

An Ephemeral Experience of Place: Growing Up In The Army

BY

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# **An Ephemeral Experience of Place: Growing Up In the Army**

## **Abstract**

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Dependents of U.S. Army military personnel struggle with place perception and connection. These individuals lead nomadic lives relocating every two to three years. The majority of the literature on sense of place stresses the concept of rootedness. Here I focus on how geographic mobility alters place identity for individuals who grew up within the Army. Using open-ended interviews, I talked with twenty such dependents, exploring their views on the concept of home and how mobility has affected them. Major findings include: ways in which career-focused movement lessens place attachment, a sense of place Army people find in the concept of mobility itself, and the intentional process of place creation on military bases. My study expands knowledge of how sense of place operates. Mobility, after all, is rapidly increasing for nearly everybody in today's world.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

I grew up in a military family. Both of my parents were officers in the United States Army. My father retired in 1990, but because my mother remained in the service, our family continued to move. Due to constant relocation, I never felt attached to any particular place we lived. I have fonder memories of some places, but generally have trouble calling any one place home. This kind of nonattachment to place is articulated best when someone new asks me the standard getting-to-know-you question: Where are you from? With a look of confusion on my face, I answer, “I grew up in the military.” Depending on the questioner, that response normally generates a head nod. Sometimes, more extensive questioning follows, but for the most part, people understand that growing up in the military implies that you moved frequently and you have a difficult time designating a *place* to call home. I was never proud to say I was a military brat; I just was. Falling back on my parents’ occupation was easier than explaining my true feelings about the many places I have never been able to label as home.

It never occurred to me how unique my military experience growing up was until my sophomore year in college. During that semester, in a Western Views of Nature class, Liz Black spoke as a guest lecturer. She had written a memoir about her childhood in western Kansas and asked our class a simple question: “Are you a nomad or a settler?” The majority of my class admitted to being settlers and spoke of deep emotional connections they had to the place where they grew up. I admitted to being a nomad; but not by choice. It was during that class discussion when I first realized that I experienced place vastly differently from my classmates. Unlike the self-proclaimed settlers, I had no landmarks from which to extract concrete memories. Being a military brat means you are hypermobile, leaving places and people behind. Although some memories and feelings for specific sites were still in the back of my mind, I was hesitant to

attach myself to any place because I knew eventually I would have to leave. My perception of place was liminal while a dependent of the Army. After the nomad/settler class discussion, I became curious to see if my thoughts and feelings about growing up in a transient mode were similar to those of other military children. This curiosity led directly to my thesis topic--the ways in which military family members experience place.

My research explores geographic experiences in career Army family members. I wanted to determine whether or not collective feelings exist towards place(s) among those people, and if so, what feelings these are. To explore this phenomenon--connection (or lack thereof) with place, I interviewed people who either grew up within or married into the military. As I describe later in this chapter, some interviews were with old friends, some with military personnel at Fort Leavenworth, and some with people I was referred to by others. I spoke with these people in Fort Leavenworth in Lawrence, and on a month-long road trip to Arkansas, Tennessee, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Virginia, New York, and Illinois.

Although the study of place is central to the discipline of geography and sense of place a common approach to its study, the inherent subjectiveness of both terms makes them hard to define (Johnson 2010). John Agnew (1987), for example, has defined sense of place as the subjective feelings people have about places including the roles they play in identity formation, while Kent Ryden (1993) said the feeling results “gradually and unconsciously from inhabiting a landscape over time, becoming familiar with the physical properties.” Yi-Fu Tuan (2001), the most influential scholar of place, has argued that the experience of place is the way in which each individual organizes his or her world to give it meaning. Experience is the key word here. To Tuan, a sense of place is not just a feeling, it is an experience created in an individual.

Sense-of-place studies have conceptually penetrated a variety of academic disciplines, including but not limited to American studies, anthropology, art history, folklore, and literature. Keith Basso, an anthropologist, for example has written extensively on the Western Apache and their connections to the landscape in and around Arizona stressing place epistemology, consciousness, and the mutual relationship people have to the land. He explains that “relationships with places are lived whenever a place becomes an object of awareness” (1996, p. 7). Awareness is an important concept in acknowledging place as a subjective theme with academia. Predictably, the majority of sense of place studies have been conducted on settled populations, but Tuan and others (Relph [1976] and Entrikin [1991]) have wondered how awareness to places might apply to nomadic populations. Army dependents fall into this general category. They are not pastoral like traditional nomads, yet still possess traits similar to such populations as I will discuss in subsequent chapters. Studying this kind of modern nomadic population should contribute to the important theoretical question of how mobility affects sense of place.

Since Tuan’s suggestion of studying mobile sense-of-place experience, few scholars have written directly on this phenomenon. Still, a considerable literature exists on the related subject of placelessness, a term coined by Edward Relph (1976). Key studies include Relph’s *Place and Placelessness* (1976), Cairns’s *Youth on the Move* (2008), Baerenholdt and Granas’s *Mobility and Place* (2008), Auge’s *Non-Place* (1995), and Massey’s *For Space* (2005). Placelessness, of course, does not fully fit with the experiences of Army dependants. These people acknowledge place and see it as a backdrop to their lives. They simply do not spend sufficient enough time with any particular place to create a deep connection to it. For these people, sense of place is uprooted. It is a perception tethered not to landscape, but rather to a collection of individual

experiences. In looking at place this way, my intent in the interviews was to have discussions on place in its broadest definition. I wanted to include, for example, home in its physical and mental capacity and the overall sentiments of participants towards the military's relocation requirements. After all, the military was facilitating these individuals' mobility and encouraging that kind of mobility both financially and systematically.

Many of the existing studies of mobility of place (e.g. *Youth on the Move* (Cairns 2008), *For Space* (Massey 2005), *Mobility and Place* (Baerenholdt and Granas 2008), *Place and Placelessness* (Relph 1976) *Youth on the Move* (Hauvette 2007) have focused on European case studies. Perhaps the partnership of the various nations combined into the European Union (EU) has sparked this interest on the general issue of the ways in which nomadic populations experience place. Pam Baker has coined the phrase "disappearing sense of place" which suggests that, with the current global trends in technology and globalization, place has become insignificant (2010). Her idea needs testing, but certainly mobility is on the rise worldwide. According to a U.S. census report (2009), for example: "37.1 million people 1 year and older changed residences in the U.S. within the past year. This represents an increase from 35.2 million in 2008." I see my work on the life within the mobile sense of place experience of the U.S. Army as a good way to expand the geographic perspective of this important inquiry within the field of geography.

#### Statement of Purpose

I hypothesize that military children and army spouses have a unique sense of place. Family members of a service person play an integral role within military life (Gleason 2010). The military emphasizes their role in emotional support and the family moves together as a small unit. Spouses marry into the military, of course, but military children have no choice in their

involvement. Oftentimes military children develop unique personalities as a result of this experience (Williams and Mariglia 2002). Some of them struggle to develop and maintain deep, lasting relationships, and others feel like outsiders in U. S. civilian culture (Ender 2002). Their transitory lifestyle can hinder potential for constructing concrete relationships with people and developing emotional attachments to specific places. It is my experience that most Army dependents assimilate with ease, by necessity, after each relocation. Being on the threshold of adolescence, military children have a unique identity and occupy a place of liminality. They must be emotionally ready to move to a new place without much advance warning. They must then make new friends, which requires a certain kind of people skills, especially knowing that, in the not too distant future, the cycle of moving away and being *the new kid* will continue.

My main objective in this research is to determine what kinds of general and specific connections military family members have towards the many places they have lived. Frequent moving has been said to create a wide range of emotions (Ender 2002), but I suspect that generalizations are possible. A related objective within this thesis was to elaborate on the transient sense of place in regards to home.

To investigate connections to place within the military, I conducted open-ended interviews about the transitory lifestyle with three different kinds of Army dependents: (1) those who have moved to different locations as children and chose not to continue a military life, (2) those who have chosen the military a career path after moving under their parents' military orders during childhood, and (3) military spouses who have voluntarily chosen to participate in this kind of transient lifestyle.

A qualitative, open-ended approach works well for research objectives such as mine, when an issue is complex and cannot be given a simple yes no or other finite answer

(Shuttleworth 2008). Qualitative research is a flexible technique often used to explore topics on which little research exists. Its strengths lie in the accumulation of verbal rather than statistical data (Bowen 2005). This fits my purpose, since the goal is a full exchange of ideas (Cresswell 2004). Geographer Cary de Wit agreed, saying that he found “the best way to evoke amorphous issues relevant to sense of place was to simply let people talk at length without an imposed structure” (2003). My primary methods of obtaining data during this research were interviews and direct observation.

### Methodology

I chose my three interview groups because each had a different connection to the military lifestyle. Army spouses have chosen to marry into the military world. Military brats have no choice in the matter, yet are deeply affected by living within a nomadic population. Army brats who have chosen to continue a lifestyle within the military are a special group, one that interests me especially because they have experienced this lifestyle from two perspectives. Although three disparate groups may seem broad for the proposed qualitative research, the intent is to achieve a rich understanding of the research questions (Creswell 2004). I interviewed twenty in total: three military spouses, eight individuals who grew up as Army children, and nine Army brats who are current military members themselves. These dual survey participants added greater depth to the research in their decision to continue a military lifestyle when their parents retired from the service.

