

## Right to the City and the Quiet Appropriations of Local Space in the Heartland

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In the past two decades the discourses and practices of citizenship have departed dramatically from earlier eras. Citizens are disillusioned with the Western liberal promises of automatic social, civil and political gains based on their legal membership in a nation state. They rather associate their citizenship with concrete and tangible gains they experience as genuine citizenship or lack thereof, and no longer confine their expectation of such gains to their national belonging. It is in specific localities — the neighborhoods, the towns, the cities — where citizens live their lives and wage their struggles for livelihood and dignity.

The diminished responsibilities of the central state resulting from global capitalist restructuring have contributed to these dramatic changes in people's expectation of their citizenship rights (Turner 1990; Purcell 2003; Miraftab 2012). This has highlighted two fallacies of the liberal democratic expectation of citizenship.<sup>1</sup> First, that civil, political and social rights are accumulative — one leads and guarantees the other; second, that the nation state is the source and guarantor of citizens' rights and entitlements. Neoliberal processes of privatization of basic public services that erode the public sphere responsibilities (and hence the links between political and social entitlements) de-link citizens' civil, political and social rights (Lister 1997). These processes also de-center the state in the citizens' expectation of rights and well-being.

In some instances, restructuring the powers of the national state has invigorated the local and global sites of citizenship contestations — such as in urban and transnational citizenship practices. Subordinate groups, through their local and trans-local practices, have offered an alternative, challenging the assumption that the national state is “the only legitimate source of citizenship rights” (Holston 1998: 39). Undocumented immigrants, legal or illegal residents of squatter settlements, *favelas* and townships have, in certain instances, taken charge of the local spaces they inhabit. They make their own living space and livelihood not because of, but often despite the state's institutions and laws.

Global accumulation processes where social reproduction of labor is outsourced and performed through transnational families and networks across the globe expose the fallacy of formal citizenship as guarantor of inclusion/exclusion (Miraftab, in press). A large number of people are better able to secure their wellbeing against social and economic uncertainties outside the national territories where they have formal political membership. The Mexican and Togolese immigrants in the small Illinois town of Beardstown discuss below are instructive. These immigrants are better providers to their families here in the U.S. and across the border than they would be within the territories of their national citizenship. As studies of global remittances

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<sup>1</sup> The expectations of liberal democratic citizenship is perhaps best articulated in writings of T.H. Marshall arguing that formal membership in a nation state grants national citizens the civil, political and social rights that automatically guarantee their entitlements (see Marshall [1950] 1977).

show, a large population supports citizen members of national political communities from beyond the national territories where they are located (Ratha 2005). Poor families increasingly depend on a family member abroad for their safety net. In a strange twist of circumstances, the solution to the problems of disenfranchised citizens and their unfulfilled promise of citizenship has been membership or even non-membership (illegal existence) in another political community. In yet another instance, for example, in the early 1990s battle for democratization in Togo against General Gnassingbe Eyadema's dictatorship, the town of Sokode in the central region operated as a stronghold for the opposition. Sokode, a town that Piot (2010:4) describes as having a "pure collective fantasy" of living abroad, offered a lifeline to the national struggle for political citizenship. Emptied of its youth who had fled for asylum in Germany, the money sent to Sokode from Germany sustained those who were supporting the opposition in Togo. In this context, where expatriates play a significant role in the mobilization for inclusion in the Togolese national political community, much of the citizenship conception is post-national even global (Piot 2010:169).<sup>2</sup>

These realities confirm the new conceptualizations of citizenship that are not tied to the territorial and political bounds of the national state, nor limited to a set of formalized recognitions. Rather than a bundle of rights granted from above by the state, citizenship is understood as processes constructed from below by citizens' local, trans-local and increasingly trans-national practices that secure tangible gains independent of their formal status vis-à-vis a national state. In this alternative conceptualization, which Smith and Guarnizo refer to as the "unsettled terrain of national citizenship" (2009: 611), it is not the state but the citizens beyond their legal status vis-à-vis the state; and it is not the nation but the city, the town, the neighborhood, the concrete spaces where inhabitants make their dignified life and livelihood, that constitute the heart of the citizenship's contestations.

