



Call for applications

**Authoritarianism and Global Capitalism:
Emancipatory Counter-Strategies in and from the Middle East**

6 Short-Term Fellowships (up to 9 months) for postdocs, research-based artists, and journalists from [ODA-recipient countries](#) of the MENA region in 2021

Application deadline: 1 March 2021

Location: Berlin

The Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies, the Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies (both Freie Universität Berlin), and “Europe in the Middle East—The Middle East in Europe” (EUME), a research programme at the Forum Transregionale Studien, invite postdoctoral researchers, research-based artists, and journalists from countries of the Middle East and North Africa to apply for up to six short-term research fellowships in the period from April–December 2021.

We explicitly welcome applications from researchers who are currently residing in Germany or other European countries.

Authoritarianism, Global Capitalism, and Counter-Strategies

We are witnessing a worldwide resurgence of reactionary nationalist, religious, racist, and antifeminist discourses and movements that give form to specific ideological amalgams and practices in different contexts, as well as rapid authoritarian transformations of political systems in all regions of the world. Not everything is new about this. But although contemporary developments in many ways may represent a continuation of previously-existing authoritarian patterns, their worldwide spread and their specific economic, political, and ideological character pose important questions concerning the concrete conditions and processes of this globalization of authoritarianism.

Economic politics are key to understanding the specificities of the current developments. Following the crisis of 2007–8, neoliberalism as a global political and economic regime of governance and as a specific mode of capital accumulation is paradoxically expanding, deepening, and being stripped of some of its “progressive” facets by authoritarian regimes, while simultaneously being questioned for its destructive effects on society, politics, and the environment.

Struggles and strategies against authoritarian politics and austerity measures have emerged across the South/North and East/West divides that governed politics and academic inquiries over the last century. Large-scale mobilizations have been unfolding in Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, Hong Kong, Thailand, Chile, Bolivia, Belarus, and other countries. From local small-scale campaigning by grassroots organizations to massive feminist mobilizations against the culturalist-conservative backlash or oppressive political

conditions, strong claims for pluralism, redistribution, participation, and social justice have emerged during the past few years.

The revolutionary uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa region in 2010/2011 in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Syria, and Yemen, as well as in 2018/2019 in Sudan, Algeria, Lebanon, and Iraq have contested authoritarian rule and socio-economic injustices in the region through mass movements. Defying predictions that underscored the supposed durability and resilience of local authoritarian rule, these uprisings mobilized people far beyond national borders and had and still have a massive impact on progressive movements worldwide. At the same time, the authoritarian backlash that has characterized the last few years poses important questions regarding the organization, structures, limits, and challenges of emancipatory politics today.

We consider that there is a lot to learn from each of these struggles and from a transregional comparison. On the one hand, they are key sites for understanding what is currently at stake. Critical perspectives that zoom in on concrete struggles, its representations, its actors, and the strategies they implement seem to us most promising for understanding the political subjects of what has formerly been called “class struggle” – i.e. subjects that not only constitute these struggles, but are contingently constituted by them. On the other hand, in view of a globalized authoritarian challenge, we consider it important to critically engage with resistance strategies, campaigns, and initiatives for a renewal of emancipatory internationalism and its transformative potential for the idea and practice of a just world.

Possible research questions may be articulated from all branches of the social sciences and humanities and include:

- Questions regarding (new) political subjectivities expressed in and formed by anti-authoritarian movements and initiatives, their political practices, and forms of organization and communication, especially regarding its transnational, transregional and/or global entanglements;
- Questions of new or old imaginaries and narratives (inside and outside of organized anti-authoritarian struggles) that may relate different movements towards a broader platform or counter-project to the hegemony of global authoritarianism and the destructive effects of capitalism;
- Discussions of the most vibrant (outspoken and silent) demands which connect many people in the locality or region and could serve as the basis for an inclusive alternative agenda against prevailing forms of classist, nationalist, racist, sexist, religious, and other forms of marginalization;
- Narrative, visual, archival, and communicative strategies and practices that can cope with the authoritarian spectre of the near-absolute control and massive oppression that is available through technological surveillance;
- Analyses that focus on specific manifestations, processes, and practices of reactionary ideologization and mobilization as well as the counter-hegemonic responses to them;
- Studies that address the transformation of institutions and infrastructures that were built up or conceived to safeguard the rule of law and the principles of citizenship;

- Questions concerning the relation between national and regional actors, and the global struggle for cultural hegemony and the “global authoritarian populist axis”, as well as their relation to the general context of neocolonial, imperial relationships;
- Inquiries into the transformation of secular and religious politics as an integral part of policies designed to tighten the authoritarian grip;
- Discussions of the global impact of the uprisings in the MENA region.

