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Transgression of the Concept of Public-Private

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Abstract- In this era of individualism almost everyone is concerned about maintaining the privacy, but it becomes too confusing as the core concept of public and private can no more be described in a straight and easy way. Both of these issues get different dimensions which actually transgress the characteristics of being "Public" or being "Private". Even the concerns of people about privacy and concealing or sharing their private matters or experiences are also changed. This paper deals with present ideas regarding these complicated issues of public and private, how these changes are occurred, which trend works behind this change and also the existing psychology of the modern people regarding the conception of privacy and public matters. Earlier, while people kept diary to reflect their dreams, pain and pleasure, but now the technocrat people share almost every thinking firstly in the "What's on your mind" box in Face book. It becomes so normal to share the mind with lots of people. In this capitalist and corporate world human being are no more treated as human being rather they are treated as commodity. Privacy and livelihood of individuals become victims of dominant corporate culture. Their experience, life style, emotion everything become the products for selling.

Keywords: individualism, public, private, transgression, gaze, panopticon, social media commoditization.

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Transgression of the Concept of Public-Private

Kasfia Yasmin Anwa

Abstract- In this era of individualism almost everyone is concerned about maintaining the privacy, but it becomes too confusing as the core concept of public and private can no more be described in a straight and easy way. Both of these issues get different dimensions which actually transgress the characteristics of being "Public" or being "Private". Even the concerns of people about privacy and concealing or sharing their private matters or experiences are also changed. This paper deals with present ideas regarding these complicated issues of public and private, how these changes are occurred, which trend works behind this change and also the existing psychology of the modern people regarding the conception of privacy and public matters. Earlier, while people kept diary to reflect their dreams, pain and pleasure, but now the technocrat people share almost every thinking firstly in the *"What's on your mind"* box in *Face book.* It becomes so normal to share the *mind* with lots of people. In this capitalist and corporate world human being are no more treated as human being rather they are treated as commodity. Privacy and livelihood of individuals become victims of dominant corporate culture. Their experience, life style, emotion everything become the products for selling. So, is there anything called "private" in our life, do we have any "private place" for us while CCTV cameras and mainly the Gaze of the society which follow us for all the time: this paper deals with these questions and argues that psychological change of human mind due to social anomalies' and the economic injustice done by the power and the confusion created by the authority which blur the boundaries between the concept of private and public.

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I. Introduction

Individualism, freedom of self, space for own are the most talked topics for today. Everyone is concern about own interest, own life and mainly about not to give any space to any *outsiders* to own periphery. In a word, privacy is one of the prime concerns of modern people. But, this is the time of confusion, instability, raising questions, time of deconstruction, re-construction and the time of destabilizing the definition. It is difficult to give any fixed definition or say something definitely that, "this is this" or "that is that". This is also applicable regarding the concept of "Public" and "Private". Now a day it is difficult to say categorically which one is public issue and which one is private. In a general sense public means, those issues, all the people have right to know about, anyone can ask question, can give or have their own views and comments (apart from the social/ legal/religious restrictions). Particularly 'public' means for "all", for a large number of people are related to it though they themselves are not known to each other or have any connection with one another. On the other hand the word "Private" mainly refers to the personal issues like individuals' choice, liking or disliking, family decision etc. The main difference between public and private is, Public issue is for sharing with a large number of people while private issue is only for limited personal areas. But, in this period people have different sorts of ideas regarding "Publicity" and "Privacy" which make it too complicated to distinguish the concepts in a straight and easy way. Technology, change in human psychology, social structure and mainly the economic power play of the authority have the influence on existing ideas on Public and Private. Now, people share with a relatively large number of persons of their private experiences, which we can say "Privately public". On the other hand, there are some issues, which should be circulated in detail to gain large number of public concern, but are not accessible to all. There are restrictions or social barriers on these public issues which can be marked as "Publicly Private".

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II. Facebook ↻ Personal Diary

Technology has changed the way of our lives, way of our expressing emotions, thoughts, feelings and any state of our minds. Sometimes it seems that we do not control the technology rather it controls us. Technological changes are vital factors in controlling the ideas regarding public and private. Internet, mobile phone, webcam etc. including the media bring the epoch making change in human mind. We may take "Facebook", "Twitter" or "Google +" as the example which in the name of social networking actually blurs the boundary between public and private. If we analyze the statistics carefully then we can see that the users of Facebook are large in number than the diary keepers in present time. Earlier, while people kept diary to reflect their dreams, pain and pleasure, to document their told and untold thinking and experiences only for their own and kept the diary in a secret place so that no one can know about the diary and its contents which were exclusively private. But now the technocrat people share almost everything readily in the "*What's on your mind*" box in Facebook. It becomes so normal to share the *mind* with lots of people and to expose a private experience in public. If we observe the "Status" of Facebook minutely then we see that these are on topics

