

Understanding the Role of Religion and Religious Organizations in the Life and Work of Overseas Filipino Workers in an Islamic State

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**Asia Pacific Journal of
Multidisciplinary Research**

Vol. 7 No.2, 55-64

May 2019

P-ISSN 2350-7756

E-ISSN 2350-8442

www.apjmr.com

CHED Recognized Journal

ASEAN Citation Index

Date Received: August 1, 2018; Date Revised: April 5, 2019

Abstract - *The study discusses the situation in an Islamic State in terms of policies on migrants and religious practices. It identifies different Christian religious organizations present within an Islamic State where members include OFWs and examines their current status, organizational operations, and religious practices. It discusses how religion and religious affiliations affect the life and work of OFWs, and describe the religious beliefs and practices of OFWs in a host country where religious freedom is restricted.*

The study employs qualitative research methods. A review of literature on policies in the Islamic State and interviews were used as methods of data collection. The study made use of a thematic analysis as method of data analysis. Participants are Christians who have worked or are currently working in the Islamic State as professionals, skilled, or domestic workers.

The Islamic State in the study remains a conservative host country and such is reflective of its policies on migrants and religious practices. The said country, in principle, tolerates religious practices of migrants; however, many of its citizens remain intolerant of religions and religious practices other than Wahhabi Islam and its practices. Three dominant Christian organizations were found to be actively conducting religious activities, albeit clandestinely. Religion acts as: (1) a source of strength, (2) a form of amusement, (3) a form of motivation to become a better person, (4) an anesthetic that numbs the physical, emotional, and mental strains, (5) a source of networks, and (6) a method of knowing God for Christian OFWs in the said Islamic State.

Keywords: *Christians, Islam, OFWs, Migrant Workers, Sociology of Religion.*

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines lauds itself as one of the largest producers of high caliber skilled and non-skilled workers around the world. Its government expresses satisfaction over the increasing deployment of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) abroad. However, exploitation and abuse of OFWs have been documented since the beginning of the Filipino labor exportation in the 1970's and up until the present time. Reports would reflect how OFWs are subjected to long hours of work, deprived of day offs, often underpaid, and are only provided with small living spaces and inadequate food rations. Filipino migrant workers are subjects of racism and discrimination, often physically abused, raped, and even killed [1]. The Filipino House of Representatives Committee on Overseas Foreign Workers reported that about 700 workers, mostly women, die each year following maltreatment by their employers. There are also many

overseas Filipino workers who remain behind bars while others are in need of help in order to escape execution. Examples of OFWs who are persecuted are Filipinas who accidentally murdered their employers after fighting for their lives in order to escape maltreatment and attempted physical and sexual assaults [2]. Aside from physical strains, OFWs are also subjected to emotional, mental, and spiritual strains [3]. Such strains then work as an impetus for OFWs to seek for comfort and support. Religious groups organized by Filipino migrants and workers abroad serve as sanctuary by providing assistance to those who are in need, especially for the newly arrived OFWs - the most vulnerable ones.

Religion and Migration

According to Hirschman [4], religious faith and religious organizations remain important for it is only through religion that many are able to find solace from

inevitable human experiences such as death, suffering, and loss. Hirschman added that churches and other religious organizations are vital in the creation of community - a major source of assistance for those in need, especially for migrants. Hirschman explained that “*the idea of community, of having shared values and enduring association, are often sufficient to motivate persons to help and trust one another even in the absence of long personal relationships*” (p. 2).

Religion can either be a positive or a negative element in the personal integration process of migrants depending on the host country: (1) Religion can become an isolating force that alienates new migrants or a drawing force that gives them a sense of belonging; (2) Religion may alienate new migrants especially when the host country restricts freedom of religion or belief; and (3) Religion may pave way for the new migrants to easily adapt and belong to the new environment given that the host country is open and tolerant to freedom of religious expressions [4]. The religious laws of the host country not only affect the personal well-being of a migrant, but also affect his or her daily life determining what clothes to wear, food to eat, his or her working conditions, and others.

