

Faraway Intimate Development

FARANAK MIRAFTAB

INTRODUCTION

The two-and-a-half-hour journey from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign campus to Beardstown, Illinois, crosses a typical Midwest landscape: long stretches of corn fields punctuated by road signs in defense of the right to bear arms and a number of small, sleepy towns. Some look abandoned, with boarded-up shops and fading walls advertising bargains from decades past. The few retail stores still operating predominantly find their clientele among those left behind by younger generations who have departed in search of jobs, excitement, and the promise of a better life in a big city. Whites predominate in this part of the country, a region where many towns once had ordinances that kept blacks out after sunset. A few white elders even recall a childhood trip with their parents to nearby towns to watch lynchings. But Beardstown, with an approximate population of 6,213, is different.¹ The downtown area has no boarded-up shops, no fading advertisements for long-dead businesses. A few shiny new ads, albeit in Spanish, grace a number of storefronts. Remodeled and improved houses add spark to the neighborhoods. On a nice summer weekend, garage sale signs appear in three languages: English, Spanish, and French. Although Beardstown shares a similar racist history with its neighboring towns, on its sidewalks French-speaking West Africans in traditional attire mingle with fellow residents from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Central America, as well as with native-born English speakers of European origin. Family-owned restaurants offer Mexican, Dominican, and Cuban fare. Local grocers' stock ranges from tortillas to cassava.

Arriving in Beardstown almost feels like crossing a border to a new land, far away from the rural Midwest. A further dimension to this surprising demography is that unlike large U.S. cities, here there is no Latino, Anglo, or African neighborhood, no rich or poor neighborhood. The two- and three-story houses of the affluent sit unashamedly next to newly remodeled smaller homes occupied by immigrants. Trailer homes complete the mix, providing accommodation for a cross-section of the low-income sector of the population. In the town's integrated elementary school, the curriculum is delivered through the Dual Language Program—meaning that all students, including children living in English-speaking families, receive half of their curriculum in Spanish.

The catalyst behind the diversification and vitality of Beardstown is a meatpacking plant that over the past two decades has recruited a workforce from among minorities and immigrants. The vast body of literature on the global restructuring of the meat industry has long established the logic of capital in this process. By relocation to rural areas, industry moves away from urban strongholds of unions and draws closer to raw materials (in this case, hog farms). It also is better able to vertically integrate (production of animals and their feed, slaughtering of animals, processing and packing of meat) and take advantage of economically distressed rural municipalities offering tax abatements along with lax labor and environmental regulations. In the past two decades, the recruitment of an immigrant and minority labor force to plants in small towns has further enhanced a rural industrialization strategy by creating a segmented labor market, pitting one group of workers against the other.

While an analytical focus on global restructuring of production helps explain some aspects of the rapid social and demographic transformation of this town, parts of this complex process remain unclarified. It may offer insights into the logic of capital in relocating production sites and wooing an immigrant labor force but it falls short in explaining why immigrants take these jobs and what kind of processes and practices make such jobs a “viable” option for them.

To account for these shortcomings, I have adopted the method of global ethnography, an approach that seeks to reveal that “what we understand to be ‘global’ is itself constituted within the local; it emanates from very specific agencies, institutions and organizations whose processes can be observed first-hand.”² Along with this, I employ a Lefebvrian conception of place that stresses the relational constitution of a specific place in the production of global processes. A multi-sited ethnographic inquiry expands the physical sites of my ethnographic study beyond the territorial constraint of Beardstown to other locations across the globe intimately connected with this town.

In the spirit of global ethnography, I looked at historical, political, economic, and cultural forces, as well as immigrants' everyday practices and imaginations, that connect these local communities to each other to construct the global. I combined several years of fieldwork in Beardstown (beginning in 2004) with visits to Tejaro, Michoacán, Mexico in 2008 and to Lomé, capital city of Togo, in 2010. In Beardstown, I interviewed native-born residents, new immigrants, authorities, and members of nonprofit groups and civic associations.³ In Mexico and Togo, I interviewed the relatives of Beardstown immigrants, returned immigrants, immigrants to be, and other key informants.

