Understanding the Covid-19 Pandemic through Foucault

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Abstract: **Due to the severity of the pandemic, countries across the world had to accept a lot of sophisticated new technological solutions to keep the pandemic under its grip, which included embracing digital surveillance tools as quick fixes and as policy responses to the crisis. However, the use of ICTs have made it much harder to distinguish between what is considered public and private. Thus, the use of such technologies have raised serious concerns related to mass digital surveillance practices, the outsourcing of expertise or sensitive personal data to private companies, and the potential infringement of citizens' fundamental rights. States of emergencies, like the coronavirus crisis, tend to warrant an extension of discretionary governmental powers. This can become problematic when they are used as a rationale, or as a pretext to suspend and undermine democratic principles and rights. This paper seeks to investigate the heightened correlation between the emergence of sensory power and surveillance as a means to regulate/control disease, ushering in an era of normalized surveillance, and the slippery slope that it presents.**

Keywords: **Surveillance, Panopticon, Covid-19, Sensory power, Biopower, Covidiot, Data, Privacy.**

I.   INTRODUCTION

The mass surveillance mechanism which had earlier been unmasked by Edward Snowden has proven to be true as its manifestation has become rampant due to the coronavirus today. The pervasive nature of Covid has deteriorated the calibre of democracies even among the countries having strong democratic tradition, namely the USA, India, South Korea, Argentina, etc., who too have undermined privacy and human rights compliance all over the world. According to the Democracy Report 2020 of the University of Gothenburg, there was a decline of the tradition of democracies, on a global scale, in at least 82 countries. The report studied the violation of fundamental rights in containing the pandemic. This is why more than 100 human rights organizations, civil liberties activists, and consumer groups around the world have issued a collective declaration on Covid-19 and electronic surveillance, asking governments to use tracking technologies only if they are carried out strictly in accordance with human rights principles (Antonia do Carmo Barriga 2020). Due to the severity of the pandemic, countries across the world had to accept a lot of sophisticated new technological solutions to keep the pandemic under its grip. This meant that states began embracing digital surveillance tools to be quick fixes and as policy responses to the crisis (Csernatoni 2020). ICTs have made it much harder to distinguish between what is considered public and private. Thus, the use of such technologies have raised serious concerns related to mass digital surveillance practices, the outsourcing of expertise or sensitive personal data to private companies, and the potential infringement of citizens' fundamental rights (Csernatoni 2020). The logic for such heightened surveillance goes along the lines that, "when everyone feels at risk because of the virus, the acceptance level for exceptional measures and enhanced digital surveillance is higher". States of emergencies, like the coronavirus crisis, tend to warrant an extension of discretionary governmental powers. This can become problematic when they are used as a rationale, or as a pretext to suspend and undermine democratic principles and rights. This viewpoint is in similar lines to the work of Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben on the state of exception, namely that the coronavirus state of emergency has become the permanent condition of political life via the unusual extension of governmental powers to tackle the pandemic (Csernatoni 2020).

The unbridled biosurveillance carried out by countries is another area of concern that the paper delves into. Facial recognition technology has prompted racial and minority discrimination including socio-economic inequalities. As Habermas asserts, privacy preservation is imperative for people to be free and capable of expressing their opinions and decisions in the public sphere, this is exactly what the technological spying attacks – freedom of speech, movement, etc. which are ultimately the essence of democracy. "Surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action" once said by Foucault stands true as the post-pandemic world would not only face the risk of normalization but also of surveillance creep. It is important for citizens to be informed in order to participate in the debate regarding surveillance measures and the way technologies are designed since they pose serious threats to both privacy and democracy. Citizens are becoming more aware that their political activity is increasingly monitored, this can involve a more self-constrained political activity or, in some cases, even demobilize their political activity altogether.

Through this paper, we wish to make the following claims;

1. The heightened correlation between the emergence of specifically sensory power and surveillance as a means to regulate/control disease, ushering in an era of normalized surveillance.

