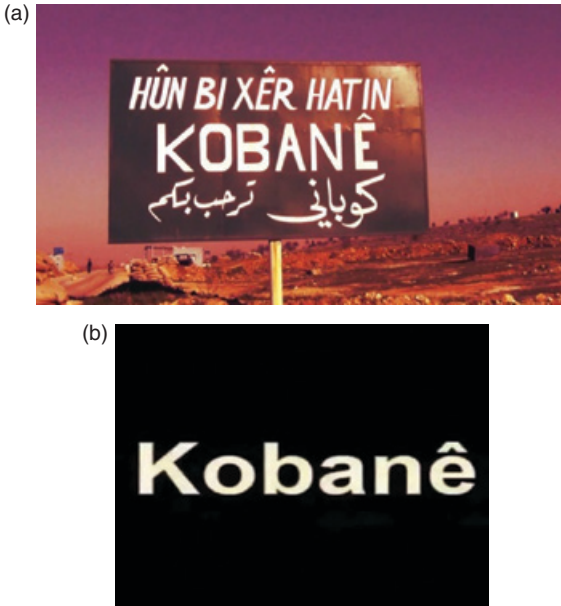
Figs. 6.22a–b   Memes in support of the Kurdish population in Kobane

The atrocities in Kobane led Kurds who had never previously used Facebook for political content openly to express their anger about what was going on and to criticise the Turkish government for not allowing any support to reach the Kurdish fighters in Kobane. However, once again on Facebook the mobilisation was influenced by self-censorship, and criticism towards the Turkish government was expressed mainly in quiet tones. The Turkish government was considered the main accomplice in this human and political disaster because it had prevented the Turkish Kurds from crossing the border, but had allowed militants of ISIS to cross the country undetected in past years. However, its responsibilities were not widely debated on social media. Most of the pictures and comments publicly posted on Facebook addressed the issue from a 'humanitarian' perspective and not from a political point of view. A 30-year-old Kurdish friend told me: 'On Facebook I share content about the Kurds in Turkey only with a small group of relatives. I tend not to post in public news about Kurdish politics. But I did it when ISIS attacked Sinjar because this is a humanitarian disaster; everybody agrees that civilian men, women and children don't have to be killed by these crazy men!'

Although he had a clear view about Turkey's responsibilities in supporting ISIS and in not giving aid to the Yezidi refugees, this was not the first object of his public posts. The public Facebook was not the place to criticise the government, but to receive 'likes' and agreement from friends. He rather tried to get approval and support from a larger number of people and not to create divisions among his Facebook friends. He preferred to condemn these events in a 'universal' language understandable by everybody, and nothing is more universal than the visual language of photos of dead innocent civilians. Self-censorship on social media led to the spreading of images portraying wounded children and dead bodies, and this had the effect of 'de-politicising' the public discourse to some extent.

None of my AKP-supporting Facebook friends posted anything about the occupation of Mount Sinjar or Kobane by ISIS. They were not concerned about the murder of thousands of Kurdish civilians, but they were quite active in condemning another massacre. In July 2014 Israel started a new operation against Gaza and killed almost 2,200 Palestinian civilians. Arab Mardinites shared a lot of memes and news to denounce Israel and express solidarity with the Palestinians. They became politically active as they had never been during the rest of the year because mainstream media also gave quite a lot of visibility to the Israeli war against Gaza.

(c)

Fig. 6.22c   Meme condemning the Israeli war in Gaza

In summer 2014 the political content posted on the public-facing Facebook was polarised between Arab AKP supporters and Kurdish BDP supporters: the first posted about the attack on Gaza, the second about the occupation of Sinjar, and both ignored the other ongoing disaster. This division reflected the Turkish government's critical position towards

the State of Israel and Kurdish autonomy in the region, and in turn the different positions of Mardinites towards the Turkish government. Yet the cases of the Yezidi in Sinjar and Palestinians in Gaza could both be seen as humanitarian tragedies that could be regarded as undeserved by everyone equally in Mardin and in Turkey. It was therefore 'safe' to express one's concerns since these would not impact upon local social relations.

Conclusion

In Mardin, the political mostly belongs to the domain of public silence: the coexistence of different groups that share a history of reciprocal violence has led to the formation of a 'public secrecy'[36] and diffusion of norms of respect and indifference that make daily life in the town possible and peaceful. This invisibility is partially reproduced on Facebook too: people tend not to be too politically active and not to publicly share political posts that break the norms of 'public secrecy'. However, Facebook is a space with its own affordances and architecture, one in which boundaries between public and private take new forms and appearances in the political domain too. Sometimes the lack of activity online is in essence a reflection of the lack of activity offline. But not necessarily. During the elections of 2014, the two domains were different from each other.

Overall, in respect to politics, as in the previous discussions of gender, the public-facing social media tends towards a greater degree of conservatism than is the case for offline life. Conservative is the appropriate term, because political surveillance and control by the State has produced an online public sphere dominated by the governing political forces, but also because ancient concerns over honour and shame that have dominated anthropological discussion of the region's traditions have led to a lack of online discussion and critique. In this chapter, as in previous ones, the emphasis upon maintaining good social relations with people and avoiding negative repercussions on one's personal reputation and social status actually triumphs over the desire to express one's passionate beliefs.

Firstly, Facebook has strengthened local norms of honour and public secrecy which traditionally prevented people from publicly criticising other Mardinites, and made them fearful of exposing opinions that might lead to public ridicule. The result of this has been a reluctance to post in regard to local politics. But at the same time social media has opened up a new space of political participation in issues of national and

regional interest, where people can more freely express political feelings because they don't directly address local issues and local politics. The comparison between local politics (the local election) and regional politics (the solidarity campaigns with Palestinians attacked by Israel and with the Kurds under occupation by ISIS) is the primary evidence for this argument.

Secondly, another equally critical factor shaping online political participation is the impact of the State. On the one hand, opponents of the government felt themselves to be even more under the threat of State surveillance when expressing themselves online than they were offline, and evidence suggests that they are entirely right to be fearful in that regard. On the other hand, the Turkish government and its supporters took advantage of the new increased opportunities of visibility created by social media and started actively to produce and share online content. The effect of these two factors has led pro-AKP supporters to be much more visible than pro-BDP, who have learnt by now that they must continually act only in accordance with internalised principles of self-censorship. In this sense, we can argue that Facebook has strengthened the political inequality between those who adhere to the ideological model of the Turkish nation and those who do not.

These conclusions are an important corrective to much of the current academic and public debates about the relationship between social media and politics. These have mostly focused separately on the uses of social media for activism and protests, on State surveillance and propaganda, or on the uses by political candidates for their political campaigns. My research has instead concentrated on the daily life of ordinary inhabitants of a town, in order to find out whether social media has changed the way people are involved in what they consider political. Political scientists or scholars in the field of media and communication studies will always find political commentary on social media if they look for it; but there is a danger in assessing this material outside of an ethnographic context which can determine whether postings, or absences of them, are typical or unusual, and what the causes and consequences of it are.

In all sectors of private and public life, the evidence provides examples of continuity with prior offline norms, but also shows up transformations and unprecedented possibilities. There is therefore little evidence to support academic and public arguments that social media in and of itself has had a major impact upon people's political conscience or political activism. The key point is that the reasons for the presence of political postings on social media, or their absence, lies in their consequences, not for politics, but for people's safety and their social relationships with

others in the town. In that respect, many of the points made here resonate with those made in the previous chapters about topics such as love and romance; and this consistency across these chapters, and with respect to quite disparate topics, leads to the conclusions of the book.

7
Conclusion: What kind of social change?

A moral panic surrounding Facebook spread in Mardin during the course of the research: people were using special applications to steal Facebook user names and passwords in order to damage the reputation of other people. These anonymous impostors derived much pleasure from posting shameful words, images and videos on other people's walls. Misuses also included the modification of photos of female friends into sexually explicit images, or requesting sexual acts from female friends and money from male friends. There were many cases of people affected by these kinds of pranks, and teenagers and young adults in Mardin lived with the fear that something like this could happen to them as well. A local police internet crime specialist, as well as local lawyers, remarked that reports of pornographic videos or sexual images posted on Facebook walls by strangers were quite common. These account abusers damaged their victims' honour and reputation and those of their friends. They created major anxiety and fears that led several women to refrain from posting photos of themselves and caused several men and women to close their Facebook account or not to open one.