Using a multisited ethnographic approach unveils the interrelated global realities that shape Beardstown's processes of social and spatial transformation. These transnational processes are not merely a global restructuring of production. They are also restructurings that occur in the sphere of social reproduction. They involve countervailing processes that rely on local communities, neighbors, and households, and yet draw on translocal and transnational social, cultural, and economic resources of families and friends. I call this a "global restructuring of social reproduction." Thus, the processes of local development in Beardstown need to be understood in conjunction with processes taking place in other global locations.

In the present research, I employ an inclusive definition of social reproduction based on the notion that immigrants decide to migrate not simply to reproduce their bodies and sell their labor power for a wage. Immigrants' "internationalization strategies" also take into account the promises of migration in social and cultural terms—nonmaterial factors, such as identity formation and the imagination of futures. Construction of immigrants' identity, dignity, and honor, plus their possibilities in fulfilling their social and cultural obligations, and their hope for a better future, all contribute to the "viability" of their options to go to work in places like Beardstown.

BEARDSTOWN, ILLINOIS

While most of the neighboring towns lost between five and eighteen percent of their population between 1990 and 2010, Beardstown grew by nearly eighteen percent.⁴ Beardstown's striking difference from other towns in Cass County also resonates in terms of ethnoracial diversity. In 1990, less than one percent of Cass County residents identified as either Hispanic, Latino, or black.⁵ By 2010, the number of Hispanic, Latino, or black residents of the County swelled to nearly twenty percent. But the transformation extends much deeper than mere census statistics. Life is qualitatively different than it was fifteen or twenty years ago. Perhaps the transformation in schools has been most dramatic. In 1990, Beardstown School District had a total enrollment of 1,717, with twenty-five students, identified as Hispanic

and none identified as black. By 2000, fourteen percent of students within the district identified as Hispanic and 0.7 percent of students identified as black. By 2009, nearly thirty-five percent of the student body was composed of Hispanic students, while the black population increased to more than two percent. More than five percent of students were identified as multiracial. With an enrollment increase within the district of almost twenty percent from 2000 to 2009, these new students also have prompted the allocation of greater resources to the district, including the building of a new elementary school and the expansion of curriculum. Most importantly, the diverse student body of the school is recognized and supported by district's adoption of a Dual Language Program.⁶

Moreover, Beardstown has a relative healthy housing market with racially integrated neighborhoods. Between 1990 and 2000 residential vacancies in Beardstown decreased by more than seven percent, at the same time as the number of new dwelling units increased by two percent. My 2009 housing survey in Beardstown conducted with the Illinois Institute of Rural Affairs and the University of Illinois Extension Office, indicated eighty-eight percent home-ownership among native-born residents and forty percent among Spanish-speaking immigrants. The residential neighborhoods in Beardstown today are not ethnically or racially segregated. Landlords renting across white/nonwhite and Latino/African lines are common and all blocks are relatively mixed in terms of racial, ethnic, and linguistic groups. Calculating from 2000 census data, for example, Diaz McConnell and I⁷ found that White-Hispanic Index of dissimilarity for Beardstown is lower than that for major metropolitan areas like New York, Los Angeles-Long Beach, or Chicago.

Such demographic changes and revitalization are in part due to Beardstown's connection to the global restructuring of the meat industry. This point is documented in other Midwestern towns as well. In 1967 Oscar Mayer opened a meatpacking plant in Beardstown. The company viewed Beardstown as a site with an ideal location: at the intersection of the Illinois River and the railroad, with proximity to farms raising hogs and producing animal feed. Following a fierce and long collective bargaining process in the 1980s, Oscar Mayer shut down the Beardstown plant. This decision not only outraged its unionized workforce but also deprived Beardstown of its largest employer, causing widespread consternation among the local population.⁸ Taking advantage of this anxiety, Cargill purchased the old Oscar Mayer plant and began operating in 1987. The enticement package from local authorities included a twenty-year "Enterprise Zone" tax abatement and a state wage subsidy to the tune of \$125,000 for retraining the displaced local labor force. The reopened plant shed an experienced, predominantly white, and unionized labor for less experienced workers who earned \$6.50 an

