

Authoritarian Capitalism, Reactionary Populism & Emancipatory Counter-Strategies: Global Perspectives from the South.

A Call for Applications from the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung for postdoctoral fellowships at research institutions in countries of the Global South, as part of an International Research Group on Authoritarianism & Counter-Strategies

Application deadline is 4 August 2019.

Short Description

The Global Scholarly Dialogue Programme is an initiative of the [Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung](#) (RLS) aimed at supporting critical research in countries of the Global South, and at strengthening dialogue on crucial international political and social issues, both internally, between countries in the South, and between the Global South and the North. To achieve this, the RLS will fund up to **10 postdoctoral fellowships for a period of up to 26 months** (funding ends in December 2021) for research by scholar-activists on authoritarian capitalism, reactionary populism, and emancipatory counter-strategies.

The postdoctoral researchers will be based mainly at **institutions of their choice in Latin America, Asia, and Africa**, and we ask interested scholars to choose a suitable institution and mentor for their project themselves. Nevertheless, participation in regular global and regional workshops as well as other digital and analogue forms of collaboration will be key to our goal of **establishing an International Research Group on Authoritarianism & Counter-Strategies**. Participants are also strongly encouraged to spend up to six months of the funding period (first or second semester 2021) as visiting scholars in Germany, during which they will work on collaborative projects with other participating researchers (the RLS will support researchers with their search for an appropriate host institution in Germany during the first year of the program).

With this call-out, the RLS is seeking research proposals on the global entanglements of authoritarian politics, reactionary movements and ideologies, and emancipatory counter-strategies. We are especially interested in studies that propose a global perspective for and from the Global South on this issue. That is, studies that critically relate regional problems to global economic and power relations and transnational actor networks, and propose creative, inter- and transdisciplinary research strategies. We favour scholar-activist methodologies—i.e. rigorous academic work that is embedded in actual left-wing political projects, movements or initiatives—and are looking for research output that reflect this scholar-activist character.

The programme's explicit goal is to contribute to a global dialogue between radical progressive scholars and activists who seek to better understand the rising tide of global authoritarianism, develop emancipatory counter-strategies, and advance a different path towards a just, democratic society based on international solidarity in the tradition of the workers' and women's movements, and on the principles of anti-fascism and anti-racism.

Authoritarian Capitalism & Reactionary Populism: Global Perspectives from the South

We are witnessing a worldwide resurgence of reactionary nationalist, religious, racist, and antifeminist movements, as well as rapid processes of the undermining of political systems, accompanied by “shrinking spaces” for civil society actors. Since the election of Donald Trump and the more recent success of right-wing populist parties and movements in Europe, authoritarianism – long considered an expression of incomplete democratization processes in the Global South – has been increasingly seen as a *global* phenomenon. It no longer appears as a kind of failure, but rather as an *active process* of the transformation of practices of rule.

Meanwhile, developments in the Global South are no less dramatic than those in the North. In Latin America, the democratic breakthroughs of recent years have come to an end, and the advance of reactionary movements has reached its climax—for now, at least—in the election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. In the Arab world, a brief spring has been followed by a comprehensive counter-movement towards authoritarian regimes. In South-East Asia, the election of Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines and the military dictatorship in Thailand have marked an end—for the time being— to democratic advances, just as Narendra Modi’s government has done for India. And a tendency towards an authoritarian transformation of the state is becoming apparent in numerous countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

Closely connected with these processes of authoritarian transformations of the state, we are witnessing a global culture war waged from the Right, which presently seems to be leading to a resurgence of reactionary and populist ideologies and movements. Nationalist, (cultural) racist, colonialist, religious, antifeminist and classist discourses are coalescing—often in very different ways—to form specific ideological amalgams and practices. But what seems to be common to all of them are forms of favouring and discriminating against specific groups, practices which are violently shaking the foundations of democratic societies, even as they are often supported by large parts of these same societies.

The metaphor of a “rising tide of authoritarianism”, which is often used to summarize these dynamics, evinces the radical political and social devastation they are causing worldwide, as well as how surprised most observers have been by them. At the same time, the rising tide marks the end of the “end of history” or, in other words, the neoliberal promise that the liberalization of markets would bring with it a global triumph of Western-style democracy.

But is this also the end of neoliberalism, as different voices could be heard saying amid the confusion following the crisis of 2007-2008, and as a rekindling of nationalist rhetoric seems to suggest? The politics of neoliberal austerity has been massively criticized from various sides. Along with its central actors—from parties and governments to international organizations that are identified with it—it has suffered an enormous loss of legitimacy. And yet the question is whether neoliberalism as a global political and economic regime of governance and as a specific mode of capital accumulation based on the often violent commodification of the environment, work, and social reproduction, has in fact lost its dominant position—and thus also how we might be able to characterize and conceptualize a post-neoliberal moment.

