

## [PAPER 2]

### ***Shifting the Focus on the Kopino Phenomenon: Contexts, Misconceptions, and Spatial Reform***

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It's almost 2016. Technologically speaking, the world has made leaps and bounds. It is often said that new technology such as the Internet has made the global economy much more prosperous and enabling for communication and information flows. We continue to advance every year as far as technology goes.

Consequently, our world is also increasingly becoming interdependent. People from all over the world can now communicate through the purportedly universal language known as English. And globalization and migration have been commonly said to be opening up borders, bringing people from all over the world closer to each other.

Yet the sad truth is many of the world's peoples do not progress as fast as technology does, especially in terms of tolerance, acceptance, and empathy.

Don Gordon Bell, a Korean War Baby (KWB)<sup>1</sup> was once asked by a pastor, "Are you the one who is kinda, sorta, Asian?" The KWB replied, "Yes, I am half-Korean, my mother is Korean...don't know about my father. I was born during the Korean War and adopted to the US." To this the pastor added,

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<sup>1</sup> Korean War Baby refers to half-Korean children born during the Korean War and adopted to the US.

perhaps voicing what the KWB had been feeling, “All your life you have lived with being a ‘divided person.’ You’ve been divided since the day you were born, despised from birth by your mother’s people and unaccepted by your father’s countrymen. Your mind has been divided... torn between two cultures, you have searched desperately for love and acceptance” (Bell, 2000).

Shine, a 21-year-old Kopino who went to the US in 2013 to study in college, had a related experience. When she was asked to fill out her scholarship forms, she was unsure about what to mark. Recently, when she applied for a Philippine passport renewal, she wasn’t sure whether to tick “dual citizen” or “Filipino citizen.” The fact is she holds both Korean and Filipino passports. Ironically, when asked what country she felt she belonged to, Shine replied that although she’s half-Korean and half-Filipino, she belonged to America.

Like the KWBs and Shine, biracial Filipinos, whether they are Chinoy, Fil-Am, Japino, or Kopino<sup>2</sup> have also experienced being a “divided person” and have been confronted with the question “What are you?” In many racial discourses, however, as in other discourse related to identity (class, gender, ethnicity, etc.), it is often forgotten that all humans are fundamentally divided from within. The fact that we humans are divided, therefore not “fully” ourselves and self-coincident, explains the truism that we have the capacity to view ourselves outside our symbolic identities and transform our social contexts (see Rothenberg, 2010). In the prevalent

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<sup>2</sup> Chinoy (Chinese-Filipino), Fil-Am, (Filipino-American), Japino (Japanese-Filipino), Kopino (Korean-Filipino)

mainstream discourse on race, this fundamental human division is placed *between* peoples. What inevitably results from this is the flawed belief where one group is perceived to be in possession of a “pure” identity while other groups are “lacking” or “tainted.” Within this divisive horizon, KWBs are often demanded to explain their lineage. Or, as illustrated by the case of Shine, those considered biracial or mixed have to choose their identity from the limited options presented to them. In the same way, Kopinos, like other racialized social identities, often find themselves confronted by the challenge to traverse and even transform the circumscribed space society dictates that they occupy.

The number of Kopino (Korean-Filipino) children has been steadily increasing over the past twenty five years. In recent years, however, the term “Kopino” has received added connotations such as “abandoned,” “illegitimate,” “poor,” and “offspring of a sex worker.” These prejudices aggravate the fraught space of Kopinos in the societies of their transnational parents. Against this background, the article has two related aims: to provide a description of and critical reflection on the Kopino phenomenon in the context of globalization and migration. First, it will comparatively look at the historical, economic, and socio-cultural contexts of South Korea and the Philippines to explore the significance of these perspectives in elucidating the Kopino space in South Korea-Philippines relations. Second, it will illuminate the continued vulnerability of impoverished Kopino families in relation to the problematic framing and constructions of the Kopino issue by the Korean media and transnational actors. Finally, the article will draw out the implications to stakeholders in overcoming the pessimism towards Kopinos as necessary in

bridging the cultural and economic gap between South Korea and the Philippines.

## **I. The Kopino Phenomenon**

The Kopino phenomenon and the social space within which it exists have arisen and are continually redefined by the heightened increase in interactions between Koreans and Filipinos in the context of transnationalism, marriage migration, and globalization. The issue strongly attracted the attention of transnational actors such as the Korean media, as well as church, human rights and NGO groups. However, this attention has not yet materialized in producing scholarly works and crafting public policies.

### **A. Korean and Filipino Migration**

The early part of the 1990s saw South Korea in the midst of social transformation brought about by globalization. Part of this social transformation was increased migration to neighboring countries such as the Philippines.<sup>3</sup> Alternately, such migration generated a counterflow, from the Philippines to Korea.

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<sup>3</sup> In 2006, Korean tourist arrivals to the Philippines reached 572,133, an increase of almost 10 times from 1985 to 1986 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2007). From January to July 2015, Korea was the biggest contributor to visitor arrivals in the Philippines with 762,277 arrivals. They also continue to provide the biggest contribution to the Philippine economy in visitor spending per year. In July 2015 alone, Korea recorded US\$166 million visitor receipts for the country (Department of Tourism, 2015). This steady and continuous movement of South Koreans to the Philippines resulted in intermarriage, cohabitation, or transitory sexual relationships that produced mixed children.

The Philippines saw the rise of migration of Filipino brides to Korea in the latter part of 1990s. This cross-border migration also caused the establishment of new and commercialized Korean marriage agencies that attracted mostly uneducated, poor, or rural Korean farmers as clients. Some of these clients are divorced or are currently married in Korea, but they come to the Philippines in an effort to find a bride due to a shortage of females in their own country. By 2007, 13% of all marriages in South Korea involved a foreign spouse from several developing countries in Southeast Asia (KOSIS, 2009). An average of 1,670 Korean and Filipino marriages per year was reported in Korea from 2012 to 2014. As of August 2015, the Korea Ministry of Justice reported a total of 10,736 Korean Filipino marriages (KOSIS, 2015). This figure, however, does not include unreported Korean and Filipino marriages in the Philippines.

Some of these marriages became successful while others failed (Asis and Battistella, 2013). When the couple based in the Philippines separated, the responsibility of raising Kopino children usually fell entirely on the Filipino mother's shoulders. Usually, the Korean father abandons his Filipina wife or partner when the latter gets pregnant. The father usually leaves the Philippines and cuts off communication with his Filipino wife and Kopino child/ren.<sup>4</sup>

## **B. The Kopino Children**

Officially and historically, the "Kopino" issue began to unravel when Bum Sik Son, a Korean married to a Filipina,

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<sup>4</sup> Based on interview records of Kopino mothers documented by Kopino Children Association Inc. from November 2005 to September 2015.

founded Kopino Children Association, Inc. (KCAI) in August 2005. Son established KCAI after three years of introspection and after having served in the United Korean Association, Inc. as Welfare Director. Son conceptualized the term “Kopino” in 2004 to refer to children born to a Korean father and a Filipino mother. The “Ko” in “Kopino” stands for “Korean” and “pino” stands for “Filipino” (Son, 2005).

