

MY FAITHFULL MACHINE: THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN DAILY LIFE  
THE CASE OF SINGER SEWING MACHINE IN TURKEY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
OF  
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

BY

AYŞEN İŞLER SARIOĞLU

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR  
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE  
IN  
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY STUDIES

SEPTEMBER 2011

Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences.

---

Prof. Dr. Meliha Altunışık  
Director

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science.

---

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Erkan Erdil  
Head of Department

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science.

---

Prof. Dr. Onur Yıldırım  
Supervisor

**Examining Committee Members**

Prof. Dr. Onur Yıldırım (METU) \_\_\_\_\_

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Teoman Pamukçu (METU) \_\_\_\_\_

Prof. Dr. Erkan Erdil (METU) \_\_\_\_\_

**I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.**

Name, Last Name: Ayşen İşler Sarıođlu

Signature:

## **ABSTRACT**

**MY FAITHFULL MACHINE: THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN DAILY LIFE  
THE CASE OF SINGER SEWING MACHINE IN TURKEY**

**İŞLER SARIOĞLU, AYŞEN**

M.S., Department of Science and Technology Policy Studies

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Onur Yıldırım

September 2011, 99 pages

This thesis aims to investigate the role of domestic technology in daily life. It focuses on the impact of household technologies upon women's lives and attempts to address the questions of how women could create an agency through technology to transform their lives and how a technological appliance could act to empower women. Of all household technologies, Singer sewing machine was chosen owing to its representative nature. Accordingly, the thesis provides a brief history of Singer Company in order to describe the major aspects of both the Singer Company and the sewing machine technology. It is argued that sewing machine technology became a convenient tool for women to transform their lives both economically and socially. The testimonies of the women interviewed for this thesis show that their technological skills were a significant part of their identity. Furthermore, middle-class Turkish women used this technology to meet middle class standards whenever they and their families aspired to.

**Keywords:** Singer Company, Household Technology, Sewing Machine,  
Women

## ÖZ

### BENİM SADIK MAKİNAM: TEKNOLOJİNİN GÜNLÜK HAYATAKİ ROLÜ TÜRKİYE'DE SINGER DİKİŞ MAKİNALARI ÖRNEĞİ

Yüksek Lisans, Bilim ve Teknoloji Politikası Çalışmaları Bölümü

Tez Yöneticisi : Prof. Dr. Onur Yıldırım

Eylül, 2011, 99 sayfa

Bu tez evsel teknolojilerin günlük hayattaki rolünü incelemeyi amaçlar. Tez bu teknolojilerinin kadınların hayatına etkisine odaklanarak kadınların teknoloji aracılığı ile hayatlarını değiştirecek gücü nasıl oluşturdukları ve teknolojik aletlerin kadınları, hayatlarına yön verebilecek şekilde nasıl güçlendirdiği sorularına cevap arar. Bütün ev aletleri arasında, Singer dikiş makinaları konuyu iyi örneklemesi nedeni ile seçilmiştir. Buna uygun olarak, Singer Firması'nın ve dikiş makinası teknolojisinin ana özelliklerini ve tarihsel önemini vurgulamak için Singer Firmasının kısa tarihine yer verilmiştir. Dikiş makinası teknolojisinin kadınların hayatını hem ekonomik hem de sosyal alanda dönüştüren bir araç olduğu tartışılmaktadır. Bu çalışma için görüşülen kadınların tanıklıkları, kadınların teknik becerilerinin kişiliklerinin önemli bir parçası olduğunu göstermektedir. Ek olarak, orta-sınıf Türk kadını bu teknolojiyi kendilerinin ve ailelerinin ihtiyacı olduğu durumlarda ekonomik olarak orta-sınıf standartlarını korumak için de kullanmıştır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Singer Firması, Ev Teknolojileri, Dikiş Makinaları, Kadın

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First of all, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Onur Yıldırım for his valuable advice, encouragements and patience. It has been a great privilege to have worked with him. I also want to thank Prof. Dr. Erkan Erdil and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Teoman Pamukçu for kindly taking part in the jury and their valuable comments.

I especially want to thank my sister, Şeyda Şükran İşler. She has patiently read and reread my thesis and has given valuable comments. Without her support, writing this work would be much harder for me. A very special thank you also goes to my husband, Özgür Sarioğlu, for his patience during the stressful period of writing this thesis. He has also made valuable contributions with his editing.

I am very grateful to my parents, Handan and Erdal İşler, for the love that they have given me over the years. I have also been very lucky to have the support of my friends and colleagues. They have voluntarily covered for me in the office during my absence. At last but not least, I would like thank my grandmother, Nadire Şakar, and all of my other interviewees who inspired me during the writing of this thesis. My friends, who introduced me to my interviewees, Deniz Akalp, Nalan Alikasıfoğlu, Emre Aytaç, Alev Çakmakçı, Mine Oskay, Şafak Sezginer, also deserve a special mention.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAGIARISM.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
ÖZ .....	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vii
LIST OF TABLES.....	xii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xiii
CHAPTER	
1.INTRODUCTION.....	1
2.HOUSEHOLD TECHNOLOGY AND SINGER SEWING MACHINE .....	13
2.1 History of Singer Sewing Machine in the World .....	19
2.2 History of Singer Sewing Machine in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey.....	37
3.MACHINE AND WOMEN_THE IMPACT OF SEWING MACHINE TECHNOLOGY UPON WOMEN OF TURKEY.....	53
3.1 My Faithful Machine: Women, Identity and Social Life.....	60
3.2 Women Labor and Sewing Technology .....	77
4.CONCLUSION.....	90
REFERENCES.....	95

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Singer's United States and Overseas Sales, 1867-1873 .....	25
Table 2 Singer Sewing Machines Sales in Selected Countries, 1877-1920.... .....	30
Table 3 Singer's Advertising Expenditure in London Office, 1867-1884 .....	34

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 - Singer New Family Machine,1858, head only.....	22
Figure 2 - Singer New Family Machine’s brochure .....	24
Figure 3 - Singer Company – Throughout the World logo.....	27
Figure 4 - Singer Advertisement for the machine produced in Britain .....	28
Figure 5 - Singer Girl from Germany .....	29
Figure 6 - Singer Girl from an Advertisement in Russia .....	35
Figure 7 - Singer Sewing Machines Sales in Ottoman Empire,1875–1920. .....	38
Figure 8 - Singer Advertisement .....	41
Figure 9 - Singer Advertisement .....	42
Figure 10 - Singer’s 100-Year Poster, National Library 1951.....	44
Figure 11 - Singer Advertisement with Miss Turkey of 1966 .....	45
Figure 12 - Singer Advertisement of 191 Y Model .....	47
Figure 13 - Model Yoknaz Mavi İnci Model, Hayat 1974 .....	48
Figure 14 - Singer Sewing Machine Company’s Warranty Coupon, 1940 .....	49
Figure 15 - Singer Advertisement– Milliyet, 1965.....	50
Figure 16 - Banner of the Singer’s Sewing Introduction Class .....	51
Figure 17 - Singer Advertisement, Hayat .....	52
Figure 18 - Nursel Hanım with her Singer sewing machine .....	65
Figure 19 - The Cover of Singer’s Zigzag Model User’s Manual.....	71
Figure 20 - My Singer Sewing Machine .....	72
Figure 21 - One of the works of Emine Hanım .....	75

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION



My childhood was colored by my grandmother's sewing machine that magically turned fabrics into beautiful dresses. I fondly remember those times when my grandmother took it as her job to sew for us, her family. When I used to go to shopping with my mother, my grandmother's skills and her machine were always there to produce the alternatives to the fancy dresses decorating the shop windows. If the dress, I desired, was too expensive, it would be sufficient to describe the model of the dress to my grandmother. She never said no to her first grandchild. Her skills with her beautiful old machine gave me the chance of wearing whatever I desired. In the light of my good memories, I am writing the story of sewing machine by following its trail from U.S to Turkey, from its inventor to user. My storyline is built on a few questions drawn upon the fields of history of technology and women's history. The principal question has to do with the ways in which a technological invention affects people's lives. As I address the impact of the

sewing machine upon people, more particularly women, I tend to look at the ways it empowered people and the ways people created an agency through this technology. While doing this I also look at the other side of the story and try to expose the ways through which the invention under question is changed by the people. The origins of my story go back to the Industrial Revolution.

In the eighteenth-century Britain, Industrial Revolution was strongly marked with the mechanization of production, thus an increase in efficiency. The mechanization of the work and the new emerging production system, namely factory production transformed the life of millions in an irreversible way. Landes talks about the amount of transformation in ordinary people's lives;

For the worker, the transformation was even more fundamental, for not only his occupational role, but his very way of life was at stake. For many ... the introduction of machinery implied for the first time a complete separation from the means of production; the worker became a 'hand'. On almost all, however, the machine imposed a new discipline. The factory was a new kind of prison; the clock a new kind of jailer (Landes, 1969).

As Landes argues above, the new technologies and production system did transform the working life of man and the workplace. As much as the nature of work was changed, the daily life and the domain of house were also dramatically altered with this transformation. The technological advances used actively in production were adapted to household technologies by inventors and entrepreneurs and thus technology began to make its way into

home, the domain of the family. And an irreversible process of change was triggered.

The amount of change for the household can be seen clearly if the modest houses of the eighteenth century were compared with their modern counterparts. As Braudel states; the furniture of the poor people “*consisted of next to nothing, at least before the eighteenth century*” (Braudel, 1992). An open hearth, a pot, few basic kitchen items, a table and a bench with few clothes and bedstead were almost all the tools and furniture used by household. Water supply and sanitary systems, without which we cannot even imagine a life nowadays, were relatively new developments. “*A bathroom was a very rare luxury in these seventeenth and eighteenth-century houses*” (Braudel, 1992). The development of continuous piped supplies of water reached the houses of England working class about 1850’s (Daunton. 1983). These novelties were gradually exported to the rest of the world as westernization began to be incorporated into the agendas of national elites in the non-European-world.

The scene inside the Ottoman houses was different in the sense of furniture but they were again sparse. Davies describes the furniture of a seventeenth-century-upper-class Ottoman house as divans, a few chests, plentiful rugs and some small articles for cooking and bathing. Different than European

houses, there were no bedsteads, tables and chairs until “*Westernization took hold*” in the nineteenth century (Davies, 1986).

In short, beginning with the eighteenth century, the transformation in the material culture in the western part of the world can be observed from the changing pattern of consumption and the inventories of the household. De Vries argues that already in the second half of the seventeenth century there was a shift from production to consumption:

...Northwestern Europe and British North America experienced an “industrious revolution” during the long eighteenth century, roughly 1650-1850, in which a growing number of households acted to reallocate their productive resources (which are chiefly the time of the member) in ways that increase both the supply of market orientated, money-earning activities and demand for goods offered in the marketplace (De Vries, 2008).

Redirecting more resources of the household to the money-earning and consuming activities and advents of the new technologies introduced after the Industrial Revolution transformed the house and housework. The housewives turned to the consumers of new products of services including running water, prepared food, electricity and electrical appliances. Secondly, the mechanization of the housework changed similarly the way and frequency of doing housework. The mechanization of housework could be dated with the sewing machine around mid-nineteenth century. It was the first machine that entered the house. Thanks to the monopoly and great success of the Singer Company, the name Singer became synonymous with the

sewing machine; this appliance used by millions of women to alleviate the burden of sewing.

The variety of household devices increased while the electricity became commonplace in Europe and North America since the beginning of the twentieth century. Vacuum cleaners, refrigerators, washing machines, radios and later televisions were introduced to the daily life of people one by one and transformed their daily routine. For example, vacuum cleaner eased cleaning the floor comparing to brush and wipe. However, the increased expectations with the new hygiene standards also raised the frequency of sweeping the floor with the vacuum cleaner. Today, technology and the consumer culture still work hand in hand to increase our domestic inventory and affect our daily lives in our houses. As we, people, continue to shape the technology, the technology continues to shape our way of life in a reciprocal way. As Cowan makes it clear,

Tools are not passive instruments, confined to doing our bidding, but have a life of their own. Tools set limits on our work, we can use them in many different ways, but not in an infinite number of ways that we may not have anticipated. People use tools to do work, but tools also define and constrain the ways in which it is possible and likely that people will behave (Cowan, 1983).

This study is based on the very relationship Cowan points out. The main goal is to analyze the role of technology in the daily life of women, the invisible history of silent majority. And I believe that all devices and utilities used in our

houses deserve the attention as a technological artifact which, as Cowan says, changes our way of doing things and thereby, brings about transformations in our lives. In this study, I try to highlight the role of domestic technology in daily life while investigating the impact of sewing machine upon the daily lives of women in Turkey. Beginning from the history of the sewing machine, I discuss how *the machine* from its invention to the diffusion was itself changed while the life of women has changed thereby. My personal memories of my grandmother's experiences inspired me to study the process by which Turkish women created an agency through sewing machine technology.

I argue that women's competence with a particular device and their relevant technical knowledge are effective in the construction of their own self. I believe that this knowledge helps enhance their daily life therefore empowers them in their restricted social space. While most of the domestic works are accepted as a part of women's unskilled labor, the activity of sewing became the very way of self-expression because it is a skill which is also related to mastering a machine. Far from the repetitious feature of the housework, sewing opens a space for creativity. I argue that sewing machine as a technological object has a function which enables women to claim an expertise on a subject and display their skill.

I believe that the importance of my experience comes from its ordinariness. As I said, this study is concerned with the unwritten history of women and their ordinary everyday life. My basic question is whether or not “technology has the power of transforming life?” or to put it in other way, “if people can benefit from technological artifacts to transform/improve their life” I think, it is the boring, ordinary everydayness, where we should search the answer to this question. Because the real transformation begins for most of the people when the accepted social rules, expectations and taken-for-granted ideas are opened to discussion and challenged. As Silverstone emphasizes, the everyday life must be taken seriously, since “*its generality that we can see and understand how meanings that sustain as well as challenge its taken-for-grantedness are generated and communicated*” (Silverstone, 2005). And it is through the conduct of everyday life that we begin to observe and try to understand the salience of women whether they could transform their life and could create a difference for themselves with the sewing machine technology and whether they could challenge the social bounds that imprison them. Therefore, the way of understanding the transformative power of technology lies in appreciating its value in everyday life.

The following chapter provides a survey of the invention and diffusion period of the sewing machine and offers a discussion of the strategies that brought the success to the Singer Company. The history of sewing machine technology as a household commodity is important in a few aspects. First of

all, it enables us to see the rise of global firms, which symbolized the turn toward the consumer culture. The firm is one of the first global firms that managed to enlarge its market from Europe to Latin America, from the Middle East to Japan. As Davies states that the managerial skill of the company worked *peacefully to conquer the world* (Davies, 1986). Secondly, it highlights the mechanization process in the industry since the eighteenth century which spread to the houses particularly through women as consumers of new technologies who have been targeted by both the advertisers and the producers. The perception that machines belong to the domain of “man” was partially challenged with the introduction of sewing machine. Consequently, the debate on using machine by women was set off. It was unimaginable until that woman could be competent with a machine.

