Title: Religious Conversions of Filipino Workers in the Arab Gulf region and the Transformation of Intimate Spheres

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Abstract

The Arab Gulf region is one of the three major destinations for international migrants today. The six fast-growing, resource-rich countries in the region have attracted millions of workers from South Asia, Middle East, East Asia, Africa and other parts of the world. Further, according to the World Bank’s estimate, migrant workers in the six countries sent home about $61 billion in 2011. Despite such a large volume of human and monetary flow, this migration trend has been investigated almost solely from the perspective of “labour movement” or “labour problems”, leaving the social and human dimensions of the phenomenon unexplored. My talk will examine the social dimension by focusing on the religious conversion of Catholic Filipinos to born-again (Protestant) Christians or Muslims during their sojourn in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It has been argued that there is little place for the migrant workers to form close relationships that cross lines of class and nationality with other people, because of legal and socio-economic constraints in the Gulf region. However, if we look at social relations of Filipino converts in the UAE, we can observe that some of them have crossed those lines. I will elaborate on the relationship between religious conversion and the development of new social relations among Filipinos in the UAE, comparing those who have become born-again Christians and those who have become Muslims.

Biography
