

Call for Papers

Police Intelligence, from Local to Global From 1750 to the Present Day

Brussels, 24-26 January 2024

Police and intelligence are two concepts that are intimately and invariably linked. From the police utopia of François-Jacques Guillothe (*Mémoire sur la réformation de la police de France, soumis au roi en 1749*, ed. by J. Seznec, Paris, Hermann, 1974) to the ‘Clearview AI’ affair or the use of facial recognition software based on illegal data by the Belgian police, police work has often been confused with the collection and processing of information. Compared to the latter, intelligence is defined by Sébastien Laurent as ‘an element of information theoretically enriched by verification and analysis’ (Laurent, 2004, p. 175) and it contributes to the decision-making process. Despite its decisive role in the functioning of the state, the economy or international relations, intelligence has only been addressed within the framework of questions on surveillance, centralisation, bureaucratisation, the identification or use of information and communication technologies, the control of political radicalisation or even espionage. As a corollary of the inexorable growth of the state, and barely transcending the image, intelligence in the field of policing is often fantasised and has hence often been restricted to the practices of political police forces, willingly cultivating a culture of secrecy. Flies, snitches and spies have been the focus of the researchers’ preoccupations, with no real questioning of their role in the construction of administrative knowledge. Within this very fragmented historiography, intelligence in the context of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes has attracted most of the attention (Dandeker, 1990. Droit, 2019).

For the past twenty years, however, researchers have begun to explore the history of information, surveillance and control technologies (About and Denis, 2010), particularly in the wake of Michel Foucault’s work on the disciplinary society and security measures. It is only recently, however, that intelligence has emerged as the subject of a specific field of study, more focused on a historical anthropology approach (Rios-Bordes, 2018), as evidenced by the work carried out in the field of ‘Intelligence Studies’ (Gill and Phythian, 2016. Van Puyvelde and Curtis, 2016). In this emerging historiography, the specific policing aspect of intelligence generally only appears as an aside to its military, diplomatic or economic functions. The aim of this conference is therefore to take a look at police intelligence, to highlight its specific characteristics and its role in the work of law enforcement agencies. It will thus aim to present new developments and consider new approaches in the history of the administrative management of information and, above all, in the history of the police.

The conference will not, however, focus solely on this, it will also aim to address the questions, as yet little explored by historians, of the production and use of police intelligence, of the parties and tools involved in its development, and of the content that feeds it. These questions may be considered with regard to the transition from testimony to traces (Ginzburg) and to the transformation from the search for the individual criminal to the surveillance of suspect groups. To highlight these changes in the contexts and uses of intelligence, the conference will consider a lengthy timeline, from the middle of the eighteenth century, a period that saw the proliferation of modern police systems and the development of a transregional security culture geared to political surveillance (Härter, 2013), to the present day, a time of unprecedented use of information and communication technologies to the benefit of the police. Finally, it will take a resolutely comparative and transnational approach. The papers will attempt to show the dynamics at work on a global scale, to analyse the methods of information exchange and the circulation of knowledge and intelligence techniques. The perspective envisaged is definitely a

global one, but it will also emphasise the grounding in specific territorial or even local contexts. Ultimately, the aim is to observe the shifts and continuities, the interrelationships between police information-gathering operations, their structuring, their circulation between the different levels of power, as well as the transnational dynamics at work. In this respect, intelligence will be considered in the context of both high-level police practises (political police and criminality) and ‘low-level policing’, i.e. day-to-day policing outside the strictly political and judicial sphere, in both exceptional and ordinary contexts. The sources of ‘ground level’ intelligence – citizens but also the procedures at the origin of this intelligence, such as complaints, testimonies, neighbourhood enquiries – could also be addressed in the context of local surveillance practises.

Contributions will be divided into three areas: the parties and tools involved in police intelligence, its content and its use (or, indeed, its non-use).

a) The parties and tools involved in police intelligence

The first aspect of the conference will focus on the parties and tools involved in police intelligence. These are understood in a broad sense. The parties involved in producing intelligence may be law enforcement professionals themselves, the specialist units, but also their auxiliaries. Uniformed police officers, police spies and ‘informers’, the military, neighbours, members of the clergy, private police forces, private intelligence bureaus, thinkers and theorists, police hierarchies, documentalists and administrative employees, the population at large, and targeted individuals can all be involved in the construction of police intelligence. Then, turning to the history of techniques and material resources, the papers may also address the tools such as record-keeping technologies, passports, registers, databases and communication devices, which are also used in the process of gathering and using intelligence. The tools and methods used to process and store information can also be analysed (use of written documents, photography, film or video images, and image technologies, creation of registers or files, archiving procedures, geographical mapping, classifications, conversion into statistics, technical resources used for dissemination, etc.) (Becker and Clark, 2001. Williams, 2014).

b) The content of police intelligence

Papers may focus on groups, individuals, areas or behaviours that are supposed to be the subject of police intelligence. This requires identifying the nature, mapping and temporality of the perceived and actual risks and their relationship to criminal, political, linguistic, economic or moral considerations. More specifically, the analyses presented will seek to understand the concerns of States and their public order agencies and how they evolve, according to whether societies are moving towards greater democracy and pacification or whether they are experiencing episodes of increasing authoritarianism.

c) Uses and non-uses of police intelligence

There are multiple aspects to the question of the use and non-use of police intelligence. For example, the conference will examine the destination of the intelligence gathered by police institutions. By its very accumulation, this intelligence forms a basis for the construction of risk, which itself characterises a social and political danger that must be addressed. Police intelligence therefore feeds into political action, which underlines the extent to which police and politics are naturally interconnected realities. The papers will attempt to trace the presence of intelligence in the priorities set for the transformation of the police system and – subsequently – its role in local policing practices. The papers will also seek to explore how this intelligence is mobilised as a means of understanding the dynamics and particular interests of the different institutions involved in policing. This examination of the use of

intelligence could, for example, focus on its influence on the teaching of policing and crime control, and its use in police training. The processes involved in perpetuating intelligence techniques and knowledge in the specific contexts of training are very much part of the conference's theme.

Furthermore, the questions raised should not ignore the context within which this sometimes abundant, sometimes scarce information is managed, with situations ranging from the anomic to the hypernomic, and the quantitative effects this has on its use or non-use. The normalisation of practices put in place during such exceptional periods, which may subsequently be maintained or abandoned, is a further aspect of the use of police intelligence that the conference hopes to examine.

To submit proposals

Proposals for papers (max. 3000 characters) should be sent by 21 April 2023, together with a brief curriculum vitae, to the conference organisers (policeintelligence.conference@gmail.com). The conference will be held in English and will be followed by the publication of a collective work. To allow time for discussion, each presentation will last 20 minutes. Texts will be requested from participants by 15 November 2023 to give session chairs and participants time to prepare for the discussions and to ensure rapid publication after the conference. Accommodation costs will be covered by the conference organisers. Subject to available budgets, travel costs may also be covered.

Bibliography

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Practical information:

Dates: 25-26 January 2024

Venue: State Archive of Belgium (AGR/ARA), Rue de Ruysbroek 4, 1000 Brussels, Belgium.

Organisation committee: Jonas Champion (UQTR), Margo De Koster (UGent), Antoine Renglet (UGent/UCLouvain), Xavier Rousseaux (FNRS/UCLouvain)