Like the rest of the mixed-race Filipinos, the official number of Kopinos is unknown. The National Statistics Office of the Philippines does not keep a record of the ancestry of registered individuals and this is true for other mixed race Filipinos such as Chinoys, Fil-Ams, and Japinos. It is even more difficult to identify who among the total number of Kopino children residing in the Philippines are living with both parents, are being raised by their Filipino mothers, are enjoying sufficient finances, or are struggling to meet their basic needs.

KCAI was formed to address the situation of Kopinos being raised by their poor Filipino mothers. The Association’s primary objective is to increase awareness on the plight of Kopinos and to serve the cause of poor, abandoned, orphaned, and disadvantaged Kopinos residing in the Philippines. Its secondary purpose is to assist their mothers to be gainfully employed or to maintain a livelihood for their financial independence.

The existence of hundreds of Kopinos whose Filipino mothers are either referred to KCAI by the Korean Embassy in Manila or have directly contacted KCAI to seek help is significant. This small mixed-blood community in the

Philippines is with much shorter history than the other mixed-raced communities, but their increasing number cannot be ignored.

**II. Illuminating the Kopino Issue**

To better illuminate the issues surrounding the Kopino space in South Korea-Philippines relations, this paper looks at the nuances in the historical, economic, and socio-cultural contexts of both countries.

**A. History**

<b>Korea:</b> Immune to foreign invasion; Resists outsiders	<b>The Philippines:</b> Easy target of conquest; Disunited in resisting colonizers
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South Korea is a country that has a long history of foreign invasions and subjugation by its bigger neighbors. Current tensions with other countries like China, Japan, and Mongolia and other small tribal groups can be related to the painful history of invasion by the larger powers (Seth, 2011). Wary and cautious of outsiders, South Koreans may have built-up immunity and stubborn resistance against any invasion (Seth, 2006). Their ability to assert themselves in the face of destruction during the Korean War may have contributed to their sense of pride and mindfulness of Korean cultural identity (Seth, 2006 and 2010). They emerged from the war victorious and prosperous. They also overcame the harsh conditions of post-war era and gained self-respect after becoming a global economic power. Their success was immediate, astonishing, and phenomenal (Amsden, 1989). Now economically powerful and not threatened by any

foreign invasion, Korea's distrust of foreign invaders is still reflected in their very limited interaction with non-Koreans when they live abroad. They create and sustain a community abroad by putting up Korean grocery stores, travel agencies, hair and beauty salons, restaurants, beer houses and KTV bars, boarding houses, English language schools, internet cafés, etc. (Miralao, 2007). Korean "community associations" provide them with the information they need, as do weekly or monthly newspaper-magazines locally published in their mother tongue (Kutsumi, 2007). As a group perceived to be exclusive (Damazo, 2007), Koreans are more likely to remain "separated" from Philippine society (Miralao, 2007:15).

The Philippines is the opposite: It doesn't seem to be immune to war and invasions like South Korea. With a country abundant in supply of natural resources, Filipinos did not find the need to invade other nations. However, their abundant resources attracted the covetous eyes of other countries. The Philippines was initially colonized by a mere 200 or so Spanish soldiers (Crossley, 2011). Following a brief period of independence from the 300-year Spanish rule, it was subsequently colonized by the United States and then by Japan. Four centuries of colonization has left its mark on a certain Filipino mentality. David and Okazaki (2006b) identify this mentality as "internalized coloniality." Molded by subservience to colonial repression, this mentality is characterized by a self-perception of cultural inferiority. Hence, foreigners in the Philippines "are seen not as 'culturally discriminated objects,' but as 'superior people who should help the Philippines' because they are wealthier" (Kim, 2014).



The historical contrast between the two countries comes into focus when conflicts arise between Koreans and Filipinos in the Philippines. Perhaps without the two groups realizing it, the colonial history of both countries plays a role in some of their attitude toward each other. For example, when some Filipinos perceive Korean migrants as insensitive and arrogant, perhaps the judgement may have a different meaning if approached with an eye on the Korean resistance to colonial rule, which helped in nurturing Korean nationalism and a protective attitude toward their identity. In the same vein, some Filipinos' sensitivity towards belittling words and actions from foreigners may have grounding in their country's long history of subservience to colonizers.

## B. Economy

<b>Korea:</b> Belongs to the 10 strongest economies in the world since 2000; patriarchal.	<b>The Philippines:</b> Was leading in Asia in the 1950s; socio-economic system is largely colonial and feudal.
Many are middle class but this trend is slowly declining. The gap between the rich and the poor is not large.	The rich become richer while the poor become poorer. The gap between the rich and the poor is severe.

Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, South Korea's economy has been in the top ten (10) strongest and most powerful in the world. In fact, South Korea since 1996 has been a member of the Organizations for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), an elite international economic club of the world's 34 wealthiest nations. The middle class mostly compose the country's economic structure; the economic gap among classes is not wide.

In the 1950s, the Philippines was among the economic leaders in the continent. Today, its “emerging and developing” economy is the 39<sup>th</sup> largest in the world based on nominal GDP (International Monetary Fund, 2015). However, the gap between the rich and the poor is severe. The rich become richer, and the poor become poorer. Of the total population of more than 92 million, about 39 million people live below the international poverty level of \$2 a day (UNDP, 2013). Those living in poverty struggle to have access to education, jobs, and other basic necessities. It remains to be seen the optimism expressed by a United Nations Development Programme report (2013) stating that the Philippines is staying resilient through tough economic times, is becoming less dependent on aid, and is building its own capacity to spur economic growth.

The dominant socio-economic system in the Philippines remains colonial and feudal. This framework accommodates social inequality, corruption, and political dynasties accounting for 70% of the legislators in the country (Mendoza, 2012). More than three-fourths of the country’s annual income is under the control of the 40 richest Filipino families (Habito, 2012). Unlike many Koreans who believe that “a dragon rises up from a small stream,” members of the lower class comprising the marginalized majority are left with limited opportunities to overcome poverty and escape the economic class they were born into. Consequently, one manifestation of internalized Filipino tendency is “acceptance of fate rather than the demand to remake the world” (Hunt et al. cited in San Juan, 1999).

In developing countries, widespread and prolonged poverty has made some people think that the way to a better

life is through a marriage with a foreigner of higher economic standing (Seol, 2005). Similar to what is happening in other developing countries such as Thailand, India, Russia, Indonesia and Malaysia, many in the Philippines see foreigners, especially those from richer countries, as wealthy and powerful people (Mckenzie, 2012). In a nationwide survey of 945 female migrants with various nationalities in South Korea, 41% of the respondents said they married Koreans through marriage brokerage agencies<sup>5</sup> to improve their economic status, while 37% said they did it for love (Seol et al., 2006).

