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**Abstract**

American university globalization has increasingly targeted and been courted by authoritarian states. While the reasons for these partnerships are manifoldâ€”including the ease of top-down large-scale monetary investment, â€œknowledge economyâ€• development strategies, social engineering programs, and other corporate and imperial entanglementsâ€”an overwhelming discourse has emerged around higher education initiatives in places like the Arabian Peninsula, China, Singapore, and Central Asia that juxtaposes liberalism (in the form of higher education) with the illiberal, authoritarian contexts it is supposedly encountering within the framework of neoliberal globalization. Through a discussion of American branch campuses in Qatar and the UAE, this article traces a more complex web of actors whose interests may include neoliberal and imperial inclinations but are not reducible to them. By focusing on the discursive framings of these branch campus initiatives, we

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show how the notion of “liberal education” operates as a global discourse of power through American branch campuses in the Arabian Peninsula and, by extension, other nondemocratic states around the world. Specifically, we argue that the very concept of “authoritarianism” is discursively produced in and through these university projects, and simultaneously builds (upon) an idealized narrative about the national self in the United States that erases existing and emerging inequalities—indeed, authoritarianisms—within the home spaces of American academia. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)