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Making Digital Surveillance Unacceptable? Security, Democracy, and the Political Sociology of Disputes

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Despite extensive criticisms of mass surveillance and mobilization by civil liberties and digital rights activists, surveillance has paradoxically been extended and legalized in the name of security. How do some democratic claims against surveillance appear to be normal and common-sense, whereas others are deemed unacceptable, even outlandish? Instead of starting from particular "logics" of either security or democracy, this paper proposes to develop a political sociology of disputes to trace how the relation between security and democracy is shaped by critique in practice. Disputes entail critique and demands for justification. They allow us to account for the constraints which govern whether an argument is deemed acceptable or improper; common-sensical or peculiar. We mobilize disputes in conjunction with Arjun Appadurai's reflections on "small numbers" in democracies in order to understand how justifications of surveillance for security enact a "rise in generality," whereas critiques of digital surveillance that mobilize democratic claims enact a "descent into singularity." To this purpose, we analyze public mobilizations against mass surveillance and challenges brought before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). We draw on interviews with a range of actors involved in the disputes, the parties' submissions, oral hearings, judgments, and public reports.

Malgré les nombreuses critiques de la surveillance de masse et la mobilisation des militants des libertés civiles et des droits numériques, la surveillance a paradoxalement été étendue et légalisée au nom de la sécurité. Comment pouvons-nous expliquer que certaines revendications démocratiques contre la surveillance semblent normales et de bon sens, alors que d'autres sont jugées inacceptables, voire saugrenues ? Au lieu de partir d'une « logique » particulière de sécurité ou de démocratie, cet article propose de développer une sociologie politique des litiges afin de retracer la manière dont la relation entre sécurité et démocratie est en pratique façonnée par la critique. Les litiges englobent les critiques et les demandes de justification. Ils nous permettent de rendre compte des contraintes qui déterminent si un argument est jugé acceptable ou inapproprié, de bon sens ou étrange. Nous mobilisons ce concept de litiges conjointement aux réflexions d'Arjun Appadurai sur les « petits nombres » dans les démocraties afin de comprendre la manière dont les justifications de la surveillance à des fins de sécurité mettent en œuvre une « montée en généralité », tandis que les critiques de la surveillance numérique qui mobilisent des revendications démocratiques mettent en œuvre une « descente dans la singularité ». À cette fin, nous analysons les mobilisations publiques contre la surveillance de masse et les contestations portées

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devant la Cour européenne des droits de l'Homme. Nous nous basons sur des entretiens avec une série d'acteurs impliqués dans ces litiges, les soumissions des parties, les audiences orales, les jugements et les rapports publics.

A pesar de las amplias críticas a la vigilancia masiva y a la movilización por parte de los activistas de derechos digitales y de libertades civiles, la vigilancia se extendió y legalizó paradójicamente en nombre de la seguridad. ¿Cómo algunos reclamos democráticos contra la vigilancia parecen ser normales y de sentido común, mientras que otros se consideran inaceptables e incluso descabellados? En vez de partir de una "lógica" particular de seguridad o democracia, este artículo propone desarrollar una sociología política de disputas para rastrear cómo la relación entre la seguridad y la democracia toma forma por la crítica en práctica. Las disputas implican críticas y demandas de justificación. Nos permiten representar las limitaciones que rigen si un argumento se considera aceptable o impropio, de sentido común o peculiar. Movilizamos las disputas junto con las reflexiones de Arjun Appadurai sobre los "números pequeños" en las democracias para comprender cómo las justificaciones sobre la vigilancia por motivos de seguridad adoptan un "aumento de la generalidad," mientras que las críticas de la vigilancia digital que moviliza los reclamos democráticos adoptan un "descenso a la singularidad." En este sentido, analizamos las movilizaciones públicas contra la vigilancia masiva, así como los retos presentados ante la Corte Europea de Derechos Humanos. Nos basamos en las entrevistas con una variedad de actores implicados en las disputas, los alegatos de las partes, las audiencias orales, las sentencias y los informes públicos.

> We did not talk about how problematic it was to have mass surveillance per se. We just continued to have the same arguments … hiding behind the idea that "we need more safeguards" … I do not think we should give up criticizing mass surveillance. But it's just so hard to escape. (Interview, February 24, 2020)

Despite extensive criticism of mass surveillance and mobilization by civil liberties and digital rights activists, surveillance has—paradoxically—been extended and legalized in the name of security. The Snowden disclosures in 2013 and the subsequent introduction of the Investigatory Powers Act in the United Kingdom in 2016 were met with sustained mobilization by activists, academics, and NGOs. Both through the coalition "Don't Spy on Us!" and a series of cases lodged before the Investigatory Powers Tribunal (IPT) in the United Kingdom, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and the Court of Justice of the European Community (CJEU), different organizations, and individuals have raised public challenges to the rationale, extent, and form of these practices of digital surveillance. As many of our interlocutors within civil society suggested, however, so often within these challenges, arguments were formulated around the more nuts-and-bolts aspects of surveillance. "Escaping" from these constraints was extremely difficult.

How do some democratic claims, such as the establishment of safeguards, appear to be normal and common-sense, whereas others are deemed unacceptable, even outlandish? Instead of starting from particular "logics" of either security or democracy, we propose to develop a political sociology of disputes to trace how the relation between security and democracy is shaped by critique in practice. Disputes, as we discuss later on, entail demands for justification, which are "inextricably linked with the possibility of critique" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005). They allow us to account for the constraints which govern whether an argument is deemed acceptable or improper, commonsensical or peculiar. In doing so, we propose to contribute to the work that has engaged with the relations between security and democracy in International Relations (IR).

Critical security studies and IR more broadly have served as fertile ground for thinking through this security–democracy relation. Jef Huysmans has recently proposed to revisit the relation between security and democracy by approaching security as "enacting democratic limits" (Huysmans 2014). Other critical scholars have highlighted the limits of democracy, particularly in its instantiation as liberal democracy, in being a resource for criticizing security. Democracy's gendered (Phillips 1991), racialized (Hanchard 2018), and neoliberalized (Brown 2015) logics render it inadequate or even inept in its resistance to security practices. Both security and (liberal) democracy are practices of excluding abnormal or potentially dangerous others, as they deploy mechanisms of discipline and surveillance to police boundaries between self and other. At the same time, democracy is also connected with spaces of dissent and the possibilities of contesting security (Jabri 2006), and with conceptions of justice and equality (Davis and Mendieta 2005).