When their marriage or relationship fails, some Filipino mothers, especially those who are economically hard up, rely on available options such as the litigation against their child's father. For instance, based on accounts retrieved by KCAI, a Filipino mother signed an agreement with a Korean lawyer who was introduced by a Korean agent, WLK Consulting.<sup>6</sup> The Korean lawyer was appointed as the mother's attorney-in-fact in all matters pertaining to a lawsuit to be filed against the Korean father of her daughter. Despite knowing that the lawsuit will cut the ties between her child and her Korean father, the mother maintained that forced her to file a lawsuit for lack of financial resources to raise her Kopino child. This case is similar to other cases KCAI have identified in just a matter of one month this year.

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<sup>5</sup> Marriage brokerage agencies are legal in South Korea. However, in developing countries like the Philippines, international marriages facilitated through these agencies are illegal.

<sup>6</sup> WLK Consulting is a company that offers to file a lawsuit against the absentee Korean father of Kopino children who are residing in the Philippines in exchange for a signed Contract which requires the litigant to pay 50% of the revenue from such lawsuit.

In another case, a Filipino mother employed the services of WLK Consulting to file a lawsuit against the Korean father of her children. The lawsuit was her desperate attempt to see her eldest Kopino son who disappeared with her husband 13 years ago. Her son was only 2 years old then while her daughter was newly born. She sought the help of WLK hoping that she can be reunited with her son. However, she gained a different perspective after the Korean Embassy in Manila referred her to KCAI for counseling and assistance. In her discussion with Mr. Son of KCAI, she learned that a lawsuit was not the proper recourse for her case. All she needed was a translator who can help her communicate with her Korean husband and son who had since been living in Korea.

Cases gathered by KCAI reveal that some Filipino mothers see filing a lawsuit as a quick fix to their economic problem. Some may easily blame their misfortune on the Korean father alone and even forget that they are equally responsible for the life of their Kopino child.

The interaction between Koreans and Filipinos in the context of economic inequality can be partly understood using Friedmann's (1966) model, which helps explain the lopsided structure of the world economy and the capitalist countries' exploitation and socio-cultural domination of poor countries. The interaction of the core (South Korea) and periphery (the Philippines) is based on unequal exchange and can function as a kind of "class relation" (Bergesen in Chase-Dunn, 1998). Further, as Seol (2006) argues, the "exploitation by males" from core economies of women in non-core economies is in an upward trend.

When used to analyze the increase in international marriages resulting from globalization and migration, Friedmann’s theory helps to shed light on “the uneven development among countries in the global economy which consequently encouraged the commercialization of women” (Seol, 2006).<sup>7</sup> Due to poverty and lack of employment opportunities, women from developing countries migrate to wealthy countries “to improve the lives of hers and her family” (Ibid).

**C. Society and Culture**

The discussion for this sub-section is divided according to the topics of family, language, religion, and race.

**C.1 Family**

<b>South Korea:</b> Undergoing demographic transition: low fertility rate	<b>The Philippines:</b> Young population; high fertility rate
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In the 1960s, Korea’s standard household accommodated about four generations of one family. The eldest children usually lived with their parents and are made responsible to take care of the household. The parents expected their children to give back what the former sacrificed in the past.

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<sup>7</sup> Other factors that contribute to the increase of cross-border marriages that Seol (2006) identified include (a) “the country of origin’s patriarchal culture and government that seem indifferent or covertly encourage female migration in order to find a solution to the country’s poverty and unemployment, (b) the same of the destination country that promote such migration as a way to solve its lack of young female population for marriage, and (c) the marriage agencies that benefit from the aforementioned structural problems.”

This is usually not the case anymore at present. It has become extremely expensive to raise a child in Korea. Apart from financing their children's education, Korean parents are expected to help them in marriage and start-up businesses. When their children get married, Korean parents are obligated to help with housing costs, if not shouldering the entire cost of the property and the furnishings. Despite the huge expenses associated with raising them, Korean children often do not carry the burden of looking after their parents later. Although children are much valued in Korea, studies suggest that many parents prefer to have a small family because of the high cost of raising children (Seth, 2010).

Moreover, Korea today is at the heart of a demographic transition resulting from globalization. Due to more Korean women putting off marriage at a later age, Korea's fertility rate has dramatically declined from 2.8 in 1975-1980 to only 1.3 children per woman in 2005-2010 (Seth, 2010). Allocating more resources to the economy rather than to child rearing, Korea enjoys high levels of economic prosperity (Longman, 2012). However, this demographic situation is expected to become a liability. Political analysts argue that maintaining intact and married families and at least 2.1 children per woman is important in achieving sustainable economic growth (DeRose, 2012). But given the demographic changes and increasing unavailability of Korean women, South Korea may be forced in the future to encourage its male citizens to look elsewhere to raise a family.

In contrast, the birth rate in the Philippines is the highest in Asia with a fertility rate of 2.4 to 3.14.<sup>8</sup> Forecasters

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<sup>8</sup> In 2012, World Bank, placed the Philippines' fertility rate at 3.14. Retrieved from <http://www.ph.undp.org/content/philippines/en/home/countryinfo>

estimate that the population could double within three decades. Abortion is illegal and the influence of the Catholic Church is so strong that many women shun the use of contraception. Family planning is not common, either. While it is true that the Philippine population is aging, the Philippines has a young age structure similar to past decades (Albert, 2012; McKenzie, 2012; DeRose, 2012).

Since there is relatively less pressure on Filipino parents to limit family size based on financial capacity, Filipino families are comparably larger than Korean families. The extended family can rely on the principal family or vice versa, depending on who is more in need of assistance. This is one of the reasons why the Filipino woman, married or not, will usually have the custody of her Filipino child when she is separated from her Korean husband or partner. The Filipino mother usually counts on her family and relatives to help her raise her child.

In 1995, 12% of children were born outside marriage in the Philippines. There is more than a three-fold increase in 2000, with 39% of children born to an unmarried mother (Longman, 2012). An undetermined number of Filipino children are born out of wedlock—some through prostitution—and did not get to experience a father-child relationship or meet their Korean fathers.

McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) integrated their insights and extensive analyses on the substantial long-term effects and consequences for children growing with only one biological parent. They concluded that children who spent some part of their childhood in a single-parent family fared poorly in school and were less likely to finish high school or

enter and graduate from college. Consequently, these children are more likely to be unemployed regardless of the parent's race or education. Many studies confirm that children with unmarried parents and raised in a single-parent family are more likely to live in poverty (Moore, 2009; Haveman, 2001). They also have a higher tendency to "poor developmental outcomes" (Ryan, 2012). Moreover, they will more likely experience childhood stress, cognitive and psycho-social problems, and poor and less stable living arrangements (Aquilino, 1996; Haveman, 2001). Children born out of wedlock are more likely to have lower paying jobs and troubled marriages in their adult life (Amato, 2005). Despite these possible consequences and based on the experience of KCAI, the unmarried or separated Filipino mother who usually bears the responsibility of child-rearing will not give up her Kopino child for adoption.

