

VISUALLY RE-MEMBERING THE EASTSIDE:
TRAJECTORIES OF BELONGING AND DISPLACEMENT IN AUSTIN

by

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ABSTRACT

Historically the home to predominantly Black and Chicanx communities, the Eastside of Austin, Texas is being confronted with the distinct pressures of the city's rapid growth. Residents of the Eastside are experiencing significant losses of physical spaces in the communities of the Eastside. Along with the closures of schools and local businesses, many lifelong community members are being pressured to sell their homes to developers as property values increase. This research explores the effects of these pressures and losses in the day-to-day lives of residents who are most vulnerable through visual and anthropologically-informed methods. Through the visual approaches of photovoice and social mapping, this research challenges traditional photographic practice by facilitating community members in the creation of their own visual representations of the Eastside. This research also explores the value of these visual methods to cultural anthropology, as they may serve to complement more established ethnographic research methods, such as informal interviews. This research examines the complex, ambivalent experiences of long-term residents living a gentrifying space, where senses of belonging, home, and place are being actively challenged or subverted by the incoming demographic. These senses are also able to remain fixed both within and because of community practice. Through the visual research methods used in this project, considerations of agency and representation are reviewed for future visual inquiry of urban space and place, belonging, displacement, and other relating issues in social research.

I. BACKGROUND: THE EASTSIDE OF AUSTIN

The City of Austin boasts many supposed exceptionalisms such as its reputation as a desirable and unique place for many to live, work, and play, and as a tolerant and socially liberal city (Auyero 2015). These sentiments are evidenced in one of the city's beloved slogans, 'Keep Austin Weird', a popular catchphrase for the city which implies a sort of unique inclusivity of a quirky, or diverse, social scape. The city also claims the title as being the 'Live Music Capital of the World', pulling people from all over the country and the world into its urban centers and downtown neighborhoods for music and multimedia festivals year-round. The city's exceptional reputation, booming population, and industry growth overshadow the far less enchanting experience for many community members who occupy historically vulnerable and relegated neighborhoods to the east of the city's downtown.

The Eastside of Austin, Texas, for purposes of protecting the anonymity of the participants in this research, will be loosely defined as any neighborhood community area east of the main highway, Interstate 35, which runs north and south through the heart of the city. Austin is a city fundamentally shaped by the separate but equal doctrine in both its infrastructure and its practice. In order to understand the social and spatial scapes of the city today, we will need to understand first the historical contexts of segregation practices of the city, both in municipal as well as social practice. In 1917, the United States Supreme Court declared city zoning laws which segregated groups on the basis of race to be illegal. In other words, cities may not enforce segregation through the use of zoning laws. So, the City of Austin, in order to maneuver this law and to continue segregation for the city's

growing population, developed and implemented the 1928 Koch and Fowler City Plan, or Austin's "1928 Master Plan". As this plan came into effect, it set the boundaries for what would be the designated "Negro District" of the city. This plan saw the removal of non-whites, particularly Blacks or African Americans, from white areas by relocating all Black facilities east of East Avenue, which is now Interstate Highway 35 (Busch 2017, Houston 2018). Part of the plan reads:

"It is our recommendation that the nearest approach to the solution of the race segregation problem will (be) the recommendation of this district as a negro district; and that all facilities and conveniences be provided the negroes in this district, as an incentive to draw the negro population to this area. This will eliminate the necessity of duplication of white and black schools, white and black parks, and other duplicate facilities for this area." (Koch and Fowler, 62)

This plan ultimately segregated the city racially as well as in land use (Busch 2017) -- the Eastside became the neglected side of Austin. Today, this divide lives on, with the 35 Interstate Highway as proof of the hard line between the West and East sides of Austin. I35 did not merely set an infrastructural divide for the city; it became a symbol of the socioeconomic relegation of residents in East Austin, serving as an institutional tool of segregation for the city for many decades. To live on the Eastside of Austin was traditionally to be neglected by city and civic attention, to be deprived of many of the rights and opportunities afforded to white, west Austin residents, and to be deemed the bad and dangerous, 'other' part of town (Auyero 2015, Busch 2017). As this negative stigma of 'the hood' and 'the barrio' were carried for generations by non-Eastside occupying residents of Austin, the Eastside remained the undesirable, dangerous part of the city for many

Austinites up until the early 2000's during the city's revitalization efforts (Busch 2017, Way et al. 2018). The revitalization endeavors on the Eastside, according to the City of Austin, were intended to create economic opportunities and to stimulate the development of an "improved and culturally rich area" (City of Austin). Institutionalized spatial and social segregation remained the norm in Austin, in part because of the racialized stigma of the Eastside, as well as the municipal and social practices in colorblind racism, where Eastside discourse often claims 'cultural' issues instead of identifying racially-rooted issues (Cheng 2013). Possessive investments in whiteness, the discriminatory economic practice of investing in the development of white spaces, which also sought the removal of non-white minority groups from invested or improved areas (Busch 2017), ensured that white residents of the city have received the greater socioeconomic advantage. Members of non-white communities, such as Black or African-American and Latinx, Chicanx or Hispanic groups, were largely left to create communities without equal civic attention and support.

The Eastside communities of Austin are shaped by myriad complicated forces, both nuanced and overt, such the lived de facto and de jure effects of segregation, as Eastside residents were largely excluded from Austin's narrative of exceptionality for much of the city's recent history (Auyero 2015). Many Eastside residents, however, might argue that the Eastside was always beautiful and exceptional -- it just wasn't receiving the same municipal treatment as other parts of town. In spite of the negligence from the city which touched most aspects of life in East Austin, the de facto segregation of the city brought communities of color together, and small businesses were set to thrive by the communities who built them (Busch 2017).

The Eastside neighborhoods of Austin today are still active sites of contention for its residents, but now it seems the Eastside cannot get enough attention; the Eastside has seen a dramatic boom in commercial and real estate development, intervention from the city for parks and recreation restorative projects, and a sharp increase in much of the area's property values each year. The Eastside is where the consequences of the city's economic and social growth of the moment are being disproportionately shared. Eastside communities are facing the severe predicaments of gentrification as they bear witness to the complete physical and cultural alterations of their communities and their homes. These changes are most apparent in the spatial identities of the communities, such as in the demolition of homes, which often have been occupied by the same family for generations, in the demolition to government-assisted housing communities, in the changes of many small businesses, and in commercial development. The effects of gentrification are also evident in the changes of the social and cultural identities of the Eastside, such as a large influx of whiteness into non-white neighborhoods (Romero 2017). The gentrification of Eastside Austin is contributing to the significant loss of the physical spaces which are integral to the daily practices of the area's original residents, thus affecting fundamental senses of belonging, of home, and place -- of what the Eastside is, is not, and what it ought to be.

II. INTRODUCTION

The Eastside and Me:

The questions grounded in this research project first arose from a personal photographic essay about my coming of age. I spent the summer of 2018 photographing my friends as we revisited our beloved childhood places, enjoying our days off. In the long, balmy days of that summer, I began to pay closer attention to those spaces, as I considered how and why we loved them; what attributes made them so sacred for us, and what it meant that so many were disappearing to the growth in Austin as we were also growing up. Most of these places happened to belong to the Eastside of Austin, an area of Austin that was all at once wonderfully familiar and mostly unknown to me, as I had grown up in neighborhoods in South or West Austin and only began to spend time in the Eastside to visit friends in high school. One such sacred place I wanted to understand is the childhood home of a friend, as it became the place I went to almost every day as we all sought shelter from the heat. It was a landing place for many of us, not just as an escape from the middle of a summer day, but as a place we could stay for a while if we wanted. For my friend, it held the memories of nearly his entire life: the house was hand-built by his father who had passed away a few years ago and my friend hadn't really lived in any other house. It seemed that every other week, if not every week, my friend would get letters in the mail or have people knock on the door offering obscene amounts of money to buy the house from him, likely as a real estate development investment. When my friend talked about this, he spoke about feeling torn between parting with his life-long home, likely taking a very different path forward in his life, such as using the money to leave Austin and travel around. He

wondered if he should keep his home and everything that was, and is, a part of it. I've thought a lot about what it would mean for that house to no longer exist, and if any amount of money could ever match its true value. Since that summer, I've thought a lot about the Eastside. I wanted to explore the implications of gentrification on lifelong or long-term residents of the Eastside, like my friend. I wanted to explore how gentrification not only alters the outward cultural identity of a neighborhood or community, but how it shapes daily life, how it complicates place-making for traditionally neglected populations in Austin, and perhaps how the resulting losses carve trajectories of both belonging and displacement for many Eastside residents.