hour instead of the \$8.75 previously paid. The reduced wages, along with the increased work speed and injuries that came with industrial restructuring, made these jobs less attractive for most white skilled workers. By the early 1990s, the turnover rate at the Beardstown plant was presenting a growing concern. To address its serious labor turnover problem, Cargill shifted to translocal and transnational labor recruitment. The company sent a team of mobile recruiters to towns on both sides of the Mexican border. This brought the first wave of Mexican workers. Since that time, recruitment of Mexican workers has continued through workers' social networks and a bonus system rewarding employees who mobilize a new hire. A similar mechanism ensued among French-speaking Africans. The first group was recruited via a few African workers who found their way to Beardstown from another meat processing plant in the Quad Cities.⁹ The flow continued via the bonus system¹⁰ noted above, a strategy also documented in other meatpacking towns. In 2007, after an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raid apprehended a number of undocumented Latinos, Cargill shifted its strategy to searching for legal minorities. As a result, the company sent mobile recruitment teams to San Jose, Puerto Rico, and little Havana, Florida, to lure Cuban and Puerto Rican workers. All told, this translocal recruitment among minorities and a more vulnerable labor force contributed to lowering Cargill's labor turnover rate from close to seventy-seven percent in 1990 to fifty-two percent in 2008.

For the original white residents, this recent process of change is effectively emigration *in situ*. Without having moved an inch, they feel they have moved across borders to a different place: Their neighbors on each side are now people of cultural, racial, and linguistic origins different from their own. Their children come home with homework in a language they do not know (Spanish); their grocery stores carry previously unheard of food items; and at least two or three times a year they see their entire downtown plaza and surrounding streets taken over by Mexican parades bearing a flag other than the only two that ever waved in their town: the Stars and Stripes and the Confederate cross.

This has not prompted simply a white backlash. Rather, the original white residents' reaction to this process of transformation is complex, contested, contradictory, and volatile. In reaction to the new immigrants' arrival, some locals burned a cross and participated in a KKK march in 1996. Others took a different track, mobilizing in support of immigrant newcomers and welcoming the diversity and new dimensions of economic livelihood. This more open approach led to the formation of Beardstown United, a group that included members of the clergy and Chamber of Commerce.

Perhaps the position of the town's mayor best captures this complex relationship. As of this writing, Bob Walter, a former union organizer and Oscar

Mayer worker, is in his fourth term as mayor. While an outspoken opponent of U.S. immigration policy and immigrants' arrival in Beardstown, he is also a broker of deals for Cargill to keep the company in town. These include agreeing to Cargill's proposal to make payment in lieu of tax when the company disputed its 2007 taxable asset value. This settlement not only handed Cargill almost a million dollars in tax cuts but also allowed the company to use the payment as leverage for creation of patronage within local institutions.

TEJARO, MICHOACÁN, MEXICO

Of the 2,000 or more Latino immigrants who live in Beardstown, a large number come from Tejaro, a rural town of 3,716 in the highlands of Michoacán, the Mexican state with the highest export of immigrant labor to the United States and the highest level of remittances received. In Tejaro, as one resident declared, there is no house or land not purchased with money earned in El Norte—that is, the United States.

My first journey to Tejaro revealed the outcomes of this process. After traveling on a twisting and turning dirt road that took us through villages notorious for their drug activities, we arrived in a quiet town that almost seemed abandoned. While unemployment and absentee home ownership were rife, an astonishing set of public works projects were in place or in progress: nicely paved roads, and newly installed sewage and water lines. Recently built or improved houses lined residential streets. Most of these were built by and/or for immigrants abroad and stand vacant. As one of the residents said, "I feel strange because I have houses next to me but I don't have neighbors. I have no one to ask for a cup of sugar or for a helping hand or to converse with. They are all gone." In some cases, immigrants invite friends or relatives to occupy their houses as guest residents simply to avoid vandalization.