All of these unique attributes make the history of the sewing machine critical for understanding its role in the daily lives of women. Among these, the discussions on the use of a machine by women are quite remarkable, how the sewing machine, and specifically the Singer Company, contributed to the transformation of the general perceptions related to women and machines. An article published in 1869 by the New York Times Magazine summarizes the ongoing discussion then. The title, which speaks for itself, was “Sewing Machines. Their Effects upon the Health of the Women. Do They Produce or Aggravate Disease?”. Beginning with the emphasis of motherhood and the importance of future mother’s health, the author was convinced that the

disastrous effects “*caused by the use of the treadle*” of the sewing machines were “peculiar to women”. Another important claim was that women as a sex were ‘unsuitable’ for using complex machinery, and to prove this ‘fact’ the newspaper published letters from the ladies, who were unable to learn sewing with their new machine. Naturally the sewing machine companies countervailed such propaganda. From the very beginning, the Singer Company employed women to demonstrate and to teach the operation of the machine, thus “*proving beyond a doubt that they were perfectly capable of controlling it and would remain sensible and unhysterical while doing so*” (Brandon, 1978). An additional challenge was to convince men, who eventually were the ones that were going to pay for the sewing machine, about what women did with the increased free time that the sewing machine provided to them. Since the women’s domestic labor was, and has always been, unpaid, the need to lighten the burden of it seemed quite unnecessary. Meanwhile, the Singer Company began to advocate the idea of using this free time for the training and the education of younger children and for women’s own leisure.

Similar to European and American examples, the Singer Company brought the technology into the Ottoman’s houses with the sewing machine. The second part of Chapter Two looks at this history of sewing machine and the Singer Company in the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey. This part has greatly benefited from the advertisements of the Singer Company published

in Turkey. The message given through the advertisements shows how the sewing machine was represented and, by implication, how the gender roles are constructed in Turkey. The advertisements highlighted the modern women emphasis without challenging the established gender roles. For example, sewing machines were represented as a way of dressing both economically and beautifully. However, making money with it was never emphasized in the advertisements, despite the fact that, a lot of women earned and are still earning their living with sewing machine from their home. The resemblance between the woman images in the advertisement and the 'modern women idea' constructed as the part of modernizing project of the new Turkish Republic is remarkable.

Another critical point was that the advertisement strategies of the company in the Ottoman Empire and later in Turkey was in line with firm's global strategy. While the advertisements underlined the experience of the firm throughout the world, they also acted like a local firm, like using Turkish model name. Similar to twenty-first century global firms, Singer Company, as a global company, adapted its strategies to local needs at a very early stage.

The history of Singer Company and its advertisements strategies discussed in Chapter Two are also beneficial to see the life-span of a technological object, which can be divided into three stages: the invention and diffusion, maturity and decline phase. Considering that sewing machine is currently in

its decline phase, it makes it even more interesting to study its affects on Turkish women as a domestic technology. As a device introduced around 1880's to this geography, the sewing machine had been used widely until the early 1990's. Fortunately, the memories of women, who used it extensively in their life, are still vivid and attainable. Historically, these narratives contain valuable information and clues to understand how women benefited from a domestic technology in order to create a liberalizing space for themselves and to transform their life. Therefore, the oral history method is used in Chapter Three with the purpose of analyzing the ability of Turkish women to create agency within the constraints of their social environment and economical resources.

It is the oral history method which enables us to study the relationship between the technology and the life of women through the narrative of their daily life. As Somers argues,

... it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities (Somers, 1994).

Therefore, I try to analyze how women have positioned themselves in the storyline of her daily life in relation with the sewing machine technology. How woman used her sewing machine as a tool for self-realization? In this

respect, I look at the ways in which my interviewees construct their identity by locating themselves in daily life narratives.

Fourteen women from different part of the Turkey were interviewed. The only criterion for the interviewee was that she should be over fifty. I asked my friends, my colleagues and my relatives if they had a relative or acquaintance that have a Singer sewing machine and actively sewed or their friends have an acquaintance who sew or sewed with her Singer sewing machine. In this way, I reached my interviewees. They all belong to middle and lower-middle classes. Four of them had earned money from sewing, three of them worked as a sewing tutor and six of them sew only for their own and their families. Only one interviewee had her job as a tailor and she sewed wedding dresses.

The interviews concentrate mainly on the experiences of the interviewees related to sewing machine beginning from their childhood until now and the daily routine of their adulthood. I primarily benefited from the positioning theory for analyzing the life experiences of the interviewees. It is understood that women use the sewing machine to open a creative space in their limited social environment. Moreover, women manage to use their technological knowledge to enhance their economic condition and even, they use it to make the ends meet, whenever needed. In this way, they challenge the

social prejudices against women labor, and they show their competence on using a machine as good as men.

The narratives of women show that women deconstructed their accepted identity roles and found a tool to display their skills and ability through dissemination of sewing machines. Indeed, they managed to transform their life both economically and socially with the basic tools they have. Therefore, this study aims to explore the life of my grandmother and other Turkish women who created an agency through the sewing machine technology and transformed not only their life but the history of women in Turkey as well as the history of the sewing machine.

## CHAPTER II

### HOUSEHOLD TECHNOLOGY AND SINGER SEWING MACHINE



An old advertising motto; “*Her genç kızın rüyası...*”<sup>1</sup>, which was once a famous sewing machine advertising slogan in Turkey, was summarizing the claim of new household appliances since the nineteenth century. Household technologies are designed, produced and marketed for women since the sewing machine. Therefore, history of the sewing machine is a good starting point to trace both the impact of technology on women lives and the transformation occurring in the home due to the household technologies. Nevertheless, before discussing the history of sewing machine and the Singer Company, I want to answer some simple but significant questions: What is meant by household technologies? What type of appliances, devices or utilities constitutes household technologies? And what is so critical about the sewing machine among the household technologies?

---

<sup>1</sup> The dream of every young woman...

By household technologies, I mean first of all, the machinery, devices and appliances that are designed for doing household tasks and marketed to housewives, such as washing machines, kitchen aids, ovens or vacuum cleaner. Secondly, I point out techniques women developed to do housework such as sewing. This includes the activities and practice of people related to domestic tasks. Thirdly, it refers to a total system such as electricity or water supply; the infrastructure of the house such as sewage system. In short, I use the term '*household technologies*' as "simply the technologies that comprise the activities of especially women / housewives and the tools they use in doing housework as well as the system that makes them possible" (Özkan, 1999).

Then, one may ask why one should study household technologies in the first place? Household technologies such as vacuum cleaners or washing machines are not seen as important as high-tech devices by historians, social scientists and engineers. Similarly, academic research on the household technologies is not accepted as valuable or important in the field of sociology of technology or history of technology.

This perception is analogous to the value given to women domestic labor. Housework and the domesticity associated with women are represented as boring, monotonous, and lower valued. Therefore, the household technology is also devalued as a research subject. Cockburn explained the academic

prejudices that she and other writers of the edited book 'Bringing Technology Home'. She explains her feelings as being "*mere kitchen sociologist*" while discussing her study with the male sociologist of technology (Cockburn et. all., 1994).

During my thesis work, it was disappointing to realize that there was very little about the history of household technologies. The existing literature on the pioneering household technology firms did not generally focus on the history of the household products of the firms, instead they concentrated on the marketing and the success of management of the related firms<sup>2</sup> or other products different than household technology<sup>3</sup>. The general view was that the household technologies are simple adaptation of innovations developed for other and more important areas such as industry or defense. However, it is not high-tech equipments that we encounter and use on daily basis. On the contrary, it is those that we use in our homes and they continuously transform our daily life. Accordingly, it is critical to study the household technologies to understand the complex relationship between women and technology and the effect of technology on very daily life of ordinary people.

---

<sup>2</sup> See for example N. T. Synder and D. L. Duarte 2008 *Unleashing innovation: How Whirlpool transformed an industry*. 2008 Jossey-Bass: San Francisco.

<sup>3</sup> For example, the following books about the Bosh and Siemens Company are about different braches of these componies different than household technology. Although both companies are important firms in household technology, there are no source about their operations on household technologies: N.J. Hoboken. *Bosch automotive handbook*. 2007 Wiley: Chichester. B. Zoellick. *Siemens Medical Solutions : information architecture as strategic advantage* . 2005 Gilbane: Cambridge.

Among them, I believe the sewing machine technology and the Singer Company which is associated with this technology had a special place in the history of household technology. First of all, sewing machine was one of the first standardized and mass marketed complex consumer goods to spread around the world. As Godley argues; “*this global diffusion was predominantly the responsibility of just one firm, Singer Company*” (Godley, 2011). The history of Singer Company accompanied the birth of the consumer culture and global firms. The company successfully used the domain of home to sell their sewing machine, when the home and machine were imagined to belong to different spheres in daily life. Using machine and the technical knowledge accompanied with it was associated with “*the men's world*”. But with the sewing technology, a machine had begun to be produced, be advertised and be sold specifically for *the women for the first time in history*. And Singer is among the first firms which perceived women as targeted consumers in their advertisements. Singer as a well known firm had unique strategies to create a market for middle and lower classes. Their most effective strategy for engaging lower classes has been to provide different payment options, for instance, installment plans. More detailed discussion on Singer Company’s sales strategy will be given later in this chapter.

Secondly, sewing was one of the most time-consuming house-works until coming of the ready-wear textile industry. From the clothes of the family member to the bed sheets or curtains, almost all textile material needs were

met by the households sewing skills, mostly by women. However, the time spent for sewing was not the only thing that made sewing technology special. Sewing means a burden depending on circumstances, but also a way of self expression and showing artistic skills for women. Moreover, sewing became the only means of living for a lot of women.

This chapter attempts to provide a brief survey of the history of Singer-brand sewing machines. It first gives a short history of the initial period of invention and then explains the diffusion of sewing machines with the history of Singer Company. Instead of explaining the technological stages of the sewing machine, that is, from hand operating sewing machines to the computer programming ones, the present chapter focuses primarily on the sales strategies of the company. This focal point is critical to understand how the firm contributed to the creation of the social image of the sewing machine via advertisements. In addition, this process is important to show how a technological artifact was domesticated specifically for women, when the use of machine was characterized by male dominance. I think, understanding the diffusion process of sewing machine helps answer the question of how it transforms the domestic daily life.

The chapter is divided into two parts. The first one concentrates on the history of Singer sewing machine throughout the world. The second part investigates the operations of the Singer Company in the Ottoman Empire,

later Turkey. Here I demonstrate that the Singer Company implemented advertising and pricing techniques in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey in a way typical of its worldwide operations.

## ***2.1 History of Singer Sewing Machine in the World***

By the nineteenth century, the mechanization of production process meant the increase of productivity and wealth. It attracted mechanics and innovators to search new possibilities to reach wealth like the case of sewing machine. Not so much the domestic use but the industrial use of the sewing machine, like the manufacturing of uniforms for armies or manufacturing of shoes, attracted the inventors for wealthy future. However, the history of the sewing machine showed that the real success laid with the domestic costumers; who were the new consumers of the technology.

### **2.1.1 Invention and Early Years of the Singer Company**

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the idea of inventing a machine for sewing had attracted several inventors throughout Europe and North America with above motivations. The first known patent for a sewing machine was granted to an Englishman, Thomas Saint, but to my knowledge his idea was never put to any practical use (Lewton, 1930). The first practical sewing machine belongs to a French tailor, Barthelemy Thimonnier. He sold 85

sewing machines which were used in sewing uniforms to the French army. However, its initiative became a victim of Luddism and the sewing machines were destroyed by angry tailors, who were afraid of losing their jobs. Although the earliest inventors were European, it was the American inventors who succeeded in producing commercially valuable sewing machines. The first successful sewing machine was designed by Elias Howe, Jr in 1845. Although, Elias Howe, Jr. could not be successful in the business of sewing machine; he made a quite good profit thanks to his sewing machine patents. By 1850, in 5 years after the Howe's first machine, several manufacturers, like Wheeler and Wilson, or Grover and Baker, were offering sewing machines to the general American public (Connolly, 1999). That same year was also the year when Isaac Merit Singer entered the sewing machine business.

I. M. Singer, who was a mechanic in a small shop, began his business with a borrowed-capital of \$40 (Lewton, 1930). Singer's machine was actually a practical version of Howe's machine with an important improvement. His machine could do continuous stitching. In the beginning of his business, he had to defeat his rights in the court against Howe, Jr. By the early 1850's, Howe, Jr. and several manufacturers claimed their credit for developing successful sewing machine. As a result of these claims and law suits; the formation of "Sewing Machine Combination" was established between some of these manufacturers and inventors in 1856. The combination, Elias Howe;

Wheeler, Wilson and company; I. M. Singer and company and Grover and Baker Company pooled their patents covering the essential features of the machine. The three companies had started the production about the same time and approved of Potter's (president of the Grover and Baker Company) idea. However, Howe accepted the combination agreement with following requirements. First one was that at least twenty four manufacturers were to be licensed. The second requirement was that, in addition to sharing equally in the profits with the three companies, Howe would receive a royalty of \$5 for each machine sold in the United States and \$1 for each machine exported. Cooper claims that, Howe received over \$1,000,000 as his share of the license fees between 1856 and 1867 when his patent expired (Cooper, 1976). The organization was called the sewing Machine Trust or Combination and the important patent contributors were:

- The grooved, eye-pointed needle used with a shuttle to form the lockstitch patented and held by E. Howe
- The four-motion feeding mechanism patented by A. B. Wilson and held by Wheeler and Wilson Company
- The needle moving vertically above a horizontal work plate, a continuous feeding device by belt or wheel yielded presser resting on the cloth patented by Bachelder, the spring or curved arm to hold the cloth by a yielding pressure patented by Morey and Johnson; and the heart-shaped cam as applied to moving the needle bar patented by

Singer. All these patents are held by the Singer Company (Cooper, 1976).

According to Connolly, “*The combination was the first patent pool formed in the United States, and it presaged similar business combination later in the century*” (Connolly, 1999). The Sewing Machine Combination had two effects. First, it eliminated small enterprises from the market, who could not afford the licensing fee. Secondly, it ended the patent wars and manufacturers could concentrate on their business (Godley, 2006).



*Figure 1 - Singer New Family Machine, 1858, head only*

Source: *Smithsonian photo 45524-F*

Singer's first version of the sewing machine, which was rather heavy and bulky, was intended for the use of commercial firms. Its price was \$150. However, the ready-wear industry had not been developed enough at that time to feed the sewing machine industry and the demand of the tailor was not large enough to drive the industry. The success came with household

models. It was in 1856 that Singer introduced its first sewing machine which was solely intended for domestic use. This model was smaller and lighter than previous models. Its price was \$125 (Connolly, 1999).<sup>4</sup>

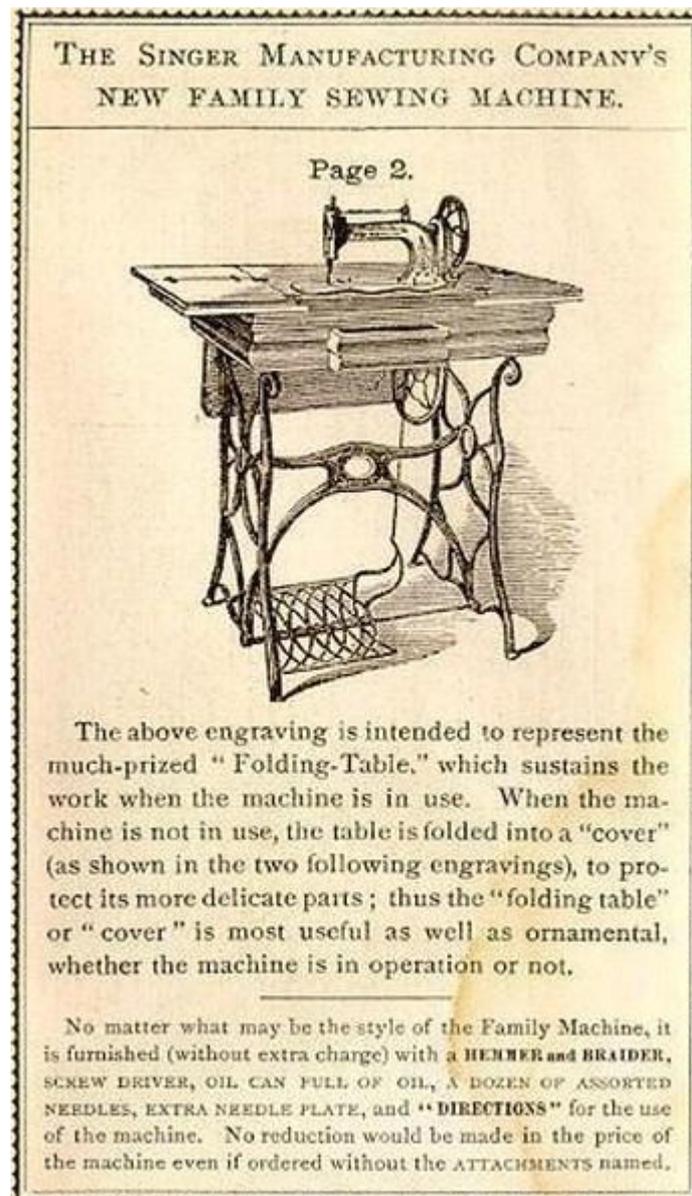
At these prices, sewing machine represented a sizeable investment at a time when the average family income was under \$500 a year. In order to tap the huge potential of the family market, *Singer inaugurated the hire-purchase, or installment plan, which enabled women to get a Singer sewing machine for as little as \$5 down payment* (Connolly, 1999).