As a photographer-turned beginning career anthropologist, I've been compelled to re-examine the approaches of traditional documentary photography and also to reconsider the ethics of using photography to explore such sensitive issues as the loss of a home. Many photographers, documentarians, and news media have gone into the Eastside neighborhoods to chronicle the effects of gentrification. These efforts include taking photographs of the closures of locally owned restaurants, the demolitions of houses, and of the people living in close proximity to these changes, ultimately creating a visual record of Eastside neighborhoods of the past few decades. In this record, however, depictions of the Eastside sometimes seem to lack the community itself or seem to be redundant and repetitive in their approaches; the images of the Eastside sometimes seem to be mere depictions of a place lost, captured by a concerned outsider. In the depictions that do incorporate members of the community, it often appears that just a mere platform for voicing concerns has been offered, without a greater collaborative effort in the photographing of the Eastside. My primary concern in incorporating photography as a

means to explore the issues and the effects of gentrification was that I would come in as the outsider to offer a ‘voice for the voiceless’. This common sentiment and well-known phrase in journalistic and documentary photography, though well-meaning, can be a disempowering assumption on behalf of the practitioner, and thus deny the community a telling of its own story. As I considered these concerns of photographic practice, as well as my awareness of issues regarding representation, confidentiality, and agency, I found that the arts-based research method of photovoice remedied much of what was problematic in the ethics of photographing a disappearing place.

Storytelling of the Community, By the Community:

Photovoice, a community-based participatory and an arts-based research method, which incorporates the use of photography in the equitable and collaborative pursuit of data (Camar 2015), allowed for the facilitation of community members to retell or remember their own stories in this research. This method also provided the means for a collaborative effort in meaning-making about living through the effects of gentrification, as each member of this project took photographs of their communities and later assembled these images as we discussed the meaning and experiences behind them. Photovoice recognizes the potential of photographs as representational visual data, as the images can serve as artifacts or otherwise as expressive mechanisms (Golden 2020) in the research. Based on their needs and perceptions, my informants were able to create photographs on their own for use as immersive and communicative devices in this project. In sum, I chose to use photovoice as the central procedure of this project, as the method advocates for the importance of storytelling of the community by the community itself. Through the encouragement of self-representation and advocacy for the participants’ agency, this

method generated knowledge, a more critical inquiry into the topic of gentrification, and allowed for expression and photography to serve as a way of knowing.

Collaborators and Research Methods

The informants of this project, which I will refer as my collaborators, first were each individually interviewed at a location of their choosing. Each collaborator was then given a Polaroid instant film camera with up to twenty instant photographs, and roughly a week to take Polaroids of what was important to them in their sense of home or life in the Eastside. I did not provide further instruction or direction as to what they should or should not take pictures of. I ensured that each collaborator knew how to operate the camera, and made myself available for troubleshooting via email should they need any assistance or support in using the camera, changing film cartridges, etc. When each collaborator felt they had finished taking their Polaroids, we met again in a place of their choosing, where they would photomap the Polaroids and discuss their experiences and images in a final interview. Each collaborator was asked to assemble the Polaroids into a ‘map’, not necessarily to depict a geographical representation of their neighborhood or home, but instead to incorporate them into a singular, cohesive, and representational object of what they photographed. I was present for each collaborator’s photomap activity, and provided materials such as paper, tape, scissors, and markers, should they wish to use them. My collaborators had full creative autonomy in this exercise and were not given specific directions by me. The final interview prompted discussion about their experiences using the cameras, the subjects or locations of their Polaroids, and the final products -- the photomaps.

Two of my collaborators I personally knew prior to this project, while the other

three were recruited through virtual flyers that were displayed through the social media platforms Facebook and Instagram, on both my personal page and in community-centered ‘groups’ for East Austin communities. Interested individuals contacted me via email or Instagram. There were five collaborators total in this project, and I will introduce each in their own ‘chapter’ to allow for the space and exploration of their individual and complex perspectives. In each chapter, I will introduce the collaborator, their social map, the ethical and practical issues which arose in the implementation of photovoice, and the themes that emerged for each person based on their interviews, the photovoice exercise, and their photomap. The photomaps of each collaborator in this project can be found in their individual chapters as well as in the appendix with larger versions of the photomaps for easier viewing.

Photovoice: Privacy and Protection Concerns for Collaborators

Before I introduce each chapter, I must first address the issues of privacy and confidentiality in using photovoice, as this research certainly relied on the photographic representations of typically identifiable places in the Eastside of Austin, such as well-known parks and businesses. Per the guidelines of the Institutional Review Board of Texas State University, all identifiable information such as names, street signs, business logos, et cetera, must be altered in order to protect the anonymity of those participating in the social research. Another concern of using photovoice is the digital privacy of each collaborator, where the use of digital photographs might create potential for compromising information to be used or distributed outside of this research, such as the taking of metadata from a digital photograph which can display the GPS and time information of the image.

The use of the instant Polaroid film largely remedies these concerns for this project.

The dark shadows or underexposure of many images, as well as the occasional hiccup in the chemistry development on each Polaroid, aided in making each location not easily identifiable. The use of Polaroids also allowed for the immediate existence of the photograph as an object the collaborators could hold in their hands and interact with freely without intervention from me, the researcher. They could lay them out to look over with their families, they could put them away and forget about them -- they were free to interact with the objects as they desired. The use of film also ensured that each photograph is unique in terms of pixel patterns, further protecting the sensitive information of collaborators and the locations that were photographed.

I digitally scanned the photomaps in order to create a digital JPEG image of each map. Then, using Photoshop, I cropped each map so that every Polaroid could be reverse image searched through Google, or [images.google.com](https://www.google.com/images). This was done to ensure that the locations of each photograph had no existing match on the available internet based on pixel patterns. In other words, if the pixilation in the JPEG versions of the Polaroids matched other images on the internet, it would be likely that those places would be easy to identify. Fortunately, every Polaroid photograph and accompanying keyword, such as the explicit name of the depicted location, did not match anything available on the internet. Thus, it would be difficult to find these locations without having prior knowledge of them.

In addition to reverse image searches, I scrutinized each Polaroid and photomap for identifiable names or signage. I once again used Adobe Photoshop to pixelate and rename each compromising element of the photomaps, if there existed any. Navigating this aspect of photovoice was certainly not a straightforward endeavor, and any digital alteration I did to a photomap I did only out of absolute necessity to maintain privacy. This

was done minimally, and the alterations are obvious for the sake of the integrity of the photographs and out of respect to the informants who made them. In other words, you may easily see where I intervened in order to protect the subject of the image. Finally, each photomap was returned to the collaborator who made it. Out of the five participants, only one declined to keep the map.

III. Ema: Where Everybody Knows Everybody

“There’s a lot of sad, sad feelings that come with the change. It’s sad to see things go, or sad to know that you know, you knew that owner and their business just got bought out. Whatever it is. It makes you feel like a foreigner after a while.”