This anxiety was also fostered by the campaign demonising social media by the incumbent Prime Minister Erdoğan and his government.[1] Erdoğan became aware of the power and dangers of social media for his government during the Gezi Park protests that started in June 2013. A few months later, during the electoral campaign in 2014, he also faced a big scandal in which recordings of conversations circulating on YouTube proved his involvement in corrupt operations. He adopted the strategy of blaming and demonising social media and presenting it as a 'force of evil',[2] a threat to the unity of the nation, the unity of the family and to

women's integrity and morality, all values that are at the core of Turkish national identity.[3] The demonisation campaign went along with a ban on Twitter and YouTube in March 2014 which, among other official reasons, was also justified by the case of a Twitter account used to distribute pornography under the false identity and name of a real housewife. Anxieties and fears about social media clearly originated both from the bottom and from the top. In the tension of the political campaign for the local election in February and March 2014, the theft of social media passwords was frequent, and this seems to have perfectly served the Prime Minister's strategy of demonising social media. But what matters most for this book was its effects on the lives of the people I spent time with in Mardin: a general feeling of anxiety associated with the diffusion of social media.

These pranks represented the spectre of what social media could potentially do to its users: the public revelation of what has to remain absolutely hidden and private. They could be seen as the extreme end of a spectrum of cases which mainly consist of far more ordinary episodes that still create some sense of shame and embarrassment: among others, the public display of photos that portray women standing close to men or wearing inappropriate clothes; or photos of men in silly postures with grimaces on their faces, or while drinking alcohol. In Mardin, shame is a very common emotion that originates when the public presentation of the self does not conform to the expectations of society. By increasing exposure, social media makes the self even more vulnerable, and Facebook, more than any other social media, produces the general feeling of not being in control of one's own public image, in an online space that is imagined as constantly under the gaze of others. And this creates shame.[4] This is not just a characteristic of Mardin. The concept of honour and shame, and the public observance of codes of honour for men and values of modesty for women are at the core of the way anthropologists have characterised Mediterranean and Middle Eastern societies over several decades of research, so in a sense this returns us to the most foundational or classic issues discussed within regional anthropology.

Furthermore, social media has not only increased the chances of making public what has to remain hidden or private: it has also expanded the opportunities for secret and private forms of communication and relationships that do not have any legitimacy in public space. It is the combination of these two elements that could turn the use of Facebook into a significant threat. By expanding at the same time 'very private' and 'very public' spaces, social media in Mardin has also forged different moralities and values appropriate to these two very different settings: it

has extended individualistic inclinations and romantic desires, while at the same time making people even more concerned with the public performance of traditional values of honour and modesty. Social media in Mardin has also created different kinds of 'semi-private' and 'semi-public' spaces, such as closed groups on WhatsApp or Facebook; however, the most prevalent use of social media has to do with either the super-public (the public-facing Facebook, Instagram and Twitter), or the super-private (one-to-one chat on WhatsApp, Facebook, Viber, Tango or WeChat). Social media in Mardin has expanded the influence of two opposite settings; it has not simply multiplied the spaces with the different degrees of privacy and sizes of groups that is typical of scalable sociality.[5]

The anxiety expressed in the episodes of moral panic mentioned above people's apprehension and interest in talking about Facebook or WhatsApp reveal that social media is having a major impact in people's lives. As I have shown throughout this book, and as I will develop further in this conclusion, social media has indeed changed things in Mardin. It has reproduced social and cultural patterns of the offline world, but it has also created new practices, new aspirations and new fears. What kind of social change has been facilitated by social media?

The expression 'social media and social change' can be a bit tricky. Trying to determine the degree of social change is a task often carried out by development and humanitarian projects, which develop programmes based on the deterministic assumption that the use of horizontal and participative technologies facilitates democratic transformation.[6] In post-colonial countries of the Arab Middle East, these kinds of interventions have been frequent. This deterministic assumption has also shaped North America's ideas of democratic intervention in the region,[7] as well as several journalistic narratives. This book has little to do with those assumptions about communication technologies and social change. My findings also have little to do with the way scholars have traditionally studied digital media in the Middle East. Especially after the Arab uprising in 2011, social scientists and media scholars have studied the field of organised politics, activism, power, resistance and the transformations going on in the public sphere;[8] these studies are sometimes based on reductionist notions of 'politics', seen as a domain divided from the rest of people's lives.

My research, instead, has moved to the holistic perspective of the anthropological point of view that looks at the entirety of human beings in their daily and ordinary lives. Fifteen months of ethnographic study afforded the opportunity to see how domains commonly thought of as separate from and pertinent to 'politics', 'kinship', 'marriage' or 'love' were

intertwined with each other. From this position of participation and observation, I discovered that the most significant consequences of social media have to do with the redrawing of the boundaries between private and public in all these different domains of people's lives. Moreover, the investigation of these boundaries brought us exactly into the core of the culture I studied, in this particular historical moment. For this reason, in order fully to understand the implications of social media in southeast Turkey, we must temporarily put aside what we know about social media in Milan, London or Palo Alto. We also have to forget our understanding of private and public in Italy, England or the USA. We will start better from the understanding of what 'private' and 'public' mean in Mardin.

Indeed, it may be more helpful to see the results of my field work as the opposite of those described by Miller in his volume within this series, *Social Media in an English Village*.[9] While we both use the concept of scalable sociality, the key consequence of this in Miller's case is to populate the middle ground of suburban English values with forms of moderation and an avoidance of extremes, for example, his Goldilocks strategy of keeping relationships 'just right', neither too close nor too distant. As we can see from the study of Mardin, however, the rise of social media as scalable sociality with a wider range of both privacy and size of group can also have the opposite effect. Instead of populating the middle ground, we see the extension of extremes: an ultra-conservative public space that goes beyond that found offline, and a greater freedom in private spaces that also goes well beyond what is visible offline.

The issue of what is private and what is public has also been one of the most debated topics in the studies of the Muslim Middle East. Many anthropologists and social scientists have described Muslim societies as characterised by a gendered division between private and public. Bourdieu, for example, described Kabyle society as organised around the oppositions between the private world of female life and the male world of the city.[10] Janet Abu-Lughod described the Islamic city as accomplishing the need of Islam to divide 'functions and places on the basis of gender and then of creating a visual screen between them'.[11] She also challenged the dichotomy between the female private and the male public and recognised more fluidity of gendered behaviour with the introduction of the category of 'semi-private'.[12] From the mid-1980s scholars have started to criticise the private/public dichotomy and preferred to emphasise the pluralities of spaces and gendered domains. The literature on this issue is extensive. The practice of 'veiling', that is of women wearing headdresses to cover all or parts of their head or face, has also

been understood by scholars as a way to protect women's privacy from the gazes of men in public spaces, and therefore as a reproduction of the female-private / male-public opposition.[13] Certainly ideas and practices relating to the private and public in the Muslim world are multiple, and they change from one place to another and under different political forces in different historical times.

In Turkey, contemporary imaginaries and ideas of private and public have to be understood as the result of the processes of modernisation and secularisation undertaken by the Turkish State. When Mustafa Kemal Atatürk came to power and founded the Turkish Republic from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, his main concern was to delineate the basis of the new secular and modern nation, opposed to the 'backward' Muslim and pre-modern Ottoman Empire. The definition of a new secular public sphere, ruled by the principle of European democracy and modernity, was also part of his programme. Therefore, throughout the history of modern Turkey, different ideas drawn from secular or Muslim sources have competed to define the appropriate notions of private and public. For example, Nilüfer Göle[14] proposes viewing the public sphere in contemporary Turkey as a stage for the performance of the modern subject, where visual and corporeal aspects are explicitly worked out and are the result of a conscious and intentional performance. She proposes understanding public presences and behaviours in the context of a State that has silenced religious signs and practices to develop a modern public sphere that is defined against the Muslim segregated social organisation. Yet the last years of the AKP government were marked by a new reinterpretation of secularism and new attempts to introduce Muslim definitions of public and private. The public presence of women has become an important terrain where different interpretations of Islam and society battle, and the public sphere becomes a place where people actively and publicly perform through their own bodies their idea of modernity, Islam or secularism.[15] Notions of public and private, in Turkey, have always been at the centre of political battles and competition between different visions of modernity, religion and morality.