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including political view, social criticism, religious belief etc. But apart from these there are topics which are too personal to share, like personal feeling of grief and grievance, personal rage, anger or hatred for someone even it includes the conversation with the beloved. It cannot be denied that Facebook or Google + help to circulate news among the known, semi-known and unknown persons, these social networking sites help to create a kind of network but at the same time with this *net* gradually we are being so tightly wrapped with that our minds fail to *work* as individual mind rather it becomes a part of that *net*. For example, a person just has an intention to circulate an announcement about reunion of his school and gives it as his Facebook status. He starts using Facebook with this. Then he starts sharing the school memories to reunite the friends, maybe there are some common friends who are attached both of his or her school and childhood memories, so that he or she starts sharing his memories about childhood and gradually it goes onward and so many personal matters. One more thing, we often use webcam for video conversation with the so-called friends about whom we have least ideas. Do we ever think in this way that when we are using the webcam sitting in our bedroom for the conversation with a semi-known or almost unknown guy actually we give them access to enter into our bedroom? Using the technological advancement we give entry to the public to our private life consciously or unconsciously. Same thing happens in sharing the pictures. As "profile picture" or in the "album" a person accustomed with sharing pictures in such a way as if it is an integral part of the life. Even by using "Check in" we announce where we are with whom at any particular moment. It seems accomplishment of any tour or event is partly depended on sharing pictures on Facebook a family tour or family gathering whether it is worth sharing or not.

a) Publication of Private

Now come to another point which can help to understand the blurring position of public and private in present days. It is the Celebrities. In the celebrity show, in the entertainment pages of newspaper we get details about the private life of the celebrities. The TV show like "Big Boss" or the tabloid paper keeps nothing as private in the life of the celebrities. From the earlier period people have interests about the celebrities. They are curious to know the detail about the popular figures. Media as the part of their business tries to meet up this public curiosity and it is not an unusual. But now a day, it seems the celebrities themselves are in competition of exposing their private lives more and more exceeding the others. For example, before the special occasions like Eid or Puja there are special shows on TV channels and pages on newspapers only on the topic that what will the celebrity do on that special day, what will he or she wear, what will he or she purchase for the family and even what will he or she specially cook for the family. There are also some shows which are for celebrating the birthday of the popular face while birthday can be marked as an occasion for personal celebration. Even some known faces use rumors or scandal about their private life to make themselves popular or somehow known to the public. Media use the personal conversation or video of the celebrities for economic benefits and in many cases the celebrities themselves give consent to it. It seems that celebrities take their private lives as the capital to gain popularity or success in their career. These are the example of "Publication" of private matters.

b) Publicly Private

But there are some areas which strictly have the reasons to be treated as public, which need more and more public concern but they are neglected as private matters. Abusive behaviors to the family member, torturing home-maid, neglecting the physically challenged child etc are the example of these. Even committing suicide is still now marked as a personal matter by majority people. Gaze of the society actually control these issues. In most of the cases the victims keep silent and try to hide their problems and sufferings from the other by thinking that what will say the others, how the society will react after knowing their problems regarding, for example, the problem of an addicted child or the problem of cruelty from the torturing husband. Gaze of the society also controls the mind of the people who have desire to raise the voice against these problems or have a desire to help a victim. If he or she is not powerful enough (both economically and by social status) then he or she have face hundred of questions like "who told you to interfere into other *family problems*," "who are you to talk about these" etc. These issues like torturing own family members, committing suicide are still now marked as personal matter while these are extremely issues for the public concerns.

c) Why this Public ↻ Private?

Now the question is why are these changes, why people share their too personal emotion too publicly, why they give access to the public to their private life. From our childhood we have heard a saying, "Human is social being". Man cannot live alone. Not only for livelihood but also for emotional survival they need others accompany. In this era of individualism people become too individual, too alone like the island. Most of the families are now nuclear families. Parents are busy with their jobs, siblings (if there is any) are too busy with their own study and career and they have hardly any bondage to share their feelings and emotion, there are hardly any scope for gathering the friends and relatives. In this corporate world human beings become like machines, they run after work for their survival. Individualism and self interest are the agenda of

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capitalist society where there is no time to be concerned of others.

