

Summary & Questions

David Murakami Wood, "The Global Turn to Authoritarianism". In *Surveillance and Society*, 15, (3/4), 2017, pp. 357-370.

Murakami Wood's article examines the problem of authoritarianism in relation to the question of surveillance. To start with, situating the problem of authoritarianism in global studies, the author notes the disciplinary and contextual character of varying definitions, in recognition of the prevalence of historical, or so called "temporal", interpretations of authoritarianism in liberal democratic political expositions (Murakami Wood, 2017: 358). In departure from the latter definitions, the author inquires whether the problem of the rise of authoritarianism is simply a question of democracy's decline. As Murakami Wood (2017: 359-360) explains, besides democracy's own inherent drawbacks, the undermining of democracy is also greatly implicated in surveillance practices, including the systematic collection, storage and usage of personal information by the state.

In view of the question of the relationship of authoritarianism to surveillance, Murakami Wood (2017: 360) claims that, to offer an answer, one first needs to have an accurate account of what constitutes a surveillance society and what are the possible varieties of such societies. For this reason, he puts together a systematic schematic description of the impact of surveillance practices in democratic and non-democratic governance models (Murakami Wood, 2017: 360-361). This allows the author to emphasize the interconnection between surveillance, freedom of information and data protection in democratic societies, but also to define totalitarianism as authoritarianism with a high level of surveillance (Murakami Wood, 2017: 364).

The aforementioned highlights result from the author's systematic schematic description, on the basis of his view that surveillance adopted by different political economies reflects their differing rationales, which are defined by two types of relations at varying degrees of interdependence: between the state and the person, as well as between the state and capital (Murakami Wood, 2017: 360). On this explanation, Murakami Wood (2017: 360-361) outlines his own basic definitions of surveillance practices, such as 'panoptic', 'oligoptic', 'synoptic', 'perioptic' and 'adiloptic', which he uses for classifying types of states, such as 'isonomy', 'democracy', 'polyarchy' and 'autocracy', but also the non-state of 'anarchy', based on the level and type of surveillance applied on each one. Moreover, he outlines fifteen ideal typical political forms of states and non-states resulting from different combinations of level of surveillance and state form (Murakami Wood, 2017: 361-362).

The author concludes that, outside his proposed schematic account, there is a range of conceptual and practical factors, such as unequal power relations and intersectional characteristics of different states and peoples, which determine

definitions and categorizations of contemporary states in view of the problem of the relationship between authoritarianism and surveillance (Murakami Wood, 2017: 364). Such additional considerations bear several noteworthy implications; for instance, as Murakami Wood (2017: 364) argues, that increasing privacy does not guarantee counteracting surveillance.

To exemplify the aforementioned viewpoints, the author briefly examines case studies of non-democratic contemporary states, such as Venezuela and Turkey, where surveillance is justified by claims to constitutions and constitutional ideas of what is a democracy, thus challenging normative rights-based views on the relations between citizens and the state (Murakami Wood, 2017: 365). Likewise, as the author claims, in African and Middle-Eastern states, traditionally imposed post-colonial territorial regimes annihilated the self-determination of indigenous populations (Murakami Wood, 2017: 365). The above examples of contemporary forms of non-democratic states, compared to democracies conceived in the liberal tradition, in the author's opinion provide the ground for the United States' extensive system of global surveillance and state interference in the so called "Global South" (Murakami Wood, 2017: 366). Consequently, there is no sensible claim to authoritarianism in these states, as understood in liberal democratic societies, because authoritarianism with surveillance practices is the established status (Murakami Wood, 2017: 366).

Murakami Wood's account of the contemporary global tendencies to authoritarianism (2017: 366) comes with his recognition of the rise of globalization and neoliberalism, which are two modern interrelated phenomena. According to Murakami Wood (2017: 366), globalization led to a socialist democratic and welfarist turn in Western liberal democracies where it originated, while the parallel political economic phenomenon of neoliberalism, emphasizing deregulation and markets over social goals, offered an intellectual response to the rise of authoritarianism in the 1920s and 1930s. Furthermore, growing out of this early trend, in the 1970s, neoliberalism came as a solution to polarized unsuccessful political economies: social democracy in the Global North, or "first world" economies, and post-colonial independent governments in the Global South, or "third world" economies (Murakami Wood, 2017: 366).

Murakami Wood (2017: 366) further explains that the main effect of neoliberalism has been the application of a higher level of surveillance, aiming to protect capitalism from the negative reactions of citizens in the old social democracies turning neoliberal. In parallel, Western human rights charities adopted paternalistic attitudes towards post-colonial governments, such as Turkey's, some of which reinforced neoliberal political economic interests (Murakami Wood, 2017: 366-367). Industrial acceleration causing environmental destruction and the appearance, with varying results, of authoritarianism in global political economies, have been additional notable global effects of neoliberalism's rise (Murakami Wood, 2017: 367). Murakami Wood (2017: 367) brings forth the example of the Global North's "neurotic citizenship", manifesting, amongst other, in the fear of migrants in neoliberal nationalist states, which the author characterizes as a "profoundly nostalgic" expression of the contemporary authoritarian turn.

In view of his analysis and critical evaluation of authoritarianism and surveillance in contemporary neoliberal states, Murakami Wood (2017: 367-369) envisages four trajectories forward:

- Continuation of the particularist world of divergent authoritarianisms characterizing "nostalgic" populist reactions
- Reassertion of neoliberalism at a more genuine global level
- Emphasis on technological solutions
- Other possibilities opposed to authoritarianism, surveillance and capitalism

When considered in our post-globalization era, the above four emerging trajectories consist respectively in the following:

- Multiplying authoritarianisms in the form of "nostalgic" nationalisms
- Global authoritarianism of a neoliberal character in the form of institutional neoliberalism at a planetary scale
- New information technologies accompanied by new forms of social, economic, political, ecological life and new forms of surveillance, such as global corporate surveillance capitalism by Google, Apple, and Facebook, manifesting in a sort of techno-communitarianism
- Redefinition of politics by a rediscovery of collective desires for a planetary humanistic future based on equality and ecology

In conclusion, and as the author mentions in his brief editorial introduction, Murakami Wood's article (2017: 357) invites us to consider surveillance studies relatively to the global, post-colonial rise of authoritarianism as a threat to contemporary democracy. For this reason, the author calls for our attention and potential response to international and transnational, rather than domestic, trends to authoritarianism in contemporary neoliberal political economies (Murakami Wood, 2017: 358).

Questions

How do we understand the problem of authoritarianism in relation to surveillance in contemporary states after reading Murakami Wood's article?

Why does the author criticize authoritarianism and its political and economic effects globally?

What has the impact of the so-called "neo-liberalist turn" been globally?

Are the two described conditions of neoliberalism (such as the emphasis of deregulation and markets over social goals and an intellectual response to the rise of authoritarianism) compatible?

What are the author's visions for the global future beyond authoritarianism and neoliberalism?