



Imperfect strangers: Picturing place, family, and migrant identity on Facebook



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ABSTRACT

Places have meanings and significances beyond mere location or functionality. This assertion becomes especially salient for migrants, whose status is defined by a physical move from one place to another. The aim of this paper is to discuss the practice of *place-making* by migrants, with specific focus on the role of Facebook in this endeavour. We present the particular case of Amy, a Filipina immigrant to New Zealand, and her Facebook activities. Central to the discussion is a four-minute audio-visual piece that she produced herself and posted online to commemorate her family's second year as New Zealanders. Guided by the framework of multimodality, the concept of place, and the practice of everyday photography, and with invaluable insights from a semi-structured interview of the participant, we illustrate how semiotic resources afforded by social media sites such as Facebook foster the construction of the discourse of the *good life* and a claim to national belonging. Our analysis shows that everyday family photography, in interaction with social media, potentially signifies migrants' *becoming* a natural part of the national landscape. By interrogating the boundaries of private and public spaces, and reproducing the "migrant gaze" in everyday family photography, Amy transforms images into unified strands of the ideal immigrant narrative.

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1. Introduction

While taking a walk one chilly afternoon in an Auckland suburb in New Zealand, a thought occurred to Amy: "How did I ever get to this place?" Amy recounted this moment with a laugh and admitted that she had asked herself the question a couple of times before. There is no doubt that she considers New Zealand to be *home* after four years of knowing and being in the country. Nevertheless, she acknowledges having an inexplicable sensitivity to the fact that she now finds herself in a place that used to be so far removed from her reality. When asked how she sees such introspective moments, her response reflects a geographic imagination configured by her own personal journey vis-à-vis the larger Filipino diaspora pattern and a dominant myth that surrounds the construal of the new place:

You are kind of amazed—what happened that I ended up here? Like, there is the feeling ... you were in that small nation then suddenly you find yourself here at the end of, the end of the

world. I don't know ... or maybe because as Filipinos, we are more likely to find ourselves in countries that are more familiar—in the States, for instance. It's like if a Filipino moved to the States, it's normal; if a Filipino moved to Australia, it's still considered normal since we know where Australia is. But a Filipino who moved to ... New Zealand—the only thing that Filipinos know about New Zealand is *Lord of the Rings*, right? That's it! Or sheep! They don't know that there are these buildings here. There are even those who sometimes would ask me, "Where are you again? Aren't you in Europe?"

The feeling of loss and being lost is a common trope in stories of migration. Yet, the peculiar emotions attached to the place that induce existential ruminations in Amy have been brought on by a sense of being found, more precisely, of often finding herself contemplating being in a country that is radically different from where she hails. Her words set the tone of the discussion in this paper. As part of a larger study on migrant identity construction on the Internet that centres on experiences of Filipino migrants in New Zealand, we present the particular case of Amy and her use of Facebook as both a communicative and signifying platform.

Amy was in her mid-30s and pregnant with their second child when she, along with husband Ted and son Ben (all are pseudonyms),

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moved to New Zealand in 2009¹. She has a master's degree in communication, which could explain her proficiency in the technical aspects of design and production as shown by the object of analysis in this paper. The family (now with Sarah, born in Auckland) had been in New Zealand as permanent residents for two years when Amy decided to produce and put up on her Facebook profile an audio-visual presentation (AVP hereafter) to celebrate their second year in the country. This seemingly banal activity gains greater significance when seen as a particular instance of the confluence of everyday photography and social media practices as a means of making sense of one's place and oneself when building a life in diaspora. Our main aim in this article is to shed light on the dynamics of *place-making* in another land, its intersection with identity work, and the role of social media and in particular Facebook in imagining this area of migrant life.

In order to achieve this objective, we first discuss the concepts that inform our major arguments: place and place-making; social media and diaspora; everyday photography; and self-presentation and identity work. A background of the data set and the analytic framework we used follow this section. The AVP is the central text the potential meanings of which are examined through an analysis and interpretation of its multimodal composition. A deeper appreciation of the context and insights of Amy, as author of the text, was accomplished through a semi-structured interview, also the source of the quote in the opening. The succeeding parts are centred on the presentation and discussion of our analysis that focuses on the key components of the AVP.

2. The presentation of one's place in everyday life: The framework and data

2.1. The place of new media in migrants' lives

Augmenting their communicative capabilities to sustain connection with family and friends in the Philippines is Amy's primary reason for choosing to stay on Facebook. She admitted that she would have used it less had they not moved to New Zealand. Her case exemplifies how, as Miller (2011) claims, Facebook has spelled the "death of time and distance" since it enables people to come "closer to the sense of the family as a whole group in constant interaction with each other" (p. 194). For the diasporic person, it is safe to say that finding ways of communicating with significant people from a distance is a fundamental aspect of life away from the former homeland.

Madianou and Miller (2012) in their seminal ethnographic work, *Migration and New Media*, examine the diverse means that Filipino migrants employ to maintain connection with their families in the Philippines. From the "old" ways of writing letters, long-distance telephone calls, and recording voice messages on cassette tapes up to the more "modern" means of keeping contact such as sending short messages (SMS) through mobile phones, and computer and Internet-based methods (e.g. email, social networking sites, and blogs), they map the practice, function, and value of different media forms available for communicating and keeping ties. Madianou and Miller propose the use of the term *polymedia* to refer to the various means of facilitating communication and connection in the continuance of relationships amidst separation. The concept captures the "entire range of media as a communicative environment" the potential value

of which to users depend on the affordability of certain media forms, the skills and confidence users possess to harness the capability of the available digital media, and the infrastructural costs to realise media use (Madianou and Miller, 2012, p. 137).

Today there is an evolving phenomenon of "virtual families" in which parents and children who are thousands of miles and several time zones apart are just a mouse click or a few keypad strokes away (Komito, 2011; Torres, 2005). New forms of communication media are relatively cheaper, more accessible, and more efficient. These technologies, being digital, are easily manipulated, capable of being networked, and is more interactive than traditional media (see Flew, 2008). For these reasons, it is no surprise how the uptake and use of these modes of communication have been quick for those who have to endure great degrees of physical disconnection.

2.2. Blurred lines: Social media as personal and mass media

Pertierra (2007) has made similar observations of the place of computer-mediated information and communication technology (CMICT) in the lives of Filipino labour migrants and their families in the Philippines. He put forward the idea of "co-presence" as one of the main contributions of new media technologies. Earlier discussed by Goffman (1963), co-presence "renders persons accessible, available, and subject to one another" (p. 22). In situations where separation is difficult to overcome, achieving co-presence, earlier felt in the communication modes of the telegraph and telephone, "expanded structures of communication beyond *direct* aural and visual contact" (our emphasis) (Pertierra, 2007, p. 40). Further, Pertierra's articulation of "representation" as an effect of "non-physical" co-presence becomes cogent in probing identity discourses in new media texts. Recent and emerging forms of communication made available on various Internet platforms, such as social media sites, require that we engage in the business of *signifying* ourselves since "co-presence is virtual as much as corporeal" (Pertierra, 2007, p. 40). Chat rooms, blogs, media sharing sites, and social networking sites (SNS) – of which Facebook is an example – perform a communicative function between people without bodily co-presence as a precondition. Obviously, such an interactive situation possesses affordances and limitations that are distinct from face-to-face interaction: paralinguistic cues from the voice, face, and gestures are absent. These features of physically co-present discourse are appropriated through other symbolic means such as texts, icons, and images (e.g. emotion icons). The "textuality" of interaction of Internet-based media makes the act of "sign-making" paramount. Additionally, the capacity of these platforms to archive one's activities as generated content is further reason for new media users to consider their recorded discourses as potential presentations and representations of who they are as a "person" to both an intended and unintended audience.