The people interviewed were selected in various ways. A few attended junior high school with me at Fort Leavenworth. Others came thorough a casual process of “snowball” sampling, building outward from known contacts. This procedure complimented the first set of interviews and widened the opportunity for analysis of the social dimensions of reflections and impressions

of military life. Still other interviews occurred almost randomly. I would sometimes see a person in uniform and ask if they grew up in the Army and, if so, could I speak with them. One interview was a result of my eavesdropping on a coffee-shop conversation between a young women and man who were discussing how growing up in the military had given them “a third eye” to the world.

About half of my interviewees were colleagues of my mother, all of whom I had never met. My mother was an instructor at the Command and General Staff College (CGSC) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. She allowed me access to several of her students and fellow instructors.

I tape-recorded each interview. Recording gave me an opportunity to go back and accurately quote the participants. Some researchers have hesitated to record their interviews out of fears that the process might inhibit responses. My subjects had no qualms about the recordings, however, perhaps because of their backgrounds of constantly meeting new people and places, and so I went ahead. I used a small digital handheld recorder.

Aside from recording the interviews, I wrote my own notes, to include topics of conversation that I might want for later retrieval and in subsequent discussion. I also kept a personal journal in which I recorded where each interview was held and my own personal critiques of the day. Writing for later reflection has also been a helpful tool for me. Perhaps this is why I chose to transcribe each of the twenty interviews in full.

Most of the interviews took place in homes or offices. About half occurred in or around Fort Leavenworth and Lawrence, the rest during a road trip in June and July 2010. Four interviews (all unplanned) were conducted in coffee shops or noisy restaurants. For six months, I always carried my digital recorder as I never knew where or when I might meet someone who fit my interview criteria. At a 2010 regional meeting of the Association of the American

Geographers, for example, I met two cadets from the Air Force Academy who had grown up as Army brats. I interviewed them on the spot, in between their presentations. A typical interview lasted from twenty to thirty-five minutes.

I thought it important to meet my interviewees face to face. This way I could connect with each person, get them to relax, and therefore feel freer to share memories and stories. Many of the subjects told me they had not given much thought to the topic of place and how much their transient experience had affected them. In this way the conversations often were often instruments of self discovery.

Following de Wit's call for a natural approach, I opened each interview session with, "What do you tell someone when they ask you where you are from?" The remainder of the questions did not follow a distinct order so as to allow flexibility in conversation flow. Like de Wit, I viewed my role as "guiding the conversation gently now and then with a comment or another question" (2003, 15). Still I had a standardized list of topics to explore over the course of each sitting. These questions were as follows: What was your home like in Army quarters? Were the rooms generally assembled similarly from place-to-place? If so, why? Did your family shed unnecessary belongings frequently to avoid clutter between moves? In your new homes, did your family get to know the people living and working around them? Did you stay in close proximity to the post? For what reasons did your family leave the post? How did you feel when you left post? Did you ever live off post while your mother or father were still on active duty? Why? Did you keep in touch with the friends you made along the way? If so, how?

The questions posed were drawn from several sources: the sparse existing general literature on nomadic sense of place, previously documented experience of military children, and my own memories. My research is not the first to shed light on where military dependents life of

transience and how they define “home.” Mary Truscott in her book *Brats*, for example, wrote that “In a way I am from all the places I have lived. The fact that my memories are from so many different places is the legacy that compensates for my vagabond life” (1989, 208). The military children Truscott interviewed nearly all admitted that home is an illusive concept; this fits my experience as well. Home is a great many things: It could be where the dependant’s parents were raised, the last place they were stationed, the place they lived the longest, etc. I was curious to dig deeper into the lack of place attachments, feeling that a large story lies in that disconnection to place.

In a similar light, I hoped to investigate the actual home-making process in the military. Almost no literature exists on this topic aside from “army wife handbooks.” In my personal experience, two extremes occur. Some families have lots of collected belongings that move with them continually while other families shed items from move to move. Brenda Rowan, one of Mary Truscott’s interviewees, belongs more to the second group: “I can only take so much junk lying around and then I give it to Goodwill or throw it out. In fact, I do get very attached to certain objects though, like this chair that we have, and my Oriental art collection. I have certain things that I am very attached to, and I keep moving them from place to place” (Truscott 1989, 214). I suggest that an outright emotional attachment and meaning is assigned to the objects that travel, but fuzzy attachment and memories to the actual states and countries where those objects sit.

I am also interested in the kinds of social connections and attachments that life in the military creates or, perhaps, destroys. Mary Wertsch concluded her book, *Military Brats*, as follows: “What I found is that we military brats have a home life too, a home that we all share, that lives in each of us, that we can visit in one another” (2006, 426). The concept of *home* to

Wertsch is found in the consciousness of the shared experience of living nomadically. My interviews explore the extent to which this kind of consciousness of home is shared amongst all military dependents.

My research is of a mobile population. Army dependents make up a large population and are perhaps heralds of increased transience for the population at large in a globalizing economy. Research into the problems and advantages of this lifestyle can help us understand place attachment and broaden the scope of sense-of-place studies. Studying Army dependents can give geographers a new window into the minds of those who move often, and as a result, how they ascribe meaning to the world around them.

Chapter two of this thesis will go into depth on the existing literature of nomadic populations, military brat memoirs, and a theoretical framework using the geographical perspectives of Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), Edward Casey (1997) and Edward Relph (1976). Considerable literature exists on Army Brats themselves, but the geographic aspects of this life is typically addressed in a scattered fashion. My job is to package this material in a concise manner.

Chapters three and four contain the results of my interviews and observations. In chapter three I stress the role of place in mobility. Place connections obviously are complicated by frequent moves, and interviewees mentioned several ways in which the military tries to ease the assimilation process by offering amenities, housing, and ways of utilizing the landscape that are similar from place to place. Still, the places these individuals have lived are not placeless in their minds. Place exists for them, but must necessarily occupy a level of importance secondary to other aspects of life.

Chapter four focuses specifically on the concept of home within this mobile population. Key issues here include the re-creation of home both in its simulation and how the place is

involved in home-making. I investigate what elements are involved in making each place “feel” like home and also how “home” is defined in the minds of these individuals. Is it a feeling, an actual place, a person, a family?

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

To provide context for my study on mobile lifestyle and observed placelessness within military families, a review of previous scholarship on these subjects is essential. In one sense this literature is large, because many studies exist on the concepts of place, sense of place, and mobility. Only a few researchers have examined sense of place for mobile populations, however, even fewer for the specific case of military children.

My general search strategy focused first on scholarly materials. For this I explored databases such as EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, and ProQuest using the keywords *place and mobility, identity formation, military life, and military brats*. To this base of information I added military-specific information gleaned from memoirs, military blogs, and news articles.

Place and place meaning are the largest-scale themes in this thesis. I explored these general concepts first and then the only slightly narrower issues of place attachment and the effects of mobility on sense of place. Discussion of the meaning of home came next, a particularly strong example of place attachment. Finally, I considered the specific case of military life and its relationship to all of the above concepts. My aim was to give a broad understanding of those topics, especially as they provide the background for the themes that flow throughout the rest of this thesis.

### Place

The philosopher Martin Heidegger once proclaimed that being in place is “being-in-the-world” (1996, 138). As such, place is everywhere. It is unavoidable, always present, and difficult to define. Another philosopher, Edward Casey, wrote that “place brings with it the very elements sheared off in the planiformity of site: identity, character, nuance, history” (Casey 1997, xiii). In

this chapter, I provide an outline of the literature involving place with stress on how it is perceived by people and the role that mobility is said to play in its construction.

Place means many things to different people. It can be a stage, a location, a tree, a memory, a smile, or even a friend. Sometimes a place exists only in a person's mind. When people travel they consume place, moving through it as an experience and gathering memories to be added to their expanding collection. Another example of place experience occurs when people move to a new location. Here the anticipation of experience is different than just traveling: a realization that this change will be more permanent.

Place is an important concept for academia as well as for ordinary people. Tim Cresswell, for instance, has called place "an opportunity for geography" (2004, 1). Many geographers have noted the changeability of places and also how experiences within those places change the lives of the people involved (Massey 1997). Experience and subjectivity are how one gets to know place (Tuan 1977). Today, because of the rising degree of human mobility, place often directs experience and is lived more than known (Tuan 1977). Place is also important to geography as a theme by which to look at the lived environment and human interaction. It unites lived experience with the rhythm of everyday life. Thrift, for example, has explained that place can be considered as "stages of intensity, traces of movement, speed and circulation" (1994, 212).

Place studies by geographers originally were naturalistic. Carl Sauer used history and evolutionary biology to support his work in identifying regions and landscapes (1925). Now, place is more often studied through a humanistic lens, focusing on individual experiences and meanings. Place within experience has been the main theme of phenomenologist geographer Anne Buttner (1976). Using the term "life world," she sees this concept as a bridge between a person's involvement with places and the environments experienced in everyday life. Places

form the vantage points for everyday movement within this “life world,” with each memory of place possessing a different rhythm and flow of scale (1976, 285).

Another example of the impact of place on people is Doreen Massey’s notion of “throwntogetherness,” which she uses to illustrate a meshing of spatio-temporal events (2005, 130). This idea emphasizes the inherent multiplicity of place and the subjectivity of encounters within it. Massey’s term also notes how difficult it is to define place, not only in terms of space, but also with regard to time, happenstance, experience, and consumption. Massey is an important figure in the geographies of place. She has highlighted place as a concept of differences, by which she means “networks of practices and relations” (2005, 151). She and other scholars look at place as more than just a fixed area in space. Kirsten Simonsen, for example, has argued that place(s) are “unique moments of social relations and social experiences, where some of these relations and experiences are constituted within what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself while others are based on far larger scales and connect the place to other places” (2008, 16).