From 1850 to 1863, three companies dominated the U.S. market- Singer, Wheeler and Wilson, and Grover and Baker<sup>5</sup>. After 1863, Singer brand dominated both the US and world market with a 20,000 annual sales and the name Singer became synonymous with the sewing machine (Connolly, 1999). The diffusion of the sewing machine in the United States accelerated after 1866. Godley explains this increase in the demand with the post-Civil War growth and the emergence of “family market”.

---

<sup>4</sup> Another resource claims that *Singer Company brought out a light family machine in 1858 that was first sold for \$100. It was then reduced to \$50, but it was not popular because it was too light. In 1859, Singer brought out its second, more successful family machine, which was sold for \$75.* (Cooper, p. 47, taken from I.M. Singer Co.'s Gazette, vol. 5 no. 4 (March 1, 1859), p. 4 and a brochure, Singer's New Family Sewing Machine (in Singer Manufacturing Company, Historical Archives.)

<sup>5</sup> There are different dates in the literature about when Singer began to dominate the USA market. Most of the resources, including the company's web page, give dates between 1863 -1875.



*Figure 2 - Singer New Family Machine's brochure*

Source: Smithsonian Institute Collection

The sales numbers of the company also illustrated this increasing trend in the demand of sewing machine. As it could be seen from Table 1, Singer sales increased four times in dollars.

Table 1 Singer's United States and Overseas Sales, 1867-1873

Year	United States (\$)	Overseas (\$)	Total Sales (\$)	U.S. Share of Total Sales (%)
1867	1,487,717	340,935	1,828,652	81,4
1868		521,398		
1869	1,783,142	559,039	2,342,181	76,1
1870	2,481,170	504,400	2,985,570	83,1
1871	3,044,301	1,043,523	4,087,824	74,5
1872	4,976,031	1,374,743	6,530,774	78,4
1873	6,004,907	2,050,446	8,055,353	74,6

Source: Godley (2006)

This growth in the U.S. market was interrupted with the agricultural depression in 1873. The demand in the domestic market was almost reduced by half. However, Singer Company was not affected with this depression as much as their competitors since it had already increased its overseas sales. The expiration of the Sewing Machine Combination in 1877 also affected the U.S. market. Godley discusses the striking effects as:

Singer response was unequivocal, slashing retail prices by half to \$30 within a week of the patent combination's demise. This price war in the U.S. market, Woodruff thought, "should soon so weed out competitors as practically to leave Singer Company alone in the field." He was right. Within six years the industry was almost wholly reorganized, with only Singer and Wheeler and Wilson of the original combination members surviving (Godley, 2006).

The Singer Company priced its products at the top of the market and depended primarily on advertising and other marketing devices to keep up sales and profits. Singer took pride in the high quality of its machines, clinging to the "European method" of having each unit "finished" by hand.

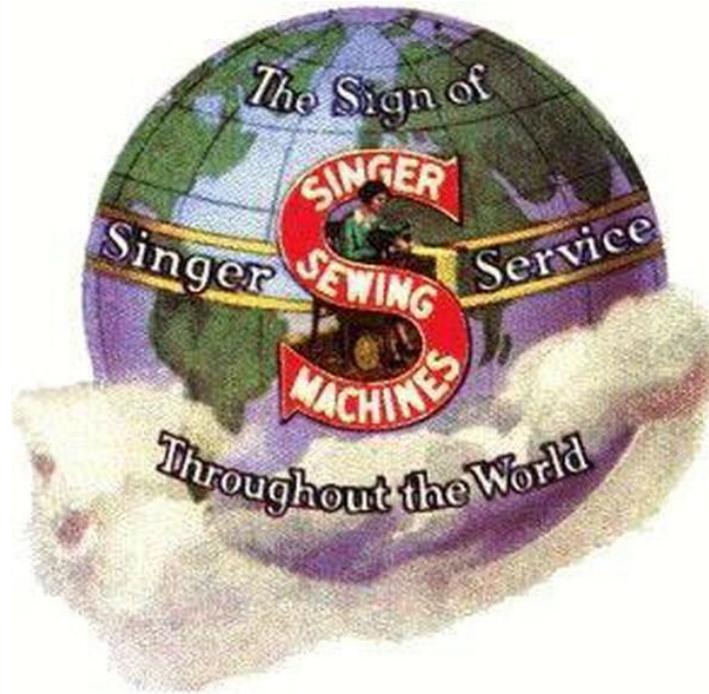
After 1880's, Singer did gradually attempt (with only limited success) to move toward the armory system of production and began to use interchangeable parts in the production (Pursell, 2007). The reduction in the prices in 1877 must have driven the company to search more efficient production method.

The idea of interchangeable parts goes back to the eighteenth century. With this method, the duration of production of a standard part is reduced considerably while the required skill is reduced by the same time. However, the amount of investment required to use this method delayed its common use in the industry. It is the mass production and mass consumption that make possible the extensive use of this method. As a production method, the true success belonged to Henry Ford from the automobile industry, which is another story in the history of technology.

The market share of the Singer Company reached 60% of whole American family market in 1902. As one of the first global companies of the U.S, Singer opened the first skyscraper at 149 Broadway in New York City. It remained the headquarter for the Executive Office for 54 years<sup>6</sup>.

---

<sup>6</sup> Singer official web page.



*Figure 3 - Singer Company – Throughout the World logo*

Source: Singer official web page.

In the global market, the success of the Singer Company was more striking. According to the Singer Company's official web page, Singer began its overseas expansion as early as 1855, starting with Paris. But the big step for world market was taken in the year 1867 with the decision of building a factory in Glasgow. The company had two main advantages with this investment. First, there were no big sewing machine producers in 1860's in Europe. The two sewing machine producers, namely British James Starly and the French firm Peugeot switched their business from sewing machine production to bicycle production from the late 1860's onwards. So, Singer could dominate the European market easily with its large scale production.



*Figure 4 - Singer Advertisement for the machine produced in Britain*

Source: Singer official web page.

Secondly, the wages in Scotland were relatively cheaper than the wages in U.S. Therefore, the company products were far more competitive than any of the indigenous European producers as well as the exported output of other U.S. Producers.

By 1870, Singer claimed 75% of the world market share. The world sales were being controlled from three main locations. Singer head-office made direct sales to Canada, Caribbean and some Latin American market. The company entered into the other world markets with its European sales force. The heads of two main sales networks were the agencies in London and Hamburg. The London agency controlled most of western and southern Europe covering France, Belgium, Scotland, Spain, Portugal, Italy and the British Empire including Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and India. The

Hamburg agency operated in Central and Eastern Europe including Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia, Scandinavia, Netherlands, and the Ottoman Empire (Godley, 2001).



*Figure 5 - Singer Girl from Germany*

Source: Singer official home page.

In Table 2, Singer's sales figures can be seen in selected companies between the years 1877-1920. The company consistently increased its sales until the World War I. By the year 1904, the firm was selling 1.35 million sewing machines annually and already had production plants in England, Canada, Austria, and Scotland and even in Russia besides the ones in North America.

Table 2 Singer Sewing Machines Sales in Selected Countries, 1877–1920  
(machines per annum)

Year	GB	IRE	F	SP	ITA	RUS	DAH	IND	World Sales
1877	38800	2500	15000	8000	3000	6800	50300	30	282812
1878	44000	2800	15000	12000	5000	12500	53100	70	356432
1879	49200	3100	17500	16000	7000	18800	54900	130	431167
1880	58502	3750	22500	19205	7500	22300	80200	250	538609
1881	63588	3829	24842	24160	8981	27262	90100	552	561036
1882	75321	4494	26144	18747	10001	31600	107300	515	603292
1883	81402	4534	26375	20847	12514	35400	114200	1088	600000
1884	85767	5644	25695	21349	12920	36200	128200	1607	500000
1885	83454	5278	28315	17900	12486	41200	85000	1761	500000
1886	77277	5155	28900	19285	11900	31200	70000	2012	500000
1887	85340	5877	29500	19369	11350	32300	70000	2131	500000
1888	92525	6022	30013	21406	10806	52200	70000	2966	500000
1889	119925	7341	35096	23927	15726	48100	75000	3578	625000
1890	140870	9138	40091	26590	18010	42000	89300	3763	750000
1891	135573	10328	42891	29165	20001	40700	83600	4145	769000
1892	136179	10382	45263	28213	24592	46100	87000	4824	788000
1893	128301	10288	48178	23500	21518	56200	96700	5770	806000
1894	136257	10195	51751	24000	22230	65000	98373	6720	825000
1895	133233	10101	52595	24000	22755	68788	118541	7670	845000
1896	124690	8752	56132	24000	27680	72000	127056	8620	863000
1897	123688	9720	58342	20500	34650	85910	133937	9570	881000
1898	129080	10687	58042	22734	34503	92369	144983	10500	900000
1899	152764	12785	68330	31038	37634	99444	157565	11470	990000
1900	153571	11409	72349	32331	37041	110316	164798	12420	1080000
1901	148926	6432	74987	36083	33944	128249	165394	13352	1170000
1902	142682	8254	82048	45243	40154	132266	172969	13351	1183607
1903	127696	8926	86973	48694	43435	182668	190345	15842	1329886
1904	120692	9598	88936	45092	49970	202592	201986	17781	1399991
1905	132389	10270	93528	39916	51894	310881	224022	18075	1583013
1906	156587	12150	98772	43449	56325	376336	257671	17331	1850489
1907	152498	11478	107514	44313	67219	413905	258749	20478	1933194
1908	119408	8988	110899	43702	71724	446151	254091	20159	1781590
1909	126805	9544	115129	43918	70444	481796	254048	20873	1901430
1910	121575	9151	112303	52020	78182	505066	262415	24855	2019217
1911	120131	9042	111566	61229	94308	504489	268082	26582	2109600
1912	128018	9636	123833	75413	110792	570371	278909	36481	2326956
1913	132084	9942	126320	72580	110665	675174	275367	44819	2510652
1914	128994	9709	114000	67201	97817	678986	248000	41437	2185104
1915				64844				21500	
1916	139329	10487		67406				61296	1725978
1917	143220	10780							
1918	160669	12093		44290				43058	1348867
1919	195919	14747		62482				56731	1758353
1920	180410	13579		60806				53732	1507363

Source: Godley (2001)

In 1929, nine worldwide Singer manufacturing facilities existed, employing 27,000 people and producing 3,000 models. In 1951, Singer Sewing Centers trained an estimated 400,000 housewives. Singer recovered from the effects of the WWII when sewing machine production was suspended, reaching \$307.8 million in sales in 1951 which is its centennial year. In 1966, its consolidated sales reached billion-dollar mark for the first time. In 1971, the number of people working for Singer reached 120,000.

By 2006, the firm was united with two other sewing machine companies, Pfaff and Viking under the VSP Holding. Leaving 156 years behind, the company's models illustrate the development steps of the household technology. After the mechanical-operated first models, the company introduced its first electrical model in 1889. The firm's sewing machine models evolved from hand-operated to computer controlled ones from 1880's to 2000's. In 1998, the first computerized sewing machine of the world, Quantum XL-1000, was produced by the Singer. Today, the company continues its business with more than ten different models and different types of sergers and garment care products, like irons. While sewing machine is not as widely used as once used to be, it maintains its importance for many women throughout the world. The 160<sup>th</sup> anniversary campaign of the company showed how sewing machines are still vivid in both women's lives and memories. More than seven hundred women wrote their Singer Sewing Machine stories<sup>7</sup>.

---

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.mysingerstory.com/> On September 17, 2011 the number of women who wrote their personal stories reached 873 and it is increasing on daily basis.

### **2.1.2 The Marketing Success of the Singer Company**

The marketing mix (or the “four P’s”) emphasizes the importance of competing through price, product differentiation, place (or location), and promotion strategies in the pursuit of market share (Jobber, 2007). However, Gordon argues that Singer’s selling strategy did not apply the four P’s (Gordon, 2004). The firm almost never pursued price competition; indeed, its sewing machines were always relatively expensive. Nor Singer models were ever differentiating in the market. It was never a technological leader, for instance. At different times the machines of Wilcox and Gibbs and Wheeler and Wilson, and later on some German competitors like Pfaff, were supposedly superior. In addition, the Singer design was not superior to the other models in the market. Almost all sewing machines looked very similar around the world.

Instead of applying one of the four P’s, Singer Company’s organizational and managerial ability brought their success. Robert Davies ascribes company’s success to “*the product, the sales and marketing organization, and the qualities of management,*” before he goes on to emphasize the importance of the rational organization, the impact of its advertising strategies, and the personal qualities of senior management (Davies, 1986). The Singer Company established face-to-face relation between customers and vendors via its trained sales force all over the world. As Gordon states; “*Singer’s success in promotion was rather more to do with its direct selling*

*organization knocking on people's doors all around the world"* (Gordon, 2004).

As the first global firm in the World, Singer had no example to look up to for dealing with both the organizational and administrative problems, and international trade. They depended on managerial skills of their executives. Davies speaks about the headquarters and both the London and the Berlin agencies as problem-oriented business people and having the aim of a sustainable organization. They did not hesitate to take risks for improvements in the management (Davies, 1986). In the international trade, US government's assistance began after 1880. However the Singer Company had already succeeded in the world trade with more than 75 % world share of sewing machine business by the 1880's.

Apart from the managerial achievements, two main factors were featured in the success story of the Singer. One of them was its effective use of the advertisements as early as, the 1860's. In Table 2, Singer's advertisements expenditure can be seen together with the firm's income. The advertisement expenditure of the firm began to decrease after the early 1870's. The key strategic decision in the advertisement was the targeting of women for the home models. Coffin emphasizes this advertisement strategy of the company by pointing out the fact that *the "Singer girl"* who appeared in the company's

Table 3 Singer's Advertising Expenditure in London Office, 1867–1884

Year	Expenditure (\$)	Income (\$)	Expenditure/Revenues (%)
1867	10,174	166,776	6.1
1868	12,990	263,957	4.9
1869	12,744	243,648	5.2
1870	12,703	245,529	5.2
1871	20,193	685,284	3.0
1872	13,828	900,065	1.5
1873	58,310	1,361,059	4.3
1882	61,538	2,468,559	2.5
1883	36,640	2,667,936	1.4
1884	38,326	2,848,553	1.3

Source: Godley, 2006

advertisements became the trademark of Singer's aggressive effort to associate itself with the home model and to win the female market (Coffin, 1994). Moreover, the early effort of the sewing machine advertisement underscored the status that had to be created through the consumption. The sewing machines were pictured in elegant cases alongside decorated mirrors, pianos, "all which were cast as furnishings to upgrade a household" (Coffin, 1994).<sup>8</sup>

The use of commercials was a powerful tool to persuade the public, that only the Singer machine could best suit them, and as Davies quoted a Dutch observer opinion dated 1885, that *the public still believed it* (Davies, 1986). As seen in Figures 5 and 6, the company gave importance to reach local

<sup>8</sup> Coffin discusses the advertisements in the France. However, similar advertisements were used by the Singer Company throughout the Europe and USA.

peoples. The examples of famous “Singer girl” in different local costume could be seen on the advertisements of the Singer throughout the world.

