

Professorial Lecture: The Rise of Cool Christianity in Australia: Pentecostalism, Branding and Youth Cultures



Presented by

Professor Cristina Rocha

Professor in Anthropology, Director of the Religion & Society Research Cluster,
WSU School of Social Sciences and Psychology

13 June 2019

12:00pm - 1:00pm

Western Sydney University - Liverpool City Campus (Level 9)

ABSTRACT:

Throughout most of the 20th century proponents of the secularisation thesis argued that religion would decline or become privatised. However, in the 21st century the opposite has happened. Religion has gained renewed visibility in the public sphere (Casanova 1994), and the boundaries between the public and private spheres are continually transgressed (Knoblauch 2011:7). In this presentation, Prof Rocha will address the rise of Cool Christianity -- a type of Christianity that blurs the private and public spheres through the intense use of digital media, and the adoption and setting of new trends in fashion, music and youth culture. Pentecostal churches have been at the forefront of this phenomenon. In particular, Prof Rocha will explore the growth of Pentecostalism in Australia, a country that has seen its national narrative of secularism dented by the astonishing growth of the megachurch Hillsong, one of the most powerful Australian youth brands and global cultural exports, and the rise to power of the country's first Pentecostal PM, Scott Morrison.

Prof Rocha will argue that as Pentecostals became more aspirational and middle class, they made efforts to engage with the world through youth culture creating the phenomenon of Cool Christianity. At the same time, they, at least in public, ditched aspects of Pentecostalism not palatable to middle-class sensibilities, such as speaking in tongues, and rituals of healing and exorcism. In this effort they have had to walk a tight-rope between Pentecostalism's traditionally conservative values (e.g., against same sex marriage, abortion, women's liberation) and worldly progressive values (e.g., inclusivity and acceptance of LGBT people).

BIOGRAPHY:

Professor Cristina Rocha is an anthropologist and the Director of the Religion and Society Research Cluster, SSAP. She is the President of the Australian Association for the Study of Religion. She co-edits the Journal of Global Buddhism and the Religion in the Americas series, Brill. Her research focuses on the intersections of globalisation, migration and religion. Her publications include: John of God: The Globalization of Brazilian Faith Healing (Oxford University Press, 2017), The Diaspora of Brazilian Religions (with M. Vásquez, Brill, 2013), Buddhism in Australia (with M. Barker, Routledge, 2010), Zen in Brazil: The Quest for Cosmopolitan Modernity (Hawaii University Press, 2006).

RSVP at SSAP-research@westernsydney.edu.au by 6/6/2019