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Early State Dynamics as Political Experiment by Henry T. Wright 395

Louis Dumont and the Essence of Dravidian Kinship Terminology: The Case of Mudiya by George Tarlowan C. 321

Grey Stewart Brown Carhartt: Narrative Transition, Relocation, and Reorientation in the Lives of Corporate Refugees by Brian A. Hoge 347

Book Reviews 373

Editorial: JAR Goes Electronic by Lawrence Gay Stroud 447


GREY SUIT OR BROWN CARHAERTT
Narrative Transition, Relocation, and Reorientation in the Lives of Corporate Refugees

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This article examines relocation stories of people who have left corporate work culture, relocate from metropolitan areas to small towns and rural places, and attempt to recreate themselves as family and community members. Decisions to move are guided by the need to create a new life story, and what does not go through a process in which geography is a hero. For these migrants, a choice about where to live is also a story about how to live. Choices of how to live are made of more than simple economics, they are also moral. The restructuring and corporate downsizing that defines the contemporary workplace has led some workers and their families to a challenge of the American Dream that promises future reward for loyalty to an employer, hard work, and self-sacrifice. These dilemmas are replete in their attempts to find potential selves and idealized families in new places.

KEY WORDS: Career change; Narrative analysis; Postindustrial economic restructuring; Urban-to-rural migration; Work and family studies

"DO YOU GET TOLD WHAT THE GOOD LIFE IS OR DO YOU FIGURE IT OUT FOR YOURSELF?" Alain poses the question philosophically, but I can see that he is considering how he might answer it. His weary voice in the course of unscripted conversation as we drink strong coffee at his kitchen table. We sit together in the glow of light reflected off deep drifts of snow blown in Lake Michigan during one of many sudden squalls that blanket the communities of northern Michigan during the long, cold winters. This weather keeps the area from growing even fruit through in-migration. A former Town-Car-driving, suit-wearing corporate manager who underwent a personal transformation through which he became a canoe-Carcraftsman, Alain left behind a self-professed career as "professional human being" to move here.

After a few moments have passed in thoughtful silence, Alain turns forward over his steaming cup for approval and answers his own question: "In corporate America I seemed getting tired." Pausing briefly, he continues: "I look back now and I was told what your good life is. It was a four-bedroom colonial house in the..."
suburbs and working for a main company, dressing in a suit every day, going to the job, weekends off and getting to go somewhere on the weekend. I had that, but I wasn't happy. I just didn't know it at the time.

I first met Alan while looking for a place to live. I was moving here to conduct two years of ethnographic fieldwork. During a planning visit, I called about renting an apartment in the Long Branch area of Lake Morey, just known as Grand Traverse Bay. A local real estate agent walked me through the building. Answering her questions in polite conversation, I described my reason for moving to Traverse City. I explained that I was coming from behind the kitchen counter where I was greatly missing repairs. In pain-splattered coveralls, he gripped a party knife with an expectant stare that unnerved me, I took 3 steps toward the door. Why would you move to Traverse City? she asked me. Is it something in my research? As it turned out, he and the real estate agent are husband and wife. In what would become a familiar storyline, they described how they bought well-paying jobs in southeast Michigan a few years earlier. Alan and I are two of many lifestyle migrants moving to the Grand Traverse region. It was in this move that Alan became a "corporate refugee."

In a popular book aimed at a surgent popular audience of downsizing and downsized workers that includes lifestyle migrants like Alan, Ruth Luban (2001) identifies emotional stages of leaving or losing one's job. A timestamp that specializes in behavioral health and issues of personal transition, Luban argues that leaving a work position causes not only a loss of income but also losses of identity and the structure of routine in everyday life—an experience that she metaphorically likens to the relocation experience of being cast out of a homeland (cf. Gin 2000). Primarily a self-help manual, Luban's intent is to provide a usable road map for the disillusioned who need to find a place of refuge for personal renewal and fulfillment (cf. Sheedy 1977). The stages that Luban suggests describe a travel story analogous to the physical and psychological journey that lifestyle migrants make to find a place of personal refuge.