Since the particular case study is a Facebook account, we present our understanding of this platform as a type of "social media". There is no form of media that is not social, clarifies Lomborg (2011) but adds that social media become distinctly social because they are based on interpersonal communication, interactive content creation, and personal purpose. Being "personal" refers both to content and authorship—social media generally contain personal topics and are authored by an individual (or individuals) whose subjective *voice* is what is represented in the content. Since the personal ethos of social media builds on the desire and ability of a user to project a *self* on a chosen format, identity remains "core" to many social media platforms (Kietzmann et al., 2011) be they blog sites, media sharing sites (e.g. YouTube), micro-blogging sites (e.g. Twitter), or SNSs (e.g. Facebook).

Despite social media catering to personal purposes, however, the possibility of having an audience beyond oneself and one's

¹ As part of the larger project the first author conducted a face-to-face semi-structured interview with Amy to elicit deeper thinking on such notions as place, family, and migrant identity. Quotes from the interview were translated into English from the original Filipino by the first author. Amy was recruited into the study because of her existing connections with the researchers and her willingness to share her Facebook page.

immediate interpersonal relationships alters the way we consider the reach and significance of an individual user's personal content. Due to the digitalised and networked property of new forms of media, social media cease to be purely personal and increasingly blur the lines of distinction from traditional mass communication (Lüders, 2008). A social networking site is no different. As a *networked communication platform* in which one can have an identifiable profile, can publicly display connections, and can consume and produce user-generated content, sharing of content to a bounded group of users is its foundational characteristic (Ellison and Boyd, 2013).

Before the advent of digital modes of interpersonal communication, Lüders (2008), p. 685 argues, people had a clear sense of who is at the other end of the communication process. She goes on to explain that with new media formats available to Internet-users, people are no longer able to identify and specify who "consumes" the content they generate and for what purpose. For instance, even though one is able to define one's network of "Friends" on Facebook – a *bounded* group of users – the final destination of one's posts cannot be exactly controlled or determined. For this reason, Facebook issues caveats in its privacy information such as the following: "Remember, when you post to another person's Timeline, that person controls what audience can view the post. Additionally, anyone who gets tagged in a post may see it, along with their friends" (<https://www.facebook.com/help/459934584025324/>). The estrangement of the content (text) from its originating context is witnessed in such instances. What is more, the internalisation of an audience when creating Facebook content is affected by the impossibility of clearly defining the limits of one's self-presentation through the semiotic resources afforded by the said new media platform.

2.3. Facebook as stage: Place-making on a social networking site

Places have meanings that transcend functionality and facticity as location. They should be seen as socially constructed as one makes "material, representational, and symbolic" investments in them (Harvey, 1993, p. 23). From the point of view of diaspora and transmigration, place becomes conspicuous since it is the boundaries of space and the defiance of such that are at the core of moving. Tolia-Kelly (2004) suggests that the marginalised position of migrants within the dominant national landscape drives them to look for, if not construct, other landscapes and ecologies that accommodate the affirmation of their individual and collective identities. This primacy of place is evident in the second-year anniversary AVP as one of the most important contents produced by Amy on her Facebook profile.

As shown above, Facebook and other social media are more than pragmatic for "they fulfil a variety of private and public purposes" (De Zúñiga and Valenzuela, 2010, p. xxxv). The Internet, in general, not only provides communicative functionality to individuals, it also generates platforms of self-expression, representation, and identity-formation (Alonso and Oiarzabal, 2010; Ellison, 2013; Hiller and Franz, 2004; Komito, 2011; Parham, 2005; Wandel and Beavers, 2010; Wood, 2010).

Discussing the representational potential of Internet platforms, Facebook in particular, would not be complete without adequate attention to the current practice of everyday photography. Posting photos remains one of the most popular activities on social media sites (see for instance Brenner, 2013; Gibson et al., 2013). Everyday photography should then be apprehended as it traverses the *digital path* (Sarvas and Frohlich, 2011) where its relation with the affordances offered by information technology becomes a primary determinant of contemporary visual culture.

On its own, the everyday photograph is a challenge to theorise and historicise due to its repetitiveness in form and content

(Berger, 2011). The linguistic/literary concept of the *cliché*, to be discussed in more detail later, proves useful in this regard as it sheds light on the origins, role, and practice of repeatedly producing images that follow a noticeably overused format. Different genres of everyday photography will likely fit this description. Family photographs (Chambers, 2006; Hirsch, 1981) and tourist photographs (Haldrup and Larsen, 2003; Larsen, 2005) are the two best examples of photographic practice defined by the *cliché*. It is not uncommon for these two genres to intersect in the all-too-familiar family photo album—a cultural object that possesses a whole cultural, social, and political dynamic of its own.

The resulting images and these mundane acts are at issue in this paper since the repetitive character of the photos and the ritualised event of capturing and displaying these end products possess a specific significance to Amy's projection of an ideal migrant life through the consumption of place and the redefinition of placedness. The uniqueness of Facebook as the site of convergence of production and consumption of family images comes from its ability to continue the familiar practice of displaying precious, if banal, photographs not unlike in a traditional photo album. However, in contrast to this mode of collecting and displaying "print" photographs, the SNS reconfigures the entire experience of textual reproduction and circulation. Through the particular functionalities of Facebook, for instance, the average user has access to digital means of creating, reconfiguring, and presenting not only images but also images as elements of an entire *text*. The fundamental way of engaging with the format, thus, potentially alters meanings and meaningfulness of both the images and the experience of "looking" at them.

Goffman (1971), specifically his basic concept of "self-presentation", proves useful in examining the way family photographs are displayed and consumed in social media. What we reference here are some of his earliest concepts that act as building blocks of understanding the "interaction order" (e.g. front and back stage, sign-equipment, impression management, performer and character), albeit we are extending their application to instances of the "digitised interaction order" (Jenkins, 2010). Facebook engagement, in our view, is akin to presenting one's self on a uniquely configured platform where a single person can potentially have more productive and distributive control over generated content not previously experienced in traditional modes of mass media (e.g. print publishing or broadcasting). Further, the particular SNS as an expressive medium not only underscores the influence of an *internalised audience* (Vološinov, 1986) in constructing a presentation of one's self, what is also ingrained is the constant expectation for feedback from this set of audience composed of at least one's identified network (i.e. depending on one's privacy settings, people not known to Facebook users may be able to access their accounts).

We focus only on the Facebook Timeline as an online front stage. The Timeline is the person's main profile that is accessible to a bounded public. It is a space that is imbued with various items of expressive potency and potentiality through which particular aspects of one's life are made to seem to matter more than others. Although we centre on a multimodal analysis of a particular user-generated text on the Timeline, it is necessary to point out that our understanding and interpretation of the various semiotic elements in the AVP are premised on the confluence of the photographic image and Facebook as social media in appropriating "truth-telling" as a defining element.

Photographs share with Facebook the power to construct "appearances of the real". While the photograph is an effective vehicle to impart an "effect of reality" (Barthes, 1986) because images appear *natural* (van Leeuwen, 2001), Facebook enhances the credibility of the profile owner via the presence of third party comments (Walther et al., 2008). In addition, because one's social

network is more apparent on an SNS, self-presentations on such a platform may be less highly embellished (Ellison and Boyd, 2013), hence, a semblance of the real is generally assumed or achieved. The convergence of the natural image in the photograph and the essentially networked structure in the SNS appears to make veracity in Facebook de rigueur. It is, therefore, crucial to keep in mind that as far as presenting the self goes, the reality effect is a product of composing signifying elements together to appear that there is nothing more to what is actually seen.

