

Call for Papers for an edited volume under contract with the University of Toronto Press
Tentative Title: Surveillance and the dossier: record keeping, vulnerability and reputational politics

Editors:

Cristina Plamadeala, PhD

Rafael de Almeida Evangelista, PhD

Ozgun Topak, PhD

Overview

The key objective of this edited collection is to offer new empirical studies, frameworks, and concepts for studying the crucial importance of dossiers in “surveillance societies” (Lyon 1994; Norris & Armstrong 1999), past and present. While interesting work has been carried out on the use of dossiers in the study of past authoritarian regimes as well as in colonial contexts (see, e.g., Los 2004; Epstein 2004; Samatas 2005; Stoler 2010), recent technological developments and political trends warrant a broader inquiry into the contemporary significance of the dossier in surveillance societies.

The burgeoning field of contemporary authoritarian surveillance studies is beginning to appreciate the historical significance and continuities in dossier surveillance and the use of police, paramilitary groups, informers and collaborators as agents of surveillance (e.g. MacKinnon 2011; Topak 2017; 2019; Ogasawara 2017; Akbari 2020; Plamadeala 2019a, 2019b, 2020). New empirical and conceptual studies on past realities, historical continuities and contemporary manifestations of the dossier can be especially valuable for the examination of the history of surveillance (e.g Boersma et.al 2014; Thompson 2016; Heynen and van der Meulen 2019) and of contemporary surveillance societies. Toward this purpose, the proposed volume hopes to bring together varying historical, contemporary and international approaches, as well as case studies on the surveillance dossier, be it paper-based or digital; gathered on individuals or groups; deployed by governments, health agencies, schools, corporations, or private individuals; and carried out in a variety of political settings ranging from authoritarian to the liberal democratic. This volume, therefore, aims to make explicit the potential continuities between surveillance practices across rather different political and economic regimes; and, in doing so, it aims to interrogate how surveillance policies increasingly redraw these boundaries between regime types. Accordingly, this book seeks to discover historical parallels to (and perhaps warnings about) our contemporary surveillance culture.

Even though Western media are quick to excoriate China’s fabled “social credit system,” which uses a wide variety of data points to politically and socially “rate” citizens, the COVID-19 pandemic has fueled similar long-developing trends across the globe. In fact, social and political files have a long history of use by intelligence agencies, employers, credit bureaus, and other entities. Today, as social networks function like a repository of investigational resources—and as these resources are increasingly integrated with other data sets for exclusionary purposes—there is a good reason to apply and expand this critical perspective to emerging surveillance practices beyond China. This is especially true in the wake of COVID-19, when many societies have embraced snitch tip-lines, contract tracing, behavior-based corporate blacklists, and other mechanisms of surveillance-based record-keeping.

Furthermore, as a number of scholars have demonstrated (e.g., Marquis 2003; Solove 2004), the concept of the dossier—and more recently, that of ‘dossierveillance’ (Plamadeala

2019a; 2019b, 2020)—provides a useful heuristic for understanding how corporations, security agencies, and other institutions collect and store information for purposes of behavioral management. Dossierveillance is a type of surveillance wherein the dossier, file (or a series of files), paper-based or virtual, lie at the center of what makes a person afraid or reluctant to act in a certain manner, or to disclose information that, once placed in the file, has the potentiality to be *interpreted* in a way deemed or perceived as harmful for the respective person. The dossier in dossierveillance holds power on a person either through its existence or the *possibility* of its existence and thus can be *potentially* employed in the future in a way that would harm the respective person. The dossier has, as a result, panoptic implications of ‘soul training’: it is the cause of one’s self-surveillance or self-censorship. The person subjected to dossierveillance learns, in the process, to be careful/secretive/reluctant to offer details in respect to the information divulged to a specific authority compiling the dossier or to act in ways that, if taken note of, may not harm the respective person in the future (Plamadeala 2020).

While Plamadeala’s work on ‘dossierveillance’ and that of other scholars working on past authoritarian regimes (e.g. Los 2004; Epstein 2004) has been employed to analyze political surveillance in totalitarian regimes (Plamadeala 2019a, 2019b), the dossier’s broader applicability to the study of current authoritarian regimes, liberal democratic and corporate surveillance deserves greater attention. Along with its cognate concepts, including the file, the folder, the personal record, and related database technologies, the dossier highlights how the collection and storage of personal information can be used to empower, marginalize, and regulate access to goods, services, political rights, and professional opportunities (Ruppert 2012). This volume, therefore, intends to offer a fuller theorization and broader historical and critical examination of this concept.

Questions asked:

This edited collection will ask the following questions: What constitutes a dossier? What are the historical continuities and discontinuities that frame the present political state of these surveillance-based files? (These files can be private and public, commercial and governmental and are kept on citizens.) What is the role of the dossier in bureaucratic transactions and paperwork within today’s surveillance societies? What conceptual parallels can be drawn between new trends and well-tested mechanisms of surveillance-based political management, such as the dossier? How did the rise of smart technology and algorithmic intelligence provide a new impetus to the classic political tactic of ‘gathering dirt’ on targeted individuals? What is the role of the personal dossier in carrying out the strategies employed to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, such as contact tracing, quarantine tracking, and immunity mapping?

Chapter topics may include but are *not* limited to:

The self-generated dossier
Performativity and the dossier
China’s social credit system and the dossier
Surveillance capitalism and the financial dossier
Global south, new democracies and the political dossier
From slavery to racialized facial recognition systems
Histories of dossierveillance
Workplace surveillance and the dossier
Patient-Doctor relations, disease management and the dossier
Data motility, the dossier and the digital archive

Vulnerability, risk and the dossier
Art, surveillance and the dossier
Disease management, disability and the dossier
Policing and the dossier
The constitution of disability and the dossier
The dossier and migration (such as border control mechanisms, identification systems, etc.)
Criminology and the dossier
Cyber crime and the dossier

Abstract submissions:

We encourage submission from scholars in surveillance studies and beyond, whose subject of research may be looked at/reexamined through the lens of the questions asked in this call for papers. We especially encourage submissions that are based on scholarly works that explore themes such as gender, class, immigration, sexuality, illness, disability, and race and racialization.

Interested contributors should send a 350-550 word abstract and a 150-200 word bio to the following email: surveillanceandthedossier@gmail.com.

Timeline

- Abstracts, written in English, are due before May 30, 2021
- Short-listed papers will be notified on or around June 15, 2021
- Papers due October 30, 2021
- Peer-review and feedback, round 1: due by May 1, 2022
- Revisions due: September 1, 2022
- Peer-review and feedback, round 2: December 1, 2022
- Final papers: due April 2023

Submissions will undergo peer review following the usual procedures of the University of Toronto Press. Please note that the invitation to submit a full chapter, following the submission of abstract, *does not* guarantee acceptance for publication. The volume will include up to twelve chapters, between 7,000 and 8000 words each (including endnotes and bibliography). Each chapter may contain up to two illustrations.

Inquiries: Please address them to Cristina Plamadeala, at surveillanceandthedossier@gmail.com

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