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Understanding and confronting authoritarianism

MEETING REPORT
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ideas into movement

In June 2017, 35 researchers and activists from 20 countries joined TNI staff in Amsterdam to examine the new wave of authoritarian politics spreading worldwide and how movements committed to social and ecological justice might best challenge it. The intense discussions and debates took place over three days and offered rich insights. This report highlights some of the core themes and debates that emerged. Clearly, it would be impossible to discuss everything related to authoritarianism even in three days nor will a summary do justice to all its insights, but we hope it opens up some important issues and analysis that deserve more attention.

Defining terms

Authoritarianism and populism have become widely used terms as the likes of Trump, Duterte, Erdogan and Modi have come to power. Everywhere, there are concerns that we are entering a new authoritarian and populist era. The Brazilian committee for the World Social Forum in August 2017, for example, declared that 'the growth of reactionary and authoritarian thought, in Brazil, in Latin America and in the World, places us all advocates of a new world in the framework of solidarity, social justice, democracy and peace, in a state of alert and permanent mobilization, and demands a process of articulation and world unity of social movements'. Research undertaken by CIVICUS earlier in 2017 showed that only 3% of the world's population live in countries where the rights to protest, organise and speak out are respected, protected and realised. Even the World Economic Forum believes that we are 'entering a period that is easily recognizable as pre-authoritarian and fascistic'.

But what is authoritarianism and how does it differ from populism? The terms are often bandied about as if they were the same, but they are clearly not. Authoritarianism is typically understood as a form of government or politics that concentrates power, minimises political pluralism and represses civil society, often in the name of confronting a supposed 'enemy' within or without.

Populism is a more contentious term, but is usually understood as a form of politics that appeals to a certain group or imagination and claims to represent 'the people'. Doing so may be mobilised along class lines or by appealing to the majority of people seeking to challenge the concentration of power. Populism, however, is more often associated with charismatic and authoritarian leaders using the language of 'the people' but appealing to a single essentialised definition of culture, biology or ancestry. Some have argued for avoiding the term, given its ambiguity and because it often serves to limit discussions to structures of electoral politics, without touching upon deeper layers of social and economic power. Such critics propose instead a language of popular power or popular sovereignty.

Authoritarianism's long history...

The surge of concern about authoritarian politics might suggest that it is a new phenomenon. But if we understand authoritarianism as concentration of power, repression, and the creation of an enemy 'other', then it has a very long history indeed. Regimes from antiquity have more often than not been authoritarian.

From the post-war period until recently, however, 'authoritarian' generally referred to unelected or fraudulently elected governments, such as the military dictatorships experienced by many in the South or the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe. This helped bolster the legitimacy of liberal democracies, most of whose citizens enjoyed much greater freedom and capacity to shape policy than their counterparts in the Soviet bloc or in dictatorships and autocracies elsewhere. The wave of democratic revolutions in the 1990s, from Eastern Europe to Western Africa, suggested a permanent shift away from authoritarian rule. But instead, two decades later, the term is again on everyone's lips, more often than not referring to elected leaders who then undermine the liberal institutions of democracy (such as the judiciary) and restrict civil liberties, often demonising minorities in the process.

The roots of contemporary authoritarianism, however, lie in nominally liberal states. The former colonial powers such as France, the UK or the Netherlands, and settler states such as the US and Australia, have their origins in enslavement, genocide and dehumanisation and practiced an authoritarian politics. The Cold War argument that capitalist economics had a natural propensity to produce anti-authoritarian politics was never compelling and now looks weaker than ever. In the capitalist centres, governments have always, for example, been involved in the repression of labour. The early years of industrialisation already saw the demonisation and repression of the poor, the indigent, political movements of workers – anyone who was not part of a docile waged labour force. Later, as social struggles won democratic space, capital was always willing to sacrifice democracy to repress labour. Chile under military rule was a classic example, as corporations and neoliberal ideologues quickly abandoned promises of freedom when Pinochet offered the opportunities of liberalised capital.

For many countries of the South, liberalism has more often meant tyranny rather than democracy. After all, modern liberal democracies were built on the slavery and dehumanisation of Black bodies and the genocide of indigenous peoples. They thrived and continue to do so on the brutal extraction of resources, and today stand behind a border regime that considers tens of thousands of migrants who die trying to cross militarised borders as essentially 'disposable'[1]. This dehumanisation of people in order to exercise power is integral to capitalism and imperialism. The rise of civil rights, independence and anti-colonial movements challenged this, but many of the post-independence leaders have eventually replicated or at least perpetuated the systems of domination.