2.4. Situating the data and analytic framework

In the larger study, we looked at Amy's Facebook activities since the time she began accessing the media while still in the Philippines in 2008 up to the time she moved to New Zealand. Including a semi-structured interview, data-gathering period ended in 2011 allowing us to cover almost three years of her Facebook content generation, although in this paper we do not conduct a diachronic analysis. To aid in our understanding, we categorised her Facebook content between "everyday ordinary" and "special extraordinary" events. This paper focuses on a portion of the study that concerns the latter. As opposed to everyday situations, our attention is on one of the special occasions that Amy had chosen to *literally* highlight on the social media stage, that is, by marking such posts as "Highlights"—a function afforded by Facebook. Choosing to focus on the second year anniversary AVP as case study is based on this conscious act by Amy to identify it as something "special"—giving it salience not bestowed on other posts. Also, the audio-visual piece is a deliberate acknowledgment of her and her family's status as migrants in New Zealand, explicitly recognising their position in the particular society and implicitly providing – *giving off*, in Goffman's term – ideas about how she perceives her identity in the receiving country.

We turn to the tenets of multimodal discourse analysis to cover not only the different semiotic resources at the disposal of Facebook users but also the different levels of engagement that one could have in producing content. Key to multimodality as outlined by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) is the attention to both the different sign-making "modes" one chooses to employ and the processes of content design/conceptualisation and production/distribution. These two basic strata in the process of creation are potential sites of meaning, that is, it is not only in designing content where discourses are generated but even in the actual means of production (e.g. what materials we choose to use) and distribution (e.g. analogue or digital). Internet-based new media offer greater opportunity to flatten hierarchies of cultural production. Where the processes, for instance, of design, production, and distribution are conventionally thought of as separate procedures handled by different experts, Internet-based new media creation is hinged on the principle of "convergence" as a technological and cultural practice (Deuze, 2007). Despite its limits, new media allows for the breaking down of production barriers leading to a certain amount of control over multiple strata, and in some respects enhancing the agency and power of the individual.

People use different semiotic resources available to them in making signs in the process of creation. These "modes", provided by one's culture, allow the simultaneous realisation of discourses and types of (inter)action (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 21). Particular to Amy's Facebook activities in this paper, the most salient semiotic resources are of the linguistic, the aural, and the visual kinds: words, music, images, and narratives that she either produced herself or creatively adapted to achieve a desired outcome in her sign-making pursuits.

The careful and deliberate fusion of different components in the AVP is the main reason for deploying an analytic framework that focuses on *composition* as a "system for integrating different modes into a multimodal whole" (van Leeuwen, 2003, p. 24, also

Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). There are three aspects of composition to be considered in the analysis of the AVP according to van Leeuwen (2003, p. 24ff.):

1. *Information value*: refers to how meanings are conveyed by the arrangement or positions of elements in space. We focus at this point on the left and right positions that signify the "given" and "new" respectively, where the former refers to what is already a known, familiar, and taken for granted departure point, while the latter is something which is not yet known, thus, the more important highlight of the message.
2. *Salience*: refers to the degree to which elements are made more noticeable (e.g. eye-catching or ear-catching) than others in an arrangement.
3. *Framing*: refers to the degree to which elements are separated or connected, continued or discontinued from each other by certain connective devices. Elements may be strongly or weakly attached to each other or to other elements resulting in a sense of grouping, rhyme, or repetition.

These three compositional dimensions provide a framework to examine the way a unified message or meaning is imparted through the dialogue between the different semiotic elements that make up the text. Our contention is that although the images do not possess one definite meaning on their own, placing them in a collection, in a particular order, complemented with a description and a specific song, constructs a signifying route for the viewer that potentially leads to an assertion about what life is like for a Filipino in a place like New Zealand.

We are focusing on three semiotic elements that comprise the AVP's wholeness as a text: the short introduction (verbal) that appears on Amy's Timeline, serving as overview to the content; the music that serves as the only audio element of the presentation; and, the images as main content of the AVP. The latter is, admittedly, given greater attention in this discussion due to issues of space and the more relevant reason that the media – both Facebook and the AVP – through which Amy chose to present her commemoration of being in New Zealand are necessarily visual. With the image-centric character of these media formats, we complement the understanding of textual composition with the Viewer Network and Spatial Network analysis also outlined by van Leeuwen (2008). In designing the analysis as such, we hope to demonstrate how the use of images in place-making forms a significant aspect of Amy's identity construction as a migrant. The specific components of these frameworks are explained in a succeeding section. We recognise that along with the rich insights gained from a single in-depth case study we have potentially, although not necessarily, sacrificed a wider generalisability.

3. A place of our own: The migrant family and Facebook

3.1. Defining the good life: Framing images through words

Amy provides the following as overture to her celebratory audio-visual presentation, presented here as a series of numbered lines for easy reference. In the original post, it is composed of just two paragraphs, in which the second one is solely comprised of sentence 7 below:

1. We've been here in New Zealand for two years now, and though we still sometimes miss UF, Le Ching, isaw² and all our friends and family, NZ has become our home now.

² UF stands for Amy's alma mater; Le Ching is a Chinese restaurant; isaw (i-sao) is grilled chicken, pork or cow intestine skewers, a common street food.

2. We love how Ben and Sarah can run around the park and enjoy being kids.
3. We love the clear blue skies, the fantastic views and kid-friendly activities everywhere.
4. This video is for our friends and family.
5. It encapsulates our family's milestones and some of the places we've been to in the past two years.
6. All praises to God for bringing us to this wonderful country.
7. Our life is not a perfect life, but it is a good life.

It is important to remember that the above piece of writing is an accompaniment to the video, the major purpose of which was to celebrate the family's second year as legitimate residents of the country. As a material that memorialises an important event in their migrant life, it is expected that its content would tend to highlight the appealing aspects of their move to New Zealand.

Also germane to the issue of presenting an idea of life abroad is how this introduction is devoted to showcasing the places Amy and the family have been able to see in the conduct of their relatively inchoate New Zealand life. Although there is a simultaneous historical and geographic depiction of migrant subjectivity, as shown by the terms "milestones" and "places" (they have been to) in sentence 5, all prior statements (1–3) speak of specific places of attachment in the Philippines and the general character of New Zealand as place. Bestowing the label "home" upon the latter leans largely on the appreciation of the kind of environment that the country is able to offer, something that, though unsaid, is presumably unavailable where they come from.

Place is one of the most important concepts in human geography (Cresswell, 2011). The pioneers in the field such as Relph (1976) and Tuan (1977) advance the idea that places are created because of people's deep attachment to spaces they occupy so that generic locations are transformed into specific places when deeper and more complex emotions, memories, and significances are given to and given by it. Relph (1976), p. 96 asserts further that the centrality of place in human lives implicates it in developing a sense of security and identity, so that "people's opportunity and power to experience and determine their own relationship with places" should always be recognised.

Amy's depiction of their success as immigrants is contingent on the description of New Zealand as a viable place to experience an ideal family life. Focusing on the last sentence of the short introduction using the "given-new" principle illustrates the emphasis on the concept of the *good life*, which serves to anchor the meaning of the entire AVP. Although from the explanation provided above, the "given-new" system pertains to the "horizontal dimension" of arranging semiotic elements in a space, the principle can also be "applied to messages articulated in time" (van Leeuwen, 2003, p. 34). Following this argument, the sentence in question would have the following progression of expressed ideas:

Our life is not a perfect life, but it is a good life.

