

【Book Review】 Jesus Loves Japan: Return Migration and Global Pentecostalism in a Brazilian Diaspora Suma Ikeuchi

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journal or publication title	Christ and the World
number	33
page range	258-260
year	2023-03
URL	http://doi.org/10.34581/00002532

*Jesus Loves Japan: Return Migration and Global
Pentecostalism in a Brazilian Diaspora* – Suma Ikeuchi

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Transnational migration creates the dilemma of needing to belong; to feel and be at home. Migrants face the challenge of developing modalities and creating identities that suit their wellbeing in the new environment. How the migrants construct their reality has a significant impact on whether the new stop is a place of promise, or a mere stop in the journey towards home. This construction is even further complicated when the migrant has to negotiate multiple identities, and never feels fully at home with one. This is the case of second-generation Japanese-Brazilians (Nikkei Brazilians) who migrate from Brazil to Japan. How do they situate themselves in the new environment to belong? If home is a promise for a future, how do they fashion a vivid future which they can lay claim as their own? Suma Ikeuchi gives a possible answer in her book, *Jesus Loves Japan: Return Migration and Global Pentecostalism in a Brazilian Diaspora*, that God or religion can be the pathway to home.

Ikeuchi's ethnography study among Nikkei Brazilian Pentecostal migrants in Japan describes transnational migration as a journey of culture making. At the heart of her book is the question of how the Nikkei Brazilians remake their worlds and realities into a space in which they belong. As she traces the journey of these Pentecostal migrants in Japan, and notes that they have to navigate loss of a national identity and creatively use religion to cultivate new subjectivities as "peregrino" (pilgrims). She narrates how these migrant converts craft a new self "by weaving together multiple national belongings, ethnoracial identities, and

potential homelands” (p. 7). Pentecostalism for the Nikkei Brazilians is not just an ethnic religion; rather, it allows them to generate a new evolving multiple self that belongs to an unbounded space.

Ikeuchi’s book is analytically rigorous and pleasant to read. Each part, interlaced with anecdotes from the Nikkei Brazilians’ life experiences, represents a segment in the pilgrim’s journey to a desired future: the beginning, the messy in-between, and the return. The beginning documents the history of these Nikkei jin who encompass a breadth of subjectivities. There was “no one single” anything about her protagonists. They were a people of “multiple borderlands constantly at the edge of nativeness, or foreignness, and of belonging” (p. 31).

The next chapters illuminate the struggle that defines migrants navigating multiple identities, and the gradual formation of the in-between subjectivity. She aptly describes this liminal space with descriptors like “feeling suspended”, “putting aside living”, “neither here nor there”. While these could come off as negative or constituting lack, she illustrates how the Japanese Brazilians use religion to reframe feelings of loss by invoking Christian myth and reframing their experiences as “new events discontinuous from the past and directed towards ultimate salvation” (p. 84). Religion gives them language and a pathway to move from a suspended life to one of a “right here and right now” that acknowledges the temporality of migration.

This pathway intimates a ‘Return’. For a people accursed to a life of perpetual suspension, religion and God offer a return to an omnipresent home. Religion, Pentecostalism in particular, breaches the borders of both Japanese and Brazilian nationalism and allows them to reclaim an identity with their Christian origin, home at last!

Ikeuchi’s ethnographic work sparks several questions. How does the situation of the Nikkei jin compare to that of other groups: migrant converts from elsewhere who do not claim Japanese blood, non-Japanese converts born in Japan, expats or student migrants from other continents? Does religion play a similar role for

migrants who cannot claim Japanese blood and are thus more bound in their national identity? These questions reveal the ways in which Ikeuchi's ethnography can serve as a foundation for future research.

Stanford University Press, June 2019, 256 pages