D(I)aspora: Discourse, Multimodality, and the Speaking of Migrant Subjects in New Media

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abstract

The paper has two main aims: first, I emphasize the need for a multimodal lens in discourse analysis; second, I present a critique of the discursive construction of migrant identity on Internet-based new media platforms that are produced by state institutions (i.e. official websites) and created by individual migrants on their own personal social media profiles. Using a multimodal framework that accounts for not only words but the various semiotic resources available to participants in online media content production, I focus my analysis on two sets of cases of official texts from Philippine and New Zealand government migration websites and three sample cases of social media content by Auckland-based Filipino migrants in New Zealand. In both the official and individual texts, there is an apparent idealization and romanticization of migrant life in New Zealand depicted mainly through the hegemonic images of "home", "family", and "childhood" that act as *nodal points* in setting up discursive boundaries. Although it may seem that individual agency is not realized in the purported democratized avenues of expression of the Internet, I argue that migrant self-presentation online or offline is contingent on the very complexity and contradictions of migrant daily life as configured by both the home and host nations.

keywords:
Multimodal Analysis, Discourse Analysis, Diaspora, Filipino, New Zealand

Introduction

The notion of "diaspora" has been appropriated by various groups within the academe and sectors outside it (Clifford 1997). Defined, in general, as a dispersal of a people from a single original place, a classic conceptualization by Safran offers a model of diaspora that is largely based on the Jewish experience of having been driven away from the Holy Land (2005; 1991). As such, the formed expatriate minority communities continue to attach themselves to this place of origin as a source of their identity and solidarity, commits to maintaining and restoring the homeland, and imagines an eventual return to it at the right time. However, the concept's alliance with transnational, post-structural, and post-colonial projects has largely defined the theoretical route of diaspora discourses and experiences at present. Clifford's "polythetic" understanding of diaspora, for instance, embraces a more fluid notion of the idea. Homeland, by his definition, does not necessarily pertain to a physical place of origin that a people with an experience of dispersal long to return to. In fact, in this view, the diaspora discourse need not even be restricted to the idea of a symbolic homeland since a people's origin, a prolonged separation from it, and a resolute drive to come back are not the only elements that could characterize the phenomenon. He frames the concept with a very appealing catchphrase, "dwelling-in-displacement," summarizing both the spirit of today's transnational subjectivity and a more generous version of diaspora as a conceptual tool (Clifford 1997, 310).

Opening up the diaspora discourse to a more varied and differently angled view to capture people's global movements in the twentieth century is the basic impetus for conceptual and terminological innovation such as "transnationalism" and "transmigrants" as outlined and theorized in Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton (1992) and Schiller (1995). The move to a new name is fuelled by the objective of revising the belief that immigrants are "uprooted" from the homeland since, in reality, they are able to "build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement" in which activity "they develop and maintain multiple relations" (Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992, 1-2). The greatest contribution of the framework is, perhaps, the release of immigrants or diasporic subjects from the rigid coupling of home and identity, since the premise is that they possess the creative capacity to manage and appropriate ideas and objects in order to

establish their place in both the home and host countries. A transnationalist perspective, therefore, claims that immigrants can be firmly rooted even outside their countries of origin since they are able to maintain "many different racial, national, and ethnic identities" (Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992, 11). The assertion reveals a global perspective in migrant identity formation and reconceptualizes the limits and agency of the immigrant subject. However, it is important to remember that certain confinements in identity construction will always be in place since "it is in terms of these bounded identity constructs that migrants frame their individual and collective strategies of adaptation" (Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992, 19). In this light, the role nation-states play in regulating the movements of their population is at once affirmed and questioned in the context of globalization and transmigration.

Turning to a "transnational" standpoint is clearly influenced by the post-structural and social constructionist strands of thought in social science. But, as a dilemma charged against the postmodern enterprise, there is the danger of slipping into a pluralistic, yet nebulous, approach such that all analyses become receptive to a wide array of experiences and perspectives but at the same time deprived of any historical consciousness. San Juan (2000) issues a caveat against the postmodernist tendency to eschew politics by noting that any analysis of identities "will remain vacuous if it does not take into account the reality of imperial world-systemic changes" (231). Neoliberal globalization may be the prime example of these world-systemic changes that San Juan encourages critical inquiries on identity to consider. This is an invaluable perspective in today's paper since globalization is the condition of late modernity characterized by, among other things, the defiance of spatial and temporal distance (see for instance Harvey 1989; Giddens 1991; Fairclough 2010), the context in which I aim to situate my readings of articulations of Filipino migrant identity in new media.