GIVEN → NEW

Not having a perfect life is a given – no one could possibly say that one's life is perfect. The "given" information is assumed to be generally true, and so the "new" information – that they have a "good life" despite not having a perfect one – should be the message in focus.

Describing life as good relies on abstraction that results in a sweeping assessment of the country as an ideal place. The actual meaning of the good life is presupposed in the discourse, not directly asserted, so that it is more difficult to deny or challenge (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1998). Though no exact reason is provided for saying why she considers their life to be good in New Zealand, there are details in the text that may serve as clues to the reasons for Amy's positive appraisal of their situation, and

these have something to do with how she perceives and consumes place. Take, for instance, sentences 2 and 3 in the excerpt: 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.

These short statements are a trove of rhetorical moves that serve to buttress the idealisation and romanticisation of life in a land that, by insinuation, is very different from, if not the opposite of, the Philippines. The affective impact of the lexical choices "good" and "perfect" is reinforced by the mental images projected by the general description of their surrounds: "clear blue skies" and "fantastic views" in sentence 3. Amy's children are implicated in the portrayal of their blossoming relationship with the place—they can finally "run around the park and enjoy being kids" (sentence 2). Depicting the identity of Ben and Sarah through *spatialisation* presupposes an order of how it is to "really" be a child – an essential condition of being – that is successfully fulfilled in New Zealand. Spatialisation, as a recontextualisation of practice in discourse, possesses the effect of imparting the character of a place to a person associated with it (van Leeuwen, 2008). This point is emphasised in sentence 3 that possesses a hyperbolic attitude: there are activities especially for kids *everywhere!*

The representation of kid-friendliness of the country is, of course, not necessarily accurate. Meaning-making is a matter of making a choice that is based on particular subjectivities and agency individuals possess in the role of either an originator or receptor of signs. Choices are positionings and this is what makes semiotic practices political (Kress, 2009). The AVP, after all, is still part of Amy's staging of their private lives in a public "front" stage where the image of the "good life" is equated with New Zealand as "home".

3.2. *What you hear is what you get: Background music as discursive foregrounding*

The AVP features a background song entitled *The Good Life* by the American band One Republic. It is largely the only sound heard in the AVP (except for occasional audio coming from some of the video clips), which means that the entire 'soundscape' (cited in Machin, 2010; term coined by Schaefer, 1977) is solely defined by elements the track is able to provide.

The song's instrumental composition features drums, keyboards, acoustic guitar, bass (in the chorus), and an interesting human-like "whistling". The 4/4 drumbeat that serves as foreground sound suggests a lively but relaxed energy—constant, continuing, unremitting but pleasant. The keyboard in the background produces a mid-level monotonous pitch not exactly languid but unmistakably light. But perhaps the most crucial feature of the music in terms of meaning potential is the whistling that appears 20s into the song, after the pervasive drumbeats. This element, a high-pitched sound that rises and falls regularly, introduces a "fresh" break to the monotony of instrumental sounds through its modality—it projects a "human" quality. Not only does it complement the relaxed and steady pace of the melody but it injects a human-like sensibility to the soundscape, making it appear more real, relatable, and easily absorbed as a sensual experience. It disappears slowly just before the first line of the lyrics is sung and resurrects in the chorus shortly after all words have been uttered except for a lingering melodious "Ah", affording the listener a carefree feel by combining the two distinct sounds.

The music evokes an image of regular movement that is not hurried but constantly proceeding. This could very much be likened to a steady pace, in the manner of a traveller who can afford to linger in certain spots without losing the intent to walk on. The regular drumbeats suggest this and the whistling – based on our actual experience of the act (its provenance) – emphasises that the journey being depicted is not a race. Amy's choice of

background music conveys a movement in space and coupled with the lyrics, place-making is at the heart of the song. From the opening lines: Woke up in London yesterday/Found myself in the city near Piccadilly, up to the fifth stanza: To my friends in New York, I say hello/My friends in L.A. they don't know/Where I've been for the past few years or so/Paris to China to Colorado, it celebrates a peripatetic lifestyle that is not entirely different from Amy's chosen path. As a deliberate feature of the AVP, which is an entire sign in itself, place as location paves the way for place as assertion. What it asserts, in particular, is the discourse of the good life that is made evident by the information value and salience of the concept.

The “given-new” principle is, once more, apparent in the song as the opening lines excerpted above (GIVEN) usher the listener to the chorus (NEW):

Oh, this has gotta be *the good life*
 This has gotta be the *good life*
 This could really be a *good life, good life*
 I say, “Oh, got this feeling that you can't fight”
 Like this city is on fire tonight
 This could really be a *good life, a good, good life*

With the very noticeable repetition of the lines and the term “good life” (six times) sung relatively up-tempo, with an enduring mid-level pitch “Ah” in the background, and kicked off with a comparatively louder utterance of the “Oh” to signal the beginning of the chorus, the musical accompaniment to the images is able to hold together an essence of the entire text that points to the quality of living Amy's family now enjoys.

The discourse of the good life, therefore, achieves salience within and across the distinct modes of the short introduction (verbal) and the song (sound). In the former, the term is made the NEW information, and as the final words in the final paragraph, it potentially sticks longer in the reader's memory. In the latter, the term is heard in the chorus, a focal point of dynamism, energy, and interactivity (van Leeuwen, 1999) in the song, repeated several times. As the AVP is the same length as the song, the chorus is heard three times up until the final image. Lastly, further emphasis on the good life discourse is achieved across modes through repetition.

The final line of the song, *What there is to complain about?* is also conspicuously heard in the AVP as these are the parting words sung when all other musical elements subside. It performs an interesting dialogue with the message in the introduction and the lines in the chorus. Amy may be conveying the idea that life at present, though not perfect, is good and there is no reason to complain despite “other” things that may be contrary to the good life discourse—information that is *excluded* altogether in the text. The single narrative of the good life provides a “thematic frame” through which the varied images in the AVP can be connected and become continuous. Below, we present how this is accomplished in the way the images are chosen, sequenced, and labelled by Amy in order to represent their presence in many New Zealand landscapes and attachment (physical and otherwise) to the place they now call home.

3.3. Facebook as family album: Photographing the good life

Overall, the AVP is composed of 88 images (78 still images, 10 video clips). A majority (79) features the children, Ben and Sarah, and depict locations outside the home (71). The significance of these general observations in conjunction with other characteristics of the images in the AVP is discussed in the succeeding sections. At this point, we would like to present our particular application of the

Viewer Network Analysis and the Spatial Network Analysis as the main tool for examining this aspect of the text.

In outlining the Viewer Network Analysis, van Leeuwen takes the position that the angle, framing, and gaze of subjects in images imply a particular relationship dynamics between those who *see* the image and those who are being depicted. Three general components of the framework need attention (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 136ff.):

1. Social distance
 - a. “Close shots” (e.g. close-ups) make the subject appear to be near the viewer.
 - b. “Long shots” (e.g. wide shots) make the subject appear far from the viewer.
2. Social relation
 - a. Involvement
 - i. “Frontal angle” depicts involvement of the subject in the viewer's world.
 - ii. “Oblique angle” depicts detachment of the subject to the viewer.
 - b. Power
 - i. “High angle” from where image is taken gives viewer power over the depicted subject.
 - ii. “Eye level” angle connotes equality.
 - iii. “Low angle” depicts the represented has power.
3. Social interaction
 - a. There is “direct address” when gaze of subject is directed at viewer (e.g. subject looks directly at camera).
 - b. There is “indirect address” when subject's gaze avoids viewer.