The advertisement strategy of the firm was also supported by the training program developed for women. Woodruff, general agent in London, talked about his intentions in initiating an education program in a letter he wrote to the New York head office: “...to give a clear and thorough knowledge of your machine to every person who now has one, and thus obtain a good sound basis from which to extend” (Davies, 1986).



Figure 6 – Singer Girl from an Advertisement in Russia

Source: [http://petersburg.berkeley.edu/olga/olga\\_singer\\_ad1.html](http://petersburg.berkeley.edu/olga/olga_singer_ad1.html)

This training program had special importance in the history of Singer Sewing machine success. In the aforementioned period, to purchase a sewing

machine was a real investment. For most of the customers, the return of this investment is behind the use of only household needs. Therefore, learning to operate a sewing machine free of charge, which was then an important skill, might have been be a big motivation for the purchasers. I should also mention that the company still continues its free education as a part of its selling strategy.

Second important factor for reaching such sales figures as early as the end of the nineteenth century was the installments plan and credit payment options. Buying a sewing machine was a huge investment for a middle class family at the end of the nineteenth century. As Coffin argues, the expansion of credit was crucial to developing a working-class market for the machine (Coffin, 1994).

In brief, the managers of the Singer Company competently handled organizational problems. Without having an example of global firm, they depended on their experience and intelligence. As it was explained, they successfully combined their advertisements strategy with installment plans and door-to-door selling tactics. While emphasizing its experience and global success, Singer also used local figures in their advertisements successful. They also differentiated their company with their training programs. The headquarter forced its retailer to open sewing machine courses for the customer. These strategies and how it worked are discussed more detailed

in the following chapter on the company's activities in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey.

## ***2.2 History of Singer Sewing Machine in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey***

The expansion policy of Singer executives did not exclude the Ottoman market. As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, the German agent of the Singer Company was responsible for the sales in the Ottoman region. In fact, the Singer Headquarters appointed George Neidlinger, the general agent of Germany, to Turkey in 1880. (Davies, 1986) Then, both American and the European markets had reached some kind of a saturation level. Therefore, Neidlinger saw the Middle East as a potential market. Moreover, the fluctuating demand during the depression of 1884 was also effective in the decision to pursue new markets like the Middle East and the Far East. According to Godley, 70 machines were sold in the Ottoman region, including the Balkans, in 1880 (Godley, 2001). Afterwards, the sales increased continuously, which can be seen in Figure 7.

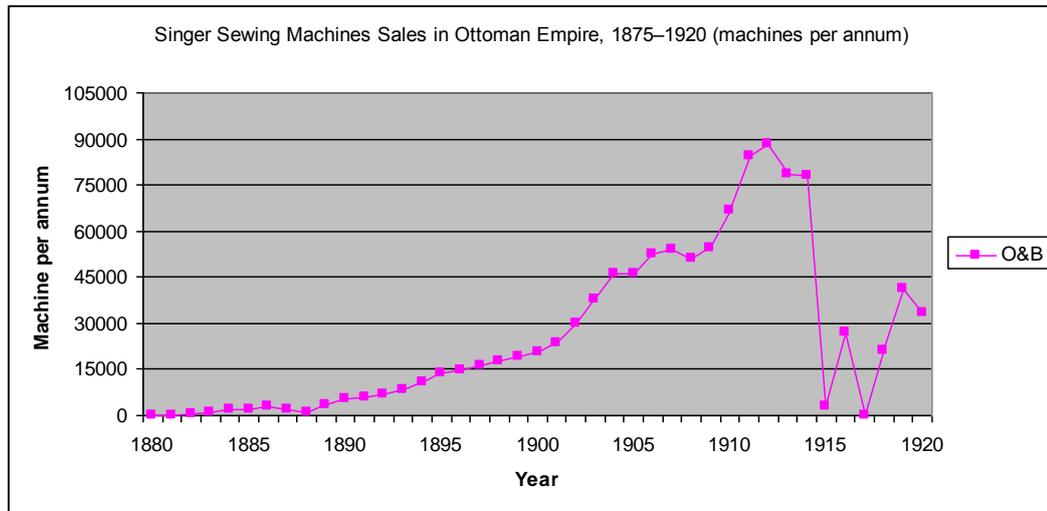


Figure 7 - Singer Sewing Machines Sales in Ottoman Empire, 1875–1920 (machines per annum)<sup>9</sup>

The increasing sales during the last quarter of the nineteenth century resulted in establishing depots in Elazığ in 1900, and opening also branches in Diyarbakır, Mosul, Baghdad and Basra responsible for the firm's commercial activities (Kupferschmidt, 2004). Around 1900, the total sales figures had reached over 20,000 machines, 400 machines were said to have been sold in the Kharput region, which included Diyarbakir, Mosul, Baghdad and Basra, and some 375 in Bursa, 250 in Konya. In Izmir, 16,000 machines were sold between 1903 and 1905 only. Sivas had a share of around 2,000 machines. (Kupferschmidt, 2004; Godley, 2001)

In the first decade of the twentieth century sewing machines entered many Ottoman households. Paul Fesch estimated in 1907 that some ten thousand American and German-made sewing machines were owned in Istanbul, and

<sup>9</sup> The data are taken from Godley (2001).

twelve thousand in Damascus (Fesch, 1999). In the Ottoman capital, the well-known French department store of Orosdi-Back acted as local depot for Singer. This firm also acted as the Singer agent in Beirut.

Singer gradually established a large network of agents throughout the Middle East. Kupferschmidt states that the Ottoman Empire and the Balkans were dominated by sales to Turkey and Greece, regions normally considered to have been economically backward at this time (Kupferschmidt, 2004). According to Godley, from a small amount of sales in 1880, the population who had sewing machine has increased 1.5% in 1910 to 2% by 1913.

Singer Company's commercial activities continued after the establishment of Turkish Republic in 1923. Although, the sales decreased during the WWI and the Turkish War of Independence, the company regained its pace afterwards.

At the end of the 1950's, a production facility was added to commercial activities of the firm. In 1959, the Singer Company decided to invest in Turkey and opened a sewing machine factory in Istanbul with a 2,595,000 TL capital. The founders of the Turkish Singer Company were The Singer Manufacturing Company, Donald G. Robbins, Jr., and Robert W. Stewart from US, and Muammer Çavuşoğlu, Neşet Arıman and Daniş S. Somersan

from Turkish Republic with an equal share. The purpose of the enterprise was defined in the “Singer Sanayi Anonim Şirketi Esas Mukavelesi”<sup>10</sup> as:

[The firm] is in the business of the production, the assembling, the distribution, the wholesale and the retail trading, the leasing, the maintenance and the service, the repairing, the importing and the exporting of all sorts of sewing machines; as well, also, as, of various kinds of special features related to such machines, such as parts and tools including the wooden frames and members, boxes for needles, reels and such, pedestals, all sorts of furnishings, electrical motors and light bulbs.<sup>11</sup>

By the year 1974, Singer Sewing Machine Factory was producing 65,000 units of sewing machines per year with 650 employees. It was the largest factory in its field in Turkey. Furthermore, the plant had exported 20-25% of its annual production, especially to the Middle East and African countries (Arıġsoy, 1974). This factory was closed in 2004. Today, Singer Türkiye Singer Dikiş Makinaları Ticaret A.Ş. continues the business of the firm in Turkey.

### **2.2.1 Marketing Strategy of the Singer Company in Turkey Region**

In accordance with its global marketing strategy, the Singer Company effectively used the weapon of advertising in the Ottoman market.

---

<sup>10</sup> Article of Singer Industry Corporation.

<sup>11</sup> The original manuscript founded in the National Library was: “*Mobilya ve aksamı, mahfazası, ayakları, her türlü mefruşatı elektrik motör ve ışık cihazları da dahil olmak üzere bilimum teferruatı ve aksamı ve aletleri ile birlikte her türlü dikiş makinaları imali, montajı, tevzii, toptan ve perakende satışı kiralaması, bakım ve servisi, tamiri ve ihracat ve ithalat muameleleri ile iştigal etmektedir.*”

Advertisements are important in order to understand the image of the product and the targeted classes of society by the firm. The advertisement began to be published both in foreign and local newspapers in the Ottoman Empire. A Singer Advertisement dated 1888 can be seen in Figure 8.



Figure 8 - Singer Advertisement

Source:Akın, 2002.

This advertisement was taken from a newspaper published in French for a store in Pera. The advertisement presented Singer machines both for

families and tailors. It clearly targeted the minorities that lived around Galata and Pera. However, the following advertisement seen in Figure 9 taken from Ottoman newspapers aimed to reach Muslim customers. The company used a different domestic setting for the Muslim customers. The portable machine ornate ironwork table by resting the latest model on top of the Turkish-style rug illustrated the image of Muslim house (Frierson, 2000).



Figure 9 - Singer Advertisement

Source: Frierson, 2000.

After the Turkish Independence War (1918-1923), the new secular state was established and the new Turkish Republic continued to be an important sewing machine market. The new republic gave importance to the education of women in order to create modern Turkey. The aim was rising a new

generation of mothers and wives in line with the ideology of the new Republic. As Akşit said, *the Turkish Republic needed the first generation of young women to internalize its new ideology, and spread it to their family and neighbors (Akşit 2002)*. The Girls' Institutes were established with this goal and they were the primary school for the Turkish women, where they learned to sew besides attending other classes. Therefore, sewing knowledge was an important quality of for the *modern girl* for many more years to come.

One of the important features of the Singer advertisements published after the establishment of the Turkey was using this idea of *modern women*. For example, a Singer advertisement dated from the late 1960's showed the Miss Turkey of 1966 while was sewing happily with her sewing machine (Figure 11).



Figure 10 - Singer's 100-Year Poster (1951)

Source: National Library Collection.

She was presented as a role model for the modern women of Turkey. The motto for the company was also in line with the idea of modernization: “that is *the modern machine of modern era (İşte Modern Çağın Modern Makinası)*”.

**İşte Modern Çağın  
Modern Makinesi** **SINGER\* ZİGZAG**

*Türkiye Güzeli İnci Asena diyor ki:*

**BAŞKA DİKİŞ MAKİNELERİNİN YAPAMADIĞINI SINGER ZİGZAG YAPAR**

- YAPYENİ
- MODA YARATAN ALTI ŞİRHİ DESEN KALIBI
- ÇİFT İÖNÜYLE İKİ RENKTE ZİGZAG DESENLER
- GÖZLERİ YORMAYAN VİZYON RENĞİNDE MAKİNE
- MAT ÇİCİLİ İSKANDİNAV TİPİ KABİNE VE MODERN BİR GÖRÜNÜŞ...

**KULLANIŞINI ÜCRATSIZ ÖĞRETİYORUZ.**  
Bütün Singer mağazalarında makineyi satın alırken iki saatlik basit bir kullarına kursu her zaman ücretsiz olarak almışsınızdır.

Konstan tavris makineyi hatırlayacak, sevmiş ve kullandığı yıllardan beri kullandığımız gibi hissedebilirsiniz.

**SINGER\***  
EN AZ TAKSİT, EN UZUN VADE SINGER'DE

STANDBART ZİGZAG	ZİGZAG DİKİS	SİVRİ DİKİS	YIRTILMAK DİKİS	KIVRUKLU DİKİS	KIVRUKLU DİKİS
------------------	--------------	-------------	-----------------	----------------	----------------

MORAN - 1347 - 388

Figure 11 - Singer Advertisement with Miss Turkey of 1966

Source: Hayat, 1969.

The Singer Company's advertisement strategy was typical of its global strategy. Almost all banners and newspaper advertisements were prepared for women and for the domestic models of the firm. Although the company had professional models for tailors and industrial usage, Singer preferred to focus on the advertisement of domestic models.

Like targeting the women for domestic sewing machines, the company offered affordable payment plans, which were emphasized in the advertisements. One of the interesting advertisements was that the Singer Company offered different payment plans for different income groups. Figure 12 dated 1966 illustrates two different couples; one is from the rural parts of the country whereas the other is from the city. The company's motto was “*minimum installment and maximum long term warranty (en az taksit ve en uzun vade garantisi)*”. The advertisement presented easy payment opportunities for farmers in which installments were due only at harvest times; whereas they were monthly for government officials.

In another example (Figure 11), “*proper paying option*” was emphasized among other qualities of the machine and services of the Singer Company. The ad announced available installments plans as long as eighteen months.

**SINGER®**  
191 Y 92 TİPİ  
DİKİŞ MAKİNASI



**Çiftçilere Hasattan Hasata...  
Memurlara 24 Aya Kadar Vade...**

Şimdi hayalinizdeki Singer dikiş makinasına kolayca sahip olabilirsiniz. Ödeme imkânlarınıza göre Singer'in bu güzel modellerinden ihtiyacınıza uygun olanını seçiniz.

**191 Y MODELİ**

- Yücecik makik, ileri geri dikis tertibatı
- El, elektrik veya ayakla çalışır
- Tek ve çift gubneli, sabitli veya portatif modeller.

**191 Y 9 MODELİ**

- İnce boyun
- İleri geri dikis tertibatı, yücecik makikli
- El, elektrik veya ayakla çalışır
- Tek ve çift çukmucali veya portatif modeller.

■ BUGÜN SİZE EN YAKIN SINGER®MAGAZASINA GİDEREK BU MODELLERİ GÖRÜNÜZ

**EN AZ TAKSİT  
EN UZUN VADE**  
BÜTÜN SINGER®MAMULLERİNDE

**SINGER®**  
Ticari adını markası

1966

Figure 12 - Singer Advertisement of 191 Y Model

Source: Hayat, 1966.

The use of promotions was also another method that the company used as a marketing technique. In Figure 13 dated 1974, the company gives away “tayyörlük kumaş/suit fabric” for free as a promotion to 100 lucky women.



The Singer Manufacturing Company was one of the first firms to ever provide a warranty system for its customers. Figure 14 showed a warranty coupon, dated 1940. The coupon gave the customer an opportunity to have her machine repaired for free for the first time it broke down.



Figure 14 - Singer Sewing Machine Company's Warranty Coupon, 1940

Considering other advertisements that mentioned warranty system and service of the Singer Company, these features should be important for the customers and must have affected the sales. For example, a newspaper advertisement dated 1965 announced "famous" Singer service, which cover all over Turkey as well as world. This advertisement emphasized the 114-year-experience of Singer Company with the company's easy payment plan.

Moreover, it advertised company's 827 stores, 158 service cars and thousands of Singer employees.



**114 yıllık tecrübe yalnız Singer de**

**Günde 150 kuruşla**  
**bir SINGER dikiş makinası**

Az bir peşinat ve günde 150 kuruşla herkes istediği anda bir Singer dikiş makinasına sahip olabilir.  
(Peşinat 110 liradan başlar)

Bütün dünyada olduğu gibi, Türkiyeyi de kaplayan meşhur Singer servisi, Singer dikiş makinasının en emin GARANTİSİDİR. Singer Dikiş Makinası Kumpanyasının. 827 mağaza ve yetkili satıcısı, 158 Servis arabası, Tamir atelyeleri, Dikiş - Nakış kursları ve binlerce mütehassıs Singer elemanı, memleketin neresinde olursanız olunuz daima emrinizde ve hizmetinizdedir

\* tescil edilmiş markadır

*Figure 15 - Singer Advertisement*

Source: Milliyet, 1965.