I will first introduce Ema J., the first collaborator to join this project. She contacted me by email after seeing a flyer on Facebook. Ema describes herself as a 24-year old female, as Hispanic, and as having lived for 15 years in the Eastside. When we met and began the first interview, Ema immediately stated that she loves her neighborhood and life in East Austin. She explained that it felt like the Eastside is where everything is, describing her community as a place where “everybody knows everybody”, and explained her sense that she and her family would never have to leave East Austin-- almost. We then discussed if Ema’s feelings had recently changed about life on the Eastside: she explained that she and her husband often discuss what they will do when they’re ready to buy a house and where they will go, because they can’t afford to live in East Austin anymore. “But this is where everything is”, she told me, “you know, your mom lives up the street, this is where all the cousins live. So... it’s hard to think that one day we won’t be able to be in the Eastside.”

In this first interview, Ema recalled childhood memories of a bakery where her grandfather would buy pink cake for her before school every morning and how happy she is to see that this place still exists, of going to Mister’s when she was in high school, a convenience store owned by the family of a best friend who died too young. She told me about walking by the cemetery with her young children, about her husband’s family living by government housing projects a few blocks away, and about feeling that home comes

from a sense of her family being so close to her. She professed her love for local H.E.B., a Texas grocery store chain, and how it was the same for years and years, that she could probably have gone through the store blindfolded and found what she needed before the marketing and products changed to meet demands of the new, incoming demographic.

For Ema, her husband, and her children, living where they know everybody makes them feel safe and feel good, that they can walk in an area where many people probably wouldn't normally feel secure in doing so. Ema explained to me that she knew her neighbors kept eyes on her house when they weren't home, watched their kids play outside if her or her husband's back happened to be turned for a moment. Ema described a sense of home, which for her is constituted in the proximity of her family living around the corner from her, from her neighbors having her back, and from having a sense that they know everybody, and everybody knows them.

Ema has a strong sense of knowing when someone in the neighborhood is not from the neighborhood -- "you can just tell when someone is from the neighborhood and when someone is not". She told me about pulling into her driveway one day during one of Austin's many festivals and seeing a random man sit on her front porch charging his phone in an outlet. In another incident she recalled, a man she did not know parked his motorcycle in her yard so he could go wherever he wanted. In these instances, she expressed a strong sense of a lack of respect from these nonmembers of her neighborhood, stating that for people who didn't grow up there, maybe the Eastside isn't home for them but just where they live. She described a sad feeling knowing that a lot of people moving into the neighborhood probably don't know that many of the houses on the Eastside are the homes that people built themselves, how so many have been developed for expensive, luxury

housing; she described how sad it is “to feel like something’s yours -- that you built with your bare hands, and that they can just tear it down.”

Ema and Her Photovoice Experience:

Ema’s experience with photovoice raises the possible ethical and practical dilemmas of using the method, and it also highlights the apparent benefits of the adaptability of this method to suit the practical needs and daily lives of participants. Ema admitted that she had lost the packs of Polaroid film given to her, so she used her daughter’s instant film camera, as seen in the images labeled “Mattie’s” and “Mister’s” where the format of the film is a smaller size. This issue is a practical issue of this method, and especially in the use of Polaroid film, as the film is packaged in individual cartridges with eight Polaroids in each. Ema’s experience in losing track of materials points to the possible issue where a collaborator must keep track of several materials in order to complete the exercise -- though I assured her it was not an issue and that using the other photographs was fine.

The ethical issue that was raised in Ema’s experience with photovoice is my needing to intervene with the map in order to protect the anonymity of the locations depicted. Figure 1 shows where I was required to intervene and how the interventions, such as the Serif font and the pixilation of what I covered, were made to be obvious in order to protect the product of Ema’s experience and the integrity of the photomap. I did not interject while Ema was writing on the photomap, as I did not want to sway or alter how she chose to create her photomap.

Despite these issues, Ema stated that this activity was a fun experience for her: she and her husband got to reminisce, recall memories of when they were dating, and to show

their kids different parts of Austin -- all without leaving her car to take the photographs. She expressed that this was the first time she and her husband had taken dedicated time to show their kids parts of their growing up in East Austin, to take time to look around.

Ambivalence and Belonging

Ema images are each accompanied by a caption to explain the significance of the place for her and her family, such as the government-assisted housing projects that where her family and friends once lived, and what is left of her childhood convenience store, Mister's. Ema took photographs of places that are important not only for her sense of home, but also locations that are significant for many members of her community. She included a Polaroid of East Park, a public park that has been an important gathering place for community members for decades. East Park is home to a weekly low-rider car show, where people come together to show off their customized cars, play games, and cook out. For her, seeing East Park and the lowriders, with everyone dressing in a similar style, is the Eastside. She explained that "it's nice to see that not all the traditions, despite all the changes that have taken place, that not everything has changed."

In contrast, Ema also included locations which, for her, signal the change and gentrification occurring on the Eastside: there are images of two former businesses in the communities and the restaurants that now occupy those spaces, Mattie's and Leroy's, and two government-assisted housing projects that were recently demolished, Cameron Courts and East Lakeview.

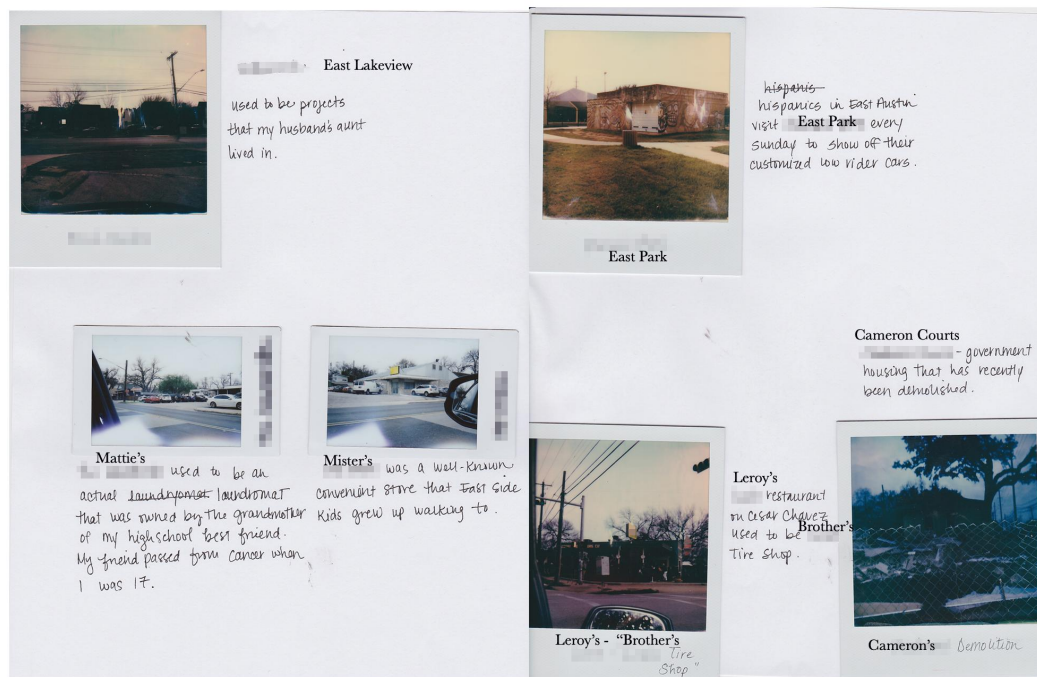


Fig. 1: Ema's Photomap. The image has been altered to anonymize the locations depicted. (Pg. 47)

Ema's feelings should strike one as a complex entanglement of ambivalence, where all at once she maintains her sense of community while also engaging in an internal conflict about the greater civic attention her neighborhood is receiving. She resents the loss of the familiar spaces and is saddened by the thought of knowing that something like a home that was hand-built by their occupants could be demolished without a second thought; but is also glad to see that the neighborhood is no longer so neglected.