Structure and Goals

The fellowships are funded by the [International Research Group on Authoritarianism and Counter-Strategies](#) of the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS), an initiative aimed at supporting critical research in and from countries of the Global South, and strengthening the dialogue between scholars and research-oriented artists and journalists from the Global South and North.

This call is made in cooperation with three Berlin-based research institutions: the [Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies](#) and the [Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies](#), both at the Freie Universität Berlin, and [Europe in the Middle East—The Middle East in Europe](#), a research programme at the Forum Transregionale Studien, to establish a working group that explores emancipatory strategies against authoritarian capitalism and reactionary politics with scholars from the Middle East.

Fellowship holders gain the opportunity to advance their own individual research and/or artistic projects and to collaborate closely with colleagues in an interdisciplinary and transregional research milieu.

They will become visiting researchers at one of the aforementioned institutions and fully take part in the academic and intellectual life of those institutions. They will also be fellows of the RLS International Research Group on Authoritarianism and Counterstrategies (IRGAC) that brings together more than 20 researchers from across the Global South.

Apart from advancing their own research, the fellowship holders are expected to work together in a joint project to map the most important, most virulent, or most promising struggles and strategies against the authoritarian transformations in the MENA region. At the end of the nine-month period, the research group should present a comprehensive paper/study on this issue that will serve as a basis to establish the framework of a more comprehensive research agenda for a future, long-term activist research project on counter-strategies in and from the region. The fellows are also expected to present ideas, positions, and preliminary findings of their work on a separate blog section of the research group’s website, and we strongly encourage the fellows to present their work in public or semi-public events such as an academic workshop series.

The fellowships explicitly aim to contribute to a more global conversation between scholars for a better understanding of the rising spread of authoritarianism and to advance the idea and praxis of just and democratic societies. We are particularly interested in approaches that propose comparative and international perspectives for and from the Global South on these issues, and are curious for an exchange on how diverse historical and contemporary experiences of authoritarian practices and counter-strategies contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon.

Requirements

Due to funding stipulations, only citizens of [ODA-recipient countries](#) are eligible to apply.

Applicants with academic research projects should have completed their PhD within the last five years.

Applicants with artistic or journalistic research projects should have completed studies up to Master's level and have professional experience that is comparable to a PhD.

Please note that in order to facilitate an ongoing and productive dialogue between scholars, the working language is English. Therefore, applicants are required to have a very good command of the English language.

Financial Support

The financial support provided to the researchers is calculated at €2,500 per month. In case this is necessary, return (economy class) airfares for intercontinental flights will be covered by the fellowship, as well as travel costs to attend events organized by the RLS. Additional project-related funds may be granted.

Submission

Please direct any queries and submit your application in one single PDF file (5 MB max; please name the file "SurnameName_application.pdf") to gmdp.application@rosalux.org.

We strongly encourage applicants to inform themselves about the research fields of each institution and propose one of them as the preferred host institution in their application.

Your application should include:

- A letter of motivation, including a statement on your preferred host institution and a brief description of political, social, and/or cultural engagement.
- An outline of the project you would like to carry out, consisting of:
 - abstract (max. 250 words);
 - research proposal (max. 2000 words);
 - project timeline; and
 - proposed outcomes.
- Curriculum vitae, including a publication list.

The publication list should be divided into publications in peer-reviewed journals, book chapters, and conference papers. For artistic researchers, please provide documentation of your work. If available, please provide a digital link to the publication.
- 2 names of referees.

We will inform all applicants of the results of the selection process by mid-March 2021.

Partners

For more information on the International Research Group on Authoritarianism and Counter-Strategies and the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, please visit:

www.irgac.org | www.rosalux.org



For information on the research programme “Europe in the Middle East – The Middle East in Europe” (EUME) and the Forum Transregionale Studien:

www.eume-berlin.de | www.forum-transregionale-studien.de



For more information on the Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin:

www.polsoz.fu-berlin.de/en/polwiss/forschung/international/vorderer-orient/index.html



For information on the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies at the Freie Universität Berlin:

<http://www.bgsmcs.fu-berlin.de/en/index.html>