Despite the high divorce rate in South Korea and informal separation of couples in the Philippines, a survey conducted by DeRose (2012) shows that 97% of the Filipino respondents and 92% of the Korean respondents agree that children are happier growing up with both parents together. These results, however, exclude some Kopino children born outside marriage and who usually grow under the care of their unwed single mother. Generally, an already married Korean male will not support or live with his Kopino children in the Philippines, nor will he maintain contact with them. This can be partly due to how Korean women, who before were subservient to their husbands, are now much more empowered. When the husband misbehaves by fathering a child with another woman, he will usually not be forgiven by his Korean wife. In some cases, the Korean wife evicts the husband from the house.



## C.2 Language

<b>South Korea:</b> Homogenous	<b>The Philippines:</b> Heterogeneous
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Korea is linguistically homogenous. Although regional accents are prevalent, Koreans speak, read, and write only one language: Hangeul. They do not need a translator, and communication is relatively easy.

The following story can illustrate the importance for Koreans of using Hangeul as a mode of communication. On her first Chu-Seok<sup>9</sup> in Korea, the wife in a Korfil<sup>10</sup> relationship received her first culture shock. Her husband's younger brother roared in anger at hearing her speak in English in front of him and other family members. He yelled at her and openly scolded and humiliated her for "not behaving properly" as the wife of his elder brother who ranks as the eldest grandson of the head of the clan. He complained about the fact that she married a Korean and had not learnt how to speak Hangeul. Although she did not feel she was discriminated against by the family, her Korean husband's family took five years before they accepted her and included her name and her children in their clan's family tree. The family initially saw the husband's marriage to an "outsider" as a challenge to and weakening of the family ancestry. The difficulty for the family in accepting the Filipino wife was

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<sup>9</sup> Chuseok is the Korean word for "thanksgiving."

<sup>10</sup> KorFil couples are legally married in the Philippines but such marriage was not necessarily reported in Korea. These couples live in the Philippines.

compounded by the expectation in Korean society for the eldest son to be the future caretaker of the family ancestry.

In contrast to Korea, the Philippines has 120 to 175 languages. Although Filipino and English are widely used in the Philippines, there is actually no single language used nationwide (McKenzie, 2012). With 93.5% of Filipinos able to communicate in English (Department of Tourism, 2009), the Philippines was able to create a hospitable business atmosphere for foreigners. This is one of the main reasons why Koreans visit the Philippines for short-term or long-term study and business. However, unlike the less linguistically diverse countries that tend to thrive economically, ethno-linguistic countries like the Philippines tend to have poor economic growth (Cong Wang and Steiner, 2015) caused by a cycle of dependence on foreign capital and investments.

**C.3 Religion**

<b>South Korea:</b> Confucianism is pervasive among Buddhists and Christian groups including Catholics and some other religious sects.	<b>The Philippines:</b> A mixture of cultures; Roman Catholicism is dominant.
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Buddhism has become Korea’s national religion since the founding of the Koryo dynasty in 918. Four hundred years later, Confucianism was introduced and implemented as the standard guide for both political and private aspects of the people’s life. Neo-Confucianism, an orthodox form of Confucian culture, is deeply embedded in Korean consciousness and is comparably stronger and more solid

than Chinese Confucianism (Seth, 2006 and 2010). Part of the respected tenets under the Neo-Confucian system is the subservience and inferiority of women (Lie, 1995). In Confucian culture, women are required to follow three forms of obedience: obedience to the father when young, obedience and devotion to one husband, and obedience to the son in old age (Palley, 1990; Seth, 2006). Hence, the woman is considered to belong to the man.

In Korea's patrilineal society, an unwed Korean mother is largely the object of antipathy and ridicule. Shunned in Korea's society, women who bore children out of wedlock with a local or a foreigner usually give up their babies for adoption. This explains why South Korea has earned an international reputation as the leading "baby exporter" (Bahk, 2013) "for foreign adoptions" (Choe, 2009). Consequently, a negative attitude toward illegitimate or mixed blood children became prevalent in Korea (Bianchi, 1997). While globalization and transnational migration provided the groundwork for multiculturalism in Korea, Confucianism remains to have a far-reaching effect on the people's lives (Palley, 1990). Perspectives on ethnicity have been shadowed by "pureblood" nationalism and proud, steadfast adherence to Confucian values and patrilineal principles.

The Philippines has more than one stream of religious influences imported from the West and the Middle East. The various religions may all share similarities in their belief in the existence of one "God" or "Yahweh" or "Allah", but there are signs of underlying discord especially between Filipino Muslims and Christians. The dominance of Catholicism in the Philippines has a historical relation to Spanish colonial rule,

which is reinforced by the continuing influence of the United States in the mindset of Filipinos. Fascination and obsession with foreigners and a penchant for imported or “stateside” items over locally produced goods are but two indications of a strong colonial mentality among many Filipinos. Years of colonial and feudal relations have benefited the ruling elite, many of whom are foreigners more powerful and rich than majority of the locals (McKenzie, 2012).

**C.4 Race Mixing: Half-Korean, Half-Filipino**

<b>South Korea:</b> Claims to be pureblood or undiluted; less diverse	<b>The Philippines:</b> With a diverse mix of cultures
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Korea prides itself of being an ethnically homogenous, pure-blooded race. The repeated attempts of its neighboring countries to subjugate the country helped to generate the South Korean perception of “pure blood” identity, patriarchal mores, and “defensive” nationalism (Seol, cited in Choe, 2009; Kim, cited in Park, 2006). However, the claim to be homogenous is an age-old myth, and more Korean people are questioning this long-held belief (Fuqua, 2011).

As a result of centuries of migration and colonization, the Philippines has heterogeneous cultures, subgroups, and mixed bloodlines, such as the Negritos and the Malayo-Polynesians. The country also has other racial groups, such as the Japanese, Han Chinese, Spanish, Hindus, Europeans, and other mixed races.

#### **C.4.1 The Hoa Nyang Nyeons**

During the Second Manchu invasion of Korea under the Choseon Dynasty, China held as many as 300,000 Korean women as war prizes, and as such, these women were believed to have been forced into sexual slavery. Choseon officials were able to negotiate for these Korean women to be allowed to return to their homeland. But upon their return, they were ostracized and treated as outcasts. Because of their society's deep fixation with racial purity and allegiance to the teachings of Confucianism, these women were regarded as dirty. They were discriminated against and later called “hoanyangnyeon,” (화양년) which is translated in English as “tramp.”