2. Covid-19 pandemic witnessed a dramatic rise in information control among democracies and autocracies alike.

3. The emergence of a new slippery slope; how technologically enabled disease surveillance can constitute a long-lasting threat to individual privacy and democracy if it is in the wrong hands. Drone surveillance, tracking and tracing of Covid-19, and the social distancing behaviours of the public, has made more visible the practices of biopolitics.

II. EXTENDING THE PANOPTICON

Human beings have long become subjectified and made into subject-peoples. They have been reduced to becoming numbers that make up data; be it their search history, what they buy online, the music they stream, health and fitness apps, or their location history. The Covid-19 pandemic has only made this subjectification more visible and the use of sensory power even more apparent. Tracking and tracing of infections, monitoring movement of people and their contacts, the usage of apps, devices, sensors, platforms and agencies etc. are examples of the visible manifestation of this power.

Foucault understood power to be everywhere. So for him, governance was not just limited to states but expanded to include other sites like hospitals, prisons, camps, schools, armies, cities and so on, for in all these places, power, i.e., the strategies and technologies through which people governed the behaviour of others and selves, could be found. He identifies forms of power, which refer to the governing logic through which power produces the desired effects.

The pandemic has made it much easier to understand how routinized and tacit human beings have become to these forms of power, for they readily accepted the impositions made- like the lockdown, albeit a few protests were there in certain countries like the United States. Sovereign power or obedience is extracted through lockdown, curfew, confinements, border controls and overall restrictions on the movement of people (Engin Isin 2020). Disciplinary power, i.e., submission focused on optimizing the capabilities of the human body and maximizing its production. This means forms of knowledge were used to better understand how human beings could govern themselves. Thus, forms of submission, like distancing, isolation, and new forms of conduct for protecting others and themselves, like masks, hygiene routines etc. were developed and followed (Engin Isin 2020).

Regulatory power involves calibrating the effects of the above mentioned two forms of powers on the health of the population, i.e., the infection rate, mortality rate, transmission rate and so on. Foucault originally designated it as 'biopower' and its exercise as 'biopolitics', "a way to describe the managing of populations through statistical, population-level regulations" (IV 2020, 1-4). The body with its various mechanisms and processes and the various factors affecting it were examined, and a prescription for more appropriate forms of conduct for the body that would lead to better health and wealth of the population were given. The advertisements by the UK government asking people to keep R down, which is the rate at which the virus reproduces itself, is one such example (Engin Isin 2020, 6).

Sensory power has changed the dynamics of how societies functioned. While earlier states had complete monopoly over the knowledge about their citizens or subject peoples, this is not the case today. The current scenario has technology companies in command of such knowledge and constantly competing with each other to gain a monopoly over it. There is a huge competition involving these companies and states on who gets to control this data, its usage and access. Most often these competitions are reported as privacy concerns or struggles over it. Satellite data, apps, mobile phones, and more are

used to obtain such data on people. During the pandemic, techno-giants like Apple, Google and Facebook have produced their own mobility reports. The pandemic has made more visible the tracing and tracking done by these companies. But it would be a mistake to limit it to just diseases. These companies have been collecting the same information in the past years for various other purposes as well.

The pandemic with its restrictions and surveillance can be viewed as an extension of the Panopticon structure. People are constantly under supervision and the breaking of rules like, violation of quarantine protocols, ensure punishments and fines. The pandemic made it easier to understand how such a structure could be implemented deftly and, more importantly, how people easily fall in line with it. The question is not on whether such restrictions were required to negate the spread of diseases, instead the focus here is on whether people are aware of the invisible chains on them and if they are capable of questioning and removing such chains in case the states decide to misuse that authority.

