

**IHSS Research Seminar Program 2023**

**“Postcolonial political theory:  
Tracing the contours of an emerging subfield”**

**Dr Rachel Busbridge**

Co-convened by Dr Kristie Flannery & Dr Killian Quigley

**Tuesday 4 April 2023, 1-2pm AEST**

To be held in room 460.3.01 and online via Teams

**Abstract:** Postcolonial thinkers have long made sweeping critiques of Western political theory and its intimate relationship to colonialism. Arguing that the norms, categories, and assumptions of traditional political theory are profoundly Eurocentric and entwined with spurious notions of civilisational superiority and white progress, they highlight its complicity in the legitimization of European empire and the ongoing Western domination of the Global South. In so doing, postcolonial thinkers raise powerful questions about the purported universality of political theory. Can it be usefully applied to understand the non-Western world? To what extent can it illuminate the concerns, claims, and aspirations of formerly colonised, Indigenous, and non-white peoples? Do dominant theories of justice, rights, freedom, and democracy adequately extend to struggles against colonialism, imperialism and white supremacy? This work-in-progress seminar draws on a book project examining the impact of postcolonial scholarship in political theory and the emergence of postcolonial political theory as a distinct subfield. I outline some of the main thematics and tensions informing this project, as well as some of the methodological challenges involved in tracing the contours of an emerging subfield, particularly one as diverse and contested as postcolonial political theory.

**Bio:** [Rachel Busbridge](#) is a Senior Lecturer (Sociology) in the National School of Arts and Humanities, based in Melbourne. Prior to joining ACU, she held research positions at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, La Trobe University and Freie Universität Berlin as an Alexander von Humboldt Postdoctoral Research Fellow.

Rachel is a political sociologist who specialises in cultural politics. She has particular interests in social and political theory, postcolonialism, nationalism and urban politics. Her work has appeared in leading international journals like *Political Geography*, *Political Studies*, *Theory, Culture and Society*, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* and *Social Identities*, amongst others. Rachel's first book, *Multicultural Politics of Recognition and Postcolonial Citizenship: Rethinking the Nation* (2018), was published by Routledge as part of the Postcolonial Politics series. Her second book *How Local Governments Govern Culture War Conflicts* (co-authored with Mark Chou) is published with Cambridge University Press. She is currently working on her third book, *Postcolonialism and Political Theory*, which is under contract with Polity Press.



Rachel is an Editor of *Thesis Eleven: Critical Theory and Historical Sociology* (Sage) and current Co-Convenor of the Social Theory Thematic Group of The Australian Sociological Association (TASA).