I learned from the public works project labor force that remittances from places like Beardstown funded much of the infrastructure improvement. Typically, the municipality pays half and residents pay the other half. Each homeowner pays for the infrastructure costs in front of their lot. The share of those who cannot pay is picked up by others in the street. Effectively this means immigrants abroad pay not only for their own share of infrastructure costs but also subsidize neighbors of less economic means.

In Tejaro, like the rest of the state, immigration to the United States is not a new phenomenon. The earliest wave was at the turn of the twentieth century to build the railroad, pick sugar beets, or work at auto factories in Detroit or meat-packing plants in Chicago. The second wave was facilitated by the *bracero* program, an agreement between the governments of the United States and Mexico, which facilitated shipment of more than four million young and healthy Mexican men of working age to the United States to save the agricultural production during World War II.

The North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) fueled the most recent wave of emigration from Tejaro, particularly the section of the agreement that allowed subsidized farmers in the U.S. Midwest to compete in a free market with Mexican farmers, whose subsidies had been cut or diminished as part of the same agreement. Señor Fernández, a local *ejidator*¹¹ and father of one of the Beardstown immigrants, remembered the effects of the 1994 NAFTA agreement on production of milk and dairies. “In Tejaro we used to have a huge production of milk, lots of milk! I had cows that would give me up to thirty liters a day. . . . When Salinas was the president, the price of milk went down, because the brother of the President was bringing in dried milk which sold much cheaper. . . . We wanted to sell the cows’ milk at two pesos when the powdered milk was at 1.20 pesos. Everybody started buying that kind of milk. We drove around in our pickup trucks, [but] no one would buy anything. What was left for us to do?” So, Mr. Fernández explains, he had to send two of his sons North—to Beardstown. Similarly, he and other Tejaro residents talked about the diminishing agricultural production in an area no longer able to compete with imported items. Mr. Fernández noted that seven pyramid-looking silos used to store corn in earlier years were empty. “There is a proposal to use them for an art project and use them for murals. I say that is good,” Mr. Fernández added. “At least that would put them into some use!”

One Beardstown immigrant captured this economic devastation in referring to Tejaro: “allí te mueres de hambre! No hay nada!” (“There you die of hunger! There is nothing!”) Another Tejaro resident described a local high school as a border crossing training ground. He spoke of how in this school the youth learned which coyotes to use and which to avoid.

A local youth who served as a waiter in a nearby three-star hotel exclaimed, “We’ll take the risk to cross. It is simple, I earn one dollar an hour, that is eight dollars a day. If I cross the border I’ll get that for every hour. So I’ll take the risk and if I make it, I work dangerous and difficult jobs. I don’t care, I know I’ll come back and will be set for the rest of my life.” The fact that youth like this waiter imagine a bright future following immigration North does not mean that this is necessarily what they will get. This imagination has a power of its own that fuels their internationalization strategies.

Magnolia, for example, after five years of work at Cargill in the deboning section of the plant, came back not with a fortune but with a U.S. \$10,000 settlement for an on-the-job shoulder injury. She spoke to me about her injury and the price tag that the corporation attaches to each injured body part. She explained the dark irony of how a shoulder that required laser surgery was the point of “envy” for her Mexican coworkers, who thought she was set for life with her settlement. After the settlement, she moved back home to Mexico, expecting to be able to make a convenient living with that amount of settlement. She laughed at the envy of her coworkers, explaining how she

used the settlement money to help finance buying a truck, which was stolen a month after she arrived in town. She also shared costs with her father-in-law to set up a hair salon where she now worked. But business was slow and she was thinking of emigrating again.