In the discussion regarding Marxism, Barry (2010) says:

> The exploitation of one social class by another is seen especially in modern industrial capitalism, particularly in its unrestricted nineteenth-century form. The result of this is *alienation* . . . People, in a word, become things. . . . the pursuit of individual economic self interest would bring economic and social benefits to the whole society(the belief which was and is the underlying rationale of capitalism). (p. 151)

So, in this situation, all are looking for an outlet, a space where they can share the emotion and also wants the reaction and interaction. By sharing the private matters publicly, people actually want to find an escape from loneliness or alienation. By sharing own feeling on a social networking site people actually want to connect themselves to reduce their loneliness.

Human being wants recognition and attention of the others. It becomes almost impossible to live without any attention of the other. Human psychology is very complicated and our psychology has different levels and parts. We always try to hide some part of it and to focus on the other parts.

In the discussion of psychoanalysis Tyson (2006) says:

> "Our unconscious desires not to recognize or change our destructive behaviors-because we have formed our identities around them and because we are afraid of what we will find if we examine them too closely- are served by our *defenses*. Defenses are the process by which the contents of our unconscious are kept in the unconscious. . . . Of course, sometimes our defenses momentarily break down, and this is when we experience *anxiety*. Anxiety can be an important experience because it can reveal our *core issues*. . . . *Fear of abandonment*- the unshakable belief that our friend and loved ones are going to desert us (physical abandonment) or don't really care about us (emotional abandonment). (p. 15,16)

In this busy world people hardly have any time to pay any attention for the other. So, when a person shares a too personal experience publicly there is obviously a reason that he wants to grab the others' attention.

Commoditization of human being is another reason which blurs the concept of public and private. In this capitalist and corporate world human being are no more treated as human being rather they become commodity. Nationally and internationally privacy and livelihood of individuals become victims of dominant corporate culture. Human experience, life style, emotion everything become the products for selling. For example the celebrities themselves become the product knowingly or unknowingly. They have to sale their private experience in the name of sharing because of gaining popularity which is directly connected with their livelihood. There are many shows on TV channels on the topics related to private life style of the Celebrities. But we do not view such number of shows on the topics like- how a neighbor can raise his or her voice against the abusive master of next-door or how they can help the parents of an addicted child. There are hardly any regular shows or column on the newspaper which focuses on the issue that committing suicide is a crime and say that problems of life should be faced rather to end the life. Though some human right organizations work on these issues recently but if we compare it with the earlier examples which are mentioned, then we find that the number is very insignificant, those can be counted in finger. The numbers become just opposite only on the special days like Women's Day, World day against child labor, International day against drug addiction etc. There is a clear reason, that is, selling the private experience of a celebrity is much more easy and profitable than a programme on steps against social problems like cruelty on women or drug addiction etc. So, there is a chain which controls the privacy or publicity of human life and the chain of control depends on the mode of economy and the form and character of the state power. One more thing, that is, in this era, the concept and theory of postmodernism mold the thinking of the people greatly and they have a mind to question or *problematize* any sort of traditional or stable idea. It is a common question in their mind that who defines which should be public or which one should be private. The concept of individualism influences the individuals to choose their own position though unknowingly all of them are within the chain.

In the discussion about "Cultural Studies and Secret" Clare Birchall (2006) says:

> Who will decide what is and what is not legitimate, and how do we know that that decision is being made responsibility? What apparatus is available to bring to light and / or legitimate one kind of knowledge over another? What can or cannot be fully revealed? (p.295)

Regarding privacy and publicity the same thing happens. An issue which is considered as a private matter by one and can be an issue of sharing with all to another. This blurring and confusing situation makes it complicated to decide which one should be marked as private and which one as public. All these reasons and factors work as the catalyst for the transgression and reshuffling of the idea of Public ↻ Private.

III. Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that, in this era of individualism people are concerned about privacy but the core concept of public and private become too vulnerable in this modern and corporate world. Actually now it is a question- is there anything "Private" in our

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life? Do we have any "Private Place?" for us where CCTV cameras and mainly the Gaze of the society follow us for all the time? Do we have any "private thinking" while our thinking is controlled by ideology and hegemony? You will be tagged as a backdated one if you do not have access in the social networking sites and if you are not a part of this network, you have to remain alone in your room while the other members of your family and the friends are busy with earning their livelihood, if the celebrities do not sell their private life they have to be tagged as unpopular or not famous figure by the media which will directly affect their careers. So, it can be said that we are within a chain where the economic interest of power and authority takes the opportunity of restlessness and loneliness of modern life which make it too simple to share the "mind" with a lots of people to create so many confusions that transgress the boundaries of the concepts of Public and Private.

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