This flawed belief in pure-blood Korean identity can easily be dispelled when we look at the history of Hoa Nyang Nyeons (Korean women treated as outcasts and prostitutes during the Choseon Dynasty), the Lai Dai Hans (biracial people born to a South Korean soldier and a Vietnamese mother during the Vietnam War) and the Twi-gis (Korean War Adoptees).

#### **C.4.2 The Lai ĐạìHàn**

The Vietnam War (1955-1975) produced Lai ĐạìHàn (라이따이한) children. “Lai ĐạìHàn” is a Vietnamese term referring to a biracial person born to a South Korean soldier and a Vietnamese mother during the Vietnam War. Many Lai ĐạìHàn were children of South Korean soldiers with Vietnamese comfort women, but some were products of romantic relationships with Vietnamese women. As the Korean veterans went back to Korea after the Vietnam War, they left behind their Lai ĐạìHàn children with the solo

parentage of the Vietnamese mothers. These children were discriminated against and became the subject of hate in Vietnam for having been fathered by South Korean soldiers, considered to be the enemy of Socialist Vietnam. Lai ĐạiHàn is a cultural concept that has a negative connotation, “Lai” being any type of hybrid and “ĐạiHàn” being associated with South Korean mercenaries of wartime. The Lai ĐạiHàn were isolated and they struggled to get educated and employed. Most of them were raised by their poor mothers and many still wait to meet their Korean fathers.

More than two decades ago, Vietnam became a popular investment hub for Koreans after Vietnam converted to a market economy. It was then that the long-hidden historical issue of the Lai ĐạiHàn resurfaced (Grasso, 2015). The Korean government stepped in to spare their country from embarrassment in the midst of heated discussions over the issue of South Korean soldiers and Vietnamese comfort women. When the DoiMoi<sup>11</sup> policy was introduced to the world in 1986, South Korea was the first to offer huge investments. Furthermore, some Korean businessmen started helping “Lai ĐạiHàn” by hiring them or taking them into vocational schools in Vietnam. South Korean President Kim Dae-jung apologized on behalf of South Korea for causing pain to the Vietnamese people during wartime. He added that the Korean government was responsible for the wrongdoings of South Korean troops during the Vietnam War. Finally, in 2006, a law was passed to grant South Korean citizenship to

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<sup>11</sup> “DoiMoi” is a Vietnamese term given to the economic reforms in Vietnam in 1986 to create a “socialist-oriented market economy”.

biracial children. Despite the Lai ĐạiHàn issue, the Vietnamese warmly welcomed the Koreans. The Vietnamese may have understood that the Lai ĐạiHàn issue was a legacy of war involving their government and that of South Korea.

#### **C.4.3 The Twi-gis (Korean War Adoptees)**

In Korea, mixed-blood connotes disgrace, shame, and dishonor. This biased attitude stems back to the Korean War when abused Korean women and Korean prostitutes bore the children of American soldiers. These American soldiers left to go back to their home country and abandoned these children. The Korean society and Korean media blamed those American soldiers for abandoning their children, but they also blamed the Korean mothers for having sexual relations with American soldiers. It left a painful scar in many Koreans and the shaming of the Korean-American children manifested when they were labeled “twi-gi” (투기), a term for animal hybridization and a derisive way Koreans use for mixed-blood people.

The word “twi-gi” carries deeply ingrained prejudices. It does not refer to humans but is rather used for animal hybrids. It literally means a fusion between a male donkey and a cow, which produces an impossible breed that does not belong to any animal species. The word “twigi,” therefore, can mean “half-breed monster,” “outcast,” “dirty,” “filthy,” and “unlucky.”

The antipathy towards these mixed-race children in Korean society forced their unwed Korean mother<sup>12</sup> to turn to orphanages for their child's intercountry adoption. In recent years, these Korean war orphans have begun searching for their birth mother. But the likelihood of being reunited to their birth family has become a complex issue for them. For example, with over 75,000 out of more than 200,000 Korean adoptees who visited Korea to search for their culture and birth family, only about 2.7% or 2,025 have been reunited with their birth family (Jones, 2015). This could be an indication that their birth family would continue to evade them out of embarrassment and shame.

#### **C.4.4 Damunhwa**

Korea began to use the term “damunhwa” (multicultural)<sup>13</sup> to describe cosmopolitan Korea. The term multicultural society describes the ethnic diversity in Korean society. Multiculturalism in South Korea in mid-2000s was not meant for the integration of people of diverse cultures into the Korean society. It was purely “utilitarian,” and was intended for foreign migrant workers who were labeled “trainees” of demeaning, difficult, and dangerous jobs (what's called 3-D jobs) that Koreans dislike. Furthermore, South Korea focused efforts on inviting more foreigners to address the issue of low fertility. As a result, people from neighboring countries, most of whom were Chinese, moved to Korea as marriage migrants.

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<sup>12</sup> About 90% of Korean war adoptees are born to unwed Korean mothers. Having mixed race children and raising a child born out wedlock remains to be taboo for Korean women.

<sup>13</sup> “Multicultural,” “biracial,” and “multiracial” are used interchangeably in this paper.



However, their integration to the Korean society was not inclusive. The imposition of culture and the “Koreanizing” of all foreigners seemed to be the actual reality.

#### **C.4.5 The Kopinos**

Kopino families comprise a part of the Korean multicultural society. With the goal of helping multicultural families adjust to Korean life in South Korea, the South Korean government provides multicultural families with the opportunity to study Hangeul for free. Multicultural children enjoy the privilege of attending subsidized schooling (Korean Immigration Service, 2009). However, because multicultural children and their families are less empowered to adapt into Korean life, they continue to face severe “familial and racial discrimination” which results in poorer Korean language skill acquisition (Lim, 2011). Consequently, 20% of multicultural children in middle school and 40% in high school continue to face below average dropout rates. This implies that multicultural children, including Kopinos, will “face a future as the country’s permanent, racialized underclass” (Ibid).

In the Philippines the locals are relatively more welcoming to foreigners especially the mestizo-looking visitors or those with lighter skin. Being “mestizo”<sup>14</sup> is considered a privilege and they are looked up to in the Philippines. People with lighter skin color and high nose are perceived “classy” and superior (McKenzie, 2012); they are also considered to be educated and financially stable. As a result, they are usually accorded preferential treatment compared to those with

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<sup>14</sup> Mestizo means “of mixed descent.”

darker skin (Hannon, 2014). If a Filipina were to choose between a local and a foreign partner, many were found to most likely choose the latter, especially if the foreigner comes from a wealthy country. As discussed earlier, traces of this kind of colonial mentality date back to the Spanish colonial period when the colonized Filipinos were taught to regard the colonizer's culture and tradition as superior than their own (David and Okazaki, 2006b).