The practice of pacification helps to understand this process. Initially practised in the colonies before being imported into the imperial metropoles, pacification (or counter-insurgency) builds upon the coercive and productive dimensions of power. The goal is to obtain and maintain political and economic control over territories by winning 'hearts and minds'. This involves moderating the violence of war, domination and exploitation with promises of civilization, progress and development in order to limit or prevent the rebellion of those who have been colonised or repressed. Colonial regimes trialled authoritarian systems, such as surveillance and internment camps, and developed the counter-insurgency tactics that deliberately sought to undermine the social fabric. These tactics were then adopted back home and continue to be used, for example in extra-judiciary rendition sites or in urban security policies.

Despite this, there remains a collective amnesia about the authoritarian heritage of colonialism. France's 1958 constitution, for example, was passed in the midst of colonial repression and blood-soaked war in Algeria, and even now privileges the white population in the name of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) or to defend its *laïcité* (secularism). There continues to be blindness to the ways Western democracies have been built on authoritarian systems of control, or how the vast majority of people in the South have long experienced authoritarianism as the 'normal' rather than unusual system of governance.

The failure even to look at more recent history, which has seen an exorable trend towards restrictions on civil liberties and breaches of human rights conventions, means that we fail to appreciate how much of the groundwork for authoritarianism was laid by earlier 'liberal' leaders. Failure to understand our history means that many of the liberal 'solutions' on offer – that seek mainly to roll back the latest attacks more egregious attacks on civil liberties - will do little to stop the steady and long-term institutional embrace of authoritarian politics.

In this sense, the recent attention to authoritarianism suggests not greater but rather a lack of awareness of the authoritarian tendencies and trends within capitalism, imperialism and contemporary 'liberal' governments. It appears that the myth that capitalism equates to democracy and increased freedom still holds sway.

...and deep roots

Authoritarianism is embedded in systems of domination that long pre-date either capitalism or imperialism. It is certainly embedded in racism, and in patriarchy. There have of course been female authoritarians, but it is very noticeable that the current crop of major authoritarian leaders are all men, many of them known for their misogynistic attitudes and practices. They project an image of being the 'big man' in charge, are disproportionately supported by movements of men who are fuelled by a toxic culture of fear and resentment of women as well as anyone who does not conform to their assumptions of 'normal' sexuality. The Alternative for Germany party, AfD, for example, has declared a war on gender mainstreaming – which means assessing the gendered impacts of any public policy. And when authoritarians succeed in winning power, many enact policies that undermine women's rights and encourage a culture of abuse and violence against women.

The state itself replicates systems of domination that tend towards the concentration and extension of power. Many progressive movements pay too little attention to the dangers of state power. In seeking to gain power, left movements and parties often fail to examine how it is used and how it changes us – a lesson that social movements have learnt to their cost in the 'pink tide' that swept Latin America in the last decade. Governments brought to power by social movements have often ended up repressing those very movements, using a discourse of 'development' and 'the people' to dispossess communities of their land, water and environment in order to extract wealth, and have in the process demobilised social movements. Now that the region swings back to the right, social movements now lack the same strength to effectively resist.

What's new?

The long history and deep roots of authoritarianism does not mean there is nothing new about this moment. The number of authoritarian governments, the rise of reactionary right-wing parties, the closing down of democratic space and repression of social and labour movements, feels like a shock for good reasons.

There are new dimensions to the authoritarianism that come from mainstream politicians' open embrace of racist and xenophobic rhetoric, and the fact that today's authoritarian leaders tend to come to power through elections and not through military-style coups such as the Pinochet's and Mobutu's of the past.

Perhaps the most significant change is the technological context, which has allowed states unprecedented power to monitor, survey and control people and enabled corporations to have access to our inner lives and thinking. There has been an explosion of databases containing our personal data, which state authorities or law-enforcement agencies can access. These contain not only the data we deliberately submit, but also increasingly track our daily actions – the way we use the internet, our communications and networks. Our willingness to hand over our thoughts, our network of relationships (the meta-data) to commercial companies, combined with the acceleration of state surveillance since 9/11, has created a world beyond anything George Orwell might have imagined. The rhetoric that only people who have something to hide need privacy has become extremely hegemonic. The result is a society where privacy is ever more threatened and surveillance ever more pervasive. And we have yet to properly digest the consequences.

