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**Mimicking the mimics: problematizing cover performance of
Filipino local music on social media**

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Abstract

The performance of cover songs in popular music has long been a subject of critical discussion and debate due to the artistic, social, cultural, and commercial issues that covers raise. In non-Western societies, most popular songs covered by artists are Anglo-American, a situation which implicitly privileges Western music and reinforces both the “west and the rest” trope and the cultural imperialism thesis. Taking American amateur artists and their online videos performing Filipino popular music as case studies, this article examines how social media platforms facilitate and problematize center-periphery relations in popular music through a diffusion of cultural products “from the rest to the west.” Moreover, we show that more than the promise of audience reach, the phenomenon reflects how these cover artists embody cultural and social situatedness in Filipino culture. As they mimic the mimics, they also embody an identity in motion.

Keywords: *cover songs, Facebook, Filipino music, globalization of music, social media, YouTube*

Introduction

The field of popular music studies has long considered the performance and recording of cover songs primarily in terms of their aesthetic, commercial and social significance in both recordings (e.g. Cusic, 2005; Griffiths, 2002; Plasketes, 2010a) and live performance (e.g. Bennett, 2000; Brocken, 1996; Homan, 2006). Underlying the obvious distinction between cover versions and originals is a focus on songs originally written, performed and recorded by Western musicians, which implicitly privileges Western music and reinforces a sharp distinction between the “west and the rest.” Contemporary developments, including the rise of the internet, social media, and the blurring of time and space concerning global circulation of cultural products have served to problematize the west/rest flows. Understanding this relatively new situation leads us to rethink the trajectory of popular music production, consumption and circulation. In particular, we are now seeing, through digital technology, examples of original music produced by those who were previously considered as “other” being consumed and re-produced as cover songs by Western musicians.

In this article, we examine the ways in which user-content focused social media platforms, such as YouTube and Facebook, facilitate the cultural circulation of non-Western popular music to and by American artists. We consider a recent trend where “Western” artists perform cover versions of songs from other countries in the “original” language and examine how this phenomenon problematizes center-periphery relations. Our specific examples are videos of amateur American cover musicians who perform pop songs in the Filipino language.¹ The article teases out the complexities of this phenomenon and its implications for global popular music and non-western music.

The article is divided into three sections. The first discusses the literature focusing on cover songs and considers the formation of identity for Filipino musicians through renditioning. Rather than considering this practice as the cultivation of mimicry, we suggest that by employing the practice of renditioning, Filipino musicians engage in the global circulation of popular music and promulgate their identity in both online and offline environments – an illustration of “identity in motion” (Griffiths, 2002) as well as transmedia performance (De Kosnik, 2017; Jenkins, 2007). In this section, we also show the role of social media in opening up a more accessible, widely disseminated but also *contested* platform for the performativity of artists. The final part of this section outlines the approach we use in addressing the subject at hand.

The second section of the article presents three case studies of American musicians performing songs in the Filipino language through videos posted online. These case

studies represent more general contemporary trends in the covering of non-western songs by Western musicians. They also demonstrate “virality” in terms of how they embody the performative and affective dimensions of “symbolic ethnicity” (Balance, 2012). In the final section of the article, we analyze and discuss the chosen video examples and consider the implications of this trend for global popular music in general.

Cover Songs and Performance

Cover songs have long been an object of critical discussion and debate in popular music studies. Shuker (2008) points out that the common view among musicians, fans and critics is that the cover artist is at the base of the hierarchy of popular music performers, on grounds that “reliance on someone else’s material concedes that you have nothing of your own to say” (p. 62). While in the main correct, Shuker’s suggestion needs, on the one hand, to be appropriately historicized – before the rise of popular music artists who performed and recorded their own songs in the early to mid-1960s (The Beatles, Bob Dylan, The Beach Boys, The Rolling Stones, etc.), the separation between songwriter and performer was routine. On the other hand, popular music scholars have argued that playing cover songs, particularly by performers with a track record of writing their own material, demonstrates various forms of sociological, cultural and aesthetic value (Baker, 2015; Cusic, 2005; Griffiths, 2002; Negus and Pickering, 2002; Plasketes,

2010a). In this paper, we follow Griffiths' (2002) suggestion that cover versions illustrate "identity in motion" as they invite listeners to examine musical and cultural transformations when different artists perform a particular song. Further, we recognize that the "cover song...[is] systematically ambiguous" (Mosser 2008: 8--9). As Plasketes (2010b) argues, "[t]he cover complex, with its multiple variations, issues, and contexts, comprises an important and rich popular culture text...represent[ing] aural artifacts which embody artistic, social, cultural, historical, commercial, biographical, and novel meanings" (p. 2).