Alan moved away from a self-described destructive path through his decision to relocate from the upscale middle-class neighborhood of Detroit. Now he lives in the rural area where I did my research in the northwest corner of Michigan's Lower Peninsula. As with most others whom I call "lifestyle migrants," Alan reconstructs his narrative of relocation in a manner akin to stories of religious conversion. This story of real and metaphorical travel describes a process of self-transformation in which individuals are transformed into who he called his "second-chance" life. When applied to secular phenomena or experience, "conversion" refers to a far-reaching personal change. This involves adopting a new interpretive framework in which individuals reinterpret their actions and experience them as purposeful. Conversion stories are a special form of autobiographical narrative in which a person dispossesses a "real self" from anauthentic self (e.g., Schultz 2001). Self-transformation in the process of conversion entails the creation of a new vision of oneself when long-term social roles and self-presentation are challenged by changes in self-interpretation together with changing personal practices (Ramisz 1993; see also Bryant and Lamb 1995).
PLACE LIFE-STYLE MIGRATION IN THE LITERATURE

Life-style Migration as a Quest for a "New Place" in New Places

Life-style migration is a process where people move to a new place in search of a "new place". This involves not only changing one's physical location but also a change in one's way of life. Life-style migrants often seek out places that offer a different lifestyle from the one they are accustomed to. This could be due to various reasons such as seeking better climate, lifestyle, or opportunities for personal growth.

The concept of life-style migration has been studied in various contexts. For example, life-style migration has been observed among retirees who move to warmer climates to enjoy a different lifestyle. Similarly, young people have been observed moving to cities or urban areas in search of better job opportunities and a more vibrant social life.

Life-style migration is often studied in the context of "new places". This refers to places that are perceived as offering a different way of life compared to the one people are currently experiencing. These "new places" could be located in different parts of the world, and people may choose to move to these places for various reasons.

In conclusion, life-style migration is a significant phenomenon in contemporary society. It involves a change in one's way of life and often involves a move to a new place. Understanding life-style migration helps us better understand the complexities of modern society and the ways in which people seek to create new experiences and fulfill their desires.
and a kind of self-transformative correction experience. Within this transformative process, certain key events may become turning points in the way they use the site.

There are several reasons, as I refer to them, that give essential conditions to critical narrative transfers in a story told on the "road of life." (e.g., Taylor 1997; McClamy et al. 2001).

As an actual and metaphorical travel of travel that comprise narratives of commitment, Alston’s story shows one finding of behaving in a place of personal 1

Although the case presented here consists from an informant who voluntarily downplayed from his corporate career, he experienced something and specifically the choice to relocate to a rural place, with perceived elements of neighborhood, greater authenticity, and slower pace, is an indispensable part of the story for life-style migrants. Numerous scholars, including Johnson and Bales (1988), MacKenzie and Day (1998), Hostetler (1980) and Smith (1985, 1986), have commented on the enduring American attachment to rural ideal and a persistent connection between notions of the good and "simple life" and "The Rurals."

Take all life-style migrants, Alston saw his work, family, and personal identity as bound up with his sense of place—both his sense of the limits of what was possible for him in Detroit and the potential for new beginnings through relocating to the study area. In the Great Lakes states people talk about the region the study area is located "Up North" not only as a poetic geographic description, but more importantly in order to signify a fundamental sense of being. For many, it is a way of literally measuring oneself spatially and orienting oneself ideologically to the ideal of The Rurals. In Michigan, the term is used to distinguish the northern part of the state from the condition of being in the heavily urban and suburbanized "downstate" south.

While speaking of journeys to and from the study area, many life-style migrants refer to a changing portrait of passion at the point where they feel that they created some kind of home. Doing work in the Midwest, the geographers Audra Clark and Pay Officer (1962) favorably were the objectively verifiable boundaries. It is in part a kind of common—have visited the distinct ecological systems. Geologic and climatic conditions of these ecosystems have favored different ecosystems.

Today, broad fields of modern agriculture spread southward to give way to vast industrial areas reaching out from Detroit along the river valleys. To the north, ferns are now covering the brookside of logging that helped led Midwesterners out to the south. Although, for a range of ecological and economic reasons, a rough boundary may be set to exist, most important is the fact that passage from one region to another is indeed with personal meaning for those who seek to feel at ease in the rural places Up North by crossing that line.