In 1976, geographer Edward Relph was the first person to investigate the converse of place, coining the term “placelessness.” Placelessness is the loss of distinctiveness that occurs in the mobile world via globalizing society and the subsequent rise of *inauthentic* places. Increasingly, time and place have both become resources to allocate. Everyday life is centered around movement, transport, and technology. Inger Birkeland has gone so far as to state that, because of technological development, people have forgotten how to be “in the world” (2008, 42). Both Birkeland and Relph see this change as tragic, arguing that people need distinctive places to be human. Relph stated: “to be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places, to be human is to have and know your place” (1976, 1).

Place has also been looked at as a point of intersection or as an encounter. Within such an intersection, a social narrative is played out and “marked by an openness and change but not without material, social and cultural durations” (Simonsen 2008, 22). Thrift suggested looking at places “as taking shape only in their passing” (1999, 310). It is important to understand that the experience of place is embodied and is therefore subjective. Place encounters are mediated through others concepts of space, time, and other factors. As such they are open-ended, and rely on what Amin (2004) has called a heterotopic sense of place, where multiple encounters can be directed at any one place.

### Place and Mobility

Place has been a focus of geographers since it was established as a discipline. Today, however, this concept is now being considered alongside other factors that add to its allure. One of these factors is mobility. We live in a hypermobile world, and geography’s turn toward mobility follows trends in globalization (Adams 2012).

Mobility and place are now intersecting research themes, with interest in the pairing having grown along with the recent “mobility turn” in the social sciences that is challenging the previous, relatively “a-mobile” stance (Sheller & Urry 2006, 232). This change is relevant because, traditionally, mobility and place have been looked at as opposites. Now, scholars argue “that mobility and place attachment can be complementary and more specifically that increased mobility does not necessarily erode place attachments” (Fielding 1992, 205). This notion of place and mobility being complementary has sparked many endeavors within the social sciences.

In a way, mobility has reinvigorated place study. Whereas place is often still associated with roots, deep ties to the landscape, comfort and familiarity, it may also “represent imprisonment and narrow-mindedness. Similarly, mobility may signify freedom, opportunities,

and new experiences as well as uprootedness and loss” (Gustafson 2001, 680). In an attempt to bring the two subjects together, Gustafson (2001) has suggested the consideration of roots as routes and routes as roots.

Mobility can be a connecting factor between multiple places. Recently, for example, Holly Barcus and Stanley Brunn have argued that “globalization appears to have given mobility and rootedness new meaning, paradoxically both by empowering individuals to create multi-centered identities and simultaneously imploring them to seek out and protect what remains of the authentic that makes modernity so illusive” (2010, 285). Thinking in this way, these scholars have coined the term “place elasticity” to denote feelings towards a place even though a person may have ceased to reside there (p. 281). Such elasticity then forms a bridge between place attachments and notions of mobility.

In the Appalachia case study where Barcus and Brunn developed their concept of place elasticity, they noted three prerequisites for the idea to exist: strong place bonds, permanence, and portability. Place bonds are the emotional elements that tie a person to a place. Permanence reflects maintaining place connections, while portability "extends the idea of permanence, allowing individuals to take their place attachments with them when they travel, migrate or retire" (Barcus & Brunn 2010, 291). Portability is an especially relevant idea in that it argues that attachments to place can and do travel with an individual no matter where he or she may migrate. Barcus and Brunn’s three elements of place elasticity provide an explanation for how any population can maintain a connection with place. They suggest that "elasticity is possible today because of the extensive transportation and communication networks that facilitate greater interaction among people in distant places" (p. 281). Place, through the use of transportation and technology networks, facilitates a sense of mobile connectiveness.

The broadening of place attachments in the wake of increased mobility requires a consideration of the kinds of bonds that attach a person to a place. One of these is physical, including reminders of the place such as newspapers and photographs. Bonds with place also can be spiritual and personal. This type would include memories or other strong feelings growing out of past experiences with the place. Other factors in place attachment include the duration of one's residence within the place and the extent of involvement in that community.

Merging the concepts of mobility and place raises a series of important questions. How long does it take to assimilate to a place, to put down one's roots? How long does it take to become a local? Thanks to globalization and the rise of mobility, people can now move through time and space at higher speeds, but are they experiencing these new places so much as they are just experiencing or undertaking a movement? Conversely, can attachments happen if one never leaves a place? Oftentimes it takes a visit to a different locale, region, or place to make a person appreciate the place he or she has previously lived. Mobility, in other words, enables us to compare sentiments towards place.

Kirsten Simonsen and Nigel Thrift have taken a different approach to the mobility/place question. Simonsen has proposed places as "encounters," a word that suggests a notion of fleeting, a passing through (2008). Similarly, Thrift has called places "stages of intensity, traces of movement, speed and circulation" or "in Beaudrillardian terms as a world of third-order simulacra, where encroaching pseudo-places have finally advanced to eliminate places altogether" (1996, 289). Although Thrift's view may seem an extreme delineation of place, his point about how mobility causes a rise in encounters with different places and why people are surrendering to mobility is thought provoking. Simonsen has suggested that place and mobility be looked at as contributions to each other. She also champions Henri Lefebvre's idea of place

rhythms in everyday life wherein place becomes a locus of encounters, meeting points, and "multiple becomings" (2008, 18). In other words, places are relational and succumb to the passing of time and everyday lives. They are impermanent, "throwntogether," and highly complex.

#### Attachment to Place

Barcus and Brunn's findings (2010) that place attachments do not necessarily decline as mobility increases, is supported by other research. Nigel Thrift, for example, stated that places are supported by mobility as they are, "stages of intensity, traces of movement, speed and circulation" (1999, 71). Similarly, the Sami peoples, natives of the Scandinavian Arctic and sub-Arctic, believe that place occurs not in specific geographical locations but along paths. They say that the mobility of coming and going is "place binding but not place bound" (Ingold 2007, 100), and that the path place travels corresponds with the individual who is conducting the movement, by navigating through places.

Gregory Bateson's idea of "metamovement" (1973, 252) takes the path-as-place idea further. Metamovement, meaning a movement within an already existing movement, suggests that, instead of one set movement (or path) existing for everybody, there is a convergence of all movements of mobile beings. Metamovements correspond with mobility by uprooting place and allowing the individual to take places with him or her without being dependent on physical attachment. Rather, the attachment to place becomes a part of the individual and travels along life trajectories (Bateson 1973).

Attachments to place add up to a personal sense of identity towards a relational place. Although place is sometimes understood as a locale or geographic position, Cresswell (2004) has posited that places may have no physical boundaries or limits. Rather these kinds of places

become almost abstract feelings. Similarly, place attachments do not require residence at any one place. Jeffrey Smith (2002) has articulated how Hispanics in New Mexico and Southern Colorado have emulated their place attachments through music, art, and other culture elements. In this population, media becomes an outlet to portray a relation to the place they live regardless of duration. The art and music become byproducts of place and thus bond the person through the experience of those media outlets.

## Home

Home, like place, is an important theme in humanistic geography. As Morton Ender has explained: “a sense of home and roots” is essential in providing cultures with “a familiar space for evolution” (2002, 212). His juxtaposition of the words “roots” and “home” is important, for the two concepts are interrelated and each important to place. A person’s roots (where he or she is from) are tied to landscape and suggest permanence. The concept of home, in contrast, is not necessarily tied to any one location. A person may change homes many times in a lifetime.

The first geographer to discuss home and its importance to place was Yi-Fu Tuan. Although his writing lacks elaboration on the potential mobility of the idea, he makes clear home’s important role as the center of meaning (1974,1977). Other scholars have expanded on Tuan’s work, and some of them argue that home sometimes is an idea, a feeling, or a memory more than a fixed geographical space. Edward Relph, for example, described the “most profound” form of home as an attachment to a particular setting or a particular environment” (1976, 40). Those personal attachments to a setting or environment lay the foundation for establishing roots. Oftentimes people say home is where the heart is, “an invention of which no one has yet improved” (Douglas 1999). As such, home can be and often is the central focus of

one's life. Home as a concept and as an aspect of everyday life is constantly being recreated by humans.

Two issues arise in using home as a focus for attachment to place: the point at which a place becomes a home and the factors involved in this transition of attachment. Tuan (1976) has written that place becomes home after meaning is ascribed to it. Alternatively, Theano Terkenli stated that the transformation from place to home is found in the "sense of personalization of the immediate environment as an expressed measure of control or identification" (1995, 326). Home, according to Terkenli, can be thought of as a dwelling or a retreat from the rest of one's life world. In examining the processes by which place becomes home, Terkenli saw the process of creating "home" as an intended physical separation of public and private space. "An individual acquires familiarity with these ties and routines (to home) by investing time, resources, and emotional commitment in them: they become a projection of the self" (p. 132).

Considering the antithesis of home, or homelessness, provides further insight into the term's meaning. Society regularly stigmatizes people who do not own or rent a place for personal retreat. To occupy only public (as opposed to a private) space, of course, means giving up a large measure of security and privacy. These losses cut to the human core.

