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### **Small-Town Transnationalism: Socio-Spatial Dynamics of Immigration to the Heartland**

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Reflecting on the post-World War II German experience with guest workers, the Swiss playwright and novelist Max Frisch coined an often-quoted phrase: “we wanted workers, we got people”. Here I use this quote to frame my complex and contradictory observations in a US Midwestern small town about 45 miles outside Springfield, Illinois. In this town, since the 1990s a meat packing plant of the giant multinational Cargill has recruited workers among diverse immigrant populations to address its problem of high labor turnover. Today, of the approximate 6,000 population in this formerly all-white town, about 30 percent are immigrants from Spanish-speaking Latin America (predominantly Mexicans) and French-speaking West Africa (predominantly Togolese). The corporation’s transnational and translocal recruitment strategies are often designed to create a dual labor market which sets one group against the other and weakens labor’s collective bargaining power to accept the low wages for risky and back-breaking jobs (Bonacich 1972). But outside the workplace workers may forge solidarities with each other that profoundly transform their social and spatial relationships. This chapter focuses on transnational labor recruitment by local plant in Beardstown, Illinois, and the inter-racial interactions and dynamics that emerge among workers outside the plant in this town. It highlights the constraints and opportunities that historically constituted local spaces may offer and the difference they may make in the emergent social and spatial relationships. This work also seeks to understand how the settlement experience of immigrants in such small-town destinations may be influenced by the specific attributes of the local space – e.g. size, being a company town, and having a particular racialized-history. Key questions I will address are: does local space matter in the kind of interimmigrant and interracial relationships that emerge? How would social and spatial dynamics that create and are created by transnational processes vary in small-town America from those often documented in metropolitan centers?

Existing literature has well documented the social and spatial dynamics of global capitalism in large metropolitan centers and global cities. Fewer paid attention to, however, spaces outside these focal centers: namely, the small towns in the belly of the beast – that is, the heart of global capitalism for agricultural and food production. The contribution I hope to make to the present volume is bringing into focus these marginalized spaces in the discussion of transnationalism and urbanism – and begin the discussion of what might be called the transnationalism of small towns.

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### <A>Stories of Globalization

Like most Midwestern rustbelt towns, Beardstown, Illinois had its own share of anxieties with loss of its industries in the 1980s. However, unlike many dying towns of the rustbelt, Beardstown has maintained and even increased its population over the last two decades.<sup>1</sup> In large part this is a result of immigration to this town since 1990. In Cargill corporation purchased the local meatpacking plant formerly owned by Oscar Mayer. Cargill reopened the plant but dropped the starting hourly wages from \$8.75 to \$6.50 (Walker 2003). To address the problem of high labor turnover rate among its primarily local and native born workers, the plant initiated a strategy of recruiting workforce among immigrant populations. They began in the early 1990s by seeking out Latin Americans predominantly Mexicans and later, in the early 2000s turned to French speaking West Africans predominantly Togolese. This corporate strategy, which managed to bring the labor turnover rate from close to 77 percent in 1990 to 52 percent in 2008,<sup>2</sup> also resulted in a local population change that transformed the social dynamics of the town. In the span of twenty years Beardstown changed from a racial and linguistic monolith to a diverse town. While in the 1990 census only 32 people identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino (or 6 percent of the total population) and only one person identified themselves as black (or about 0.2 percent of the population), in 2010 1,994 Beardstown residents identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino (or 32.1 percent), and 360 residents identified themselves as black (or 5.8 percent) (see Miraftab 2009:1). This sharp increase is expressed in the following statement by a local citizen: “we did not want to go to the world, but the world came to us” (Interviewee #23, 2008).