Sertaç Sehlikoğlu[16] describes the meaning of private in Turkey through the concept of *mahremiyet*, an 'institution of intimacy',[17] constituted by the two components of gazing and hiding and specific notions of privacy and public.

> [*Mahremiyet*] is a non-translatable word into English as it simultaneously refers to multiple words in English including privacy, secrecy, and domesticity and derived from the word 'mahrem',

which literally means forbidden. The word in Turkish, commonly denotes a private, often sexual realm in the lives of individuals, couples, or families and is therefore confined by normative boundaries … It always denotes confidentiality that the insider is expected to preserve and an outsider is expected not to violate.[18]

Mahremiyet refers to the intimate and domestic space inhabited not only by women, but also by the men of the family, and it is understood 'as a border-making mechanism that creates border between spaces, individuals, and within the body of the same individual'.[19] As we will explain further, social media in Mardin has changed the culture and institutions of intimacy as imagined and lived spaces, but also the idea of public as a space for visual expression of different ideas of modernity, Islam and secularism.[20]

The new online public

In her attempt to explain to me the usage of Facebook in Mardin, a young woman mentioned what she considered a strange and inexplicable episode: 'On Facebook strange things happen. I have a religious friend with covered face that posts photos of herself with her husband hand in hand!' Mardinites continuously mediate between what Facebook initially encouraged them to do – disclose many details from their daily lives – and what they consider appropriate to display in public which is very few moments from their daily lives. For example, posting pictures of family members inside the private spaces of the house, or images of married couples, or the display of conversations about private topics was often described as sinful and shameful. Indeed, few people did it. As a result, the variety of pictures and conversations displayed on Facebook is significantly reduced compared to what we are used to seeing on the Facebook walls of many other people in Europe. What the studies in the 'West' describe as the 'disclosure effect' of Facebook in Mardin was experienced as a severe threat to people's social world. However, despite people's attempts to keep things private, social media has created a point of entrance for the intimate into the public domain. Desires for visibility, social affirmation and fame have sometimes been more powerful than existing normativity around the private sphere. As we saw in Chapter 3, images from private life promoted in public were those that increased people's reputation and fame, and created the image of a more educated, wealthy, moral and successful person.

Mardinites pursue different strategies to mediate between the contrasting desire to protect the intimate and private and at the same time achieve fame and visibility. For example, in Chapter 3 I noted that when dinners occur in a public space with friends, they more often show the faces of the dining companions, but when feasts are consumed at home with relatives they often avoid including the faces of the people and the details of the house, and they rather focus upon images of food. Also, the intimate zone of the house, such as bedrooms and bathrooms, never appears on the public Facebook, but the display of sitting rooms is more common. As a result, semi-private spaces of the house become public and are seen by a wider audience. Also, people always select formal and posed photography to eliminate traits of intimacy and familiarity. Chapter 3 also revealed how, in these games of negotiation, the winners are those who can display enough to achieve fame, but not so much to lose morality and honour. Despite people's mediations, negotiations and resistance to disclosure, social media has partially transformed domestic intimacy into an object of others' gaze.

Secondly, the gendered composition of the online public space has changed as women have achieved a new visibility. This is a very significant consequence of the uses of Facebook in Mardin, and it has produced several conflicts between partners, parents and daughters, brothers and sisters, since control of women's presence and movement in public space is one of the main sources of men's honour and a family's respectability. The online presentation of the self in public among women varies significantly across social classes and levels of education, and between secular or religious families, and it reveals different ideas and notions of modernity. But in every case, even when women use social media through fake names and identities, they participate in a new public life and this is locally considered as modern; the public performance of the secular or rather religious woman always occurs in this new, modern, online public space. This transformation runs parallel to wider economic and social changes going on offline: women in Mardin have new access to education, the job market and new, modern mixed-gender public spaces.

Thirdly, on social media women have become careful observers of men, and this has led to a new gender composition and direction of the gaze. Traditionally in the offline world the male gaze is directed towards women. In the streets of Mardin this is immediately clear, as women are constantly the targets of men's attention and have to defend their morality by looking down and not around. On Facebook, a new inverted relationship between gazes has surfaced. Men continue to look at women, but they have also increasingly become the object of the gazes of women,

who have become tenacious and determined observers of other people's images and appearance online. Women very commonly look at men's Facebook walls and pictures, and men are quite derisive and critical about it. For example, one young man criticised Facebook itself as the cause of his derision. A friend filmed him dancing in a funny way in the corner of the salon at a wedding party and circulated the video on Facebook. In the days that followed, all of his peers, including female friends, laughed at him. Women were actually the primary observers of the video, which reinforces the finding that Facebook is used by women to observe the behaviour of men and gossip about them. This was one of the main *raisons d'être* of Facebook use by women.

These three elements described above lead to a break with the traditional gendered boundaries between private and public. However, it is exactly in this very new public space that people perform traditional social relations and selves that conform to traditional social norms. The public Facebook is a hyper-conservative place where people appear as they do in the official gatherings of the extended family. They perform selves and social relationships that in the offline world have been undermined by processes of urbanisation, modernity and economic development. Yet, instead of performing a limited set of actions as they do in wedding ceremonies offline, they now appear in a larger assemblage of activities: meals with family members at home or at restaurants, holiday trips, work events, leisure time with children. Despite differences between secular and religious and progressive and conservative families in the way women are portrayed and domestic events are displayed, a high degree of conservatism is shared by everybody. To avoid shame and the damaging of reputation, nobody goes beyond the limits of what is jointly considered to be an appropriate presentation of the self in the new online public.

Social media has indeed largely been used to maintain relationships with members of the extended family dispersed around the country and abroad and to strengthen kin ties. It has also enabled intense connectivity between members of the nuclear family. The hyper-conservatism of the new online public is the result of the specific settings and situations created by social media,[21] but it is also interwoven with the wider current religious and conservative turn that Turkey experienced under the impact of the AKP government. In Mardin the making of the new 'modern' city came along with the new conservativism promoted by Erdoğan; for example, new mixed-gender places such as cafes and shopping malls developed at the same time as new Islamist politics, which regulate and limit relations between sexes. But public social media goes beyond this.

The key point in Chapter 3 was that Facebook is by no means simply a reflection of the conservative aspects of offline life, since so much that can be seen offline does not appear online. It is rather in its own way creating a unique ultra-conservative space that has no offline equivalent.

The new online private

The transformation of the public sphere arrived with the creation of new private online spaces that facilitate secret communications and relations between people of different sexes, to an extent that was not even imaginable until a few years ago. This led to the spread of premarital love and romance, which also had an impact on the institutions of marriage and family, and on the meanings of love. The expansion of these new individualised forms of communication seems to confirm Barry Wellman's theory of networked individualism, which argues that mobile phones, social media and 'personalised' technologies are part of a shift towards societies organised around individual personal networks. However, these networks do not have legitimacy in the society and they coexist with public ideologies which legitimise arranged marriages, traditional family organisation and the traditional role of women within it. These premarital relations are also constantly threatened by the possibilities of public disclosure facilitated by social media. The emergence of these individual-based relationships exist at the same time as the repair and strengthening of family-bond social relations, lineage and tribes that have declined owing to greater geographical dispersal, and this shows an orientation to traditional groups which is the exact opposite of the trajectory documented by Rainie and Wellman.[22]

Nonlinear social changes

The social change brought by social media does not follow a linear route, but it is rather the result of two apparently opposite shifts. The spread of premarital love and romance, the individual choice of partners, the creation of new friendships with strangers and the increased autonomy of women and young men in deciding about their ties are all considered to be part of the new, the secular and the modern. Yet the production of individual-based social relations occurs in parallel with the maintenance of ties with the extended family, tribes and lineages, and the rise of neo-conservative religious values.