We identified the characteristics of the representation of the subjects and the way they potentially relate to the audience using the above system in analysing the images used by Amy in the AVP. The potential meanings the subject-viewer relationship conveys is further advanced by how the representation of “place” is employed to construct an identity of the subjects that are shown to occupy and use certain spaces. This complementary analytic route we take is premised on the argument that the AVP, in its entirety, *spatialises* the subjects in which their identity is built on the portrayal of the places they inhabit.

We adopt the Spatial Representation Network in van Leeuwen's, (2003), pp. 88–104 recontextualised practice framework in order to assess the significance of place in the chosen images and its relation to the projection of the good life discourse made salient in the introduction and the background song. In line with this, we are adapting the concepts of “acting in space” and “interpreting space” to the particular analysis, among all the other aspects of the “grammar of space” that van Leeuwen proposed. The decision to focus on these two is based on the specific issues each tackle that are pertinent to the AVP images. The former addresses the relationship of social actors to the space they occupy thereby having their actions define the space they use (e.g. how do the images in the AVP depict subjects' actions and what do they tell about the arrangement of space seen in the pictures?) while the latter relates to the meanings we give to space based on our representation of it (e.g. is the depicted space functional or ideological?).

Although our basis for understanding and use of the concepts is van Leeuwen's explanation, we expand on them by considering other related issues. For instance, while we identify whether depicted action is a “position” (showing spatial arrangement in a particular moment of a social practice) or “transition” (change in space of one social practice to the next) (van Leeuwen, 2003, pp. 90–96), we are also keen on determining whether the action is “natural” or “posed”. The assumption is that there is no way to actually know whether an action is natural (i.e. not planned or composed) or staged in images. However, the actual task is to see if

the depicted action is made to appear “naturally occurring” in concurrence with the basic function of the setting in the image or if the image is completely aware of its “constructedness”—the performance of an action is the deliberate objective (e.g. striking a pose). The significance of these two categories is simple: natural actions embed the subjects in the places depicted in the images while “posed” actions highlight the intent of the subjects to draw attention to themselves and their presence in particular places. In the former, subjects are represented as doing what is naturally done in certain spaces, thus, projecting a sense of “disinterest”, somewhat related to Kant's (1987), p. 174 notion of fine art becoming successful only by having “a look of nature” even when we know it is purposive. In the latter, subjects are made the locus of attention by presenting them as “involved” in the projection of an image instead of blending them in the represented environment.

In addition, we modify the notion of “interpreting space” in the analysis. One could either assign *functions* (demonstrate conventional or natural use of space) or *meanings* (convey connotations of space) when interpreting space (van Leeuwen, 2003, pp. 97–98). Space may be depicted as purely “functional”, which means that its relevance lies in its utility (e.g. playground for playing), or “meaningful”, which we understand to be connotative, in Barthes' term, thus, ideological (e.g. playful body language in national monuments). Being functional or connotative is, however, not totally discrete in many instances. This may be the reason why van Leeuwen, 2003, pp. 102–103 contends that interpreting space can only be realised visually when accompanied by words. In the AVP, for example, images of the playground are usually depicted as “functional” since Ben and Sarah are seen playing in it. However, this could also be interpreted as projecting a “myth” of ideal childhood that is carefree, playful, and innocent, thus, the basic utility of the space gives way to another level of signification. For this reason, we formulate the “functional-meaningful” interpretation of space as a *continuum* where depictions of space may be “function-leaning” or “connotation-leaning”. We do believe that even in the absence of words, images can still project space as either functional or

connotative in the way that represented agents are depicted to make use or meaning of it. In some cases in the AVP, there are images that interpret space as somewhere in between.

3.3.1. Between the public and the private: Locating home and a sense of place

A medium, high angle, revolving shot of Ben standing on grassy ground with mouth agape – as if uttering words aloud – and arms raised in the air opens the AVP. As the camera moves, it would appear that the world revolves around him and at that moment he becomes the centre of a vast, green space. New Zealand, after all, touts itself as ‘100% Pure’. Immediately following is a lone photo of him and Amy sitting on a bench in an airport lounge sending a clear message that they were on a trip. This nondescript picture becomes pivotal to the objective of the entire presentation and paves the way for the telling of their move to New Zealand. A photo in the airport, therefore, serves as a marker of a break in a period of their lives and a point of crossing over spaces – essentially, the very instance of their migration journey becoming real.

Table 1 presents the captions in the AVP in order of appearance. There are 27 captions to label each set of images and of these, 11 are solely about places (generic and specific) indicated by “P” in the second sub-column, six are about events or “E” (some could be considered “milestones”), and 10 mention activities with indicated place names or “PE” (e.g. “Strolls in the city”). This illustrates that most of the shots were located outdoors (71 of 88), an aspect of the collection that points to the act of colonising space beyond the boundaries of the private sphere. The third column supports precisely this point as it establishes that most of the photographs portray places in public spaces. This highlights how Amy, in presenting how far they have come – literally and figuratively – as newcomers to a foreign land, appropriates the potential of visual cultural practice to perform an identity that dissolves being strangers, strangeness or being out-of-place. All images depict, in one way or the other, “settings” even when specific sets of pictures are not identified by the centrality of the place. This wilful labelling of places illustrates how an attachment

Table 1

Captions (P, E, PE)*, shot location, and type of space whether domestic or public in Amy's second anniversary in New Zealand AVP.

	Theme/caption (in order of appearance in the AVP)	Location	Public/domestic sphere
1	PE First few days in NZ	Outdoors, playground, museum, beach, shops, park	Public
2	P Our first home in NZ	Indoors/outdoors, house	Domestic
3	PE June 2009: Ben starts Kindy at AA Kindergarten	Outdoors, school grounds, parking area	Public
4	P WETA cave	Outdoors/indoors, WETA cave	Public
5	E Our little princess is born	Indoors, (assumed location)	(Domestic)
6	PE October, 2009: Ben starts primary at BB school	Outdoors/Indoors, school	Public
7	E Our first family picture!	Outdoors	Public
8	P Wellington Botanical Garden	Outdoors, in a garden of flowers, next to lake or pond	Public
9	PE F1 Exhibit at Te Papa Museum	Indoors, in exhibit area	Public
10	P Our 2nd home at Wellington	Indoors, in a living room, bedroom	Domestic
11	PE Our first summer in NZ	Outdoors, beach	Public
12	E A visit from Ateh!	Outdoors	Public
13	P Wellington Zoo	Outdoors, open grounds	Public
14	PE Ben transfers to CC Primary School	Outdoors, school grounds	Public
15	P Zealandia	Outdoors, near a lake	Public
16	PE Strolls in the city	Outdoors, playground, park; Indoors, children's book library	Public
17	P Staglands	Outdoors, farm, river	Public
18	E Ben's school production	Indoors, school auditorium	Public
19	E Sarah's first birthday	Indoors, party venue	Public
20	PE Move to Auckland!	Outdoors, shot of a big mountain, tree-lined road, Auckland landscape	Public
21	P A new house in Auckland	Outdoors, house, neighbourhood	Domestic
22	PE A new school for Ben—DD Primary	Outdoors/indoors, school grounds	Public
23	E A reunion with old friends	Outdoors, park; Indoors, restaurant	Public
24	P Auckland War Memorial Museum	Outdoors/indoors, museum grounds	Public
25	P Auckland Zoo	Outdoors, zoo open grounds	Public
26	P Kelly Tarlton's	Indoors, aquarium park	Public
27	PE Picnics at parks	Outdoors, parks	Public

* P—place-specific captions, E—event-specific captions, PE—place+event captions.

to place becomes a salient aspect of migrant life and its projection to others.