The rapid diversification of Beardstown’s population, as I discuss elsewhere, is not an exception (Miraftab and Diaz McConnell 2008). It is indeed in line with a larger national trend that shows an increasing rate of migration to non-gateway states – that is, states other than Texas, Arizona, and California – and a greater immigration growth rate in non-traditional destinations – those outside the large metropolitan centers. A combination of factors contributes to such rapid demographic change. The literature on the meat industry and its restructuring provides some clues. A number of writers (Kandel and Parrado 2005; Griffith et al. 1995) have linked the growth of immigrant populations in rural areas to changes in production and consumption of food, in particular of meat and poultry. They conclude that the industry’s changing strategies for accumulation of capital and reduction of the need for skilled labor (spatial relocation to rural areas, vertical integration, and technological innovation) all ultimately contributed to labor recruitment among immigrants to maintain low pay for high-risk jobs.<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly the meat industry as a whole includes a high percentage of minorities, 42 percent Latino and 20 percent black or African American, and 32 percent white (Government Accountability Report 2005).

To understand the rapid demographic diversification of this town and many like it in the Midwest, it is important to understand not only the logic of capital for rural relocation and immigrant worker recruitment but also to understand the motivation of immigrant laborers who accept low pay in a high-risk industry. Elsewhere, I discuss further this aspect of the phenomenon, articulating the role played by immigrants’ transnational families and their translocal practices to restructure social reproduction processes and achieve not only reproduction of their labor force but also cultural meaning and identities (see Miraftab, 2011). In ‘Faraway Intimate Development’ (*bid.*,) I discuss more fully the motivations and aspirations that closely link developments of heartland communities to the development or underdevelopment of immigrants’ communities of origin in Togo and in Mexico.

While there are many facets to the complex story of transnationalism in Beardstown, in this essay I choose to hone in on immigrants constructing this small Midwestern town as their home. Most importantly I seek to understand how the context matters – how the constraints and opportunities that come with a small company town, for example, could make a difference in the settlement experience of immigrant workers. I tease out varying local and translocal histories, resources, and constraints of actors and local space that shape distinct experiences across immigrant groups in the same locale. These are key to understanding the complex and, at times, contradictory processes with which emerging transnational spaces in the US heartland grapple. In this case the differential histories, resources, and obligations of the diverse labor force have helped them to develop complementary relationships that allow renegotiation of the social and spatial interactions set in place by the corporation's interest.

To understand this complex social space I have relied on a multisited global ethnography spanning the years 2005–2011 in three locations: Beardstown in Illinois, Tejaro in Michoacán, Mexico (summers 2008 and 2010), and Lomé in Togo (summer 2010). Although my insights benefit from the information obtained through fieldwork in all three sites, in this particular essay I focus only on information collected empirically through multiple means in Beardstown and its adjacent town Rushville (hereafter referred to as Beardstown area).<sup>4</sup>

### **<A>Making a Home in the Heartland**

New arrivals to this town come with a variety of histories and stories that make it impossible to treat them as a single entity labeled 'the immigrants', or 'the workers'. Rather they constitute an ensemble of complex and contradictory relationships and experiences. To understand the different resources and constraints of the two main immigrant groups in this town, some of the 2008 survey findings will prove helpful.<sup>5</sup> For example, in respect to education, 54 percent of the French-speaking Africans had some college education as opposed to 14 percent of the Latinos.<sup>6</sup> With regard to family composition, a majority of Latinos (84 percent) had their children with them in Beardstown as opposed to only 33 percent of the Africans.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Latinos and Africans had a quite different status regarding homeownership. While 40 percent of Latinos owned their homes, among West Africans only 5 percent were homeowners.<sup>8</sup> These differences in resources and constraints of the two groups do not necessarily bring about conflict. Contrasting resources and difficulties of the two groups in this context, my ethnographic work reveals, have worked to bring the two groups closer and created mediating spaces to renegotiate interimmigrant relationships. We now turn to a fuller explanation of this process.