Recent public debates about digital surveillance have mobilized arguments about security and democracy to either justify or criticize surveillance by intelligence agencies, particularly in the wake of the Snowden disclosures. As we see below, in one challenge to UK state surveillance powers lodged before the ECtHR, civil society groups argued that a state that enjoys all of these powers cannot be called democratic and is instead "truly totalitarian" (Jaffey in ECtHR 2019). Related public advocacy campaigns likened the UK government to authoritarian regimes around the world, calling on former Prime Minister Theresa May to "stop giving Putin and Xi Jinping ideas" (Don't Spy on Us 2016). Yet, academic discussions have put less emphasis on democracy and the resources it can provide for critiques of digital surveillance. For surveillance theorist David Lyon, liberal democracies are ultimately both compatible with, and lead to, authoritarian surveillance (Lyon 2014, 11). In a collective article dedicated to the effects of mass surveillance on human rights, democracy, and subjectivity, the authors argue that the meanings of both security and democracy are not only changing, but their relationship is becoming destabilized. However, there is an assumption here that democracy is about the "the possibilities of liberty or self-determination" (Bauman et al. 2014, 135). Another reason why democracy has been less prominent in the discussions of digital or mass surveillance is that public discourses have tended to emphasize "privacy" and "data protection" rather than democratic principles and practices more broadly. This is also echoed in the academic literature, which challenges the assumption that security needs to be "balanced" against liberty or, more recently, privacy.

We propose a political sociology of disputes to advance an agenda that analyses the contestation and critique of security practices. The terminology of a sociology of disputes was coined by Luc Boltanski, mostly known in IR for his work with Laurent Thévenot on pragmatic sociology (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006), and with Ève Chiapello on "the new spirit of capitalism" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005). Disputes have been part of a wider vocabulary of social and political contestation which includes controversies, scandals, and affairs. Among these, controversies and struggles have been most fruitful for recent analyses of security beyond securitization theory. Yet, disputes have often been used interchangeably with other vocabularies of contestation (but see Martin-Mazé 2017). While controversies and disputes are both coinages of pragmatic sociology, there are subtle, but in our view important, differences between these. We argue that we need to attend to the specificity of disputes and the constraints upon the different grammars of justification and critique in Boltanski and Thévenot's work, to precisely shed light on how some arguments against bulk surveillance are rendered unacceptable, and thus "off-the-table." We approach these questions of acceptability through the dynamics of generality/singularity and the capacity of justifications and critique to "rise in generality" (Boltanski 2012b). To understand how the general and the singular play out in democratic disputes, we supplement the discussion of generality/singularity with

anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's (2006) critical reading of "small numbers" in liberal democracies. Appadurai's work on majority/minority allows us to advance a *political* sociology of disputes.

Since 2014, a number of international and UK civil society organizations have mobilized publicly and before the courts, leading to three key cases challenging the practices of UK intelligence agencies on surveillance before the ECtHR. The ECtHR has been a productive site for disputing digital surveillance both before and after the Snowden disclosures. Three cases—*10 Human Rights Organisations v UK, Big Brother Watch v the UK, and the Bureau of Investigative Journalism and Alice Ross v UK*—were filed in 2013 and 2014, in the wake of the Snowden disclosures about mass surveillance. The three cases were brought together for the Chamber judgment of September 2018. In the wake of the initial judgment, the cases were referred to the Grand Chamber, where they were joined with a fourth case, *Centrum för rättvisa v Sweden.* On May 25, 2021, the Grand Chamber issued its judgment.

All three cases challenged existing UK legislation on the acquisition, interception, and retention of communications under Article 8 and Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights. They brought together a heterogeneous range of digital rights and civil liberties actors from across the world, both in the applications and through interventions in the case (third-party submissions). Many of these actors were also equally involved in public debates and campaigns against digital surveillance, such as the "Don't Spy on Us" coalition. We focus on the parties' submissions since 2013, oral hearings, as well as extensive third-party submissions by a range of actors situated both within Member states of the Council of Europe and beyond. We supplement this textual and oral material with justifications gleaned from interviews with several of the actors involved in these disputes, both before the Court and publicly.[1]

Through empirical analysis of these disputes, we reconsider how the relations between security and democracy are enacted through the justifications and critiques of various actors. We argue that justifications of surveillance for security lay claim to the "general," whereas critiques of digital surveillance that mobilize democratic claims have difficulty rising in generality and remain singular.

To develop this argument, we proceed in three stages. We start with a brief discussion of the different ways in which the relation between security and democracy has been addressed in IR. We locate three discursive and analytical modes: limits, symbiosis, and controversies. In a second step, we introduce the sociology of disputes, and focus on the political aspects of the treatment of democracy. Third, we analyze how the relations between democracy and security are articulated through different dynamics of the rise in generality/descent into singularity in the disputes between the UK government, courts, and civil society actors.

Security and Democracy: Limits, Symbiosis, Controversies

The relation between security and democratic practices has preoccupied critical social sciences and IR for some time. While it is impossible to discuss this scholarship exhaustively here, we can distil three main ways in which these tensions have been tackled by different authors. These approaches are not fully separate, there are also combinations, entanglements, or transitions between them.

A first approach can be understood as that of "limits." Both security and democracy are constituted by particular "logics" that are mutually limiting. In securitization theory, security practices appear as an expression of a "limit," be it the limit of democracy, of politics, of norms, and normality. As Jef Huysmans succinctly ren-

[1] While many of our interviewees have agreed to be named, others have not. Therefore, to avoid inadvertently de-anonymizing some of the participants, we have decided to use anonymized quotes in this analysis.

ders this approach, "exceptionalist securitising also defines what counts as normal or democratic in the very act of identifying what is considered abnormal or non-democratic" (Huysmans 2014, 78). Andrew Neal (2019, 1) locates, and subsequently challenges, the view that security is "anti-politics." Security is not just about drawing the lines and constituting normality and abnormality, exceptional and ordinary practices, but about the limits of (democratic) politics. In poststructuralist work on security, limits are conceived differently, as "historically and culturally diverse ways of enacting distinctions, discriminations and classifications" (Walker 2015, 15). For instance, Walker (2015, 282–3) problematizes the relationship between security and democracy in terms of limits, but conceives security both as a spatiotemporal and social "condition of possibility and limit." He draws out this discussion on the politics of security and democracy by contrasting different understandings of the demos/polis.