My main research questions, therefore, are: first, what form of agency do Filipino migrants, specifically, possess in constructing and understanding a diasporic identity, that is, an understanding of themselves as Filipinos living in a place outside their homeland? And second, what role do Internet-based new media have in migrant identity work? In particular, I draw on the experiences of Filipino migrants in Auckland, New Zealand – a relatively new destination site for Filipinos wanting to move permanently (i.e. acquire residence and eventually, citizenship) or temporarily (e.g. for work or study)

abroad. New Zealand is also unique in the sense that it attracts a particular kind of Filipino migrants as statistical trends demonstrate: the kind that could be considered as "ideal immigrants" (e.g. of middle class background, highly educated) based on a human capital paradigm similar to the case of Filipino skilled immigrants in Canada who, as reported by Barber (2008), are preferred by the state since they are able to "land on their feet" and immediately become "economically productive" (1280). For instance, in 2013 Filipinos in New Zealand had the highest labor force participation among the Asian ethnic groups and even the general New Zealand population (Statistics New Zealand nd).

This paper is also largely about representation. In particular, I analyze the construction of migrant identity in state-produced texts from the Philippines and New Zealand and identity work of Auckland-based Filipino migrants on their individual social media profiles the context of which is the overall diaspora dynamics, as discussed above, intersecting with new media affordances, that is, Internet-based information and networking technologies. In particular, the texts of interest are the following:

1. Official or state-produced texts (2012 to 2014): three cases of video testimonials of Filipino migrants in New Zealand, deposited in and accessed from the official New Zealand immigration website New Zealand Now (https://www. newzealandnow.govt.nz/).

2. Official or state-produced texts (2012-2014) from the Philippines taken from the website of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO): an audio-visual brief that introduces and promotes CFO as a government agency in charge with issues pertaining to Filipinos based abroad, especially in asserting their role in nation building.

3. Individual social media of Filipino migrants in Auckland (2010 to 2012):
   a) Mga Kuro-kuro ni Ka Uro
      (http://a-pinoy-in-nz.blogspot.com/)
   b) Filipinos in Auckland
      (https://filipinosinauckland.wordpress.com/)
   c) Personal Facebook account of a Filipina in Auckland

These materials are accessible online and nearly all are public-access except for the personal Facebook account. This fact is important to consider since the context of the Internet assumes not only a location for storing and distributing content but also capacities in terms of meaning-making resources and technologies of content production potentially available to many Internet users. Indeed, though partial and conditional, Internet-based media offer a more democratized space in terms of participation and content creation compared to traditional media (e.g. broadcast media). In teasing out the semiotics and politics of representation in these texts, I employ the analytic potential of integrating the frameworks of Discourse Theory (DT) outlined by Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001; Kress and van Leeuwen 2006; Kress 2009; van Leeuwen 2005; van Leeuwen 2008). Methodologically, then, I would like to emphasize the need for a multimodal lens in studying discourse, that is, there must be a constant and systematic approach to studying the many resources for meaning-making in our largely textualized contemporary culture especially when we take the Internet and its new media offering as data site. The information and network era, as the migrant experiences in my study show, has provided mobile persons not only the practical but also an ideational and performative means of connecting with others and continuing relationships from a distance. Social media, in particular, are not just ways to express views but are inevitably occasions for self-presentation (Aguirre 2014) beyond the way of language since images and sound, for instance, are undeniable aspects of these new media engagements. What I will stress by way of demonstration using particular cases is the importance of multimodality in critical discourse studies as it integrates the non-linguistic dimension of semiotic processes in the attempt to understand certain aspects of human experience.

Conceptual and Analytic Frameworks

Aside from laying my understanding of diaspora on the table, identity is the other major concept that needs a little more discussion. As an exercise in interpretive work with a focus on the subject of identity, I rely on Stuart Hall's elucidation of the concept when he said: "though we speak, so to say 'in our own name', of ourselves and from our own experience, nevertheless who speaks, and the subject

who is spoken of, are never exactly in the same place" (2003, 233). Essentially, what I attempt to do is locate the place of the "I" or the speaking subject in instances of migration discourses where the migrant voice is invoked. Echoing Hall (1996) once more in contending that identity exists within and not apart from discourse, I also forward the perspective that it is only through discourse events that identities are able to be expressed and apprehended; displayed and comprehended; performed and (mis)construed. This assertion brings us to another level of discursive relations that involves the analysis of power in discourse events. As explained by the positions of, among many others, Foucault (1983), Laclau and Mouffe (1985), Hodge and Kress (1988), and Fairclough (2010; 1992) a critical analysis of discourse is an interrogation of the politics of meanings and the construction of certain truths within structural and agentive positions that define the place of both institutions and individuals in society (Giddens 1984).