Many have praised the possibilities that technology has provided to progressive social movements, but it has also enabled the far right to mobilise and connect, whether it's the social media cohorts that cheer on and bully opponents of Modi or Duterte or the European fascists that crowdfunded a 'Defend Europe' boat in 2017 to disrupt migrant rescue boats.

The GWOT has also made security and authoritarian politics an increasingly transnational enterprise. Whether through surveillance systems, drones, black sites, or blacklisting, the politics of security is increasingly transnational with almost no accountability and often with no legal redress. So, someone can be detained at a border in one country, due to the demands of the government of another country, under guidelines drafted somewhere else, with lawyers prohibited from obtaining any knowledge of the decisions behind the detention. This is a transnational authoritarianism that is qualitatively different from anything we have seen before.

The other dynamics that are particular to this moment of authoritarian politics are the global convergence of crises – economic, social and ecological. These crises, far from being resolved, are more often made worse by today's political leaders as any effective response requires systemic changes that elites will never self-initiate. The emerging convergence of parties from left and right behind neoliberal policies has led to the political establishment to focus more on managing crises rather than resolving them. As a result, ever more people are becoming vulnerable and precarious as politicians retreat to increasingly authoritarian forms of politics and economics.

Market authoritarianism

While capitalism has always been intertwined with autocracy, neoliberalism accelerated a process which has hollowed out politics and citizenship in favour of the rights of corporations. Friedrich Hayek helped establish the popular myth that free markets were about freedom as his ideas successfully set in motion a well-financed 'march through the institutions' to change public opinion against regulations that discipline capital. However, the contradictions between a democracy supposed to serve and answer to the majority and a neoliberal plan that concentrates wealth and power in a few hands have never been overcome. Moreover, they have been exacerbated by a post-war economic reality of systemic overproduction that has periodically caused financial crises. In the process, time and again, wealth and power have trumped democracy and human rights. Orlando Letelier, TNI's second director, speaking about Chile in 1976, acknowledged this when he said the terror inflicted by Pinochet and his neoliberal reforms were not two distinct strands of politics but integrated: 'Repression for the majorities and "economic freedom" for small privileged groups are in Chile two sides of the same coin'.

Liberalising markets and giving corporations free rein requires disciplining labour and popular movements and limiting democratic accountability. This has been facilitated by a massive rise and concentration of corporate power: Corporations now make up 69 of the 100 world's richest economic entities. They have secured this impregnable position by funding and buying elections, winning judicial protections under investment treaties, as well as creating think tanks and 'astroturf' campaigning organisations to advocate for their interests. This has been accompanied by a systematic attempt to undermine social movements that protest against corporate power by attacking their legitimacy, accountability and funding, and even infiltrating them with corporate spies.

Financial capital has become particularly powerful, investing not in production that could create jobs, but in speculative schemes that reap huge profits for their shareholders but do little to improve welfare and also create a highly fragile global economy. A Zurich university study that examined 43,000 TNCs showed that just 147 companies, mostly financial firms, controlled 40% of them. The collapse of any these super-connected companies could cause systemic collapse, as we almost witnessed in the 2007/08 global financial crisis.

The power of the financial elites has become ever more visible to people worldwide as the experiences of many nations in the South in the 1980s and 1990s caused by Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) arrived in the North with the politics of bailouts for the banks and austerity for the people. This process has also been enforced transnationally, with bodies such as the European Commission policing market authoritarianism. This was brutally clear in the aftermath of the Greek referendum in July 2015, when the 61% of voters who rejected the conditions of the Commission's bailout deal were told in no uncertain terms that democracy had no value if it meant challenging banks or financial markets. 'Elections change nothing', was how Wolfgang Schäuble, Germany's finance minister of the time put it. Or in the words of the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, 'There can be no democratic choice against the European treaties'.

A 2014 US study which examined 1,779 policy outcomes over more than 20 years revealed how alienated public institutions have become from the public they supposedly served, finding almost no correlation between public opinion and public policy. Public policy decisions almost exclusively reflected the views of corporations and elites. In many countries, the corporate capture of politics has also been accompanied by ever more outrageous cases of corruption coming to light, at the same time that work has become more insecure and wages stagnant or in decline.

The global consequences of this neoliberal push have been a dramatic increase in inequality and social insecurity in most countries, a systemic undermining of collective organisations such as trade unions that supported and provided community and solidarity for working people, the corporate capture of the political system and an ecological system that has been brought close to breaking point. The result has been a collapse of the centre in politics and of the legitimacy of the political system itself.

