



## Book Review

**Samatas, Minas. 2004. *Surveillance in Greece: From Anticommunist to Consumer Surveillance*. New York: Pella.**

191 pp. Paperback, \$30 (US). ISBN-10: 0918618908; ISBN-13: 978-0918618900

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This book offers us a socio-political perspective on surveillance systems in Greece, spanning from the post-civil war period (1950-1974) until the year Athens hosted the Olympic Games (2004). By providing a chronological account, Samatas' work shows how Greece, due to its history of dictatorial and military regimes, has a strong tradition going back almost a century, of using surveillance to control its citizens. Samatas argues there is a history marked by a culture of fear, suspicion and discrimination.

Until the second half of the 1970s, when democracy was established in Greece, one of the chief criteria for identifying citizens was their political sympathies, which were translated into different types of citizenship status. The state's use of what the author calls "traditional" surveillance mechanisms, which we might describe as less sophisticated than the ones existing nowadays, depended on observation, denunciation, wiretapping, violation of private correspondence, and so on. These were intended to fight communism and detect activities considered to be politically subversive. The authorities had a file for each individual, containing information on each citizen and their relatives.

The book stresses the significance of North American influences, showing how the "McCarthyism" of 1950s America was implemented and assimilated in Greece in its fight against communism. In Greece, however, these policies persisted long after their demise in America. In fact, although the military dictatorship ended in 1974, giving way to a transition toward democracy and technological and bureaucratic modernization, political corruption remained the dominant theme: the political surveillance apparatus was kept in place until 1982 and continued to be used by subsequent governments (causing several media scandals) as a way to control members of opposing parties.

Throughout this modernizing process, Greek citizens yearned for a greater transparency in politics which would protect their individual rights, and prevent the continuation of invasive measures experienced in the previous period. However, not only was surveillance for socio-political ends not abolished, it assumed new features. In addition to the technological modernization (like the use of computers), other relevant external factors, such as Greece's inclusion in the Schengen area in 2000, provided a new paradigm of national security and external borders.

Samatas demonstrates that despite political change in Greece, and shifts in the political arguments used to legitimize the use of surveillance as an instrument for social control, the situation has remained largely unchanged. The notion that there is an "enemy" remains, but it has shifted from being "the communist" to "the terrorist" or "the alien." The author also shows us how the 2004 Olympic Games held in Athens was a key factor in implementing surveillance systems on a massive scale, namely through the introduction of surveillance cameras throughout the city and country.

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Samatas further expands his study on Greek culture by linking this surveillance structure to mass consumerism and mass culture. He describes citizens' lured by commercial attractions, being ready to disclose personal information and reflects on the commercial success of the reality show "Big Brother," concluding that these developments reveal a culture which seems unable to resist "spying" on others. The book successfully shows how current surveillance in Greece assumes commercial and entertainment forms, where citizens are somehow "accustomed" to having their public and private lives scrutinized by the state, which is obviously connected to the heritage of repressive and totalitarian dictatorships (similar to Portugal, Spain or Italy). It also helps us understand (especially in the last chapter, where the author examines the relationship between "surveillance and democracy") that Greek society, contrary to what common sense would lead us to believe, is not – either by tradition or by ignorance – unfavourable to surveillance. The average citizen is not very concerned about his/her data being grouped into categories used to create economic profiles for marketing uses, and does not see resemblances between this kind of data collection and the political surveillance which marked this country's history.

This book is useful for surveillance scholars precisely because it encompasses several political, historical and social spheres within Greece that present important differences when compared to other countries where the use of surveillance assumes different political and cultural contours, such as the USA, UK or Canada.

I will end with two brief comments calling the reader's attention to what I believe are the weaknesses of this otherwise relevant work. While the first section of the book provides a rich amount of information in historicizing surveillance systems in Greece, it feels disconnected from the concluding chapters. These latter chapters are structured by more narrow issues, such as court cases on privacy invasion taken to the European Court of Human Rights, which make the read at times uneven. Another limitation is the lack of dialogue with an already vast literature on this subject which weakens the analysis by failing to place it within the broader context.

Nevertheless, this book may become a reference work for surveillance scholars, not just because it provides an unprecedented case study of surveillance in Europe (and more particularly in Mediterranean countries), but also because it offers a comparative perspective which will contribute towards defining Europe's specific characteristics.