There are different kinds of cover performances and the classification of a particular performance is usually based on its relationship with the original recording as well as the artist's intent, authenticity and context (Cusic, 2005; Griffiths, 2002; Magnus et al., 2013; Mosser, 2008). Griffiths (2002) suggests three main categories of cover version: renditions, transformations, and appropriations. Magnus et al. (2013) refine this classification, suggesting there are four kinds, or perhaps more precisely levels, of cover version, each further distant from the original and each entertaining a different mode of evaluation appropriate to it. These are: mimic (merely "echoing" the canonical track); rendition (changing the sound of the canonical track); transformative (diverging from the original to the extent they instantiate a distinct, though derivative, new song); and referential cover (which instantiates a distinct song that in part refers to the original song). This categorization system is based on Mosser's (2008) continuum, which

includes reduplication, interpretive, send-up, and parody covers. While these categorizations are valuable in understanding cover songs, particularly when Western songs are covered, they remain starkly within a romantic original versus derivative paradigm and are unable to capture some key nuances, especially for the context we are considering in this article.

In order to consider the complexity of the phenomenon, we draw from Magnus et al.'s (2013) notion of "mimic covers" though with some caution, as it may not completely satisfy the characteristics of the cover songs we are examining. For simplicity, we use the term "cover song" or "cover performance" to denote "mimic" covers although this type does not exactly illustrate the case studies analyzed here. Nonetheless, this ambiguity or in-betweenness lies in the fact that while the cover artists try to emulate the original song, a recontextualization of the original recording also becomes apparent.

The Filipino Brand of Mimicry

Although there are pre-colonial, folk and indigenous music heard in different parts of the country already, Filipino popular music emerged in the wake of first Spanish (1565-1898) and American (1898--1946) colonizations, and a subsequent musical and sociocultural reaction and revolt through its post-colonial and contemporary history (Gabrillo, 2018; Maceda, 2007). Colonization resulted in the almost complete silencing

of indigenous Filipino music and its replacement with musics from the colonial cultures. Part of the “revolt” involved the reclamation of the Filipino local sound and identity. Consequently, a localization of popular music has been carried out by combining the Filipino sensibility and Anglo-Saxon musical styles, including but not limited to the “*bodabil*” (1940s), the Manila sound (mid-1970s), and Pinoy rock (1970s--1990s). While we do not disregard the existence of originality in Filipino music, two key defining features of the Filipino musical identity on the diasporic stage as well as in virtual spaces have become established throughout history: on the one hand, hybridity and on the other, mimicry.

Filipino musicians tend to perform cover songs as a form of labor (i.e. as work and employment) (De Dios, 2016; Ng, 2006) or as an artistic endeavor aimed at jumpstarting their musical careers (Balance, 2012; Cayari, 2011; Watkins, 2010). In both cases, the musicians utilize their renditioning skills as a ticket to play and travel around the world and gather as much musical knowledge as possible to create their own hybrid kind of music at home and in the Filipino diaspora. Watkins (2010) suggests that mimicry is a step for Filipino musicians on the way to achieving specific creative and artistic goals. An interesting historical example of this is Borromeo Lou (aka Luis Borromeo), who was born in Cebu province and in 1915 traveled to the US as a pianist in vaudeville acts, returning to the Philippines in 1921 to establish a musical style known as *bodabil*, a localization of vaudeville (Keppy, 2013). In more recent times,

researchers have recognized the skills of Filipinos in the US hip-hop market particularly in DJing (e.g. Invisibl Scratch Picklz) and rappers such as Apl.de.ap (Black Eyed Peas), and Chad Hugo (Neptunes, N.E.R.D) (Balance, 2012; Devitt, 2007; Tiongson, 2013; Villegas, 2016; Wang, 2015).

Early research and theories of popular culture assumed that the circulation of popular culture has always been from the west to the rest, noting that the West (the US and the UK/Britain, in particular) is the center (e.g. Featherstone, 1990; Tomlinson, 1997). However, there has been a long history of Western artists appropriating elements of “musics from the rest” to diversify Anglo-American popular music. Hybrid musics have been formed by fusing non-western elements with American and British music. The Beatles were, of course, well-known and extremely influential in treading the path towards “orientalism” in their music (Farrell, 1997; Reck, 1985, 2008). In a more general consideration of the logic of the gift in relation to David Bowie’s performance of cover versions, Baker (2015) considers *Don’t Let Me Down and Down*, a cover, with roughly translated lyrics, of Mauritanian singer and model Tahra Mint Hembara’s song *T Beyby*, which was a wedding gift to Bowie’s partner Iman. O’Leary (n.d.) underscores the complexity of the movement between the West and its other by pointing out that Tahra’s original was one of a group of songs “derived from the traditional modal system of Mauritania...but which were interpreted by French musicians in state-of-the-art Parisian studios in 1988.” The strategy of establishing identity and expressing Asian