Apart from the advertisements, the Singer Company opened sewing machine courses in accordance with its global policy. The company forced its dealers to open training centers. In these centers operated by dealers, quite a number of Turkish women learned how to use a Singer sewing machine.<sup>12</sup>

Today, the company still continues these courses for its newest models.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Neriman Hanım, Ankara 2011; She says "Besides, when my husband was a franchiser, the company forced him to do that they opened a training center. I don't remember how many girls were there, but many girls attended the classes. They earned their living. (Hatta eşim bayilik yaparken firma onu mecbur etti. Bir eğitim yeri açtılar. Orda kaç kız, bilemeyeceğim artık, epey bir kızlar ders aldı. Geçimlerini sağladılar.)"



*Figure 16 - Banner of the Singer's Sewing Introduction Class*

*Source: National Library Collection.*

The Singer Company successfully reached the women in Turkey. Both the marketing strategy of the Singer Company and the teaching classes which made learning to sew with sewing machine available to every Singer's customer had considerable effect on this success. Behind this marketing success, the company and its product had important effects upon the lives of Turkish women. Thanks to the Singer sewing machine, the technology made its way into the Turkish houses and the lives of women. Moreover, it had a significant role in transforming the lives of housewives. In the following chapter, this impact of Singer sewing machine technology on Turkish women is analyzed through the memories of the women, user of the *Singer sewing machines*.

İşte... modern çağın  
modern makinesi

# SINGER' ZİGZAG

**BAŞKA DİKİŞ MAKİNELERİNİN YAPAMADIĞINI SINGER ZİGZAG YAPAR**

**YEPENİ:** Diğer dikiş makinelerinden çok farklı olan SINGER Zigzag dikiş makinesi sadece dikme değil, aynı zamanda kumaş, kumaş ve pamuk yapar. Zigzag ve farklı diğer dikişler için ayarlanabilir. Her türlü dikiş için ayarlanabilir. Her türlü dikiş için ayarlanabilir.

**SİNERİ KILI KALIP:** Moda dünyasında olan her kumaş için kalıp yapma kalıp yapma makinesi dikiş yapma ve farklı dikişler için ayarlanabilir. Her türlü dikiş için ayarlanabilir.

**ÇİFT İĞNELİ KESİLMİŞ ZİGZAG:** Çift iğneli dikiş

İki dikiş arasında kol, yaka, cepli, masa örtüsü ve parçaların birleştirilmesi için ayarlanabilir.

**MODERN İN ÖZELLİKLERİ:** Bu makine, tüm türlü dikiş için ayarlanabilir. Her türlü dikiş için ayarlanabilir. Her türlü dikiş için ayarlanabilir.

**KULLANIMINI ÖĞRETMESİNE ÖZEL:** Makinenin kullanımı için ayarlanabilir. Her türlü dikiş için ayarlanabilir.

Her türlü dikiş için ayarlanabilir. Her türlü dikiş için ayarlanabilir.

**UYGUN ÖZEM ŞARTLARI:** Fazla veya az sayıda dikiş için ayarlanabilir. Her türlü dikiş için ayarlanabilir.

**SINGER**

STANDART ZİGZAG ZİGZAG DİVİS SİNERİ DİVİS YUVARAK DİVİS KÜTLELİ DİVİS KUTLU DİVİS

1934-1935-1936-1937

Figure 17- Singer Advertisement

Source: Hayat, 1966.

**CHAPTER 3**  
**MACHINE AND WOMEN:**  
**THE IMPACT OF SEWING MACHINE TECHNOLOGY UPON THE WOMEN**  
**OF TURKEY**



*...Increased sales were linked with the amelioration of poverty brought about by the diffusion of technology. Singer management concluded that poverty could be removed from society by self-help, and that the company was placing in the hands of hundreds of thousands a technological device by which the masses could improve their station in life as well as their material rewards. Singer executives in the nineteenth century prided themselves on this, their world's work. (Davis, p. 300)*

The pride of Singer executives that Davis mentioned came from the belief that they could change and improve the life of people with their technology. In fact, sewing technology, as to be explained later in this chapter, turned out to be a tool for earning lives throughout history in different part of the world. However, the significance of this technology goes beyond this attribute. As emphasized in former chapters, Singer sewing machine has a special place

in the history of domestic technology by producing and advertising the first machine for women. Therefore, this chapter is particularly interested in the history of the Singer sewing machine in terms of its impact upon the lives of women in Turkey after the 1950's.

Before discussing the transformative power of the sewing machine technology among Turkish women, the brief account of the literature related with sewing machine, sewing culture and history of the Singer Company is given here. Most of the studies on sewing and sewing machines focus on the changing role of women in relation with consumer culture, economy and changes in society. For example, Gordo studies the sewing culture in relation with cultural dynamics of women's role between 1890 and 1930. She stresses the cultural meaning of home sewing, which was seen as an important part of feminine domain and more than that, "*home sewing could serve as a refuge of traditional ideas about women in an era of rapid and often unsettling change*" (Gordon, 2004). But at the same time, home sewing could be a tool for challenging social standards of modesty or fashionable and appropriate dress. The "*boundless possibilities*" of dressing with home sewing serve as either catching middle-class standards or negotiating the limits of one's social class.

Connolly's study focuses on the transformation of home sewing with the sewing machine and the emergence of consumer culture in USA, in the

period 1850–1929. She raises important questions related to technology and the conception of domesticity.

As a piece of complex machinery designated for women's use in the home, the sewing machine raised questions about the place of technology in the home. ... Thus Americans had to ascertain just how they were going to classify the sewing machine in their homes, and how they were going to fit the machine into their daily lives. (Connolly, 1999)

She points out the dual attitude towards technology in America in that people were enthusiastic about technology and the welfare that came with it, and yet they also feared its potential destructive impact on society. Therefore, machines could be accepted into the home *if they were properly domesticated*. In addition, she discusses the rise of consumer society and the effects of ready-to-wear industry on home sewing.

Other studies, like Goggin and MacLean, concentrate on the sewing and embroidering work of women. They discussed that sewing or embroidering is a way of identity performance. The sewing works of women are critical in order to understand and appreciate the different layers of women identity. Moreover, as Goggin discussed, "*it sheds light on the complex relationship between the material culture and identity*" (Goggin, 2009).

The history of home technology literature is also a valuable source for the history of domestic sewing machines. One important source is Cowan's book, "*More Work for Mother: the Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*". While Cowan discusses the effect of home

technologies after the Industrial Revolution, she challenges the common belief that domestic technologies make women's life easier and alleviates the burden of housework. She stresses that the domestic technologies take away some heavy and time consuming tasks from the shoulders of women, and yet new responsibilities emerge at the same time.

Unfortunately, there are almost no studies in the history of home technology and specifically on sewing machines and home sewing in Turkey. However, related to sewing machine technology, there are some studies on the Girls' Institutes, which were important schools for girls to learn sewing as well as other stuff during the early Turkish Republic. One of them is the work of Akşit. She compares Girls' Industrial Schools (1865) of the Ottoman Empire and Girls' Institutes of the Turkish Republic. She argues that Girls' Institutes were seen as an important tool to reproduce the middle-class Turkish family in accordance with the new state policy. However, *the practice diverted from its original purposes* because of the ethnic differences of Eastern and Western Turkey and class differences of full-time and part-time students.

Other than sewing culture and home sewing, there are also a lot of studies related to the marketing strategies of sewing machine producers and particularly the Singer Company in different countries from France to Japan, from the Middle East to Russia. One of them is the works of Andrew Godley. In two articles, Andrew Godley discussed the diffusion of sewing machine

technology and Singer's international marketing strategy. This literature has mostly been referred to in the first chapter. Among them, Kupferschmidt's work, *The Social History of the Sewing Machine in the Middle East*, is quite remarkable for showing how fast the diffusion of sewing machine was in the Middle East, where technology has become a part of daily life relatively recently compared to the West. In addition to the work of Andrew Godley, the information from her article became main sources about the level of sewing machine consumption in the late Ottoman and early Turkey Republic periods. Secondly, Robert Davis' study on the Singer Company, *Peacefully Working To Conquer the World: The Singer Manufacturing Company in Foreign Market, 1854-1889*, is a useful source for recognizing the importance of the "Singer" brand in the history of marketing and business. Davis lays out the management strategies of Singer managers, which brought the company the success.

While attempting to reconstruct an unwritten part of the women history in Turkey, the primary source of this work is again Turkish women. Oral history method is primarily used for uncovering women experiences from different part of Turkey. There are two main reasons of this choice behind the value of oral history records. As McLean discussed, home sewing has been included in the domain of domestic labor; *home dressmaking has not historically been defined as valuable or considered to be "real" work* and has not been archived except for recent studies (McLean, 2009).

... The majority of information regarding individual women's experiences of dressmaking and homemade clothes is stored in their memories and accessible only through oral history interviews.” (McLean, 2009).

This lack of information is the also the case in Turkey. It is only natural that oral history is an important tool for studying the effect of technology on women. This is all the more so, since the lack of written culture among women in Turkey forces one to refer to oral testimony.<sup>13</sup> The stories and memories of women about their sewing machines give us important clues about the social changes that accompanied the introduction and the use of the sewing machine technology in Turkey. It is these memories of everyday life that help us trace the ways in which new technologies transform our lives.

In addition, this work is important in the sense that the women, who are the subject of this work, may very well be the last generation of women who have actively used the sewing machine. It may be our last chance to record a dying culture, which makes such a study all the more valuable. Today home-model-sewing machines are disappearing with the diffusion of the ready-to-wear industry. Most of women do not have a sewing machine anymore, or if they do, they sew in very rare occasions.

---

<sup>13</sup> Elif Ekin Akşit also mentions this problem in her book “Kızların Sessizliği – Kız Enstitülerinin Uzun Tarihi” as “We do not have the memories of either her (Akşit’s grandmother) or others from Girls’ Institutes. (Ne onun ne de başka enstitülünün anıları var elimizde).” and she also used oral history as a source in her book (Akşit, 1999).

Fourteen women were interviewed to learn about their experiences of home sewing and their feelings about their own sewing machines. All of the interviewed women were above their 50's. In fact, eleven of fourteen women's ages vary from 60 to 77. They are from different parts of Turkey and live in various cities, such as Malatya, Adana, Ankara and Samsun. They all belong to middle and lower-middle socio-economic classes. Four of them had earned money from their sewing, and six of them do it only for themselves and their families. Only one of these eleven women had a professional job as a state servant. Among the fourteen interviewees, three of them are distinguished by both their age and occupation. These three women are younger compared to the others. They are in their early 50's, and more importantly, they have worked as sewing tutors in the Center of Public Education.

During the interviews, these women were encouraged to tell their memories related to their sewing machines and their sewing experience. Starting with their childhood, they are asked questions such as when they had encountered the sewing machine for the first time, how they learned sewing, when and why they bought sewing machine. In addition to questions related to sewing machine, they are asked what they do in an ordinary day. Besides their memories, these women have shared with me their photographs and showed me some piece of clothing that they had made.

Although the number of women I interviewed is far less than the statistically required number of a good representative group for Turkey, the stories these women told provide valuable insight into how the life of lower-middle and middle class women of Turkey had transformed with a significant household technology, *sewing machine*.

Other material, like advertisements, printed books and pamphlets about sewing and sewing machine and printed material about the Singer Company in Turkey are generally used in section two of the second chapter. In what follows, the phrase “sewing machine” refers to the Singer brand sewing machine. The reason is that because Singer was really the only brand that was around and all of the interviewees had no other than Singer brand sewing machines. It is still the first brand that comes to mind when one mentions a sewing machine. Moreover, as discussed in the first chapter Singer Company’s sales strategy directly affect the diffusion of sewing machine among household users. The firm played an active role in the learning and using the sewing machine by women.

### ***3.1 My Faithful Machine: Women, Identity and Social Life***

In order to understand the effect of Singer sewing machine technology on the life of women in Turkey, the question of “how these women define themselves” is a good starting point. The involvement level with the technology has shown itself most obviously in the live narratives of “self”. The

social positioning theory provides a useful framework for understanding how women express their identities. According to Luk Van Langenhove and Rom Harré, conversations are the most basic substance of the social realm. It is within the conversation, that the social world is created and social meaning and icons are generated and reproduced. (Harré et. all., 1991) Positioning theory replaced the metaphorical notion of “role” with that embodied in the word “position”. (McLean, 2009)

Removing people from the static positions and relationships that “roles” imply (such as mother-son or teacher-student), the concept of “position” conveys much more “fluid and dynamic sense of the multiple 'selves' or 'identities' one has, and also how these are ... actively constructed, in conversations between people or in other discursive contexts. (McLean, 2009)

“Discourses make available positions for subjects to take up.” (Hollway, 1984). People create meanings within the discourse by placing him/herself in relation to other people. Van Langenhove et al. describe several ways in which individuals position themselves and others in the conversation. First order positioning refers to the way persons locate themselves and others within an essentially moral space by using several categories or story-lines. (Harré et. all., 1991) Second order positioning occurs, when this first order positioning is renegotiated and challenged. Performative positioning takes place within the conversation with the person who has positioned another person in the first order. Accountive positioning occurs when second order positioning occurs within a third part.

Benefiting from the positioning used by women in their narratives of their own lives, I try to trace the effect of Singer sewing technology on the construction of women's identity in relation to their environment. This method enables us to recognize different layers of women identities instead of labeling them just housewives or mothers. Moreover, the idea of multiple identities gives the chance of looking at the relationship between women and technology beyond the stereotypes.

The use of sewing machine / sewing work in the performance of women during the interviews indicates the importance of the sewing machine for their identity. Almost all of the interviewees used first order accountive positioning in order to show how their works are appreciated and how important it is for them. The statements such as “My neighbors said that you sew very nice, you never scrap fabrics.”<sup>14</sup>; “... Everybody admired what I sewed.”<sup>15</sup> or “Everybody appreciated my sewing.” show how the narrators’ skill and resourcefulness were important to their social standing and self representation. They also illustrated this fact by different stories about both their customers and their families. The anecdote of Nadire Hanım gives a good example of her powerful position with her customer, where she appraises her skill:

---

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Macide Hanım, Polatlı. “Komşular ay çok güzel dikiyorsun, hiç parçalamıyorsun kumaşları diyorlardı”

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Nebiye Hanım, Ankara: “Herkes çok beğeniyordu yaptıklarımı.”

...She begged. She said please please, my husband is fat, could you sew one (shirt)? I pay you whatever you want. I said 'okey', pay me 6 TL. I sewed for 6 TL. Her husband said 'Go and convince this lady with whatever means necessary, fetch clothing for ten shirts and get this lady to sew for me'... I swear he admires that much... She said that you sew very beautifully. ... Later, I moved to my new house. She looked for me and found my new address. She begged me to sew new shirts for her husband.<sup>16</sup>

The frequency of the references during the interviews to the social environment as examples of both appreciation and achievement shows how much this skill, the ability of using a sewing machine, and its product may have contributed to their identity. This feeling of pride and fulfillment is common both in the women who made sewing for earning money and who did it only for themselves and their families. For example, Nebiye Hanım mentions her friend and her friend's relatives who came from Kayseri to Ankara for her sewing work. She stresses the quality of her work through her customer just like Nadire Hanım. Similarly, Nursel Hanım and Macide Hanım frequently brought up the positive attitude of their families and neighbors. For example, Nursel Hanım frequently speaks about her daughter-in-law in the interviews and tells the story of her and her friends' amazement.