Not all returned workers were like Magnolia, however. For example, Mr. and Mrs. Garcia were among the first families to move to Beardstown. After twelve years of work at the Cargill plant, they were ready to quit and enjoy the fruits of their labor. They had built their house and contributed to the paving of the road that passed in front. Each of their children also had managed to buy a piece of land close to them. But with their children and grandchildren in Beardstown, they were ambivalent about staying in Tejaro. Plus, at last they were about to receive their Green Cards. They were thinking of going back to the United States and letting relatives look after the house.

One day I met a group of ten men in the town plaza. They looked to be in their fifties and sixties. I asked them if they had worked in the United States. All except one responded affirmatively. Others made fun of the one odd case joking that “it’s because he is a *cacique*” (affluent, often politically corrupt landowners). These men had spent their most productive years in San Diego, Chicago, Nevada, Los Angeles, and Arizona. Two or three said they needed medical care and so came back. The others said they ran out of work. Their discussion echoed the thoughts of the cohort of high school boys who had envisioned their trip North in the school courtyard.

LOMÉ, MARITIME, TOGO

Of the roughly 350 West and Central Africans living in Beardstown and its adjacent town Rushville (henceforth called the “Beardstown area”), the majority come from Togo, a former French colony. Togo is a long stretch of land bordered by the Atlantic Ocean, Burkina Faso, Benin, and Ghana.

Getting off the airplane at Lomé International Airport on an evening flight is like walking into a sauna. The thick air stands still, no breeze, smothering humidity. The city is completely dark; public street lighting is a luxury saved for a few strategic spots in the city. The lights from vehicles and the fast moving *zamijs* (motorbike taxis) that move passengers around the town are the only illumination offered to the streetscapes. In the 2010 fiscal year, the annual budget for all of Lomé came to U.S. \$850,000—an amount considerably less than the annual earnings of the football coach at my university. This meager budget translates into no public health care, close to nonexistent public education, and rare instances of paved roads or ongoing infrastructure projects.

Some of Togo’s recent decline has historical roots. During the Cold War, many West African countries favored or flirted with the Soviet Union. By contrast, Togo was chosen by the nonsocialist countries as a base. Former

dictator General Gnassingbe Eyedema regularly hosted meetings of Western capitalist states for the region. By the early 1990s, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the geopolitical importance of Togo diminished. The dictator's once-ignored political abuses were no longer overlooked. The aid flows to Togo from the United States and European Union diminished as Western embassies increasingly supported multiparty movements that had spread rapidly in the continent.¹² In this New World Order, the dictator survived but "the Togolese state nevertheless became a shadow of its former self."¹³

A combination of political and economic changes at the global and national levels brought the country to an astonishing state of austerity with little hope for job-seeking adults. In 2010, Togo ranked seventeenth lowest in *per capita* income of the world's 218 nations. Once a place where Ghanaians used to come for passing a good time, today the situation has reversed. The Ghanaian capital, Accra, now marks the good life beyond Togo's borders. When asked what motivated Togolese to travel to the United States, one interviewee in Lomé told me: "I have been to Accra and I have seen what good life and a nice city could be like!"

The Togolese immigrants find their way to the United States through a range of legal and semi legal visa acquisition strategies. In Beardstown, they almost all arrive through legal residency and work permission acquired by Diversity, or in popular reference "lotto" or "lottery Visa." The Togolese acquisition of Diversity Visas involves a labyrinth of translocal practices and networks that the work of the anthropologist Charles Piot in Lomé and mine in Beardstown document. This is a quota system established by the U.S. State Department in 1991 and implemented in 1995 to grant U.S. residency to the underrepresented populations. Between 1999 and 2008 alone, about 185,900 Africans migrated to the United States through this visa category; that is an average annual number of 18,594.¹⁴