pride and heritage in music (Sharma et al., 1996) has, according to Clayton (1998), been used by popular British artists such as Kula Shaker and Bally Sagoo, who integrate Indian cultural elements in their songs. The indie-rock band Cornershop is also relevant in this regard. Britney Spears' 2003 single "Toxic" also successfully exploited Western interest in bhangra music, famously sampling string sounds from the 1981 Bollywood film *Tere Mere Beech Mein*. More recently, we have witnessed the circulation of popular music from the peripheries to the center or from east to the west in the form of K-pop from Korea (Jung, 2014) and J-Pop from Japan (Monty, 2010).

While amateur Western musicians covering Filipino music in its local language on social media is a recent phenomenon, this is not the first instance of American artists covering Filipino songs. The 1960s pop male vocal trio The Lettermen performed "kundiman" (traditional Filipino love songs) such as *Dahil sa Iyo* (Because of You) and *Sapagkat Kami Ay Tao Lamang* (For We Are Only Humans). Similarly, Nat King Cole covered *Dahil sa Iyo* during his 1961 concert in Manila. These artists were already established in the industry when they performed these songs and covering was a deliberate strategy to affectively reach the Filipino audience. Contemporary amateur cover musicians are also deliberately targeting a Filipino audience, their mimicking occurring in a different social context and under different technological conditions. Little attention has been paid in the academic literature to cover versions and forms of impersonation in this context. Moreover, limited research has been done on the utility of

social media as a means by which artists access musical resources and reinterpret the songs for both a local and international audience.

Social Media and Cover Performativity

Popular music has become easily accessible through the internet and social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and others (e.g. Cayari, 2011; Chow, 2018). With the advent of social media as well as technologies to easily and conveniently record audiovisual performances, many amateur musicians, some are Filipinos, have utilized YouTube and Facebook to attempt to establish careers and foster potential markets. YouTube is a public online platform that allows registered users to upload videos and have their videos available for public viewing. Clement (2019) reports on Statista that “[a]s of May 2019, more than 500 hours of video were uploaded to YouTube every minute.” YouTube has become the single largest platform where various forms of content such as music and music videos are broadcast. It has overtaken the dominance of MTV, the network with the predominant role in the globalization of pop music and music videos in the 1980s and 1990s (Banks, 1997).

Along with YouTube, Facebook provides a powerful tool for aspiring musicians and performers. Facebook is a social media platform that allows users to post stories, videos, photos, and links to their “wall,” which can be set to public or private viewing, limiting visibility to themselves or their direct networks or “friends.” The various

affordances of Facebook make it almost synonymous with social media and electronic networking, making it an important tool for musicians due to its ability to connect people, groups, businesses, and audiences. With 2.71 billion active worldwide users in 2019 (Sanchez, 2019), Facebook has the capacity to draw a large audience for artists. It is also possible to connect YouTube clips to Facebook, though not vice-versa. The massive figures on both YouTube and Facebook have proven to be of great benefit to artists who aspire to have their music be known internationally. The platform also allows feedback and exchange of content leading to an interaction between originator and users, illustrating a collaborative produsage or “the collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement” (Bruns, 2006: 2).

Methods

The key methodological approach used in the analysis of the videos is discourse analysis. This approach, although originating from linguistic studies (Harris, 1952), also has a long-established place in media research (e.g. Bauer and Gaskell 2000; Rasmussen Pennington, 2016) where it has proven to be of critical importance in identifying and interpreting the often complex relationships between images, objects and texts embedded in media content. Following the method used by Weintraub (2009) and Hess (2005), we describe the videos as a text and discuss their meanings in terms of social

construction and ideology. To supplement the discussion, we also analyze the comments on the videos from YouTube and Facebook. Particular attention is given to understanding how the audience perceives and reacts to the covers and the artists.

As accessible digital archives for media content, YouTube and Facebook have rapidly emerged as significant research resources. For this article, we sourced and analyzed videos² posted on these platforms from American amateur independent musicians David Dimuzio, Ako Si Chris (a.k.a. jOePM), and Puting Pinoy, each of whom performs songs in the Filipino language. The artists were chosen due to their prominence on social media and broad representativeness of the trend for mimicking songs in the original language of non-western artists.

