

Manila, Tel Aviv and back

Claudia

Liebelt

Research Institute for Law, Politics & Justice, Keele University



Living room decoration in the home of a Filipino family, whose grown up daughter left to work in Israel

In recent years, consumption and possessions have been recognised as important themes in migration studies. The short history of migration between the Philippines and Israel has indeed produced a rich material culture of its own, with fascinating stories yet to be told. Since Israel started to recruit Filipina care workers in large numbers in 1995, numerous objects have travelled back and forth, while many were created along the way. Within this process, these objects have changed their meanings and transformed their functions. In both countries, they now mark the homes of those who travelled, as well as the homes of their loved ones, employers, and neighbours. In Manila and Tel Aviv, the respective cultural centres, they have entered the public space, sometimes visible only for those, who themselves have travelled.

Rather than providing a complete account or thorough investigation, this essay highlights some stories and material objects of migration from the Philippines to Israel and back, as well as the social space between them.

Altars

Given the fact that most airlines provide only about twenty to thirty kilogramm of baggage allowance on flights between Manila and Tel Aviv, there's not much one can carry either way. However, Filipinos travelling in between Tel Aviv and Manila typically have their suitcases filled not with objects destined for their own use, but with commodities to be sold, things to be consumed with relatives or friends at the place they travel to, as well as gifts to deliver. Lots of gifts. Even if they have never been to Israel before, they are likely to have former neighbours, classmates, or relatives who left ahead of them and who will now wait for their arrival, as well as for the arrival of the Filipino food, much cheaper sandals or whitening creams they ordered to be brought along from the Philippines.

This is why one has to really set priorities in choosing what to take to Israel from among one's own objects. So what, apart from some clothes (many of them gifts, too...) and pictures of loved ones in the Philippines could be more important than objects, which will protect and bless you on this journey to a far away land?

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