Book Review

Review of Keller, William W. 2017. *Democracy Betrayed: The Rise of the Surveillance Security State*. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint.

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In the past few years, terrorism has been defined within a narrow media and political discourse as the new threat that democracies of western societies must face after the Cold War. Even if the dimension and extent of the terrorist events in the United States and Western Europe are minuscule, it still appears to be a preoccupation compared to other causes of violence. According to William W. Keller, the real threat of terrorism is, paradoxically, in the response the State has proposed to face it: generalized and systematic surveillance of society. *Democracy Betrayed* shows that the challenge to western democracy's values does not come from violent extremism, as is commonly believed, but from the surveillance measures that undermine the liberties and freedoms of several sectors of the population. Actions designed and put into operation by a new class of intelligence and security professionals who, with the excuse of building the bases for a safer society—and guaranteeing the continuity of the democratic regime—exert their power in a dull, not very transparent manner. This makes violation of human rights easier, and makes it difficult to assign any penal responsibility to the authorities violating them. Keller does not suggest that this means the end of democracy, due to the fact that the elements that define it—such as voting and elections, political parties, and a justice system—cohabit with security systems working in a dreary sort of way. It simply means that political and security leaders unfortunately consider liberties and freedom to be second to the security of a nation. This argument is what allows Keller to speak about the creation of a secure democracy, especially in the United States, but in other countries as well.

Democracy Betrayed is divided into eight parts. In the first chapter, Keller looks at the general tendencies that explain the shift from a liberal democracy to a secure democracy. The latter is characterized by the idea that internal security, State secrets, surveillance, torture, as well as the *ex Parte* tribunals—which authorize antidemocratic government activities—are all above civil and human rights. This investment in individual values by liberal democracies is shared not only by a group of countries, it is also part of a new common sense shared by intelligence agencies at a global scale. To safeguard against the terrorist threat, these agencies foster presidents and prime ministers to have greater prerogatives that allow them to collect data indiscriminately and at a large scale. A frame of action is thus created where the executive figure takes on the roles of judge, jury, and executioner. These attributes in a single person should be deemed illegal in any liberal democracy. In this way, Keller's text is, in one hand, a clear incitement to demystify the idea that terrorism is the main enemy faced by democracy in western countries. On the other hand, it

unveils how the irrational imagery built around terrorism—a concept that has no precise meaning—generates a vicious cycle where anti-terror policies stimulate the terrorist dynamics, at the end of the day.

In the second chapter, Keller promptly examines how the *bete-noir* of terrorism is built out of government discourses and narratives, thus justifying, on one hand, the internal security measures, and on the other, increases in the public budget to ensure the operation of these measures. Keller's goal is to highlight the way a security industrial complex emerges out of this process, which works by connecting government agencies, contractors, universities, big data corporations, and the information technology industry itself. The complex functions thanks to the involvement of experts acting outside of the limits of democracy and rule of law, a state within-the-state—and outside of secret budgets—which makes the discretion of contract assignment easier. The security industrial complex turns out to be, to a large degree, the pump house that allows the construction of the surveillance security state.

Chapter three questions the irrational foundations driving the security machinery in the United States. By historicizing the presence of terrorism in this country, Keller is able to show us the disconnection that exists between the real threat of terrorism and the fear it breeds. Firstly, the chapter claims that, in reality, the presence of terrorism in the United States, and in the West overall, is minimal and marginal. Secondly, it assesses how the acts considered to be terrorist in the United States have been planned and put into operation by local radical groups. Thirdly, and contrary to what certain media broadcast, terrorist acts have drastically decreased in that country since the sixties. This tendency is in contrast with the increase of terrorist attacks at a global scale, which focus mainly in Iraq and Afghanistan since the beginning of the 20th century. However, Keller argues that, despite this evidence, the discourse of the terrorist threat's apparent magnitude has encouraged the North American government to increase expenses significantly to keep the security industrial complex working, which ultimately affects civil liberties and the structure of liberal democracy.

Chapters four and five analyze the extent to which the workings of the surveillance security state are limited at preventing catastrophic terrorist attacks—those that happen in belligerent contexts exclusively, as well as episodic terrorist attacks (those carried out by *lone wolf/ves*). According to Keller, the reason is that the recollection and analysis of large amounts of data that the surveillance security state allows cannot predict and prevent the movements behind both types of attack. Nevertheless, surveillance does compromise people's privacy and liberty. In this sense, the author suggests that terrorist acts of a devastating or episodic order can be prevented, if security mechanisms are set up in spaces considered to be at risk.

In chapters six and seven, the author analyzes how the authoritarian means of intervention by the government on behalf of internal security are complemented, on one hand, by extralegal detention practices and torture practices, and, on the other, by the standardization of surveillance and control practices. The former are linked to the proliferation of tribunals acting under a standard of secrecy that lack in mechanisms of transparency. The dissemination of surveillance and control over the population are linked, in and of themselves, with the standardization of emergency state declarations, which North American authorities have recurrently issued since the events of 9/11. These dynamics express the way in which secure democracy has invaded and substituted the workings and operation of the United States' liberal regime, in many cases.

Keller finishes *Democracy Betrayed* with a reflection on how the growth of the surveillance security state is changing the face of modern liberal democracy, turning the latter into an obsolete form of government. He suggests that some actions by civil society can be carried out to challenge secure democracy, especially if protection laws for citizen rights and liberties are pushed from civil society. In this sense, its wager is not on creating a balance between liberty and security, but on considering that the former should always hold privilege over the latter. I consider *Democracy Betrayed* to be a relevant text that will help

scholars comprehend the process of change that western democratic regimes are going through. The text provides a set of useful tools to address the tension being generated between the liberal democratic frame and the antidemocratic tendencies linked to the growth of the surveillance security state at a global scale.