For the time being, it seems that neoliberalism—or what’s left of it—may have been deeply shaken, but remains unchallenged by serious alternatives on a global scale. However this should not obscure the fact that it was various emancipatory movements—from the Arab Spring to Syriza and Occupy—that first formulated responses to the global crisis. The reactionary character of the present developments can also be understood in the sense of a

reaction to the big social mobilizations of those years. But these developments have also seen the collapse of the *illusion of neoliberal democratization*, just as, on the other hand, the authoritarian facets of global capitalism are becoming more and more conspicuous.

Reality, however, never kept step with the promise that neoliberalism would necessarily bring with it more open, democratic societies. Although there certainly have been social advances in many countries during the last 30 years, the implementation of neoliberal reforms has always been deeply dependent on state and para-state forms of coercion, particularly in the Global South. While neoliberal restructuring met with relatively broad social acceptance in many countries of the North, in large parts of the South massive authoritarian interventions were often needed to suppress criticism and popular dissent and to strengthen the role of the state as the custodian of capital accumulation.

Especially if we take a view from the South, the following questions arise: What is actually new about the authoritarian tendencies we are currently able to observe? And where and when did the “tide” begin to rise? There are numerous countries in which state and para-state practices of discipline, criminalization and violent repression never really disappeared, and the same goes for group-specific forms of marginalization operating at the intersections of class, gender and ethnicity and the ideologies that go along with these. In the Global North we have seen an authoritarian restructuring of the state that has been under way at least since the inception of the “war on terror”. Moreover, a look at the recent history of the European and US border regimes shows how deeply rooted authoritarian practices and discrimination against specific groups are in formally democratic systems. In this sense, it is indeed possible to assert that European society, and dissenting social groups in particular, are increasingly subject to a set of state policies of marginalization, discipline, and social control that were long reserved for the Global South, while authoritarian practices of rule and reactionary ideologies are also being expanded and generalized in the South – all of which makes a critical and internationalist dialogue of emancipatory thinkers and forces more necessary than ever.

In this sense, contemporary developments in many ways represent a continuation of previously existing patterns and practices, and enquiring into the historical continuities and discontinuities of these patterns and practices will undoubtedly be central to understanding them. However, when we consider the rapid, global process of de-democratization and the spread of reactionary ideologies, the most pressing questions concern the conditions and processes of their *universalization*.

For it is precisely this universalization and globalization of authoritarianism that represents one of the central innovations. To date, however, these have been inadequately analysed: most studies remain tied to a methodological nationalism and discuss authoritarian developments as endogenous problems of particular societies. The International Research Group on Authoritarianism & Counter-Strategies aims to focus attention on the regional and global interconnections of authoritarian capitalism and reactionary populism, and to place them at the centre of scholarly debates.

In pursuing this undertaking, we believe it is crucial both to name and analyse the specificities and particular facets of different authoritarian processes, and to enquire into the *overarching and connective elements* that unite these different processes – not ontologically, but according to the concrete *conditions* on which the various forms of authoritarian capitalism and reactionary populism are based, and to the *practices and actors* that actually bring together the different (national and regional) processes. Our goal, then, is to combine in-depth studies of national, regional and local processes of socioeconomic transformation and

politics with a global perspective that recognizes and analyzes the universal manifestations of authoritarian capitalism and the universalizing processes that lie beyond the “rising tide of authoritarianism”. At the same time, we are proposing an internationalist perspective on local and regional counter-strategies, a perspective that, while discussing alternative paths and concrete, popular resistance strategies, campaigns, and initiatives, inquires into their potential to pave the way towards internationalist emancipatory transformative strategies.

Starting from a perspective that focuses attention on the *globalization* of authoritarian capitalism and reactionary populism and takes the South as the point of departure for its reflections, we pose the following questions:

- *What are the specific conditions that today lend the global generalization and intensification of authoritarian practices and reactionary populisms their social and historical significance?*
- *Which specific conditions and actors are currently leading to an expansion and universalization of authoritarian practices and to the ideologies that go along with them?*
- *What aspects do specific processes and practices of reactionary ideologization and mobilization present? And what is their relation to the global struggle for cultural hegemony and to the “global authoritarian populist axis”?*
- *To what degree do worldwide authoritarian processes represent a renegotiation of class relations on a local, national and global scale?*
- *What is the function in this context of neocolonial, imperial relationships?*
- *And what actors and strategies have developed and are developing effective counter-strategies that successfully challenge authoritarian politics and reactionary ideologies and movements on a local, national and (potentially) international scale.*