In this context, the expectation of social well-being has shifted from formal, top-down and national to informal, bottom up and transnational processes and practices. To fulfill their expectations of a dignified, humane livelihood, people take their interests in their own hands. Whether among minoritized populations of the global North or marginalized residents of the global South, they employ direct action, i.e., democratic practices where citizens do not relegate the defense of their interests to others — be they politicians, bureaucrats or planners. Furthermore, they do not confine their claims-making actions to "invited spaces of citizenship" such as the Senate, the municipal councils, the planning commission's community hearings, citizen review boards, and NGOs. Such citizenship practices occur in self-determined "invented spaces of citizenship" where people participate through direct action to respond to specific contexts and issues (Miraftab 2006, 2009).

The discourse of the "Right to the City," has increasingly been used to mobilize direct action among disenfranchised and globally mobile citizens. As Mark Purcell (2003) explains, when understood in a radical Lefebvrian sense, this discourse involves the right to appropriate (and in that sense to use) and the right to participate (and in that sense to produce) urban space (Lefebvre 1996). From this perspective the urban landscapes of most cities of the global South

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<sup>2</sup> Another point in time is the five-month sit-ins held in front of the US embassy in Lome, capital of Togo, by Togolese applicants to the US Diversity Visa whose applications were rejected by the embassy. Applicants for the US Diversity Visa, which brings a winner a Green card and in five years a US citizenship, took part in this enduring sit-in to claim, yes to claim, their visas unjustly denied by the embassy. In words of one of the protestors cited in Piot's extended analysis of the event "we are here to claim what is rightfully ours" (Piot 2010:166).

constitute the material/ spatial evidence of citizens' asserting their right to the city — not simply through legal means and bureaucratic channels, but through insurgent citizenship practices by which people produce their shelter, appropriate urban spaces, and use the city to secure a livelihood (Mitchell 2003; Holston 2008; Irazabal 2008).

In the “Right to the City” perspective both as an alternative theoretical construct and as a slogan motivating transnational social movements “[i]nhabitation becomes a privileged status granting citizens and noncitizens alike a right to participate in public policy-making, as well as in decisions of private corporations affecting urban life chances” (Smith and Guarnizo 2009:615). Disadvantaged and marginalized inhabitants (citizens or non-citizens from a formal stand point) recognize the inadequacy of formal rights and turn to direct participation to achieve justice. They do not hand the advocacy of their interests to others, but directly take part in decisions that affect their lives and shape binding decisions. This formulation of democracy promotes a form of citizenship that is multi-centered and has multiple agencies, including the citizens. Their gains might be trivial, small, and slow but they are real and tangible.

### *Citizenship Constructed From Below*

To better understand this alternative notion of citizenship as practices grounded in civil society (Friedmann 2002), I offer a case study from the Midwest of the United States.<sup>3</sup> This example comes from the experience of immigrants, many of them undocumented, whose access to food, shelter, and education has improved despite, not because of, their status vis-à-vis the state.

In the economically distressed, small town of Beardstown, Illinois, with a population of about 6,000 people, Cargill Corporation recruited an immigrant labor force for its meatpacking plant. They first targeted among Spanish-speaking Latin Americans in the early 1990s, (predominantly Mexicans) and then French-speaking West and Central Africans (predominantly Togolese) in the early 2000s. The town's formal politics of citizen participation in governance comprised an all-white and native-born city council led by an outspoken anti-immigrant mayor. Despite their exclusion from formal political structures, the town's immigrants, estimated to be more than 30% of the population, have fashioned new forms of citizenship that afford them certain inclusions in public institutions and in public spaces. This has occurred in a town that