The emergence of 13.9 million solo parent families, transnational and skip generation families, and around 3 million children in solo parent<sup>15</sup> homes highlights the evolving nature of the Filipino family.<sup>16</sup> The single Kopino mothers who struggle to raise and support their children on their own or with the help of their parents and family are participants to this transition. The growing number of single-parent households comprise the “disadvantaged sector that DSWD serves and protects” (Soliman, 2012).

Nevertheless, in the past years, some KorFil couples who live in the Philippines, have directly alienated the Kopino children of unmarried Korean and Filipino couples. They insist on dividing the Kopinos into two groups: one group is the children of married Korean and Filipino parents, while the other group is those with unmarried parents. Ironically,

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<sup>15</sup> DSWD, pursuant to the Solo Parents' Welfare Act of 2000 classified solo parents into 10 categories (DSWD, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> According to a study by the Department of Health (DOH) and the University of the Philippines–National Institute for Health (UP-NIH, 2011), solo parents account for approximately 14-15% of the Philippine population of an estimated 94 million Filipinos or a total of about 13.9 million. Transnational families are considered “with members living in different nation states” while skip generation families are with children whose parents are absent from the household and are raised by their grandparents (Cruz, 2014).

KorFil couples are also alienated in Korean society. In order to maintain a better standing in Korean society, they alienate the single-parent mothers of Kopinos and their children. Their purpose is to distinguish Kopinos with “clean” backgrounds from those Kopinos born out of wedlock. As a result, it is the children born of transitory liaisons between a foreigner and a Filipina escort who are punished (McKenzie, 2012).

Because of the prejudices and to ease the alarming tension, KCAI at one point began to refer to the Kopinos by a hyphenated designation: Filipino-Korean. KCAI had to argue about the question of the sequence of the designation—Filipino-Korean or Korean-Filipino—and decided later to use Kopino and Korean-Filipino interchangeably. Both terms assert their ethnic identity and reinforces their “Korean-ness” and “Filipino-ness”. However, as Concannon (2009) argues, “the hyphen becomes a signifier of separation rather than connection,” which is why this complex segment of culture still needs articulation.

### **III. Transnational Actors**

While different organizations from South Korea such as civic, human rights, religious, and private individuals claim to be advocates for Kopinos, most of these transnational actors have variously contributed to creating a problematic space between Philippine-Korean relations. In South Korea from 2005 to 2009, discussions on mass media about Kopinos have stimulated interest on the Kopino phenomenon.

## **A. Korean Mass Media and Social Media**

The media in general impacts the values and attitudes of a society (Sanson, 2013). As the media can inform and strongly form people's collective response to certain issues, its role is crucial to the wider public's recognition of a social problem (Mahoney, 2003; Hilgarten and Bosk, 1998). However, some individuals in the field can also slant the news when they "specifically decide" what they will not tell the people (Caddell, 2012). Focusing on their subjective viewpoint on issues, they engage in "dagdag-bawas" (literally means "add-subtract") schemes to favor a narrative in which "they choose what to cover and what not to cover" (Glicken, 2011). They use this scheme to often provoke and stimulate people with sensationalized information. In relation to Kopinos, the outcome is tainted, distorted, and inaccurate reports.

For example, in the Wikipedia entry titled "Kopino" (2015), it is claimed that "85% to 90% of the [Kopinos'] mothers work as bar girls or in brothels with foreign clients." The said article uses as reference documentaries and news reports from the Korean mass media. But the claim is without any scientific basis. KCAI, since starting its work in 2005, could claim that only about 28% of Kopinos are born of prostitution. The figure is based on KCAI's correspondence with more or less 1,000 Kopino children and their mothers via KCAI's social media accounts.

Documentaries, articles, and media exploits have more often depicted Kopinos as a problem of society, portraying them as poor, rejected, and sexually abused children of Koreans and Filipino prostitutes. These reports neglect the fact that most Kopinos have married parents, some have

parents who separated and divorced, and some have Korean fathers who ran away from their responsibilities. These reports contribute to the further alienation and lower acceptability of Kopinos in Korean society. In the context of this media malpractice, it comes as less surprise that according to a Korean Multicultural Acceptability Index survey conducted by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MOGEF, 2012), 63.8% of Koreans continue to have negative views on co-existence and blending of cultures.

The distortion of the image of Kopinos has now become pervasive. Sometime in 2006, my husband decried an online post of a Korean who wilfully classified Kopino children as belonging to the species between apes and humans.<sup>17</sup> Even the definition of the term Kopino now is distorted and connotes a negative meaning. Just last year, Yonhap News Agency (2014) defined “Kopino” as a word “which refers to children of mixed Korean and Filipino descent of an unwed Filipino mother.” Olsen (2013) referred to the term Kopino to mean “Korean-Filipinos whose mothers are often prostitutes.” Others defined the term Kopino as referring to children born to a Filipino mother and a Korean father out of marriage (Chung and Partners; Sadorra, 2014).

Stereotyping reflects one’s long-held biases, prejudices, and insensitivity to cultural change and differences. Insensitivity invites ethnocentric projections, that is, seeing one’s culture as superior to the others, particularly as concerns behavior, customs, religion, and language. Heavily influenced by media misinformation, many TV viewers (and

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<sup>17</sup> The Korean website was called Philcafé24. This site was shut down in 2010.

Internet users) tend to misunderstand and be hostile to “outsiders” whom they consider to be socio-economically inferior to them (Saguy, Gong and Gruys, 2010). As manifestations of the core-periphery relation, it’s important to ask for future research: Where do these misrepresentations come from? Is Korean media similarly predisposed to show bias with respect to other issues involving ASEAN or developing countries?

### **B. NGO’s, Human Rights Groups, and Religious Workers**

Briggs (2012) argues that poor children and marginalized women have been seen as symbols of heroic rescue, child-saving ideology, and human rights. This was significantly amplified by the way mass media, human rights advocates, and other transnational actors present the images of Kopino children and their mothers in charity appeals, awareness seminars, and fundraising events. The face and images of poor Kopino children living in the slums are common scenes and necessary accessories for these activities.

Some Korean writers and civic groups, along with “foundations” mostly run by Koreans residing in the Philippines, contribute to the seemingly unending perpetration of distorted truth about Kopinos. Their press releases, websites, and public claims focus only on the already exaggerated negative side of the issue, deliberately excluding the differences between the two countries’ contexts. Disabling the synthesis of opinions by stimulating emotions to increase public support and patronage, some Korean groups sell human rights and welfare issues to serve their own profit-driven motives.