By discourse, I mean what critical discourse analysts (CDA) since the 1980s have been saying about the problematic and political relationship of language, institutional structures, and individual lives. Ruth Wodak summarizes effectively the methodological and political task of critical discourse analysis by saying that there is a need to analyze opaque and transparent manifestations of power, dominance, and control in actual and extended social interaction that take partly linguistic forms (in Blommaert and Bulcaen 2000). Discourse, a term often used in everyday talk, is generally understood within the theorizations and practice of critical discourse studies in the following manner:

> Discourses are characteristic (socially and culturally formed, but historically changing) ways of talking and writing about, as well as acting with and toward, people and things. These ways are circulated and sustained within various texts, artefacts, images, social practices, and institutions, as well as in moment-to-moment social interactions. In turn, they cause certain perspectives and states of affairs to come to seem or be taken as "normal" or "natural" and others to seem or be taken as "deviant" or "marginal…" (Gee 2000, 183)

The specific strand of critical discourse analysis I am using in today's presentation is one that engages with the multimodality of texts. Blommaert & Bulcaen (2000) in their assessment of CDA after roughly two decades of development claim that a virtually sole

reliance on a "linguistic outlook" weighs down the practice of critique within the discipline and limits what could be done in terms of fusing linguistic and non-linguistic semiotic practices. As a response to calls to go beyond the linguistic to achieve a fuller understanding of discourse situations, Kress and van Leeuwen, for instance, have developed a multi-semiotic framework to deal with the various resources for meaning-making available for people to use in their sign-making practices within particular cultural contexts.

Van Leeuwen, in particular, prefers to call signs "resources" to veer away from the connotation conveyed by the former that meanings are inherent in objects (2005, 3). Kress (2009), on the other hand, puts it best when he asserts that people are not sign-users but are sign-makers; the focus should then be on the making of signs and not the use. In a similar vein, Lemke (1995) underscores the active and deliberate process of meaning-making by calling it a "kind of doing" within a social context. This perspective implies that people are not merely consumers and recipients of meanings bestowed by higher authorities in society for social structures and the agents of social action are involved in a "dialectic of control" (Giddens 1984, 16). In this relationship, structures built into social institutions do not necessarily dominate "docile bodies" for even the subordinate(d) can exert influence, perhaps change, on the superior (Giddens, 1984).

The theoretical ability of resources or signs for making meaning Van Leeuwen calls "semiotic potential", which –

> ….. is constituted by all their past uses and an actual semiotic potential constituted by those past uses that are known to and considered relevant by the users of the resource, and by such potential uses as might be uncovered by the users on the basis of their specific needs and interests. Such uses take place in a social context… (2005, 4)

In this paper, I account for the linguistic and semiotic resources put into use by my participants in their sign-making endeavors in online new media. These resources are themselves carriers of a history of sign-making whose potential relevance to the diasporic experience is only revealed by the specificities of the social context of the individuals involved in the practice of making signs. They are semiotic resources that are at once distinctly available within the spatiality and temporality of Filipino diaspora experience in New Zealand and as affordances of Internet-based media.

The concept of meaning-potential is fundamentally an analysis of power in society in general and power in the making (or holding down) of meanings in our signifying practices in particular. The fact that these resources or signs have no fixed meanings does not mean that meanings are made equal or on equal terms. When the meaning-potential of a possible resource is restricted, there are those who benefit from the occlusion of either dissent or change.

Discussion

Case 1: The CFO Audio-Visual Brief

The "I" in leaving: (De) articulating participants in the migration process

The Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) looks after the interests, rights, and welfare of Filipinos residing abroad – whether short or long-term –and ensures their continued connection to the country. It was created through a national act in June 1980 and operates under the Office of the President.

The official website of CFO (www.cfo.gov.ph) is a rich source of information if one wants to learn more about its mandate and programs. One of the smaller but, nonetheless, critically engaging elements that is available on the website is a downloadable audio-visual presentation (AVP) – produced in 2012 and runs for eight minutes – that summarizes what the commission is all about. Table 1 provides a thematic outline of the AVP.