The tension between the new and the old also operates at the level of each individual. During cultural change, conflicts are the norm and people's sense of their moral weight is stronger.[23] In those cultures where values are in conflict, people become conscious of making choices and feel a 'heightened sense of moral concern'.[24] In Mardin, the affirmation of moral values was visible and imperative in every moment of daily life. It was constantly invoked by young and old, women and men; and it was often displayed on the online and offline public scene, not least through the development of the memes discussed in Chapter 3. I see this compulsory and conscious performing of a new public moral self as a reaction to the ongoing social changes. Chapter 4 introduces a story that well exemplifies the usage of social media publicly to affirm morality and virtue. A man started obsessively to post pictures of himself together with his wife after he had cheated on her. He did this in order to dispel gossip and publicly to reaffirm his moral credibility. In the modern Turkish Republic, male polygamy is not recognised by law and it is socially condemned. Even in the Kurdish region it is considered immoral, although it is widely practised in the form of betrayal. With the recent increased economic opportunities, a higher number of divorces and the spread of social media, it has become more common for men to have a mistress and to cheat on their wives. Social media has facilitated these practices considered immoral, but it has also allowed the public display of the happy married couple. Pictures portraying the couple together hand in hand, at a restaurant during a romantic dinner or on holiday allowed the man to affirm his formal sense of morality, through bringing pieces of his ordinary intimate life into the new public space. The public disclosure of conjugal life was necessary to reaffirm his presumed morality and correct conduct in public.[25]

The new public presence of women even more clearly illustrates this double dynamic of change that results in a public exposition of morality. Some women posted as profile pictures images of themselves with sober clothes; others posted images from the Koran; others performed their religiosity by showing beautiful and fancy veils and clothes; others portrayed themselves as devoted mothers; others used fake profiles with false names and unrecognisable profile pictures to preserve anonymity; others displayed their beauty and attractiveness. They all entered the new online public space and reaffirmed in these different ways their ideas of proper conduct and their notions of modernity, secularism or Islam. These are public performances of moral selves, which are based on the re-appropriation of religious or secular values and models. As pointed out by Deniz Kandiyoti,[26] in Turkey women's bodies have always been

considered a marker of change. The reinvention of the public self also reflects a wider trend in Turkey that has been documented by scholars who explored how the public sphere has changed under the influence of Islamic politics, economic development and neoliberal processes.[27] In Mardin online bodies and faces of Arab and Kurdish women also express different visions of modernity, secularism and Islam. Non-religious urban Arab women represent their modern ideal of beauty with the use of make-up, coloured hair or Western fashions, whereas urban Kurdish women prefer to appear with a sober Kurdish look. They are less concerned with fashion and fancy clothes, while rural Kurdish women more often don't exhibit their body at all and use fake profiles and fake pictures.

Finally, the redrawing of the boundaries between private and public, displayed and hidden, is central also to the political domain. Once again, social media has brought us to the core values of the society being researched. In a place that has witnessed and experienced several episodes of political violence, such as the Armenian genocide, the Kurdish uprisings, the conflict between the PKK and the Turkish State (that has restarted again while I am writing this book) and the fleeing of refugees from Syria, Syrian Kurdistan and Iraq, the division between what is discussed in public and what is not is clear and neat. Violence has produced a list of themes that in the offline world are 'not said' and 'not discussed'. Social media has reproduced this, but it has also shifted the limits between the publicly visible and invisible. The internet is a place under State and social surveillance that limits the visibility of those who don't conform to the ideological model of the State and enhances the visibility of those who do.

The social changes produced by social media are contradictory, nonlinear and non-uniform. The switching of boundaries between the private and the public, and the spread of new forms of secret and 'forbidden' social relations, came along with a new public re-appropriation of moral values and the strengthening of family and kin relations. These are themes that have been touched upon throughout this book. The first chapter introduced the city of Mardin, a place that is undergoing significant transformations. The process of urbanisation and the expansion of the new city constitute an example of the effects of the investments undertaken by the AKP government in the building sector over the last decade. Construction has been placed at the centre of economic growth, and in those areas of the southeast that were an AKP stronghold the impacts of this planned urbanisation are significant. Urbanisation has led to nuclear households, a new public presence of women and new relations

between genders – and it came along with an increased level of education and economic expansion.

The first chapter thereby establishes a principle that new spaces constructed in new ways in and of themselves facilitate changes in social relations, such as the shift from extended to nuclear families; but at the same time we see another set of new spaces, which have no material manifestation and no basis in political policy. These are the new online spaces represented by social media and its creation of scalable sociality. Here the shift is not from extended to nuclear families, but towards a more extended field of sociality. This can be still more conservative and far more liberal at one and the same time, as seen in the increased individual personal networks described in Chapter 2, the normative public spaces of Facebook walls described in Chapter 3, the repair of the rupture created by geographical dispersal of families and wider units such as the tribe described in Chapter 4, the new intimate worlds whose remarkable transformations are the subject of Chapter 5 and, finally, the new political world with its unexpected online absences and presence that make it far from merely a reflection of offline politics, as noted in Chapter 6.

Throughout this book the intention has been to adhere to the ethos of an ethnographic study. Such a study tries to avoid taking issues of politics and gender as abstracted from the context of the everyday lives of the people themselves, their understanding of gender roles and their experience of politics, ranging from the national scene to the issue of not offending one's next-door neighbour.

This study has hopefully brought us to the heart of what matters in the lives of the people of Mardin, and has tried to describe empathetically, often through stories, how they experience the constraints, possibilities, consequences and moralities of new social media. But the ultimate aim is not parochial. The reason for putting aside the wider debates and entering as deeply as possible into the experience and perspectives of Mardinites is to thereby make a more authentic contribution as an academic anthropologist to those same global debates. In conclusion, all these findings that have illuminated our understanding of this specific context are entirely available for the purpose of shedding light on the two grand narratives that have described the impact of social media at a global level: the narrative of disclosure[28] and the narrative of networked individualism.[29] As I have described throughout this book and in this conclusion, elements of both these processes have been found in Mardin too. However, they also appeared with their opposites: the disclosure of private lives came together with a strong concern about the protection of old and new private spaces and new public conservative performances

of the self, whereas networked individualism moved along with forms of online group and family-based sociality. The outcome of this juxtaposition of large global narratives and a localised ethnography is not to dismiss the global and academic debate. It is rather to enrich it by pointing out contradictions, extensions and consequences that we as academics may not have imagined, but which the people of Mardin have clearly realised in their everyday usage of social media. Only from the knowledge of these many contradictory and opposite uses and consequences, and of the way they are entangled with one another, can we grasp the specificity of the social change brought by social media in Mardin and its implications for our understanding of what social media has the potential to become in our contemporary world.