There are only three sets of images that are explicitly identified as spheres of domesticity (shaded grey in the Table) by the anchoring effect of the captions. In all these three instances, the depicted space is specifically nominated as “home” or “house”, signalling permanence in the family’s placement. It is interesting to note that the first set of images that bears the label “home” only appears after the first nine images. Pictures of their domestic life were preceded by pictures of playgrounds, parks, the museum, and the beach that go under the label *First Few Days in NZ*.

Amy intimated that they stayed with a friend in the beginning. This was also the same friend who had become a big influence in their decision to consider migrating to the country. She picked them up from the airport and took them under her own family’s care until they had settled in. This may be the reason why, in Amy’s representation, their first few days in New Zealand did not begin “at home” for they did not have one to consider as their own; they did not have a place yet to symbolise their own, unique, and legitimate place in the foreign land.

Migration is an expropriating act. One leaves behind properties, social network, profession, and even symbolic capital, such as status, in choosing to depart from the homeland. Since the home, at once the physical family dwelling and the symbolic attachment to place of origin, is lost in the creation of a new life in a new land, it is one of the primary acquisitions that immigrants desire to have in order to get a sense of acceptance in the new society. But unfortunately for New Zealand, in particular, housing has been one of the banes of new settler life due to cost, income constraints, and racial prejudice (Butcher et al., 2006). Treating the material dwelling in the new country as home is contingent on developing a sense of belonging. Acquiring a place to stay does not automatically translate to feeling *at home* but in Amy’s case, finding “a place of their own” afforded a feeling of control over their space.

In the Table above, it is evident how the home – domestic sphere – punctuates Amy’s narrative of their New Zealand life. Within their first two years, they moved three times: twice in Wellington and once to Auckland. Every move is indexed by a declaration of having a place they could invest in – materially and emotionally – to be able to establish a recognised domiciliary status. Every home, in turn, becomes a marker of a foray outside the private space and into the public sphere. It is as if every declaration of acquiring a home frames the stages of their settling in as migrants for once a base is secured, the world outside is actively explored.

The interaction of the public and private spheres in the depiction of the family’s life is crucial in achieving a successful migration story. This has the power to portray mobility and access to means of material and experiential appropriation. The link between material acquisitions as fulfilment of symbolic ties to a place is more vividly shown in their second move in Wellington. After having their second child, they deemed their first house too small and decided to look for a larger one. Although the first house they rented, being fully furnished, satisfied their practical needs as newcomers, their second home, an unfurnished rental property, crystallised their identities as incontrovertible subjects of New Zealand. The need to fill in the new dwelling with objects made their separation from the Philippines more real, as Amy explains in the interview:

It’s like we were already buying stuff that is ours, compared to what we had before, all right, we were using those things but we didn’t own them. When we moved house, we needed a fridge, we needed things, it was real, like there was already acceptance: “Ok, this is it. We are in New Zealand.” Before, it was like something was holding us back; since you did not have anything here, you can always pack your bags and go home, go

back to the Philippines. But when you get your own stuff, of course, this is it! That is when your life really begins.

Some things matter (Miller, 1998) because objects are not neutral entities (Appadurai, 1986; Bourdieu, 1984; Latour, 1993). They are given value and meaning by the subjects and contexts of their engagement so that the making and understanding of reality is impossible without them (Latour and Venn, 2002; Latour, 1993; Miller, 1987). Displacement of people entails replacement of objects since a new environment requires an understanding and navigation of a new material world (Burrell, 2008; Rosales, 2010). Hecht (2001) observes that acquiring significant objects is a necessary practice after migration since “things” bring emotional fulfilment in the attempt of re-making the home.

Fig. 1, for instance, shows a photo that bears the caption “A new house in Auckland”. The shift in lexical choice in this third set of images of home in New Zealand is noticeable. Whereas Amy identifies their Wellington residences as “home”, the Auckland one (also a rented property) is labelled as “new house”. The subject matter framed by the photo is partial to the material object that fulfils the title of “home”. In fact, this is one of the rare instances in the AVP where Amy shows a photo that is empty of persons (4 photos in total). Even their homes in Wellington are shown as dwelt living spaces at all times. The image in question favours a projection of material procurement in their migrant life. The house and the car are commonplace items in portraying a comfortable middle class status—these have become established as common amateur photographic *mis-en-scène* (Chambers, 2006, p. 105).

Berger (2011) adopts the notion of the cliché as framework to read vernacular photographs or more specifically, snapshots, to speak of the quality of pictures that artists abhor as boringly repetitive and highly unimaginative while the same characteristics are what is valued as familiar and meaningful by the ordinary person. Further, cliché images in family photographic self-representations potentially uphold the prevailing values of the culture and the time in the practice of photography as “middle-brow art” (Bourdieu, 1990). That is to say, they not only capture personal and intimate moments but portray national narratives of an ideal family (Chambers, 2006, p. 98). They not only represent the ideal immigrant lifestyle but the ideal immigrant identity favoured by state-imposed human capital standards—economically viable and socially assimilable (Barber, 2008; McLaren and Dyck, 2004). Our further analysis of the images included in the AVP is in consonance with this premise as illustrated by a “touristic sensibility” in making images of place consumption.

3.3.2. Migrant gaze and the construction of family-in-place

Since many of the photographs and video clips in the AVP feature the different places Amy and her family had been to (for the first time) in the first two years of their New Zealand life – an aspect of the presentation that she herself highlighted in the accompanying introduction – a touristic *flavour* cannot be missed.

The “tourist gaze” (Urry and Larsen, 2011), though appearing to categorise a particular way of looking, is neither one kind nor is it purely descriptive. It refers to the many “ways of seeing” (Berger, 1972) that are generated in the culture, practice, economy, and politics of travel coupled with the continually changing means of capturing and documenting the experience of being in and, primarily but not solely, looking at places – photographs, postcards, films – that enable “the gaze to be reproduced, recaptured, and redistributed over time and across space” (Urry and Larsen, 2011, p. 4).

As with the salience of domesticity and domestic materiality in picturing the private sphere in Amy’s AVP, the photographic cliché also characterises snapshots of “special” public spaces in the family’s travels around New Zealand. Reference to the concept of cliché does not necessarily connote that tourist-generated photographs are “performed”, to reference Urry and Larsen, because



Fig. 1. Screen capture of the AVP at 00:02:40. As shown, it was captioned “A new house in Auckland”.

these are manifestations of “performing” the self in consonance with the practice of tourism as a “modern” leisure activity (2011, pp. 4–5) that has not only become a marker of status in society (Jaworski and Lawson, 2005; Urry and Larsen, 2011) but instances of consumption and momentary arrogation of space. A good example of this touristic cliché is a photo of Amy³ in which she appears to be mimicking a life-size model of Gollum (an iconic *Lord of the Rings* character) in an exhibition. The said image performs a “disrespectful” stance towards the space and its defining objects (Jaworski and Thurlow, 2011, p. 244).

Of greater significance in understanding Amy’s touristic images, in connection with her diaspora narrative, is what Haldrup and Larsen (2003) propose as the concept of “family gaze” in which, instead of the consumption of places, tourist photography (especially those produced in family holidays) serves to enact sociality—the pre-eminence of social relations in the “extraordinary ordinariness” of intimate social worlds. Amy’s touristic set of photographs in the AVP demonstrates the premise of family gaze well, especially since many of them were taken in usual tourist sites (e.g. museums, zoos, aquarium park). Although there is a place-centric framing of the images based on captions used, the performance of familial sociality is prominent in majority of the images.