It is in this context that most Social Democratic parties – which tried to marry a commitment to globalisation and neoliberalism with a politics of empathy for those who lose out – found they could not square the two. Most ended up embracing market authoritarianism and ending their commitment to redistribution. They were unable to address how globalisation, including shifts in technology and work, is accelerating uncertainty and insecurity for millions of people. Nor could they find solutions to the 2007/08 global financial meltdown or to the unfolding environmental and climate crisis.

Many people worldwide, increasingly including the middle class, threatened and alienated by the political system, have ended up in a political void. This has led many to embrace a victimising politics that blames and targets the 'other' (refugees, Muslims, drug-users, welfare recipients, Eurocrats), in which authoritarian leaders who promise to clean up the mess become ever more attractive. A politics that appeals to place, identity, emotion and sentimentality, while deliberately blaming certain 'other' groups, becomes appealing and is seen as a solution to people's feelings of insecurity, anxiety and alienation. Furthermore, a largely corporate-controlled media that is obsessed with personalities rather than policies ensures that authoritarian leaders receive disproportionate public attention.

Authoritarian policies are also what the state is most easily able to implement, as security policy is one of the few areas of government authority that has escaped the market. With the rise in social instability, states therefore all too easily default to disciplining dissidents and the dispossessed. Politicians who promise more security can appeal to an alienated electorate, and once in power are able to wield a more powerful state security apparatus than ever before.

Era of permanent war

Wars and the creations of internal or external enemies have always been a stock in trade for authoritarian leaders, so the era of 'permanent war' has been a boon for this new wave of authoritarians. While there have been various proxy wars in past decades – such as the Cold War, or the war against drugs – 9/11 nevertheless proved to be a pivotal moment when the US reacted by treating a major crime as an act of war. Autocratic leaders worldwide rushed to join Washington's GWOT and the world has been dealing with the consequences ever since.

In the countries where the wars erupted or escalated, primarily across the greater Middle East and North Africa region as well as Afghanistan, the violence and foreign occupations fuelled the rise of reactionary extremist movements such as ISIS/Daesh while existing terrorist organisations and networks continued to thrive. The ensuing violence and chaos provided governments everywhere, authoritarian and not, with excuses to repress all dissent – far beyond supporters of extremist forces. The result 16 years on is that authoritarian leaders worldwide have had their hand strengthened.

In the Middle East and North Africa, the escalation of wars and the consolidation of authoritarian leaders and movements, has created the largest number of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in that region since World War II. Many thousands of these people have sought refuge in Europe, and have been used by authoritarian and neo-fascist elements in Europe and by the Trump administration, to build racist, xenophobic and particularly Islamophobic movements in order to win public support and ultimately state power.

As the GWOT spread, it enabled certain countries to construct an authoritarian system of control that would have been hard to imagine prior to 9/11. Many of the methodologies and technologies of authoritarianism that are enacted in contemporary imperial ventures (Afghanistan, Iraq, Niger, Pakistan) or under occupation (West Bank and Gaza) are then deployed at rich countries' borders against migrants, and finally imported back into their own societies, aimed first at Muslims and people of colour and later at other movements, such as environmental activists who are seen as posing a threat to economic and state interests.

Unrestricted surveillance, blacklisting and vetting, detention without trial, and even killings of suspects (through drone-based assassination campaigns) have, in the name of security, become everyday modes of governance. Initially introduced as temporary and exceptional powers to deal with a particular security threat, they then become permanent, often with little political debate.

In the process of normalising authoritarian measures, the permanent war has added dynamism to the policies of mass incarceration, the militarisation of the police and the shrinking of activist space worldwide, while also creating the conditions – for example, ramping up Islamophobia – for justifying more imperial wars. The guns pointed at the amorphous target of 'terrorism' are pointed both outwards and inwards, turning whole communities into suspects and undermining the social fabric of trust. In the US, the FBI now has 15,000 informants, 10 times more than during the Hoover era.[2] The Prevent policy in the UK requires every civil servant, doctor, teacher and public official in the country to be trained to spot dubious signs of 'radicalisation', based on unsubstantiated theories that it inevitably leads to terrorism.

In France, Islamophobia has become so normalised that the state is able to close mosques and hold Muslim suspects without trial. Its continuing state of emergency has further legitimised discrimination against people of one religious faith while also serving as a convenient tool to silent dissent, particularly of left-wing activists.

