

Professor Pnina Werbner

**In the Footsteps of Jesus and the Prophet: Sociality, Caring and the Religious Imagination in the Filipino Diaspora
End of year report for 2008**

Progress and highlights:

In Israel, the fieldwork period of 10 months has been successfully completed. Dr. Claudia Liebelt, the research fellow, utilized anthropological methods of participant observation, which included attending church services and meetings, going on pilgrimages and block rosary 'crusades' in people's homes, casual conversations and more formal interviews. She also visited returning migrants in the Philippines for 6-8 weeks. She recorded events and interviews and distributed cameras for Filipina workers to photograph significant events in their lives. These will be displayed as an exhibition in the final conference of the project.

Most of the primary empirical research on Muslim Filipino migrants has now been completed. That included ethnographic research undertaken by Dr. Alicia Pingol in Madinah, where she lived with a Saudi family, and in Jeddah and Riyadh, where she lived with a Filipino couple. During this time she got to know well and intimate circle of Muslim Filipinos, many of them converts, over a five month period, from Sept 07 – Jan 08. Dr. Pingol subsequently spent five months meeting migrants and their families in their home places in the Philippines: that work was focused primarily on Balik Islam (Muslim converts) in Northern Part of the Philippines.

Dr. Johnson spent a further 5 weeks of research in the Philippines concentrating his work among 'born' Muslim Filipinos migrants and their families living in Metro Manila. Dr. Johnson will be spending an additional short period of research in Saudi Arabia this year.

As part of her fellowship, Deirdre McKay completed the final draft of a book (now awaiting only an epilogue) and has embarked on four months' fieldwork mainly consisting of in-depth interviews, in which she plans to follow up the careers and migratory paths of Filipino migrants who migrated from Israel to work in Jewish care homes in London. She is also hoping to follow these migrants to Canada and possibly Italy if appropriate links can be found.

Our findings are necessarily preliminary since the project has six months to go (out of two years).

In summing up the highlights of the research both in Israel and in Saudi Arabia it is important to note that these are first anthropological /ethnographic in the two countries. In particular, there have been few studies of Muslim Filipino migrants.

A few of the Highlights of the Saudi Research:

- Though migrant life in Saudi Arabia can be difficult, especially so for single/lone women, it is also often experienced by those women as engendering a greater sense of independence and self-reliance.
- Though religion may reinforce compliance, it is also a resource for contesting subordination and is one of the primary means of establishing meaningful social networks.
- For 'born' Muslim Filipinos, work in Saudi Arabia offers opportunity to enhance their religious knowledge and go on pilgrimage, increasing their social standing in their home communities.
- Though conversion (or 'reversion') to Islam (*balik Islam*) among Christian Filipinos was not previously unknown, it is a more frequent and visible occurrence among migrant workers in Saudi Arabia. Conversion not only

opens up new avenues for social interaction and engagement, it may also be a route to enhancing their social standing. The potential for increased social standing abroad however may be accompanied by a diminishment in their social standing among their home communities in the Philippines.

A few of the Highlights of the Israeli Research:

- Migrant to Israel engage emotionally and intellectually with the sacred geography of the Holy Land, a focus of devotional pilgrimage for Christians worldwide.
- Social engagement in religious congregations, such as the two groups studied in Israel, namely a Catholic Block Rosary group and the evangelical Jesus Is Lord church, both set up by Filipino domestic workers, offers lone migrants spaces of sociality, empowerment, devotion and transnational activism.
- Their devotional relation with Israel also increases migrants' cultural capital at home.
- Christian Ethics and morality enables Filipino carers/ domestic workers to cope with labour demands, to meet claims by the host society and build transnational social fields of action.