Douglas Porteous examined the interconnected issues of ownership, territoriality, and security in his article, "The Territorial Core" (1976). Herein, he argued that home is a small space of one's own that is personalized to conform with individual identity. Not only is home a "reference point for the structuring of one's reality," but it is also a core of territory, a security of space (Porteous 1976, 384). In his definition of home, Porteous saw a binary: a secure home versus the world of travelers who "are temporarily homeless and carry small articles of home along with them" (p. 387). He also suggested that home cannot be fully appreciated unless a

person leaves. In a similar fashion, this concept was touched by Terkenli (1995) when he suggested that distance from a home makes it more "valued when it shrinks relative to ever-expanding surrounding horizons counterbalancing the tendency of home to grow with increased distance from it" (p. 331).

### Sense of Place in Military Life

A military understanding of place and home is necessarily different from the simple binary described by Porteous. Military people move often and thus have to wrestle with the concepts of place, place identification, and home on a regular basis. In fact, many memoirs have been written on the subject including Bellard's *Gone for a Soldier* (1991), McDonough's *Platoon Leader* (2003), Wertsch's *Military Brats: Legacies of Childhood Inside the Fortress* (1991), Morris's *Once a Brat, Always a Brat* (2010). Home is a concept that many military members long for. Place attachment for them becomes a self-actualization process, a way to get through a life full of mobility. The military life exemplifies a kind of "mobile-home" because, as these families change places, their possessions travel with them.

Although the study of place identity among all career military people would be an interesting subject, most researchers in this realm have concentrated on children. Military children, of course, have been mobile all of their lives and therefore should have an extreme perspective on the concepts of home and attachment to place. A good starting point for this literature is Ruth and John Useem's study of American youths who grew up in other countries (1993). They worked with the children of government officials and of global business people, but focused on military dependents whose parent (usually the father) was stationed abroad. They termed this group "third culture kids" (p. 2), a phrase that was then used by Kathleen Jordan (2002) in a more detailed study of a subset known familiarly as "brats." The origin of the "brat"

term for children who move around from place to place as a result of their parent's occupation in the U. S. military is unknown and seemingly derogative. However, Mary Wertsch, author of *Military Brats: Legacies of Childhood inside the Fortress*, has argued otherwise, saying that: "The vast majority of us really like to be called military brats. We look upon it as an affectionate term with humor built into it" (1991, 86). At any rate, the use of the word brat has become standard and so is employed in this thesis.

The most current and largest study of military brats was conducted by Morten G. Ender, a sociologist at the United States Military Academy at West Point (2002). Ender grew up as a brat himself and based his research on an eleven-page questionnaire with open-ended queries about demographics, social history, and lifestyle. He located participants through electronic websites, magazines, mail, two Department of Defense high school reunions in Washington D.C., and two regional newspapers in the Midwest.

Ender found that his sampled military families had moved an average of eight times, that most of the respondents lived overseas at least once, and that, after military life, these dependents were likely to travel for work or play. The respondents to Ender's questionnaire all had all grown up prior to the collapse of the Berlin Wall and, as such, had spent more time abroad than do current military dependents. He explored the levels of satisfaction his participants felt with their post military life, and observed a "paradox between the social and psychological weight associated with geographic mobility juxtaposed with the awesome experiences once they have moved to and experienced a new and diverse place and culture" (2002, 96). Ender's research is a strong building block for all future research on the military brat population. And, because he specifically noted how "geographic mobility and foreign residence" infused the experience of his participants (2002, 89), his work also sheds important light on my own qualitative endeavors.

Mary Truscott (1989), in a detailed, five-year study of Army brats, concluded that a majority of these military dependents saw home as “abstract” (p.58). They rarely obtained a stable home/dwelling place. Some of her subjects confessed that “home to me is not a dwelling. Home is more like a feeling” (p. 209). Many of the families Truscott talked with felt that, for one reason or another, they had no specific hometown to which they could return. The brats from these families consequently had an almost clinical interest in what it must have been like to grow up, quite contentedly, “in one city, one neighborhood, one house” (p. 209). In overview, the interviewed dependents felt a light nostalgia towards the idea of home, a longing to know what it would have been like to have put down more permanent roots.

In one particular interview, Helen Pierson recollected that “I feel like I missed something, not having roots some place. Some place to call home. I noticed it when I went to visit my relatives down South, and I saw how close they all were. I hadn't seen these people in twenty years, and I'm the outsider. . . . I wish I would have had that stability” (Truscott 1989, 212). Others of Truscott's respondents envied the hometown relationships they saw existing for their spouses. When Terry McCullogh moved to Seattle, where her husband was from, she felt this reaction:

I envy the fact that my husband can go into the store and nine times out of ten, he runs into someone he knows, or he runs into a friend of someone he knows. He's so deeply rooted in this place that he doesn't even question it. He knows the place. Around every corner there is a memory. I think that's why his childhood is so vivid to him, because he can pick out memories everywhere he goes. He remembers everyone, whereas to me childhood is a blur (p. 217).

In both Pierson's and McCullough's confessions, one sees a longing for attachment to a place of familiarity. Both women romanticize what it would be like to know a place well and realize that their lack of solid memories is a result of the mobile lifestyle they experienced as children.

In studies published in 2002, Williams and Marglia added context to Truscott's personal accounts. Realizing "that all children gain part of their identity from their family" (2002, 69), and that the social culture in which military children grow up is both hyper mobile and very structured, they demonstrated how the military community creates obstacles to identity formation. Through a survey of adults who had grown up as military children they asked "why do adults who were in military families seek out each other?" Five areas proved to be pertinent to their post-military life (2002): keeping in touch with other people known from their childhoods in order to hold associations with the past, socializing with these same people, escaping and letting go of the social hierarchy of the military, having problems adjusting to civilian adult life, and an "unconscious desire to reconnect to a known, structured system" (p. 75).

### Chapter 3: Place and Mobility in the U.S. Army

Traditionally place has been thought of as fixed and rooted. Currently, however, geography has identified a *mobility turn*. This concept emphasizes the interconnectedness of places as a result of globalization. People are more mobile, with Americans moving 12.5 percent more in 2009 than a decade before (U.S. Census 2010). As I explained in chapter two, the ways in which mobility affects one's sense of place has been researched and elaborated in many disciplines. Charles Magee Adams, for example, has explained that "we take frequent moving as a matter of course, a normal part of present-day living. America, in fact is a nation of transients" (1937, 319). My case study takes a particular group of these transients (those of the mobile military) and investigates how moving every two to three years affects their collective sense of place.

What are the dynamics between a lived experience and the sentiments connected with a mobile lifestyle? Eyles has argued that "involuntary immobility and mobility tie people to places not because they are necessarily attached to them, but because of the constraints created by those different situations" (1989, 102-110). The question of how long it takes a person to settle into a place or to become "rooted" is key to my research. Yi-Fu Tuan has wondered whether or not the process can even operate anymore, writing that modern man "is so mobile that he has not he time to establish roots; his experience and appreciation of place is superficial" (1977, 183). Knowing the problem, the U.S. Army has been proactive in easing place transitions. They have provided group therapies, workshops, bazaars, mentor programs, and pamphlets to soldiers and their family members.

The Army experience is unique. Families are moving to be sure, but not to a completely new community altogether. They are usually going to another government installation, one that

offers amenities, programs, personnel, and street names similar to the one they lived at before. Such uniformity within Army bases is intentional, of course. Lack of variations aids mobile families, helping them to ease into a new place or “duty station.” This uniformity was referred to indirectly by the people I interviewed. None of them spoke in detail about any one specific locale. Instead, they stressed their collective experience of “Army place,” which culminated in their current lifestyles.

The process of assimilation and the conditions of the military mobile lifestyle that I discuss on the following pages are reflective of a progressive (global) sense of place as argued by Doreen Massey (2001). To Massey, such places have movement and flows based on politics of inclusion rather than exclusion. Army bases definitely exhibit this trait. In fact, it is a key part of what the military calls “readiness.”

Since place is such a broad topic, even in the context of the Army, I first examined the experience of each of my interviewees separately. Then I grouped the comments into common themes. Four of these, the ones most frequent in occurrence and largest in scope, serve as headings within this chapter. They are as follows: life in the Army, life off the base, the mobile military family, and a mobile sense of place.

#### Life on an Army Base

Life behind Army gates has changed over the years, but still provides a classic example of a planned community. The base is a “company town” where the employer is the grocer, landlord, sheriff, judge, banker, and fire department. Each resident is part of the same mission—to protect our country from outside enemies—and so the town has something of a bunker mentality. More often than not, families are sectioned into neighborhoods based on the military rank of the senior person in the household. One of my interviewees, Megan, recalled that living

on base “was always like a little community. Going off base to me was like going into a completely different world. It’s not set up the same. Like going to the commissary and a bunch of connected neighborhoods. Off base was something really, really different. It was foreign. I think they (i.e. the bases) were all the same to me.” Other participants looked at life on base much more casually. Mike, for example, said that “life on base didn’t seem all that different to me. Schools were still public. People were people. When you have grown up near the same people your whole life, it’s just something new. Everyone has to move and turn in (in the Army).”

Each military base is arranged differently, but uniformity still exists in many things, even in the locations of the amenities. For example, the grocery store on an Army base is called a commissary. It gets its name from a history of being a dispensary for selling food and health-related necessities. Commissaries on Army bases are usually next to gasoline stations and the post exchange (Figure 1). A post exchange is more like a Walmart, providing gifts, electronics, clothing, alcohol, toiletries, and other miscellaneous items. Nearly everything that one would need to live can be found inside a base’s walls including a hospital, shops, post office, recycling facility, swimming pool, sidewalks, cemetery (Figure 2), museums, conference center, schools, libraries, office parks, and gymnasiums. All of my interviewees agreed on this, with Betty recalling that “everything I needed was on post. They [her children] went to only preschool off post. When they were at school, I shopped and ran errands around town.”