Urban-to-Rural Migration in Postindustrial America

Life-style migration is a recent expression of an approximately three-decade-old phenomenon of urban-to-rural migration in the United States. In some rural areas where agriculture and natural resource extraction have dominated local economies but have typically gone into decline, this migration has reversed a long...

CORPORATE REFUGEE IN THE MIDWEST

...to start over some time else. "When I go back home, people don't treat you. For me to get my personal space where I liked people, I had to get away from the environment where I didn't trust people. A life-style migrant who moved here as a single, thirty-six-year-old woman, Paula describes a similar sense of distance from her former life: "My lifestyle was too hectic, too watch time working and comming-fun in... drinking and smoking. I decided to move and start over! After moving it because a completely different life, different pace. [As] I would stand in line, at the bank, take my check, sign my name and then get 'the damn' on. I've just gotten a government. Everybody is staring at you that you couldn't do anything I did, I was forced to slow down! "The act of relocation and specifically the choice to relocate to a rural place, with perceived elements of neighborhoods, greater authenticity, and slower pace, is an indispensable part of the story for life-style migrants. Numerous scholars, including Johnson and Bales (1988), MacKenzie and Day (1998), Hostetler (1980) and Smith (1985, 1986), have commented on the enduring American attachment to rural ideal and a persistent connection between notions of the good and "simple life" and "The Rurals." Take all life-style migrants, Alston saw his work, family, and personal identity as bound up with his sense of place—both his sense of the limits of what was possible for him in Detroit and the potential for new beginnings through relocating to the study area. In the Great Lakes states people talk about the region the study area is located "Up North" not only as a poetic geographic description, but more importantly in order to signify a fundamental sense of being. For many, it is a way of literally measuring oneself spatially and orienting oneself ideologically to the ideal of The Rurals. In Michigan, the term is used to distinguish the northern part of the state from the condition of being in the heavily urban and suburbanized "downstate" south.

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CORPORATE REFUGEES IN THE MIDST

as behavior that I knew was wrong, but I was drinking too much and I was
not doing anything about it. I tried to talk to a psychologist, but I was
afraid that my wife would find out. That's when I met my friend, John. He
wasn't a psychologist, but he was a good listener. He helped me to
see the problem and to start doing something about it.

John and I had the same problem. We were both drinking too much. He
told me that the key to recovery was to find a new way of life. He
suggested that I try meditation and yoga. I was skeptical, but I was
ready to try anything. I started going to a meditation group and I
began to feel better.

I also started going to a support group for people with similar
problems. It was a great help to talk to other people who were going
through the same thing. They gave me a lot of support and
encouragement.

I am now two years sober. I still go to meetings, but I feel much
gerent now. I am proud of what I have accomplished and I am
happy to be able to help other people who are going through the
same thing.

I have also started writing a column for a local newspaper. I
hope that it will help others to see that recovery is possible. I
want to show them that there is hope for the future.

I am grateful to John and to all the people who have helped me.
I couldn't have done it without their support.
A former GM executive turned consultant appears to agree with Ali's salary assertion. He states that today's workers are being moved from job to job in a way that used to be true when he worked for GM. "When I was at GM," he says, "we had a clear career path from entry level to supervisor to manager to vice president to president. Today, the path is much more fluid. Employees are being moved from one project to another, from one department to another, and from one company to another. It's a new kind of career path."

Several other sources agree with Ali's assertion. "The job market is much more fluid today," says a human resources expert. "Employees are more likely to be laid off and then quickly hired again. This is a new kind of job market."

The old model of a stable career path is being replaced by a more fluid and unpredictable one. "Employees are more likely to have multiple careers," says a recent study. "This is a new kind of career."
of such a definition because the word of work upon which it had been based appears now more unstable and unpredictable, more fluid and boundless (Sennett 1990). The geographer David Harvey (1989) points to the early 1970s as a collective watershed when shifts in the organization of capitalism together with new forms of time-space experience opened a postmodern age. As with other discussions of the structural and cultural shifts during this period and their impact on the conduct of everyday lives and construction of selves (Hall 1976; Janerson 1991; Skojoick 1991), Harvey points so how "The relatively stable aesthetic of Fordist modernism [gave way] to all the tertian, instable, and fluctuating qualities of a postmodern aesthetic that celebrates difference, differential, spectacles, spectacle, fashion and the commodification of cultural forms" (1989:156).