Table 2 illustrates this character of the collection through the Viewer Network Analysis (depicting the relationship of subject to viewer). The Table only includes images depicting what could be considered usual “tourist” spots. Identification of these places was based on the captions used (e.g. Weta Cave) to label a set of images or the depiction of pertinent places on the photographs or video clips even without explicit labelling (e.g. the parliament building or landscapes). Other public places, namely parks and playgrounds, are not included in the count. Although they could be interesting spaces to see for local and international tourists, we consider them more as spaces for “mundane”, rather than special, activities.

Larsen (2005), p. 430 observes that the family gaze produces subjects who connect with the viewer of the image through direct eye contact; positioning the spectator face-to-face with those pictured, thus producing nearness, commitment, and involvement. This is likewise seen in the AVP, labelled in the Table as “direct address” (21 of 31 images). Kress and van Leeuwen’s, (2006)

notion of *contact* in visual grammar, subjects in images looking directly at the viewer “demand” the latter not to see them as mere objects of observation or contemplation but instead, occupy a position that takes part in the truth of the reality they are in. As far as Amy’s case is concerned, it is perhaps the reality of the kind of experiences her family can acquire and the quality of life they have away from the Philippines.

In addition to eye contact, most of the images (28 of 31) in the AVP present the subjects as close to the viewer through the use of medium or close-up shots, generally,⁴ making the setting secondary to the depicted persons. Also, most represent the subjects as highly involved (25) and equal in power (28). It is worth noting that more than half (18) of the total number of images exhibit the combination close distance, involved, equal, and direct – clearly demanding engagement from the viewer while projecting equal power, awareness, and agency. The subjects referred to here are Amy and the family – alone, with another, or altogether. As mentioned earlier, Ben and Sarah dominate the entire collection while half of all the images (45) portray the children (alone or together) with at least one of the parents. In total, four images depict all of them together.

Table 3, a Spatial Network Analysis, complements the foregrounding of subjects in lieu of the special locations depicted in the touristic shots. It focuses on the dimensions of “acting in space”, nature of the depicted action, and “interpreting space”. Three more images that show no subject other than the scenery or landscape themselves are accounted for here (see Fig. 2).

The arrangement of space, or establishing shots (Fig. 2, for instance), is rarely depicted (8) compared to representing a transition in the subject’s position in a social practice (26). But even these scenic photographs do not call attention to themselves as they only serve as a bridge to the continuance of an underlying plot in Amy’s migration narrative. They represent, literally (as the set of images depict the movement from Wellington to Auckland by road) and figuratively, the family’s mobility and the furtherance of their immigrant journey. Most actions are posed (25), indicating that the represented subjects draw attention to themselves instead of the depicted place no matter how unique, exotic or special. Also, a majority of the images interpret space as connotative (26), more so if the “functional-meaningful” category is considered to lean towards the connotative instead of the functional.

³ Certain referenced images are not shown in the paper to protect the participants’ privacy. There are photos in the AVP that lose effectivity as illustrative examples of a particular point when anonymised. For instance, the photo of Amy mimicking Gollum depends on showing her facial expressions which is lost when protecting her identity.

⁴ Long shots usually present subjects in images as far from the viewer by showing the whole body within an equally expansive setting. However, certain instances make it appear that a represented subject is relatively closer to the viewer even when the whole body is seen, for example, in group shots or when subjects foreground a setting or a prominent element in a setting.

Table 2
Viewer network analysis of the AVP—touristic photos ($n=31$).

Viewer network dimension	Number of images
Social distance	
Close (close shot, subject is close to the viewer)	28
Far (long shot, subject is far from the viewer)	3
Social relation	
<i>Involvement</i>	
Involved (frontal angle)	25
Detached (oblique angle)	6
<i>Power</i>	
Viewer has power (high angle)	2
Equality (eye level)	28
Representation has power (low angle)	1
Social interaction^a	
Direct address (gaze of subject directed at viewer)	21
Indirect address (gaze of subject avoids viewer)	17

^a Total in this dimension is greater than 31 since in seven photos, different gazes are displayed by different subjects.

Table 3
Spatial network analysis of the AVP—touristic photos ($n=34$).

Dimensions of representation of space	Number of images
Acting in space	
Position (establishing shots, arrangement of space)	8 ^b
Transition (movement from one position to another)	26
Nature of action^a	
Natural	12 ^b
Posed	25
Interpreting space	
Functional	7
Meaningful (connotative)	26 ^b
Functional/meaningful	2

^a Total in this dimension is greater than 31 since in three photos, different subjects project different nature of action.

^b Three landscape shots included.

The practice of tourism produces a recontextualisation of experience in which everyday life is lifted into the realm of the fantastical and the banal transformed into the exotic (Jaworski and Thurlow, 2010, p. 255). Inasmuch as the AVP displays many images that can be seen as touristic, it can be argued that these also act as conduits of performing “scenes” beyond the purpose of merely highlighting special tourist places in New Zealand. The message projected may not necessarily be fantastical, but constructions of “fantasies” are certainly involved.

Family closeness appears to be the privileged theme in the AVP’s touristic images, as illustrated by Fig. 3. It exemplifies how the special quality of places takes a backseat to projections of the family’s bond and intimacy. However, we have further identified the following possible meanings represented in the images considering that a majority of them renders space connotative (all images included). Listed according to the number of images where each meaning is a potential, the specific themes are:

1. Ideal family (intimate, bonded, together; happy, shows at least one parent and one child) 24
2. Ideal childhood (carefree, playful, innocent, secure, natural or unaffected, discovery) 24
3. NZ landscape/NZ brand (green, 100% pure, snow, ideal Western lifestyle, myth of Middle Earth) 8
4. Ideal home (green, secure, sufficient, clean, happy) 6
5. Owning public space (playfulness, defiance or disrespect) 5
6. Social connection (friends, connection with others) 4

7. Mobility (movement, airport, travel) 4
8. School is a fun place 2
9. Middle class status (material acquisition) 1

Obviously, projecting the ideal family and ideal childhood appears to be the major goal of the AVP. The different images bear witness to the family’s occupation of a foreign place not mainly by consuming sites as if they were exotic objects unattached to any form of social life and cultural practice of people, but by presenting them as backdrops to the on-going performance of the family’s everyday identity as a close-knit unit whose oneness and bond were never broken by the displacing effect of a diasporic journey. Since it is the family who *sees*, the images reflect not the “extraordinary” character of the material worlds but rather, the “extraordinary ordinariness” of intimate “social worlds” (Haldrup and Larsen, 2003, p. 23). This observation is made evident by the analysis of the viewer and spatial network presented above where the subjects in the images and their relationship with one another are given more salience than the uniqueness of their locations. Additionally, visually projecting Ben and Sarah as *being* how children should be reaffirms the romanticised childhood discourse in Amy’s other Facebook albums and in the AVP introduction of childhood innocence—carefree, playful, and secure.

The entire collection could be seen as migrant place-making; not solely are familial consumption perspectives of places performed, but the “migrant gaze” is involved in capturing images. The “ordinary extraordinariness” of place takes over the “extraordinary ordinariness” of intimate sociality; the “special” quality of the place (the “fantastical” and “exotic”, as per Jaworski and Thurlow above) is projected as a remarkable yet *natural* location of the family’s presence. It may be exotic to some of Amy’s viewers – e.g. family and friends in the Philippines – but it should appear as ordinary to the subjects in the captured image. Picturing themselves in the special and ordinary public places that typify or imagine a New Zealand ethos is Amy’s basic goal in memorialising their young life in the country. Moreover, the images *place* Amy and her family as immersed and subsumed subjects of a national landscape.