Table 1: Thematic outline of the CFO Profile AVP produced in 2012

Time	Theme	General content
00.00	Introduction/Opening	Migration in the world and in the Philippines
00.41	Migrant profiles	Filipino migrants in different countries and their reasons for going abroad
01.25	Commission on Filipinos Overseas profile	Presenting its history, mandate and programs

05.50	Social costs of migration	Negative effects of emigration in the Philippine society
06.15	Financial issues of Filipinos who go abroad	Helping Filipino migrants handle their earnings wisely
06.29	Aquino government speech on Filipino migration	Making the decision to go abroad a choice and not a necessity
07.14	Conclusion	Reiteration of the thrust of the CFO

Focusing for now on Theme 2 that runs from 00.41 to 01.25, it is easy to see how viewers are led to the individual personal telling of migration experiences, an action that gives a human face to abstracted information about migration, such as statistical data. In many instances, resorting to aggregated data and numerical information is an efficient way of depicting an overall picture of a particular phenomenon. Such is certainly true for the CFO AVP in question particularly in its introductory section, which provides an overview of the traits and trends of Filipino migration in general terms. What aggregated representation misses is the specificity and uniqueness of individual cases that are not captured by the modal privileging of large generalizable data often conveyed in abstracted forms (e.g. numbers). However, although the individual testimonials of Filipino migrants in different geographic locations provide a *warmer* complement to "cold" figures, the deployment of these "migrant voices" in the CFO AVP performs a construction of migrant discourse both at the level of representation, and necessarily, at the level of ideology.

As an official voice of the state, the CFO through the audio-visual brief endeavors to give prominence to the notion of emigration as a purely "individual" decision and the migration process as a volitional act while softening the articulation of the role of the state in people's decision to leave. The migrant profiles sequence is introduced by a question, *why do Filipinos leave the country?* because while the use of "Filipinos" makes it appear that everyone in the country is leaving, it places the responsibility on the individuals themselves and in so doing reinforces the evocation of migrants being the only clear participants in the migration process. As a response to the question, a series of brief testimonials of Filipinos who have migrated to other countries is showcased. Curiously enough, there is no representation

of a Filipino permanent or labor migrant in an Asian territory except for one from the Middle East. This is remarkable considering that Southeast Asia is one of the most popular destinations of Filipino overseas workers (see for instance POEA 2014). This detail becomes more significant when viewed as a move to make invisible particular characteristics of the Filipino diaspora, perhaps, those that go against the construct of an ideal immigrant image.

Table 2 gathers the reasons why Filipinos leave as 1) identified by the video (voice of CFO, presumably) through the actual texts that are generated on the screen (first two columns from left); and, 2) as narrated by the very migrants through the clips of their interview supplemented by shots of them at work/in action, pertinent still images, and other ambient shots. These testimonials are to be taken as real cases that exemplify the identified reasons for migration. Easily enough, this feature gives credibility to the purported reasons through the "authentic" voices of the individuals telling their own stories. I focus on the representation of the process or act of migration and its participants or actors through the discursive strategies that make up this particular section in the AVP.

There is a prominence of the subject "I" and this is understandable since the individuals shown in the video clips are talking about themselves. This, however, gains a specific meaning when viewed relative to the overall discourse on Filipino migration that the AVP outwardly conveys and the ideological underpinnings that it does not express explicitly. The "I" becomes a central signifier because the *sign complex*, to use Kress' terminology (2009), at this particular juncture in the text revolves around the projection of the "I" as the main actor in the process of migration. As a response to the question "why Filipinos leave," the testimonials of individuals referring to themselves and their reasons for going abroad provide suitable and quite expected answers: greener pasture, family unification, better opportunities, marriage. In recognizing the various reasons for engaging in the act, the subject "I" becomes central, therefore, in identifying which actors or participants are involved in the migration process by favoring its immediate presence while suppressing that of others.

However, though there is a ubiquity of the "I" in this section, other participants are nominated as also involved in the final decision to leave. Personal relations are mentioned such as parents (for Chuck Lapus) and the brother-in-law (for Wilfred Tua). Also, a very interesting supernatural category could be considered as another

actor in the process. This is exemplified by Grace Manuel's attribution of her being outside the Philippines as a consequence of "God's plan"— an attitude not difficult to understand considering Philippine society's religious underpinnings. Taking into account the mention of these other participants in the migration process, it can be argued that the text attempts to represent the act of leaving as either a volitional choice or a providential move made by the migrant.