The broader culture of suspicion created by the GWOT, presenting certain communities as a problem, allows the far right to thrive – often only articulating what is implicit in so much of mainstream politics today. The liberal elite shock at the election of the presidents of India, Philippines, Turkey

and the US hides the fact that their own policies created the fertile terrain which the right is now exploiting to brutal effect.

The fact that so many states are also 'captured' by corporations means that the industries that benefit most from this climate of suspicion (such as prisons, surveillance, and military and security equipment) are both driving the process forward and earning handsome rewards. It also means a constant diversion of resources from social needs to the ever-increasing budgets for wars and national security, fuelling vicious cycles of economic and social insecurity in which a politics of authoritarianism can thrive.

It is now commonly accepted that there is never enough security, so the only response to any terrorist attack is a further restriction of civil liberties. The paradigm of security has become so normalised that many are blind to it, particularly as its impacts play out so differently according to race and class. The militarisation of the police in the US, for example, and its realities in terms of the huge numbers of deaths and imprisonment of Black Americans, became a mainstream issue (or even a concern for many white activists) only when Black Lives Matter activists made it visible. In France, a state of emergency approved in the wake of the Bataclan massacre has now been made permanent by law. In the Philippines, the regular and constant use of violence against mainly impoverished and powerless drug users has become so normalised – and supported by an army of social media trolls – that ever fewer dare to raise their voice.

The left and progressive forces in general have struggled or failed to challenge this permanent war. While the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 mobilised many critics throughout the world, there have been no similar broad-based movements to tackle the ever-increasing surveillance and curtailment of civil liberties in the war against extremism. Populist politicians of the left, such as Jeremy Corbyn in the UK, have challenged the War on Terror, but have rarely been prepared to challenge the growth of the security state at home. Indeed, some prominent left-wing governments in Latin America, notably Venezuela but also Ecuador and Bolivia, rather than opposing authoritarianism have replicated it in their own responses to popular protests against the extractive industries of oil, gas and mining.

From the borders to the *banlieue*

As national borders have become increasingly militarised, they have served as areas in which to trial new authoritarian tools and technologies. Immigrants, who have often already lived under neo-colonial policies, are now subjected to militarised borders as they leave (or flee) their homes, treated as dangerous threats to security. Consequently, international human rights are not just ignored but absent altogether. European governments that used to talk about supporting the development of a good neighbourhood of Mediterranean democratic states have maintained their neo-colonialist habits of cooperating with dictators, signing agreements with the most authoritarian regimes such as those in Chad, Egypt and Turkey, in order to keep migrants out. At the same time, they also continue to fuel the wars that create the refugees, even rewarding those involved: a 2016 TNI report showed that three of the biggest European arms sellers to the Middle East are also the major beneficiaries of EU security research funding.

Increasingly, both the language and legislation to deal with migration and terrorism are merging, with the same legal systems being used to criminalise migrants and even those who offer them humanitarian support. Again, the language of Trump – who uses the terms Mexicans, criminals, and terrorists interchangeably – is simply a crude expression of a system in full swing. Worldwide, more than 60 national borders are being established in a way that denies migrants any legal rights. Meanwhile, rescue ships in the Mediterranean and humanitarian organisations offering assistance to refugees are being harassed and threatened by EU and neighbouring countries, rather than being supported and funded.

Clearly, how these border regimes play out is shaped by people's ethnic and religious identity, class and sex: there is intersectionality in how vulnerable people become under an authoritarian border-based regime. For instance, of all migrants and refugees, women and girls systematically experience greater levels of violence at every stage – from embarking on migration journeys to the detention centres.

How border policies and practices act as the testing ground for authoritarian politics can be seen in the way they are applied to urban security. Since the 1970s, urban security forces have shifted away from policies covering all citizens and towards a focus on specific populations. In the process, new 'suspect' communities have been constructed, many of them now experiencing still greater surveillance and control. The fact that many of the people under surveillance had already experienced border repression is just part of the evolving continuity between border and *banlieue*, or urban areas where immigrant populations are concentrated.

Varying contours of authoritarianism

While many of these elements underlie global authoritarian trends, they take distinctive shapes in different countries. The workshop participants heard presentations from activist scholars in France, Hungary, India, the Philippines, South Africa, US and Venezuela.