These artists were also the earliest to become “viral” in this realm, which led to stronger popularity enabling them to penetrate the Philippine music scene. Virality is important as it draws upon the performative and affective dimensions of the “symbolic ethnicity” (Balance, 2012) of the performance and performer. Balance (2012) suggests that viral media depends upon (1) a niche or subculture’s active participation through online networks (i.e. websites, blogs, and social networking directed at its particular needs/concerns) and (2) its knowledge of and ability to craft emotional hooks; key signifiers that touch upon a shared set of affective investments and affiliations. Three specific videos were chosen for analysis in this article: *Kahit Maputi na ang Buhok Ko* by David Dimuzio,³ *Narda* by jOePM, and *Ang Huling El Bimbo* by Puting Pinoy.

These were selected based on the following criteria: 1) the song is in the Filipino language, 2) it is the oldest video uploaded by the cover artists, 3) it has the highest analytics (number of views, likes, and comments) among the artist's public videos.

Mimicking the Mimics

Historically, in relation to the Western music industry, Filipino musicians are primarily known as mimics. While social media has enabled many Filipino artists to become popular through online covers (Cayari, 2011; De Kosnik, 2017), there have also been Americans and other non-Filipinos who have become known for their viral videos mimicking Filipino songs on YouTube and Facebook. A news clip introduces David Dimuzio as "...American as apple pie and baseball, but he has a heart full of love for Filipino music..." (Tagala, 2016). Dimuzio is explicitly and symbolically described and juxtaposed between American material symbols and intangible Filipino value and heritage. His love for Filipinos and their music was not intrinsic but rather formed through exposure to Filipino music and personal networks. As mentioned in an interview (Tagala, 2016), Dimuzio's fascination with Filipino music started when he watched an album launch by Rico Blanco and became fascinated with the songs though he could not understand the lyrics. After that encounter, he started researching Filipino music, learned the language and covered many Filipino songs.

Another cover artist who has caught the attention of Filipino fans is AkoSiChris from Hoboken, New Jersey, who fondly refers to his cover versions and himself as jOePM (a portmanteau of Joe, a slang for American soldiers in the Philippines back in WW2 and OPM, the acronym of Original Pilipino Music). According to Chris, jOePM is “OPM with an American twist!” (Ako Si Chris TV, 2008). Similar to Dimuzio, Chris has a Filipina partner, but he claims that there is no story to his singing Filipino songs as he is “...just a fan of OPM.” Unlike Dimuzio, who performs Filipino ballads or love songs, Chris performs songs by popular Filipino alternative rock bands. His earliest videos were posted on 13 July 2008 and his last cover was on 24 October 2012. He has not added new songs after posting a teaser for his new band Surfesque (which includes Filipino members) that plays original songs, thus mirroring the kind of Filipino musicians discussed earlier who perform Western covers as a stepping-stone to developing their own hybrid sound. Just as Dimuzio has performed with Filipino professional artists, Chris has played some gigs with artists such as Kamikazee, Spongecola, and Itchyworms, the bands whose songs he usually covers.

In 2018, another personality has emerged “mimicking the mimics,” calling himself Puting Pinoy (White Filipino). Puting Pinoy (real name Jared Ammon Gilet) considers himself as a vlogger (video blogger) than an artist. Most of his videos are illustrations of ordinary life and experiences, including his first video on YouTube entitled ‘*American Covers a Filipino song and translates it to English – ‘Ang Huling El Bimbo’.*’ Like

Dimuzio and jOePM, Puting Pinoy has collaborated with amateur musicians and vloggers, but he has not performed with more established popular artists. Puting Pinoy has also written some original songs and posted these on social media.

Cover Performances and the Filipino Audience in Virtual Translocal Spaces

Filipinos are one of the biggest users of social media in the world. Based on a 2019 report from Hootsuite, social media users from the Philippines have an average daily online presence of 10 hours and 2 minutes, topping all other countries (Gonzales, 2019). The figures are more staggering for specific social media such as Facebook and YouTube. The same report mentions that there are about 75 million Facebook users in the Philippines. On the other hand, more than 85% of Filipinos who go online usually watch YouTube videos and most of them watch music videos (Think with Google, 2018). The Philippine online audience is thus an extremely rich resource for any artist who wants to tap a big market. However, with thousands of artists competing for this segment of the audience, artists who want to reach the Philippine market need to have an appropriate strategy in place.