This complex relationship with her neighborhood is evident in the Polaroids: each location she photographed is a site where the threat of gentrification looms, or where it has already taken effect. She chose these locations as each place reminded her of a certain time or certain person in her life: locations that are emotionally significant to her. She told me, "I wanted to find places... to help me feel ways I maybe haven't felt in a long time." For

Ema, each special place has been touched by gentrification, with the exception of East Park which seems to stand as evidence that traditions have not yet been eliminated. In particular, she expressed a deep sense of feeling disrespected in the instance of Mattie's and Leroy's, both new and expensive restaurants, how these new businesses had incorporated murals that had existed on the buildings prior to the new businesses. Ema wonders if the incorporation of the murals was done out of respect for the community, or if it was to capitalize and attempt to make the murals a commercial benefit for the new businesses: a conundrum of gentrification.

"It's just the culture, the language that we use, the way we talk to each other -- we know if you're from East Austin." Ema says the amount of time one has been in the Eastside makes a difference -- knowing the history of the neighborhood also makes a big difference. If nobody knows you, it's like you don't belong here. Ema says that sentiment might sound mean or possessive, but that's how she feels about it. To see people at Leroy's or Mattie's leaves a bad taste in her mouth -- like seeing a stranger in her territories. She feels that her space has been invaded when she sees businesses that are evidently not serving the community where they are located, but nonmembers of East Austin.

Ema considers the effects of gentrification and how so many familiar places are being altered for the benefit of nonmembers of East Austin. Seeing the Polaroids in the photomap in front of us, Ema said her mind goes to the thought:

"It didn't matter when our side of town was shitty before, when we lived here. Now people with money moved here and suddenly things need to be nice -- to be nice for them. Suddenly they want to put effort into fixing things, into making it look nice. When it was us, they didn't care."

Ema's ambivalence suggests a particular situation that the many conundrums of gentrification present: that gentrification affects the sense of belonging for those who previously belonged to a sanctioned, racialized space. This ambivalence is further complicated by Austin's historical racist practices, as the Eastside was willfully neglected for decades as Black or African American and Latinx, Hispanic or Chicanx occupied those spaces. As possessive investments in whiteness (Busch 2015) shape the spatial landscapes, many nonwhite members of the Eastside struggle with the sense that they are being pushed out.

IV. Rey: Wellsprings Proud

Rey Z. was the final collaborator of this research. I find that his discussions are in some ways similar to Ema's, but that the theme I will discuss both deepens and contrasts the theme which arose from Ema's chapter. Rey identifies as a 39-year old Latino and that he has lived in East Austin for 30 years. Rey told me he wanted to participate in order for his neighborhood, Wellsprings, to have some representation in this project. This neighborhood differs slightly from Ema's, and coincidentally the other collaborators, in that it was not always traditionally Black or Latinx, and so perhaps was not under the same racialized pressures. Wellsprings, Rey told me, was not always predominantly nonwhite. A military base was located nearby, which means that the neighborhood saw a high turnover rate with a change in demographics each decade; from white in the 1980's, to Black in the 1990's, and then to predominantly Latinx in the early 2000's. Rey shared that because of this, growing up in Wellsprings was unique in that he was able to experience a wider range of people with varying backgrounds. The Eastside neighborhoods Ema and the following collaborators discuss are quite different -- they were historically Hispanic, Latinx, Chicane, or Black and African American; Wellsprings was not.

Rey told me that the community members of varying racial identities all grew up together in Wellsprings. For him, it doesn't matter if someone has a differing racial, social, or political identities than him; "There's a different sense here -- you're still Wellsprings, don't matter what party, what ethnicity you are -- you're still Wellsprings." For Rey, if you shared the same laundromat or H.E.B., went to the same high school, recreation center, or lived down the street -- if you went to the same places that's all that mattered in the sense of being a part of Wellsprings. Of these places in Wellsprings, Rey conveyed a strong sense

of pride. In fact, he's the president of a group called Wellsprings Proud Group. "You gotta be proud of where you're from," he told me. This group organizes weekly community gatherings to discuss the goings on in the community, and they also put together emergency funds for members of their community and facilitate scholarships for kids from Wellsprings going into college. Rey said he has always loved his neighborhood and his community, even as a kid, when it was a tougher place to live. Rey explained that he felt that the neighborhood was getting left out of government support when he was a kid, that back then nobody paid attention to what was going on, but now Wellsprings receives a lot of attention. When he was a kid, nobody went to Wellsprings unless they were from Wellsprings.

Rey talked about a new subdivision in Wellsprings, describing it as one of those new subdivisions where not everybody wants anything to do with the old neighborhood. He said having different people with different levels of income move into the neighborhood and having new homes in the area brings better property value are all good things. However, Rey describes a sense that new members of Wellsprings didn't want to identify as being a part of Wellsprings community but rather to identify with their individual neighborhoods with Home Ownership Associations (HOA). Rey is not ok with new members of the community isolating themselves in their HOA, and that he doesn't agree with newcomers not wanting to be a part of the old neighborhood. Rey wonders if the newcomers might think that community members like Rey see new residents as the new gentrifiers, if his community wouldn't be accepting of them, and so they are probably wary to participate in his community. Rey says he understands this concern. Rey also wonders if they think they're better than the old neighborhoods in Wellsprings, or that they don't

want anything to do with the rest of the neighborhood, and that that's the part he's not ok with.

Rey described a new Ferrari car dealership that replaced a beloved movie theatre in the older part of his community. "Now all of the sudden there's a Ferrari dealership in the neighborhood, so you come here to buy a Ferrari in this neighborhood -- people that would never ever be caught dead in our neighborhood." It's wild, he told me, how evident it is that this new business was not there to serve the community in which it now occupies a storefront.



Fig. 2: Rey Z.'s photomap. The image has been altered to anonymize the locations depicted. (Pg. 48)

A Wellsprings Community of Practice

Rey conveyed a strong sense of belonging in his Wellsprings neighborhood and community. Similar to Ema, this sense of belonging is shaped by the places frequented by members of the community, places which he chose to depict in his photovoice activity. Where my interpretation of Rey's interviews, photovoice, and photomap differs most notably from Ema's is in how integral the specific locations are to that sense of belonging. Rey took photographs of the Wellsprings Recreation Center, the fire station which displays a neighborhood banner, his preferred H.E.B., and the contested Ferrari dealership. Rey visits or drives by each of these locations on a regular basis. Rey took a photograph of the local video store, a place where community members can pick up a neighborhood t-shirt to display neighborhood pride -- something you don't get unless you're from the neighborhood; Rey says you can go anywhere in Austin wearing that shirt, and everyone will know you're from Wellsprings. Rey shared that as he was taking the photographs, different memories came into his head for each location: having his son's first Easter egg hunt at the recreation center, getting lost as a kid in the aisles of the H.E.B., and attending the only all-Spanish middle school in the district.

“If you went to certain places and that's where you -- that's all that mattered. On Saturday, you went to Roosevelt Park. That's the oldest park in the neighborhood, so, if you have memories going to Roosevelt Park, that's pretty much -- I don't care who you are -- if you went to Roosevelt Park, you went to Roosevelt Park. Everybody knows that.”

Rey's sense of belonging to the Wellsprings neighborhood is characterized by the history one does or does not have with the neighborhood facilities, stores, and parks. The neighborhood is centered around these common practices and activities: sharing or attending the local facilities and businesses. The social meaning behind these shared practices that are spatially-specific, for Rey as well as the other members of this project, can be best understood through the analytical lens of community of practice. This conceptual framework is helpful in understanding how society and social groups are shaped by day-to-day practices (Mendoza-Denton 2008), where the mutual participation in developed ways of doing certain thing within that group help to construct a common sense of identity within that group. The community develops a constructed sense of itself because of as well as through these shared practices and the common goals within them.