A sociological reading of "limits" does not start from differing logics, but it sees these as relational and emergent logics of practice. Thus, logics of security emerge through the definitional struggles over (in)securitization by various security professionals and experts (Balzacq et al. 2010). Therefore, there are different logics of (in)securitization by the military, police, border guards, or risk management fields (Bigo 2014). Critical scholars addressing the political effects of the "war on terror" mapped these transformations of security logics across various fields and arenas of practice. For instance, in analyses of risk-based technologies and bulk data collection access by (in)security professionals, security practices have encroached upon ever increasing spheres of social life (Amoore and de Goede 2008; Aradau and Blanke 2015). As suspicion becomes the principal way through which people relate to each other, it also challenges the logics of democracy. Bigo, Guild, and Walker (2016, 9) have traced such shifting of limits and argued that "we confront a significant integration of systems of security across both functional sectors and territorial spaces and a systematic privileging of integration in security apparatuses." This, they continue, "is in sharp contrast to the heterogeneous practices of democracy, rights, and liberty, all of which seem to be fragmented or fragmenting" (Bigo et al. 2016, 9). Critique entails making visible these competing logics of security and democracy, and challenging them from different fields of practice.

A second approach can be seen as that of "symbiosis" between security and democracy. Rather than antithetical, security and democracy—particularly liberal democracy—are symbiotic, inextricably entwined, sharing one overarching logic. Inspired by a Marxist approach, Mark Neocleous has rejected the discourse of "balance" between security and liberty as a "liberal myth, a myth that in turn masks the fact that liberalism's key category is not liberty, but security" (Neocleous 2007, 131). Given that liberalism inscribes prerogative, discretion and decision beyond the law into its techniques of governance, it renders security as paramount. In these approaches, liberal democracy is security and there is little that distinguishes them. Other critical scholars have asked to diffuse the distinction between normal and exceptional, challenging assumptions that (liberal) politics can be non-militarized or non-violent, as exemplified in Ali Howell's coinage of "martial politics" (Howell 2018). Howell criticizes the concept of militarization—in ways that extend to the concept of securitization—for presuming "peaceful liberal order that is encroached on by military values or institutions" (Howell 2018, 117). In these critical approaches, democracy pertains to a broader "martial politics" of liberal orders. Both security and democracy are martial, imperial, and colonial projects.

Here, too, sociological readings have attended to practices of gendering, racialization, and othering in different spatio-temporal sites, and have traced the continuities of security's exclusionary logic historically. Rather than urgency, exceptional decision and friend/enemy lines, logics of security and risk entail the constitutive exclusion of racialized and gendered bodies (e.g., Gray and Franck 2019; Young 2003). There are subtle differences across these literatures in whether

symbiosis is read through the continuous legacy of origins or through practices of (re)production, the latter also giving an account of resistance and opening to the transformation of (democratic) politics. Both in and beyond IR, security practices have been analyzed as reproducing colonial logics through policing and exclusion. While democracy re-enacts this logic, for instance through the "prison industrial complex" as a racializing and gendering apparatus, it is also the site of struggles for freedom (Davis and Mendieta 2005). In excavating the deep intertwinement between surveillance and anti-blackness, Simone Browne recasts surveillance studies in relation to the archive of transatlantic slavery and suggests different modes of critique. Although she does not address democracy explicitly, she contrasts racializing surveillance with "the possibilities for fugitive acts of escape, resistance, and the productive disruptions that happen when blackness enters the frame" (Browne 2015, 164). Browne's critical reworking of surveillance studies leads to a focus on subversion and struggle which speaks, in many respects, to our problem of the "inescapability" of constraints faced by critics of surveillance and what makes certain claims acceptable and heard.

Third, practice approaches have more recently mobilized pragmatist literature to analyze the relation between security and democracy as more contingent and messy. In this vein, Huysmans speaks of security as diffuse practices of "assembling suspicion" (Huysmans 2014) and not just exceptionalist securitizing. Drawing primarily on Actor Network Theory (ANT), a lively strand of scholarship in critical security studies mobilizes the terminology of "socio-technical controversies" and highlights the significance of material devices for the constitution of public debates related to security problems. Controversies attend to the multiplicity of human and non-human actants that do not inhabit a field or a social world (Latour 2005). In this vein, analysis is oriented toward the material infrastructure and devices of political articulations and critiques. Building on what William Walters has called "the theme of controversies," critical scholars have mobilized controversies conceptually and methodologically to understand how security is enacted and with what political implications (e.g., Schouten 2014; Walters 2014; Hönke and Cuesta-Fernandez 2018).

Gros, de Goede, and İşleyen (2017) articulate this approach around the LIBE committee's hearings on the Snowden disclosures, as mediation itself becomes an object of struggle; the materiality of the hearings themselves and the online archive of documents and dossiers related to Snowden are imbued with explicit moral and political capacities. Methodologically, they draw on Noortje Marres' notion of "material participation," in which public participation is theorized as being entangled with material objects, thus enabling the examination of platforms and forums involved in the emergence of publics (Marres 2012). Indeed, for Snowden himself, the power of "publicity" and an informed public was deemed crucial in holding governments to account for bulk surveillance (Gros, de Goede, and İşleyen 2017). This linking of publicity and democratic critique is central to the ANT-inspired literature, where the "normative force" of critique cannot be untangled from the material composition of a public (Marres and Lezaun 2011, 503).

Politics here is conceived more in terms of the socio-material work of assembling and reassembling, while democracy is understood in relation to publics and publicity as ways of contesting security practices (Walters 2014; Walters and D'Aoust 2015). This modality of critique has also been advanced in relation to surveillance practices which are diffuse, generating emergent publics which are multiple, dispersed and outside of established institutional settings (Monsees 2019).

Though this work has made great strides in terms of analysis of the modes of contesting security, there has been less attention to differences between pragmatic approaches. Specifying the particular theoretical and methodological clout of analyzing "disputes," as opposed to controversies or struggles, is something we wish to

address by orienting our analysis of critiques of surveillance to a description of the processes through which criticism is taken seriously by different actors (Gadinger 2016). This process of being taken seriously attends not only to the substance of the critique and the capacity of actors to shift the frame of situations, but to the constraints within which these are embedded and all the contextual relevance the disputing process embodies (Chateauraynaud 2009). As Martin-Mazé (2017, 213) has aptly put it in the context of disputes, "actors quarrel over the justification of their actions . . . they dispute how to test reality, but not reality itself." In short, our analysis tends to the *politics of acceptability* of certain arguments.

