

In the Footsteps of Jesus

Sociality, Caring and the Religious Imagination among Christian Filipinas in Israel

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General Statement

In the Footsteps of Jesus offers a unique anthropological enquiry of contemporary Christianity as lived by Filipina care workers in the setting of one of the prime loci of Christianity, the so-called Holy Land. The book addresses two highly relevant themes: First, it deals with lived Christianity, pilgrimage and the religious imagination during a time when religion has become increasingly salient – on the global political scene as well as in academic research. Secondly, it provides original empirical data on the growing number of sole female migrants from the global South, who leave their families to take up work abroad. By critically exploring how contemporary female Christian working-class migrants practice their faith within a specific, sacred geography while reaching out to a global faith community, the proposed book has the potential to make a major contribution to current scholarly debates.

In Israel, predominantly Christian and female Filipinos have been recruited to work as carers in large numbers since the early 1990s. Filipina migrants in Israel actively engage with the biblical sacred geography they encounter and which they explore devotionally. Within the dislocating process of migration they may become ‘born again,’ seek refuge and compassion in faith communities, turn into global activists for Christ and upon return to the Philippines gain highly valued cultural and symbolic capital from their first-hand knowledge of Israel and of Jewish customs. They form religious congregations, go on pilgrimages and form circles of devotional practice. By looking at Filipinos’ care work and pilgrimages in Israel, portraying a Filipino evangelical congregation set up in Tel Aviv’s central bus station and following a Catholic Filipino Block Rosary through the southern city’s downtrodden streets, the book provides insight into migrants’ attempts to sanctify Israel, the Jewish city and their own lives. In the process of migration, these are oftentimes envisaged as threatened by spiritual temptation and material commodification.

The proposed book combines an original ethnographic study of Christian travel in novel circumstances, adding fresh insight to studies of pilgrimage and evangelical Christianity in the context of migration. It investigates Filipina Christians’ subjectivities as carers for whom a sacred text has been transformed into a living sacred geography, and analyses how these experiences affect their moral careers and narratives of self. Based on twenty-seven months of anthropological fieldwork in Israel and the Philippines over a period of almost five years, the proposed book draws from a large archive of qualitative material, including interviews, questionnaires and participant observation.

Finally, *In the Footsteps of Jesus* fills a major gap in the academic literature on Christianity in motion, non-Jewish migration to Israel, the Filipino diaspora and Asian domestic workers in the Middle East. Much of the substantial body of work on the vast migratory movement of Filipino workers has been concerned with the predicaments of female domestic and care workers, while little has been written on how religious practices and imagination figure in this process. To date, the proposed book is the only anthropological monograph on Filipina domestic workers in the Middle East. The role of migration in the transformation of global and Filipino Christianity as well as Christian pilgrimage remains undertheorised and, indeed, unwritten.

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