In order to pin down a definite answer to the query "why Filipinos leave," it was prudent to supply answers that appear personal, actual, and truthful. This was achieved primarily through the use of semiotic resources that are high in naturalistic modality – what the audience see are real people speaking about their real experiences. The text gains believability by nominating each individual migrant that in turn projects an honest and authentic voice. The positioning of the audience is, thus, achieved when they are made witness to "real" people sharing only their "real" stories and when they develop a sympathetic regard for what the series of testimonials imply about the (f)actors that impel migration. In addition, the generated onscreen texts synoptically highlighting the themes of what each featured migrant say (first column on left of Table 2) perform a legitimation of the purposes for each decision to leave. Such utterance constructions are what Van Leeuwen calls "moralized actions," which are realized by means of abstractions that reference moral qualities or values undergirding the identified action (2008, 126). "Greener pasture", "unification", "advancement", and "better opportunities" are immediately perceived as desirable purposes without careful scrutiny as to what each actually means or entails. A deeper account of specific cultural and social undercurrents explains how "following god's plan" and "marrying a foreigner" also become something "good". While the former is hinged on the religiosity of many Filipinos, the latter is based on the stereotype of a better life with a foreign partner. While both are premised on arguable assumptions, their prevalence cannot be dismissed. What is clear, as demonstrated by a socio-semantic analysis of this specific section of the AVP, is that migration or diaspora, at least in the case of Filipinos, is driven by personal agency where the "I" or individual subject is in absolute control of the decision to move, or else driven by family or supernatural providence.

Table 2 Represented Participants in the Process of Migration as Shown by the Testimonials of Filipino Migrants in the CFO AVP

Text on the screen	Migrant testimonial	Represented participant/actor in the process/event
To find greener pastures...	Sammy de Hitta, USA	I'm in this country for greener pasture. Although I have a good job in the Philippines but I like it better here.	'I' *Actor is nominated and individuated; Country is likewise identified (same for the rest)
Destined to live abroad…	Grace Manuel, USA	I never dreamed of coming to this country pero (but) I think God has other plans for me.	'I' God
Family unification…	Chuck Lapus, USA	I'm in this country because my parents brought me here for a better life.	'I' Parents
Professional advancement…	Eduardo Rodriguez, Saudi Arabia	Nagsimula ako bilang, ah, field salesman at kalaunan ay na-promote ako bilang spare parts manager. (I started as, ah, field salesman and eventually got promoted as spare parts manager).	'Ako' ('I')
For better work opportunities…	Wilfred Tua, Australia	Yung isang brother in law ko, nauna siya rito sa Australia and then nagsabi sa akin na mas maganda raw dito sa Australia. So, sinubukan naming mag-apply. (A brother in law, he came here to Australia first and then he told me that it is better here in Australia. So, we tried to apply).	Brother-in-law 'We' (presumably his family)
Marriage to foreign nationals…	Susan and Malcolm Conan, UK	Susan: Nung nakilala ko siya…ayun…nagkapamilya… (When I met him…we had a family…	'Ko' ('I')
		Malcolm: Filipinos are caring and an…fantastic people [sic].	Filipinos (collectivised)

Case 2: New Zealand Now Migrant Testimonial Videos

Romancing immigrant life in NZ: Home, family, and children as nodal points

My specific objective for this particular section addresses both a particular conceptual issue and a specific methodological step: I forward the deployment of multimodal analysis of texts that employs the notion of *nodal points*. In analyzing three video testimonials of Filipino immigrants in New Zealand, I would like to demonstrate how the use of words and images in a state-managed new media site achieves a *hegemonic intervention* in migrant identity discourses of/on Filipinos in New Zealand. By hegemonic intervention, I make use of Laclau's explanation that it is the process by which conflicting discourses, or at least those that are characterized by ambiguity, achieve a fixation in meaning (Laclau 1990). Hegemonic intervention as I use it here is not entirely in line with Laclau's original discussion though, which, if I correctly understand, has to do with the application of force in order to achieve a suppression of other potential meanings within a discursive field. I am using the concept instead with reference to a more Gramscian take on hegemony and the development and maintenance of "common sense" to prolong the status quo. In essence, the concept of hegemonic intervention I forward pertains to making certain discourses more long-standing than others through cultural intervention, not only and not necessarily by force or direct violence; a kind of discursive hegemony where there is an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity by arresting the flow of differences in order to construct a center through the use of nodal points or privileged discursive points that momentarily fixate meanings.

