Moates (2010) Clasificadores- 'Living Off the Trash' and Raising Hogs at the Urban Margin

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As the world becomes increasingly urbanized, inner cities breed alternative agrarian lifestyles. “Clasificadores: ‘Living Off the Trash’ and Raising Hogs at the Urban Margin” details one such occupational niche which has resulted from increased urbanization and a decrease in available resources. As the article notes, clasificadores are people in Uruguay who scavenge resources from dumpsters to be recycled. Often these people also raise hogs as livestock and feed them with their finds. The author, A. Shiloh Moates, gives the clasificadores credit for developing an effective agricultural lifestyle in a heavily populated city despite societal contempt as well as laws that prevent clasificadores from obtaining resources from trash sites.

Moates states that the clasificadores are important to anthropological study, because they represent a lifestyle that will become increasingly prevalent in the world. Appropriate evidence is cited for this assumption in the form of historical statistics and growth rates of urbanized countries. The author also references community gardening organizations as a recent development to further the point that under economic stress, people will use their access to urban resources for agricultural purposes. Here the author’s point seems to be well developed, although further evidence of such lifestyles in other cities and nations would aid in the generalization that this phenomenon in Uruguay applies to the entire world.

The author does a thorough job explaining the lives of the clasificadores by detailing their methods from start to finish. Evidence of studying real life Uruguayan clasificadores and quotes from the workers show that the author’s facts are well researched and based on actual people. The author could have detailed a particular family’s life in the role of clasificadores to make these people more real to the reader. This could provide a clear demonstration of how the strategy works, what day-to-day problems these people face, and how the occupation is passed down through generations.

The historical development of the clasificadore lifestyle adds to knowledge about these people and shows the natural pull of inner city poor to such an agricultural strategy. This historical account aids in proving the author’s point that the world is moving towards the clasificadore approach and provides a factual basis for such claims. Moates also talks about the stigma surrounding clasificadores in their own society. Showing the negative stereotypes that developed about these people enhances the hardships that they face. The fact that this is such a hard and unpleasant job makes it more interesting to study why so many people have turned to it. In response, Moates describes the importance of the independence and freedoms offered to clasificadores. Combined with a united political and social struggle, this gives clasificadores enough pride to remain in their ways.

Moates does a good job describing the unique lifestyle of the clasificadore in this article. Firsthand research as well as historical research backs his claims that more of the world is moving towards such urbanized agricultural lifestyles. However, more research and discussion about specific clasificadore people could be more insightful and give the reader a better overall understanding. Fascinating choice and very well written (aside from a few sentences that are a bit repetitive throughout). Good critical thought.