With these questions, five fields of research begin to emerge that orient this call for applications. They intersect at various points:

1. **What are the specific conditions that today lend the global generalization and intensification of authoritarian practices and reactionary populisms their social and historical significance, both at regional and global levels?** Which transformations on different scales have been triggered by the crisis (or by multiple crises), which sections of capital and which class fractions have been strengthened and weakened by them, and how? What is the significance of authoritarianism and populism as national and global strategies for coping with crises? What strategies of accumulation are emerging at both the global and national level, and how do they relate to one another? Which changes in these strategies in the Global North are influencing the South, and vice versa? Which continuities and discontinuities can we observe in relation to (neo)colonial North-South relations?
2. **Which actors and practices are contributing to an expansion and universalization of authoritarian practices and reactionary populist discourses?** Are we faced with actors that are independent of one another and even working against one another, or are we witnessing the emergence of a global authoritarian populist axis? What networks and links exist between reactionary movements and authoritarian governments at regional and global levels? What does the authoritarian transformation of state and para-state practices look like, how do the various processes relate to one another, and to what degree are they connected globally? Which actors and political subjects are crucial,

and how do they articulate their messages? What roles are played in all of this by questions of class, gender, religion, nation, etc.? Which groups are most affected by the authoritarian transformation? What position is accorded to subaltern groups and classes, and what role do they play in the process? What historical (dis)continuities can be observed? To what degree can (historical and contemporary) experiences with authoritarian practices in the Global South contribute to a global understanding of the phenomenon today, and how might authoritarian practices in the South in fact have functioned as a “laboratory”?

3. **What do processes and practices of reactionary ideologization and their relationship to specific *populisms* and to globally active authoritarian populist forces look like?** What shifts in discourses and ideological practices are able to be observed and to what degree are these (also) a transnational phenomenon? Do developments and entanglements suggest a worldwide “culture war from the right”, or numerous unarticulated and contradictory processes? How does concrete reactionary populist mobilization work today? Who produces which ideologemes, how are they linked up, which in-groups form them, in which directions are they mobilizing and demobilizing? What does reactionary populism *offer* to those who support and propagate it? How are different communication strategies connected with each other? What influence does the global interconnectedness brought about by social networks have? Who are the key actors? What role is played by traditional and new media? What kind of “public” emerges in this communication?
4. **To what degree does the worldwide turn to authoritarian capitalism represent a renegotiation of class relations at local, national and global scales, and what is the function in this context of neocolonial, imperial relationships?** Do authoritarian capitalism and reactionary populism represent a reconfiguration of imperialist strategies of rule and exploitation and an attempt to cordon the Global North off from the South, or do they instead represent a worldwide intensification of class war “from above”? Are we dealing with an increasingly organic, globally coordinated ruling class, or with various nationally and regionally constituted classes that are strengthening authoritarian practices “domestically” and, in the case of the Global North, are exporting them even more brutally than before? How are the new power blocs composed? What role is played by the “intermediate classes”? What position do authoritarianism and reactionary populism accord to various subjects—including, indeed especially, subaltern ones? Does the authoritarian populist turn truly mean more rule by coercion and less by hegemonic persuasion, or does it also represent a reactionary self-empowerment of the subaltern? To what degree are they symptoms of a more or less profound transformation of the power bloc (or power blocs) and an altered configuration of the different factions of the ruling class?
5. We understand the question of **how social movements worldwide can and should best confront authoritarian capitalism and reactionary populism as transversal to these fields of research.** How can we advance towards building an inclusive, internationalist social movement and concrete solidarity? What actors may – or rather should not – be allies of the progressive left? What conditions for the emergence and existence of concrete experiences of resistance can be identified? What are the geographical conditions for counter-strategies, and where is their internationalist potential located? What practices of resistance have proved particularly successful,

and to what degree can they function as reference points? What discursive strategies can serve to resist the authoritarian turn and reactionary ideologies?

This is not an exclusive list of possible research questions. We welcome a wide range of perspectives and analyses on the theme, and favour research projects that take inter- and transdisciplinary approaches, are methodologically creative, and critically reflect upon North-South relations and the geopolitics of knowledge and knowledge production.

Although we emphasize the importance of a global perspective on authoritarian neoliberalism and reactionary populism, we are aware that such a perspective is rare and difficult to develop. Although we do ask you to reflect upon and suggest a “global perspective from the South” in your research proposal, we also believe that such a perspective can only be fully developed in a collaborative, internationalist dialogue, both internally, between countries in the South, and between the Global South and the North.