Discussions on religion and religious organizations benefiting migrant workers are evident in several studies. However, many of these studies were conducted in secular countries where exercise of religious freedom is highly respected. Hence, this study focuses on the religiosity of Christian Filipino migrant workers situated in an Islamic State that not only prohibits religious expressions of non-Moslems, but also persecutes those who defy their Islamic laws. The researcher takes on another perspective in studying religion as a factor influencing migrants and the migration process by focusing on the lived experiences of overseas Filipinos.

The study intends to discuss the situation in the Islamic State in terms of policies on migrants and religious practices; identify the different Christian religious organizations present in the Islamic State whose members include OFWs and examine their current status, organizational operations, and religious practices; understand how religion and religious affiliations affect the life and work of OFWs; and describe the religious practices of OFWs in a country where religious freedom is restricted.

METHODS

Participants of the study are 20 OFWs who are either currently and temporarily out of the Philippines

as a contractual worker or who had previously worked in the Islamic State and are currently situated back in the Philippines. During the preliminary investigation, three dominant Christian religious organizations that actively conduct underground religious worships within the Islamic State were found by the researcher. To protect the identity of these religious organizations, the researcher refers to them in the entire manuscript as Religion X, Religion Y, and Religion Z. The researcher came up with 20 participants by first dividing them based on their religious affiliations. Then, they were segregated according to their job classifications: professional workers, skilled workers, and domestic helpers. Participants were further divided based on their biological sex. The researcher was able to engage the participation of at least one respondent per religious affiliation, job classification, and biological sex.

Given the sensitivity and potential risk of the research to the participants of the study, the researcher provided them a copy of an informed consent form and briefed them about the purpose, the procedure, and the duration of the study. The researcher allowed the participants to select the method of the conduct of the interview that is convenient for them. Some of the interviews were through Facebook-mediated textual communication or “chats”, given that some participants who were currently situated in the Islamic State during the conduct of the study are working and could only allot several minutes of their time per day, while others are hesitant to divulge their true identities.

Review of literature on policies in the Islamic State to understand the policies on migrants and religious practices, and face to face and online interviews to gather information from OFWs who were once or are currently working in the Islamic State were utilized as methods of data collection in the study. All interviews were transcribed, and a thematic analysis was utilized as a method of analysis in the study.

RESULTS

Islamic State of the Study in Brief

It is first necessary for one to know the following information in order to have a better understanding of the study: (1) Wahhabi Islam is culturally embedded in the Islamic State since its first Founding [5]; (2) The Islamic State is a highly patriarchal society [6]; (3) Freedom of religion is neither recognized nor protected under the law of the State and practice of religion other than Wahhabi Islam is highly proscribed

[7]-[10]; (4) The number of Filipino migrant workers in the said State are continuously increasing[11];(5) Professional and skilled worker OFWs are mostly contented with their living conditions in the State, while domestic helpers are experiencing abuse [12]; and (6) Some OFWs are in death row, while others are incarcerated mainly due to their violation of the Sharia law [12].

Christian Organizations in the Islamic State

Although the Sharia law prohibits religious practices of non-Moslems, Christian organizations are still present in the Islamic State. The study identified three dominant Christian groups where OFW participants of the study are affiliated to.

Religion X is very active in several parts of the Islamic State. Victor, a heavy generators mechanic claimed that Religion X is the most active Christian organization in the said State given the number of groups they have per area. Christian organizations such as Religion X adapt by doing worships clandestinely to avoid religious persecutions. However, such set-up restricts them from conducting their other activities such as public preaching and public evangelizations. Unlike other organizations, the denominations of Religion X are independent of one another and that they do not have a central authority that governs them all. As Tina, one of their members explained:

“Most of our members belong to different denominations in the Philippines. But here, some denominations merged together since we will be very few in numbers if we will be strict with grouping to our original denominations. We adhere the same principles, so it is okay...”

For most members of Religion X, the activities of their religious organization are as similar as before. They remain active and they have not observed any changes on their religious worships nor did their membership fluctuate for several years.