Notes

Chapter 1

1   To protect privacy, all the names in this book are pseudonyms.
2   The AKP (Justice and Development Party) is the religious and conservative party that has governed Turkey since 2002. See Chapter 6 for more about the political situation in Turkey.
3   Friday is the Muslim holy day when the most important worship is held at noon. In many Muslim countries Friday is a bank holiday, but this is not the case in Turkey, which has followed the Western Gregorian calendar since 1927. However, in Mardin, especially in the old parts of the city, shops often close around noon on Fridays.
4   See Rainie, L. and Wellman, B. 2012. *Networked*. Cambridge. MA: MIT Press; and Rainie, L. and Wellman, B. 2013. 'If Romeo and Juliet had mobile phones', *Mobile Media & Communication* 1(1): 166–71.
5   Rainie and Wellman, *Networked*, p. 6.
6   There is much research on the role of social media in the organisation of protests in Turkey and the Middle East. For a more comprehensive presentation of the literature, see Chapter 6.
7   An important recent contribution to the understanding of digital technologies in Turkey in the English language is Akdenizli, B. ed. 2015. *Digital Transformations in Turkey*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
8   Miller, D. 2016. *Social Media in an English Village*. London: UCL Press.
9   Miller, D. et al. 2016. *How the World Changed Social Media*. London: UCL Press.
10 More accurate data on the ethnic composition of the town is not available, because there has been no census on linguistic minorities since 1965. This is part of a strategy to diminish the significance of minorities and emphasise national homogeneity.
11 The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is a guerrilla group that was founded in 1978. Conflicts between the State and the Kurds started in the 1920s and '30s with the foundation of the Turkish Republic and its assimilation policies built on the idea of the modern, secular and homogeneous Turkish nation. The suppression of demands for recognition of national and cultural rights through legitimate channels led to a radicalisation of the conflict, to the foundation of PKK in 1978 and to the beginning of the armed struggle in 1984.
12 The Artuklu were a Turkish people who arrived in Mardin in the eleventh century and governed for a few centuries before the arrival of the Ottomans.
13 For general accounts on Kurdish nationalism within Turkey, see, among others: McDowall, D. 1996. *A Modern History of the Kurds*. London: I.B. Tauris; Jabar, F. A. and Dawod, H. eds. 2006. *The Kurds: Nationalism and Politics*. London: Saqi; van Bruinessen, M. 1992. *Agha, Shaikh, and State: the Social Political Structures of Kurdistan*. London: Zed Books; van Bruinessen, M. 1998. 'Shifting national and ethnic identities: The Kurds in Turkey and in the European diaspora', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 18(1): 39–52; Houston, C. 1998. *Islam, Kurds and the Turkish Nation State*. Oxford: Berg; Kiriflçi, K. and Winrow, G. 1997. *The Kurdish Question and Turkey*. London: Frank Cass; Olson, R. ed. 1996. *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement in the 1990s: Its Impact on Turkey and the Middle East*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.
14 On the history of Mardin and the relationships between its ethnic and religious minorities, see Biner, Z. Ö. 2007. 'Retrieving the dignity of a cosmopolitan city: contested perspectives on rights, culture and ethnicity in Mardin', *New Perspectives on Turkey* 37: 31–58.
15 The number of Syrian refugees living in Mardin is unknown, as only a few are officially registered.

16 In the city of Mardin the treatment of Syrian refugees by the local population has been relatively accommodating compared to other towns of the region inhabited by a Kurdish majority. I never came across any significant or open collective violence against refugees, whereas in other Kurdish towns fights between groups of local Kurds and Arab Syrians were more frequent.

17 Aydin, S., K. Emiroğlu, and O. Özel 2000. *Mardin: Aşiret, Cemaat, Devlet*. Istanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı.

18 Aydin et al., *Mardin*.

19 Sari, E. 2010. *Kültür, Kimlik, Politika: Mardin'de Kültürlerarasılık*. Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları.

20 Aydin et al., *Mardin*.

21 Biner, 'Retrieving the dignity'.

22 Biner, 'Retrieving the dignity'.

23 At the time of writing in summer 2015, the political situation in the region is significantly different from the time of the field work in 2013 and 2014. Clashes between Turkish troops and PKK militants have again started to become a daily occurrence, reaching heights of conflict similar to those of the 1990s.

24 BDP, the Peace and Democracy Party (*Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi*), is the Kurdish political party that in 2014 joined HDP, the People's Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*).

25 Oktem, K. 2005. 'Faces of the city: Poetic, mediagenic, and traumatic images of a multi-cultural city in Southeast Turkey', *Cities* 22(3): 241–53.

26 Biner, 'Retrieving the dignity'.

27 The population in Mardin Province increased from 745,778 in 2007 to 779,738 in 2013.

28 Atalay Güneş, Z. N. 2012. 'Theorising "trust" in the economic field in the era of neoliberalism: the perspectives of entrepreneurs in Mardin'. Phd Thesis submitted to the Graduate School of Social Sciences of Middle East Technical University, Turkey.

29 Atalay Güneş, 'Theorising "trust"'.

30 Atalay Güneş, 'Theorising "trust"'.

31 Stokes, 2010. *The Republic of Love: Cultural Intimacy in Turkish Popular Music*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. He writes: 'To be lousy lovers, on the other hand … a truly sorry state of affairs! But one, at least, that everyone – Islamist and secularist, leftist and rightist, Turk and Kurd – might be persuaded to agree is a real issue. Discursively speaking, it evokes common ground, core values, Herzfeld's "assurance of shared sociality"' (p. 33).

32 For a more detailed account of Kurdish and Arab kinship in Mardin, and the role of social media in it, see Chapter 4.

33 In patrilineal descent groups people belong to their father's kin group and not their mother's.

34 www.turkstat.gov.tr

35 Horst, H and D. Miller, 2012. *Digital Anthropology*. Oxford: Berg.

Chapter 2

1 In this chapter, I will refer to the data I collected from two questionnaires I administered during my field work. Questionnaire 1 (Q1) was submitted to 102 participants between June and September 2013. Questionnaire 2 (Q2) was submitted to 130 participants between June and August 2014. The participants were chosen randomly in streets, parks, shops, houses, offices and schools of the new city in Mardin. Although the sample is not wide enough to make inferences about the whole population, it gives us an idea of the frequency and modality of access to the different social media platforms.

2 Translated from the Turkish text: '*Bazen evlı erkekler başka kadınlarla tanışıyor karışını aldatıyor ve o facebookta tanıştığı kadınla yaşıyor. Benim eşım başka bır kadınla aldatıyor facebookta tanıştığı kadının yanına gitti.*'

3 See Abu-Lughod, J. L. 1987. 'The Islamic city: Historic myth, Islamic essence, and contemporary relevance', *International Journal of Middle East Study* 19(2): 155–76.

4 Abu-Lughod, 'The Islamic city'.

5 The *dershane*s are private preparatory schools that train students to pass the university entrance examinations and other public national exams. Most of the *dershane* in Turkey are owned by the community headed by Fethullah Gülen, the Islamic movement that had a close relationship with the governmental AK party until the beginning of 2014, when they started to diverge, which is now leading to closure of the *dershane*.

6 The word *yabancı* can have different meanings: not member of the family, foreigner or stranger. In Mardin this word is also used for people who are not from the region, whether they are Turks or foreigners.

7 Gender differences in patriarchal Middle Eastern families have been extensively debated in the academic literature. Among others, see: Abu Lughod, L. ed. 1998. *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Kandiyoti, D. 1998. 'Bargaining with patriarchy', *Gender and Society* 2(3): 282–89; Joseph, S. 1999. *Intimate Selving in Arab Families. Gender, Self, and Identity*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press; Al Ali, N. 2005. 'Reconstructing gender: Iraqi women between dictatorship, war, sanctions and occupation', *Third World Quarterly* 26(4–5): 739–58.

8 Information obtained from a local police officer.

9 Almost all the respondents to Q1 owned a mobile phone, and 80 per cent owned a smartphone.

10 67 per cent of the respondents to Q1 affirmed that they had a broadband connection in their houses; 10 per cent connect through a USB dongle, while only 20 per cent don't have any internet connections at home. Similarly, 80 per cent of the respondents had at least one computer in their house, and 23 per cent had two. Data from the Turk-Telecom company that is in charge of 90 per cent of internet broadband contracts in the Province of Mardin (with a population of 773,026) show that there are 21,494 ADSL and 1,141 optical fibre connections in private houses, and 600 in offices. It's reasonable to think that half of these contracts are based in the city of Mardin and the remaining in the other towns of the province, as the majority of rural areas lack broadband access.

11 The Gülen movement is an Islamic movement with supporters in Turkey and other parts of the world, founded and led by Fethullah Gülen. One of their main activities is education, and they lead hundreds of private schools in Turkey and also abroad.

12 Madianou, M., and Miller, D. 2012. *Migration and New Media*. London: Routledge, p. 3.

13 How the presence of different types of people change the nature of online spaces was investigated in research on internet chatting in Jordan, see Kaya, L. P. 2009. 'Dating in a sexually segregated society: Embodied practices of online romance in Irbid, Jordan'. *Anthropological Quarterly* 82(1): 251–78.

