

PUBLIC LECTURE

“Serving the Nation”: Neo-Pentecostal Megachurches in Singapore and the Boundaries of Religious, Public and Commercial Spheres

Speaker

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Date and Time

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Venue

Bankstown Campus
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Abstract

The small city-state of Singapore has one of the highest population densities in the world and the construction of new buildings for religious purposes is governed by the state's rational, pragmatic, and effective planning principles based on mathematical ratios. Simultaneously, these serve to segregate and balance the major religions in the secular state of Singapore. Moreover, state regulations prescribe a strict separation of the political and the religious sphere and promote the maintenance of religious harmony between the different religious traditions; a violation of the separation or the cause of religious disharmony are punishable by law (Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act). Since the 1980s, a sustained growth of (mainly Neo-)Pentecostal churches in Singapore is observable. The paper addresses how Neo-Pentecostal megachurches negotiate the state-imposed

boundaries according to their growing demand for worship spaces. Early strategies used by megachurches were renting “secular” public spaces, such as conference rooms in hotels, theatres, or school halls, as temporary meeting grounds. In the last decade, some of these churches have established business arms that provide the financial resources to build and manage multifunctional spaces that serve public, cultural, commercial, and religious purposes in Singapore alike. The paper examines the most recent example of such a commercial and public building, The STAR Performance and Arts Centre, which was financed by and is used as a worship space by New Creation Church. The analysis will focus on the legitimizing strategies employed in the process and how these are tied to the popular discourses on prosperity, success and serving the nation.

Biography

Dr. Katja Rakow, a scholar in the field of Religious Studies, is currently leading a research group on Global Pentecostalism at Heidelberg University, Germany. Her research interests focus on the transcultural dynamics of religious history, especially of Tibetan Buddhism and contemporary forms of Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism in a global context.

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