Exposing the *myth* of certain prevailing discourses being natural and universal is the main task of critical discourse analysis. To Laclau and Mouffe (1985), the politics in discourse lies in the *artificial* cessation of making possible meanings. Jørgensen and Phillips (2001) explain this stance:

> A discourse is established as a totality in which each sign is fixed…This is done by the exclusion of all other possible meanings that the signs could have had…Thus a discourse is a reduction of possibilities. It is an attempt to stop the sliding of

the signs in relation to one another and hence to create a unified system of meaning. (26–27)

The more important facet of this premise, however, is in its implication of the process by which certain "fixing" of meanings becomes more recognized than others and how this forms the dominant discourses that rule over the ways we make sense of our lives. Laclau and Mouffe remind us further that a critical stance towards discourse means that we should endeavor to "map out the processes in which meanings of signs are fixed" and the process by which "some fixations of meaning become so conventionalized that we think of them as natural" (in Jørgensen and Phillips 2001, 25). From a multimodal semiotic perspective, we can analyze the process through which meaning potential is arrested by looking at compositionality or the system for integrating disparate modes into a multimodal whole (van Leeuwen 2003). I am at this point, for the sake of time and simplicity (although I would like to underscore the fact that textual analysis is a messy undertaking), using the notion of "salience," which refers to ways of making some elements more noticeable than others, thus, privileging one element while marginalizing another. Salience is achieved in the design of a text by, among others, frequency, regularity, and relative position within the composition. Further, my assertion is that in order for nodal points to be realized as pinning discursive possibilities across several textual compositions, there must be *intratextual salience* and *intertextual salience,* as the diagram below shows. Intratextual salience, of course, means that certain elements are more noticeable than other elements within a particular textual composition. Intertextual salience, on the other hand, pertains to certain elements' being more easily observed (because more apparent) than other elements across different textual compositions (possibly of the same genre or type, but not necessarily) such that there appears to be consistency or regularity of their presence, therefore, having the potential of being construed as unquestionably "what is".
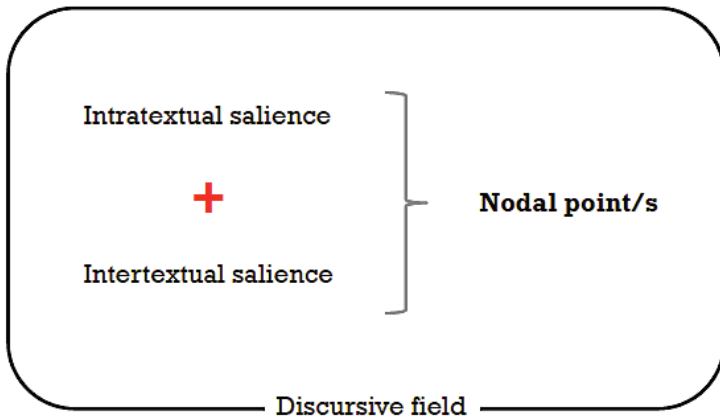
Diagram 1: Multimodal realization of nodal points through the
notion of "salience" within a field of discourse

The three texts in question are video testimonials of Filipino migrants in New Zealand. These are available and can be accessed from the state-managed website New Zealand Now, (www.newzealandnow.govt.nz), under the "Video Resources" section. Also, these are all the testimonials that feature Filipino immigrants on the website at least up to 2015, the year I last checked for data verification. The videos go by the following titles on the website:

Video 1: John Evangelista
(https://www.newzealandnow.govt.nz/resources/john-evangelista)

Video 2: New life in Christ church
(https://www.newzealandnow.govt.nz/resources/new-life-in-christchurch)

Video 3: Nursing and new life
(https://www.newzealandnow.govt.nz/resources/nursing-a-new-life)

"Home" as nodal point

The notion of "home" is one of the privileged signifiers in the representation of Filipino migrants in the above texts, as effectively demonstrated by the following lines from the featured testimonies delivered by the featured subjects themselves:

Video 1:

In a way if I would summarize it, I would say that this is the place that we could really call **home**.

Video 2:

We're lucky here. We're safe here. We like the place. We like the people. We feel at **home** here – in New Zealand.

Notice that along with thematic repetition, the word "home" is articulated in the final instance. Kress and van Leeuwen term as the notion of "information value" the relative position of elements in a text and the relative importance such a placement bestows upon the said element considering the overall meaning the composition attempts to convey (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006; van Leeuwen 2003). Uttering "home" at the closing of the video makes it the last information delivered, thus, potentially achieving greater memorability or resonance in the viewers. Such a position in the succession of elements, I argue, is a means of granting the image and imagination of home a privileged status as signifiers in constructing the Filipino migrant discourse in the specific case of New Zealand as destination.