14 Boyd, D. 2008. 'Facebook's privacy trainwreck', *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 14(1): 13–20.

15 See, for example: Binder, J., Howes, A. and Sutcliffe, A. 2009. 'The problem of conflicting social sphere: effects of network structures on experienced tension in social network sites'. Paper presented at *Computer Human Interaction 2009*, Boston, MA; Broadbent, S. 2011. *L'intimité au Travail*. Paris: FYP Editions; Chambers, D. 2013. *Social Media and Personal Relationships: Online Intimacies and Networked Friendship*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; Ellison, N., Steinfield, C., and Lampe, C. 2007. 'The benefits of Facebook "Friends": Exploring the relationship between college students' use of online social networks and social capital', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12(3): 1143–68; Lampe, C., Ellison, N. B., and Steinfield, C. 2007. 'A familiar Face(book): Profile elements as signal in an online social network', *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*. New York: ACM, pp. 435–44; Mesch, G. and Talmud, I. 2007. 'Special Issue on e-relationships: The blurring and reconfiguration of offline and online social boundaries', *Information, Communication and Society* 10(5): 585–9.

16 For a summary of the debates on individualism or corporatism in Middle-Eastern societies, see Joseph, *Intimate Selving*, pp. 9–11.

17 Suad Joseph, drawing from her research on Lebanese families, solved the dichotomy between individualism and corporatism by proposing the model of *patriarchal connectivity*, 'the production of selves with fluid boundaries organised for gendered and aged domination in a culture valorising Kin structures, morality, and idioms', Joseph, *Intimate Selving*, p. 12.

18 Joseph, *Intimate Selving*, p. 12.

19 This is in contrast with the situation in western Turkey, where arranged marriages tend to be seen as outmoded and backward, and practices of love-matches have more public legitimacy. See, for example, Hart, K. 2007. 'Love by arrangement: The ambiguity of 'spousal choice' in a Turkish village', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13(2): 345–62.

Chapter 3

1 *TOKI* is the Housing Development Administration of Turkey that provides social housing targeting low–middle-income people.

2 As noted by Roland Barthes in Barthes, R. 1977. 'Rhetoric of the image'. In *Image-Music-Text*, Sel. and Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, pp. 32–51.

3 It was not possible to collect accurate quantitative data about the number of Facebook profiles per person. People might share this information with me during in-depth interviews or informal conversation, but not in the formal settings of questionnaires, where people tend to present a public image of an honourable and respectable self. However, based on ethnographic observation, my understanding is that owning more than one Facebook profile was a common practice, especially among teenagers and very young adults, and tended to decrease with age.

4 On the impact of the lack of internet freedom in Turkey, see also Akdenizli, *Digital Transformations in Turkey*.

5 Surveillance is here considered as a productive force that generates specific performances and production of public selves. Social norms entangled with a patriarchal form of society, the control of an authoritarian state and a long history of violence and oppression have produced clear boundaries between what can be publicly visible and what cannot.

6 For an examination of the relationship between the ideology of honour and the specific aesthetics of photographic posture, see the research about a peasant society in southeast France by Pierre and Marie-Claire Bourdieu: Bourdieu, P. and Bourdieu, M. 2004. 'The peasant and photography', *Ethnography* 5(4): 600–86.

7 See, for example, Eickelman, D. F. and Anderson, J. W. eds. 2003. *New Media in the Muslim World: the Emerging Public Sphere*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

8 This aspect was discussed by Lauer, J., 2012. 'Surveillance history and the history of new media: an evidential paradigm', *New Media & Society* 14(4): 566–82.

9 Chambers, *Social Media and Personal Relationships*.

Chapter 4

1 Zeydanlioglu, W. 2008. 'The white Turkish man's burden: Orientalism, Kemalism and the Kurds in Turkey'. In *Neo-colonial Mentalities in Contemporary Europe? Language and Discourse in the Constructions of Identities*, edited by G. Rings, and A. Ife, 155–74. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

2 Among others, see: Barth, F. 1953. *Principles of Social Organization in Southern Kurdistan*. Oslo: Universitetets Etnografiske Museum; Barth, F. 1986. 'Father's brother's daughter marriage in Kurdistan', *Journal of Anthropological Research* 42(3): 389–96; Gellner, E. 1969. *Saints of the Atlas*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press; Leach, E. R. 1940. *Social and Economic Organization of the Rowanduz Kurds*. London: London School of Economics.

3 See, for example: van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State*; Yalçin-Heckmann, L. 1991. *Tribe and Kinship Among the Kurds*. Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Peter Lang.

4 The two main ethnographies on the Turkish village are: Sterling, P. 1965. *The Turkish Village*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson; and Delaney, C. 1991. *The Seed and the Soil: Gender and Cosmology in Turkish Village Society*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

5 Sterling, *The Turkish Village*, p. 29.

6 In the segmentary model each sub-group in turn is seen as an opposition. A tribe is united, but at the level of lineage below the lineages may be in opposition and competition. Similarly a lineage itself is a unity, but sub-lineages may compete. This system has often been described within the anthropology of the Middle East and North Africa. See, for example, Fortes, M. and Evans Pritchard, E. E. eds. 1940. *African Political System*. London: Oxford University Press; Eickelman, D. F. 1981. *The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall; Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas*.

7 van Bruinessen, M. V. 2002. 'Kurds, states and tribes'. In *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East*, edited by F. A. Jabar and H. Dawod. London: Saqi, pp. 165–83.

8 van Bruinessen, 'Kurds, states and tribes'.

9 Here I am using the word 'tribe' (*aşiret*) as it's used locally. I don't pretend to use it consistently with the anthropological definition of tribe (for example, Leach defined the 'tribe' as a political group, opposed to the 'lineage' understood as a kinship group, see Leach, E. R. 1940. *Social and Economic Organization of the Rowanduz Kurds*. London: London School of Economics). Mardinites often use the expression *aşiret* ambiguously and with different meanings, but mainly to connote the social organisation of the Kurds as opposed to that of the urban Arabs.

10 By third cousins I mean the great-grandchildren of great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers' sisters and brothers.

11 Kızıltepe is a town in the Province of Mardin inhabited mainly by Kurds, located 20 km from the new city of Mardin.

12 On how kinship networks among the Kurds constitute a form of resistance against the assimilation policies of the Turkish State, see also Belge, C. 2011. 'State building and the limits of legibility: Kinship networks and Kurdish resistance in Turkey', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43: 95–114. For a more general analysis of the effect of political violence in the Kurdish region of Turkey, see Aras, R. 2014. *The Formation of Kurdishness in Turkey: Political Violence, Fear and Pain*. London and New York: Routledge.

13 For ethnographic studies on the experience of Kurdish migration within Turkey, see: Houston, C. 2001. 'Profane intuitions: Kurdish diaspora in the Turkish city', *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 12(1): 15–31; Seufert, G. 1997. 'Between religion and ethnicity: A Kurdish-Alevi tribe in globalising Istanbul'. In *Space, Culture and Power: New Identities in Globalising Cities*, edited by A. Öncü and P. Weyland, 157–76. London: Zed Books; Grabolle-Celiker, A. 2013. *Kurdish Life in Contemporary Turkey: Migration, Gender and Ethnic Identity*. London: I.B. Tauris.

14 van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State*.

15 van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State*, p. 50.

16 van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State*, p. 50.

17 *Iftar* is the dinner eaten soon after sunset during the month of Ramadan.

18 Chambers, *Social Media and Personal Relationships*; Broadbent, *L'intimité au Travail*.

19 For an outline of the patterns of anthropological discourse on the Arab world, see Abu-Lughod, L. 1989. 'Zones of theory in the anthropology of the Arab world', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 18: 267–306.

20 *Okey* is a very popular table-top game in Turkey, which came to be very popular on Facebook too.

Chapter 5

1 See, for example, Kaya, 'Dating in a sexually segregated society'; Wheeler, D. 2006. *The Internet in the Middle East*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

2 Miller, D. et al., *How the World Changed Social Media*.

3 See Abu-Lughod, L. 2000. *Veiled Sentiments: Honour and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press; Gilsenan, M. 1982. *Recognising Islam: An Anthropologist's Introduction*. London: Croom Helm; Lambek, M. 1993. *Knowledge and Practice in Mayotte: Local Discourses of Islam, Sorcery and Spirit Possession*. Toronto: Toronto University Press; Marsden, M. 2005. *Living Islam: Muslim Religious Experience in Pakistan's North-West Frontier*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Marsden, M. 2007. 'Love and elopement in Northern Pakistan', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13: 91–108; Schielke, S. 2009. 'Being good in Ramadam: Ambivalence, fragmentation, and the moral self in the lives of young Egyptians', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15(s1).