Such politics of acceptability gets us closer to a more nuanced understanding of the limits of democracy in contesting surveillance in the name of security. At the same time, it also points to possibilities of thinking more practically about the ways in which democratic principles can be mobilized precisely within the constraints objectivized using the Boltanski-inspired analysis we propose. In the next section, we introduce the sociology of disputes, and supplement it with a reading of the relation between democracy and critique via Appadurai's work on "fear of small numbers."

A Political Sociology of Disputes and the Grammars of Critique

Disputes, according to Boltanski, are situations in which different points of view come into conflict. Alongside ANT, the sociology of disputes is another of the pragmatic approaches that have emerged through varied critiques of Bourdieu's sociology. As disputes entail dynamics of critique and justification, Boltanski's pragmatic sociology has also been described as a "sociology of critique," a "sociology of critical capacity" (Susen and Turner 2014). In its focus on disputing processes and situations, it shares similarities with ANT and other practice-oriented approaches to contestation (Gadinger 2016; Bueger and Gadinger 2018). IR scholars see it as another analytical "tool . . . to study controversies as done by assemblage and actor-network theorists" (Ochoa, Gadinger, and Yildiz, 2020, 4). While ANT has focused on scientific controversies, Boltanski is thought to attend to conflictual situations more generally (Guggenheim and Potthast 2012, 5).

Yet, disputes are subtly different from controversies, struggles, or conflicts, even as these languages have been largely used interchangeably in IR. For Boltanski and Thévenot (2006, 13), disputes are "limited neither to a direct expression of interests nor to an anarchic and endless confrontation between heterogeneous worldviews clashing in a dialogue of the deaf." Disputes are subject to a series of constraints that "govern the construction of a well-founded argument" (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, 140). It is the careful unpacking of constraints on "making reality unacceptable" (Boltanski 2008) that distinguishes the sociology of disputes from mapping controversies and other sociological analyses of contestation. Over several decades, Boltanski, in collaboration with Thévenot, Chiapello, and Claverie, has explored the various forms of critique, from denunciation to scandals, and how different arguments are seen as acceptable or normal or not. These constraints on rendering the reality of digital surveillance unacceptable are particularly important for us, given the difficulties that critics of digital surveillance have faced.

How do certain critiques become accepted in disputes? How do certain justifications account for what is acceptable in the world? Boltanski has analyzed how disputes become acceptable by attending to how different actors are able—or, conversely, unable—to generalize claims about injustice. In this paper, we want to draw attention to a particular aspect of the sociology of disputes: the category of the "general" and the practices of rising in generality—and the opposite practice of descending into singularity. The dynamics of generalization/singularization alert us

to the constraints that critique encounters beyond the moments of openness and multiplicity when reality is put to the test.[2]

The relation between the "general" and the "singular" is central to disputes about injustice, partly—we would argue—because it is central to grammars of democracy. Whether in his analysis of justification of abortion, of justice, or of distant suffering, the "rise in generality" (and its opposite, the "rise in singularity") is key to disputes and the justifications of different actors. We propose to attend to a specific aspect of disputes about injustice, where a demand for recognizing claims as acceptable or "normal" entails processes of generalizing—or what Boltanski has also called "aggrandizing."

Given the recurrence of the "rise in generality" across his work, it is surprising that it has been largely overlooked in engagements with the sociology of disputes. The category of the general first appears in the work on justification and critique with Laurent Thévenot. Here, generality is both a constraint and a condition of possibility for justifications and critiques to be taken seriously. There are six worlds that Boltanski and Thévenot analyze as constraints upon justification: inspirational, domestic, reputational, civic, commercial, and industrial. Each of these worlds has different criteria of "worth" in common, so the rise in generality would be enacted differently in each of these. In the civic world, which is most relevant for how public debates about digital surveillance have been framed, the worth of people "corresponds to the generality of their state" (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, 121). As Boltanski and Thévenot summarize it, the worthy beings of the civic world are "the *masses* and the *collectives* that assemble and organise them" (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, 186). The civic world relies on the simultaneous rejection of the particular and the construction of generality through reference to collectives as majorities, masses or the people. The rise in generality can be simply put as the more general a claim, actor or statement, the higher the worth it acquires.

In *Justice and Love as Competences,* the rise in generality becomes central to disputes over injustice. Here, Boltanski discusses a series of letters sent to the French newspaper *Le Monde*, which denounce different forms of injustice (Boltanski 2012b). He reconstructs the judgments on the acceptability of the claims. It is not the claims themselves that are judged as "normal," but the situations in which they are formulated and how they represent the relation between the victim and the denouncer. Boltanski sees the relation between the general and the particular as underpinning the judgment of normality: "the constraints of normality that weigh on denunciation must depend fundamentally on the way in which each political order constructs the relation between the particular and the general, between private interests and the common good" (Boltanski 2012b, 194). Generality is not immediately connected with democracy, although Boltanski acknowledges that political denunciations of injustice need to have a collective aspect, as he notes that "it is not normal, for example, for the father of a family to write a political programme destined solely for his children" or "for a private individual to use a letter to the editor to denounce before public opinion a son guilty of lacking respect for his parents" (Boltanski 2012b, 193–4).

While briefly noting that different social distributions of how the relation between the general and the singular is rendered acceptable, Boltanski does not inquire into *why* some of these dynamics appear normal and acceptable, whereas others do not. If, for him, the rise in generality is a constraint on what is acceptable critique in public disputes about injustice, it is also a desirable aspect of disputes. This is also partly due to the wider democratic context of situations of dispute that Boltanski has analyzed. Some commentators have argued that Boltanski's pragmatic sociology is a "critical political sociology of democracy," which likens actors' regimes of

[2] Ochoa, Gadinger, and Yildiz (2020) focus their analysis of the Snowden disclosures on these moments of "uncertainty" and "fragility" when reality is put to the test.

justification to a "plurality of democratic repertoires" (Blokker and Brighenti 2011, 242).