Power implies authority over another, legitimate or not. It has allowed social inequality to flourish, for it, creates vulnerability just as it exacts strength. An interesting factor to be analysed while examining the Covid-19 pandemic, is how it has enabled discrimination of minorities to occur, both within India and worldwide, often under the sanction of the state or members of the ruling party. Within India, for instance, there have been many cases wherein members of certain religious communities were unjustly targeted due to the pandemic.

The pandemic become the perfect excuse for these forces to justify their villainization of the other. The same can be found worldwide, the recent hate against Asian Americans in the United States being the best example for this. It is not just in the US though, it is in Italy, the UK, France, Australia, Russia, Brazil, South Africa and more. The violence is not just limited to Asians but to Blacks and Hispanics as well. For instance, China began a campaign to forcibly test Africans, and many of them were evicted by their landlords or refused service at restaurants and shops. Sri Lanka witnessed hate against its Muslim minority. Misinformation, xenophobia and ignorance has caused indiscriminate targeting of such communities (Aguilera 2020). The fact that government leaders themselves use the pandemic to further their anti-immigrant, white supremacist agendas makes it worse. The discrimination is evident not just through words and acts of violence, but in the lockdowns and restrictions which are imposed only on certain sections, and in the forcible testing of some.

III. STATE SURVEILLANCE AND COVID-19

Amidst the backdrop of the pandemic empowering a surveillance society with the state utilising digital technologies to control and regulate citizens' behaviour and 'shift from a regime of truth to a regime of anticipation' becomes fundamental. Additionally, governments' ripened grounds to instil control over the population, curtail its movements, deny access to institutions under the garb of unprecedented State of Exception becomes highly prevalent. The complexity of despotic lies naked in linking panoptic institutions' development and the magnificent nexus of the capitalist, Neoliberal society. The systemic use of COVID-19-19 symptom-tracking apps is scrupulously placed globally to carve obedient citizens deputised or compelled by corporate and governmental strategies to perform the securitisation footwork of personal health monitoring, as well as self-govern as has been feared to enhance the state's circle of 'dual biopower'.

On a drive to arrest the pandemic, many states pursued technological solutionism apparent in the myriad of detecting infection from voices, a barrage of biometric systems, remote temperature sensing, and above all, developing "Contact tracing apps" privileging mass surveillance guided by tech- control as legitimate. However, the issue lies in the sheer lack of cost-benefit analysis and the market-building function that drove away policy response from the ubiquitous technology problems such as ventilators, mask manufacturing towards tackling a repurposing of population surveillance infrastructures. While technologies have been portrayed as a trade-off or transaction in-lieu an extension of surveillance as it necessitates "surrendering data in exchange for the return of civil liberties after emergence from quarantine, or for the promise of an as yet unarticulated "safer" future." (Rose Bernard 2020) The underpinning rationale at the height of pandemic reveals Post Panopticon mode of Surveillance, often conceptualised as Liquid Surveillance wherein newer modes of scrutiny get determined by indirect observation, algorithm predictions and self-surveillance instead of direct state monitoring.

The adoption of 'population management techniques, focused on better conditioning the living forces', it transpires that 'even drastic actions have not been enough to contain the spread of the virus, and a sense of collective responsibility (Kalpokas 2020) imbricate with the entire quarantine practice, whereby restrictions on the movement of people get institutionalised by the state owing to the purposes of security, the quarantine implies for instance then the sacrifice of

individual liberty for the security of society as a whole as it circumscribes the panopticon narrative woven by Foucault whereby minutest of details get recorded and the citizen is relegated to the receiving end of a asymmetric surveillance.