The Wellsprings community of practice is built from the tenure of local establishments and those who frequent them, where the common enterprise within this practice is the identity of the neighborhood itself (Mendoza-Denton 2008). Here, mutual ways of spending a Saturday at Roosevelt Park as a kid, picking up a "Wellsprings Proud" t-shirt from the video store, or having attended a particular middle school set the parameters of belonging to the communities.

This framework of communities of practice is also helpful to understand how communities might differentiate themselves from one another, such as how members of Wellsprings might identify with Wellsprings or their particular HOA. The whole of the community, at least those like Rey who identify as being Wellsprings Proud, is built by that local context and the characteristics of those shared spaces. The Wellsprings community of practice is shaped by its relationship to outside or differing communities of

practice, such as in Rey's assertion that if you go there, you belong there; if you don't, then perhaps that choice is an intentional means of differentiating one's self from Wellsprings Proud, or a signal that one isn't from Wellsprings. For Rey, it seems that this community of practice is salient to being a part of Wellsprings, but not an exclusive practice, as he hopes that new members of the community will participate in his community meetings.

In regard to alterations in the neighborhood, the good changes in Wellsprings have good effects, and the negative changes have negative effects, Rey explained. The incoming demographic has caused an increase in property values, which has varying effects, depending on the context. Wellsprings doesn't have the same high crime rate it did in the 90's, and there are new libraries, recreation centers, and swimming pools in Wellsprings now. Rey described two negative aspects to the neighborhood changes: that people are moving into Wellsprings who want nothing to do with the communities of the old neighborhood, and that businesses are starting to crop up that are clearly not meant for Wellsprings residents, such as the arrival of the Ferrari dealership. Rey expressed frustration in seeing such a high-end, luxury car dealership has a location in Wellsprings; the base price of a new Ferrari is something close to \$250,000, while the median household income in 2018 for Wellsprings' zip code was \$67,000 (U.S. Census).

“I don't think there's anybody in that neighborhood gonna afford a Ferrari, so, that's definitely not for us. But it's in our neighborhood. So that's gentrification right there. There's a Ferrari dealership in an inner-city neighborhood.”

Rey expressed opposition to nonmembers or new members of his Eastside Wellsprings community who do not contribute to, partake in, or that differentiate themselves or their businesses from the community of practice of Wellsprings. It seems

that Rey's Wellsprings -- the beloved video store, the Wellsprings Proud gatherings, and the community practice of supporting the members of the community, much like the many other neighborhoods of the general East Austin area, are being set on a trajectory of their own as community leaders like Rey hope for a middle ground in Wellsprings where new and old community members may stand.

V. Rudy and the Barrio: Loving, Not Fighting It

“East Austin had soul. It had a feeling of struggle. It was scary for other people to go to that neighborhood but for us, it was beautiful. Everyone felt that way. I’ve never met a person from East Austin who’s ever said they disliked East Austin. There’s a reason why they stayed.”

Rudy G. and I met at a coffee shop on the Eastside, a popular study spot for many college students in Austin. This location, we remarked, seemed rather out of place in terms of the surrounding businesses and homes, as it was newer and extremely busy into the evening hours. Rudy told me about growing up in ‘the Barrio’, he discussed his family’s histories, his origin story on the Eastside, and about seeing the very end of the Eastside as he knew it. In the first few minutes of our meeting, Rudy joked that he has never experienced fear while living on the Eastside, in spite of its reputation, until he saw a white person walking their dog down his street at night. He marked this instance as the moment he first became aware that things were changing in his neighborhood. Rudy identifies as a 20-year old, Mexican-American male who has lived in the Eastside his entire life. Rudy described the Eastside, or particularly his Chicana, Latinx, or Hispanic neighborhood, which he endearingly referred to as the Barrio, as a site of struggle and inimitable beauty. He stated that because of this dualistic history of struggle and sense of cultural celebration in his neighborhood, East Austin had soul.

Of the changes occurring in the Barrio, Rudy stated that he sees no point in resisting or fighting the imminent changes, as the forces of gentrification seem to be unstoppable; the neighborhood can’t just return to what it was, no matter how much they might fight or resist it. He told me about a friend of his who digitally collects photographs from various decades of the old Eastside, which range from family albums to pre-digital era photographs

of storefronts. In this effort there's a sense of preservation and remembrance Rudy admires, as he told me that his friend is "just recognizing how this part of town used to be", and that this was a perfect way to do it -- to accept the changes, but also remember what the Eastside was. When Rudy spoke about gentrification, he spoke about its apparent positive influences on his views of racial divide in the United States and admitted that his family has benefited from gentrification. Regarding racism in the U.S., Rudy stated that seeing white people willingly live next to people of color in the Eastside -- particularly Mexican-Americans and Blacks or African-Americans -- was astonishing to him. The phenomenon of whites and non-whites living right next to each other in a neighborhood where this rarely happened before gave him a sense of hope that the practices of racism are perhaps lessening. He spoke about sometimes playing basketball with these new, white members of the Eastside, and that it was surprising for him to experience not being treated differently because he is Mexican-American. He also said he was surprised that the non-white members of his basketball games weren't treating the white members any differently, either.

Of the collaborators in this project, Rudy spoke most openly and directly about racial or ethnic experiences. Given that I am a white, non-member of the Eastside, I was glad that he did not seem to feel discouraged or swayed by my positionality in bringing the topic of race into our discussion, as it is a critical one to any conversation regarding the Eastside and gentrification. To leave race unaddressed in this topic, especially in how it has shaped the lived experiences of generations of Eastside communities, would be to leave a glaring chasm in the conversation. For this reason, I am grateful Rudy was open to sharing his thoughts and experiences about race. Rudy told me that if the new white members of the Eastside are scared of the non-white members, that they must be good at hiding it. He

quipped, “how can they be scared of us if we’re not even here anymore, right? So that’s where it’s kind of weird.”

On the one hand, Rudy echoed a sentiment that other members of this project expressed: new white members of Rudy’s Barrio, a historically Latinx neighborhood, don’t seem to be buying into racially-based fear, aversion, or bias, nor do they seem to subscribe to the area’s former reputation as the bad side of town as previous generations of white Austinites had. On the other hand, Rudy expressed a frustration with many new white members of the community as apparently having no familiarity with or recognition of the neighborhood’s substantive history as being a place fundamentally shaped by racist municipal practice, or its importance as a site struggle for the groups that were relegated by those racist practices. Following this thought, Rudy told me that sometimes he notices new white members of the Barrio giving him harsh looks – “they look at me like I’m a new person in their neighborhood” – and that he feels angry at being othered, when he perhaps sees this incoming demographic as the other.

“They’re not from here. They don’t know the history, you know, they don’t know the struggle, they don’t know why I’m here -- the reason I’m here is because 50 years ago, we weren’t allowed to buy west of I35. If you had a Latino last name, you weren’t allowed to buy West of I35.”



Fig. 3: Rudy's photomap. The image has been altered to anonymize the locations depicted. (Pg. 49)

Practiced Remembrance as a Device for Localized Identity

Rudy's photomap suggests a complex relationship with the current state of changes sweeping his neighborhood, not unlike the other collaborators that have been introduced and those that will follow. In our second meeting, this time in a community college library, as he was making this map, he told me it felt weird to walk around his neighborhood taking Polaroids of the places he grew up looking at and that he sees every day. In this way, he told me, the places he sees aren't extraordinary – they are a part of his every day. In the same breath, he told me also that these places are a part of him.

Part of this seemingly contradictory sentiment is Rudy's frustration with the fact that suddenly non-members of East Austin seem to care about the histories and preservation

of Old East Austin, now that many of the old inhabitants of the communities are gone. The contradictions of Rudy's experience with new members of his neighborhood or interested non-members is noteworthy, as he expressed feeling hope in seeing white people living next door to Black and Latinx, but also a sense of frustration in this new white attention in his neighborhood. The complexity of feeling hope and resentment simultaneously in the presence of new white members of a formerly predominantly non-white community seems to highlight the pervasive and multitudinous ways living in a gentrifying space may be experienced by a lifelong community member; the experience of living in a gentrifying space can be full of contradictions and conflicting emotions.