This understanding of democracy as grounded in pluralist societies is partly supported by Boltanski's own sparse reflections on democracy. The inaugural public lecture for the Pétrarque Prize, awarded to *Mysteries and Conspiracies,* is one of the few occasions where Boltanski addresses relations between critique and democracy (Boltanski 2012a). While he sees critical sense as "one of the more general human capacities," he highlights the relation between institutions and critique. Critique is central to democratic institutions, as without critique, institutions would be all-powerful. "The cause of critique is the cause of democracy," he concludes (Boltanski 2012a). We would argue, however, that it is a rather minimalist conception of democracy which is understood only through the trope of "plurality." Separately, sociologist Kate Nash has argued for the need to supplement the six worlds developed in the early work on justification with a grammar of human rights, while simultaneously highlighting the lack of specification of the political order in which everyday claims against injustice are formulated. She adds her voice to a range of critics who have pointed out that Boltanski's analyses of disputes, critique, and justification "can be valid only in a constitutional democracy, in which, by definition, there is respect for pluralism" (Nash 2014, 358). Yet, even as democracy does not acquire the status of a "world," democratic claims to rights also enact generality and singularity. However, there is a further dimension to the rise in generality in (liberal) democracies.

In his reflections on the "fear of small numbers," Appadurai has problematized the relation between majorities and minorities in liberal democracies in terms that help shed light on the potential injustice of the "rise in generality" (Appadurai 2006). He argues that minorities and majorities are "recent political inventions," which rely on technologies of counting, statistics, and the modern nation-state (Appadurai 2006, 49–50). As he puts it, "Majorities need minorities in order to exist" (Appadurai 2006, 50). Alongside individual/collective, majority/minority is another of the forms through which the general and the singular are problematized in democracies. For Appadurai, majorities become dangerous when they turn into "predatory identities" which see themselves as a threatened majority and exhibit an "*anxiety of incompleteness* about their sovereignty" (Appadurai 2006, 52). Rather than the "tyranny of the majority," which has preoccupied theorists of democracy, Appadurai is concerned with the limitations of liberal democratic thought in addressing the relation between minority and majority. Although democracy often uses the language of the people, the public or popular sovereignty, in practice democracies work with these tensions between majorities/minorities. "Small numbers," Appadurai reminds us, "represent a tiny obstacle between majority and totality or total purity" (Appadurai 2006, 53).

Minorities are part of liberal democratic processes, as the idea of a minority is "a procedural one, having to do with dissenting opinions in deliberative or legislative contexts in a democratic framework" (Appadurai 2006, 63). Thus, for him, minorities in liberal democratic thought have everything to do with "dissent" and little to do with "difference." It is in that sense that liberal democratic thought is unable to understand and engage with the potentiality of violence that undergirds the relation between minorities and majorities. Liberal thought is limited to understanding minorities as "procedural" rather than cultural or ethnic, and therefore as "temporary minorities, minorities solely by and for opinion" (Appadurai 2006, 63). Appadurai, however, is interested in social and cultural minorities, which have become permanent and thus cannot be just temporary or procedural. With the rise of human rights and claims to the protection of cultural and social minorities, we have seen an increased ambivalence as to the relation between temporary and permanent minorities, between procedural and cultural ones. How do democratic

claims about minority dissent or difference come to be taken seriously when they do not or cannot enact a "rise in generality"?

While Appadurai rightly acknowledges the tensions between minorities of dissent and of difference, he does not offer an analysis of how these categories are contested or how they play out in justifications and critiques of social and political practices. Yet, his analysis helps nuance the more celebratory approach that Boltanski takes to the "rise in generality." Indeed, the "rise in generality" can harbor injustices and erasures of singularity/minority. Moreover, it can obscure how critiques can become acceptable through what sociologist Nathalie Heinich (2019) has termed a "rise in singularity," as in the example of a petition which can gain acceptability not just by being signed by large numbers of people, but also if signed by a small number of "notable" names.

We propose to unpack how disputes about surveillance enact a rise in generality/descent into singularity. While security does not always require justification, we have seen an increased presence of public contestation and dispute around security practices.[3] Digital surveillance by intelligence agencies has become a matter of public contestation, with numerous actors, forms of evidence, and materials mobilized on the various sites. For us, a political sociology of disputes can capture some of the ways in which the relations between security and democracy are configured in concrete situations. In the following section we propose to approach the relation between security and democracy through an empirical analysis of how disputes over digital surveillance by intelligence agencies work through different modes of rising in generality or descending into singularity.

Disputing Digital Surveillance: Generalizing Security, Singularizing Democracy

How do the different actors involved in the ECtHR cases enact the "rise in generality"? The disputes before the Court are inevitably subject to constraints—they draw on legal principles and cannot invoke other questions of justice, which would be deemed to be *ultra vires*, as one of our interlocutors notes (Interview, March 24, 2020). Yet, these disputes have unfolded publicly through the campaign "Don't Spy on Us" and activist mobilization. Arguing against the permissibility of the UK's newly termed "bulk powers" was not in fact entirely possible in the context of litigation, even as that had been the position of many of the NGOs and digital rights activists in the wake of the Snowden disclosures (Interview, March 3, 2020). As privacy and freedom of expression are qualified rights, NGOs were obliged from the outset to frame their critiques, by and large, in terms of establishing safeguards and legal mechanisms of necessity and proportionality. There is no implication that there can be no interference through surveillance and "the devil was [therefore] in the detail" (Interview, January 9, 2020). We propose to unpack the dynamics of disputes through the "rise in generality," as it frames the tensions between the security practices of intelligence agencies (intensified by digital technologies) and democratic rights.[4]

We start from the applicants' critiques of indiscriminate or mass surveillance, the reconfiguring of suspicion, and the problems of opacity and secrecy as points of departure and then turn to the justifications of surveillance by the intelligence

[3] Critical security studies have formulated different positions on the existence of controversies and disputes in security practices. Andrew Neal sees them as particular recent developments in the "politicisation of security" (Neal 2019). Conversely, Marieke de Goede has argued that security is more contested than other fields of practice, with policies "controversy-driven" and knowledge claims "continually contested" (de Goede 2018, 41).

[4] Within the ECHR, an exception to the right of privacy is permitted such that it is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety, or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others (Greer 1997).

agencies to each of these objections. We argue that the UK government simultaneously performs a "rise in generality" of security and a "rise in singularity" of the effects of digital surveillance on democratic rights. Which justifications and critiques gain acceptance and which ones manage to "make reality unacceptable"? We explore the difficulties that civil society organizations and rights activities have in enacting a "rise in generality." Drawing on Appadurai's work, we also attend to the limits of the "rise in generality." We conclude with implications of this analysis for the security/democracy dynamics and the democratic potential of a "rise in singularity."