4 Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments*.

5 Marsden, 'Love and elopement in Northern Pakistan', p. 92.

6 Kurds follow the Shafi'i school of Islamic jurisprudence, while Turks and Arabs from Mardin follow the Hanafi school. The differences between the rules of the two schools are minor and mainly involve the times of prayers, the position of the hands during prayer and ritual purification.

7 White, J. 2013. *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks*. Princeton, NKJ: Princeton University Press. On the same topic, see also, Çarkoğlu, A. and Kalaycıoğlu, E. 2009. *The Rising Tide of Conservatism in Turkey*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

8 As pointed out by Talal Asad: 'For the (Muslim) community, what matters is the Muslim subject's social practices – including verbal publication – not her internal thoughts, whatever these might be' (in Asad T., Brown, W., Butler, J., and Mahmood, S. 2009. *Is Critique Secular?: Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, p. 40).

9 See Hart, 'Love by arrangement'.

10 On *Arabesk* music in Turkey, see the work by Martin Stokes (Stokes, M. 1989. 'Music, fate and state: Turkey's *Arabesk* debate', *Middle East Report* 160: 27–30; Stokes, M. 1992. 'Islam, the Turkish state and *arabesk*', *Popular Music* 11: 213–27. Stokes, M. 2010. *The Republic of Love: Cultural Intimacy in Turkish Popular Music*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.) Stokes describes *Arabesk* music as having an important impact on the concept of love in 1980s Turkey. Along with Turkish popular films of that time, *Arabesk* portrays love as hopeless, and premarital romances as not leading to a happy marriage, but rather sadness and melancholy.

11 For a description of the social transformation brought about by Western places as opposed to the traditional Turkish coffeehouses in Istanbul, see Kömeçoğlu, U. 2006. 'New sociabilities: Islamic cafes in Istanbul'. In *Amman Islam in Public: Turkey, Iran and Europe*, edited by N. Göle, 163–90. Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Press.

12 As we will see in the concluding chapter of this book, stealing Facebook passwords to play nasty jokes was quite common in Mardin.

13 *Bajarili* is a Kurdish word that means 'urban'. In Mardin it is used to name the urban Arabs as opposed both to Kurds and to Arab speakers with less noble origins.

14 The impact of social media on relationships between gay men is similar. Facebook groups were used by men from Mardin to secretly meet other men, but gay encounters have not become more visible. Facebook group members use anonymous profiles with pictures portraying muscle men's bodies or male sexual organs; and gay online dating applications such as Grinder were not used. I found no evidence of social media uses for same-sex relationships between women.

15 According to many young men and women I talked with, premarital sex is not unusual between unmarried couples, but it never includes vaginal penetration.

Chapter 6

1 See, for example, the work by Dahlberg, where the concept of the 'public sphere' was used as a normative ideal: Dahlberg, L. 2001. 'Extending the public sphere through Cyberspace: The case of Minnesota e-democracy', *First Monday* 6(3).

2 Vincent, J. ed. 2002. *The Anthropology of Politics: A Reader in Ethnography, Theory, and Critique*. London: Wiley-Blackwell.

3 See Candea, M. 2011. 'Our division of the Universe. Making a space for the non-political in the anthropology of politics', *Current Anthropology* 52: 309–34 and Spencer, J. 2007. *Anthropology, Politics and the State: Democracy and Violence in South Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

4 Taussig, M. 1999. *Defacement*. New York: Routledge, quoted in Biner 'Retrieving the dignity'.

5 Taussig, *Defacement*, p. 39.

6 See also the concept of 'non-political ordinariness' in Achilli, L. 2014. 'Disengagement from politics: nationalism, political identity, and the everyday in a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan', *Critique of Anthropology* 34(2): 244.

7 Aras, *The Formation of Kurdishness*.

8 The anthropological literature on political violence is vast. Among others, see: Das, V. 1997. 'Language and the body: Transactions in the construction of pain'. In *Social Suffering*, edited by A. Kleinman, V. Das, and M. Lock, 67–91. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press; Navaro-Yashin, Y. 2012. *The Make Believe Space: Affective Geography in a Postwar Polity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press; Scarry, E. 1985. *The Body in Pain: the Making and Unmaking of the World*. New York: Oxford University Press; Green, L. 1994. 'Fear as a way of life', *Cultural Anthropology* 9(2): 227–56; Gilsenan, M. 1996. *Lords of the Lebanese Marches: Violence and Narrative in an Arab Society*. London: I.B. Tauris.

9 https://rsf.org/index2014/en-index2014.php

10 Tunç A. 2015. 'Quest for democracy. Internet freedom and politics in contemporary Turkey'. In Akdenizli, *Digital Transformations in Turkey*.

11 Tunç, 'Quest for democracy'.

12 Tunç, 'Quest for democracy'.

13 An important exponent of the internet celebratory discourse is Clay Shirky, see Shirky, C. 2008. *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organising Without Organisation*. New York: Penguin;

Shirky, C. 2010. *Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age*. New York: Penguin.

14   The main exponent of this is Morozov, see Morozov, E. 2011. *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*. New York: Public Affairs; Morozov, E. 2013. *To Save Everything, Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism*. New York: Public Affairs.

15   Postill, J. 2012. 'Digital politics and political engagement'. In Horst and Miller, *Digital Anthropology*.

16   KCK is the acronym for the Koma Civakên Kurdistan (Union of Communities in Kurdistan). It was founded during the reorganisation of the PKK within the framework of the principle of democratic federalism suggested by Abdullah Ocalan in his 2004 book *Bir Halki Savunkam* (*Defending the nation*). KCK works like an executive organ coordinating the PKK and the other parties and organisations operating in the other Kurdish regions in Iraq, Iran and Syria. It is often defined by Turkish media and authorities as the political wing of the banned PKK (Çandar, C. 2012. *Leaving the Mountain: How May the PKK Lay Down Arms?* Istanbul: TESEV).

17   After the coup d'état of 12 September 1980, the prison in Diyarbakır is remembered as the cruellest place in the history of the Turkish Republic. The extremity of its brutalities, tortures and crimes has led several prisoners to commit suicide and burn themselves (Aras, *The Formation of Kurdishness*).

18   On internet surveillance in the Kurdish region of Turkey, see also Çelik, B. 2015. 'The politics of the digital technoscape in Turkey'. In Akdenizli, *Digital Transformations in Turkey*.

19   Deniz Gezmiş was a Turkish Leninist political activist in the 1960s, who was sentenced to death by the Turkish government. He then became an icon among the leftist movement in Turkey. However, in order to protect the privacy of my informants, in this book even fake Facebook names have been changed.

20   Adana is a town in south Turkey that became one of the main destinations for Kurds fleeing their villages and home towns.

21   *Red Hack* is a Turkish Marxist-Leninist hacker group considered a terrorist organisation by the Turkish government. It was defined as an 'armed separatist terrorist organisation' during a public prosecution. They have a website, a Facebook profile and a Twitter account where they circulate news.

22   *Aleyhtar*, which in Turkish means 'opponent', is an online newspaper promoting anarchist and libertarian ideas and values.

23   *Sosyalist Beşıktaş* is a left-wing fan group.

24   *Haber Enstitüsü* is a left-wing online journal.

25   The Kurdish language was banned in Turkey after the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Kurds were not allowed to speak their native language in public spaces, offices, schools and streets, and even speaking the language in the home was under threat. Under pressure from the European Union in 1991 the ban was slackened, and the AKP lifted restrictions on Kurdish rights and the use of their language. Now Kurds are no longer arrested for speaking *Kurmanji* (the most widespread Kurdish dialect in southeast Turkey) in the streets, and in the last few years some institutions around Turkey have started to teach Kurdish languages. Mardin Artuklu University is one of these.

26   Aras, *The Formation of Kurdishness*.

27   In Mardin, publicly defining oneself as an atheist can lead to serious repercussions. Although atheism is not considered a crime under Turkish law, people in Turkey don't easily admit to being atheist. The current Law 216 on hate speech makes it illegal to insult religious values, and this has been used to prosecute intellectuals who write online comments seen as offensive towards Islam.