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<sup>3</sup> This case study is part of a larger multi-sited research spanning 2005-2011. Beardstown data was collected through more than 70 semi-structured and in-depth interviews with local established residents as well as Spanish- and French-speaking immigrants; three focus group sessions through ESL classes with mixed groups of Hispanic and African students; mail-in surveys on housing and households conducted in collaboration with the Illinois Institute of Rural Affairs and the University of Illinois Extension Office, complemented by door-to-door follow-up surveys among Spanish- and French-speaking residents (400 English; 69 Spanish; 65 French); observation of community meetings and celebrations; review of archival and contemporary newspaper articles from Beardstown and from nearby metropolitan areas; and analysis of census data. The 2006 field work for this project was conducted in collaboration with Dr. Diaz McConnell as reflected in our joint publications 2008 and 2009. I acknowledge the support in fund and kind received from the following units at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign: Center for Democracy in a Multiracial Society (2004, 2006 and 2007); Centre for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (2008); College of Fine and Applied Arts Innovative Research Grant (2010) and Office of Vice Chancellors Research Board (2010).

until not long ago remained virtually all white through its municipal policy as a “sundown town” (i.e., a town where blacks had to clear out before sundown.)<sup>4</sup>

Today we see high levels of residential integration on almost every block.<sup>5</sup> We also observe a high homeownership rate among Mexican immigrants, with many of them becoming local landlords. In addition, a multi-lingual education system known as the Dual Language Program (DLP) has emerged. Under the DLP students receive half their instruction in Spanish. Lastly, there is a notable presence of immigrants in public space — through cultural identity celebrations (e.g., Mexican Independence Day or Africa Day) and through numerous multi-racial soccer clubs playing on outdoor fields. Let us explore how this came about.

In my ethnographic study of community change in this Midwestern town I have witnessed the importance of informal politics and innovative everyday practices through which subordinate groups renegotiate their social and spatial relations. The gains listed above were not decrees granted by the town’s unsupportive local government, nor were they fruits of immigrants’ legal citizenship through naturalization. These are rather gains built from below by the efforts of immigrants and their allies through everyday practices and informal politics that assert their right to the city. Stripped of the opportunity to participate in state sanctioned decision making due to their legal status, immigrants in this town have practiced their Right to The City in a radical Lefebvrian sense by producing residential and recreational spaces and to a certain degree appropriating and using public space and institutions. Although acting quietly and unassumingly, immigrants in this town assert their Right to the City through everyday practices that have brought them tangible gains. Below I will further discuss the ways in which this quiet appropriation of local space has taken place.

### ***Beyond Formal Politics: Quiet Appropriations of Local Space***

Despite the exclusionary formal structures of governance and decision-making that privilege established white residents and their informal networks, Beardstown immigrants have achieved a certain inclusion in public institutions and public spaces.

The first important aspect of the newcomers’ achievements is in spatial terms. In 1996, a few years after the recruitment of the first group of Spanish-speaking immigrant workers, violence erupted in the town. This resulted in the killing of a white resident, a subsequent march by the Ku Klux Klan, followed by the burning of a 6-foot tall cross in the main plaza of the town.

At this point, a few local, native-born residents joined forces with the immigrants to try to engineer a peaceful transition to a multicultural and multi-racial community. The white Anglophone priest of the Catholic Church instituted weekly services in Spanish and flew in three nuns from Puebla, Mexico; the Nazarene Church brought in a bilingual, U.S.-educated pastor from Jalisco, Mexico; the local realtor signed up for an intensive Spanish course in Springfield; and the school hired an El Salvadoran community liaison to facilitate the intercultural relationships at school and between the school and the community. In the early stages of the

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<sup>4</sup> For further discussion of the sundown town phenomenon across the U.S., see Loewen (2006).

<sup>5</sup> In 2000, white-Hispanic index of dissimilarity for Beardstown was 57.6 compared to 62.1 for Chicago; 63.2 for Los Angeles-Long Beach; and 66.7 for New York (for more see Diaz McConnell and Miraftab 2009; Miraftab and Diaz McConnell 2008).

post-1996 response, these local agents played an important role in the inclusion of immigrants in public institutions and spaces. The nuns worked hard among new arrivals who were struggling with poverty and alienation and having to live doubled and tripled-up in run down rental units. The pastor, the priest, and the school liaison were important as cultural brokers between the new and the established residents and frequently wrote editorials in the local newspaper to promote a culture of tolerance. The entrepreneurial realtor helped many Mexican tenants to become owners of their own homes and then owners of rental properties offering more residential options to their fellow newcomers. School teachers (English- and Spanish-speaking) mobilized a campaign for the Dual Language Program. Members of this army of cultural understanding paid a visit to the households of elementary school children in Beardstown.