Arbitrariness and Discretion: Generalizing through Large Numbers, Singularizing through Small Numbers

For digital rights activists, surveillance can be seen as generalized in the sense that, in a digital world, everyone has become a source of data and object of surveillance. Yet, both the language of "mass surveillance" used by scholars and campaigners, and the implication that surveillance is indiscriminate and therefore generalized as it encompasses the majority of the population, have been rejected by intelligence agencies. Rather than justifying exceptionalism and executive power, intelligence agencies reject both the criticism of arbitrary or unfettered power, and that of mass surveillance. Rather than an unfettered power, they argue that their work should not be "fettered" further, as it would undermine their capacity to defend the "general community" (Big Brother Watch and Others v the UK 2018 hereinafter BBW 2018). Arguing strongly against the applicants' assertion that the UK government's line is simply to "trust us" (Jaffey in ECtHR 2019), the government in fact stresses the veracity and independence of their oversight and safeguarding mechanisms (Eadie in ECtHR 2019).

How is the rise in generality enacted? The UK government rejects the terminology of "mass surveillance" in an attempt to reduce the generality of rights infringements. It "denied that the section 8 (4) regime [of RIPA] permitted mass surveillance of *generalised access* to communications" (BBW 2018, §284 emphasis ours). While NGOs use the language of "unfettered" and "arbitrary" to characterize the practices of intelligence agencies, the UK government renders these practices as "fettered" and "limited." The government not only denies the generality and arbitrariness of surveillance, but it also mounts a different justification, which draws on the distinction between large numbers/small numbers, majority/minority.

As the ECtHR puts it, for an interference with an individual's rights to be justifiable, it requires "balancing the extent of the interference with an individual's rights and freedoms against a specific benefit to the investigation or operation being undertaken by a relevant public authority in the public interest" (BBW 2018, §117). A judgment of proportionality is underpinned by a calculation of generality and singularity. According to the Court, surveillance entails an evaluation of the impact on rights to avoid that the "adverse impact on the rights of another individual or group of individuals is too severe" (BBW 2018, §117). Thus, the large numbers of communities or publics need to be justified in relation to the small numbers of those who might be impacted by surveillance. The critique of disproportionate surveillance as generalized is recast through the balance of proportionate action, which limits infringements of rights while generalizing security. The government highlights the limitations of surveillance through small technical details: The number of surveilled people is de-generalized through spatio-temporal selection, the filtering and discarding of data, so that the government can argue that only a minority effectively become targets of surveillance. In the case of the interception of Amnesty emails by GCHQ, for example, the IPT found that the interception was both lawful and proportionate, but the time limit of retention was surpassed (BBW 2018, §54).

NGOs and rights groups critiquing surveillance have responded to these justifications and have rearticulated their critiques in terms of large numbers. In this regard, they attempt to generalize in relation to the sheer quantity of data collected through the bulk powers (a large quantity of data or "all communications data") and the populations affected (a substantial part of European populations). One submitter, in making this claim, points to another case, *Szabó and Vissy v. Hungary*, whereby the Court had previously accepted that a law permitting surveillance on a wide range of persons might be "interpreted as paving the way for the unlimited surveillance of a large number of citizens" (Open Society Justice Foundation 2016, §25). NGOs are thus able to link the idea of mass surveillance with the volume of data and numbers of people surveilled. The rise in generality in this case works through large numbers, as we saw in Appadurai's argument. When intelligence agencies attempt to minimize the effect of "bulk" by emphasizing selection of bearers, NGOs try to generalize by drawing attention to the fact that "selection" can still mean millions of innocent people (Big Brother Watch et al. 2019, §58d).

In their third-party submission to the ECtHR in the case of *10 Human Rights Organisations v UK*, the NGO Article 19 works through different modes of generalization and singularization. First, they aim to extend the critique beyond the singularizing focus on "the protection of private life" according to the European Convention on Human Rights. They do so by invoking freedom of expression and the protection of NGOs as social and public "watchdogs." Second, they aim at a further generalization through an invocation of individuals understood as the "general public" (Article 19 2016, 4).

The UN Special Rapporteur for freedom of expression, in his intervention to the Grand Chamber, rises further in generality, to link freedom of expression under international law, a qualified right, with freedom of opinion, which allows for *no* interference whatsoever (Kaye 2020, §9). This framing, which sees digital technologies reconfiguring the way that people hold opinions, away from an abstract notion limited to what an individual holds in their mind, to opinions being more tangibly stored, through browsing histories or email archives (Kaye 2020, §10). This rise in generality challenges the expansion of "security" by channeling democracy through a much wider placeholder than privacy, the right to family life or even freedom of expression: freedom of thought and opinion. However, this justification takes up only two paragraphs of an intervention which came very late in the case proceedings, and the Grand Chamber. The Court indeed finds a breach of Article 10 on freedom of expression, but one which is singularized for confidential journalistic material and the lack of sufficient safeguards (Big Brother Watch and Others v the UK 2021, §450–8).

Suspicion and Democracy: Generalizing through (Unknown) Threats, Singularizing through Intrusiveness

In the Big Brother Watch case, the ECtHR dispensed with the requirements in an earlier case, *Roman Zakharov v Russia*, to have reasonable suspicion against a targeted individual. The Court stated that "bulk interception is by definition untargeted, and to require "reasonable suspicion" would render the operation of such a scheme impossible" (BBW 2018, §316, 317). Before the BBW and others case, targeting was widely understood as the critical condition for surveillance practices, to protect against arbitrariness (Carrera and Guild 2014, 2). NGOs argue that mass surveillance and the uses of bulk have eliminated the requirement of suspicion and have effectively led to its generalization.