In a television interview, Dimuzio mentioned that his YouTube presence launched his success as an independent artist (Davila, 2011 on ABS-CBN News Channel; 2019 personal communication). Balance (2012) argues that YouTube has become “a means for Asian Americans to infiltrate the mainstream and, therefore, has ‘change[d] da

game” (p. 140). This is also obviously the case for non-Asians who come into the music industry via non-traditional means. YouTube’s potency comes from its ability to embody, enrich, facilitate and maintain global cultural products such as music, videos and entertainment. But although the largest, YouTube is not the only video dissemination platform facilitating this strategy, since Facebook is also considered to be instrumental in popularizing amateur and professional artists through various media (photos, audio, status posts, chat, etc.).

Table 1. Audience size and reach* of the cover artists social media page and video YouTube

	No. of Subscribers	Total No. of Views	Highest No. of Views of a Video	No. of Views in Selected Case Video
David Dimuzio	298,000	94,942,681	9,600,000	5,980,585
AkoSiChrisTV	7,240	2,191,437	332,000	332,956
Putting Pinoy	48,000	1,424,582	408,000	8,278

Facebook				
	No. of Page likes	Total No. of Followers	Highest No. of Views of a Video	No. of Views in Selected Case Video**
David Dimuzio	257,274	465,061	10,700,000	1,113,627
AkoSiChrisTV	14,630	13,851	No data [†]	No data [‡]
Putting Pinoy	12,537	13,557	23,011	1,942

*All figures are estimates and constantly increasing

**videos on Facebook may be (re)shared/posted by other users on their own pages/profiles, which may show other figures

[†] jOePM has since rebranded himself after forming a band called Surfesque but still uses his pseudonym “Ako Si Chris” on Facebook, though mostly posting about his band and his guitar gear than covers.

[‡] The video has been shared by other Facebook users but it is not available on Ako Si Chris’ Facebook page.

The popularity of such platforms enables a wider diffusion of cultural products in a translocal and transmediated fashion. The immense reach of social media in the Philippines makes Filipinos a huge market for advertisements and content. Interestingly, such a strategy also works both ways for musicians and artists in terms of promoting themselves and their songs. Table 1 shows a comparison of the audience size and reach of the three amateur cover artists in the two platforms.

Although the figures may include non-Filipino viewers and subscribers, the majority are Filipinos. This is reflected in the comments section and likes on the videos where the online audiences express their appreciation of the videos and the artists. For example, YouTube users commented on Puting Pinoy and jOePM's videos:

Wow galing mo n[a]man sir...and [yo]u have a good voice also sir. Di aq (sic) magsasawa[ng] panoorin to sir. love love love it. Support[ing] [yo]u po.

[Wow, you're so good, Sir...And you have a good voice also, Sir. I won't get tired watching this, Sir. Love love love it, I'm always supporting you] (YTPP User 1)

Man, this is the first time I have seen this music video of [an] American guy singing this song. This guy is dope. Awesome! Thumbs up brother. I always share your video to my friends. (YTAJ User 5)

This phenomenon is a reversal of what De Kosnik (2017) analyzes as Filipino mimicry as “perfect covers” for American markets. What is happening, in this case, is that American artists are tapping the Filipino audience through another form of media and attempting to embody Filipino identity by “mimicking the mimics.” Interestingly, YouTube users overseas offer their sentiments as Filipino transmigrants on the videos, showing that Filipinos who live abroad also experience the transmedia performance of the American cover artists.

Hi Puting Pinoy, this is YTPP User 24, I am now in the United States as a foreign worker or an OFW Overseas worker. We are your avid fans. *Natutuwa ako na galing mo mag[T]agalog*, [I’m very happy that you’re so good at using Tagalog] we are so proud of you. Because some of the Pinoy came over here in the United States, then *hindi nila tinuruan ang kanilang mga anak magtagalog* that’s why the half Pinoy could not talk [T]agalog. [Because some of the Filipinos came over here in the US, then they did not teach their children to use Tagalog, which is why the half Pinoy (Filipino-Americans) could not speak in Tagalog anymore]. (YTPP User 24)

Thanks for singing our Filipino songs dude. Hugs from Pinoy from Dubai UAE. [L]et us grow old and be friends to all. (YTDD User 9)

These narratives show that the cover artists can reach the Filipino audience, both in the Philippines and overseas, through their covers illustrating how the songs get circulated globally. The figures on views, likes and subscriptions shown in the table also reflect how social media enables a wider reach of creative outputs by both professional and amateur artists. Amateur singers who write their music or play cover songs also get to use social media for promotional purposes while they try to discover new music in the translocal virtual network. This disruption illustrates a circumvention of the traditional produsage, circulation, dissemination and access of popular music. As a result, non-Western cultural products, in this specific case popular music tracks, are becoming increasingly available and accessible, which is a departure from the culturally imperialistic notion of Anglo-American music dominating mainstream flows of media and culture.