In France, Islamophobia has been the entry-point for authoritarian politics built on a long colonial history in North Africa. The state of emergency declared after the Bataclan massacre, which led to closure of mosques and detention of many Muslims without trial, for example, was later used against environmental activists. Much of this is justified as defending secularism (*laïcité*), but has in practice proved a one-sided secularism allowing the state to dictate people's choice of clothing and to close down mosques, but not accepting criticism of state institutions for effectively excluding and discriminating against one religion.

In Hungary, in contrast to Western Europe, Orban's rise can hardly be described as signalling a decline in a capitalist democratic experiment, as the country and much of Eastern Europe has barely experienced it. Hungary's transition to a market economy after 1989 was coupled with high levels of social insecurity, fuelled by high levels of debt, and the country was in financial crisis by 2006. Orban's Fidesz party has channelled anger at a delegitimised model of development dependent on foreign investment, loans and austerity into attacks on migration and international institutions and law, while continuing to use EU funds to subsidise nationalist capitalist elites.

In India, Modi's authoritarian project is certainly not a recent phenomenon. It has been deliberately constructed through the work of a religious body, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which has for more than 80 years systematically built a ground-up campaign to advance Hindu nationalism. After consolidating local and state power it is now steadily gaining control of institutions such as the Executive, Congress, Election Commission and the Supreme Court, while mobilising its considerable social base to use coercive and non-coercive means to create fear and to undermine dissent. This is a profound threat, but very different to the type of top-down authoritarianism in China, for instance.

The rise of Duterte in the Philippines reflects in part a form of historical amnesia regarding the deadly human costs of the Marcos regime. It also shows the appeal of authoritarians even to the left – Duterte initially won support from Maoist groups because of his anti-establishment rhetoric and his supportive stance towards China and Russia. Experience in the Philippines also demonstrates how authoritarian regimes affect citizens in very different ways, as the war on drugs largely affects poor and petty drug users, or people from powerless, marginalised communities, which means there is limited public opposition to the killings.

In its early years, the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela balanced state-led initiatives with dynamic community-based mobilisation. However, dependence on oil revenues and the drive to set up a unified socialist party gradually consolidated a more hierarchical autocratic structure in which state control was paramount. The oil crisis – and the government's failure to respond effectively, coupled with the systematic right-wing and US attempts to undermine the revolution – have solidified an increasingly authoritarian tendency. Central to this is the failure of the Bolivarian government to escape its huge dependence on oil, which made Venezuela a rentier state, encouraging corruption and mismanagement at all levels. The example of Venezuela shows that even popular participatory democratic experiments of the 'left' can all too quickly exhibit authoritarian characteristics in the absence of sufficiently powerful popular counterbalancing efforts to the centralising tendencies of the state and the political economy of extractivism.

Fractures among elites

The global advance of neoliberalism and its divisive consequences have created new and varied fractures among global elites. In the US particularly, but also in Brazil and across Europe, these have fuelled the rise of a nationalist right, which remains committed to extending corporate and military power, but seeks to frame it within a unilateralist nationalist framework.

The so-called 'state destruction' faction (as former Trump advisor Steve Bannon dubbed it) rejects some of the tenets of orthodox neoliberalism such as a commitment to corporate trade deals or international blocs such as the EU. They are also strongly opposed to the Davos elite, those linked to the World Economic Forum, which promotes international cooperation through new forms of governance in order to 'improve the state of the world'.

This has caused a great deal of discomfort and division among global corporate elites, who have invested in institutions such as the EU and World Trade Organization (WTO) to expand their markets. Culturally, many are also uncomfortable with the 'state destruction' faction's reactionary views on

gender, sexuality and ethnicity. Nevertheless, many corporate elites have ultimately proved very willing to embrace the nationalist right, as can be seen in how Goldman Sachs' employees have bolstered Trump's administration, or the support of corporate executives for the Conservative party in the UK, notwithstanding its pursuit of Brexit. It reflects in part the fact that TNCs (despite being called transnational) remain very dependent on an enabling state and are comfortable with limiting the state to its more repressive role in order to defend their interests.

In Russia and China, and also India, the dynamics have so far maintained much closer links between capital and the ruling classes, fewer divisions among elites, and a more compliant media. Perhaps partly as a result, the torch for globalisation seems today to be passing to countries like China, evidenced by Premier Xi Jinping being the keynote speaker at the World Economic Forum in January 2017, the same month that Trump took office. Given the authoritarian nature of the Chinese regime, its embrace of globalisation reveals again the willingness of neoliberal elites to ditch anti-authoritarian rhetoric if it serves the interests of corporate capital.