In response to these critiques, the government mobilizes the distinction between bulk data and targeted surveillance. Bulk data are generalized, but they are rendered as necessary through the framing of "unknown" threats. This is compounded by the anticipatory nature of danger and the unpredictability of the internet—

threats could emerge anywhere and might materialize anytime in the future. Both the ECtHR and other oversight actors in the United Kingdom reiterate the view of the former Counter-Terrorism Legislation Reviewer, David Anderson, about the necessity of bulk powers:

> Bulk acquisition has been demonstrated to be crucial in a variety of fields, including counter-terrorism, counter-espionage and counter-proliferation. The case studies provide examples in which bulk acquisition has contributed significantly to the disruption of terrorist operations and, though that disruption, almost certainly the saving of lives. (Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office 2019, 63)

In this framing, bulk powers have a specific function, which is precisely to discover these unknown threats. There is simply no alternative to bulk powers in this regard (Eadie in ECtHR 2019). This formulation of threat, with bulk powers framed as a sort of generalized solution to a myriad of (sometimes yet to emerge) problems, is equivalent to a "rise in generality" for security. This "rise" works through connecting disparate threats quickly and emphatically; online child abuse, bombings, organized crime, fraud, and cyber-attacks are all listed in quick succession by Eadie, to justify the necessity of the bulk powers. This is an "aggrandizing" move which purports to make the claim to generality of threat acceptable (Boltanski 2012b). At the same time, surveillance is minimized, as it takes place *not* at the point of data collection, but with the selection of the data to be analyzed, involving the interception of internet bearers (BBW 2018, §325).

As the previous section showed, the UK government and the intelligence agencies justify digital surveillance through the "rise in generality" of security and the "descent into singularity" of rights infringements. If surveillance only affects a minority of people, the generality of the NGOs' critique is limited. They are only able to speak of the "substantial segment of the European populations" (Big Brother Watch et al. 2019, §21) affected by the bulk powers, and not the totality of a population who are protected against a panoply of threats, as with the government's justifications. NGOs, however, rearticulate their critique of generalized surveillance by attempting a rise in generality of the effects of surveillance for democracy as a whole.

In their Written Observations to the Grand Chamber, the applicants in the three joint cases invoke the language of democracy used by the Court in a 1978 case, *Klass v Germany,* and remind of the risk of security laws "undermining or even destroying democracy on the ground of defending it" (BBW 2019, §6). The ECtHR has also recognized that the bulk data interception regime poses a "risk that a system of secret surveillance set up to protect national security may undermine or even destroy democracy under the cloak of defending it" (BBW 2018, §308). In the 2019 oral hearing, this argument acquires a stronger formulation as that of a totalitarian danger for democracies:

> Some people might find comfort in a world in which our every transaction and movement could be recorded. Crime fighting, security, safety, public health justifications are never hard to find. The impact of such powers on the innocent could be mitigated by the usual apparatus of safeguards, regulations and codes of practice. But a country constructed on such a basis would surely be intolerable to many of its inhabitants. A state that enjoyed all of these powers will be truly totalitarian, even if the authorities had the best interests of the people at heart. (Jaffey in ECtHR 2019)

Generalized suspicion becomes a general threat to democracies, as potentially experienced by the majority of people. Jaffey explicitly links this totalitarian imaginary to the reconfiguration of suspicion, which has shifted from "targeting a suspect who has been identified to treating everyone as a potential suspect whose data must be stored, analysed and profiled" (Jaffey in ECtHR 2019). The NGOs challenge the government's view on the bulk data regime by proposing a different

formulation of generality expressed as "the cumulative effect of combining data from many warrants and bearers, as well as the building of mass data repositories, and the increasing automation—and therefore wide-scale interrogation—of those databases" (BBW 2019, §17).

Yet, in doing so, they are also caught within a different tension raised by generalized surveillance. For instance, while highlighting the extent of surveillance, they also argue about its singularizing effects of intrusiveness into the intimate details of private lives. For the NGOs, the bulk surveillance simultaneously translates into more particularized surveillance. Thus, they argue that "technological developments mean that Governments could now create detailed and intrusive profiles of intimate aspects of private lives by analysing patterns of communications on a bulk basis" (BBW 2018, §280). The main example given about "grave risks" to democracy from this more "intrusive" surveillance is the GCHQ bulk equipment interference program, Optic Nerve, revealed by Snowden, to collect images of webcam users every five minutes, many of which are, as stressed by Jaffey, of an intimate and sexual nature. With the overturning of the requirement for suspicion in any process of surveillance and the acceptability of bulk powers as necessary, the UK government can quite easily appropriate this particularization of surveillance with the argument that any alternatives to bulk powers would in fact be "more intrusive" and involve even greater infringements of privacy (Eadie in ECtHR 2019). Once suspicion can be dispensed with as a requirement for surveillance, generalizing democracy through a very particularized notion of rights infringements becomes more ambivalent than the "rise in generality" of security that bulk powers present.

Yet, this "descent into singularity" is not inevitable, as an opposite justification by The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) indicates. In an earlier case, the CJEU had "generalized" digital surveillance, arguing that bulk data collection "taken as a whole, is liable to allow very precise conclusions to be drawn concerning the private lives of the persons whose data has been retained, such as everyday habits, permanent or temporary places of residence, daily or other movements, the activities carried out, the social relationships of those persons and the social environments frequented by them" (CJEU 2016, §98–9). Here the Court brought together generic surveillance with the law's generalized interest in the rights of the individual. In the ECtHR joint cases, even though the applicants similarly invoke a mechanism of generalization through in-depth intrusion into private life, the Strasbourg court, unlike the CJEU, has not accepted the argument about intrusiveness.

Secrecy and Opacity: Generalizing through Publicity, Singularizing Transparency and the Right to Redress

Before the Snowden disclosures, the ECtHR had a relatively clear position on surveillance, as laws regulating surveillance needed to be "foreseeable" or "formulated with sufficient precision so as to guarantee legal certainty" (Carrera and Guild 2014, 2). The NGOs' objection that proportionality cannot be assessed due to secrecy relates to both the transparency of the mechanics of the law and the individual's capacity for redress within this opaque set of practices. In democratic regimes, the requirement of generality entails that rules are *publicly* known so that they can be subject to debate and disagreement. Democratic rules are generalized through the imaginary of a knowing public. The rules "had to be clear" and "the ambit of rules had—in so far as possible—to be in the public domain" (BBW 2018, §32). Relatedly, there must also exist the possibility for an individual to be made aware that they have been the subject of surveillance, and to have the capacity for effective remedy if this surveillance is deemed "unlawful." It is for this reason that a key point put forward by NGOs for a series of limits on the intelligence agencies' investigatory powers, in addition to objective evidence of reasonable suspicion and prior

judicial authorization, was the requirement for subsequent notification to be given to the surveillance subject (BBW 2018, §281).

