



Religion & Society Online Seminar Series 2024
Third Wednesday of the month - 12pm to 1pm
Convened by Professor Cristina Rocha & Dr Kathleen Openshaw

20th November 2024
12pm to 1pm
Via Zoom

Title: 'Spiritual Fandom: Hillsong and International Students in Australia'
Presented by Professor Cristina Rocha



Abstract:

This presentation draws on my new book *Cool Christianity: Hillsong and the Fashioning of Cosmopolitan Identities* (Oxford University Press, 2024). In the book I am interested in how new and reconfigured forms Christianity in both the Global North and South are increasingly digitally mediated, engaged with youth and celebrity cultures, and involve new forms of consumption, branding and identity. In this seminar, I focus on how the Australian megachurch Hillsong's aesthetic style, with its celebrity musicians and pastors, produces what I call 'spiritual fandom,' that is, an excess affective investment in its cultural and spiritual forms. Despite a decline in the numbers of international students due to experiences of abuse and exploitation at Hillsong College, fandom still leads youth from around the world to enrol at the College in Sydney every year. I argue that Pentecostalism as a branch of Christianity that relies on direct experience of the Holy Spirit lends itself for the deeply affective sensibility of fandom. In brief, this paper demonstrates how celebrity culture and spirituality can be enmeshed in contemporary times.

Short Bio: Cristina Rocha, FAHA, is Professor of anthropology and the Director of the Religion and Society Research Cluster, Western Sydney University, Australia. She was a fellow at the Paris Institute for Advanced Study (2021-2022), and President of the Australian Association for the Study of Religion (2018-2019). She co-edits the Journal of Global Buddhism and the Religion in the Americas Brill series. Her research focuses on the intersections of globalisation, religion and (im)mobilities. Her new book is just out, *Cool Christianity: Hillsong and the Fashioning of Cosmopolitan Identities* (OUP 2024). Her 2017 book *John of God: The Globalization of Brazilian Faith Healing* (OUP) won Honourable Mention in the 2019 Geertz Prize awarded by the American Anthropological Association.

RSVP: Please register by 15th November for zoom link on:

<https://events.humanitix.com/spiritual-fandom-hillsong-and-international-students-cristina-rocha-wsu>