Figure 1. The Post Exchange at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 2013  
Photograph by author.



Figure 2. Fort Leavenworth National Cemetery at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 2013  
Photograph by the author.

Some of my interviewees asserted that bases were similar even if located overseas. Jon, for example, said that:

There are a lot of similarities when you live on post. Basically you depend on the PX, commissary, and other kinds of niceties like a Burger King. Sometimes a skate park, a pool, if you are lucky; sometimes woods in the backyard you can play in. But, it's actually kind of crazy; when we moved overseas to Australia it was basically the same thing. We were in another country, but they had a base exchange, like one building where you got your goods, one building for groceries, and even fields and woods to play in. It had the same things as U.S. bases.

Iain Chambers has done extensive research on international airports. He described a typical one as follows: "With its shopping malls, restaurants, banks, post offices, phones, bars, video games, television chairs and security guards, it is a miniaturized city. As a simulated metropolis it is inhabited by a community of modern nomads: a collective metaphor of cosmopolitanism existence where the pleasure of travel is not only to arrive, but also not to be in any particular place" (1990, 57-58). A direct correlation can be made between this "miniaturized city" and a military base, even to the possession of distinctive zip codes. The only major difference is that residents of a military base will live inside its gates for a couple of years while the travelers at Chambers's airports stay merely hours.

Army posts feel secure. "I never once felt unsafe on base," Amy remarked. Each large facility has a fence around it of some sort, serving a role in actual security and as a symbol of admittance and inclusion. For parents, such safety is a blessing. Betty, a military wife with two children, contrasted her feelings on base as opposed to in civilian communities by explaining: "You could let your kids run around. Because, oh my, the independence they had on post was far

more than in the civilian world. So, I think there is no way they would have been able to do half the things they did off post. They had safe and happy environments, always outside.” Some respondents expressed their inclusive safety very explicitly. Carson, for example, explained that “I didn’t want to live off base. I felt safer living on a military base with a prison than I did off base. I could see the Ft. Leavenworth Prison from my bedroom. I have a large sense of security every time I go on base. Bad things happen on base too, but you feel safe.”

Possibly because gates physically isolate any military base, many of my interviewees felt that life on post fostered feelings of relief and convenience. Matt said he enjoyed living there, even overseas, because “everything was taken care of. My family didn’t really have to worry. People spoke English on fort and we could buy American products. You were in another country, but still had all the things you needed, as if you were still stateside.” Megan enjoyed her time on base because to her: “they all felt the same. Off base was really different. It was foreign. They were all the same, just in different locations.” Megan’s brother felt the same way about each base. “There was just an on-base feeling. It’s hard to explain. It obviously took some time to figure out, but it was a strong similar feeling.”

Although each Army outpost is different in detail, my interviewees overlooked particular arrangements of things and feelings when talking about personal memories. Cara, for example, told me that “all the bases are set up the same. It’s just a different feel. For example, Fort Riley has a much older feeling than Fort Leavenworth. Fort Leavenworth is new and always has construction.” Don noted that each “installation had a huge cultural change, especially overseas. It was like one little city to the next.” Sometimes people recalled day-to-day actions rather than physical facilities. Jon said he remembered “dealing with gates, having lots of play places to run around in. It was hearing physical training (PT) in the morning. It was having a bunch of kids in

the neighborhood, and it was having different cultures as neighbors. All the bases just feel the same.”

The military has gone to great lengths to provide similar activities and locales on all their bases. Their goal is to aid military families as they make transitions during moves. Mary Wertsch, author of *Military Brats*, has noted a downside to this predictability (1991). It is another word for monotony, she wrote, the “military’s first worn mask,” (and) its function is to suppress the individual beneath it” (p. 14). Certainly her point is true as well. On base, what you see is only the surface. Lawns are closely cropped, flags wave on door stoops, megaphones hang on street corners, and every building is freshly painted. Such regimentation is enforced to “suppress emotional connections” (Wertsch 1991, 34). Still, the people who live on base rely on this standardization. Though it can numb the mind in some ways, it also is a primary aid in establishing attachments and sentiments to a new environment. Wertsch sums up life on base as “living American nationalism at the extreme” (p. 384).

#### Life off Base (The Civilian Sector)

Most of the research done on military life focuses on conditions on the base. This ignores a large number of families who live off base for one reason or another. The social structure on military bases creates competition to attain housing within their gates and the many incentives that accompany this status. If one lives on a military installation, one does not pay for electricity, rent, water, gas, and sometimes cable and Internet connections. If a family lives off base, the military gives you a monthly stipend called a basic housing allowance (BHA). This money, which is adjusted for inflation of properties and rent prices in the geographic area surrounding a particular base, includes a flat rate for utilities and is factored into monthly wages. Married couples and families are also given money specifically for food called a basic allowance for

subsistence (BAS). Single enlisted soldiers are given meal cards and often must eat at designated mess halls or dining facilities on base.

Life on base and off base are very different. Each community surrounding a military base has unique amenities, including variations in housing styles and sizes, churches, community organizations, public and private schools, local government, and other issues. Life on base, in contrast, is not only more uniform, but also regulated. For example, base residents are not allowed to paint the walls in their quarters without approval from a commander. They also must mow their grass meticulously and otherwise take adequate care of their yards and rooms or face adverse career implications.

Military bases have communal characteristics. Erving Goffman calls this living a total institution (Figure 3), a term he defines as “a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life” (1961, xiii).



Figure 3. Infantry Barracks entrance sign, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1999  
Photograph by Dick Wright

A distinct separation of life and residence does indeed exist between a military base and the surrounding community. The Office of the Secretary of Defense put out a pamphlet in 1999 entitled *Increasing a Sense of Community in the Military* (van Laar). This report identified two key elements of this desired “sense:” an emotional, social connection among the members for mutual support, and a similar identification with the surrounding community. The pamphlet addressed sense of community in the unique case of the military, that is an institutionalized community where a group of people (the active-duty military) belong to an institution. In the studies described within the pamphlet, Army members expressed feelings of incomplete connections to the military through their career paths. The author concluded that “the nature of the military workforce may limit the attachment of members to a military community” (van Laar 1999,13).

Most of my interviewed participants noted that they had experienced life off base and observed a series of drastic differences from being within a post. The first contrast concerned the local community and its varying degrees of integration with the base. This contrast often was a family discussion topic, because on weekends newly implanted military groups like to explore their surroundings and begin to integrate themselves with the area. Betty remembers, “I always shopped off post. We would run races in the community to give back to it even though we weren’t there long.” Another way of going into the community was to “just get in the car and drive” (Don). Many people told me that it was more taxing to live off base. “Living in a civilian community is hard because lots of kids have lived there for a long time and it was harder to make friends because they didn’t understand” (Ed).

Many times, families chose to integrate into the community for religious or athletic reasons. Jon said “we had to go outside and play sports. I grew up assimilating to each town with that region’s foods and holidays. We always went to the areas (outside) the base. Basically, to feel like the locals, like we belonged, even though we were just temporarily living there for two years.” Still, it was and is difficult for military families to integrate with the outside community. Zach lived mostly off base but struggled making friends in the surrounding town because “they just didn’t understand the military movement lifestyle. They are mostly locals and stay local. I tried keeping in contact but, it just didn’t work.”

Mobility limits the connections any military family can have with the surrounding community. Wertsch has pointed out that “18% of Americans move annually, most within one locality. Military families not only move much more often than civilians, they move such great distances that it is impossible to maintain close bonds with relatives and friends” (1991, 251). Constant relocation creates an insider/outsiderness in life between that on the military base and outside of it (civilian life). Laar, writing for The Office of the Secretary of Defense, described the civilian sector as one of two “natural outgroups” for a military organization (the other, of course, being the enemy) (1999, 47). Wertsch wrote a whole chapter on this same insider/outsider phenomenon in her book *Military Brats* (1991). She highlighted that civilian America is a world that places far more emphasis on achievement than social origin. It is easier to define what one is not rather than who one is. The majority of her interviewees her that they “will never feel like a civilian” (p. 315) even after years of living off base.

Psychiatrist Don M. LaGrone has perhaps best summed up civilian sentiments towards career military and their families. He argued that people in surrounding communities see them as gypsies or transients and therefore targets for mistrust and hostility (1978, 1042). Not only does

this cause further isolation and make the Army families more likely to stay within the confines of the base, it also presents a difficult situation for the children attending public school. Education is often a key issue, because not all bases have self-contained schools, especially at the high school level. This situation forces military children to integrate more fully into civilian life than their parents.

Laar, in her military community pamphlet, noted that, when military members are concentrated in suburban areas, they can extend the military sense of community beyond the physical limits of the base (1999, 35). This extended sense of community suggests the idea of competing identities. In addition to a family's role in connection with active duty as a military member, this same family also can be a reasonably fully participating member of the community, whether it be off base or within the post. Dual identity can be a good or a bad thing depending on the individual involved. For military people confused by the conflict, Laar's pamphlet suggests creating incentives for people living off base to use the services and attend programs on base (p. 36).