Along with the connotation of the ideal family and ideal childhood that could be achieved in New Zealand, the AVP also makes significant the construction of New Zealand as a nation with a unique identity and as a place to build an ideal home (meanings 3 and 4). Seen through a migrant’s perspective, Amy’s AVP projects New Zealand as a place and the various specific places in it as ideal based on the dominant notion of what everyday life is like abroad. In many instances, as she attempts to present their status in conformity to the hegemonic discourses of a middle class, gentrified, nuclear, and heterosexual immigrant family successfully establishing a good life abroad, she also reproduces identities of the country that abide by dominant national myths.

Photos with a *Lord of the Rings* iconic character taken in a public exhibition, as mentioned above, is not entirely unexpected since the franchise has been exploited both economically and culturally to internationally profile New Zealand as a particular brand (Expósito, 2011). Fig. 4, depicting “snow”, is, however, somewhat curious since it does not snow in Auckland. The photo, to the unsuspecting viewer, could successfully pass off as authentically portraying a white winter—a projection of life in a Western country that reigns in the imagination of many Filipinos. The photo, Amy reveals in the interview, was taken in December 2010 inside a “giant snow globe” that generated artificial snow. Cadbury, a multinational confectionery company, sponsored the event.

Although entirely different in subject matter, these two images derive their semiotic potency from the “fictionalisation” of place.



Fig. 2. A composite of screen captures of the AVP at 00:02:33, 00:02:34, 00:02:37 (from top). As shown, it was captioned “Move to Auckland!”.

They both propel the idea of the good life in New Zealand by consenting to the myth-making strategies employed by a state-corporate partnership to effect a management of discourse in both the homeland and the new country. Acknowledging the “Middle Earth” fantasy is as fetishising as rendering the illusion of snow in that both surrogate for the ideal – magical even – quality of the place as a location for the realisation of the Filipino migrant’s *desiderata*.

Individually, the migrant gaze leaves no distinct mark on images. As demonstrated by Amy’s touristic photographs in the AVP, what is recognisably manifested is either the “family gaze”, in terms of foregrounding familial intimacy, or performing a “defiant” stance against culturally significant objects or space. Through a collection of images over time, however, a history of place-making and a trajectory of “placedness” are portrayed. The AVP, therefore, must be read as one whole unit – the short description, the collection of images, the captions, and the theme song taken together – to be able to unravel the intricacy of its organisation as a text, one that does not only convey but constitute experience and construct reality.

The imaging and imagination of national belonging is what sets the “migrant gaze” apart from other perspectives in the vernacular

practice of capturing images. Placing the self in sites where the nation is remembered is an act of constructing evidence and a reminder that one is part of the history and community of the local. Chambers shares the insight and astutely interprets the portrayal of space in family albums as a statement of national belonging:

The ritual of photographing members of the family beside monuments of nation and at national events reveals a familial desire to record the family’s involvement in the creation of domestic images and meanings of nation. Picturing ideas of belonging to a nation and place were ways in which the album came to represent symbols of imagined community, notions of continuity and connections to the past. (2006, p. 105).

Though picturing the family taking its place in national spaces is a means to articulate a legitimate place in a foreign territory, it is not just capturing images of “special” national monuments that need attention. This brings us back to the representation of “public” and “domestic” spaces in the previous section because



Fig. 3. A composite of screen captures of the AVP at 00:03:09 and 00:03:13 (from top). As shown, the first one was captioned “Auckland War Memorial Museum”. The second one, though bearing no caption, is part of the same set.



Fig. 4. Screen capture of the AVP at 00:03:04; a supposedly snowy day in Auckland; uncaptioned.

the mundane places of living where the family spends most of its time declaring their presence also need careful scrutiny.

If being pictured in national public spaces creates an impression of national belonging, being photographed in the domestic sphere and depicting the domestication of public places create an image of *natural* belonging. Photos and videos of Amy’s home, in Wellington and Auckland, demonstrate the family’s domesticity and in that sense, visually articulate their normal lives as ordinary inhabitants of New Zealand. Even images of public space in the AVP show not just their presence in public landscapes but act as “pictorial spectacles and visual memories of the ownership and domestication of unfamiliar, alien space” (Chambers, 2006, p. 103).

Fig. 5, a composite of several photographs seen in the final moments of the AVP, demonstrates how togetherness and playfulness in public spaces, such as parks, challenge the conventions of the public-private divide as the images document a performance of intimacy more appropriately practiced in the confines of the home. The “migrant gaze”, then, creates a difference or a separation from the geographic and historic past by articulating a present subject position that is based not just on the physicality and materiality of a new location – where they are found – but on the development of a new *sense of place* (Agnew, 1987; Cresswell, 2011): the mediated and shared meanings given to and derived from where one dwells.



Fig. 5. A composite of screen captures of the AVP at 00: 03:54, 00:03:56, and 00:04:01 (from top). It bears no caption and is the last set of images shown in the AVP ending at 00:04:04.

4. Conclusion

Depicting the good life in New Zealand is what Amy was trying to achieve when she created the AVP and made it available for others to see. This meaning is quite straightforward but one that is not inconsequential since, as she disclosed in the interview, the only acceptable result of their decision to settle in another country is one that fulfils the ideal fantasy of living abroad held dear by her loved ones: "... the people you left behind in the Philippines have expectations about how your life turned out when you moved ..."

Highlighting the attainment of a desirable status in life is, then, an apparent fact.

Goffman (1971), p. 114 explains that actuations of a routine on the front stage happen in a way that "... when one's activity occurs in the presence of other persons, some aspects of the activity are expressively accentuated and other aspects, which might discredit the fostered impression, are suppressed". Amy's performance of the good life in the AVP was an act, essentially, of sign-making, which required her to articulate some and "silence" other aspects of her reality through the sign-making potential of Facebook and

the photographic image. By using linguistic and semiotic strategies on a platform that is premised on the creation and maintenance of a network of relations, she was able to compose and convey a representation of their migrant lives that is undergirded by a discursive rendition of New Zealand as an ideal place.

Portraying a proper place to experience the good life was made possible through a combination of linguistic, visual, and aural semiotic resources configured through digital means. The digitisation of images is, perhaps, the biggest difference that everyday photography today offers consumers. Digital photographs are no longer physical objects (Sarvas and Frohlich, 2011, p. 10). This basic fact emboldens the productive agency of ordinary individuals. Not only has editing photographs become commonplace, it also has spurred a more intricate signifying project where the image plays a central role. Integrating this practice in constant social media engagement, editing images becomes tantamount to “editing” the self.

Amy’s creative skills and endeavours in signifying a sense of place and projecting it on Facebook are a contiguous online practice with place-making in the offline world driven by a diasporic disposition. As the AVP represents the good life they enjoy as immigrants in New Zealand, it also positions their target audience (family and friends) to participate in the veracity of the projected reality by making them occupy the position of an outsider who sees the unveiling of a reality across a vast distance.

Through the multimodal textual performance of the use and ownership of space, the strangeness of place is dissipated and one’s strangeness as part of the milieu erased through the visualisation of an imbedded presence in different sites. The various images in the AVP show how Amy and her family have become a part of the national landscape by mixing private and public places as natural spaces of their movement. Further, the migrant gaze that produces a reconfiguration of place also transforms distinct images into unified strands of a historical narrative of the good immigrant journey. What results is a carefully controlled story line that charts ideal geographies and geographies of the ideal life where one is neither outsider nor itinerant dweller.

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