

Masks off: Critical Theory after Liberalism

Wednesday 3 June 2026 10:45 (1h 30m)

This roundtable considers what the current conjuncture, marked by the unravelling of a liberal order, means for critical theorising. Critical scholarship in the field of International Relations has long been preoccupied with exposing liberalism's contradictions, illuminating how it functions to mask social violence on a global scale. Yet as liberalism declines, this raises questions over whether such analyses are equipped to diagnose and address the morbid symptoms that characterise the present ascendancy of the global far right. As recent interventions have underscored, notions of homonationalism and pinkwashing, as well as critiques of liberal inclusion more broadly, appear to address a set of concrete conditions from another time. This roundtable asks how we got here, and whether critical theory has the tools to help us navigate what many refer to as the current 'masks off' moment. Participants will consider how social reproduction, race, sexuality, and class have become sites where liberalism's disintegration is most acutely felt, and how critical theory might reimagine its project beyond the ruins of the liberal international order. The panel asks: What is lost, if anything, in the rubble? And what is the role of critical thought under ascending fascism?

Track Classification: Colonial, Postcolonial and Decolonial Working Group