Identifying himself as part of the last generation of the Barrio, Rudy said that it's as if previous generations are the dinosaurs, and interest from non-members into issues of gentrification is like searching for their bones. If we follow this analogy and liken the murals Rudy depicted to artifacts left by previous inhabitants, we might find that the murals function as a device for Rudy to locate his heritage and sense of place in East Austin amidst the changes. As one may notice, the content of the Polaroids are deeply concentrated to portray a specific cultural meaning and experience. In the Polaroids, it appears that Rudy not only took photographs of vivid murals, but specifically the components of the murals which are most important to him: one mural portrays a banner reading "INDEPENDENCIA" and another with a banner reading the word "JUSTICIA".

In the process of photographing the murals and recalling the histories or the events they symbolize, he appears to locate his social identities: his Mexican-American, Chicano, and Last-of-the-Austin-Barrio selves. Rudy explained that people like his parents who have immigrated from Mexico to the United States perhaps feel that their cultural history is taken

in processes of acculturation upon arriving in the U.S., or that it is otherwise washed out by the hegemonic narratives of U.S. history many are taught in schools. Rudy expressed that the most dangerous thing to do is to take someone's history away "because it makes them feel like they are nothing", and that this is what he felt growing up with an ethnocentric and Americanized version of his family's Mexican heritage. When Rudy sees the mural of the dancing woman, he's reminded that in spite of the erasure he describes, "we still keep dancing", and that he feels connected to his Mexican-American history and cultural lineage. As he was explaining what each figure in the murals stood to represent in Mexican and Mexican-American history, or the greater context of the murals, he stated that he feels as though the murals are his. He said he loved that they were done by members of the community when he was growing up, and not by non-member artists, and that they weren't big-budget commissions done by the city: they were created by the community for community.

Rudy also took Polaroids of a family member's house, a familiar convenience store, and a park where he has spent a lot of time. Of the house, he explained that his family member who previously owned it was one of the first Mexican-American educators in the City of Austin, and that they were an integral facilitator in seeing that Latinx and Hispanic youth were educated in times of segregation. The house is currently under scrutiny as to whether it should be made into a preserved and designated historical site or if it will be torn down for property development. Rudy described a resentment in knowing that his family member's house, a place where spent many Saturday mornings and afterschool time growing up with his family and an important site in Austin's Eastside history, could face destruction based on the fiscal value of the property the home exists on. In this sentiment,

Rudy also conveyed a sense that this home perhaps would not be recognized as a historical site and thus preserved and protected in part due to a lack of recognition that it is truly an important part of Austin's collective history – and especially a collective non-white history.

Though many spaces within the Barrio are being altered by gentrification, Rudy chose to photograph the unaltered spaces which are both personally reflective and declarative of his sense of belonging to the Eastside. It seems that although the forces of gentrification threaten to take away the physical spaces of the Eastside, a practiced remembrance of its history preserves the Eastside for Rudy. For him, this practice and acceptance are better than fighting a battle he explains the Barrio is set to lose. The conundrum of gentrification that Rudy is faced with is that perhaps one day he will no longer see these sites that are so culturally and personally valuable to his sense of self as well as of the Barrio. At the end of our final interview, Rudy told me he wished that inquiries like this project always existed, that nonmembers of the Eastside knew that the Eastside was always beautiful:

“I wish people still looked at it as a beautiful place to be, because there's a lot of culture here, there's a lot of struggle here, there's a lot of soul here. People who – before our time – who dealt with segregation and real, harsh racial discrimination, you have that here – it's beautiful. They have stories. It made them stronger, I think. East Austin made me who I am today.”

VI. Kirk: This is Mine Forever

Kirk C., a 22-year-old male who identifies as having a mixed Hispanic ethnicity, lives in the same house that he grew up in. He and his younger brother inherited the house when their father, who built it by hand, passed away a few years ago. As we spoke about his home, Kirk professed a love for the way the orange and pecan trees of the Eastside show the seasons, how the alleyways behind his and other houses offer peaceful refuge from the sounds of the city, and how he spends free time being outside in the neighborhood with his friends. In watching the Eastside become home to new businesses, luxury condominiums and restaurants, Kirk expressed that his feelings about the Eastside hadn't changed – he loves the Eastside and knows that affection is fixed. He feels an initial sense of curiosity and cautious optimism as a new business is developed. However, once it is complete, Kirk is left with a sense that these new sites just don't feel right. He explained this as a feeling of a clash in the energies of the new members with the old members of the Eastside. He feels that the calmness and peace he grew up with in his neighborhood is starting to disappear.

Of the gentrification of the Eastside, Kirk could classify the effects into three categories: his personal mental state, the culture of the neighborhood, and the financial effects of gentrification on the community of longtime residents. Speaking to his personal experience, Kirk told me that he feels disconnected from his community as he sees new faces and new businesses he hasn't been able to register yet. He explained he is wary of these new members of his community, such as in the case of Mattie's, an expensive restaurant which replaced a laundromat, first introduced by Ema in her collaboration, as there are certain qualities to places like Mattie's which borrow elements of the old

establishment in unsavory ways. In particular, Kirk explained his dislike for the restaurant by stating that it's visibly distinct from the surrounding historical Eastside community style which rooted in decades of Latinx culture and history; Mattie's not only appropriates former elements of the laundromat that came before it, such as a mural, some community members, like Ema and Kirk, feel that this appropriation or borrowing of the community's art is interpreted as an affront to the community, not a nod in tribute. This offense for Kirk is reinforced by the patrons of this restaurant who he feels are dismissive of the historical aspects of the neighborhood:

“Every time I’m biking up that road, and I bike it every day, I always get a mean look. I just see the difference in the people there, because of how they’re acting, how they’re acting with each other. Even how they’re sitting in the environment. Just looking around, not sure of what they’re looking at. It’s really people that don’t belong in that area -- who don’t appreciate it....The neighbors did their laundry at that spot. They were chillin’ while their laundry’s being done. You know? So, it feels super separated– in my head and in the environment. It doesn’t fit right.”

Kirk elaborated that no one from the neighborhood, except the newcomers, would go there for a meal as it was so expensive and out of place. He felt that the restaurant was a snobby façade in the middle of the realness of the neighborhood, as the restaurant exists in the middle of a community where no member of that community can afford to or would care to have a meal. In this way, Kirk’s community of practice is being challenged by the alteration of familiar and formerly frequented spaces.

Furthering the discussion on the culture of the ‘old’ neighborhood, Kirk feels that the community is still going strong in spite of the new demographic moving in. As evidence of the withstanding old Eastside culture, he listed the weekly lowrider gathering at East

Park, the “unhindered” monthly car show at a recreation center, and the quinceañeras still frequenting the Lakeview Gardens down the street from him. He feels that the community is strong enough in maintaining these community traditions that the gatherings and celebrations go on uninterrupted. The locations of these events, such as East Park, have gone mostly unaltered in the wake of gentrification, which surely helps to sustain the sense there are pockets where the old Eastside culture remains unwavering.

For the financial category Kirk addresses in regard to changes on the Eastside, he feels that this is the one force which touches all actors involved in the Eastside, though not equally. Those who benefit from the incoming businesses and residential property development see increased wealth and economic opportunity, while those who can’t keep up with the increasing property taxes, rental rates, and overall cost of living in the Eastside, have to eventually leave. He feels that things will gradually improve for all members of the Eastside, but that this positive affect will come more slowly, as those who have to leave because they are not able to afford or able to cope with the changes will not be experiencing the new East Austin. For Kirk and many others in his neighborhood, leaving the Eastside will mean leaving behind the house he grew up in, and living outside of Austin as the cost of living increases.