The right's strengths, the left's weaknesses

The rise of right-wing authoritarianism cannot be understood without also appreciating the strengths and advantages that enabled it not only to survive a global crisis of neoliberalism but in some cases to emerge strengthened. The right has succeeded in maintaining its hegemony by controlling the media and offering clear and simple answers to issues violence and insecurity, compared to the sometimes over-intellectualised solutions put forward by the left.

This appearance of straight-talking is also possibly why the right has been more effective in capturing resentment against politicians and pinned it on a 'leftist' establishment – the politician in a faraway capital, the university academics in their ivory towers, the paid NGO campaigners – all of whom are presented as being out of touch with the reality of 'ordinary working people'. In so doing, of course, they redirect any focus away from the corporate elites. And their work has been facilitated by a corporate media that largely fails to examine the systemic causes or social consequences of neoliberal policies and hence has created an environment in which the politics of distraction and diversion can flourish.

The right has also most successfully captured the politics of place or sense of identity at a time when these are most threatened by globalisation. The left has struggled with politics of place and identity, which combines both issues of self-determination and also of control and power. It has either dismissed their importance or fallen into simplistic identity politics that divides rather than builds emancipatory broad-based mass movements. It has sometimes failed to appreciate that identity is a good place to start but is not the destination. And the right – both political parties but also governments like those of Russia and India – have successfully occupied this space, appealing particularly to a nationalist or religious or racist rhetoric as a unifying force. The left needs to embrace people's wish for control but to channel that in emancipatory directions. The challenge is how to combine a desire for control and a politics that appeals to people's emotions and identities, yet is internationalist and inclusive rather than exclusive.

Moving forward

A strong articulated response by the left is clearly needed to address the complex and deep-rooted causes of today's authoritarianism. This will happen only if we learn from the past and articulate the most appropriate responses to the issues we now face. Social movements worldwide are gaining strength, while the contradictions and failures of the authoritarian right project are becoming clear – because its rise is really a symptom of the systemic crisis and does not provide real solutions. At the same time, as people become more organized and vocal, they become more of a threat to states which is an additional reason for the rise in repression.

Here are some of the principles and practices that were raised as important elements to integrate into the resistance to authoritarian leaders and the construction of an anti-authoritarian future.

Nobody is illegal or disposable

Fundamental to any project that responds to authoritarianism is a rejection of any politics and practices that dehumanise people or deny control or agency over their lives – whether it is deciding whether it is safe for an asylum seeker to return to a country or regulating how people use their social benefits. It rejects outright the view that any person's life or status is of no value or illegal – and resoundingly rejects any normalisation of the deaths of people that capitalism considers to be disposable. It also rejects seeing people as victims, rather than as people who have been dehumanised by systems of oppression, and who through collective struggle can achieve a dignified life.

Building bold, emancipatory, internationalist movements

Real democracy has always come out of struggle, particularly by those who have been dehumanised and demand dignity and respect. We need to learn from past struggles, such as the anti-colonial and civil rights struggle or, turning to history, the Haitian revolution, which articulated an inspiring emancipatory vision of society that could bridge multiple identities and mobilise change against the divisive appeals of the right or the elite-shaped universalism that promotes the 'market' and globalisation.

Some left 'populist' movements such as Podemos in Spain or Corbyn's Labour in the UK are moving in this direction, finding a language to capture the idea of the majority, the so-called 99%. But there is still much more to be done to ensure this 'universal' vision is also intersectional and able to deal with multiple oppressions at the same time. Progressive movements have ignored and side-lined marginalised communities in the past and thereby perpetuated practices of oppression. It can no longer say 'this first'. True solidarity comes from the recognition that everyone's liberation is bound up with everyone else's. Struggles like that of Standing Rock, deeply rooted in place yet inherently internationalist, provide some sense of how this might look.

Gender emancipation

Foregrounding feminism in collective responses is not only a matter of resisting authoritarians who frequently seek to reinforce patriarchy, it is also critical to building an anti-authoritarian politics and practice. A feminist politics pushes us to examine all aspects of life in an integral way (not just the state and production, but also reproduction, family, society) and to find new ways of exercising power.

Personal and collective action

Confronting authoritarianism requires personal and collective action. To defend privacy, for example, will mean taking personal responsibility to protect those in our networks who are most vulnerable to repression, combined with collective action – mobilisation, legal action, education, legislation and the building of alternatives to corporate-led communications.