Religion Y actively conducts religious worships in the Islamic State. Jean, a nurse, mentioned that they are organized underground since conducting religious worships of non-Moslems in public is prohibited by the government. Mark, a member of Religion Y mentioned that they have several local congregations situated around the country. Although the implementation of the Sharia law is very strict, Sarah who is also affiliated with Religion Y observed that their group became even more active today than it was before because their congregation is continuously

growing every year. Darius attributed the increasing number of their members to the seated head of the state who is more lenient and liberal as compared to his predecessors. According to Mara, Religion Y was established in their host country because they have several brothers and sisters within the country and some of their members have already settled down with their other family members who are affiliated with Religion Y as well.

Unlike the first two Christian groups, Religion Z’s set-up is rather special. According to Joey there are thousands of Filipino Christians scattered around the country and most of them are members of underground religious organizations. However, unlike other Christian religious organizations, Religion Z only has one group that conducts group worship services. Among the participants affiliated with Religion Z, only Nilo and Abbie are part of Religion Z. Nilo confessed that he actively participates and even organizes underground prayer meetings in this Islamic State. Although the Sharia law forbids any Christian worship, Abbie explained that they are tolerated since their group organizes and conduct worships inside the compound of a popularly known company where the Sharia law is not strongly implemented.

Some participants affiliated with Religion Z explained that they are not affiliated with any religious organizations since there is only one religious group (Religion Z) that could cater them and its location is far from their area. Dante, a member of Religion Z mentioned that the entrance to Religion z’s compound is exclusive for employees and residents of the said area, so outsiders like him are prohibited from entering except during Christmas and New Year’s Eve. Hence, several members of Religion Z are only able to conduct group worships during the said holidays.

Recruitment, Membership, and Composition

Recruiting members is one of the challenges Christian organizations experience in the Islamic State. Given that the Sharia law necessitates Christian members to be discreet in recruitment, members are limited to only inviting their proximate relations. However, the creation of networking websites enabled Christian members to build networks online and establish groups. The creation of Facebook groups and pages dedicated specifically to OFWs situated in their host country for example, enabled Religion X to establish networks and recruit members online.

Although virtual networking makes it easier for religious organizations to hunt down potential recruits, it still does not strip them off the risks of being reported and getting caught.

In terms of membership, it was found that groups and denominations tend limit their membership. Some groups are solely for OFWs, while others cater American and European Christians. There are also groups that are exclusive for Filipino migrants who are already affiliated with their religious groups in the Philippines. The main reason for such limitation of membership is to avoid foreign and Filipino informants who would report Christians to authorities in exchange for monetary rewards.

Regarding membership processes, all three Christian organizations did not change the process they traditionally adhere to. Religion Y, for instance, still requires aspiring members to go through their traditional process of: (1) daily bible and lecture studies - to know the principles and beliefs of Religion Y, (2) constant church attendance - to learn how worships are conducted, and (3) application of church doctrines - to understand the church teachings and its application in the daily life. Then, after six months of submission, the aspirant shall be subjected in a deliberation. Only when deemed worthy shall the aspirant be able to undergo baptism and become a legitimate member of Religion Y.

Majority of the group's composition are OFWs who are already affiliated with a given Christian group while still in the Philippines and are just changing locales given the change of employment location. Others are OFWs who converted to become members of Christian groups in the Islamic State, or foreigners who are originally Christians, but decided to affiliate themselves with a specific Christian group. Each group or denomination has members ranging from at least 25 to more than 50 members. Most OFW affiliates are professional and skilled workers. Filipina domestic workers are unable to join such groups given that they are confined to work within the households of their respective employers.

Experiences with the Religion police

The Islamic State has a Committee that employs Religion police. The said enforces patrol the streets to ensure that everyone is following the Sharia Law. Participants of the study affirmed that Christian OFWs are often targeted by the Religion police.

Although most participants of the study claimed that they are very careful when they conduct Christian

worship services, there are still instances that they are caught by the Religion police. Tina, a member of religion X shared her experience with a Religion police:

"There was one time when our neighbor... reported us. Good thing the officer came before we started praying so we were able to make stories... that we are gathered for a birthday celebration. The officer luckily believed us maybe because he saw that there were a lot of food on our table...because we eat after we conduct our prayer services..."