Through lottery visas, many highly educated young men and women leave Togo for manual jobs in the United States that they view as a stepping-stone to a better life for themselves and their children. To afford this emigration, many lottery visa winners leave part of their immediate family behind, typically the youngest of their children. Such a decision is not hard to understand. Costs for travel by an entire family are prohibitive. A public school teacher in Lomé earns U.S. \$25 per month; staff of a foreign-funded NGO, who are better off than private sector employees, earn U.S. \$250 per month. The application process plus the air ticket requires a minimum of U.S. \$4,000 per person. Such costs explain why at least one third of West Africans we surveyed in Beardstown had left some of their children back home. Lottery visa winners, after successful completion of their interviews at the U.S. embassy, have six months to process paperwork that must indicate a destination and include a support letter from a resident in the United States. Destinations

like Beardstown, with a guaranteed year-round employment, hold a special attraction. While the hope is that accumulated earnings in the United States will fund the emigration of the rest of the family, on arrival these immigrants often become tied to Cargill. With typically limited English and massive debts from the original journey, saving money quickly becomes a distant dream.

The lottery visa requires either a high school education or skills in specific fields listed on the U.S. Labor Department job list, but in practice, those with the minimum of a high school diploma (the baccalaureate) most often succeed in this process. Overall, in 2009, thirty-six percent of international emigrants leaving Togo came from the highest education group, many with tertiary education. In our survey of West and Central Africans in Beardstown, fifty-four percent of respondents had college or higher education, among them were engineers, sociology professors, a human rights lawyer, and a veterinarian.

Many of these immigrants did not know what to expect of Beardstown. In a focus group I held in the Beardstown area in 2008, for example, a recent African arrival stated: "I thought here is the El Dorado." Another interviewee said: "When I arrived it was dark and I woke up in the morning, looked out the window and thought my friend has brought me to a wrong place. This could not be America. I don't know what I thought. I just knew this can't be it. There must be a mistake."

To make matters more difficult, many of the Togolese had never done manual work. In a 2008 community forum in Rushville, a male immigrant who had left his wife and young child behind in Lomé described his first day of work at Cargill as an encounter with the "beast." Experiencing the big space, fast-moving machines, the sounds, the smell, the drop in room temperature, he remarked, "I prayed and asked my God to help me. To help me be strong, be strong enough to make it through this work for my wife and my child. I must do this! God give me the strength to do it!"

Despite the difficulties with working in Beardstown, a complex set of relationships keeps the Togolese workers in the Cargill plant. Kossi, for example, who has a master's degree, confided that he regretted having left his professional position in Lomé to come to the United States and if he could have he would have gone back. Prompted to explain, he detailed how upon his return he would be ridiculed by all—"by the same ones who flash me and flash me⁵ and always ask me for contributions for this and for that, the same ones will make fun of me if I go back without enough money." "Enough money" is what it takes to buy a piece of land or a home in Lomé, fund feasts and other cultural rituals in the ancestral village, and build a village home if one does not have one. While he might not be expected to afford such expenditures if he was still in Lomé, his mere presence in the United States creates new expectations that should he fail to fulfill will bring shame to his family.

His uncle on the other side of the ocean, whom I talked to in Lomé, confirmed Kossi's assertion about the shame that would result for the family if the immigrant was to come back without enough money to perform the acts of a "homecoming king." In an odd way, to be a good Togolese Ewè, the ethnic group to which Mr. Kossi belongs, he has to remain in Beardstown.

The complexities of social obligations and cultural expectations that tie immigrants to Beardstown are further evidence of what Mr. Kofi explains as people's policy for social safety. Relatives and friends who chipped in and emptied their small jars of savings to help a lottery visa winner go overseas weave fabrics of obligations and expectations that tie the immigrant to returning the favor. True, he explains, that for the community at large immigration of his nephew through lottery visa to Beardstown has been a loss (brain drain) and for him personally it has been a rupture to the chain of mentorship.¹⁶ Nevertheless, deep inside he was glad because this loss was his ticket for social security.