The various surveillance technologies thus deployed increasingly design a disciplinary mechanism and subject individuals to constant modulation wherein alongside the Power of the communal gaze as Foucault mentions combined with shaming enabling technology to produce "docile and compliant bodies" as such unprecedented state of exception legitimise power actions where even the constructed dispositive gets extended beyond public space to become an inherent feature of workplaces and the sheer suspension as well as imposition of checks under the state of emergency. "securitisation of health" which has arisen in the pandemic has enabled the state to weave narratives of equating lock-downs with a kind of pastoral protection, downplaying both their long-term health impacts as well as their likely normalising digitally monitored effects, or even the war on the virus which reaffirms the rhetoric of the "invisible enemy" as a newer illustration of the shift 'from the rule of law to the rule by law' which ushers the strengthening of the state's powers to criminalise misinformation, censorship or gain the upper hand over prerogatives of oversight bodies in charge of keeping state surveillance in check. The triad of censoring, controlling communication to tackle the "Infodemic" was made possible due to existing surveillance tactics where the state too has been charged with creating misinformation as rumours while cultivating distrust generates hence, complicity in governance.

Securitisation's discourse around COVID-19-19, dubbed as 'Coronopticon', becomes highly relevant as in juxtaposition to disciplinary Dispositif described by Foucault wherein rather than the imposition of a desired norm over well-disciplined objects gets replaced by the ability of the state to manage them in accordance to natural qualities and statistics. The subject's knowledge base gets tinkered to achieve a specific objective that corroborates the increasingly fundamental role of technologies as an enabler of the securitarian regime of Power, for it allows control in a supposedly "open space". It lurks the dangers of the fantasised spectre of a Big Brother "tenticular oligarchy," or "Big Other," as opposed to Big Brother – conveying the ominous anonymity of our current spies' state taking advantage of the crisis to 'militarise the public space." (DeBrabander 2020) The silent mutation of neoliberal governmentality to a disciplinary regime, working through declared surveillance as the case studies of nations across the globe becomes a stern reminder of the larger biopolitics at play.

The governments ubiquitously utilise the biopower mechanisms via the premise of normalising individuals' behaviour wherein each becomes a bearer of a potential threat to be manageable through data collection. Therefore, reflective of the political obsession with the dangerous individual as Foucault emphasises necessitates the surveillance technology as a imperative epidemiological legitimacy. Thus, the normalising judgment acquires production through a "small penal mechanism" in the case of Sars-CoV-2 as fines and even imprisonment get mixed with the moralisation of conduct. Inevitably, the carefree circulation of bodies gets labelled and segregated as irresponsible in contrast to the responsible citizen like in the case of 'Covidiots'.

The debate between care and control become highly pertinent as the expansion of state biopower lurks the danger of subjugating the bodies of bodies post-pandemic enabling tighter forms of control threatening democracy or even protest as Power for Foucault not necessarily a negative connotation transcends to "Authoritarianism" for the right reasons becoming legitimate". This tension between security and liberty hence becomes one of the political dilemmas that surround the securitisation lie open wherein the gradual weakening of civil society vis-à-vis the state is pronounced, from the almost dis-secular identification of bodies supposedly indistinguishable from one another, or series of actions against the dissidents and the opponents across the country. The epidemic gets homogenised using the delicately grained locational data and social network analysis to track and target individuals for containment and treatment, discrediting any privacy concerns along the way.

Equally important becomes the concerns of scholars such as Han, who fears the successful use of digital surveillance in governing the society as priming nations to import "the Chinese model of digital policing" (Han 2020) where much like Foucault's posing of how the dispositifs composing institutions, norms, practices and knowledge make use of this strategic transference to naturalise, and further legitimise it as a new form of subjection. At the other end of the spectrum, Sean McDonald uses the expanding state-run surveillance to bridge the gap left by diminished institutions as dependent on the state capacity (McDonald 2020). The efficacy of technological solutions as a part of the long-standing epidemiological process rather than short term solution to the pandemic thus depends on a solid-state capacity and the amount of legitimacy enjoyed.