Negotiating Identity in Motion

With their familiarity and affinity to the Filipino culture and language, Dimuzio, jOePM and Puting Pinoy are performing a sense of Filipino-ness in their covers. In light of De Kosnik's use of "transmedia performances" as borrowed from Henry Jenkins (2007), we argue that performing Filipino songs is a way for these cover artists to transmediate their identity to the "other" through music despite and in negotiation with language barriers. In other words, these American musicians attempt to transcend the cultural and

linguistic boundaries between themselves and Filipinos through music. In this process, the use of social media to and from physical gigs and other media such as TV and music streaming websites facilitates the transcendence. For example, Puting Pinoy's social media pages are said to be "...dedicated to the worldwide Filipino community...to bring joy to everyone by entertaining and attempting to help bridge gaps in understanding across cultures and...life" (Puting Pinoy, 2018). Similarly, Dimuzio mentioned that engaging deeper into studying and playing Filipino music "has been a way for me to connect with Filipino people and develop friendships." He says further,

I guess I wanted to connect with those people...also I wanted to learn. Learn about music in a much deeper way. So, for me, that's what I did so I dived in there pretty deep. And that's why I started learning like Chavacano songs, Bisaya songs [other Philippine local languages], and all that. It's all just like a learning, connecting kind of experience for me...and also pushing boundaries...(Dimuzio, 1 February 2020, personal communication)

Such statements reflect that the cover artists who perform Filipino songs do not aim to compete with Filipino artists as they do not try to prove their superiority (De Kosnik, 2017) but rather to prove that they attempt to bridge a gap by tapping into the Filipino language, culture and identity. Social media and music are an important part of the

structure that makes this bridging possible. This notion of the cover version as *bridging* culture does not fit neatly with the paradigm of categories established by Magnus et al. (2013). Moreover, the cover artists do this to be seen by the “other,” to the point of including Filipino emblems such as the Philippine flag and San Miguel beer logo in the case of jOePM and the use of space, particularly of a Filipino neighborhood, in the case of Dimuzio. In terms of language, not only does Puting Pinoy sings popular songs written in the Filipino language but he also speaks full Filipino sentences, albeit with an American accent, which he learned from years of living in the Philippines as a Mormon missionary. Thus, such negotiation of signs, symbols, spaces, and language illustrates how identities become dynamic and in motion – in their case, from foreign identity towards embodying Filipino-ness.

This identity in motion also relates to the artists’ position as prosumer (from consumer to producer) and performer (from amateur to [semi-] professional). They were and are consumers of Filipino music as they discovered, learned and listened to music, language and culture. This process was facilitated by their initial social networks and the fact that they were prepared to stay in the Philippines for a significant period.

Each of the three artists transitioned into making their original music after having played covers. Dimuzio mentions that his experience in covering Filipino music allowed him to learn from Filipino music/ians and expanded his musical vocabulary by

learning the songs. This is on top of the connections he was able to draw from his experience.

I actually don't think I'm gonna do any more covers. I have like two more covers in the works and they are very unique. Ahm, but yeah, I don't wanna do covers anymore. I kinda feel like I've learned all that I feel like I wanted from them. And now, I wanna use my knowledge and musical vocabulary to just create only all original music. (Dimuzio, 1 February 2020, personal communication)

The three cover musicians have also collaborated with other artists, mostly Filipinos after being recognized by the artists who wrote or recorded the original versions. Dimuzio also collaborated with other international artists such as Sasa (Chinese singer), Grace Kelly (American saxophonist), and James Delisco (American singer). This shows that playing Filipino music has not only enabled them to advance their careers and reach a bigger audience but also widened their network both in the Philippines and overseas. Through the narrative and trajectory of the three cover artists taken as case studies in this article, we can see that they attempt to create and negotiate identity in connection with Filipino culture while trying to reach a larger audience and build their musical profile. Such identity-making started from their consumption of Filipino cultural

products and then enabling them to use it to create another product, which they offer back to the Filipino audience. This process is an indication of the prosumption and produsage put forth by Bruns (2008) emerging in digital environments, or the constant collaborative creation, diffusion and improvement of digital content. By consuming content from Filipino music through online platforms, the cover artists learn new music outside of the mainstream American music. They then produce “new” content based on what they have learned and translate it as another product, which is then consumed by a wider audience. In this case, there is a second layer of consumption among the Filipino audiences who experience a recontextualized product, which is then passed around by “Web 2.0-based cultural diffusion” (Xu et al., 2015). The experience of discovering, learning, and performing Filipino music has enabled them to achieve their musical aspirations or a career in this field in music and cultural signifiers through Filipino music and culture.