For NGOs and digital rights activists, the law fell short of the requirement of generality as it was incomprehensible, complex, and opaque. Its effects of non-knowledge (see Aradau 2017) appear antithetical to democratic commitments to public knowledge and knowing publics. Mobilizing this notion of generality, the applicants to the ECtHR argue that "the law was so complex and inaccessible to the public" that it lacked the generality of law (BBW 2019, §257). Secrecy and opacity are invoked as de-generalizing and therefore render surveillance unacceptable. Similarly, the right to effective remedy is completely futile if one does not know that they have been the subject of surveillance (Jaffey in ECtHR 2019). The opacity of the law becomes a key battering ram through which to challenge the use of bulk powers (Interview, September 24, 2019). This attempt to reduce the generality of the government's key arguments opens a chink in the government's justification that its bulk powers are overseen by a "suite of safeguards" (Eadie in ECtHR 2019). This fissure is effective, as it is presented solely in terms of proportionality, which, as we previously discussed, always entails an element of generality. One interviewee set out the position of their NGO in relation to the intelligence agencies in relation to proportionality thus:

> They [the agencies] are working for the public good. They're doing amazing work and I really respect the people who work for the security services. It's just a matter of making sure that their work doesn't go too far in intruding on the other important rights that we have as a society. (Interview, February 24, 2020)

Once again, we can see the tension between generalizing and singularizing emerge. The NGOs' attempt to rise in generality through publicity and publics is undermined by their simultaneous acceptance of the generalization of security as a "common good," as shown in the interview above. Moreover, the recourse to transparency sustains the justification of democratic accountability through "safeguards" and "the liberal manifestation of democracy as an inherently accountable system" (Birchall 2011, 63). Not only are NGOs excluded from the scrutinizing publics, but their critique risks reinforcing the generalization of security and the agencies' justification that they are defending the "general community."

An interview with one of the applicants in the BBW case confirmed this idea of transparency as a sort of "last resort"; a final attempt to be able to engage with the government and the agencies, and to normalize the presence of civil society in discussions around balancing different rights, without having to resort to strategic litigation: "This [bulk surveillance] shouldn't happen, but it is going to happen. So, what we can do is try to make it more transparent and sensible" (Interview, March 24, 2020).

The risk of this strategy for NGOs is that transparency is much more particularized by the UK government from the outset, as it becomes framed as the main means for NGOs themselves to be involved in debates around safeguards. Moreover, their work can be appropriated as instrumental, sensational, and driven by self-interest in securing funding and attracting publicity (Interview, December 5, 2019). This can also be seen with the NGOs' argument around the futility of effective remedy through the IPT if one does not know that they are the subject of surveillance. Here, the UK government is easily able to rise in generality and to de-singularize the role of the IPT by framing it as an effective remedy *without* the need for evidence of surveillance, as claims can be made by any person who merely suspects they are the subject of surveillance (Eadie in ECtHR 2019).

Nonetheless, NGOs were able to rise in generality and counter some of these justifications by drawing upon the same independent reports that the UK government drew upon in their justifications. Anderson's widely invoked report, *A Question of Trust*, defines the problem with UK law on investigatory power as one of "impenetra-

bility" (Anderson 2017). The public dimension was also manifest in his reflections on the need for oversight of intelligence agencies, which "should be public-facing, transparent and accessible to the media" (Anderson 2017, 80).

If we read the justifications and the critiques of surveillance in these terms of the rise in generality/descent into singularity, it appears that while there is a widely accepted "rise in generality" of security, the most that democracy can hope for is a "descent into singularity" of rights infringements. Through safeguards and technology, only a minority of people need be affected, intrusion kept to the bare minimum required. Not only does "generality of security" remain unscathed, but it expands further, even reproduced by the NGOs whose arguments are caught within a general/singular tension. "Escape" from these constraints, as our first interlocutor so eloquently stated, is very difficult.

Conclusion: Democracy and the Rise in Singularity?

As the surveillance practices of intelligence agencies have become increasingly known to publics, we have seen an extension rather than retrenchment of surveillance and the power of security actors. We have proposed a political sociology of disputes to revisit the relation between security and democracy and shed light on these paradoxical developments. By taking disputes about digital surveillance as the entry point to how the relation between security and democracy is enacted in practice, we have shown that security actors justify surveillance through a "rise in generality," which civil society actors have much difficulty in replicating. Disputes do not present an overarching narrative about the security–democracy relation but can instead reveal the nuances of critique and justification in a particular situation.

By focusing on disputes around digital surveillance initiated by a coalition of transnational and UK NGOs in the wake of the Snowden disclosures, we have traced the rise in generality in justifications of surveillance and its critiques. Why has it been so difficult to render the reality of surveillance unacceptable? We have shown how justifications of surveillance rely on the "rise in generality" of security, whereas critiques of surveillance struggle to enact a similar "rise in generality" for democracy.

In this reading, singularity, and particularly the rise in singularity, would appear to be a risk for democratic critiques of surveillance. However, Appadurai reminds us that "small numbers" are not antagonistic to, but constitutive of, democratic practices. While the "rise in generality" has been difficult for NGOs, there has been one instance where the "rise in singularity" has been successful, thus reminding us of the need to reconsider the role of singularity—understood both as "small numbers" and as unique or different—for democracies. Surveillance of journalists and journalists' material set different limits to digital surveillance, as these communications are both a small number but deemed to be different from the majority of communications. However, the singularity of the journalistic profession did not extend to other singular groups, particularly racialized minorities whose rights can be most endangered by bulk surveillance.

Other disputes over digital surveillance, such as facial recognition, have highlighted this "rise in singularity" by highlighting the errors of technology toward women and people of color, thus rendering their critiques increasingly acceptable (Amnesty International 2021). The rise in singularity as an acceptable democratic critique has, however, remained largely outside the critiques of digital surveillance by intelligence agencies. As several of our interlocutors have remarked, this is partly due to the limitations that law poses on disputes, but also because minority claims are often seen as a challenge to the framework of universal rights, in which much of European civil society operates. Despite the tensions that such a democratic grammar could enact, not opposing the "rise in generality" and the "rise in singularity" could open up the space of acceptability of critique.

A political sociology of disputes does not offer disputes as a replacement of struggles or controversies as deployed in IR, but as a way to supplement our analytical vocabularies and nuance our resources for critique. This also means that these connections can be explored further, for instance by analyzing how the politics of acceptability could be connected to the politics of subversion or how the openness of sociotechnical controversies differs from the dynamics of political disputes and denunciation.

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