IV. SHIFT TOWARDS A MORE PERVASIVE SURVEILLANCE CULTURE? THE DYNAMICS OF DIGITAL PRIVACY/ SURVEILLANCE

Labelled as the 'Great Transformation of 2020', sovereign and administrative powers under the ambit of its state of exception become even more systematically pervading the social atmosphere where each fulfils a duty to "juridical, religious Obligation" to public health (Toscano 2020), furthering the demands of biosecurity. Countries premising notions of "individual freedom" have subtly translated to newer surveillance innovations in attempts to trace disease outbreaks and engage in case identification. Disparately unlike the days of leprosy colony model wherein exclusion was replaced by the quarantine of population i.e. "fixing individuals rather than driving them out" in the times of Plaque as Foucault probed reflecting the broader form of knowledge and governmentality as relational and thus constantly evolving as circumstance change.

The ethos of digital surveillance flourishes due to already existing power practices which gained exponential innovations and legitimacy as evident in the varying confinement measures of enforcing quarantine orders often institutionally or the 'mandatory' downloading of apps, and even the potent role of digital technologies to monitor the population on the move in order to automatically detect the norm deviations. The complexity and permeability of surveillance get complicated when the sensitive data practised by digital mass surveillance practices are mulled to be outsourced to private companies. The potential infringement of citizens' fundamental Rights if potential breach from centralised database is widely ignorant of the broader biosecurity and the normalisation of surveillance technologies.

The corporate-fuelled techno-optimism identified as "Dataism" wherein the process of datafication (Dijck 2014) enables collecting personal data extended to the public institutions as a new paradigm of science and society evolves. Shoshana Zuboff's Surveillance Capitalism (Zuboff 2019) echoes the business model supporting the current digital paradigm expanding behavioural data supply chains, further implying data collection by companies that provide 'free' services to collect and generate our behavioural data to sell in behavioural futures markets. The cycle renders individuals as profitable commodities, having consequently massive asymmetries and hierarchies in the knowledge leveraged into new forms of Power and 'algorithmic-driven computational governance.' However, the focal is the trade-off between individual autonomy and collective security, combined with the smartphone infrastructure subjected to control creep, i.e., performing tasks beyond its original intents, namely performing surveillance and governance work.

The surveillant assemblage data-driven practices are signifying the separation between the material and the datified body. At the same time, the liquid surveillance implies the blurring of boundaries between different 'watchers' result in the nuanced centralised or decentralised mechanisms of carrying out surveillance, both however grossly at risk of manipulating or giving up, and shaping the system of knowledge as a means to carry out new biopolitics, i.e. "numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations." (Lemke 2011) This entire enigma lays bare a system wherein people become subject to constant modulation via "visibility as a trap," through data-driven systems in which their behaviour becomes explicitly or implicitly steered rather than (self) disciplined.

A case in point is the 'voluntary' nature of "Participatory SIGINT," (Rose Bernard 2020), whereby rather than harvesting data from passive surveillance participants, people participate in their surveillance, expressing an obvious choice. The convergence of security narratives with discourses of scientific necessity becomes a crucial step in generating the moral imperative that has mediated individual engagement with surveillance technologies where the inherent "power of the gaze" remains ambient. Foucault's 'gaze then becomes the government; the private sector; it is social media; apps in phones and drones in the sky;' implying how the might of the gaze create a structure in which individuals to comply with the 'norm', without coercion, end up exercising self-discipline and self-restraint, and match the perceived expectations of the watchers.

The resultant practice of self-censoring such as the voluntary downloading of apps whereby people, in the name of 'safety and under pressure to 'do the right thing by their fellow citizens, compliance becomes normalised, thus relegating any site of freedom of choice or decide to own to the Power of gaze unleashed by contract tracing apps which lay down the normative conditions for reality. Foucault's problematisation of power paved freedom as more than mere liberation from domination but about agent-centred means of transgressing social practices and discerning one's subjectification. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, reveals a contrary phenomenon, the emergence of Covidiot surveillance wherein owing to the power hierarchies along with the gripping of collective fear has allowed the shaming and 'confluence of top-down efforts by states Open denunciation of COVID-19iots has become a prominent appeal from governments and the press and bottom-up initiatives by civilians' (Gabdulhakov 2021) to become the usual local surveillance practice.

