



Jesus in Our Wombs: Embodying Modernity in a Mexican Convent (Ethnographic Studies in Subjectivity)

By Rebecca J. Lester

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In *Jesus in Our Wombs*, Rebecca J. Lester takes us behind the walls of a Roman Catholic convent in central Mexico to explore the lives, training, and experiences of a group of postulants—young women in the first stage of religious training as nuns. Lester, who conducted eighteen months of fieldwork in the convent, provides a rich ethnography of these young women's journeys as they wrestle with doubts, fears, ambitions, and setbacks in their struggle to follow what they believe to be the will of God. Gracefully written, finely textured, and theoretically rigorous, this book considers how these aspiring nuns learn to experience God by cultivating an altered experience of their own female bodies, a transformation they view as a political stance against modernity.

Lester explains that the Postulants work toward what they see as an "authentic" femininity—one that has been eclipsed by the values of modern society. The outcome of this process has political as well as personal consequences. The Sisters learn to understand their very intimate experiences of "the Call"—and their choices in answering it—as politically relevant declarations of self. Readers become intimately acquainted with the personalities, family backgrounds, friendships, and aspirations of the Postulants as Lester relates the practices and experiences of their daily lives. Combining compassionate, engaged ethnography with an incisive and provocative theoretical analysis of embodied selves, *Jesus in Our Wombs* delivers a profound analysis of what Lester calls the convent's "technology of embodiment" on multiple levels—from the phenomenological to the political.

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Editorial Review

From the Inside Flap

"A stunning first book, *Jesus In Our Wombs* is a haunting ethnography with fresh theoretical insights. Blending psychoanalytic theories with postmodern imageries, Lester demonstrates that the body is both a source and object of analysis. This is a model ethnography."—Vicki Ruiz, author of *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in the Twentieth-Century America*

"In *Jesus In Our Wombs*, Rebecca Lester uses her rich, evocative ethnography of the first year experiences of nuns-in-training to explore the formation and transformation of selves, the relationships of bodily practices, and the centrality of gender to these intertwined processes of self-formation and embodiment. This work will spark renewed interest in the potential of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic theories of change to offer insights for crucial theoretical issues in anthropology and the social sciences more generally. A superb book."—Dorothy Hodgson, author of *The Church of Women: Gendered Encounters between Maasai and Missionaries*

"This study of young Mexican nuns in their first year of training is a thought provoking and ethnographically rich work that will be an important contribution to the anthropological study of religion, gender, and embodiment. Through her careful analysis of the ways the postulates negotiate their training intellectually, emotionally, and bodily, Lester provides unique insights into the religious processes of personal transformation. A beautifully observed ethnography of life in a Catholic convent."—Joel Robbins, author of *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society*

About the Author

Rebecca J. Lester is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Washington University.

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