Much of this took place in the early 2000s while Cargill undertook the recruitment of a new cohort of transnational laborers—immigrants from French-speaking West and Central Africa. Initially the company's concern for further destabilizing the ethno-racial relations prompted local authorities to steer the West Africans toward housing in the adjacent town of Rushville. As one informant explained, the plant managers did not want to risk another explosion (Interview #6, 2006). In this light, by the early 2000s a tripartite residential geography evolved, in which African Americans lived in larger cities outside of Beardstown (e.g., Springfield) and commuted to work while Latin Americans and whites resided in Beardstown. Africans stayed in the adjacent town of Rushville.

After 2007 however, following a sharp increase in gas prices that motivated saving transportation time and cost, Africans started moving to Beardstown to be closer to their workplace. Their move was facilitated by a burgeoning market in rental houses owned by Mexican immigrants. Most of these “nouveaux landlords” had arrived in Beardstown more than a decade earlier and had bought and fixed up houses first to live in and later to rent.<sup>6</sup> A randomly sampled survey among Beardstown Hispanics in 2008 indicated that about 40 percent of Latinos in this town had purchased their homes. Many of the new Latino homeowners in Beardstown began to rent units to other immigrants. Today a large proportion of the West and Central Africans working at the plant have moved to Beardstown. Here they rent from white and Mexican landlords and live side by side with other ethnic, linguistic and social groups. Immigrant groups, relying on the complementarities of their housing needs and inter-racial rental practices, thus challenged the racialized residential geography.

For immigrants in Beardstown, housing has not been the only means of claiming their right to the city and to making it a new home. The celebration of Mexican Independence Day in Beardstown (since 1998) and the newly instituted annual celebration of Africa Day in Rushville (since 2008) are public events that boldly declare the new immigrants' right to the towns and their public spaces. While the first Africa Day was celebrated indoors, the following ones have

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<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere with Diaz McConnell (2008 and 2009) I discuss that the high rate of homeownership among Spanish speaking, predominantly Mexican immigrants, has been made possible by various circumstances. One is the affordability of homeownership in this small town. The house prices are relatively low, the employment at the plant is secure and year-round, and the mortgage market that arose in the early 2000s was favorable to immigrants. The large local and trans-local network of Mexican immigrants was a source of information about the processes and conditions of homeownership. We also discussed in those publications how the absence of zoning and prior planning regulations might have contributed to the residential integration we observe in town today. The absence of any pre-existing, residentially segregated spatial structure in town means that newcomers found houses wherever there was a landlord willing to rent or sell a unit to them.

been held in the town's public park, starting with a soccer match among Africans and followed by West and Central African music, dance and food. The celebration of Mexican Independence Day in Beardstown, despite some resentment by native-born locals, has been growing every year with small but increasing participation by diverse local residents. The last celebration was marked by 21 floats parading through the town's streets to the main plaza, where they were greeted by live Mexican music at the plaza's gazebo and Mexican food stalls circling the plaza.

Immigrants in Beardstown have also achieved a notable inclusion in public educational institutions, the schools and the library. Schools were perhaps the town's first public institution to feel the impact of immigration with an enrollment increase within the district of almost 23% from 2000 to 2009. These new students have changed the racial and ethnic blend within the district. In 2000, whites comprised more than 84% of the student body, with only 14% of students within the district identified as Hispanic and only 0.7% students identified as Black. By 2009, Hispanics constituted nearly 35% of the student body, while the Black population had increased to over 2% with 5% of students identified as multi-racial (Illinois State Board of Education, 2009). This shift in the student body has had significant implications for special programs within the school district. The number of Limited English Proficiency Students, or students who qualify for bilingual education, has increased from 6.5% in 2000 to over 27% in 2009. The school responded by changing from English as a Second Language (ESL) to a bilingual Dual Language Program (DLP).