"Family" as nodal point

Closely related to the notion of home is the "family," acting as second nodal point at least across the testimonials. More apparent in Videos 2 and 3, the representation of the family appears to be paramount in constructing Filipino migrant life in New Zealand. Notice too that the families featured conform to a set of cultural norms as they are elementary, heterosexual, complete, and intact. Video 1 features a cutaway sequence of the Evangelistas (the parents and two children) at 00.22, standing together (smiling and waving at

the camera) for a family shot in front of their home, on the green lawn. Videos 2 and 3 provide a more significant rendition of the "family photo" since the preview images of their respective video testimonials on the website feature a static shot of the entire family not seen at any point in the actual video. The case of Video 3 is especially germane in this regard since the actual testimonial only shows the father talking about his experience of moving to New Zealand (i.e. the rest of his family is only a subject of talk but is neither seen nor heard in the video). The photo of an entire family, standing as the preview image of the testimonial on the webpage, is the first image seen by visitors who find themselves browsing the said section of the website. This potentially makes salient the notion of an idealized family that is successfully preserved amidst the challenges posed by migration. Although absent in the actual footage (probably due to timing issues during filming), the wholeness of the family is made present in the textual composition of the webpage, paving the way for the audience to apprehend the idea of "family" as the thematic feature of the said testimonial, possibly privileging it as main signifier of a Filipino migrant situation in New Zealand.

"Childhood" as nodal point

Imagining ideal "childhood" is another salient image in the videos. In Videos 1 and 2, specifically, childhood issues and the children in the family are rarely talked about and, further, the children's voices are not heard at all. However, each of the family's children/child becomes a persistent image essentially bringing to the fore what I would like to term as "vocal silence" in which the children form a legitimate part of the entire semiotic landscape of the particular video environment – salient and prominent – though not rendered as literally speaking subjects. Not only are the children featured in cutaway sequences in the videos (essentially comprising a third of the entire testimonial), they are always depicted as being active (e.g. playing on the trampoline or in a playground) outside the home through exterior scenes. If not directly seen, children as a topic is also collocated with the outdoors as subject of talk, as the case of the father in Video 3 demonstrates when narrating his expectations of a foreseeable future in the verbatim excerpt below:

When my children will be here, my plan is just like a Kiwis'
does: going camping. I actually have sorted places to go fishing.
So maybe we'll do that later on when the children arrives.

Case 3: Migrant Identity Work in Online Social Media

Reproducing the romanticized immigrant life in New Zealand

As an official state arm dealing with the promotion of New
Zealand as migrant destination, the videos above allow for an
imagination of the country as an ideal place to build a better life for
Filipinos and their families. It is understandable of course that
contextually speaking any material found in the NZ Now website
should serve the purpose of promoting the country as ideal
destination to attract equally ideal immigrants. However, looking at
individual social media content generated by Filipino immigrants in
Auckland, we can see that particular pronouncements about life in
New Zealand resonate the official texts' nodal points examined
above. Two examples demonstrate this claim; notice the texts in bold
face:

Excerpt 1: Mga Kuro-kuro ni Ka Uro
(http://a-pinoy-in-nz.blogspot.com/)

Happy 10th Anniversary
Monday, February 21, 2005

Some things in life cannot be measured by how much
money you earn. A stroll on the beach, Sunday at the park,
the sense of security, being stress-free. All these make up the
lifestyle we choose. For us, **New Zealand is definitely the
perfect place to raise a family**. Where you can **let your kids
play and run around like kids**. Not afraid of child molesters
or kidnappers. Where people around you are friendly and
more trusting and not paranoid of one another. Where fellow
kababayans are more than willing to approach and assist other
kababayans.

Excerpt 2: Personal Facebook account of a Filipina in Auckland

> 2011 Facebook post commemorating 2nd anniversary in New Zealand
>
> We've been here in New Zealand for two years now, and though we still sometimes miss UF, Le Chen, isaw and all our friends and family, **NZ has become our home now**. We love how **Ben and Sarah can run around the park and enjoy being kids**. We love the clear blue skies, the fantastic views and **kid-friendly activities everywhere**.

Admittedly, the samples above may be biased since the authors are all parents who not surprisingly may put at the center of their lives and daily activities their family's experiences and welfare upon migrating to New Zealand and quite possibly share these as writings on social media. The website, *Filipinos in Auckland* (https://filipinos inauckland.wordpress.com/), however, holds no such claim, purpose, or identity. In fact, judging by the website name alone, it is not hard to see that it is largely oriented to the Filipino community in Auckland and its various concerns. It is vital to raise then that as a matter of semiotic operation, the potential reasons and potential discourse fixation the website header design engenders is in consonance with at least the "family" acting as a nodal point when depicting Filipino migrant life in New Zealand. Such discourse is present in the cases I have observed earlier – both in the official state-produced texts and the individual social media content of two Filipino migrants.