An important element in understanding the differences between Beardstown Latinos and West Africans is their immigration status. Most Beardstown West Africans arrive with legal residency gained through a lottery visa (LV).<sup>9</sup> The LV requires applicants to have high-school graduation. This partially accounts for the higher general education level among Africans. Travel costs further restrict the options for Africans. Visa applications and travel costs add up to about \$4,000 per person, more than six times the annual income of a well-paid civil servant in Togo. In many cases, this made the cost of bringing family members to the US prohibitive, especially young children requiring childcare. Moreover, once they arrive they have to start repayment of the huge debt they left behind with friends, family, or loan sharks in order to finance their trip to the US. By contrast, Latino immigrants have far fewer financial and immigration constraints. The physical proximity to Latin America and the shared border between the US and Mexico makes it more likely for Latino families to be able to bring in not only their children but also their extended families.

Moreover, the differing histories of recent migration for the two groups are relevant. Many Mexicans in Beardstown are the third generation of immigrants in their families. Thus, they have a stronger network of information and support. West Africans' history of immigration in the US began fairly recently, resulting in more limited networks and knowledge of techniques of surviving in the US. Also, because Africans in Beardstown are often the only member of their family in the US, their burden of sending money back home is much greater. In those terms the financial depth found among West African immigrants in Beardstown is less than that found among Mexican immigrants. The translocal resources that Mexican immigrants can mobilize within the US, in terms of information, knowledge, confidence, as well as finance are critical to their capacity to buy homes. These are resources most of the West Africans sorely lack to become homeowners.

Bearing these differences in mind, I now turn to the ways in which these two groupings have found complementary resources and constraints to claim this former sundown town and make it their new home. But before I do that I need to highlight two critical moments in the complex racial history of the Beardstown area: (a) the violent events of 1996, and (b) the initially divided residential geography among the immigrant labor force.

Beardstown has a brutal racialized history where blacks were kept out of town before dark by use and threat of violence<sup>10</sup> – a phenomenon James Loewen has documented and coined as 'sundown towns' (2006). In this context the influx of immigrant workers in town did create much resentment and tension, the epicenter of which was marked by the 1996 shooting of a white local by a Mexican immigrant. In response, whites set alight a six-foot-tall cross in the plaza and burned the Mexican-owned establishment where the shooting took place to the ground. The day after the shooting the Ku Klux Klan marched through the town. One Mexican resident who was a child at the time recalled how scared he was during the days that followed the incident:

They [my brothers] didn't want me to leave the house. [...] [They] were telling me I couldn't go out, walk home or anything because they were worried that somebody would hurt us. Just the [*sic*] environment of fear. [...] Some people even saw them with their masks, and clothes, and they went around and put crosses, red crosses where the Mexicans lived. [...] That was kind of a threat or [to] show off that these are the houses we are marking that we know you live here, [...] and we are going to burn them down. That's what we thought they were going to do (Interviewee #49, 2008).

The chain of events and heightened fears of violence shook the local community enough to motivate certain individuals and organizations to respond positively to the rapid social transformation of the town. In particular, those who did not want to see racist brutality in their Beardstown because they knew it too well from their not-distant history took a stand and joined immigrants as local allies in support of their community's peaceful transformation.

The 1996 events were important both for catalyzing local and immigrant actors' efforts to negotiate an inclusive city, and for influencing the formation of a new racialized local geography. Hence, when Cargill started to recruit among West Africans in the early 2000s, the plant's Human Resources personnel offered the new West African recruits a rental list of availabilities in Rushville, a town 10 miles away. Like Beardstown, Rushville also had a history as a sundown town,<sup>11</sup> but African immigrants were steered by the plant to settle there to reduce risk of renewed upset among native-born locals who were still dealing with conflicting reactions to the arrival of Latino families to town. As one informant indicated, the plant managers did not want another explosion (Interviewee #6, 2006).

Directing West Africans to Rushville created a clearly divided residential geography among the plant's labor. African Americans working at the plant lived (and continue to live) in the larger towns with racially segregated neighborhoods, like Jacksonville, 30 miles away, or Springfield, 45 miles away. Latin Americans settled among native-born, white workers in Beardstown; and black West Africans settled in a third location, Rushville. Such a residentially divided workforce limited interactions among immigrant groups to the workplace.