Defending and advancing human rights

The universal framework of human rights was one of the most important popular victories in the post-war period and is a critical legal tool with which to challenge authoritarianism. In the face of a concerted attack on human rights by a reactionary right and by states ever more openly breaching their obligations, it is critical to defend these rights and in particular the idea that human rights are universal. This should include an expansive propositional view of rights based on struggles to create citizen-led spaces for advancing social and environmental justice.

Designing a progressive security policy

Right-wing forces in many countries have captured the discourse on war and security, but public opinion has not been completely won over. The situation varies from one country to another, but progressive movements have largely failed to confront the expansion of the security state at home and have increasingly ignored the continued expansion of wars abroad. As a result, left-wing politicians, including some of the most radical, are afraid to challenge the war economy and security state in which they live. The left needs to reclaim leadership in working to end all wars, across the globe and at home, and make internationalism and solidarity central to our movements. It needs to offer a different vision from the high-tech, high-security one on offer – a vision that dismantles an increasingly impregnable and Orwellian security surveillance state and tackles the root causes of violence and extremism, racism and xenophobia and defends human rights.

This must involve developing practical solutions and answers to people's insecurities. These solutions can take many forms – whether it's homes for refugees or collectively-owned enterprises providing jobs in rural areas – but they provide an opportunity to try out anti-authoritarian modes of living while meeting people's practical needs.

Reclaiming the state

Tackling authoritarianism necessarily involves dealing with the state, which enacts authoritarian policies, whether on behalf of corporations or a small elite, and has been the arena for the concentration of power and the steady trend towards authoritarianism. Any resistance to authoritarianism must deal with the state and consider occupying and democratising it or replacing it with new structures (e.g. questioning the nation/state nexus). But the question of how to do this without falling into the same structures and tendencies has to be addressed. Movements need more critical thinking on how power operates and is exercised within states in order to construct an anti-authoritarian practice. It is also critical to ensure that popular movements remain independent, in order to challenge and hold states, governments and political parties accountable and to counterbalance their tendency to centralisation.

Challenging the extractivist capitalist economy

The realities of contemporary capitalism is that a great deal of wealth and products are produced in exploitative ways through complex global supply chains. A politics that seeks merely to change domestic policies will not change this reality. In effect, the redistribution of wealth in one country is redistributing the spoils of victory. The age-old argument that you can't have 'socialism in one country' is even more relevant in a globalised economy. It is a conundrum – and makes the challenge greater – but the left needs to look beyond redistribution to critically examine, propose and change our systems of production in a global context.

Creative communication

Authoritarianism thrives on a polarised discourse, increasingly represented in the bubbles of information and knowledge that people inhabit. We need creative ways to tell the human stories that can burst through these bubbles. In some countries, like the US, there is a need to challenge racism and protect vulnerable communities, while also reaching mainly rural white voters whose disaffection has been captured by racist leaders. In many countries, it will also involve an honest retelling of our collective histories in order to confront the historical revisionism deliberately encouraged by many of today's autocrats.

Culture and economy of the commons

Building or rebuilding a commons-based economy and society has the potential to connect with and transcend identity and place. By placing value on what people contribute, rather than treating them as labour or consumers from whom to extract profit, it humanises exchange, encourages collaboration and discourages authoritarian approaches. Redefining rights as rights to contribute, and to have access to common resources, can also challenge the exclusionary aspects of a system of rights based on the nation-state, giving rights to contributors and users of common goods regardless of geographical location.

A commons governance framework is also likely to be more transparent, flexible, locally responsive, and trustworthy and provides a way to practise democracy fully, thus working against authoritarian abuses of power. It is not new, since it is the primary form of governance for many indigenous communities. For some of these communities, the commons is also bound up with territory and spirituality in which humans and nature are part of each other. Hence the commons can provide a model for rethinking politics, governments and the state, the market, households and also our relationship with nature.

The challenge is to work out how to scale up the many (re)emerging commons-based initiatives to provide the financial, political and legal frameworks in which they can flourish, to explore ways to integrate their governance within the economic sectors of state, market, commons and households, and to continue to build the international connections and 'virtual' international communities that can offer some kind of challenge to corporate-led globalisation.

Notes

1. Democracy as it emerged in the US, as Italian philosopher Domenico Losurdo argues, was seen as something reserved exclusively for white men, in particular slave owners, a so-called *herrenvolk*.

2. https://theintercept.com/2017/01/31/the-fbi-gives-itself-lots-of-rope-to-pull-in-informants/