Having a relative in the United States or Europe, explained Mr. Kofi, is like having an insurance card, a system of social security, and an education assistance program. He noted his nephew in Beardstown covered school fees for several relatives, but that is not all. Having an immigrant in the family moves "one's social rank up." The extended networks of the immigrant share the promise, the potential, the possibility of the insurance, and a real or imagined assurance that one day if all roads are closed, if all hell has broken loose, "I have someone to help and you do not!"

This is the social security system that the post-Cold War Togo enjoys through transnational, translocal practices that not only connect the daily bread of Beardstown to Togo but also the public education, health care, and social security. If for Mexican residents of Tejaro the most effective strategy for gaining access to housing and basic service provision is the export of young men and women, rather than corn, in Togo the most effective guarantee for access to education, health care, and old-age social security is not state public policy but sending a family member out of the country. Here emigration is the *public's policy*.

GLOBAL RESTRUCTURING OF PRODUCTION AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

Globalization literature has comprehensively documented instances where firms outsource part or all of their production in order to reduce costs. For the meat industry, however, this process has involved border crossing by labor bringing workers to the workplace. This transnational relocation of labor ultimately involved global restructuring of social reproduction processes by socially, temporally, and spatially reorganizing the biophysical, social, and cultural reproduction responsibilities, and by creating new sources of expectation and obligation for the provision of collective social reproduction. Let me explain.

The development processes of Beardstown, Tejaro, and Lomé form intricate parts of the conditions Marxian analysts articulate as necessary for the global accumulation of capital. Following Neil Smith's¹⁷ and Harvey's¹⁸ discussion of uneven development and Gillian Hart's¹⁹ notion of relational comparison, we see how the vitality of Beardstown, its sustained population growth, healthy housing market, and flourishing school system benefit from supply of cheap labor that diminishing agricultural livelihoods in Mexico and rising unemployment and political instability in Togo offer. Harvey's articulation of accumulation by dispossession²⁰ helps explain how the meat industry's crisis of accumulation in the 1970s and 1980s benefited from a series of dispossessions around the world resulting from political and economic adjustment policies. Immigrant workers' border-crossings constitute a byproduct of neoliberal policies in Mexico and the post-Cold War reorientation in Togo. The privatization of *ejido* land, and the subsequent agreement to North American free trade facilitated dispossession of the limited resources of Mexican farmers like Mr. Fernández, who had formerly been involved in domestic milk production, or his friends who raised corn. Similarly, post-Cold War geopolitical shifts facilitated the transformation of educated Togolese into surplus labor for the Global North. This Togolese brain drain, accelerated through the U.S. policy of lottery visas, involved processes of dispossession: the dispossession of knowledge, the dispossession of a nation's educated citizens, the dispossession of youth of their mentors. The global care chain that makes possible immigrants' internationalization strategy (by allowing them to leave their children or parents behind to be cared for by others) also facilitated a series of dispossessions: dispossessing children left behind of their parental care, grandparents of old-age care, and migrant daughters and sons of the love and attention by those they left behind.

In this light, the 1990s prosperity of Beardstown, its ability to reproduce itself as a place with a healthy housing market and school system, should be understood as part of larger global

processes of accumulation. The stories chronicled above reveal a complex set of practices, connections, and imaginations that connect immigrant workers to communities of origin and underlie the social and spatial development of Beardstown. An army of people, with women at the center, contribute to the social reproduction processes of the Beardstown immigrant worker. These processes range from family members nursing children and caring for family and elderly immigrants left behind, to neighbors caring for the property immigrants leave behind, to remittances that pay for daily bread, to road pavement and infrastructure development, to health and education insurance; from the hope that motivates immigrants to embark on risky journeys and perform hazardous jobs to the sense of obligation, honor, and pride that drive immigrants to tolerate the disillusionment and meet

cultural expectations. All of these factors keep immigrant workers in jobs that otherwise would not be viable. These complex transnational processes and practices temporally and spatially reorganize social reproduction activities and constitute the global restructuring of social reproduction.