Josie, also a member of Religion X cited the experience of her brother who was arrested because he was caught carrying Christian magazines.

"We have a brother there who was caught by the Religion police because he was carrying Christian magazines with him that is forbidden there. He was detained and tortured in prison. He was forced by the police to convert into Islam so he would become good. I am not sure if he was raped there..."

Aside from religious practices, other forms of irreverence to the Sharia Law causes harm to OFWs. One of the study's participant, Claire, mentioned of an instance when a Religion police interrogated her:

"... I got distracted and I suddenly lose sight of her [employer]. I cannot find my employer so I was really nervous. Then, a Religion police suddenly came near me and asked for my ID. He asked me "where is your employer?" but I cannot answer that we got separated during that time. The Religion police suddenly grabbed me. He arrested me because in their religion, women, even Moslem women are not allowed to be alone in public. I was really afraid and a lot of possibilities came into mind... that maybe they will think of me as a TNT or maybe they will rape me. Rape is very common here. Good thing my employer saw me. She talked to the Religion police and the Religion police told me to always stay with my employer."

Other forbidden activities some Filipinos partake in are prostitution, drinking, and gambling. Dante, a member of Religion Z told his account with the Religion polices.

“...there was one time when I ended up naked inside a prison cell! I knew that drinking is prohibited; I for one am avoiding it. But during that time, my companions were craving for some booze...you know how real Filipino men are like... so I ended up joining as well. Alcohol retailing is banned so we cannot buy any, but Filipinos have their ways. Many Filipinos, especially those who have worked ahead of us... they were able find ways to create their own booze; twenty liters of water plus sugar and yeast in a pressure cooker... and there you have it. It is very easy to make so almost every Pinoy there knows this... it is a norm for Filipinos there to get drunk every Thursday night. So, we easily agreed when our colleague invited us for a drink. We got unlucky when our colleague from Caloocan began causing a commotion. He was very drunk so he couldn't help himself. Maybe one of the neighbors reported us because our colleague was causing trouble, so several minutes later the police entered the scene. Upon arrival, they saw us half naked, very drunk, with the booze scattered on the floor. When they arrested us... ah we suddenly became sober! Hahaha!”

Upon arrival at the police station, Dante had no idea why he was separated from his colleagues. Then, a police officer asked him to take his shirt off.

“While at the police station, one of the police officers asked me to remove my t-shirt because he saw something different in my chest. It was only after I removed my shirt when I realized that I have a tattoo of the Sacred Heart on my left chest. The police officers kept on interrogating me because they want me to admit that the tattoo is Jesus Christ; however I always answered them that the tattoo is an image of my mother! I was asked to strip all my clothes off...I really thought they will rape me. Good thing they only asked me to have my forehead pressed in a cell's wall. They left me like that for three days. In each day, thoughts of being raped or lashed to death kept repeating in my mind. During those times, exhaustion never hit me. I was bailed by my employer after three days...”

Christian Filipino workers who are caught violating the Sharia law are detained, imprisoned, given lashes, or deported back depending on the worker's employer and the intervention given by the

Philippine government. Filipinos who are detained and imprisoned in the Islamic State are vulnerable to rape regardless of gender or sexual orientation according to the study's participants. Those who are punished by receiving lashes are given so every Friday. The number of lashes received by those who committed crimes vary on the degree of crimes committed as indicated in the Sharia Law. Hence, for some participants, Filipinos who are simply deported back in the Philippines are lucky enough to escape unscathed although some would rather receive lashes than to go back to their home country.

Religious Practices of Christian Organizations in the Islamic State

In the course of the study it was found that all of the said religious groups are actively organizing and conducting religious worships at different cities and provinces within the Islamic State.

It was found that in terms of the types of worship services, all of the said religious organizations have two main religious worships: formal worship services and the informal prayer meetings. Formal worship service is described as the stricter and more traditional form of worship; it is scheduled every Friday, and it only caters to the members of the said religious organization. On the other hand, the informal prayer meeting is described as the more flexible type of worship service since it only occurs when scheduled by the members of the said religious organizations—mostly during their days off. Also, unlike formal worships, informal prayer meetings are mostly open to non-members.