Consequently, Kopinos and their parents become victims of negative accounts that stem from exaggerated, grossly inaccurate, biased, and irresponsible portrayals of Kopinos as children of prostitutes and as society's problem. These portrayals of Kopinos have far-reaching effects on the Kopino image and will bring the issue of race-mixing to a heightened discussion. It only evoked the "hoa nyang nyeons" and the "twigis" of Korea in the present generation and nurtured a devastating perception about Kopinos and their mothers. This has substantially if not completely frustrated the hope of KCAI's objective to "help bridge the gap between Korea and the Philippines."

In another case, Hyun Suk Lee, director of Tacteen Naeil,<sup>18</sup> a group connected to Eastern Social Welfare Society that solicits donations for Kopino, claimed in an interview that "the number of children [born from Korean men and Filipina prostitutes] is estimated to be about 10,000" (Olsen, 2013). She also claimed that some Kopino children are fathered by Korean sex offenders who impregnated child prostitutes. In July 2014, she cited the "alarming" findings about Kopino in "investigations in 2006 and 2011" conducted in Angeles, Philippines.<sup>19</sup> However, the existence of such "investigations" remains a question until now and the site of the "investigations" has been exposed as a sex tourism site in the

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<sup>18</sup> *Tacteen Naeil is an ECPAT Affiliate Group in South Korea. ECPAT stands for End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes*

<sup>19</sup> Lee Hyun Suk. *Kopinos, Children of Shameful Korean Men*. In *Korea Focus – September 2014* by The Korea Foundation. Dong-A-Ilbo, July 2014; ECPAT Korea (Tacteen Naeil). (2013). *Report by Tacteen Naeil highlights the phenomenon of "Kopino" children, born as a result of Korean offenders in Philippine* (<http://www.ecpat.net/news/report-tacteen-naeil-highlights-phenomenon-kopino-children-born-result-korean>)

country. She also asserted that “some of them also sell sex to survive” (Kang, 2013). However, in the more than one decade of its social work with Kopino children, KCAI has never encountered even one case of a Kopino child who “sell[s] sex to survive. According to Tacteen’s website, the organization accepts donations for Kopinos. But the effect of their grandstanding and baseless reports is the opposite of helping and advocating for Kopinos—they stigmatize Kopinos all the more by disseminating false information.

The exaggerated and sentimentalized coverage of the Kopino phenomenon has not only roused the interest of other non-government organizations (NGOs), but also gave birth to Korean religious groups run by Korean missionaries and church laymen who began raising funds from Korean churches to purportedly help Kopinos. Even Korean educators, who work in Philippine state universities as academic instructors and lecturers, pose themselves as benefactors of Kopinos while running intensive English language programs for Korean visitors. By simply typing Kopino on Google, one will find a host of Kopino sites/groups claiming to exist to help Kopinos in the Philippines. These Korean groups can be found in Bulacan, Tagaytay, Cebu, Angeles, Manila, and many other parts of the country. All of them share a common objective—to raise funds from Korea to help “thousands of abandoned Kopinos.” Sadly, their efforts are interwoven with a desire to profit from the situation of poor Kopinos in the Philippines.

In the past, aid agencies have championed the ideals of global humanitarianism (Cottle and Nolan, 2007). However in their quest to “brand” themselves in the media by pursuing “separate newsmaking strategies,” their



“fragmented and conflictive character” becomes evident (Ibid). This brings us to the topic of the “briefcase NGO” phenomenon.<sup>20</sup> According to Lee (2014), many briefcase NGOs “chase funding and adjust strategic visions” in order to meet the requirements of funding agencies. Consequently, they “shift their focus away from their areas of expertise into where the money is to sustain themselves.” Imposing their claims without public discourse, they “win funds easily but causing social disruption on the ground” (The Economist, 2000).

A number of documentaries, articles and news reports have been dedicated to the Kopino phenomenon for many years. Many Korean civic and religious groups in the Philippines and some NGO’s in Korea have been portrayed as advocates for Kopinos. Regrettably, to our knowledge, only a handful has truly and honestly dedicated their efforts to benefit the alienated Kopinos.

### **C. Law Firms and the “Kopino Business”**

In 2011, a group of Korean lawyers visited the Philippines and approached KCAI to offer their services as lawyers for the mothers of abandoned Kopinos. The amount involved could reach two million pesos (US\$45,000), which, according to their plan, would be divided in two equal parts between the mothers and the lawyers. Because of KCAI’s firm stand that the issue of litigation rests on the choice and

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<sup>20</sup> “Briefcase” NGOs...are normally established to target Donor funds and are characterized by absence of offices; absence of permanent addresses of their own; lack of a well-defined administrative machinery and organizational structure; lack of reliable contacts; they are not yet registered or are still pursuing registration (Eannaso, 2003)

decision of the Kopino and not on his/her mother, these lawyers went back to Korea empty-handed. But another Korean law firm began recruiting mothers of Kopinos and enticing them to file a lawsuit against the Korean fathers of their Kopino children. This law firm's Facebook account disappeared after a short while.

The conversation about Kopinos once again stirred up in 2014, when, for the first time, a Filipino mother with two Kopino children won a paternity suit in South Korea (Kim, 2014). A few months later, some Kopino mothers were lured by a South Korea-based law firm to file lawsuits for child support. From then on, more attention has suddenly shifted to enterprising Korean lawyers, and curiosity among Kopino mothers about Korean Nationality Act<sup>21</sup> was cultivated.

The media portrayal of Kopino in South Korea has also given rise to the establishment of "Kopino Business," which are owned and operated by Koreans living in the Philippines. Their business involves recruiting Filipino mothers to sue the Korean father of their Kopino child. In February 2014, a group called WLK Consulting<sup>22</sup> formed their "consulting firm" consisting mainly of South Koreans who claimed "We Love Kopinos." As a campaign activity, they started offering milk at a busy highway in Metro Manila for the mothers of Kopinos. The photos of the mothers holding their Kopino children were then posted on social

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<sup>21</sup> *The Korean Nationality Act stipulates that a person can be a citizen of the Republic of Korea by virtue of birth, acknowledgement of the Korean father/mother, or through naturalization.*

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/WLK-Consulting-Service-Office-1417173948522320/timeline/>; an allied company, called KPN maintains a blog here: <http://cafe.daum.net/bkpn/Yz3c/12?sns=facebook&svc=sns>

media sites. In addition, they also contacted KCAI mothers who live in Korea and in the Philippines through Facebook and Korean blogs and later hosted concerts, lunches, and dinner parties for these mothers to promote and advertise their business enterprise.