Since 2007, however, to save transportation cost and time, a growing number of African immigrants have been moving from Rushville to Beardstown. This change of scene indeed has become possible by complementarities of Africans' and Latinos' needs, where Mexicans have become home owners and West Africans predominantly rent. With Diaz McConnell, I discuss the relative success of Spanish-speaking immigrants in becoming homeowners over a relatively short period of settlement in Beardstown (Diaz McConnell and Miraftab 2009). This is in part due to the greater affordability of housing in a small town, where one can buy a three-bedroom house for around \$40,000. It also has to do with a more favorable lending environment in the 1990s when Latino immigrants first arrived. Greater access to homeownership for Latinos was also a result of their extensive networks in the US, which provided them access to relevant information on the market. Latinos were therefore able to buy houses, fix them, and turn them into rental properties for which there was always demand,<sup>12</sup> especially from French-speaking Africans. On the other hand, West Africans show a lower rate of homeownership because they have a more recent history of migration to the US and to Beardstown, typically arriving in Beardstown heavily indebted and having a heavy burden of payment towards maintenance of children they have left behind. Moreover, being part of a more recent and thinner network of immigrants in the US they bear a heavier load of remittance supply to their social network back home. This has resulted in common interracial renting practices between Latino landlords and African tenants. As one of the Latino landlords, owner of three houses, explained, "I put my ad up in Spanish. If I don't find anyone, I put the ad in French. Last, I would put it in English" (interviewee #1 2008). Basically, rental housing that has become available through the first wave of immigrants is now able to serve the housing needs of the second wave of immigrants among Africans who were settled in Rushville.

Moreover, the fact that many Mexicans in Beardstown are there with their complete nuclear family or their extended family has become a resource for West Africans. The distinct local and translocal resources and immigration history of the two groups in this case has created a mediating space around child care. Mexicans are more able to bring in a family member from another state in the US or from across the border to help with child care. Within a larger Mexican extended family there is often one young or old female member who stays home to provide child care for other family members working at Cargill. Because West African newcomers seldom have their extended families with them in the US, they struggle to care for their newly born. Often the solution is child care with Mexican home-based providers. Here again the constraints and resources of the two groups converge to create a space of positive interaction outside the workplace. The synergy extends beyond mere convenience. There is a cultural convergence as well. One West African mother went so far as to respond to a Mexican caregiver's expression of affection and concern towards children by remarking: "they are like us" (Interviewee #66, 2009).

What child care has offered as a space for interracial relations among women, soccer has offered for men. Soccer leagues and fields have proven yet another critical means to claiming public space for diverse populations of Beardstown. On a Sunday afternoon, the visitors reaching Beardstown and westward on Highway 125, where once signs of racial hatred had been displayed,

encounter scenes that are unusual in the social landscape of the rural Midwest. At the very entrance to the town, weather permitting, one finds 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 founders and the players of the soccer league and its 11 multiracial teams revealed a struggle in which minorities asserted their right to play their sport of choice, and 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 at the time, used to play in private spaces like the players' backyards. Even though they tried to be publicly invisible, the interviewee recalled "the police cars driving back and forth on the street to check on us, [...] as if we were up to no good" (Interviewee #50, 2008). Then for several years they played soccer on abandoned lands around the town and behind the local school that were often covered with broken glass and trash. Once they had been kicked out of the field behind the school for construction reasons, they moved their games to the park district fields, which at the time housed baseball only. But the regular presence of enthusiastic soccer players and their families occupying the benches and the public park facilities, and the tireless efforts of the league president's negotiations 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 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 Latin American immigrants – with increasing numbers of Anglophone residents joining the teams.

Another area where immigrants have shown their presence is in the public schools. When enrollment of culturally and linguistically diverse students in Beardstown went from 1 in 1993 to 556 in 2006 (30 percent of all students),<sup>13</sup> the school response changed from offering English as a Second Language (ESL) to offering a bilingual program. By 2006 however the elementary school managed to push its inclusive response to the town's population change by adopting a Dual Language Program (DLP). DLP 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 instructions 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. Today Beardstown school district is the only rural school district among the 18 in the state that have adopted DLP and one of the few (335) districts nationwide that have implemented the Dual Language Program (Delany-Barmann and Paciotto, 2011)..