The centrality of the family in Filipino migrant life as imagined in the discursive instance of the website header is exhibited by the choice of the image that literally tops or heads the homepage of the entire site, as the screen grab in Figure 1 below shows. Not only is the notion of a purportedly Filipino family the most apparent visual element in the header, its Filipinoness is further emphasized iconographically by the images of three stars and a sun – an unmissable allusion to possibly the most banal and highly recognizable emblem of the Philippines and perhaps the easiest, if not most obvious, portrayal of one's unwavering attachment to the country despite distance – the national flag. Aside from this remembrance of origin, it is of course not difficult to notice how the notion of the family once again becomes salient as a nodal point

because its character, as far as the depicted image is concerned, conforms to a dominant heterosexist and elementary imaging as seen in the official texts analyzed prior.

Figure 1: Screen grab of homepage of *Filipinos in Auckland* featuring an image of a nuclear, heterosexual family on the website banner

Conclusion

Analysis of the above cases of discursive work made available in online new media largely illustrates how the state plays a significant role in the attachment and identification of the Filipino migrant to the home and host nations. The discursive maneuvering employed by particular government agencies has the potential to establish legitimate meanings of the migration situation, including the "necessary" traits one must possess in order to successfully build a life overseas.

The samples of social media writings in the study reveal how individuals "find" themselves in the grand narratives of officially sanctioned discourses. At the very least, they demonstrate the agentive capacities of individuals in using new media forms to signify and make sense of their diasporic lives. However, the agentive possibilities offered by the multimodal resources of online new media, in the particular case of social media engagement, do not necessarily translate to alternative or dissenting imaging and imagination of a romanticized and idealized migrant life. This is not to say that migrants do not have the capacity to resist the tendency to conform to dominant discursive formations propelled nonetheless

by dominating structures (e.g. the nation-state) or their proxies, such as state institutions (e.g. immigration agencies) or discursive technologies (e.g. state-run websites). My examples in this paper are not meant to demonstrate the triumph of compliance to hegemonic meanings or meaning-making although it may seem as such given the characteristics of the cases I mentioned and the potential discourse paths they appear to take.

Migrant life, as with life in general, is defined by complexity, ambiguity, and contingency. In my interactions and conversations with Filipino migrants in New Zealand (some of whom served as actual participants in the study), making sense of their diasporic lives and diasporic identities is a daily confrontation, with some days more benign than others. Their social media engagements are occasions for thinking about and interrogating, *inter alia,* their position as outsiders in the host nation, no matter how accommodating or conducive it is, since the limited space they occupy as migrants becomes a defining feature of who they are and what they could possibly become in the new place. Indeed, social media content creation becomes a way of self-presentation. The participants in my study attest to the special use of social media as a practical way of maintaining communication with family across the globe. At the same time, such communicative platforms also necessitate that they gain editorial proficiency in terms of the multi-semiotic meaning-making resources suddenly at their disposal and the discourses about their migrant lives and identities they display to their known and, possibly, unknown readers. One participant explained succinctly such personal discursive navigation that a migrant could potentially deal with in engaging with social media: *you can't readily talk about the sad or negative side of moving to New Zealand because Filipino friends and family have certain expectations of "achievement" attached to migrating.* Nevertheless, writing (talking) about their daily experiences as migrant persons on a platform that allows them relative autonomy, affords them multimodal expressive resources, and offers them an audience potentially beyond their immediate relations is also potentially a means to rethink long-held assumptions not only about themselves as immigrants but also about the complex and conflicted social milieu of migrant life.

In the beginning, I hoped to show the importance of multimodality as a framework to critique discourse situations in society since in reality we do not only use words to construct meaningful engagements in daily life. What I am hoping right now, however, is that I have garnered enough interest in not only

integrating a multi-semiotic lens in the study and critique of culture and discursive situations but also the incorporation of such an optic in unravelling relations and engagement of power, dominance, structure, and agency in personal, which is inevitably also social, life.

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Alwin C. Aguirre holds a PhD from Institute of Culture, Discourse and Communication in Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand. He also holds a Bachelor degree in Communication Research and Master's degree in Philippine Studies (Philippine Literature and Women's Studies) from the University of the Philippines Diliman where he is also a professor under the Department of Filipino and Philippine Literature and also serves as Associate Dean for Research, Creative Work, and Publication of the College of Arts and Letters of UP Diliman. He is a recipient of the Asian Public Intellectuals (API) Fellowship from the Nippon Foundation for his research on *Asian Science Fiction.* His research focused on the social media experience of Filipino migrants in New Zealand on Facebook and blog. His study shows the important role the internet plays in understanding and expressing migrant identities.