In the Mexican case, the immigrant workforce relies on the outsourcing of segments of the life cycle to their village of origin. It is the Mexican state, as dysfunctional, corrupt, and autocratic as it might be, that takes care of child birth, plus the limited health care or education before the Fernández children reach an age when they can sell their labor to U.S. employers, eventually returning to Mexico when they are no longer able to work. These workers have no access to social security or health care in the United States.²¹ In other words, for many Beardstown Mexican workers the beginning and the end of the life cycle rely on practice and processes that take place in Michoacán. Similarly, family members who take care of the Togolese workers' children back home need to be recognized as subsidizers of the Cargill plant in Beardstown. Women are at the center of this transnational social reproduction work, taking care of the children and family members immigrants leave behind. These women include not only female spouses of male immigrants but aunts, grandmothers, sisters, and daughters of male and female immigrants as protagonists of transnational families that subsidize immigrants' social reproduction. For Mexican or Togolese workers to remain in these high-risk, low-paid jobs, parts of processes we know as social reproduction are outsourced to extended families, to dysfunctional schools, governments, churches, NGOs, and a whole industry of so-called development programs back home. These smooth the accumulation of capital and ensure the supply of workers "willing" and able to sell their labor power to do hazardous work at low cost.

Biophysical reproduction of immigrant workers and the free work that their transnational families invest in the care of their children or their injured, old, or tired bodies is only one part of this labor's social reproduction. Cultural rituals that offer a person a sense of dignity and honor need to be recognized as well. The obligations that might be seen as draining immigrants' resources in Beardstown also offer a sense of humaneness and wholeness. Activities such as the numerous *quinceneros*, the rites of passage to daughters, are celebrated in Mexico through immigrant earnings in Beardstown. Similarly, the construction of a village home and providing feasts to honor ancestors in Togo create pressures that keep immigrant workers in their jobs while also ensuring possibilities to maintain their dignity and honor. In a strange way, Togolese rituals are performed better by those who leave rather than those who stay within the national territory of Togo.

Moreover, the promise of a place in their home country to which they will return with their savings and the dream of eventually becoming secure

for life is an important force in this story. The account of Magnolia, for example, and the “envy” of other Mexican workers, need to be pondered. Note that workers imagined the injury settlement as a way out in a manner that a worker without an imagination of an “elsewhere” would not. The imagination of a utopian elsewhere has a material power and exchange value that needs to be taken into account. This imagination makes a wage unviable for one worker but viable for another. Imagination and/or reproduction of an alternative place, a place for retreat or ultimately, retirement, is an important aspect of this process. “Home,” understood here as a “physical and social infrastructure” to go back to, becomes an important asset for the immigrant worker. Imagined or real, the alternative place that workers create becomes an asset that distinguishes the viability of wages across groups. The social reproduction of immigrant workers in Beardstown therefore involves the transnational practices that allow provisioning of infrastructure and public services such as roads, houses, and schools in their communities of origin. Both in Tejaro and Lomé, we note the significant role that immigrants play in provision of collective consumption items. In Mexico it involved the construction of homes, the paving of roads, and the provision of sewage services; while in Togo immigrant workers paid for school fees, health care, and old age maintenance. Such items were the main absorbents of immigrants’ remittances.²² Here, while the remittance immigrants provide infrastructure in their communities of origin, keeping alive the dream of a home in their native land also requires a wide range of free work performed by their neighbors, friends, and family members.

CONCLUSION

In light of the global ethnographic study of Beardstown, the social vitality of Beardstown, unlike its neighboring small towns, may seem less like the anomaly that we viewed in the opening of this paper. Beardstown’s revitalization as a community and its reproduction as a place, unlike many ghost towns of the rustbelt, cannot be captured by a focus on territorially bounded processes or on restructuring of production through industry relocation or managerial and technological innovations alone. The stories presented here reveal processes that restructure social reproduction in a broad sense (biophysical, cultural, and infrastructural) in multiple places across the globe contributing to Cargill’s accumulation of capital in the heartland.