

Call for Applications

## Situating Soft Authoritarianism Between Geopolitical Complexities and Everyday Practices

Yisares 2022: Young international Scholars Autumn Research School 2022

27-29 October 2022

University of Bremen

### The Topic

The Russian government's war against Ukraine has exposed multiple dimensions and geopolitical faultlines of contemporary authoritarianisms: The systematic hijacking of state institutions and accumulation of wealth through the extraction and capitalization of gas, oil and coal clearly stand out as indispensable preconditions for Russia's neo-imperialism and military power. The invasion has been accompanied by the dissemination of state-steered lies, disinformation and ethno-nationalist narratives. The remnants of independent media and the political opposition are threatened by a subordinated judiciary. And on a global scale the acquiescence of China and India to Russia's invasion indicates bolstered alliances between authoritarian and soft-authoritarian governments. Some pundits predict a geopolitical confrontation between an authoritarian block and seemingly re-consolidated "West". The reluctance of many postcolonial states to support Ukraine facing this attack by its imperial neighbor contributes to currently emerging geopolitical complexities.

These dynamics pose new challenges for any critical engagement with contemporary forms of authoritarianism, which range from fully fledged authoritarian regimes to

authoritarian practices within formal liberal democracies. War, securitization and anti-terrorism policies, suppression of movements against social inequalities and inhumane border regimes have time and again brought about violent policing or authoritarian legal and administrative measures also within liberal democracies. However, in past years, we have witnessed an increased dismantling of democracy from within. In a number of countries, such as Turkey, Poland, Hungary or India democratically elected politicians have managed to erode democratic principles, practices and institutions. They attack independent media and put immense effort into bringing courts under their political control. They meddle with constitutional law to impede procedures of accountability and dismantle fundamental human and citizens' rights and freedoms, to inhibit effective political participation and a functioning opposition. Often these shifts are accompanied by discursive practices variably discrediting migrants, sexual or religious minorities and political opponents. Gradually but systematically the rules of the political game are changed to secure the power of authoritarian governments and leaders, while maintaining a democratic façade.

## The Autumn Research School

During this autumn school we will take the emerging geopolitical complexities as entry point to explore and situate these forms of soft authoritarian government anew. We ask whether the current geopolitical situation impedes a further shift towards political rhetoric and interventions hollowing out democratic procedures and institutions. Or does it perhaps offer new opportunities for the tacit introduction of more authoritarian legislation, the mobilization of hate speech and the militarization of public life? What forms of transnational networks and relations of authoritarianisms can we observe?

In different thematic modules we will examine some of the legal, administrative, discursive and digital practices with which democracy is undermined in detail. We will look at how illiberal discourses are

normalized, institutions hijacked, laws rewritten, and zones of exception created. We will ask in which way these practices and discourses really manage to cover up their authoritarian intentions and deceive their citizens? And, finally, we will explore the forms and scales of violence hereby engendered.

Throughout the whole autumn school, we will also revisit the different concepts that have been developed to examine the recent conjuncture of populist, anti-liberal and authoritarian trends inside nominal democracies. Do we still dispose of the right vocabulary to analytically dissect the contemporary moment? Or do we need to adjust our conceptual and methodological toolset to make sense of authoritarianisms in exacerbated geopolitical complexities?

## Who can apply?

We invite applications from outstanding MA-students, PhD-candidates and postdoctoral researchers in political and social science, anthropology, cultural studies, geography, linguistics, law, international

relations or related disciplines. Participants are selected on the basis of the quality of their applications, which include your personal data, letter of motivation and an academic CV.

## Confirmed Speakers

**Evren Balta** (Özyeğin University)

**Éric Fassin** (Université Paris VIII Vincennes – Saint-Denis)

**Seraphine F. Maerz** (Goethe University Frankfurt)

**Shalini Randeria** (Central European University)

**Ranabir Samaddar** (Calcutta Research Group)

**Yatun Sastramidjaja** (University of Amsterdam)

**Kristóf Szombati** (Humboldt University Berlin)

**Renata Uitz** (Central European University)

## The Organizers

The Young International Scholars Autumn Research School is organized by the Research Group “Soft Authoritarianisms” at the U Bremen Excellence Chair Prof. Dr. Shalini Randeria, the U Bremen Research Project “Datenpolitiken und Autoritarismus: Digitale Verflechtungen und demokratische (Un-)Möglichkeiten”, the Research Training Group “Contradiction Studies” and the Collaborative Research Platform “Worlds of Contradiction” (WoC) at the University of Bremen. It is funded by the University of Bremen and WoC.

## Dates and Online Format

Due to the unforeseeable development of the COVID-19 and possible travel restrictions in autumn 2022 the research school will be held as an online event. The programme is divided into five modules on three consecutive days: 27-29 October 2022.

Due to the generous funding by the interdisciplinary research platform Worlds of Contradiction (WoC) and the University of Bremen, participation will be free of charge.

Please visit our website for more info and to submit your application:

<https://yisares.uni-bremen.de/>

If you have any questions don't hesitate to contact Natasha Deasy: [yisares@uni-bremen.de](mailto:yisares@uni-bremen.de)