By 2006 the elementary school had managed to adopt the DLP. This is a bold program that aims for integration of different linguistic groups in a school by requiring both language groups to receive half of their instruction in the language not spoken at home. For example, every student from an English-speaking family who participates in this program has to do half of his or her curriculum and homework in Spanish, and vice versa. The school district agreed to adoption of DLP provided that there was parental consent for every participating child. Beardstown teachers then launched what they called "the teachers' movement" — a door-to-door campaign to achieve 100 percent consent among both English- and Spanish-speaking parents. The local teachers — some long-standing, native born local people and others new, Spanish-speaking classroom aides — along with a Central American school-community liaison visited the family of every student in the elementary school and convinced them of the value of multicultural education and DLP. What motivated the local teachers, one teacher said, was "seeing the school yard tensions amongst students reflecting the classroom segregation between linguistically different student bodies. Something had to be done" (interview #31 2008). Today Beardstown is the only rural school in Illinois with a Dual Language Program. As of November 2008, in Illinois there were 18 schools and nationwide there were 335 schools with DL programs (Paciotto and Delany-Barmann forthcoming). Beardstown's public library, whose clientele is more than half Spanish and French speaking immigrants, has also taken the multi-lingual approach to its services. It offers books and staff services in the three main languages spoken in town and by its young school-age clientele: English, Spanish and French.

Today, on a bright Sunday afternoon, visitors reaching Beardstown via Highway 125 encounter scenes that are unusual in the social landscape of the rural Midwest. Where once scenes of racial hatred were on display, one finds at the very entrance to the town, large soccer fields filled with racially and linguistically diverse players in colorful outfits. This particular bold public presence of the town's diverse population is the outcome of a long spatial struggle. My interviews with the soccer league's founders as well as discussions with players on several of

the eleven multi-racial teams, revealed a struggle in which minorities asserted their right to play their sport of choice, and to play it not in clandestine fields, but in proper public ones. As one of the interviewees explained, the first immigrants who arrived in Beardstown, almost all Spanish-speaking, used to play in private spaces like their families' backyards. Even though they tried to be publicly invisible, the interviewee recalled "police cars driving back and forth on the street to check on us, . . . as if we were up to no good" (interview #50 2008). Then for several years they played soccer on abandoned lands around the town and behind the local school. Such sites were often covered with broken glass and trash. When they were finally kicked out of the field behind the school due to construction, the games moved to the park district fields, which at the time accommodated only baseball. But the regular presence of enthusiastic soccer players and their families occupying the benches and the public park facilities, plus the tireless efforts of the league president to negotiate with the park district officials at last gained them the soccer fields they enjoy today — a legitimate presence in the town's public space.

The park district's acquisition of land for their soccer teams is indeed a significant achievement in asserting of immigrants' Right to The City. These public fields today are much more than recreational spaces. They are new inclusive spaces of interracial, intercultural interaction among the Francophone West Africans and the Hispanic Latin American immigrants — with increasing numbers of Anglophone residents joining the teams.

While soccer has provided a space for interracial relations among men, child-care has served a similar role for women. Mexicans, because of their distinct local and trans-local resources and immigration history, are more likely to have their extended families with them than the Africans. The Latinos are also more able to bring in a family member from another state in the U.S. or from across the border to help with child-care. Often within a larger extended family there is one young or old female member who stays home to provide child-care for other family members, almost all of whom work at Cargill. West African newcomers have a different history of immigration and different trans-local resources and transnational family structures, such that they seldom have their extended families with them in the U.S. or Beardstown.<sup>7</sup> Those West Africans who do have children find they converge with Mexicans, around child-care, as they find the Mexicans' expression of affection and care towards children more akin to Africans. "They are like us," was how a West African mother put it when speaking about her Mexican caregiver (interview #67, 2009).