Audience reactions to the covers in terms of perceptions of authenticity is also a complex issue as it legitimizes the presence and performativity of the American cover artists in embodying the Filipino language and culture. The intent of transmediating and transcending across culture, music and language is also reflected in the comments from Facebook subscribers on the videos:

Look at this. Our singers are trying so hard to imitate foreign singers, while these two are really fluent in speaking our language. And they are like original Filipinos when you listen to them, just don't look at the video. They're so good. (FBDD_DanQu)

Wow thumbs up *ako*, while some Filipinos are dying to sing foreign songs here's a duo singing Filipino song beautifully, thank you for your rendition and congratulations. (FBDD_MaEs)

...though they are foreigner[s, it] shows gratitude to our language unlike those in the government now tried to abolish the Filipino subject as part of the curriculum. (FBDD_FlAb)

More than just an avenue for acquiring an audience, putting out cover songs on social media is a way for the cover artists to negotiate their *identities* in motion. In particular, covering songs in the Filipino language allows them to perform from one media to another, transition from consumer to producer, and embody a Filipino identity while maintaining their 'otherness' as artists. Such movement of identities in both performance and cover songs has become possible through social media; previously not

possible in cover performances and songs noted in the literature (Cusic, 2005; Griffiths, 2002; Magnus et al., 2013; Mosser, 2008).

Mosser (2008) emphasizes that an artist's intent is crucial to the authenticity of cover songs. Mosser claims that intent is either obvious or irrelevant, but in the case of non-Filipinos covering Filipino songs, the artists' intent could be both, or even beyond being obvious *and* irrelevant. Meaning, the cases we consider here resemble both obviousness and irrelevance in the sense that the artists intended to copy and present the song to the Filipino market/audience, while at the same time, attempting to claim an identity that is independent of the original song or artists that they are covering.

Problematizing the Center-Periphery Relations

The case studies presented in this article illustrate that foreign artists usually have networks with Filipino people before posting their cover versions of Filipino music. Hence, Filipino music does not exist independently in the consciousness of foreign artists because they are influenced by their network through prior cultural and musical exchanges. This challenges the usual notions of the west to the rest trope as we argue that more cultural products are circulated across transnational and virtual boundaries through networks – both personal and online means. Under these conditions, music from Western countries does not necessarily always dominate in flows of cultural products going towards other regions of the world.

As noted earlier, popular culture's circulation from the east to the west is not a new phenomenon. A more recent phenomenon that is closely related to the subject of this article is that of *Hallyu* in general and K-Pop specifically, where social media have significantly played a role in its circulation and likewise replacing traditional media in distributing pop culture content (Jin and Yoon, 2016; Jung and Shim, 2014).

Nonetheless, the case of Filipino music covered by American artists reveals a different form of circulation as it highlights a case of the Southeast Asian musical style that is different with the K-Pop because of its hybridity and its sociocultural and historical circumstances.

The way social media has become embedded in the everyday lives of many people, including musicians, illustrates the fact that such technology is now an inextricable part of the way international popular culture is consumed and responded to. Early accounts of media flows often utilized a cultural imperialism thesis (Tomlinson, 1997). This thesis suggests that such flows permeated outwards from western developed nations, challenging and eventually replacing traditional forms of culture in non-western nations with a uniform global culture (e.g. Featherstone, 1990). Later studies contested this argument, suggesting instead that local cultures were active in appropriating and re-shaping western popular culture resources producing localized variations of these cultural forms (Lull, 1995). This argument also extended to popular music where it was shown that styles such as hip-hop and metal were frequently fused with local language

and culture (e.g. Kahn-Harris, 2000; Mitchell, 1996). Anecdotal evidence suggests a prevalence of artists posting YouTube videos where they impersonate or mimic international hits often from western artists. However, the findings of our research suggest an alternative pattern, whereby Western artists, in some cases with established careers as YouTube performers, will choose well-known songs from non-Western artists to perform, including performing these songs in its original language.

Conclusion

In this article, we examined the ways YouTube and Facebook facilitate the cultural circulation of non-Western popular music to Anglo-American artists, arguing that this phenomenon problematizes the center-periphery relations in popular music. Through the case studies involving David Dimuzio, jOePM, and Puting Pinoy, we show how the traditional music industry is circumvented through social media as well as how it reflects a circular diffusion of cultural products “from the rest to the west.”