Initially the school district would only agree to adoption of DLP if there was parental consent for every participating child. Beardstown teachers then launched what they have called 'the teachers' movement' – a door-to-door campaign over the summer break to receive 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 the Central American school-community liaison, visited the family of every student in the elementary school and spent the hour or the evening it took to convince them of the value of multicultural education and the DLP.

For immigrants in Beardstown, housing, schools, or sports have 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), Africa Day in Rushville (since 2008), or the newly

instituted joint celebration of Cinco de Mayo in Beardstown's main plaza by Africans and Latinos are public events that boldly declare the new immigrants' right to the public spaces in this town. While the first Africa Day was indoors, subsequent celebrations took place in the town's public park, starting with a soccer match among West Africans and followed by West African music, dance, and food. The celebration of Mexican Independence Day in Beardstown, despite some resentment by locals, has been growing every year with greater and more diverse participation by 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. That same plaza in 1996 hosted a 6-foot-tall burning cross and Ku Klux Klan parade!

In short, the story of Beardstown is about a locally based multinational corporation bringing a diverse labor force to its plant in a former sundown town but residentially settling them separately, to stabilize community relations and to construct a sufficiently divided labor force. Diverse immigrants with differential needs, histories, and resources, however, renegotiated their interracial spatial relations in this company town outside the plant. They found complementarity in their possibilities and undermined divided residential geography through a range of mediating institutions and sites beyond the point of production. They have been able to create a notable presence in public space not only through residential arrangements in terms of mixed neighborhoods and interracial rental practices, but also in terms of recreation and sports activities that clearly assert immigrants' presence in the town's public spaces. The question I now turn to is the role of the local space. What aspects of forging these relationships could be attributed to the fact that they take place within a space that on one hand is highly controlled by a single employer (Cargill Meat Solutions Inc.) and on the other is small, with a history of brutal racialized history of blacks' exclusion. I discuss these further in the next section.

### **<A>Small-Town Transnationalism**

Decades of superb research on globalization has offered us important insights into the relationships between global processes and urban formations. The best of this work has shifted the level of analysis from global to local and examined the making and working of globalization at the city scale – in localities that serve as centers of command and control, also dubbed 'global cities'. Hallmarked by the earlier work of Friedmann and Wolff (1982), this scholarship has in various ways stressed the ways in which global processes that have changed the organization of work have also altered the social order of cities. For Sassen (1991), the shift from an industrial to a service-based economy in the global North has brought an emerging urban society that is socially and spatially fragmented and highly polarized. She argues the existence of a 'dual-city', an urban scenario resulting from globalization processes that do not foster the expansion of a middle class. Marcuse and van Kempen (2000) stress that globalization shapes cities into what they call a 'quartered city' – a city form that is the result of the arrangement among specific types of neighborhoods (quarters) for specific social groups that are spatially quartered by their income, race, and/or ethnicity. Graham and Marvin (2001) push this conceptualization further by looking at the unequal infrastructure development in cities – the hidden force they argue contributes to a splintering of urban spaces with high levels of concentration and fragmentation. Castells (2005) puts it in terms of a double movement: while urban dwellers might have a greater experience of inclusion in transterritorial terms (e.g. transnational families and networks), they experience greater

exclusion in their local context by spatial residential differentiation. In sum, this literature stresses the formation of a “fragmented metropolis” whereby urban dwellers are increasingly separated and polarized both in social and spatial terms (Castells 2005: 52).