#### The Mobile Military Family Unit

The military is mobile. As of 2010 the U.S. Army had 541,291 active duty personnel, the Air Force 333,772, the Navy 317,237, and the Marine Corps 195, 338 (U.S, Department of Defense 2013). All of these are mobile, of course, and Army people (the military's chosen ground unit) are especially so. The Department of Defense (DOD) has never released exact numbers of military brats who also participate in this kind of mobility, but it estimates their population at 15 million. Where are all these people stationed? Although the actual number of American military installations around the globe is unknown to the public, in 2009 the DOD published a Base Structure Report, which lists outposts at 662 foreign sites in 38 countries

around the world. This number is impressive, but it represents a reduction from that reported a few years earlier.

The Army has dutifully attempted to reduce the number of family relocations in recent years even as deployment rates increase in the age of counterterrorism. Still, as noted in the literature review, the U.S. General Accounting Office estimates the typical Army family relocates every two to three years. Much debate has been given to this relocation issue. Katherine Chretien (2011) has suggested that halting “the antiquated practice of mandating frequent — every two or three years — moves of its servicemembers” would “substantially improve the quality of life among military families.” Such a change would reduce government spending, of course, but Chretien also sees other advantages. While “the Army's public affairs office notes that frequent moves are the ‘natural order of things,’” she notes that, “when 1,100 military spouses were interviewed in a 2003 Rand study about ways the military could improve their quality of life, some women sarcastically suggested decreasing the number of moves, as if this was asking to “turn the sky purple instead of blue.”

The military recently proposed other ways to cut back on moves. In 2004, the Army suggested a shift in duty stations employments to something called “Life Cycle Units” (Gayton 2004). These units would mandate that soldiers spend at least 36 months with a selected brigade (task group) before potentially being moved to a new location or duty station as needed. After much internal confusion in the execution of this proposal, a new, more liberal, and wider-spanning deployment system took its place. Called Army Force Generation Focused Manning, this program is now developing alternate methods of staffing combat brigades (Tice 2010). One supporter of the new idea, Jim Tice (2010) has said that “other leaders want to return to life-cycle manning, but not until the operating tempo in the combat theater subsides, and soldiers are given

at least 24 months of dwell time at a home station between deployments (dwell time averages slightly more than 12 months for soldiers serving 12-month and 15-month deployments).” The flexibility in the Army’s assignment process is becoming increasingly important. It seems that families finally may have more options regarding time spent at their assigned duty stations.

The new manning program has only just started, of course, and a mobile lifestyle still is inevitable with a career in the Army. An extra year or two around each base would be nice, but the service member still must move as his or her career assignments dictate for training purposes, more schooling, and the good of the service. When an individual is considered for promotion, his or her board of officers continue to look at how many times that person has moved and oftentimes the promotion is contingent on whether or not he or she is willing to relocate.

How does the military move? On the surface, the process is easy. A group of professionals comes into the quarters and moves the whole family, box by box, to a new location. Essentially, everything in one quarters is taken to the next. Anxiety accompanies all this ease, of course. Through every move, the only constant for family members is their own interior items: furniture, trinkets, clothes, decorations, appliances, and photos. An anonymous Army brat confessed to Mary Wertsch (1991, 33) that “the emphasis in the military is on discipline and conformity; on what you see. There is no emphasis on interiors.” The act of moving was a frequent topic in my interviews. Don, for example, remembered that “there was so much emotion involved with each move, even though we knew it was coming.” Sometimes, of course, this anxiety is heightened further when the family is ordered to move without much warning.

The philosopher Edward Casey has distinguished the words transportation versus transition in connection with the social act of moving. *Transportation* is where “I am passively carried by an animal or machine whose purposes are independent of my own and *transition* (is)

where I move in order to pursue my own purposes” (1997, 24). The former word fits the modern military situation, of course, just as it has done so in the past. Early on, Army bases in the United States and abroad included military-issued quartermaster furniture. This practice remained strong into the 1950s, and continues even today, depending on duty-station location. Army families are still issued quartermaster beds, chairs, and appliances for use in temporary living situations. Such furniture is “issued” and used as needed.

Families do not always move with the service member. To do so they must receive a “travel message” authorizing transportation to the duty station with the military member. If the family is traveling overseas, the Army requires the family either to rent a storage unit stateside or to get rid of many belongings. Even moves within the contiguous U.S. are accompanied by weight limit for all family possessions. This limit varies by rank and time in service, and if you go over the allotted weight, you must pay out of pocket to ship family items.

Family possessions were frequently discussed by my interviewees, especially the particular items each family carried with them. Most of those things were sentimental: trinkets, antiques, photos, even furniture. Each such possession was viewed as critical in making an issued home seem more personal. In this way a family’s sentiments take on a solid form as a “collection” of things. Betty, for example, told me that she was “not someone to collect a lot of one thing. I collect a lot of all things. Of course, I like antiques and I collected a few things from different places. In Germany you had Kaiser porcelain and beer mugs. I collected what was native to that area.” Beatrice characterized her collection of things in different terms: “I’m a huge hoarder and I think a lot of that stems from having to throw away tens of trash bags of toys, books, clothes every two years as a child, just to make sure we stayed within our weight for the move.” Instead of hoarding, some participants waited to accumulate items until they knew they

could settle down somewhere permanently. Amy Loraine was one of these. She remembered that “everything was the same. I never had a hard time setting up. It’s the same stuff. I didn’t go out and buy. I knew people that spent a fortune. I waited until we had our own home. I now purchase more expensive, nice things if I know it won’t move.”

Instead of focusing on actual objects in the house, some families spent more time on arrangements and decorations. Carson commented that: “my mom always decorated the house. No matter where we lived, it always looked the same. It just looked like our (old) living room in a different house.” Don also remembered the unchanging quality of their various quarters: “The furniture was always the same in the living room. Our bedroom and the kids’ bedrooms, well certain things would always be there. Should those things get broken, there was a lot of emotion involved. My wife and I both collect antiques and have before we were married. Everything in our house is an antique, every piece has a story.” Pat also remembered the transfer of furniture from quarters to quarters. “I thought, living room here it is again. Same living room, same carpet.” About half the interviewees spoke about miniature wooden houses that they would carry with them (Figure 4). These models were carved and painted to replicate the quarters from each base. One might have “Ft. Stewart” written on it to represent the time the family lived there. Other of the models are more unique, such as the chapel where mother and father were married or the school the children attended at a particular post (Figure 5). Other families substituted signs for the models. Katelyn, for example, recalled that “we had a plaque made for everywhere we lived and it hangs over our entryway.” Whether models or plaques, these little souvenirs clearly are important. As Jon told me, “those little wooden houses are a staple in any Army family.”



Figure 4. The United States Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 2013  
wooden depiction of barracks, 2013.  
Photographs by author.



Figure 5. Memorial Chapel at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 2013.  
wooden depiction of chapel, 2013.  
Photographs by author.

It is not coincidental that half the interviewees spoke of “little wooden houses.” They are not mere trinkets, but instead represent the commodification of place memories. Families collect and showcase these little houses, antiques, ribbons, or military coins as a means of reflecting on their mobile military lifestyle. These were things that made an issued quarters residence feel more like a home. Whereas the physical military house changes from move to move, the things the military family chooses to move with them do not.

#### A Mobile Sense of Place?

If a person defines sense of place as an attachment to a locale based on time and experience, then it would follow that the term mobility should signify almost its opposite, an absence of a commitment to and involvement with any one locale (Creswell, 2004, 14). In the case of my study group, mobility certainly curtails the development of deep place attachment. Army people know full well that they will relocate to another duty location two or three years in

their future. One could also argue that Army populations are migratory with the active duty member leading his or her family to their new outpost to take on a new mission. Still, writers have suggested that mobile people can have place attachment. Edward Relph, for example, remarked that “even the most transient of people can put down roots in a remarkably short period of time” (Cresswell 2004, 13). Indeed, it is possible to form an attachment to a place just by visiting and experiencing it briefly. One’s sense of place is motivated by so many factors, all involving human experience.

Even though military populations are uprooted quickly, my interviewees still have fond memories of places. Some of these memories occur because, in the Army, one typically does not travel individually. More often the military person travels with his/her family and, as noted above, with many possessions. These people are mobile, but they also carry distinct memories and reminders of the places they have lived. Rather than being rooted in place, the mobile study population seems to accept the authenticity of places as paths with temporary intersections mandated by their jobs.

The concept of place being experienced on paths of life is credited to anthropologist Tim Ingold (2007). Ingold has done much research with transient populations, and concluded that place and mobility do not necessarily have to be seen as polar opposites. Instead, they can be unified through the idea of movement. In Ingold’s words:

Places, in short, are delineated by movement, not by the outer limits to movement. Indeed it is for just this reason that I have chosen to refer to people who frequent places as “inhabitants” rather than “locals.” For it would be quite wrong to suppose that such people are confined within a particular place, or that their experience is circumscribed by the restricted horizons of a life lived only there (2007, 101).

Ingold's comments align with my work in that all of the study participants never felt like locals until they selected spots where they would retire. At last, they said, they were finally from "somewhere." But still, according to Ingold, "somewhere" is on the way to somewhere else (Ingold 2007, 81).

Although the concept of sense of place has been discussed in many disciplines, it generates new meanings and possibilities when one considers the increasing rates of mobility for the world's population. Military moves are frequent but calculated, for example, usually around a military installation, and often a far distance from the previous residence. The sense of place for such participants can not be rooted in a traditional sense, but these people usually feel fortunate to have the opportunity to partake in such an emotionally demanding and rewarding lifestyle.