Most notably, these categories coincide with a predicament of gentrification Kirk is directly experiencing as he’s confounded with the decision of selling the house to developers, as he constantly receives substantial offers for his house. On the one hand, Kirk feels frustrated with the changing faces in East Austin as well as in Austin itself, enough that he considers leaving for this reason. In addition, the wealth selling his home would secure him is an extremely tempting offer. On the other hand, he feels an obligation to

maintain and preserve his late father's home – “I should keep this home and make it be something that's historic, cultural, long-lasting -- it's got all of my father's art in it. That's even more of a bonus.”



Fig. 4: Kirk's photomap. The image has been altered to anonymize the locations depicted. (Pg. 50)

Irresolution: Personal or Financial Value in Homeownership

“I am constantly back and forth about wanting to keep it forever, and cherish it, or just to completely relinquish it, and give it away to some maniac to just tear it down. I always get stuff in mail, and stuff on my doorstep offering very large amounts of cash for my house.”

Kirk took the Polaroid camera with him on a daily bike ride around his neighborhood, taking photographs of sites in the Eastside close to home he either cherishes or detests. The Polaroids depict the inside of his house, his front yard, a pedestrian bridge (“Paradise”) he and his friends frequent, and Ovation, a corporation visible from Kirk's

house which he says ruins the view of the horizon. Kirk's disillusionment with the new business fronts in his neighborhood was portrayed in the image of the former tax assistance agency. He told me, "is just a perfect example of taking away something important from the community" and that he is "sure it'll be replaced with something not so important."

In the photomap, it appears that Kirk didn't settle in on only illustrating disenchantment of his home. He said there was something sad in going around his home looking for sites he didn't like for the photovoice exercise, so he instead took Polaroids of places that remind him of his deep attachment to his home. In recalling taking Polaroids of his home, Kirk shared a realization that the photographs assumed greater significance for him in that that they might one day stand to represent a place which will someday no longer exist. In this discussion, Kirk seemed to be more resolute in his desire to maintain his home, whereas in our first interview, he appeared to be experiencing a lack of certainty as to whether the increasing disconnection he has been experiencing would be enough to push him out; if he should leave before he would no longer recognize the spaces of his neighborhood.

In addition to the disillusionment with the possessed spaces for new investments and the harsh looks he's given by the newcomers, a quandary Kirk seemed to be most confounded with in both of our interviews is the fact that his property is being actively pursued by developers and investors, and that their offers for the land are difficult to turn away from. This consequence of gentrification is a complicated one many like Kirk and his family are compelled to navigate as their properties become highly valuable investment opportunities for developers or 'house flippers' who are profit motivated (Lee et al. 2011). Kirk considers how his brother's and his own life would become quite different if they were

to sell the house, as well as the benefits of having greater financial means.

Kirk's irresolution offers another insight this specific predicament of gentrification, where he seems forced to choose whether the personal significance of his home is more valuable than the money being offered for the property. Kirk must one day decide if money can speak louder than the part of him that is compelled to keep the house indefinitely. Outside of our discussion, his house no longer existing is not something he ever really thinks about. "Now I live in my house, so I don't think about that at all. I just live in it every day. I don't second guess it -- it's there, it's mine." Kirk's photomap depicts that for the moment, he maintains autonomy in that choice, and that his choice is to stay:

"I wrote this is mine forever around the photos of my home because I just have a strong desire to try to hold onto this as long as possible, because I love it so much. I know it would be destroyed if I ever let it go."

VII. Jess: Anticipated Bereavement and Dispossession

“It’s like I’m going to be grieving from having to move from here. I’m going to be grieving from seeing my childhood home torn down... it’s going to be hard. It’s going to be really hard.”

Jess began our collaboration by stating that the Eastside doesn’t feel like home anymore. It is still home, she says, because that’s where her family is, but it’s no longer comfortable for her; she’s overwhelmed with the back-to-back changes and that there seems to be no time to take in each change and allow it to settle. Her family members who live on the same street are highly protective of one another, especially in the cases of acquiring new neighbors. She told me her family will tell her, “Hey watch out, there’s new people moving down the street. Be on the lookout.” These new neighbors aren’t exactly neighborly, she explains; they have had disagreements and will sometimes tell her to keep her dog quiet when he’s outside in her yard. Most importantly, she says, her newer neighbors are not protective in the ways she and her family and long-term neighbors are of each other.

In addition to the new traffic congestion she experiences in her neighborhood, Jess explained that her daily commute to and from work are exacerbated by her noticing older homes being torn down, and the frequency in which they are demolished. As she notices the new homes, she’s reminded that the neighborhood is no longer what it used to be; in these new homes, she doesn’t see a warmth or sense of home like she does in seeing the original Eastside homes. She talked about the letters she receives in the mail from the City of Austin which notify residents within a certain radius of a house being torn down. These notices include information and maps on how the demolition or redevelopment will affect nearby residents. For Jess, these aren’t notices but reminders of the constant sense of the

disappearing original Eastside Austin.

We first met at Jess's house, the same house she has lived her entire life. The house is a typical original Eastside house: it has no central heating and air, has wooden floors, with every original part still intact. Jess said that the charms of the house and the closeness of being next door to her family are what make the house a home. Jess had just found out in the week prior to our first meeting that her house, her grandfather's house directly across the street, and her dad's house immediately next door -- where he has lived for 49 years -- all will be torn down in the spring of next year. Both her house and her father's houses are on incorporated government property, and the city is now looking to develop this land for municipal use. Her grandfather's house will have to be sold soon as well, as he has recently passed away.

Jess is experiencing an active dispossession of the only home she's known. Of this anticipated loss, she described the things she and her family will no longer have, with closeness to one another being the most important thing. She told me stories of her family living on the same street for generations, about the big moments and the everyday moments, like her daily visits with her dad next door, and her uncle's New Year's Eve fireworks show that takes over the street. She told me that in recent years, the block parties that used to frequent her community are ebbing, and that she doesn't notice kids playing in the streets like she used to.



Fig. 5: Jess's photomap. (Pg. 51)

Jess said the photovoice exercise felt simultaneously nostalgic and frustrating, as everything she encountered was so different than what she was used to. She said, “It’s just frustrating. I thought it was going to be, oh yea I can do this, but it turned into oh my gosh, how’d that house get there or what happened to that house!” She said taking the Polaroids felt touristy and that her surroundings were so changed that she felt as if she was in another city. She took Polaroids of things she felt wouldn’t be around for much longer such as murals done by people she knew in high school, her house, her dad’s house, and her grandfather’s house.

An Anticipated Loss of Togetherness

I asked if Jess had arranged the Polaroids in any particular way. Initially she declined that she had arranged the images in any conscious way, but after a moment of looking over the photomap, she stated that the arrangement was completely unintentionally done, but that the arrangement did in fact organize her sense of home and neighborhood. In the left portion of the photomap, one can see Jess's house in the middle of the other six Polaroids, with her father's house to the left (just as it is positioned when looking at the houses from the street), and the Polaroids of her grandfather's house and his wedding portrait are beneath the Polaroid of her house.

"I guess I was subconsciously thinking we're always going to be together. You know -- we're always together, and pretty soon that's not going to happen anymore. A year from now, it's not going to be that way anymore. I think it's what I'm used to. But it's not going to be that way soon."

Jess stated that each Polaroid seemed to allude to imminent changes, as she suspects that within five years none of the depicted spaces in her Polaroids will exist. Jess talked about her grief, and how the mourning has preceded the actual loss of her home and her family's homes. Jess lamented about being forced to give up her roots without any control over the timeline she faces.

In talking more about her grief, she spoke about the grief of recently losing her grandfather. She said the grief of having her grandfather pass, and then to very soon see his home torn down and redeveloped into another home for someone else was difficult to come to terms with. Anticipating the bereavement that will follow within a few months as she will also see her childhood homes torn down is more difficult to reconcile. Jess hopes

to be open to the new chapter that will follow these losses, but that she's scared of the unknowns of the next few months.