Although the global cities scholarship has been powerful in explaining the increased demographic diversity and the local social spatial dynamics of globalization in such cities, it has also created vast areas of dark or blind spots. Here I borrow from Sassen (2011)<sup>14</sup> who, reflecting on the power of her own work in respect to global cities, reminds us how the more powerful the light shed on one point, the harder it is to see what is outside the circle of light. Although existing scholarship with a prominent focus on transnational movement of capital and labor through global centers of command and control has offered important explanations about the working and making of globalization in global metropolitan regions, it has also made it more difficult to see what lies outside the brightness of the global cities focal point. This process ultimately renders small towns as dark holes of nothingness. Blinded by global cities theorization, small towns of the Midwest are conceptualized as a series of absences (absence of the metropolitan) – as spaces “left behind by globalization [...] simply withering away” (Longworth 2008: 103).

The main point of this chapter is precisely to bring light to these spaces outside the focal point and circle of light in the dominant literature of globalization and cities – to see the intricacies and complexities of what lies outside the global cities and large metropolitan centers that traditionally have received immigrants and have been the hub of interracial, inter-immigrant social and spatial negotiations to assert a right to the city. Bringing to light the micro-realities of small but intensely transnational spaces like Beardstown, I hope to offer insights that help us better understand the relationship between transnationalism and urbanism.

If we take seriously the notion that social and spatial are mutually constitutive, we are bound to ask, what are the opportunities and constraints of small-town transnationalism? How could those vary from what is theorized in terms of large metropolitan areas dubbed global cities? The writing of Henri Lefebvre (1991) and Doreen Massey (1994) among other scholars have helped us understand the spatial construction of the social and the social construction of the spatial. The inseparable relationships between social and spatial instruct us to ask, how are the social relationships discussed above in the case study of Beardstown spatially constituted at local and translocal levels? That means not only how the restructuring of the global economy and labor-capital relations have transformed Beardstown but also, in return, how have the spatial relationships that define Beardstown shaped the specific social relationships that have emerged in Beardstown today? Namely, what aspects of the relationships discussed above were facilitated by the fact that they took place in a specific location with specific constraints, limitations, opportunities, and resources?

To answer this question requires an analytic framework that pushes us beyond the meta-narratives of the global as an abstract force that glides over localities smoothly and uncontested (Mittleman 2000). Namely a depiction of globalization processes that does not render “place powerless” and “power placeless” (Burawoy et al. 2000: 2), where localities passively receive global forces as mere sites of global enactment (Mahler 1998: 64). This alternative analytic lens helps us see that transnational practices are not abstractly located ‘in between’ national territories and are not deterritorialized in the sense of being neither here nor there (Guarnizo and Smith 1998: 11). They rather take place within a certain context and locality that imposes certain constraints and opportunities (ibid.).

Seeking to understand how the local indeed constitutes the global, I find the approach articulated by Guarnizo and Smith (1998) as transnationalism from below particularly helpful. This conceptualization grew out of a critique of both the globalization literature of the 1990s and the dominant paradigm in urban studies that privileged the political and economic logic of the state and capital over social actors and forces from below (Smith 2001; Guarnizo and Smith 1998). Their theorization stresses the importance of local actors' everyday practices for constituting the global processes. Transnationalism from below is an agency-oriented perspective (Smith 2001: 182–183) which pays attention to how 'globalization' is socially constructed by historically specific and spatially situated social actors. To understand global processes, it stresses the need to acquire a historicized and contextualized understanding of local communities and the transnational practice of immigrants. Their ethnographic approach emphasizes the importance of the local not only as a passive context or container for the working of global forces. It allows us to move beyond the kind of analysis that Gillian Hart (2006) critiques as the impact model.

In the Beardstown project I grounded my understanding of the construction of the global in the experience of specific populations in a specific locality utilizing particular local and translocal networks. I focused not only on the logic of capital and how that is served through the local plant's recruitment practices, but also on the logic of local space and how it may facilitate or hinder certain interactions created by and among local actors outside the work relations and workplace. I understand the local space not as a simple container of the global but as a constituent in the making of the globalization and in that sense am acutely aware of the "constraints and opportunities that contextuality imposes" (Guarnizo and Smith 1998: 11).