Some participants spoke fondly of the familiarity associated with a military lifestyle. Carson, for example, recalled that, "moving around in the military was easy; each place was just as important and familiar." Many of the participants expressed joy in such familiarity. Betty liked moving every three to four years: "I didn't even know the military existed before I met Pat's father. I lived in the same place since I was eight years old. I always tell him you opened my eyes to the whole world. It was exciting for me to change places. (And), it wasn't every year, so we had some stability." Don recalled that, "we (his family) were always busy. As familiar as things seemed, we still explored each place." Jon elaborated on this idea: "we were so active I never had time to feel sad. When you are busy, you get hungry and after you are hungry, you get tired. It worked out well for us."

A laid-back attitude toward moving around is perhaps the result of having no external control over when or where the family will move. "If you don't like a particular place your family is stationed, it's only temporary anyhow," Ed told me. This statement illustrates an

acceptance of relocation directly related to a career that dominates geographic mobility. The involved military personnel and their families grow used to relocating anywhere depending on job demands. Jon summed it up well: “we are only living there temporarily. I will probably get that itch soon. It’s hard to fight. There is an excitement going to a new place, there really is.” All interviewees, in fact, mentioned a similar “itch” to continue a mobile lifestyle. Mike said it was because “moving all the time makes you want something familiar. Every so often, I get the urge to move because I feel like I should.

Alongside a mobile sense of place, there is also a sense of place that occurs in actual places within Army life itself. Sam remarked that: “If I ever meet someone who grew up in the military, I feel instantly connected to them; they know what it’s like to be brought up this way.” The familiarity of base life serves as a reminder of the kind of temporary community the installation actually is. Residents making up that community are only temporarily living within a home that has previously housed a large number of previous people. Past and present residents are thereby joined together in a way. Megan commented that the resultant sense of community was strong but eerie: “They were all the same to me. The neighborhoods were little and quaint and full of kids. Basically, it was all the same . . . just in a different location.” Pat wondered about the lasting influence of such a life: “I have no idea how I would have turned out if I hadn’t lived this way. The places I have lived within the military are a part of me until death. We grew up on base to live a full life. It will be a sixth of my existence embedded in me.” Later he admitted that “in my memories of military life, places are first and the people always come second in my mind.” This idea is common for military children and spouses. The military asks those involved to put the country first, the military life second, and their families third.

My interviewees who chose to return to the military as adults admitted that it was a seamless transition as far as careers go. They already were accustomed to the moves, the community, the lingo, the customs, and the protocol. Paul, a cadet at the Air Force Academy in Colorado, said: “I was familiar with other lifestyles but most comfortable with a military one. We would watch my dad train and go to work. It was a structure and a lifestyle I became accustomed to. I didn’t look for anything outside of it.” The military life became ingrained in all those who were interviewed. Zach recollected: “I guess how I experienced each place was by the last one. The two would very much bleed into the next (place). That’s how I reacted. I was growing and changing and taking a piece of each of these places with me when I went somewhere new.”

The senses of place within this population are unique because of the shallow connections made with each relocation. Each interviewee acknowledged the significance of distinct places, and yet they also related to those places as a lump-sum experience. Perhaps this is an intentional circumstance. If military dependents became rooted and comfortable in a certain place, it would be much more difficult for them to make the inevitable relocations. Instead, these dependents relate to the military community as a structured lifestyle. The places continue to move with them in the form of memories and career lessons.

## Chapter Four: Home

The concept of home, like other cultural topics, changes and expands over time as scholars re-examine their premises. People have agreed that it is a container for a wide range of emotions, feelings, and memories, and that these ideas are constantly in flux along with the humans who create and experience them (Blunt and Dowling 2006, 254). In a similar way, the study participants in this research spoke at length on their ideas of homescapes both in terms of actual places (where they call “home”) and about the concept of home in general. In many cases, when asked “where do you call home?” participants did not state a specific location. Some answered that it was wherever their families happened to be at a given time. Two participants chose to identify “home” more with distinct objects.

Just as a connection exists between place and mobility, so too is there one between home and mobility. When military families move they change locations, but not necessarily other aspects of home. The Army goes to great lengths in funding and coordination to keep families together. To better understand the military concept of home, one must pay attention to a distinction between the words dwelling and home. Each participant in this study could easily talk about the various dwellings they had been assigned to live in. Dwellings in a military setting are mainly temporary quarters occupied only while the active duty member is required at a determined location. They are plain and functional, not subjects of great emotional attachment.

The term used in the Army for a directed move or reassignment is a “permanent change of station” (PCS). A PCS only applies to change of stations in the continental United States. If for any reason a family is required to move overseas, they instead are issued a date for estimated return overseas (DEROS). To aid and coordinate such relocations, the Department of Defense works jointly through a transportation office or a personnel property shipping office. Military

moves are hectic events with paperwork, orders, boxes, and logistics. The endpoint of a PCS is a new duty station and another temporary dwelling space. Why the Army adds the word “permanent” in front of “change of station” is an interesting mystery. As noted previously, Army members move often, each time with papers that imply the change will be permanent. No one seems to know why the official phrase on the orders is not “temporary change of station” or perhaps “change of station.”

Movement within the Army calls attention to the idea of creating a home-on-the-go at places usually far away from a community one may actually consider home. Rapport and Dawson (1998, 8) have argued that, when people are faced with such an “unnatural” circumstance, they begin to associate “home” more with the process of movement and mobility than with specific locations. In other words, they find themselves at home through continuity of movement. Because such directed mobility is so common, home has become an important subject for military families to consider. Handbooks and texts have been written on the subject, one of which, [militaryonesource.com](http://militaryonesource.com), suggests talking to military children at a young age about where or what the family considers home. It also recommends similar discussion post move. Of course these guides are just suggestions, but serve as an example of how ideas of home manifest themselves without personal attachment.

In the following pages I report the thoughts of my interviewees about home. I organize the ideas into three themes, each one borrowed from Yi-Fu Tuan. In 2004 he wrote that “home is a place that offers security, familiarity and nurture (Harrison, Pile, and Thrift 2004, 164). My headings follow the same order.

## Security

What kind of place is home? Yi-Fu Tuan argued that it “is a shelter or haven. It is also a simple awareness of clearly drawn limits” (Harrison, Pile, and Thrift 2004, 164). The words shelter and haven imply security, of course, and security might seem to be a given. However, my interviewees never viewed their temporary and assigned dwellings in this way. Such buildings were merely shelter or “a place where our things were stored” (Sam). The security of a home is something more idealistic, a shelter from the elements or possible intrusions, to be sure, but also a personal piece of the world over which a person can have at least a bit of control.

Safety is a word that was brought up often in interviews. Like Carson, a majority of my participants spoke of feelings of security on military bases. This overarching sense reaches beyond Tuan’s definition of home, of course. It is part of a larger goal, a level within the hierarchy of a global defense system. The Army is simultaneously protecting families on their bases and the rest of the country. Zach, a respondent who was privy to the security systems present on military bases, commented that, “although I told myself I was safe from attacks, I never actually felt it. It (the Army) was an illusion. What happened behind the gates was just as much a secret to me.”

Gates in the military are multifunctional (Figure 6). They are security measures to be sure, but also a dichotomic barrier between civilian and military lives. As discussed in the pervious chapter, families often have the choice to live “off-base.” When they return, either daily for work or school, they always pass through a set of gates. The gates had become largely symbolic in many places before the terrorist acts of 2001, but since have been increased in both infrastructure and personnel. Don remembered that, “it used to be you could just drive on and off

base freely.” Post 9-11 you cannot. One must have a government-issued identification card to enter. If you are a civilian, you and your vehicle are subject to thorough inspections upon arrival.



Figure 6. Front Gate at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1999.  
Photograph by Dick Wright.

Another security measure the military fosters concerns finance. So long as you are an employee of the Department of Defense (DOD), you receive a monthly salary and your family accrues certain benefits such as health care, waived sales tax, and special goods and services. Bea gave an example: “Two American Mormon missionaries showed up at our apartment outside of Heidelberg. They hadn’t had peanut butter in a year, so my mom and I drove on base and picked some up for them. Duty-free!” This story illustrates that, even while abroad, installations provide American consumables at the stateside price, while the DOD makes up for the extra shipping and taxes. Another memory from living in Germany, this time reflecting on unexpected lack of “home” support, was Ruth’s: “I chose to attend a German school while my

father was stationed abroad. I already knew the language and the DOD schools were not quite established at the time, so I felt my education suffered.”

## Familiarity

Sandra Wallman has considered the establishment of homelike amenities on bases abroad to be a form of “cultural compression” (1998, 202). The process is constantly a challenge for the Army since many families chose to place some of their everyday possessions in storage while overseas and because amenities abroad are not always comparable. Still, officials work hard at the task. The U.S. Army thrives on routine and standardization, on making new places seem familiar. This practice spills into military homes as well. As a result of movement, what military families consider familiar is emphasized through certain possessions, and even more, through the family members themselves, which remain constant from place to place. When asked where he calls home, Matt responded: “I know this sounds weird, but my mom asked me this a while ago and my home is my bath towel. It is the closest thing to me through all of my moves. My brother says it’s the couch in the living room. My mom was shocked.” A more common response was one expressed by Megan. She explained that “places became home just by my parents making it one. It doesn’t really hit you until you think about it when you are older. They made each place a home by doing the same daily routines and decorating the house the same way it was before. Those things don’t change-- it’s just a new house.” She is exactly right. The physical structure and place is indeed new in each move, but military families become hyperaware of methods to create familiar feelings as a way to alleviate the stresses of moving.

