

Professor Pnina Werbner
Professor of Social Anthropology
Institute for Law, Politics and Justice,
Keele University

Email: p.werbner@keele.ac.uk

Co-applicant:
Dr Mark Johnson

Email: j.m.johnson@hull.ac.uk

with Diedre McKay (ANU) as Research fellow

Summary:

In the Footsteps of Jesus and the Prophet: Sociality, Caring, and the Religious Imagination in the Filipina Diaspora

This multi-sited study of a new diaspora centres on the international migration of huge numbers of Filipina women, over 2 million strong, to work as domestic carers in Europe and the Middle East.

The project challenges a dominant scholarly and popular discourse that views these migrants merely as economically deprived, semi-educated 'maids to order', who endure harsh working conditions and unjust legal regimes in order to remit a few meagre dollars back home.

Instead, the project aims to disclose the rich cultural and religious lives of Filipinas in the diaspora by studying them as cosmopolitan travellers who develop and maintain identity, community and international networks across national borders and cultural boundaries.

In particular, the project will make a distinctive contribution to the study of Christian and Muslim Filipino international women migrants, especially their religious symbolic journeys.

For Filipina believers travelling to places holy to Christianity or Islam, prior homes of the religious imagination are rediscovered as real places of worship within a sacred geography shared by a universal community of believers.

Hence the project's proposed locations for fieldwork are Israel and Saudi Arabia, supplemented by research in Europe and the Phillipines.

One principal hypothesis of the project is therefore that religion is central to Filipinas' migratory experience, and especially so when they work in places sacred to Islam or Christianity.

A second key hypothesis is that Filipinas working as carers for the elderly construct their identity through notions of religious sacrifice and an ethos of caring and responsibility.

The project will contribute to the overall AHRC programme by providing new empirical data on an important global diasporic community and by advancing our understanding of gender and religiosity in a transnational context.