---

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Nadire Şakar, Adana. "...Kadın yalvardı. Ne olursun dedi, benim kocam şişman, bir tane diker misin? Ne istersen vereceğim. İyi dedim 6 lira ver. 6 liraya diktim. Adam demiş aman demiş git bu bacının gönlünü yap bana 10 tane gömlek al, diksin. ... Valla, O kadar ki beğenmiş... Sen dedi çok güzel dikmişsin. ... Ondan sonra yeni evimi yaptırdım, geldim. Kadın aramış, aramış bulmuş. Ne olursun benim kocama yeniden gömlek dik dedi. "

She (her daughter-in-law) wears in the hospital. Everybody admire. She said that my mother-in-law sewed it. Aaa, one's mother-in-law never sews in this way.<sup>17</sup>

While referring to a negative role, mother-in-law, she differentiates herself and emphasizes her positive attitude, the quality of her work, which is appreciated by different people.

Women could also use their success on sewing to position themselves positively against others when they underestimated their ability. Nahide Hanım refers to her mother and says that:

... My mother might have had no confidence on my ability however I proved a lot of things with that machine.<sup>18</sup>

Similar to the older ones, the younger interviewees express their identity with their work. In this time, they also used their professional identity as a tutor. Their professional life as a sewing tutor plays a key factor in associating themselves with their work. In fact, "*the pride of the home production*" of the former generation is replaced with "*the pride of their jobs*". Although all of them sew for their family and for an extra income, they rather prefer to talk about their sewing activity as a tutor.

---

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Nursel Hanım, Ankara "Hastaneye gidiyordu. Çok beğeniyorlardı Kayınvaldem dikmiş diyormuş. Aaa kayınvaldeler böyle dikiş dikmez diyorlarmış."

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Nahide Hanım: "Annemin beceri konusunda belki bana güveni yoktu, ama sonra ben o makinayla çok büyük şeyler kanıtladım."



*Figure 18 - Nursel Hanım with her Singer sewing machine*

In this time, the statements like “*How beautiful fashion shows did we organize!...*”<sup>19</sup>; “*I had a lot of student.*”<sup>20</sup> Or “*Ask me what we used to have them sew.*”<sup>21</sup> emphasized in order to express how good they were in their jobs. For example, Leyla Hanım used accountive positioning referring to her educated students and her work with them:

I used to work with joy... Most particularly summer seasons, mostly students and teachers from universities came. Their number was over 40 – 45. I performed many fashion parades,

---

<sup>19</sup> *Ne güzel defileler yapardık...*

<sup>20</sup> *Çok öğrencim olurdu.*

<sup>21</sup> *Neler diktirirdik...*

many of them... I made them sew bride dresses, engagement dresses, groom suits.<sup>22</sup>

Behind the pride of achieving and being appreciated, the language of women illustrates their connection with their sewing machines. They clearly internalized this technology and attached persona. The statements like "...But it (sewing machine) is always like my companion, like my friend."<sup>23</sup> or "This machine of mine stand up so many troubles."<sup>24</sup> indicate how strong is the engagement of women with their machine. This humanization of sewing machine implies that it is not an ordinary device for women. Rather, there is an emotional link between them. This sentimental dimension comes out whenever my interviewees talk about their old Singer machine. Almost all of them continue to keep their faithful machine in some way, even if they did not use it anymore or even they buy a new one. For example, the daughter of Nursel Hanım told that she wanted to give away her mother's old machine; however Nursel Hanım did not give her the permission. Similarly, Sema Hanım talks about her daughter's intention of buying a new sewing machine and her objection as:

Nilgün (Sema Hanım's daughter) says that she is going to buy a new sewing machine. Later, we can sell or give away your old

---

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Leyla Hanım, Ankara: "Severek yapıyordum. ... Hele benim yaz dönemimde; hep üniversitede okuyan öğrenciler, öğretmenler... Ama benim nasıl bir öğrenci(m olurdu), 40-45'in üzerinde. Ne defileler yaptım, ne defileler yaptım tek başıma. ... Gelinlik, nişan takımı, damatlık diktirdim."

<sup>23</sup> "Ama o benim hep böyle dostum gibi, arkadaşım gibi..."

<sup>24</sup> "Çok kahrımı çekti bu makinam."

machine. I said no. It's my faithful (sewing machine). I have been using it for 34 years.<sup>25</sup>

The emotional link can be seen more clearly when they talk about situations in which their machine is not available for their immediate use. For example, Nahide Hanım had to leave her machines in her mother's home, because of the circumstances, but she voices her feelings about its absence several times:

I need that machine everywhere, every moment. For example I now have three sewing machines at [my mother's] home... None of them are here with me. I need it every moment. If the machine had been here, I would have done this. ...I dearly feel its absence.

My own grandmother gave me her sewing machine as a present. In our interview, she sadly told her feelings in the following anecdote:

I hadn't worn this skirt for a while, it was tight. I reckoned, the machine will go, let this skirt be something for reminiscence. At night I sat down and got it backstitched, and in the morning I washed it. I sewed it yesterday before I went for a visit to Ayten Hanım (her neighbor). I fortunately did sew it. I said to myself this is the last time.<sup>26</sup>

Similar to the emotional engagement of women with their sewing machine is observed between the brand "*Singer*" and its customer. It was asked to the

---

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Sema Hanım, Ankara: "Nilgün (Sema Hanım'ın kızı) diyorki, makina alacağım. Senin makinayı da satalım, verelim. Yok dedim o benim emektarım. 34 sene tepe tepe kullandım."

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Nadire Hanım: "Şu eteği bir senedir giymiyordum, dar geliyordu. Dedim makina gidecek, şu etek hatıra olsun. Eteği oturdum gece teğelledim, sabahta yıkadım. Dün Ayten Hanımlara giderken yaptım. İyikimki dikmişim. Bu son dedim."

interviewees about other sewing machine brands that they would know. All women responded as the Singer was the only sewing machine available. The name Singer became synonymous with sewing machine.

Apart from being a well-known brand, the Singer sewing machine was a statute symbol for social well being in Turkey as well, just as it was once in Europe and USA. For example, Coffin studies the advertisements of sewing machine and emphasizes how it was presented with other home furniture, like piano and mirrors.

Its cost and its availability made the Singer sewing machine a status symbol throughout the first half of the twentieth century in Turkey. The expressions like “It was really hard to buy a Singer sewing machine!<sup>27</sup>” and “*In those days not everyone could afford a sewing machine!*<sup>28</sup>” indicate how hard it was to buy a Singer sewing machine. The stories of women about how they bought their machine indicate the importance of it. For example Güngör Hanım had asked for the favor of a government official:

After I learned sewing, you could not find machines at that time. Singer was very scarce. Adana deputy governor pulled some strings and bought me a sewing machine.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Singer almak çok zordu.

<sup>28</sup> O zaman herkeste yoktu makina.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Güngör Hanım, Adana: “Ben dikişi öğrendikten sonra makina bulunmuyordu o zaman. Bir ara Singerin kıtlığı vardı. O zaman Adana vali muavini bana torpil yaparak dikiş makinası aldı.”

Nursel Hanım's husband's position as a doctor in a small village was effective to reach such a technology before the remaining people of the district.

When I got married, I did not have a sewing machine... After that, we moved to Ayaş. The seller said to my husband "Doctor, this is very good brand and this (model) number is very valuable. It is a Singer machine." He insisted to sell this machine to me. It was 1965 and I started to own that machine.<sup>30</sup>

The insistence of the seller in Nursel Hanım case might indicate both the social position as a doctor and his purchasing power. Nursel Hanım's husband might be in the minority who could afford a sewing machine easily in early 1960's.

The women who are not as lucky as Güngör or Nursel Hanım should wait almost few years to get one. Nebiye Hanım talks about her unsuccessful attempt to buy one:

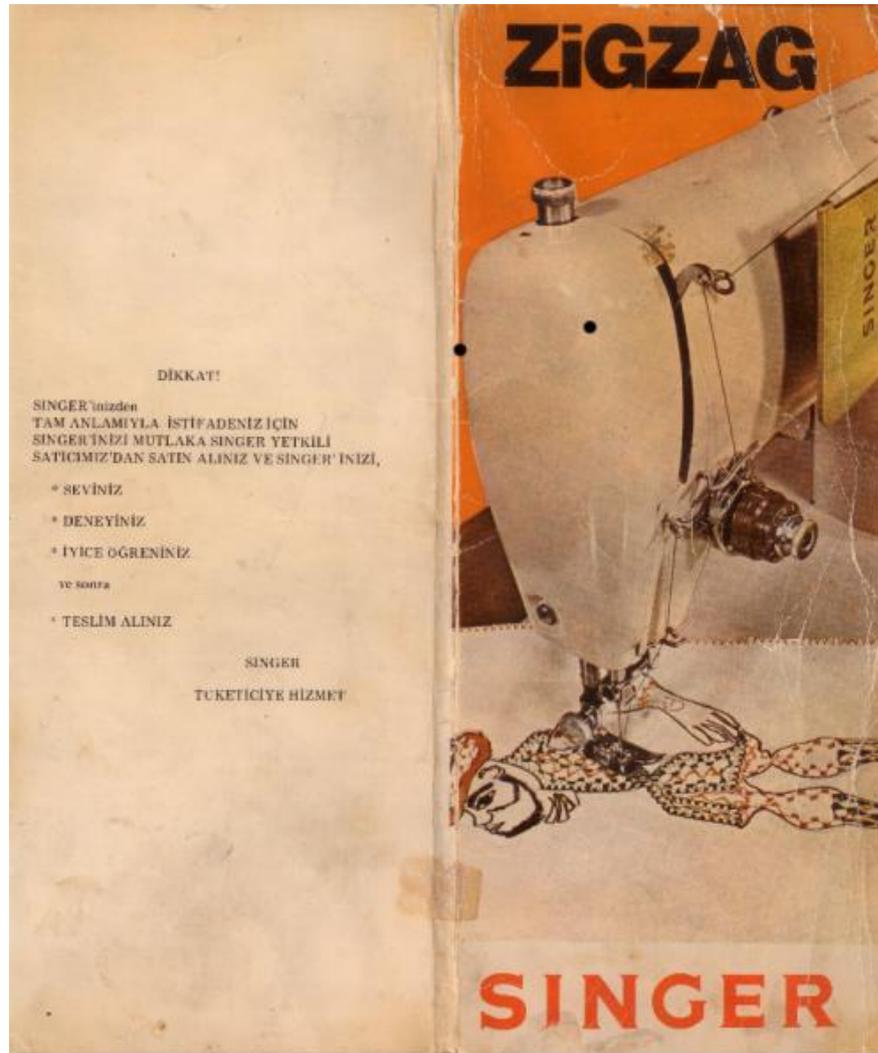
It was very hard to buy a Singer sewing machine. It was in-deed hard. You had to register first and wait for your turn to come. We could not buy in that time.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Nursel Hanım, Ankara: "Ben evlendiğim zaman yoktu makinem. ... Sonra Ayaş'a geldik biz. Sonra satıcı bey demişki doktor bey çok iyi marka, bu numara çok değerli (makinenin modelini kasteterek). Singer makinası. Ben illa bunu yengeye vereceğim demiş. 1965 yılında, o zaman oldu benim makinam."

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Nebiye Hanım: "Singer almak çok zordu. Gerçekten çok zordu. Yazılıyordunuz. Sıraya girmek gerekiyordu. Sıranız gelince alabiliyordunuz. O zamanlar alamamıştık."

Even the need for a sewing machine is getting less every day; the meaning of this technology for the women, which is apparently beyond its practical use, makes it indispensable. I believe that a distinct feature of Singer sewing machine technology has a role in this intimate relationship. We, both users of household and other technologies, are mostly passive users of technology who do not intervene in the working process of the machine. The technological object is like a black box, in that only some minority of specialists understands its operations. The washing machine, for example, washes our clothes, but most of us do not know the basic principles of how it works or cannot do even some basic repairing when it is broken. However, the case is different especially for older mechanically operated sewing machine. It can be said that sewing machine is one of the last technological objects whose users are not alienated while using it. Women actively use the sewing machine to shape and control the stitches they made. Singer Company had also significant role in this process. Since the beginning, the company promoted the idea that women can easily use and maintain it. In order to this, the company used its agencies to teach as explained in the former chapters. Moreover, the company prepared extensive user manuals that explain how one may use the functions of the machine in detail. One of the covers of the Singer sewing machine manual prepared for Turkey can be seen in Figure 19. On the back, the company warned its customers and advised that they first try and learn well how to use it before purchasing.



*Figure 19 - The Cover of Singer's Zigzag Model User's Manual*

I can say as a beginner user, one has to learn the language of his/her machine to adjust the length of stitches, the tension of the rope etc. and to repair. You are more than a passive user; you are the one to control the machine.



*Figure 20 - My Singer Sewing Machine*

While sewing machine is distinguished as a household appliance by the way of usage, sewing work is also differentiated from other housework. Because of its nature, the housework should be done everyday repeatedly from the beginning. Similar to mythological Greek King Sisyphus, who is compelled to roll an immense boulder up hill, the women should the cleaning, cooking and other stuff again and again knowing that the rock rolls back down. There is no room for creativity, productivity and joy. However, after sewing machine, sewing provides to the women the space for the realizing themselves. Different studies show that sewing was “*never-ending, time consuming task*” for women before sewing machine (Connolly, 1999 and Cowan, 1983). As mentioned in the first chapter, almost all clothing needs including furnishing the house should be met by women. However, after the sewing machine

became widespread, sewing burden lessened to a considerable degree. Sewing became more of a source of pride than a burden after the sewing machine.

Another important factor to decrease the sewing work at home was the diffusion of the ready-made clothing. For the US market, the diffusion of the ready-made clothing dated about 1920's.<sup>32</sup> As Connolly mentioned, home-sewing has been continued after cheap ready-wear clothes were available for everyone. With the sewing machine, the ready-wear industry changed the motivation for sewing. The necessity turns to demonstration of skills, creativity and technical knowledge. By the time, the emphasis of the advertisements changed from reducing the burden of women to the creativity and economy.

Apart from the pride of their creativity and skill, another critical factor, which makes sewing machine technology significant for women, is the challenge and the opportunity for self development provided by it. They combine technical knowledge with their skill. For example, most of the women I interviewed have learned to sew by themselves and every different piece of clothing has been a challenge for them.

---

<sup>32</sup> The time of saturation of sewing machine market and diffusion of ready-made clothing differs from country to country. The studies in America dated the former around 1880's and the later 1920.

When we were engaged, Apdullah brought me some fabric. I did not know how to sew a shirt. My mother said shame on you Nadire! I learned how to sew a European style shirt by creating a model. I even made money from shirts afterwards.<sup>33</sup>

Like Nadire Hanım, most of my interviewees emphasized that they learned in most of the cases by themselves or after a short period of attending a sewing class, they improved their skill by themselves. Ayşegül Hanım gives a similar example about how she overcame the challenges when she worked as sewing tutor:

I started to work at Kaymaklı, and then one of my students told me that she wanted to learn simple white embroidery. I told her "I am very busy, I'll show you tomorrow." You could not say that you don't know how. Then, I came home, opened my sewing books right away. I tightened the embroidery hoop (frame) and drew the pattern according to the steps. Then, in the following day, we had material, so I show the white embroidery.<sup>34</sup>

It is understood that this self-achievement is critical for women. Another example is Nebiye Hanım story. She repeats specifically the fact that she learned sewing by herself.

---

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Nadire Hanım: "Biz nişanlıydık. Apdullah kumaş getirdi. Ben içimde gömlek dikmeyi bilmiyorum diyordum. Annem ayıp kızım dedi. Kalıp çıkararak frenk gömleğini dikmeyi öğrendim. Sonra hatta gömlekten para bile kazandım."