Also, we considered the ways the cover artists negotiate their “identities in motion” through their musical practice and cultural identities. The use of social media, such as YouTube and Facebook, facilitates this process among the American cover performers in the case studies representing the phenomenon investigated in this article. That is, the performers playing Filipino songs do it as a means to transmediate themselves to the other through music. They also do this in negotiation with and through the language.

Identity in motion is also reflected here as amateur musicians find a way to launch their careers through non-traditional means or markets, while still trying to perform authenticity relative to Filipino culture and music.

Recently, some content creators and journalists (Capino, 2020) raised the issue of “Pinoy-baiting” - a marketing strategy used by creators to attract Filipino audience and fans - becoming a way for Filipinos’ “thirst for global validation.” However, this is not the case in our analysis. Aside from the fact that these artists started doing Filipino covers about 10 years past, we look at the phenomenon being that power is rooted in the audience since the American artists are adjusting their branding based on the Filipino audience. We see more of an approval by the “periphery” than a dominance by the “center” because of the need by the artists to be “seen” by the Filipino audience. While this may be a marketing strategy to gain more followers, this also shows that power relations go both ways.

Moreover, we consider the notion of authenticity when understanding (colonial) cultural appropriation. Being an elusive and discursively constructed (Butler, 2003) concept, determining what is authentic and culturally-appropriate cover (especially in the case of westerner performing non-western songs) through comments and reactions make it even more ambiguous. In the case of the covers presented in this study, authenticity is exemplified by remaining faithful to the original music and language as well as through an effort to explore Filipino music and culture further, but not intending

to exploit this association as well. In addition, the affective dimensions of the “symbolic ethnicity” (Balance, 2012) increases authenticity, and thus facilitates appreciation, and as a consequence, sincerely connecting to Filipino culture.

Further, although one of the intentions of posting their performances on social media is to tap the Filipino market through local affective dimensions (Balance, 2012), this phenomenon is also beyond, but does not cancel out, the economics and fame of the performance (as reflected in both profit and audience reach). That is, “mimicking the mimics” is a way for the cover artists to embody cultural and social situatedness in the Filipino culture, which they do not see and experience in other cultures outside their own. Through the performance of Filipino cover songs on social media, they are able to establish a connection with the Filipino culture and music, as well as negotiate their identity in motion, allowing them to reach a certain level of musicianship that they think they need towards musical development. As far as the cover artists are concerned, they are doing this because of their affective affinity and interest in the Filipino culture. However, we also see the potential of the Filipino market relative to the musical or transmediated careers of the amateur artists featured in this article.

Lastly, we suggest that even if western popular culture continues to dominate mainstream flows of media and culture, this dominance is less so in virtual spaces such as YouTube and Facebook. The artists, songs and videos we have analyzed in this article are part of a wider phenomenon of globalization, not just of western popular

culture but non-western as well. Thus, a growing number of self-made and audience-disseminated videos involving Filipino music performed by cover artists with different nationalities, such as Korean, Japanese, British and others are also currently available online. As such, this trend warrants further analysis. Nonetheless, this article represents an initial attempt to make sense of this phenomenon.

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Notes

¹The use of the word Filipino as people, nationality, and language in this article is interchangeable. In linguistic terms, Filipino is the national language of the Philippines. Although Tagalog is also used in some cases, Tagalog is a variant and the structural basis of the Filipino language (see Constantino, 2000; Sta. Romana Cruz, 2017).

²Videos in this Article:

a) David Dimuzio. (2013 February 18). *Pretty Russian girl sings “Kahit Maputi Na Ang Buhok Ko”*

w/David DiMuzio. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/ykd53ump>. Also available on Facebook: <https://tinyurl.com/4u684322>. The song was written by Rey Valera and popularized by Sharon Cuneta [1977] and Noel Cabangon [2009].

b) akosichrisTV. (2008 September 28). *Kamikazee-Narda* (100% AMERICAN Version jOePM). Available at: <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=NTCqT1mu10I>. The song was written and recorded by Kamikazee (2006)

c) Puting Pinoy. (2018 June 27). *American Covers a Filipino song and translates it into English – “Ang Huling El Bimbo”*. Available at <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=6suv7wu1Rko>. Also available on Facebook: <https://tinyurl.com/3t6z5uee>. The song was written and recorded by Eraserheads (1993).

³At the time of writing, the most viewed video of David Dimuzio performing a Filipino song is his cover of *With a Smile* (Eraserheads), sung as a duet with Yassi Pressman, a popular Filipino-British actress and model. Despite its high viewership, this was not considered for the article because the song is in the English language.

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