In terms of venue of worship, both Religion X and Y conduct their worship services and prayer meetings in rented rooms, rented houses, and accommodation of members, while Religion Z conducts their worships in a compound that is affected less by the Sharia Law; hence, they are able to express their religiosity freely unlike Religion X and Y.

In terms of the materials used by the religious organizations, it was found that all religious groups rely heavily on the Holy Bible. Aside from the Holy Bible, other materials used during worship services are music sheets, musical instruments such as an acoustic guitar and keyboard, and mobile phones; phones are utilized to retrieving music sheets and other guides needed for worship. It was found in the study that Religion X and Y shifted from the use of tangible materials to virtual materials; mobile phones and the internet made it easier for members to

disseminate and access worship materials simply by uploading and downloading. Also, since religious materials are prohibited in the State, transforming the tangible into intangible minimizes the risk of them getting caught.

Individual Religious Practices of Christians in the Islamic State

The following are the personal religious practices of the participants of the study: talking to God, reading or memorizing the Bible or online verses, singing worship songs, chanting memorized prayers, reviewing lessons provided by the religious organization, sharing verses and images of Jesus, Mary, Angels, and Saints online, and posting personal prayers on Facebook. The most salient religious practice done by the participants is talking to God. Out of 20 participants, 15 answered the aforementioned. According to some, they talk to God aloud or silently in their minds.

Individual religious worships are conducted by the participants on the following: bed/bedroom/room or accommodation, workplace, comfort room, Church, and Facebook- for those who share their prayers online.

Individual prayers are done by the participants upon waking up, before leaving for work, while at work, after working, upon arrival at the accommodation, before sleeping or while at bed, during free time, and before and after eating.

The following are the list of religious items used by the participants of the study: bible, online bible, Purpose Driven Life by Rick Warren, virtual biblical lessons, Crucifix, Rosary, Our Lady of Manaoag prayer booklet, image of the Nazareno, and pocket prayer booklet. All of the items enumerated are personally owned by the participants.

Role of Religion in the Life and Work of OFWs

At the end of the study, it was found that religion, in the life and work of OFWs in the Islamic State, serves as: a source of strength, a form of amusement, a form of motivation to become a better person, an anesthetic, a source of networks, and a method of knowing God.

Religion as a source of strength

The most frequent theme answered by the participants is that religion is the source of their physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual strength. Their beliefs, faith, prayers, and/or religion

strengthened them in order to endure their conditions while in the Islamic State. The Lord, God, and/or Jesus Christ are/is believed to be the source of strength and He comforts, guides, listens, protects, and watches over them. Bible verses are perceived as analogous to energy pills or vitamins that supplements energy and replenish strength. Prayer is taken as a precautionary measure from getting sick or harmed. Effectivity of prayer is determined by the frequency of one's prayer. Some participants believe that because of the strength given to them by God through prayer, they were able to finish their contract. One participant however mentioned that religion gave her strength and motivation to do well in her work, but unlike others who were inspired to do good in order to go to heaven, she was inspired to work hard in order to prove her employer that her being Christian has nothing to do with the quality of her work.

Religion as a form of amusement

Another theme commonly answered by participants is that their beliefs, faith, prayers, and/or religion serve as an amusement that distracts them from fear, homesickness, loneliness, and/or sadness. Participants figured that focusing on prayers for themselves and their distant families is better than directing their energies to thoughts that may trigger them to feel homesick which then could lead to the depreciation of their work performance. During their sad and boring days when loneliness makes them crazy, only talking to God, Lord, and/or Jesus Christ is their remedy. Religion also acts as a deterrent from committing adultery, giving in to temptations, negligent spending, and/or doing vices and other immoral, inappropriate, and sinful acts. Instead of going out and risking themselves from being exposed to temptations, most of the participants would rather stay in their accommodations and pray, while others would rather focus their day offs and vacant time to group worships. Because of religion and religious worships, some participants were able to avoid inappropriate spending and were able to save money for the needs of their families.

Religion as motivation to become a better person.

