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## **Theatre and Illiberal Regimes**

### ***A workshop at the Institute for Advanced Study***

Central European University, Budapest

**14-15 April 2025**

The year 2024 has been a difficult for democracy around the world. Illiberal gains across the world consolidated a pre-existent global ascendance. The workshop hosted by the *IAS CEU* in Budapest in partnership with *Mozarteum Salzburg* explores how illiberal regimes instrumentalize theatre to support and bolster their political agenda locally and in international contexts.

The event aims to look at a variety of cases from the illiberal spectrum (from one-party states to theocracies and various forms of authoritarianism) to uncover continuities in terms of individual regimes' deployment, today and in the past, of theatre to acquire symbolic capital, while also facing contestation from civic agency advocating pluralism and progressiveness.

Illiberalism is a contested idea with an ambiguous history. The term "illiberal democracy" has become a buzzword in response to the populist wave since 2010. While it has been tied to the current global wave of populism, the concept can aptly connect the pre- and post-1989 eras. It allows for promising research vistas centered on states that have, at various times since the 1970s, rejected the primacy of liberal democratic political and cultural values. Scholars warn against over-stressing similarities between fascism, state socialism, and illiberal regimes today. However, comparing their cultural policies and their approaches to cultural diplomacy has the potential to offer a more refined understanding of pathways to de-democratization. Comparison combined with a long-term perspective to illiberal internationalism can broaden our understanding of the global alliances and networks that fuel the rise and visibility of authoritarianisms today.

The event organized at IAS CEU follows a 2023 workshop held at *global dis:connect*, a Käte Hamburger research centre at LMU entitled *Theatre, globalisation and illiberal regimes after 1989*. The workshop proceedings confirmed the need for a wider understanding of illiberal engagement with theatre as a global phenomenon.

The event planned at IAS CEU takes the comparative approach further by investigating to what extent do the networks that illiberal regimes create and that allow them to learn from each other and protect their interests, have an impact on theatre both locally and internationally. It also aims to discuss comparatively how illiberal regimes implement cultural policies that curtail artistic production and how theatre institutions become instruments of de-democratization. Relatedly, we wish to examine how domestic struggles for democracy (i.e., cultural pluralism, artistic independence and

progressiveness) reverberate internationally to counterbalance the use of theatre for purposes of illiberal globalization.

The organizers are interested in a number of research questions (though other themes are welcomed):

- what is the role of theatre in processes of de-democratization?
- how do artists resist these processes and how is resistance organized?
- how can we compare various cases of illiberal engagement with theatre locally and internationally?
- how do the illiberal internationalizations affect theatre as a global, institutional and aesthetical phenomenon/construct?
- how can we conceptualize illiberalism in connection to theatre practice?

We welcome contributions both from scholars working on theatre in illiberal contexts and from artists that have been directly affected by them.

The workshop will be held in **Budapest at IAS CEU, on 14-15 April 2025**. Papers are to be shared among participants by April first.

Abstracts of no more than 300 words should be sent to Viviana Iacob at the following address [IacobV@ceu.edu](mailto:IacobV@ceu.edu) and **by February 27, 2025**.