Founders and business associates of “We Love Kopinos” (WLK) claim that they feel deep compassion for the Kopinos and their mothers. Capitalizing on the Korean Citizenship Act and the Paternity Act, they recruit single, married, or separated mothers of Kopino children to sue their Korean husband or the father of their Kopino child. They advertise their services as “for free” but a close look at their retainer agreement reveals that the client shall pay 50% of the collected proceeds to the attorney as a “success fee.” Apart from parties and meetings, they aggressively contact and befriend unsuspecting mothers of Kopino children residing in Korea and in the Philippines via social media sites, promising to help them receive a large sum of money from their children’s fathers 12 to 18 months from the date of filing the lawsuit. WLK would have the mothers sign a contract and a power of attorney to give full power to WLK’s partner, a law firm based in Korea to represent them in a Korea Family Court. The agreement<sup>23</sup> and the power of attorney contain

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<sup>23</sup> *The actual Retainer Agreement has a “Special Contract Terms” section that enumerates these terms and conditions: Client is informed and understands that Attorney shall agree with Defendant on behalf of Client under the Conditions described below. i. Client shall drop a suit against Defendant and shall not file the same lawsuit again; ii. Client shall not request that he/she be enlisted in Defendant’s family relation register; iii. Client shall not claim any rights for child rearing expenses retrospectively as well as prospectively; iv. Client shall not stand on the rights of inheritance. Furthermore Client shall submit a document relinquishing inheritance to a competent court at Defendant’s decease; v. Client shall respect Defendant’s family life and its welfare in Korea. Client shall*

provisions grossly disadvantageous to the Kopinos. This includes renouncing their rights to become Korean citizens and the right of lifetime access to their Korean fathers. What is more, the signing of these documents is done in the presence of WLK, not with the Korean lawyer who will represent the Kopino mother and file a “confirmation of fatherhood” case against the Korean fathers in Korea. The Kopino mothers were verbally promised an amount of about 400,000 Philippine pesos (US\$9,000) but at the same time were required to pay a 50% commission to WLK for all the litigation and other expenses incurred.

In July 2015, an MBC TV documentary that aired in Korea focused on describing this Korean consulting business as “Kopino Business.” The Kopino Business has a huge network, with many Koreans joining and investing and establishing branches in South Korea and in different cities of the Philippines with a large Korean presence. They even maintain a safe house in the southern part of Manila to “secure” the mothers from being contacted by the Korean fathers of their Kopino children during the course of the lawsuit.

MBC cited Strother’s (2014) interview with Hyun Suk Lee, where the latter made another unfounded claim that the number of Kopino children born in the Philippines “has

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*not insist on any rights derived from biological relativity with Defendant that cause discord of Defendant’s family.*

*Note: The Korean lawyer or the Korean lawfirm’s authorized representative is usually not physically present when the Kopino mother signs the Contract and the Power of Attorney. This is considered illegal in Korea. The Korean lawyer can lose his license if found guilty.*

soared to 30,000 from 10,000” (Olsen, 2013). If this figure were true—which we at KCAI argue is not—and assuming that at least 10% of the mothers will enlist the services of these Kopino Business firms, about 3,000 cases of “confirmation of fatherhood” will soon flood the Korea Family Courts. When converted into profit, these cases would yield at least a staggering 30 million US dollars in revenue for the Kopino Business owners. Indeed, many will be tempted to join this venture and the scary image of many Koreans losing their jobs in the future or Korean families destroyed cannot be avoided. What is more, the Kopino Business destroys any chance for Kopinos to see their Korean father in the future.

The mothers of Kopinos who were enticed by WLK to file a lawsuit may be unaware that the Korean court may only grant as little amount as US\$270 a month for child support. According to Lee (2015), it will take about one and a half years to win a similar case that can cost them US\$5000 to file. Out of all 390,000 single parents in Korea, only 4.6% have filed a lawsuit for child support. Of the 4.6%, only 22.6% receive support from the other parent as ordered by the court. Moreover, the Kopino mothers are usually not informed that the chances to receive a child support in are slim even if they win a case because there is no assurance that the losing parent will follow the order of the court. The losing parent may even cut off all communications with the single parent once the judgment is handed down. A single mother complained that going through the lawsuit was the most taxing thing she has done (Lee, 2015).

Usually, the legal maneuvers begin and end only in the filing of “confirmation of fatherhood” against the Korean father concerned. These Kopino Business firms do not intend

to file for child support on behalf of the Kopino mothers. As earlier mentioned, only a small number of Korean fathers pay for child support. That is why the Korean consulting firms do not aim to file a lawsuit for child support. Their goal is to threaten the Korean father of public humiliation to force him to amicably settle on the amount they demand.

If developmental psychology has revealed the commodification of childhood, social history has exposed the commodification of poverty. As Kennedy (2009) put it, “humanitarianism is now big business.” Charity appeals have been reduced to commercial slogans.<sup>24</sup> The “victims” are deprived of their individuality, autonomy, and dignity. It is deeply disconcerting that these aid and human right advocates engage in this type of discourse and operation. And it is revolting that their behavior reinforces age-old prejudices and negative tendencies toward mixed-race children.

#### **IV. Conclusion: Toward Transforming Space in South Korea-Philippines Relations**

Two decades of Korean migration to the Philippines resulted in new cross-border social outcomes, which offered opportunities and posed challenges to both countries. The Kopino phenomenon is one of these outcomes. As children of citizens of both countries, the Kopinos are in a unique position to help bridge the gap between the Philippines and Korea. As young people, they can also serve as the two countries’ investment for the future.

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<sup>24</sup> *Some commercial slogans purportedly to benefit Kopinos: “We Love Kopinos”, “Restore their Human Rights”*

South Korea is still in the early stages of transitioning from a homogenous to a multicultural society (Moon, 2010). Its phenomenal economic growth and the upsurge in transnational migration came rather suddenly and their limited experience with adapting to foreign cultures somehow limited their ability to quickly grasp the realities of this “borderless” world. Aside from their resistance against any perceived intruders, many of what South Koreans know about Kopinos are based on distorted information disseminated by self-serving media practitioners and profit-driven Kopino advocates, individuals, and groups.

Although most of these marginalized children have living parents, many of them live in poverty, particularly Kopinos who are raised solely by their Filipino mothers. In the Philippines, poverty is intertwined with lack of access to quality education. Lacking quality education in the Philippines is tantamount to being unqualified for decent-paying employment. This social issue manifests in the case of Kopinos abandoned by their Korean fathers—many of them remain and will remain poor all their lives without a good education. They are more likely to become entangled in the same cycle of poverty affecting their Filipino mothers. In most cases, boys land dirty, difficult, and dangerous jobs, while girls who are unable to finish their formal education may well end up marrying or working low-paying jobs to make ends meet (Aquilino, 1996; Haveman, 2001; Amato, 2005).

The issue of Kopinos will remain and leave a legacy in the Korean-Philippine space despite the changing circumstances. To understand and transform this space, it is necessary that intolerance, prejudice, and stereotyping be

replaced with critical thinking, empathy, and discussions on policy changes. While this study is exploratory and preliminary in nature, based as it is on descriptions and reflections, it nevertheless critically draws attention to the Kopino issue to hopefully stimulate comprehensive research on this topic. Further research on the Kopino phenomenon and instigating socio-economic policy reforms must therefore commence.

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