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The Surveillance Society

A society is a group of people living together in a community. Within every society there is a government which is responsible for protecting the society from harm and to make sure that their basic needs are well taken care of. Surveillance is the action of carefully observing someone or something with the aim of to prevent or detecting criminal activities. Surveillance societies are societies which collect records of data from phone records, camera footages, and internet use or from any other source for analysis of individual people as they go about living their lives.

This paper argues that although there is as a lot of good in a surveillance society, everyone has a right to privacy. Over the years we have seen technology emerge before our eyes, telecommunication companies for instance provided a platform for us to communicate with whoever we wanted privately at any time without fearing that someone could be listening in between or could use the private conversation in court someday in the future. The right to privacy should be for everyone.

The surveillance society has been gradually imposed to communities for a long time now without much awareness (Wood & Ball, 2006). Today, there are millions of surveillance cameras around the world, consultants from the government and telecommunications companies listening and reading our messages and gathering our private data. We do benefit from some of the surveillance in health, insurance claims, safety and education whereas the other part of it is truly questionable.

In the society, we live with different minded people, some with bad intentions to hurt others because of their own personal agendas and in the process other innocent people get dragged in. We have seen this happen from several well-orchestrated suicide bombings from around the world where foreign people enter into a country for instance and communicate with their contacts in that country and then arrange attacks on innocent people. If the government had known before through the use of full surveillance, it could have perhaps prevented some of the attacks. However in countries such as Syria and Afghanistan where civil war still prevails, communication between the oppressed on tactics of how to try escape or overthrow the oppressor could be intercepted by the oppressors as a result of the surveillance in place.

In 2013 a former Central Intelligence Agency employee Edward Snowden, leaked documents reviling that the National Security Agency has global surveillance programs running to monitor the whole world in secret. They are monitoring everything on the internet to an extent that they can read your personal internet messages on social media sites such as Gmail and Facebook (Speaks, 2016). In the United Kingdom alone, there has been reports that there are over 2 million CCTV cameras carefully watching everyone without their consent (Britain, Parliament, & Constitution, 2009) and marking "suspicious" people as possible terrorists (social sorting as David Lyon would put it (Lyon, 2003)), but with all that footage at hand, they were not able to spot any of the terrorists who were responsible for the terrorist bombings of London in July 2015.

In South Africa, on the 2nd of November 2016, the state of capture report revealed that minister Van Rooyen has been to the Gupta's home on several occasions. When the minister was initially asked by the public protector in court he denied ever visiting the Gupta home but through the use of surveillance on his cellphone, the truth came out confirming that he has visited the home for more than ten times (Madonsela, 2016/17). If the public protector had access to this surveillance data she wouldn't have had

to go through all the trouble and waste the government's time, power and money trying to get access to this information.

A full surveillance society implies better protection against crime and corruption in a country due to the transparency at hand. This will allow the police to more evidence on both sides of the story in court rooms because of the evidence available and thus implying better accountability and more responsible members of the society if they know that they are being watched. However, when people know that they are being watched, they tend to behave differently from how they would normally do and so becoming something they are not and lacking the space to be who they truly are. A right to privacy is in itself a human right and should thus be respected.

There clearly is a visible trade-off between safety and privacy within this topic. I personally think that the government has absolutely no right to invade people's privacy because that is the only space human beings have to be who they are. Taking away the sense of self from a person is not worth replacing with spying on them and making them uncomfortable to say or do what they really want to do.

Given that governments around the world have been hacked on several occasions and other companies as well have been hacked before, for instance: the hack on South Africa's AMSCOR by the group 'Anonymous' and Standard Bank's R300 million hack this year. This clearly serves as evidence to that anyone can be hacked and this can be dangerous to the society if someone gets ahold of all the surveillance footage. The cost of putting surveillance in place is as well far greater in the millions as well and the people could be asking why instead of cameras in the streets, the government invests in putting more police officers on the streets and better street lighting to make people feel safer and be safer in real time.

In every software built, one cannot guarantee one hundred percent reliability or accuracy especially with the use of tracking behaviour on the new camera technology. It really is not trivial to determine "normal" behaviour from watching what a person unaware of being watched is doing and this technology is still new and immature and certainly not enough to make definite conclusions from just speculations alone. With the use of technologies such as CCTV cameras to assist with facial recognition for instance, they can actually flag the wrong person at hand- forcing the suspect to try prove their innocence unnecessarily. Well one might argue that police officers on the ground can still flag the person and force that person to prove their innocence either way.

Today, what one is doing might be considered lawful but you never know what might be considered unlawful in the future. Having the internet under full surveillance means that curious people will not be free to make researches about topics like how to make weapons such as bombs or similar things because you would never know if someone around you was planning to make one and bomb the place around you. With full surveillance you could be on the list of suspects for something you searched for in confidence without any intentions of implementation.

As a society, what does giving up privacy for better crime reduction mean for us? Is it right that the police and whoever can get their hands on our private data can just simply have access to the data about your every move? Currently, the police need a warrant in order to get confidential information about you but with full surveillance they will easily have that without a warrant. When they put down laws about privacy, there was a lot of red tape involved including granting warrants before someone can actually get their hands on the other person's personal data. What has changed?

In big cities, when things like street lights were being implemented, some people thought that the police wanted to spy on what they were doing at night but overtime they realised that it was for their own safety and perhaps the same thing will happen with these full surveillance programs. There is no denying the fact that the government should find new ways to protect societies from twenty first century crimes and if they think that full surveillance is the most advanced and efficient way to do it then perhaps they should investigate better ways to do it and still give people their rights to privacy.

I personally see full surveillance as spying, the authorities will be patiently watching me until I make a mistake so they can throw me into jail. It is really uncomfortable to know that someone is watching my every move and can read and hear all interactions I have with the people around me. I believe I should have the right to privacy so that I can carry on living my life without worrying about having to prove my innocence when I am doing innocent things such as googling on how to make a bomb or dangerous poisons or even joke about ISIS. We cannot be watched as if they know that we are criminals already and that they just need to confirm by waiting for you to do something wrong. If we are innocent then why are they putting us under heavy surveillance?

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