In this predicament of gentrification, Jess does not have agency in the fate of her house or her family's houses -- she has just a few months to figure out where she and her father will live. In this way, Jess's community of practice is facing an imminent force which will determine how she and her family navigate their shared senses of closeness in the future. As she faces the dispossession of the spaces she has always known, Jess said she will savor every little thing that she can about her house, even if it's just taking out the trash. She says will enjoy the common moments and to accept the difficult moments as they come. As her grieving proceeds the actual losses, Jess is also confronted with the coinciding alterations of the residential scapes of her community, a situation she describes as being extremely hard. Her photomap depicts what will be lost -- not just the physical structures of the houses, but the tightly knit proximity of her family and the lifetimes of memories that were created by the houses.

VIII. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Gentrification sets and shapes trajectories of belonging and displacement for Eastside community members by complicating these senses for those confronted with the predicaments of gentrification. These trajectories are complicated not only in instances of being taxed out, or having a generational home possessed, or in the seemingly inevitable decision to sell one's home, but in seeing familiar spaces altered to no longer meet or agree with one's needs, social identities, communities of practice, and one's roots. Gentrification can deepen one's sense of belonging to a disappearing space, and it may also complicate, or dilute that sense.

This project seeks not to remedy any dilemma of gentrification in Austin, nor do the thematic discussions offer any resolutions to the conundrums some of my collaborators face. This project also does not seek to generalize all experiences relating to the Eastside of Austin or its residents. Rather, the project aims to problematize these discussions by challenging the hegemonic, visual cultural archaeology (Leavy 2015) of the typical inquiries of gentrification in the Eastside. Just as Rudy told me, it feels as if they are the dinosaurs and the flurry of media and documentarians seeking to visually salvage the remaining elements of his home are the like the outsiders discovering their bones. In recognition of this, I set out to place the experiences of the collaborators at the forefront of knowledge building in this inquiry of the effects of the current moment of East Austin. The art made by my collaborators offers visual representations of their individual or collective identity struggles within the contexts of a rapidly altering and whitening space through self-representation.

This project finally intends to build upon the tradition of the photograph or

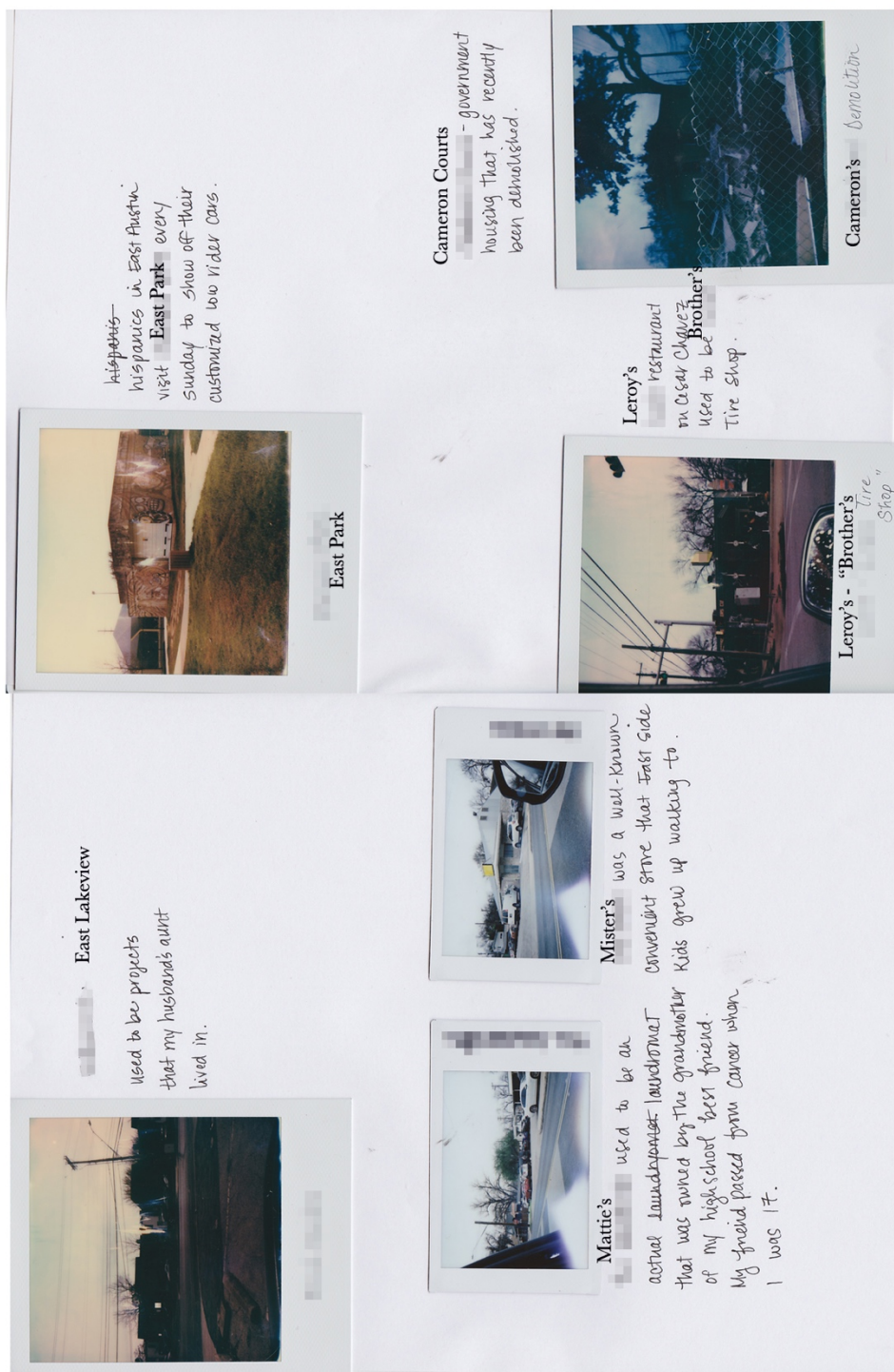
photographic essay in ethnographic practice, as well as to offer the photomaps as visual phenomenology for investigating these particular experiences. By facilitating the collaborators in the creation of their own photographic depictions of what was important to them in their sense of home on the Eastside, the photomaps function as communicative and expressive devices for exploring the experiences of gentrification and in the re-membering of their homes.

VII. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

It is my hope that the use of photography may secure its place in social research and inquiry as a functional complementary method for generating data, or as a primary means of meaning-making and knowledge-building in social research. Photography is wrought with potential for disempowerment and subjugation of its ‘subjects’, as evidenced in a well-known photojournalism mantra, “I give voice to the voiceless”, which assumes that the group or individual in question have no voice on their own; it is only through the photographer that these stories and ideas may be shared. This thought is a dangerous one. I hope that photographic practitioners continue to question this existing paradigm of photographic practice, where it’s as if those who take the photograph withhold the power, profit, and narrative of that image.

Photovoice helps to remedy this paradigm, as the photographers or collaborators in this project maintained an agency in our collaborative effort to explore the conundrums of living in a disappearing space: they took the photographs on their own time, at their discretion, and received no constraints as to what they could take photographs of. It was our coming together again to discuss the images as they assembled them where the pre-existing power dynamic of photographer and subject was disseminated into a collaborative approach to meaning-making; we became collaborators. Photographic practitioners and social scientists alike may find photovoice to be an effective, collaborative tool for conceptualizing or constructing meaning in future social inquiry. The use of visual art may also perhaps provide what words cannot.

APPENDIX SECTION



Emilia J.'s Photomap. The image has been altered to anonymize the locations depicted.



Rey Z.'s Photomap. The image has been altered to anonymize the locations depicted.



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Kirk C.'s Photomap. The image has been altered to anonymize the locations depicted.



Jess R.'s Photomap.

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