We are also convinced that the most promising approaches to the analysis of sociopolitical transformations are those that assume a perspective that is not divorced from concrete social struggles, but rather take these struggles as their practical and intellectual point of departure. The same is of course true for our desire to actively participate in the quest to identify and advance effective counter-strategies to authoritarian neoliberal politics and advance alternative paths.

This is why the International Research Group on Authoritarianism & Counter-Strategies proposes a scholar-activist methodology that produces rigorous academic work that is embedded in actual left-wing political projects, movements, and initiatives. The publication outcomes of the proposed research projects should thus reflect this scholar-activist character: including at least one published peer-reviewed journal article, but also working papers, notes, blogs, video clips, newspaper articles, etc.

General information

Please note that the **financial support** provided to postdoctoral researchers will be based on salaries paid for comparable, full-time academic positions in the region, and as such will vary from country to country. **Additional funding may be granted** (e.g. for conference attendance), and travel costs for international meetings arranged by the RLS will be covered in full. For the proposed six-month research stay in Germany, the monthly payment is €2,500. Grant recipients are not permitted to engage in full-time employment while receiving funding as part of the programme.

The funding for postdoctoral positions provided by the Global Scholarly Dialogue Programme will run through to **December 2021**. Funding will commence in **November 2019** at the earliest, depending on your schedule.

In order to facilitate ongoing and productive dialogue between all participating scholars, the working language of the entire program will be **English**. Please also note that an interview in English will be part of the second phase of the selection process, and teaching activities in Germany will have to be carried out in English.

We place strong emphasis on the candidates' **political, social and cultural engagement** and we ask you to provide information on this. If you feel uncomfortable doing this, please contact us via email.

Application deadline is 4 August 2019.

Process

The postdoctoral researchers will be based at **institutions of their choice in Latin America, Asia, and Africa**. Interested scholars should choose a suitable institution and mentor for their project themselves. We ask you to provide proof and detailed information regarding your integration into the institution (for example, as an associated fellow). The Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung will support researchers with their search for an appropriate host institution in Germany during the first year of the program.

An academic board of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung (RLS) will evaluate all complete applications. The most promising projects will then be evaluated by external academic referees, and we will invite the candidates for an interview (via videoconference). The selection committee, which comprises representatives of different areas of the RLS, the RLS academic advisory board, representatives of our network partners and scholars with ties to the RLS, will meet in Berlin at the end of September 2019 to decide which research proposals will be funded. Please note that the selection made at that time is final, and cannot be revised.

Application & Contact Details

To submit your application, please visit our [application portal](#). You will find templates for the endorsement letter and the institutional agreement, as well as comprehensive FAQs and further information on conditions, selection procedures, etc. in our Download Center. Please direct any further queries to GlobalDialogue@rosalux.org.

Your application should include:

- **A letter of motivation**

- **A project outline**, consisting of:

- Abstract (max. 2,000 characters including spaces)
- Research proposal (5 -10 pages maximum, including bibliography)
- Project timeline (please name your proposed start)
- Proposed publication outcomes

- **Endorsement letter from the institution where you plan to carry out your research project**

Please use the template provided on our [application portal](#). The endorsement letter should be filled out by the person you choose as the mentor/academic supervisor for the project.

- **Referee's report on the candidate and research project**

This report can be written either by an academic expert (preferably external to the institution where you plan to be based), or by a person involved in leftist political projects, movements or initiatives with whom you plan to collaborate for your project. In both cases, the report should provide detailed information on the project and candidate, and explain the importance of the proposed work and output.

- **Binding institutional agreement**

Please use the template provided on our application portal.

- **Curriculum vitae, including a publication list**

The publication list should be divided into publications in peer-reviewed journals, book chapters, conference papers and information on the type of publication (original work, review, etc.). Each publication must indicate the status of the publication (published, printed, accepted, submitted). Full bibliographic details (including the number of pages) are required. If available, please provide a digital link to the publication.

- **Description of political, social and/or cultural engagement**

If possible, please provide proof of your activities (e.g. non-academic publications, letters of recommendation from organizations, initiatives, etc.).

- **Copy of your passport**

- **Certificate of English language skills**

You must be able to prove at least a [CEFR C1 level](#) of English, unless it is your native language or you wrote your doctoral dissertation in English. If you do not have a certificate, please provide written information regarding your language skills in a PDF.

- **Certificate of your highest academic degree (generally a PhD).**

Unless the document is issued in English, an English translation is required (a certified translation will not be required until a scholarship has been awarded by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung). If you have not yet completed your PhD, a statement from your doctoral supervisor must be enclosed with your Master's degree (or comparable degree, e.g. diploma), along with a statement of when you expect to complete your PhD. Copies of the certificates in the form of PDF files are sufficient for the application. Successful applicants must present a certified copy of their PhD certificate before the start of the scholarship.