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Ayşegül Hanım: Kaymaklı'da başladım Öğrencinin biri dediki ya öğretmenin ben beyaz işi öğrenmek istiyorum. Dedimki ya şimdi çok işim var, ben sana yarın gösteririm. Bilmiyorum diyemiyorsun tabi. Eve geldim, hemen kitaplarımı açtım, kasmağı şeyi gerdim deseni çizdim, işlem basamaklarına göre. Ertesi gün, zaten materyalimiz vardı, ertesi gün gittim, gösterdim.

We had a tenant. She is Tatar. I learned from her. ... No. I did not learn besides our tenant. I had always observed her. I learned myself while I had watched her.<sup>35</sup>



*Figure 21 One of the works of Emine Hanım*

This insistence on self-learning issue proves again the importance of this achievement in women narrative. Sewing machine technology gives the chance of overcoming a challenge, learning sewing and using sewing machine, by herself. This is also critical where domestic labor is assumed to be unproductive and cheap. However, home sewing, which has been included in the domain of domestic labor, became the way of doing for housewives something valuable or something considered to be “real” work. Moreover the women who sewed had quite an amount of technical

---

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Nebiye Hanım: “Bizim kiracımız vardı, Tatar bir bayandı. Ondan öğrenmişim. ... Hayır, kiracımızın yanında öğrenmedim. Hep onu gözlüyordum. Baka baka kendim öğrendim.”

knowledge just like a professional tailor, and have the necessary technical skills for using and repairing a machine. Nursel Hanım's story explains the value of her experience.

They would make me take measures for hemlines. They would ask me why I wouldn't do it when they stood on a rug. I would prefer to do it on hard floor, since things would look smoother there. Because I would use a ruler to take measures. I would sit on the floor. A flared skirt. It is very difficult to take measures for hemlines... There are threads, etc on rugs and they are a bit fluffy. The ruler sometimes sinks into the rug and sometimes stays up on it. This you can not explain to these people in one hour... Actually if done on hard floor one can do it perfectly.<sup>36</sup>

It is obvious that technical skill, using sewing machine, could help to transform women's life in a positive way. The sewing machine give them the opportunity of showing their ability, which can also be traced in my interview from the emphases that they are good at sewing /using sewing machine. Both the ability of using a machine and the power of producing something useful and durable have helped these women to realize themselves. Different studies demonstrate similar results in different countries. For example, McLean concludes her study in Alberta in the 1940's that home sewing enabled women to construct positive identities (McLean, 2009). Gordon

---

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Nursel Hanım: "Etek boyu aldırırlar mesela. Niye halının üstünde almıyorsun derlerdi. Ben isterim ki parkenin üzerinde, düzgün olur çünkü. Çünkü cetvel koyarak alıyorum. Ben yere oturuyorum. Kloş etek. Çok zor olur etek boyu almak... Şimdi cetvel halının üzerinde tüy var, kabarıklık yapar. Cetvel bir yerde iner bir yerde çıkar. Onu bir saatte anlatamazsın...Halbuki parkenin üzerinde düzgün olur. Düzgün duracak biraz şöyle yapsa etek boyu değişir."

emphasizes the pleasure of sewing, as a source of creativity, pride and accomplishment and its role as personal expression. (Gordon, 2004)

### **3.2 Women Labor and Sewing Technology**

*We all earned money, although barely, from sewing.*<sup>37</sup>

For my grandmother, the importance of her sewing was behind the self-achievement. Her memories show me how the money earned from the sewing was critical to her and her children in the hard times. Therefore, it is inevitable to analyze the economic effects of the sewing machine while trying to answer its transformative power in daily life of Turkish women. Historically, sewing has been an old means for living and is still one. Women's home manufacturing harkens back to as early as the seventeenth century as a seamstresses and tailor. Until mass production became available in the market, domestic production had supplied a wide range of goods in the homes. The production of yarn, linens and all clothing were made by household member regularly for satisfying household needs as well as for making some extra income. Quataert states, the lines remained blurred between the production for household and for the market. While sewing was one of the main housework, the same skills are also used for wage work, whenever the family needs extra income (Quataert, 2000).

---

<sup>37</sup> Ayşegül: Zor zar da olsa hepimiz dikişten ekmeğe yedik.

Similar to the situation in Europe, sewing has been an important tool for earning from home in Turkey as a part of unregistered economy and later, textile and ready-wear industries became important sectors, where women's occupation is concentrated. Because, sewing was assumed a part of women's housework and an appropriate way of wage earning for housewives, it has been an important element of the girl's education throughout the world as a state policy. For example, the Prussian government consistently defended the right of women to learn sewing against the protest of the tailors' guild in the nineteenth century (Quataert, 2000). Similarly, sewing was seen a necessary part of home economics class for girls in America, where sewing machine was an integral component of the education (Connolly, 1999). In the Ottoman Empire, Girls Industrial Schools taught sewing and later, Girls' Institute and the Center of Public Education took over this task in Turkey till 1980's.

Although the content of these state classes targeted often to breed good housewives<sup>38</sup>, it also enabled women to earn their livings with their sewing machine. Beyond the family needs, the home production had been one of the few ways that would let most of the middle-class, urban women to have an income till 1980's. The skill of sewing and using sewing machine technology

---

<sup>38</sup> Akşit emphasized the Girls' Institute aim as breeding good housewives comparing it with the Girls Industrial Schools and "Realizing Müfide Ferit's dream of "Lady Life," the school authorities who regulated the Girls' Institutes determined the place of women to be in the house, in contrast to the industrial work emphasis of the Girls Industrial Schools." (Akşit, 1999).

provides an opportunity to earn money without challenging the social contract. The lack of education or, in most of the case, lack of an opportunity to have an education prevented these women from entering the labor market. Because of their social status; they also could not work as domestic worker in other houses like immigrant low class women. Besides, their economic conditions did not necessitate such kind of work. However their sewing machine and sewing knowledge left/gave the women an out to enhance their economic conditions without negotiating the social boundaries.

The oral history records present us critical examples from women's life stories about how sewing became the only accepted career for them. One of them is GÜNGÖR HANIM:

I was going to continue my education. Business High School was close to our house. There were ten female students. My older brother, who attended this high school, told that if I also went there, he would no longer continue his education.<sup>39</sup>

It is why GÜNGÖR HANIM could not choose another profession but worked as a tailor from her home. Even if having an education was attainable, there were not any options other than the imposed one. For example, Rabia Hanım had other dreams than being a sewing tutor; however similar to GÜNGÖR HANIM, she had no alternative option than sewing:

---

<sup>39</sup> Interview with GÜNGÖR HANIM. "Ben okuyacaktım. Ticaret lisesi bize çok yakındı. On tane kız talebe vardı. Benim büyüğüm orda okuyordu. O gelirse ben okumam dedim"

Why did I chose to sew? I did not like it at all. My mother did not let me go to school. She said ‘that’s it’ after I graduated from secondary school: “There won’t be any more schooling”. I cried maybe for a week or two weeks and insisted that I would continue to high school. Nevşehir High School was co-education. They won’t let me go there. If you chose to girls vocational high school, you had to chose sewing. I chose a different subject, child development study. My mother said, either you choose sewing or you have to drop out school. My aunt is very famous tailor. We asked her to sew me a skirt. She gave the fabric back to my hands. My mother felt offended and said that “You will learn sewing and sew for yourself.”<sup>40</sup>

Rabia Hanım went to school to learn sew for herself, later she managed to work as a tutor. These two narratives show clearly that sewing was an acceptable subject for girls if they would like have any education after secondary school and was generally the only option for them. However, it was not her parents in Rabia Hanım life story, but her husband let her work. She was lucky enough to find a job as a sewing tutor. The critical point for her and other women is that their ‘family’ was in need of women’s labor in order to maintain economic status. If the income of the father could easily keep up middle class standards, then working for money was not an option. Both Nursel Hanım and Neriman Hanım state the reality:

---

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Rabia Hanım in Ankara : “Ben niye seçtim dikişi? ... Hayatımda dikişi hiç sevmezdim. Annem okumama izin vermedi. Ortaokuldan sonra tamam dedi, bitti. Okumak yok dedi. Ben bir hafta mı ağladım, iki hafta mı ağladım liseye yazılacağım. Nevşehir lisesi kızlı-erkekli düz lise. Oraya gidilmez. Oraya da, Kız Meslek lisesine, gidersen dikiş seçeceksin, başka bir şey seçilmez. Annem izin vermedi. Çocuk gelişimi seçecektim. Hatta seçtim, ya onu bırakacaksın dedi dikiş seçeceksin, ya da okulu bırakacaksın. ... Benim amcamın hanımı çok ünlü terzi. Biz ona bana bir etek dikmesi için gittik. Eteği dikmeden elime verdi. Annemin çok zoruna gitti. Sen dikiş öğreneceksin ve kendine de dikeceksin dedi.”

We were not allowed to work. Just in case your status should be bad.<sup>41</sup>

In those times, women did not allow women to work my dear.<sup>42</sup>

These examples imply that women's earning money was kind of "shamefull" for family. That is only allowed if the family is in need. That is why even women who earn money through sewing position their work not in a professional area but a hobby, sort of leisure activity so on and so forth.

As it is emphasized, the income of women is used mostly to maintain the middle class standards, spend for children and help the family in hard times. Nadire Hanım talks about her husband attitude and how she has grappled with life:

I spend the money for the house expenses. I bought some stuff for the kids, shoes. I always bought the children's dowries. Abdullah did not give me enough money.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, Rabia Hanım had sewed for an extra income besides her tutor job from time to time:

Once we were having a house built for us. So I was sewing in order to contribute to the payments. The salary was not sufficient, so I was sewing while we were hard up for cash. For

---

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Nursel Hanım: "Çalıştırılmıyorduk. Ancak durumun şey olacak"

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Neriman Hanım: "O zaman kadınları çalıştırmıyorlardı kızım."

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Nadire Hanım: "Kızım, eve harcadım. Çocuklara öteberi aldım, kundura aldım. Hep çocukların çeyizini aldım. Abdullah çok para vermezdi."

side income of course... No, I was not sewing all the time. I could not anyway, there was not enough time.<sup>44</sup>

After all this additional money that women earn was used for either domestic needs or for the children, there was literally nothing left to be spent on women's personal consumption. Therefore, women's irregular income was not considered as their own but part of the household. From this aspect, among the women that I interviewed only one example diverted from the others.

Nahide Hanım is the only example among my interviewees, who has a boutique after her 50's. She entered this business after she separated from her husband. She does not want that her children feel the absence of her father and financial troubles because of this absence. (She positions herself as a father because she became the bread winner of the family)

This machine has a major role in my life. I started this business with only one machine. After that, I bought industrial sewing machine, Junker and overlock sewing machine. But the first machine always remained. It was like a dear friend, to me.<sup>45</sup>

Nahide Hanım's story shows us how sewing machine and the women's ability to master it can create an agency in extraordinary circumstances like divorce.

---

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Rabia Hanım: "Bir ara ev yaptırıyorduk ya, taksitlere şey olsun diye. Bir dönem işte sıkıştığım anlarda dikiyordum yani. Maaş yetmiyordu. Ek gelir olsun diye. ... Hayır devamlı dikmedik. Dikemezdim zaten vaktimiz olmuyordu."

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Nahide Hanım: "Benim de bu makinemin hayatımda çok önemli yeri var. Bende bu işe başlarken bir tek o makineyle başladım. Sonra sanayi dikiş makinesi aldım, Junker, overlok makinesi aldım. Ama o benim hep böyle dostum gibi, arkadaşım gibi."

Nahide Hanım gives another example from her life describing how important it was for women to have a sewing machine and sewing skills when a family income was not attainable:

There was a friend of my mother in-law, Hayriye Hanım Teyze ... She had three divorces. She always says to me, my dear Nahide, when I got divorced, I left everything behind except my sewing machine. Thanks to this machine, I restarted my life and hung onto life with it all the time. I raised my daughter and provided for her education. Thanks to this machine, I did not depend on anybody.<sup>46</sup>

In this narrative sewing was not always used for maintaining economic standards but to maintain a family and earn bread. The basic machine becomes a tool of survival for the woman (Hayriye Hanım) in the narrative and their children. However, sewing was not always used for maintaining economic standards. Women's income means sometimes meant simply bread.

Marriage is another factor, which limits the working life of women, even if they had been working in their home. They try to manage their daily routine in order to work without the complaints of their husband. For example, Nebiye Hanım had challenged her husband, and earned money from her work. But she gave priority to her housework and completed them first, then, she began

---

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Nahide Hanım: "Kayınvalidemin bir ahbabı vardı, rahmetli Hayriye Hanım Teyze. ... Üç defa eşinden ayrılmış. Her seferinde diyorki, bana şunu demişti: "Nahidecim ben kocalarımın ayrılrken, herşeyimi bıraktım, bir tek makinemi bırakmadım. Hep bu makineyle tekrar yeniden hayata başladım, yeniden hayata tutundum. İşte kızımı büyüttüm, kızımı okuttum. Kendim bununla kimseye muhtaç olmadım."

to work for her customers. Similarly, Rabia Hanım had sewn for an extra income besides her tutor job from time to time:

No, I was not sewing all the time. I could not anyway, there was not enough time.<sup>47</sup>

In contrast to Rabia Hanım, Leyla Hanım, who emphasizes her extra sewing after her job, attributes her extra work to her being single at the time

My friends were married. When they get back to home, they were busy with domestic work. I just got married. I was single at that time. When I got back to home, my dinner was ready. Thanks to my mother, she take good care of the house. I did not have to do anything. After I have eaten, I was going to sewing room. I did not visit my friends or other social activities, I was only sewing.<sup>48</sup>

Single women did not have the burden of domestic work and they emphasized their “space” for sewing activity. They had the freedom of arranging their own time, if they were free from the responsibilities came with the marriage.

For married women domestic work was recognized as their primary duty. They were allowed to or allow themselves to do any extra work after they accomplished their domestic duties. That is why sewing is generally

---

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Rabia Hanım: “Hayır devamlı dikmedik. Dikemezdim zaten vaktimiz olmuyordu”

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Leyla Hanım: “Ama şimdi şöyle arkadaşlar evliler. Geldikleri zaman evin işi, onu yapıyorlar. Ben daha yeni evlendim. Ben o zaman bekardım. Eve geldiğimde yemeğim hazır, herşeyim hazır. Annem sağolsun, yapıyordu. Bende yemek yedikten sonra geçiyordum oraya (dikiş odasına), gezmem falan yoksa, dikiyordum yani.”

recognized as “extra work” or “additional income” and hardly becoming their profession. This recognition provides them a space for earning money without making them to challenge by social prejudices. But also this recognition keeps them within the boundaries of their social environment.

The women, who sewed only for themselves and their families, arrange their daily life in accordance with the schedule and needs of their husband. For example, Nursel Hanım state that her husband gives importance to the meal, therefore she first prepared the meal after her husband left the home and do other housework. Then, she used her own time for sewing or seeing her friends.

Because sewing has hardly been perceived as a profession for women, they had to spare some time for sewing after they completed all other domestic works. But this was not the only problem. The idea that sewing is hobby for women or part of their “*natural*” domestic labor and not a profession caused problems related to social security and retirement. Women are the unfortunate actors of the history of informal economy of Turkey. Women earned with their labor, but without a social security and a retirement pension which also means there was not any regulation about work hours or fare payment. The narrative of Güngör Hanım summarizes this situation in her life story very well as:

...There was no other option (as a job). I worked, but I have no retiring pension! Now, I have nothing at all.<sup>49</sup>

Actually, her situation is common for all women who work as a tailor without a name. As Güngör Hanım states sharply that the sewing skills became the only means for producing and earning thanks to their sewing machine. They had learned mostly by themselves and put their knowledge into home production. This unregistered employment, which happened to be there all along with the other domestic responsibilities, had slowly faded away in silence with the coming of old age without leaving much of a trace.