Several participants made use of religion as motivation to become better persons, workers, colleagues, friends, family members, and et cetera. According to some participants, the teachings of their religious organizations honed them to become better persons since they constantly apply the teachings of

God in their daily endeavors. Others believe that the presences of God, Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, angels, and/or saints are/is with them, so they are motivated to become good not just for themselves, but for others as well. The aforementioned also affects the work performance of participants significantly since they believe that work performance reflects the character of a person; hence, having a good or bad output affects their relationship with God.

Religion as anesthetics that numbs the physical, emotional, and mental strains

Some of the participants answered that their beliefs, faith, prayers, and/or religion helps them to forget and/or just accept the physical, emotional, and/or mental strains they are into. Instead of loathing, participants figured that it is better to entrust their situation to God, while others humbly accepted their situation since the hardships, they're experiencing are just temporary experiences on earth and there is eternal happiness in heaven as long as they pray and do good deeds.

Religion as source of networks and community

Since they are away from their family and friends, participants saw that affiliating with religious organizations help them by having a home away from home. The brothers and sisters in their corresponding religious organizations help by providing emotional and spiritual support. Having a religious organization also aids in alleviating their homesickness since most of its members are Filipinos and the culture and traditions they follow are patterned from the Philippines. As Mara mentioned: *"It is good that there are local congregations here at least in a way I can re-live my faith in the Philippines while I am still here. At least my longing for our country is reduced."* Being a Christian and affiliating with a religious organization can also make one's life livelier in a far off place. As one participant mentioned, being acquainted with so many overseas Filipino workers made the loneliness he had at the beginning of his contract gone. Another participant pointed out that it is practical to have a religious organization since through it one would easily learn the dos and don'ts in the Islamic State.

Religion as method of knowing and glorifying God

Several participants believe that by talking to God and reading the bible, they are able to know God better. Reading the bible, reciting personal prayers,

and/or talking to God are/is perceived as act/s that strengthens their personal relationship with God. Frequency of prayer also determines the degree of glorifying the name of the Lord.

Others

Though most participants admitted that religion had a major role in their work and life while in the Islamic State, it is still important to note that there are a few of them who believe that they cannot entrust everything to God and prayer alone cannot help them in solving the problems they are faced with. Some of them realized that faith is important, but nothing will happen if one relies on prayers alone. Hence, they believe that it is important to combine and balance prayer and work.

In this sub-section, it was found that the most salient role of religion for participants is that it serves as a source of their physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual strength. Religion also functions as an amusement that distracts them from fear, homesickness, loneliness, and/or sadness. Other participants made use of religion as motivation to become better persons, workers, colleagues, friends, and family members. Some participants answered that their beliefs, faith, prayers, and or/ religion helped them to forget and to just accept the physical, emotional, and/or mental strains they are into, hence making religion as their anesthesia. Religion also works as a source of networks; it is like having a home away from home. A few mentioned that their religion serves as a method of knowing and glorifying God.

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY AND ITS MAIN FINDINGS

The study explored the role of religion in the lives and work of OFWs situated in an Islamic State. It began by discussing the situation of policies on migrants and religious practices in an Islamic State as a host country. The study then identified three different Christian religious organizations where members include OFWs. The said religious organizations' current status, organizational operations, and religious practices were also discussed in the study. The role of religion and religious affiliations in the work and life of OFWs in an Islamic State was also explained. Finally, the study described the religious practices of OFWs in a host country where religious freedom is restricted.

The study followed a qualitative research design. A sampling frame with sex and religious affiliation as main categories was developed. The study was able to engage a total of 20 Christian OFWs as participants. The study reviewed related literature on policies of the Islamic State and conducted face to face and online interviews of OFWs in the said State. A thematic analysis of the data was subsequently done. The main findings of the study are as follows:

(1) *The Islamic State remains a conservative host country and such is reflective of its policies on migrants and religious practices.* The citizens of the Islamic State are intolerant of religious expressions of non-Wahhabi Moslems. Segregation of sexes is highly implemented since the virginity of the Islamic State's woman represents purity and family honor. Religious freedom is restricted and Christian worships are kept from public. Non-Wahhabi citizens and foreigners are vulnerable to discrimination, harassment, detention, deportation, and assault of religious vigilantes.