Possessions and decorations were discussed by each interviewee. Mike specifically addressed the need for specific items. He said, “I hang onto a lot for familiarity. Moving all the

time you want something familiar.” This process of naturalizing a new place is called “home-making.” In geography, the subject has been critically studied in terms of power, space and identity. As Mary Wertsch has reminded military brats: “you go to one of two extremes--either you do nothing to make your space or you do everything for it. You either make a nest, or you don’t worry about it at all” (1991, 281). In her research, a respondent admitted that “I always have identified with turtles. I carry my home on my back. Every place I live, I create a cave place, a very warm atmosphere” (1991, 281). Military families make the best of their temporary dwelling space. What they lack in feelings of belonging to a home or place they make up for in ideas and sentiments. Oftentimes they create strong attachments to family, and in cases like Matt and others, to possessions. Such practices can even lead to hoarding. An outsider in Wertsch’s research commented that military families tend to buy larger, bolder pieces of furniture “as if they are trying to purchase stability” (1991, 281).

In studies conducted by Rapport and Dawson, home as an idea has been compared with that of a dwelling. Home to Rapport and Dawson is a “mobile habitat and not a singular or fixed physical structure” (1998, 27). Berger has agreed with this assessment acknowledging that home is now “the untold story of life being lived” (1984, 64). The story of houses in the military population is quite extensive. Each new quarters is typically referred to as a “house” and not a “home.” Cohen (2011) found the same tendency in his studies of lifestyle travelers where the concept of home was found almost entirely within the familiar feeling of “being-on-the-road” (2011, 1551). This type of familiarity came out in my interviews. Don, for example, approached home as a type of goal: “Once we (his family) retired we could finally put down roots and get to know a place. I’m from Texas, so all I wanted while in the Army was to have a big farm.” Alfred Schuetz has argued that this kind of feelings is normal in traveling peoples, but added caution

because “repetition might be aimed at and longed for: what belongs to the past can never be reinstated in another present exactly as it was” (1945, 374). Alison Blunt and Dowling call this kind of longing for home “productive nostalgia--a longing for home in practice” (2006, 213). My interviewees for this research all acknowledge the idea of home as familiarity but also spoke of future plans to create an ideal home as if it were an ongoing process.

### Nurture

The last theme Tuan gives in his definition of home is nurture. By this he meant a place for recovery and rest. It is a general concept, and what I think Ginsberg was referring to when he wrote that “our residence is where we live, but our home is how we live” (1999, 31). How Army families live is unique and thus, so is the way in which they feel about home. Below are responses to the question “Where do you call home” (Table 1). For some, it is an entire state, but for others it is their family. Still others name an object.

Table 1: Home Responses

Study Participant	Response to “Where do you call home?”
Amy	Wherever the Army sent us
Cara	Where my horses are--Leavenworth, KS
Don	Kansas--where we have settled
Jon	My grandparents’ home in Dunn, NC
Mike	No place is home
Sam N.	The Army
Betty	Tennessee
Megan	Clarksville, TN
Carson	All over
Ed	Mississippi, my first and brief residence
Pat	North Carolina
Zach	A bit of everywhere
Bob	Leavenworth, Kansas--the longest place I’ve lived
Alysha	Wherever my mom is stationed
Tom	My last home of record
Ruth	Florida--where I retired
Paul	Tennessee

Matt	My bath towel
Ian	Kansas
Bea	Germany

Table 1. Interviewee responses “where do you call home? Author’s interviewees.

To Pat, his nurturing in the military was almost stifling: “I was very sheltered. It was a give and a take though. As much as I was sheltered, there were so many feelings of togetherness, security and a sense of meaning. The military has a greater meaning than other careers because its causes are greater than us.” Pat also felt that the military lifestyle “prepared me more for real life. People I meet that have grown up this way say so too. They are a little bit stronger. They had to move around and get reacclimated. I guess they were a little more ready for the punches. Not better than anyone else--just ready to move.”

Many of the interviewees spoke of the nurture of home in relation to family life. If approved, families move alongside the active-duty service member. They relocate as a small group and have their possessions shipped ahead. Douglas (1991) has defined home as an “imagined space inhabited by people bound together by ties of familial kinship: home is where a family lives” (p. 287). This fits what I was told as well. Mike said that his family was critical to his upbringing, a family in which both his mother and father were active duty: “I felt like I was already in the military as a kid, it’s in my blood.” Tom also felt nurture from his family: “We had so much fun as a family. I mean my parents were the type that, even in Germany, every free weekend we were gone together somewhere--up to the mountains, on vacation, always out doing something. All of my positive memories as a child are more due to my parents’ input than the military. It would have been a painful way to live without them. They became a normative function and made it adventurous.” Alysha responded similarly by simply saying, “home is wherever my mom is stationed, even if I am not there.”

Rapport and Dawson (1998) wrote that “home is where one best knows oneself.” If this is true, then concepts of home in a modern, mobile world are turning inward while our other foci seem to be multiplying in pace and in depth of knowledge. To Tuan, this makes perfect sense. He reassures us that, “human beings, however, are endowed with imagination, which can extrapolate home far beyond the directly experienceable--house, neighborhood and towns--to such large spaces as region and nation-state. A whole country, even one of continental size, can then become home in security and nurture. Hence homeland can command a people’s ultimate loyalty, which is the offering up of their own life in its defense” (2004, 165). Thus, the participants of this study, while involved in protecting the home of others, are also simultaneously in constant search of their own.

## Chapter Five- Conclusion

This project has studied the effects of mobility on individual senses of place in the U.S. Army. Although each individual experience of place is unique, it is also possible to generalize these views into a collective sense of place, one typical of many military dependents. My interviewees acknowledged that bases and other military spaces have an intended similar arrangement, and yet each remains distinct in memory and location. Furthermore, these people incarnate places, bringing each of them along in a growing compilation of memories and artifacts.

Unlike most other nomadic cultures, my study population is given a weight allowance on how many possessions can accompany them and their families from one place to the other. The population thereby becomes easily attached to a small set of moveable material possessions, as these items are repeatedly present in unfamiliar home environments. Some of these things are functional, such as chairs and lamps, but others are purely symbolic, such as wooden houses that emulate specific buildings and structures, military coins, spoons from each duty station, and banners labeled “home is where the Army sends you.” These possessions create an inevitable fleeting feeling of a military home space.

The temporary occupancy of “homes” produces a unique lifestyle within the U.S. Army. These people are not incurious about place, but rather they see so many places that they have little choice but to embrace their temporary encounters. Many scholars have termed this kind of lifestyle “rootless.” Mary Wertsch, for example, admitted in her personal essay that “I made my own private treaty with rootlessness and spent my whole life trying to fake or invent a sense of place” (1991, xvii). I do not think faking is the correct word for the experience in my interviewees, however. They simply are making the best they can out of a unique living situation.

In so doing, some elements of home become reified whereas others are excluded. For example, families often make their current dwelling resemble its predecessors by arranging furniture similarly, keeping a consistent center piece, and hanging personal artwork and icons. Still, rootlessness eventually catches up with military people as they begin to think about retirement and a life with less mobility. With these thoughts comes sentimentality about place, reflections on what kinds of places an individual favored, how families used to explore the area around their living spaces, and how much a family embraced or utilized the unique military community.

Mobility as a fact of a military career gives a specialized meaning to “home” for their dependents. These individuals are not innately transient. Instead, their experiences are a side effect of a family member’s choice in career. Military bases are a great example of an intentional community. These gated towns all are similar to one another. They are selective of their inhabitants, of course, and designed as purely functional places whose occupants are impermanent and rotating.

The collective narrative of my interviewees definitely attaches meanings to places, but these meanings are not as deep as those for people who have lived in one area for a significant portion of his or her life. Still, because these military families share a common goal—to protect the nation-state--these people find worth in their life parade, a synchronicity of movement.

I grew up in a similar fashion as my study population. I relate to them. Although my own mobility was not as frequent as some, it was still significant. I still hesitate when someone asks me where I am from. This study has been therapeutic in at least two ways. I have found kindred spirits in other military brats. I also have seen that, in the modern era as mobility rates continue to rise, feelings of uprootedness have grown for the general population. The meaning in this

movement seems to have general application. For all of us, place is not as fixed as it used to be. It exists increasingly as a path along our life journeys.

In April 2011, I presented part of my research at the Association of American Geographers Annual Meeting in Seattle, Washington. It was my first academic presentation and I had been placed in the military geography session. As if I were not nervous enough for my public-speaking debut, the room seemed to swell with name tags and conference bags. But, after presenting, I was inundated with questions. My remarks about home in the military being found in the movement of a career clearly had struck a chord. The short Q&A following my presentation turned into a bonafide therapy session because, not surprisingly, many people in attendance had grown up the way I did. I did not have all the answers, but they did in their collective stories.

The main theme repeated by my participants was one of near ceaseless movement. Clearly, the parallels to nomadic cultures are many. I am in awe of how people within an organization that is so regimented and structured can, at the same time, be so fluid when it comes to assigning meaning to its places of occupation. Their place narratives are precious—real, understudied, and valuable for an increasingly mobile world.

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