In Beardstown this context comes with certain political constraints that are quite distinct from large cities where anonymity is an option. Like any other place it has its own specificities that we need to consider when explaining the transnational phenomena. We described Beardstown as a blue-collar company town, and moreover, as a former sundown town where many of the white residents may still have longed for the old arrangements whereby non-whites could work but not live in the town. This context has imposed its own opportunities and constraints to the kind of locally created transnational space.

Unlike large metropolitan areas, in small towns the possibility of anonymity is limited. Combined with dependence on a single employer, this imposes an enormous constraint on the kind of political or collective action that can emerge. Here no collective action takes place outside the watchful eyes of the corporation as the only employer in town. A public protest or even a critical remark might put a person's job at risk or jeopardize the chances of employment for their family. Under the radar, however, immigrants have been building interimmigrant solidarity, and created a bold public presence beyond the workplace. They have asserted their right to be in this town and appropriated the space not through metropolitan-style large-scale marches but through patient work, to use Appadurai's words (2001), or non-collective movements, to use Bayat's terminology (2010). Although in this town there is much that residents cannot do in terms of collective or militant action to assert their right to the city and to appropriate local space, there is also much that they have done to assert their right to make this former sundown town their new home.

Beardstown's status as a small town has helped make possible interracial rental practices and mixed residential arrangements, we observed. Unlike big cities that have racially and ethnically segregated neighborhoods that receive new immigrants upon arrival, Beardstown, like most small towns with homogeneous populations, did not have or need to enforce the zoning or other land use

regulations that created and institutionalized ethnicized or racialized residential areas. Indeed, because they have had a sundown town history, no internal zoning regulation had developed: non-whites, one might say, were ‘zoned out’ of the entire town. 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. The fact that immigrants in a short time were able to become homeowners and landlords further strengthened the possibilities for such diverse populations to live side by side (for detailed discussion see Diaz McConnell and Miraftab 2009).

Similarly, in terms of the education system, the spatial attributes of Beardstown played a role in the emergence of the DLP. What motivated the local teachers, they said, was “seeing the school yard tensions amongst students reflecting the classroom segregation between linguistically different student bodies. Something had to be done” (Interviewee #30, 2008). But what facilitated the teacher’s ability to achieve this was their determination as well as the manageable size of the town to conduct a door-to-door campaign. Unlike in New York or Philadelphia, it was actually feasible to spend an hour or an entire evening with each parent of a school-aged child. Helpful in this regard has also been the fact that ambivalent or opposing parents indeed did not have the easy option of moving their children to a school in the adjacent residential block – a process that often facilitates segregated public-school enrollments in large cities. These are aspects of a small town that indeed offer opportunities for inclusive spatial integration. The small size of this town and limited service choices available to residents contributed to the development of interimmigrant relationships – e.g. through shared child care or sports activities and soccer fields. While within the plants workers might have been set against each other, within the town they live side by side, their children go to the same school, their little ones are cared for by the same child care providers, and they play on the same soccer teams.

Highlighting these observations is not to celebrate racist local histories of small towns like Beardstown or the lack of pre-existing diversity. The point, however, is only to stress the need to understand small towns in their own right. They are intensely complex in the opportunities and constraints they present to the conceptualization of globalization.

Many aspects of social and spatial relationships that shape transnational urban processes in Beardstown are different from those documented by the vast literature on global cities. This company town that is the local site of intense global capital accumulation is also, I argue, a location of alternative formations of transnational urbanism. But we can only recognize those complexities by which local actors achieve a dignified life, and the unassuming forms of their agency, if we study globalization ethnographically, grounded in the everyday practices of people. Measured against the theorized actions that occur in metropolitan areas, the emerging transnational spaces of the heartland may appear simply as spaces of despair and victimization of newcomers. But by studying small towns in their own right we can register the alternative forms of agency that immigrants and their local allies may use.