Much as Chris Ingraham & Joshua Reeves explicate, watching over and denouncing others mitigates widespread feelings of powerlessness, the practice rampantly visible in instances such as Uzbekistan's nexus of the state placing national guards for quarantining stickers leading to social stigma to a rudimentary citizen under the avatar of vigilantes publishing the sensitive details of "virus carriers" as asocial behaviour furthered by digital technologies. Contact tracing, biometric systems, facial recognition, thermal testing not surprisingly appear to privilege the conundrum of "technologies of self", which has witnessed a much legitimate revival under the garb of Pandemic biothreat.

V. CHINA: THE SUCCESS OF A SURVEILLANCE STATE IN CONTROLLING THE PANDEMIC IN JUXTAPOSITION TO THE LAND OF UNENCUMBERED FREEDOM- USA

The Covid-19 pandemic has opened the door for Beijing to scale up the extensive surveillance of its citizens by introducing new and extraordinary intrusive methods under the disguise of fighting the Covid pandemic. Talking of drones which now berate individuals for not wearing masks, while CCTV installed outside homes of those who have been quarantined is watched every moment. These measures in China is beyond even what the Chinese citizens typically used to, but this is expected to remain as the post-pandemic 'new normal' with serious implication for the privacy of the individuals and businesses alike. "Once these systems are in place, once they are built, once they are designed, you cannot put them back in the box" Darren Byler, a technology expert specializing in Xinxiang. It is compulsory for the citizens to provide personal data such as their recent travel history and health conditions on their smartphones, usually through famous apps like the Alibaba and Tencent's. Based on the responses shown in their smartphones, algorithms will show a health code coloured green, yellow, or red, signifying the likelihood that they have coronavirus and thus their fitness to join millions of others on the road in China. (Xiang, 2020) To those who get the red code must either self-quarantine or be quarantined in a facility for 14 days. Lying in the entire process is out of the question. On a local government news website, Deng Hui said about the health code, "Through data analysis, we have mastered the trajectory of everyone's whereabouts. If you have not reported truthfully, our system will find out." He illustrated the extent of the penetration of the Chinese government's data network. With the help of artificial intelligence, the accuracy which the system can reach in pinning down one person's behaviour is even greater. Another powerful tool that prevents the people from lying in China, is China's social credit system. It is Beijing's all seeing digital network which is a comprehensive effort to fight the pandemic and at the same time also strengthens its surveillance network. This portrays the level of efficiency of airtight data system of technology in fighting a pandemic like Covid, but at the same time, it is also terrifying. The pandemic has brought to light the alarming aspects of the surveillance system sprawling in China. The question that has arisen on behalf of the Chinese governments is whether they would be able to maintain an equilibrium between the public health emergencies as against the violation of individual rights, particularly the right to privacy. This has, in a matter of decades, become so deep, so wide and so interconnected that it is impossible for anyone to escape from its grip.

Critics warn such widespread surveillance mechanism violates the international standards of the right to privacy. The international privacy standards enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, has stated in its provisions that the use of biometric data should be restricted to the population at large who have been a part of any malpractice and misconduct against the state and therefore making it limited in its scope and practice. Individuals across the world have the right to know what biometric data the government holds on them. China's automated facial recognition systems violates those standards. Since the last ten years, around 80 countries all over the world have adopted the Chinese surveillance operation procedure. This portrays the growing constitutionality of their system in battling against the pandemic. The adoption by other countries adds to the Chinese advantage because it deepens the so called 'new normal' at the same time allowing the expansion of such companies worldwide. The USA, with its strong democratic tradition have always upheld the rights of individuals, decrying about the so called 'Big Brother' surveillance and monitoring as written by George Orwell in 1989. After years it turns out that they already have a vast surveillance dataset into place just waiting for the right moment to tap into. The US government through the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention has elected to use this marketing dataset rather than mobile operator data to track the coronavirus. "Officials across the US are using location data from millions of cell phones", the Wall Street Journal reported on March 28, to better understand the movements of Americans during the pandemic. When the coronavirus first hit China, the country repurposed its surveillance state into a contact tracing and quarantine enforcement machine. The infrastructure was in place. In the west, there is no such surveillance state, whatever campaign groups might say. There is rule of law, warranted tracking, even campaigns to remove facial recognition from law enforcement. Meanwhile, we all carry smartphones loaded with apps that we give permission to track us, wherever we go and whatever we do down to a frightening level of detail. The pandemic has normalised smartphone tracking by the states. This mode of apparatus is being used by countries to confine the citizens to their respective homes, to keep a check on curfews, and play a positive role in terms of making people