The Islamic State's present labor force remains dominated by migrants since labor is cheaper from workers of poorer nations such as the Philippines. Filipino workers are classified as professional, skilled, and domestic workers. Hired domestic workers are reported as most abused workers in the Islamic State. Aside from physical exhaustion from work, domestic workers are more vulnerable to physical and verbal abuse, discrimination, and rape given that they live in the household of their employers. In contrast to the hardships experienced by the above-said are the experiences of migrant workers situated within the Islamic State's compounds. The gated compounds are treated as the haven of migrants given that it allows greater freedom since Sharia law is implemented in a lesser degree within.

(2) *Three dominant Christian organizations were found to be actively conducting religious activities, albeit clandestinely within the Islamic State.* All three religious organizations affirmed that they are actively conducting religious worships in the Islamic State. Some Christian denominations mentioned that they are connected with their counterparts in the Philippines, while others remained detached.

On membership and recruitment, members of Christian organizations are met with the following challenges: (a) recruitment is limited to people within their networks in the State and those who are affiliated to their religious organization in the Philippines; and

(b) potential recruits remain hesitant in affiliating themselves to Christian groups due to fear for punishments like detention, imprisonment, physical torture, deportation, and death.

In terms of religious practices, all religious groups conduct their formal worships at least once a week; in most cases, every Friday of the week, given that Friday is a non-work day in the Islamic State. The venue of worship service is mostly in a rented house, a rented sound-proofed room, or at times at the accommodation or apartment of a member. Informal religious practices are smaller group services where members conduct bible studies and counseling. Informal religious practices have flexible schedules. In the case of some groups, they would only conduct it depending on the members need for it. However, some are able to sustain their informal religious practices on a weekly basis.

(3) *Religious organizations in the Islamic State conduct clandestine religious practices.* These organizations adapt to the State's Sharia law to prevent themselves from religious persecutions. Religious organizations are constantly faced with several hardships: (a) having to discreetly organize and conduct religious worships weekly; (b) problematizing the challenges of recruitment and membership; and (c) having to regularly play hide-and-seek with the religion police officers.

In terms of individual religious practices, OFWs have learned to adapt to the challenges posed by the Sharia law: (a) since the law prohibits any forms of Christian worships in public, most OFWs pray inside their accommodations to avoid getting caught; (b) given that the Sharia law prohibits the entry of Christian religious materials in the Islamic State, OFWs have resorted to using alternative materials and virtual materials; and (c) since OFWs working in open areas are prevented from doing religious rituals in their work place, they have learned to just pray silently and privately.

(4) *Religion and religious affiliations play an important role in the life and work of OFWs in the Islamic State.* The study found that religion is very influential in the life and work of OFWs in the Islamic State. For OFWs, religion is the source of their physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual strengths. It also aids them in enduring boredom, fear, homesickness, loneliness, and/or sadness. Religion helps them remain loyal with their partners. It aids in fighting temptations, negligent spending, vices, and

other immoral, inappropriate and sinful acts. Religion also influences OFW interactions; it hones them in becoming better individuals, employees, colleagues, friends, and family members. Religion also helps in forgetting and/or just accepting the physical, emotional, and/or mental strains. Religion convinces OFWs that it is better for them to entrust their situations to God. Some OFWs believed that the hardships they are experiencing are only temporary on earth. Others accepted willingly the sufferings they are experiencing since Jesus suffered and endured hardships as well. There are those who are convinced that they should just do well with their jobs since they will be given eternal happiness in heaven by doing so. Prayer is perceived as an act that should be done on a regular basis in order to secure a spot in heaven. Prayer is used as a method of knowing and glorifying God. Affiliating in religious organizations paved way for networks and community for most OFWs. Having a religious organization is akin to having a home away from home. It helps by providing emotional and spiritual support, and it alleviates homesickness since it helps OFWs relive their Filipino culture and traditions.

The said findings led the researcher to develop a conceptual framework delving on the role of religion for OFWs in the Islamic State. This can serve as a conceptual frame for further studies on the religiosity of OFWs abroad.