In conclusion, the story of Beardstown helps us to reflect on the importance of locality for the kind of transnational practices and urbanism that emerge in a place. Locality and the varied resources, networks, and racialized histories of local actors situated in a specific space do make a difference in the experience of immigrants and their transnational practices. The main contribution I hope this chapter makes is bringing to focus the experience of small towns, an experience too often omitted in discussion of transnationalism and urbanism.

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### <A>Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Beardstown population changed from 6,222 in 1970 to 6,338 in 1980, dropped to 5,270 in 1990 and then following immigration influx increased to 5,766 in 2000 and 6,123 in 2010. In the last decade (2000 to 2010) Cass County, where Beardstown is located, shows a population loss of - 0.39 percent but Beardstown shows a gain by 6.19 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1990, 2000 and 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Data constructed from Local Employment Dynamics in Census Bureau,  
<http://lehd.did.census.gov/led/datatools/qwiapp.html>, Accessed 20th January 2012

<sup>3</sup> Cargill workers, for example, have an injury rate of 20 per 100 full-time workers, nearly two and a half times the national average for US manufacturing (US Bureau of Labor Statistics 2001 cited in Human Rights Watch 2004:55-56). Moreover, the average wage of \$11.47 per hour at the Beardstown plant is 30 percent lower than the national average wage of \$16.77 for all US manufacturing jobs (*ibid.*).

<sup>4</sup> 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 Latino 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

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newspaper articles from Beardstown and from nearby metropolitan areas; and analysis of census data. The 2006 fieldwork for this project was conducted in collaboration with Dr. Diaz McConnell as reflected in our joint publications in 2008 and 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Mail-in surveys conducted in collaboration with the Illinois Institute of Rural Affairs and the University of Illinois Extension Office did not have a large return for immigrants. They were therefore followed up by door-to door surveys among French- and Spanish-speaking immigrants, the results of which are shared below.

<sup>6</sup> The corresponding numbers for Latinos and Africans are respectively 6 of 43 respondents and 32 of 59.

<sup>7</sup> The corresponding numbers for Africans and Latinos are respectively 32 of 38 respondents and 11 of 33.

<sup>8</sup> The corresponding numbers of homeownership for Latinos and Africans are respectively 18 of 45 respondents and 1 of 20.

<sup>9</sup> Under Section 131 of the Immigration Act of 1990 that amended the terms of Section 203(c) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, a new class of immigrants known as ‘diversity immigrants’ (DV immigrants) was created, and the Act makes available 50,000 permanent resident visas annually to persons from countries with low rates of immigration to the US. However, the inauguration of the diversity visa lottery (DV lottery) took place in 1995. According to Section 131 of the Immigration Act of 1990, the diversity visa program is aimed at increasing diversity in the US. This objective is achieved by encouraging immigration from countries, which, the department of state has shown over the last five years, have had low immigration to the US (Department of State cited in Lombela 2008: 5).

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<sup>10</sup> Elsewhere I discuss in detail the racialized history of Beardstown as a sundown town (see Mirafatab 2009).

<sup>11</sup> For a listing of sundown towns, see <http://sundown.afro.illinois.edu/content.php?file=sundowntowns-whitemap.html> (accessed 20th January 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Of all the responded mailed-in surveys, 56 percent declared rental housing as a need in the local area. This was a total of 290 out of 447 responses, including 37 out of 40 in Spanish and 3 out of 4 in French.

<sup>13</sup> Pre-K to grade 12 ‘culturally and linguistically diverse’ (CLD) students are as follows: 1993=1; 1994=5; 1997=85; 2000=290; 2006=552. In 2006, the School District’s total number of students equaled 1,376; the School District’s total ‘free and reduced lunch’ students equaled 79 percent; CLD students as a percentage of all students equaled 30 percent; CLD students as a percentage of kindergartners equaled 45 percent.

<sup>14</sup> Saskia Sassen, "When existing assemblages of territory, authority, and rights become unstable". The Annual Florian Znaniecki Lecture, Department of Sociology, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. 5<sup>th</sup> May 2011.