### ***Persistent Creation of a Public Presence through Mediating Sites and Institutions***

While the dominant literature on globalization, immigration and social movements, including the burgeoning writings on The Right to the City, offers many insights into the possibilities for emerging transnational spaces like Beardstown, this body of work is still inadequate. The inadequacy lies not only in an urban bias towards large metropolitan centers as hotbeds of immigration and immigrants' action; but also on a political bias towards forms of action that are large-scale, collective and confrontational. Such forms of action are more likely to occur in the relatively open political environments of large cities that offer anonymity to participants.

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<sup>7</sup> For detailed discussion of differential local and trans-local histories, resources and obligation of immigrant groups in Beardstown see Miraftab Forthcoming in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*.

In order to understand the differences between Beardstown and major metropolitan areas, we need to examine the role Cargill plays in the economy and politics of the town.

Cargill is the source of earnings for the overwhelming majority of local residents and organizations. They wield virtually monopoly power in all spheres. For example, in 2007 the company had a tax dispute concerning the assessed value of their plant. When the company threatened to leave town after contesting the County Assessment Board's figures, local authorities yielded and cut the assessment in half, saving Cargill more than a million dollars in tax payments (and cutting deeply into the budget of the local authority for schools, libraries, and other services). The company responded with social donations, which according to their website came to \$150,000. This contributed to an already unequal balance of political power in the community since schools, the park district, even churches all became direct recipients of the Cargill community grants and more reliant on corporate donations than state support. This left them wary of upsetting their relationships with the plant management. In this context, possibilities for immigrant communities for collective organizing for publicly claiming their "Right to the City" are limited. But the absence of such forms of action should not be interpreted as passivism of local inhabitants, in particular the most vulnerable: the immigrants, many of them without a legal status in this country.

Subordinate groups in highly restrained political environments, such as those investigated in Beardstown, make claim to the city and to a dignified life through channels and forms of action that bypass the inadequacy and elitism of the formal structures and institutions of urban citizenship. For populations without access to legal or formal channels of citizen inclusion, informal practices offer an unnoticeable but effective means to assert their rights to a dignified livelihood. These insights expand the notion of citizenship from legal and formal entitlements originating with the state to a range of informal and substantive (including spatial) practices constituted from below through people's various forms of action.

Bayat (2010) makes an important intervention in this area of scholarship by expanding the debate on forms of resistance beyond collective forms of action and mobilization. He critiques the social movement literature for its bias towards forms of action more likely to occur in liberal democratic structures. Reflecting on the experience of subordinate groups in highly constrained and contested political environments, he highlights the non-collective forms of action and what he calls the "quiet encroachment of the ordinary."<sup>8</sup> He discusses the struggles by youth, women, and informal traders in Tehran and Cairo whose gains are achieved not through large, media-attracting marches or protests (which indeed will be doomed to instant repression), but are won rather through un-assuming forms of resistance and under-the-radar politics that are potent but performed quietly and unnoticed. He calls such actions the "art of presence"—the courage and creativity to assert collective will in spite of all odds, to circumvent constraints, utilizing what is available and discovering new spaces within which to make oneself heard, seen, felt, and realized" (2010: 26). The scholars of popular politics stress the potent force of presence by minoritized and unwanted populations in spaces where they are not wanted. Feminist scholars, for example, have stressed in particular the need for such stubborn presence by women in formal politics, coining the term "politics of presence" (Phillips 1995).

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<sup>8</sup> Bayat defines "quiet encroachment of the ordinary as pertinent to examining the activism of the marginalized groups . . . [referring] to non-collective but prolonged direct actions of dispersed individuals and families to acquire the basic necessities of their lives . . . in a quiet and unassuming illegal fashion" (2010:45).

Key to the Beardstown story is the immigrants' persistent creation of a public presence in this former sundown town. Clearly, the celebration of Mexican Independence Day and of Africa Day as well as the creation and use of open soccer fields for Sunday soccer games are not merely recreational events. They assert one's Right to The City, the right to be there in that small town where historically only white individuals and families could make a home. For Beardstown, the consideration of its history as a former sundown town is critical. In such a context simply the presence of immigrants and "others" in previously prohibited spaces counts as an important political achievement. While in a different context this might not mean much, in the context of this former sundown town the sheer presence of non-white bodies and non-English speech in public spaces from the plaza to the streets to the sports field to the churches, schools and libraries are enormous political and social gains. In Beardstown, the working of such "art of presence" surfaces in stories that residents shared with me in their interviews about Mexicans being everywhere, not only in every block of the town as neighbors, but also in every classroom of their children, in the library and grocery stores, and at the barbeque stand you can find on lazy Sunday afternoons. Resistance to being criminalized or made invisible fuels this appropriation of local space.