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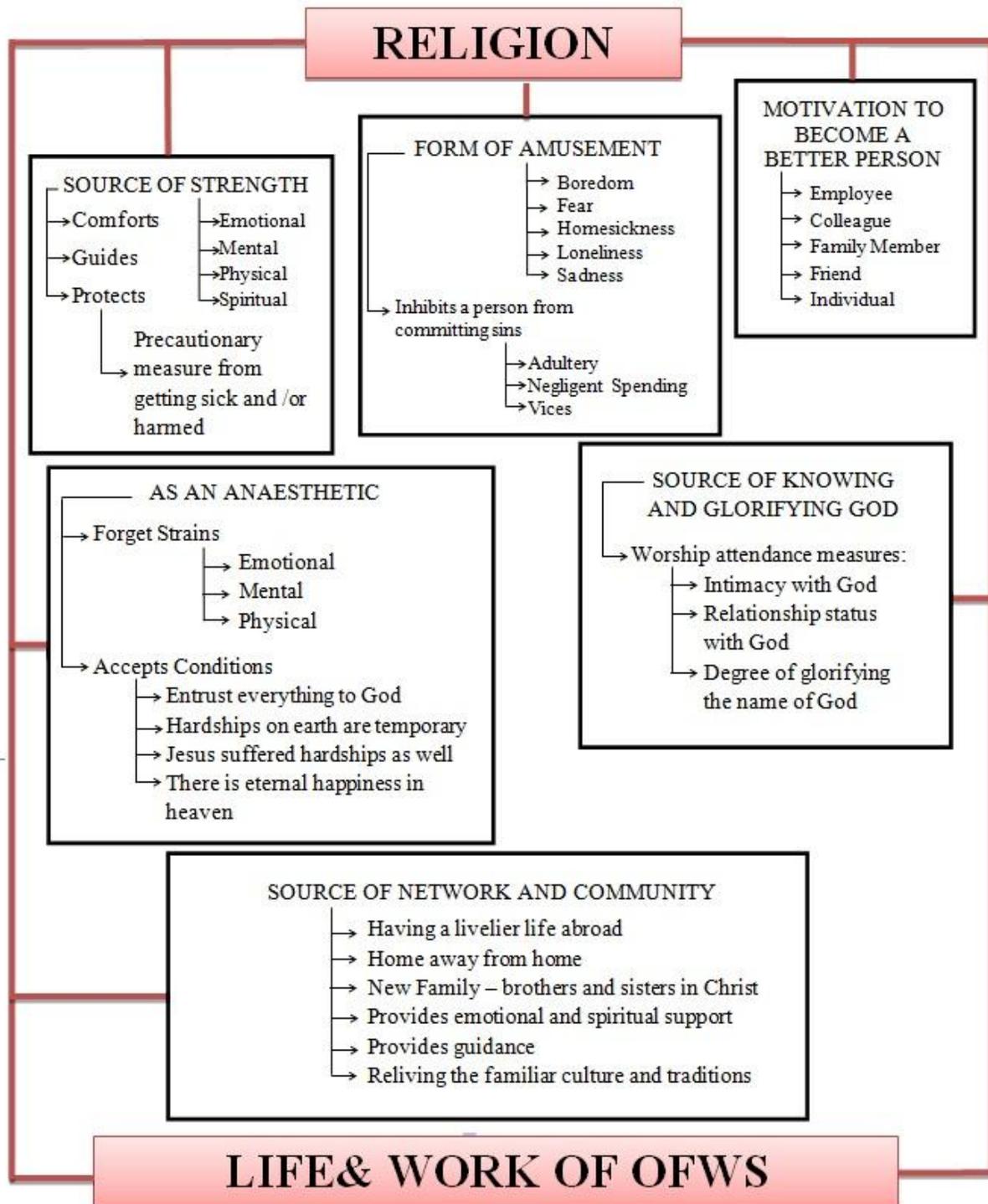


Figure 1. Conceptual framework illustrating the role of religion and religious organizations in the lives and work of OFWs in an Islamic State