disciplined to follow the social distancing norms. A smartphone is a proxy for a person. Track the phones and you track the people. Each device can be uniquely tied to its owner, whether in Beijing or Boston, or Shanghai or Seattle. In the UK and mainland Europe, governments and the European Union have pulled data from the mobile network operators themselves to track millions of citizens, aggregated and anonymised, monitoring adherence with social distancing and travel restrictions.

Mobile networks hold significant data on customers, location pings, call and messaging metadata, obviously the identities behind the numbers and whatever their CRM systems store. (Doffman, 2020) This data has its limitations. It is also heavily regulated and contains information on all of us. The data which they store is kept hidden from investigation impertinently exception being only the legitimate circumstances. One of the biggest drawbacks of such contrivance is that there are no regulatory limitations and thus can be used on the complete discretion of the states without the people knowing. Unknowingly when normal citizens use various kinds of applications, we give them permission to have our locations, activities, our contacts etc. Using this the marketing data can source all of our information needed. Where we work, where we live, and with whom we spend the most of the time with, everything is stored and recorded. This is quite the surveillance feat. If any western government set out its intention to build such a platform, there would be an extraordinary public backlash. And yet the data is there and can be accessed commercially for just the payment of a fee.

Once the pandemic is behind us, the memory of those surveillance maps will track us coast to coast and will remain. And as we look to the east, to its vast government surveillance ecosystem, perhaps we will recall the equivalent we live with ourselves. The fact is that the need of the hour demands the governments to explore new and surprising arenas. And from a surveillance stance, one of the most powerful ways imaginable has been there all the time. It is clear that over the coming days, we will be asked to further trade personal privacy for public safety.

VI. CONCLUSION

The outbreak of infectious diseases is not a new occurrence. What makes the Covid-19 pandemic different from other outbreaks like the SARS outbreak in 2002, is not just its high rate of infection or global nature, but how digital tools have been extensively used in the current scenario to monitor and control the disease, raising ethical questions regarding access, privacy, transparency and the sharing of such data. Human beings have been made into subject-peoples for long, their every action and decisions constituting just numbers that make up some sort of data. The pandemic has made this visible for all to see.

Time constraints prevented more thorough investigation into certain aspects, like how the global digital illiteracy has facilitated companies and countries in strengthening their control over the lives of citizens. There is scope for further research along these lines. People often don't know how much of their lives are under surveillance, or what all data of theirs are being tracked by apps and other mediums that they use. While the pandemic may have required such measures like lockdown, tracking and tracing of transmissions to reduce the rate of infection and control the spread of the virus, it is important that citizens are aware of the importance of the rights that they are giving up, even temporarily for this.

This paper has aimed at understanding and analysing the Covid-19 pandemic through Foucault. The claims made initially have mainly been found to be conclusive, for it can't be denied that the pandemic witnessed a dramatic rise in information control by both democracies and autocracies alike. Whether this heightened surveillance will rush in an era of normalised surveillance is something we cannot conclude at the moment, as we are still in the early stages. But it cannot be denied that the potential for it is ever-present and presents a slippery slope. The implications of this and the post-Panopticon dynamics will be more perceivable in the near future.

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