Cultural theorists John Gillis suggests that we are now in a world where everyone is encouraged to think of themselves as being in a "perpetual state of becoming" and where people are asked to continually "renew, reauthorize, and recycle" (1990:232; cf. Bridge 1994; 1993; Martin 1994; 1059; Sosič 1999; Smith 1999). In the context of economic and political epistemologies and new forms of cultural practices that characterize this transition to a postmodern and postindustrial era, today's work must be ongoing and forever learning, in a sharp departure from the ideal described in the standardized and regular industrial world of the previous century (Gim 2000; Murray 2000; Turosky 1993). Today's ideal worker is the "ever-adapting person as portfolio" defined as a living being of skills. A new culture of work has emerged which emphasizes flexibility over predictability and opportunity over job security.

So long, "Organization Man!"

In the world of sports, a free agent is a player whose contract with a particular team has come to an end and who is free to move about in a larger field of possibilities—specifically, they are free to sign with a team of their own choosing. As with many such terms and ideas, "free agent" has jumped the fence of its original usage, taking up new meanings in another sphere of social and cultural life. In the world of work and in the economy, it is increasingly used to characterize the growing ranks of some 30 million Americans who see in various manners self-employed. In contrast to William Whyte's (1963: 611) "organization man" of two generations ago, today's free agent is a larger, more independent worker, whether small business owner, temporary or contract worker. Many are born of sweeping changes taking place in everyday life as the U.S. economy moves from the industrial computer job system that defined the working world for more than a century to a postindustrial order. Whether by default (downsizing being a regular part of the postindustrial economy) or design (voluntary opting out of manufacturing or corporate career paths), increasing numbers of U.S. workers are becoming free agents.

Speaking of the "organization man," Whyte explained that these devoted, single-issue workers not only worked for the same companies, they "knew" them as well. For Whyte, they were the "voice of our middle class who have left home, spiritually as well as physically, to take the vows of organization life, and it is they who are the mind and soul of our great self-perpetuating institutions... They are the dominant members of our society... and it is their values which will set the American tempo..." Whyte's "organization man" was white, middle-class, solidly built, with values, opinions, and life-styles that defined the second half of the twentieth century and gave us a stubbornly persistent vision of the American dream. This vision was portrayed in TV shows such as the 1960s series The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet, with an upwardly mobile breadwinner father, a supportive homemaker mother, and two kids in school. Even if this image was never in reality the extreme suggested by Whyte and others of the time, in contrast to the organization man's predictability and conformity, we now have what might be a dramatic shift in American tempo toward unpredictability and diversity in work, family, and community arrangements among growing numbers of free agent workers.

Evidence of this shift can be found in recent studies of high-tech workers. Daniel Marshall's (2001) study of "smart technologies," for example, explores the emergence of new models for work, family, and identity as well as changing expectations for one's relationship with work. Research in Silicon Valley by Sorensen and others reveals how workers manage the ambiguity and uncertainty of high-tech work through emergent identity strategies which connect to the innovative nature of the technology itself (Darragh et al. 1998; 2001; English-Luck and Sorensen 2001). In addition to these kinds of changes, the influence of broader social forces such as the feminization of industry and increasing numbers of women in the workforce over the past thirty years encourage all workers to actively define their identity and lifestyle. With the experience of women entering a male-dominated workplace, today's free agent has many innovative and recent models (such successful and of how one can be self-normatively negative obligations of work, family, and self.

While free agents take different paths, their journeys begin at a common point of experience and understanding. As the structurally short-lived, but culturally important social contact between employer and employee comes to an end, many of today's conscientious workers and the idea it becomes more pragmatic and more prototypically. The old contract was an implicit understanding between the two parties, consisting of an ethical informal trade-off wherein the employer awards security to workers in exchange for their commitment (Moen 2001). Today the trust or faith workers might have had in finding and keeping a meaningful job is ebbing. Instead of rewarding loyalty, companies show "trust" long-term employees; they're hitting younger, often part-time and thus less expensive staff. Thicker younger workers enter the field at an already insecure state with virtually no guarantees and little expectation of stability in their career. Some free agents may have no choice but to accept the insecurity of what is quickly becoming the status quo and adhere to a pattern of temporary, dependent, or contingent work. Lifestyle changes inspire both the will and the means to reject this relative passivity and to employ the concept of free agency in a deliberately self-filling and creative way for relocating and starting over.
When Alan and I thought through it, making tough decisions on the back of the plane, we decided that Alan would be the one to do it. He's a pilot by training, and he's been flying this plane for a long time. It was a difficult decision, but we knew that it was the right one.