This persistent presence observed in Beardstown, however, is not asserted from the top or through formal institutions governing the city. For example, while institutional hierarchies of School and Park Districts remain dominated by white and English speaking members, native born and immigrant residents have used local school and soccer fields as significant mediating sites to renegotiate inter racial relations. Here I borrow the notion of mediation from Lamphere (1992) who argues the kind of interrelations emerging between the new immigrants and established residents in their communities of destination are not just a matter of race, ethnicity or immigration status but also influenced by the specificities of those mediating institutions and sites through which they interact. Immigrant labor force recruited to the Beardstown plant arrived to this town in the absence of public and social service agencies experienced in dealing with diverse populations and their needs. Moreover, the pre-existing formal institutions such as the town council, or the Park District or the School District Boards never opened up to include the racially diverse new residents amongst them. To renegotiate their inter-racial relations and assert their right to be present in this former sundown town, immigrants and their local native-born allies, instead focused on creating a range of local mediating sites. For example, in the absence of pre-existing rental housing complexes to receive immigrants, they promoted residential integration through inter-racial rental practices of refurbished housing units; similarly, in the absence of private, public, or non-profit sector affordable child care services, immigrant women established informally home-based child care services as a site that mediates diverse immigrant groups relationships.

Whether these mediating sites will achieve to make a dent in the formal institutions and hierarchies of city government (school and park districts, city council, policing or labor and corporate organizations) remains to be seen. The point here is not to assume grand achievements emerging through these mediating sites, nor to romanticize the hardship of immigrant workers in the Midwest and their exploitation in the hazardous meatpacking industry. The intent is not to sketch a rosy picture of optimism, harmony and a tension-free space of solidarity and cooperation across historically racialized and socially stratified groups. The social and spatial changes in this town are not consistent, nor stable. They are complex, tentative and open to future renegotiation. Nevertheless, the example of Beardstown offers perspectives that are significant to the ongoing citizenship and the "Right to The City" debates by bringing to light the

existence of alternative sites through which immigrants and native born populations renegotiate their relationships outside the formal institutions and formal politics.

The Beardstown case lends a voice to the ongoing conversations on the limitations of formal and liberal democratic formulations of citizenship. It helps to disentangle the understanding of substantive citizenship from the state's legal and formalist citizenship project to people's on the ground practices. Focusing on undocumented immigrants who formally may not have a citizenship right yet in practice achieve some of the substantive gains associated with it, pushes on one hand, the notion of citizenship beyond its formal construct; and on the other, the mediation between macro and micro forces beyond the formal institutions.

The Beardstown observations help to push the conceptualization of the "Right to the City" beyond the formal means of social and urban mobilization and beyond formal institutional means for mediation of rights. If seen only through the lens of big city marches and their heroic militancy, immigrant inhabitants of Beardstown may seem passive victims of redneck Midwestern communities and corporate-infused ethno-racial divisions. In Beardstown, analyzing transnational processes from below through opportunities and constraints that the local context offers and imposes (Guarnizo and Smith 1998), we observe not only the exploitation, ethno-racial tension and animosity, but also the forms of agency that otherwise escape attention. This reveals how immigrant groups draw on and construct distinct local and trans-local resources, networks and meanings; and how in specific, historically constituted mediating spaces, immigrants' varied constraints and resources converge into social dynamics and forms of action that one would otherwise not expect.

In short, the story of Beardstown immigrants reminds us that the subaltern can speak but we only recognize their agency if we can hear them in the language in which they speak. In this case the key to recognition of agency among diverse immigrant populations of Beardstown is in recognizing their informal and non-collective forms of action as a valid means of asserting their right to produce and to use local space.

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