The younger interviewees still had difficulties to have a job and sewing remained as the only possible chance for them to have a career at all, but thanks to it, they managed to have a registered job and a pension in retirement. While Ayşegül Hanım talks about how she had begun her job, she stated the reason as to why her working life began later than the others, in a way where she was almost trying to excuse herself, as:

In my time, 1985, the working woman was peculiar.<sup>50</sup>

From one generation to the other, women employments evolve from the point “do not allow” to the “weird”. In fact, with statements like “*I am the only*

---

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Güngör Hanım: “O zaman başka bir şey yoktu. Çalıştım, ama emekliliğim yok! Şimdi benim hiçbir şeyim yok.”

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Ayşegül Hanım: “Benim dönemimde, 85'te, kızların çalışması biraz tuhaf kaçıyordu.”

*working women in my family*”; these women differentiate themselves in a positive way with their working career. It is important, because their career is never obtained in an easy way. The story of Rabia Hanım is a good example how hard it was to complete her education and how lucky she was to have a chance to work:

I was the only working woman in my family. Other women were not working. I still could not believe how my mother allowed me to work! She hardly allowed me to study. Let say, working was my destiny. Fortunately I worked, I am so happy for that.<sup>51</sup>

Therefore, the sewing machine provided women a battle field for themselves where they could legitimately fight to work, and gain a social status through not only earning money but obtaining a skill and mastering a machine. Moreover, as Kupferschmidt emphasizes for the Ottoman case, women’s fight to work at least at home lead to another transformation: away-from-home employment:

The sewing machine may have worked as a catalyst to the rise in the formal away-from-home employment of women in the Ottoman Empire, at least where it existed, and on a small scale. (Kupferschmidt, 2004)

It is an interesting question whether the sewing machine has really worked as a catalyst for the women to work away from home as Kupferschmidt suggests, or it might have in fact resulted in delaying it because sewing, and

---

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Rabia Hanım: “Benim ailemde sadece ben çalışıyorum, hiçbir bayan çalışmadı. O da annem nasıl izin verdi! Okumama bile annem zorla izin verdi. Kısmette varmış. İyiki çalışmışım. Çok memnunum çalışmaktan”

particularly home sewing machines, enabled women to earn a living in their homes without challenging and negotiating social contracts about women and women's work. It is not easy to answer this question with the available data. However, the examples which are discussed below are mostly in favor of Kupferschmidt's argument. Though my interviewees, who are over their sixties, worked from their home with one exception; their daughters had managed to finish their education and have a professional career. The younger ones worked as a sewing tutor even if this was not their dream career. The three women are in the age of daughters of first group interviewees. The first group interviewees' unregistered employment turns into professional women in the next generation. These women who are actively producing in their home raise their kids to become doctors, engineers or teachers.

In brief, the domestic labor which turns to a way of earning an income remains problematic for women. First of all, its domestic nature makes women's labor not perceived as a professional work. In contrast, their effort is assumed to be the extension of their domestic responsibilities and their income is recognized as the family income. Therefore, their labor did not evolve into establishing a business and they remained as housewives. Although this fact did not diminish their work, it hindered the reorganization of their labor by government (they did not have a retirement pension for example). Similarly, the time management of women created a similar

perception. Although their creative work was a source for self-realization, their primary identity remained as “housewife”. However, regardless of the value of their labor, these women participated in the family and tried to make the best out of their capabilities.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

“There are at least three Americans in every foreign town in the world”, according to an old traveler’s saw, “the consul, the standard Oil man and the Singer [Sewing Machine] man.”<sup>52</sup>

In June 1951, the Time Magazine announced the hundred anniversary of the Singer Company with these lines. Being in every foreign town in the world might be an exaggeration; however the real achievements of the Singer Company were obviously its vast acceptance *by the households* through world. As Connolly said, *technology had indeed entered the American home by way of the sewing machine* (Connolly, 1999). Similarly, the sewing machine was one of the first machines, that entered homes and women lives in Turkey. Being the first machine designed and marketed for the women, I believe, it did help to take down the wall in mind between the women and technology.

This study is motivated with this belief that sewing machine technology had a role in the transformation of the daily life of the Turkish women. I think that it is critical to study the mutual interaction between women and such an early, relatively simple technology in order to understand the current impact of today’s more complicated technologies. In addition, being the first machine to

---

<sup>52</sup> The Time magazine, CORPORATIONS: Globe-Trotter, Monday, June 25, 1951

enter the home and produced and advertised directly for women made sewing machine particularly significant. My personal experience was also a factor that led me to focus on sewing machine.

Before summarizing the results of this study, I want to refer to a critical and relevant discussion in the literature; namely technological determinism. My research question brings to mind the problem of accepting technology as an independent agency that impacts the society. In fact, the belief in technology as a key governing force in society dates back to the early stages of the Industrial Revolution. Referred to as “technological determinism” by twentieth-century scholars, this belief affirms that technology has an intrinsic attribute thus the advance of technology result in inescapable social transformation.<sup>53</sup>

In this study, the sewing machine is not depicted as an independent agency but a tool that is utilized by women to transform their life. The mutual relation between women's improvement and dissemination of the sewing machine in Turkey is introduced by the first hand knowledge that is obtained through oral testimony and my personal experience. To conclude, I would like to emphasize that maybe sewing machine as a single tool and the way women integrated the machine to their lives (as a beloved friend) did not create

---

<sup>53</sup> Smith discriminates two types of technological determinism: “a soft view,” which holds that technological change drive social change but at the same time responds discriminatingly to social pressure, and a “hard view,” which perceives technological development as an autonomous force, completely independent of social constrains. (Smith et. all., 1994)

an enormous change in the gender politics of Turkey. However, the skill and expertise that women gained through owning and using a sewing machine challenged or at least complicated the given gender roles, which was dictated the view that women are not capable of mastering a technological machine and domestic labor of women is solely unproductive and uncreative.

Secondly, machines do not have an intrinsic value which causes social transformation, but they are not only passive appliances. They impact our lives through changing our way of doing and adding value/ devaluing the work done by it. The sewing machine, for example, devalued the hand sewing. On the other hand, the technical knowledge of operating sewing machine became valuable in both commercial and social space. Thus women's ability to use this machine became a signifier of social status and Turkish women are a good testimony to that.

The second chapter provided a brief history of Singer Sewing Machine Company. The distinct place of Singer Company within the history of economy and marketing came from the firm's managerial and organizational success. The skill of Singer executive played the main role in the rise of the company. The advertisement strategy of the company was also critical in its diffusion. In the second part of the Chapter Two, the history of Singer Sewing Machine in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey was discussed with specific reference to its advertisement strategies.

In the third chapter, a material based history of Turkish women was constructed in order to understand how the sewing machines matter as a household technology to the women of Turkey. Oral history records were the primary information source of this chapter. The life narratives of Turkish women illustrate that women identify themselves with their Singer sewing machines and their sewing works. The creative effort and the challenge accompanied to using a sewing machine made a big positive difference with their daily routine of the repetitious, never-ending domestic work.

The second part of the third chapter deals with the relation between the women labor and the sewing machine. Sewing skill had been a way for earning for the women throughout the history. Similarly, the economic necessity had a deterministic role for Turkish middle-class women to sell their domestic labor or to work as a professional tailor and sewing tutor. Most of time, the women used her additional income to maintain the middle-class standards. Secondly, it is observed that the domestic work is perceived as women's primary responsibility. Whether the women earn money or sew only for her family, they arrange

To conclude, this study tries to write the history of Turkish women through the Singer Sewing Machine technology after the 1950's. The framework of this study includes only the Singer sewing machine technology and therefore the interviewees were chosen accordingly. The oral history questions

embrace only the memories of women related to this technology. However, the following research questions will be also valuable to arrive at a more accurate conclusion. Firstly, it is argued that the sewing machine enabled the middle class women to have an income while living and working from home. However, a further comparative study that covers the women who had an income without using a machine or technological device will also be useful for understanding the role of technology in the lives of women. Secondly, I wasn't able to find enough data about the state of sewing prior to the introduction of the sewing machine in the Ottoman Empire. Further research on the sewing culture regarding this era will certainly be valuable to understand the role of the sewing machine in Turkish women more precisely. Another important issue was that the use of sewing machine technology as a tool to realize the modernist ideals of new republic, which was used by Singer Company in the advertisements. After the establishment of the Turkish Republic, one could now see the reflections of this modernist ideal of the new republic in the commercials. In fact, the sewing classes and accordingly sewing machine technology was an important part in the education of young Turkish women in the Girls' Institute where the students were raised to spread *western civilization and to take part in the creation of a distinct Turkish national identity* (Akşit, 2004). This dimension of sewing machine technology and women's history in Turkey is another critical subject that needs further study.

## REFERENCES

Akın, Nur. (2002) *19. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında Galata ve Pera*. İstanbul: Literatür Yayıncılık.

Akşit, Elif E. (1999) *Kızların Sessizliği: Kız Enstitülerinin Uzun Tarihi*., İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.

Arığsoy, Emin. (1974) *Forecasting and Optimization of Machine Loading in Singer Sewing Machines Factory*, Unpublished Ms. Thesis, Middle East Technical University.

Brandon, R. (1978) *The Magic Machine*. The Saturday Evening Post, March, p: 34-36 and 92, 126.

Braudel, F. (1992) *The Perspective of the World: Civilization & Capitalism 15<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> Century Volume 3*. Tran. Siân Reynolds. University of California Press: Berkeley.

Brey, Philip (2003). *Theorizing Modernity and Technology*. in T. J. Misa, P. Brey and A. Feenberg eds., *Modernity and Technology*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, pp. 32-71.

Bowden, Sue and Avner Offer (1994) *Household Appliances and The Use of Time: The United States and Britain since 1920s*. Economic History Review, XLVIII, 4, pp. 725-748.

Buğra, A. and B. Yakut-Cakar. (2010) *Structural Change, the Social Policy Environment and Female Employment in Turkey*, Development and Change 41(3): 517-538, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.

Cockburn, C. and R. Fürst-Dilić (ed.). (1994) *Bringing technology home : gender and technology in a changing Europe*, Open University Press: Buckingham England.

Coffin, Judith G. (1994) *Credit, Consumption, and Images of Women's Desires: Selling the Sewing Machine in Late Nineteenth-Century France*, French Historical Studies, Vol. 18, No. 3 Spring, pp. 749-783.

Connolly, Marguerite A. (1994) *The Transformation of Home Sewing and the Sewing Machine in America, 1850-1929*, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, University of Delaware.

Connolly, Marguerite A. (1999) *The Disappearance of the Domestic Sewing Machine, 1890-1925*, Winterthur Portfolio, Vol. 34, No. 1 Spring, pp. 31-48.

Cooper, Grace Rogers. *The Sewing Machine: Its Invention and Development*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1976. 2d ed, <http://www.sil.si.edu/digitalcollections/hst/cooper/>, last visited 21.07.2011.

Cowan, Ruth S. (1983) *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*. New York: Basic Books.

David, Robert B. (1969) *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World: The Singer Manufacturing Company in Foreign Market, 1854-1889*. Business History Review, 43:3 Autumn p. 299.

Davis, Fanny (1986) *The Ottoman Lady: A Social History From 1718 to 1918* Greenwood Press.

Daunton, M. J. (1983) *House and Home in the Victorian City: Working Class Housing 1850-1914*, Edward Arnold: London: p.246.

Faroqhi, Suraiya (2007) *Orta Halli Osmanlılar* (trans. Hamit Çalışkan) Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları: İstanbul.

Fesch, Paul (1999). *Abdülhamid'in Son Günlerinde İstanbul*. (trans. Erol Üyepazarcı) Pera Turizm: İstanbul.

Frierson, Elizabeth B. (2000) *Cheap and Easy: The Creation of Consumer Culture in Late Ottoman Society* in Quatartert, Donald (ed.). *Consumption Studies and the History of the Ottoman Empire, 1550-1922. An Introduction*. State University of New York Press.

Godley, Andrew. (2006) *Selling the Sewing Machine Around the World: Singer's International Marketing Strategies, 1850–1920*. Enterprise & Society: The International Journal of Business History, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 266-314.

Godley, Andrew. (2011) *The Global Diffusion of the Sewing Machine, 1850-1914*. Research in Economic History, Volume 20, p. 1-45.

Goggin, Maureen D. and B. F. Tobin eds. (2009) *Women and Things*. Burlington: Ashgate.

Goggin, Maureen D. (2009) *Fabricating Identity: Janie Terrero's 1912 Embroidered English Suffrage Signature Handkerchief* in Goggin, M. D. and B. F. Tobin eds. *Women and Things*. Burlington: Ashgate.

Gordon, Sarah A. (2004) *Make It Yourself: Home Sewing, Gender and Culture, 1890-1930*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, the State University of New Jersey.

Harré, Rom and Luk Van Langenhove. (1991) *Varieties of Positioning*. Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior Volume 21, Issue 4 (December 1991), p. 393-407.

Headrick, Daniel R. (2008) *Technology: A World History*, Oxford University Press:New York.

Hoboken, N.J. (2007) *Bosch automotive handbook*. Wiley ; Chichester : John Wiley.

Jobber, David. (2007) *Principles and Practice of Marketing*. Maidenhead : McGraw-Hill Education.

Kupferschmidt, Uri M. (2004) *The Social History of the Sewing Machine in the Middle East*. Die Welt des Islams, New Series, Vol. 44, Issue 2, p. 195-213.

Landes, David. (1969) *The Unbound Prometheus*. Cambridge University Press.

Lewton, Frederick Lewis. (1930) *The Servant in the House: A Brief History of the Sewing Machine*. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: pp. 559-583.

Loehlin, Jennifer A. (1995) *At Home in the Wirtschaftswunder: Gender, Housework, and household Technology in West Germany, 1950-1970*. Unpublished Ph. D Thesis. University of Texas.

McLean, Marcia. (2009) "*I Dearly Loved that Machine*": *Women and the Object of Home Sewing in the 1940s*. in M. D. Goggin and B. F. Tobin eds., *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework & Textiles 1750-1950*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, pp. 69-89.

Özkan, Evrim. (1999) *Technology and housework: changing patterns of homemaking in middle class urban women*. Unpublished Ms. Thesis. Middle East Technical University.

Parayil, Govindan. (2009) *Conceptualizing Technological Change: Theoretical and Empirical Explorations*. Rowman&Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Pursell, Carol W. (2007) *The Machine in America: A social History of technology*, The Johns Hopkins University Press:Maryland.

Quataert, Donald. (ed.). (2000) *Consumption Studies and the History of the Ottoman Empire, 1550-1922. An Introduction*. State University of New York Press.

Silverstone, Roger. (2005) *Media, Technology and everyday Life in Europe: From Information to Communication*. Ashgate Publishing.

Smith, Merritt R. (1994) L. Marx. (ed.) *Does technology drive history?: The dilemma of technological determinism*, MIT Press: Cambridge.

Somers, Margaret R. (1994) *The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Rational and Network Approach*. *Theory and Society*, Vol 23. No. 5 (Oct), pp. 605-649.

Synder, N. T. and D. L. Duarte (2008) *Unleashing innovation: How Whirlpool transformed an industry*. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco.

Vries, Jan de. (2008) *The Industrial Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present*, Cambridge University Press.

Zoellick, Bill (2005) *Siemens Medical Solutions: information architecture as strategic advantage*. Cambridge: Gilbane.