28   See, for example, Postill, J. 2011. *Localising the Internet. An Anthropological Account*. Oxford: Berghahn.

29   Fethullah Gülen is the founder and leader of a movement that synthesises Turkish nationalism and Islam, which derives from the Sufi-inspired scholar Said Nursi. Despite ideological differences with the AK party, there was reciprocal support between these two major Turkish Muslim forces. In the last few years, however, divergences and accusations have arisen between the two, eventually evolving into the corruption scandals of December 2013.

30   Saadet is a small, minor conservative Islamist party in Turkey that took the votes of the followers of Fethullah Gülen in the 2014 local elections in Mardin.

31 *Newroz* is the most important Kurdish celebration of the beginning of the new year and coincides with the traditional Iranian new year. This celebration has a great significance for the Kurds and Kurdish identity in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran.

32 In March 2014 the inhabitants of Mardin voted for both the larger Mardin Metropolitan Municipality and the local Mardin Municipality.

33 On 28 December 2011 two Turkish jets killed 34 Kurdish civilians, most of them children, who were trading cigarettes and petrol on the Turkey–Iraq border near the village of Roboski in the district of Uludere. This massacre was considered one of the worst recent Turkish State crimes against Kurdish civilians before the events of summer 2015 and the bomb in Ankara on 10 October 2015.

34 Social media played a pivotal role in giving news about the Gezi Park protests because coverage in the mainstream media was completely insufficient and biased. The major Turkish TV channels completely ignored the events. The case of CNN Turk became famous: it broadcast a documentary on penguins while millions of people were protesting in Istanbul and other cities in Turkey and international TV channels around the world reported the events.

35 See, for example, these two journalistic sources: http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB1000142 41278873235270045790791151479634742 and http://www.dailydot.com/news/turkey-twitter-gezi-akp-propaganda/

36 Taussig, *Defacement*.

Chapter 7

1 On the demonisation of social media by the Turkish government, see Tufekci, Z. 2014. 'Social movements and governments in the digital age: evaluating a complex landscape', *Journal of International Affairs* 68(1), http://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/files/2014/12/xvii-18_Tufekci_Article.pdf; Tufekci, Z. https://medium.com/message/everyone-is-getting-turkeys-twitter-block-wrong-cb596ce5f27, Mar 24 2014.

2 See also Tufekci, 'Social movements and governments', p. 7.

3 On the new Turkish nationalism, see also White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks*.

4 For a discussion on shame and mediation, see Madianou, M. 2012. 'News as a looking-glass: Shame and the symbolic power of mediation', *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 15(1): 3–16.

5 For an introduction to scalable society, see Miller, D. et al., *How the World Changed Social Media*.

6 Among many others, see, for example, the World Bank's blog: http://blogs.worldbank.org/youthink/social-media-and-social-change-how-young-people-are-tapping-technology, or the report by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue: http://www.strategicdialogue.org/Social_Media_Social_Change.pdf

7 See my previous research on the internet and new media development in Beirut, Lebanon (Costa, E. 2011. 'Social media for social change: New media development, ideologies of the internet and activist imaginary in Lebanon'. In *La Communication Électronique: Enjeux De Langues*, edited by F. Liénard and S. Zlitni, 77–88. Limoges: Lambert-Lucas.

8 There is much research on the role of social media as a tool for activism and organisation of protests in the Arab Middle East. Among others, see: Alexander, A. and Aouragh, M. 2014. 'Arab revolutions: Breaking Fear| Egypt's unfinished revolution: The role of the media revisited', *International Journal of Communication* 8: 26; Alterman, J. B. 2011. 'The revolution will not be tweeted', *Washington Quarterly* 34(4): 103–16; Khamis, S. and Vaughn, K. 2011. 'Cyberactivism in the Egyptian Revolution: How civic engagement and citizen journalism tilted the balance', *Arab Media & Society* 13; Khamis, S. and Vaughn, K. 2012. 'We are all Khaled Said: The potentials and limitations of cyberactivism in triggering public mobilisation and promoting political change, *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research*, 4: 145–63; Peterson, M. A. 2011. 'Egypt's media ecology in a time of revolution', *Arab Media & Society* 14 http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=770; Salvatore, A. ed. 2011. 'Between everyday life and political revolution: the social web in the Middle East', *Oriente Moderno* New Series XCI(1): 5–103; Salvatore, A. 2013. 'New media, the "Arab Spring", and the metamorphosis of the public sphere: Beyond Western assumptions on collective agency and democratic politics', *Constellations* 20(2): 217–28; Samin, N. 2012. 'Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the social media moment. *Arab Media & Society* 15. http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=785

9 Miller, *Social Media in an English Village*.

10 Bourdieu, P. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

11 Abu-Lughod, 'The Islamic city'.

12 Abu-Lughod, 'The Islamic city', p. 169.

13 Among others, see: MacLeod, A. E. 1993. *Accomodating Protests: Working Women, the New Veiling, and Change in Cairo*. New York: Columbia University Press; Özyürek, E. 2006. *Nostalgia for the Modern: State Secularism and Everyday Politics in Turkey*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

14 Göle, N. 2002. 'Islam in public: New visibility and new imaginaries', *Public Culture* 14(1): 173–90.

15 Göle, 'Islam in public'.

16 Sehlikoğlu, S. 2015. 'The daring Mahrem: Changing dynamics of public sexuality in Turkey'. In *Gender and Sexuality in Muslim Cultures*, edited by G. Ozyegin, 235–52 London: Ashgate.

17 Berlant, L. G. and Warner, M. 1998. 'Sex in public', *Critical Inquiry* 24(2): 547–66.

18 Sehlikoğlu, 'The daring Mahrem', p. 3.

19 Sehlikoğlu, 'The daring Mahrem', p. 4.

20 Göle, 'Islam in public'.

21 Following Goffman's dramaturgical model of interaction (Goffman, E. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press), online spaces can be studied as social situations.

22 Rainie and Wellman, *Networked*.

23 Robbins, J. 2007. 'Between reproduction and freedom: Morality, value, and radical cultural change', *Ethnos* 72(3): 293–314.

24 Robbins, 'Between reproduction and freedom', p. 311.

25 Here the publicly affirmed morality is based on the idea of the 'modern' nuclear family that was introduced in Turkey with the foundation of the Republic, and not on some presumed 'pre-modern' and 'traditional' forms.

26 Kandiyoti, D. 1989. 'Women and the Turkish State: Political actors or symbolic pawns?' In *Woman-Nation State*, edited by N. Yuval-Davis and F. Anthias. London: Macmillan.

27 See, for example, Sehlikoğlu, 'The daring Mahrem'.

28 Many researchers have affirmed how social media has led to an increased public display of private life, to the blurring of public and private, and to the collapse of the boundaries between contexts. See, for example, articles and books by Danah Boyd (Boyd, Facebook's privacy trainwreck; Boyd, D. 2011. 'Social network sites as networked publics: Affordances, dynamics, and implications'. In *A networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Networking Sites*, edited by Z. Papacharissi, 39–58. New York: Routledge; Boyd, D. 2014. *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*. New York: Yale University Press; Boyd, D. and Donath, J. 2004. 'Public displays of connection', *BT Technology Journal* 22 (4): 71; Boyd, D. and Hargittai, E. 2010. 'Facebook privacy settings: Who cares?' *First Monday* 15 (8)). See also Marichal, J. 2012. *Facebook Democracy: The Architecture of Disclosure and the Threat to Public Life*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate. Then, too, the founder of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, claimed a model of radical transparency (Kirkpatrick, D. 2010. *The Facebook Effect*. New York: Simon & Schuster), in line with its business model based on selling advertising derived from the interests and behaviours of its users. Self-disclosure of the private life to a large audience is at the same time a common finding of research about Facebook users in Western countries and an intention of the platform's designers. The convergence between these two seems to exclude the possibility of uses that don't lead to 'public disclosure of private life'.

29 The narrative of disclosure refers to the main thesis supported by Rainie and Wellman, leading scholars of the social consequences of new digital communications. They argue that we live in a new social operating system that is based on the relationships between individual-based networks rather than on the membership of groups. See Rainie and Wellman, *Networked*.

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