After we landed, we drove to the small airport where we had planned to meet up with the mechanical expert we had hired. We had been planning this for months, and we were all excited to finally see the machine in person.

The expert met us at the airport and showed us around the machine. He explained how it works and how it can be maintained. We took notes and asked lots of questions, and it was clear that we had made the right decision.

On the way back to the hotel, we discussed the future of the machine and how we could improve it. We agreed that we needed to invest in some new technology to keep up with the competition.

The next day, we continued our journey and visited some of the local businesses that had ordered the machine. We were received with open arms, and people were very excited about the new arrival.

Overall, it was a successful trip, and we left the country with a renewed sense of purpose and determination. We knew that we had made the right decision, and we were excited to see what the future held for our company.
CONCLUSIONS AND GEOGRAPHIES

Research findings presented here suggest that migration patterns and events are shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including economic opportunities, political instability, and cultural and social ties. The study of migration requires a multidisciplinary approach that integrates insights from anthropology, sociology, economics, and geography. The spatial and temporal dimensions of migration are critical to understanding the drivers and consequences of human movement. The analysis of migration flows and outcomes can inform policy decisions aimed at promoting sustainable development and reducing the adverse effects of migration on receiving communities.

In conclusion, the study of migration is a crucial field of research that contributes to our understanding of global dynamics and the complex interactions that shape human societies. By examining the diverse factors that influence migration, we can develop more effective strategies to address the challenges and opportunities that arise in the context of contemporary migration patterns.
like Alan, this transformation is literally the changing of a kind of personally redemptive, second-class chance at life to overcome personal liabilities through identifying familial values that can no longer be violated. Life-style migrants attempt to redefine their own personal relation to the good by finding ways to parapetize the material domain, in the form of pursuing a livelihood, with the social sphere, in the form of family and social relations, it is about getting overawed. As refugees from a way of life characterized by popular receptions of the corporate "rat race," life-style migrants describe how they "soft control" and "look back their lives," rejecting feelings of disorientation, depression, and being ahead. Taking back their lives entails being able to define personal identity and so to desire the world according to their own moral narrative.

Charles Taylor (1989) has said that identity is defined by "the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which [a person can] try to determine how else to be what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what [they] value or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which they are capable of taking a stand." To lack a coherent, compelling, and personally meaningful moral narrative of self is to be without a frame or horizon through which things can take on stable significance and with which a person is able to weigh possibilities as good or bad, important or superfluous. An essential part of selfhood is that a person is positioned—situated in physical and moral spaces within which they can know who they are. This orientation is not only within a culturally informed space of question about what is and what is worth doing, it is also a part of how people find their bearings and locate themselves in a particular social and physical landscape. To speak of orientation is thus more than mere metaphor. Relocation to new places is essential for these corporate refugees. In these places, they feel a meaningful connection that they imagine will sustain their commitments to a new lifestyle. The choice of where to live is also one about how to live.

NOTES

1. I would like to acknowledge the 11 reviewers and the Editor for their time and consideration. I am also grateful to the Mitre P. Allen Fraternity’s financial support for this research. Further, without the generous offer of time and insight volunteered by project participants like Alan, this work would not have been possible.

2. Lewis Rumbrook’s (1993) approach to conversion characterizes it not strictly as an inner event or singular moment in a process but as a complex process involving varied dimensions from the social to the psychological and spiritual. While Rumbrook’s approach was primarily intended as a model of religious conversion, it provides a framework for understanding the process in which people in the 20th century, from several world-conflict, in the process which they identify or resist, may experience; encounter, commitment, consequence often have clear parallels on the experience of individuals in the realm of secular experience, including the case of life-style immigrants undergoing personal changes through relocation and starting over in their work and family life. Writing how the language of conversion informs popular discourse on personal transformation and growth as a variety of contexts, including, for example, the experience of "coping out" among gay and lesbian, David Bryant and Christopher Lamb (1997) suggest that the