NOT YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD TACO TRUCK?:

A CRITICAL URBAN FUTURES STUDY OF MOBILE FOOD VENDING IN SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis. This research is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program.

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ABSTRACT

This ethnographically informed critical urban study is concerned with local resident perspectives about the significance and possible futures of street food vending in San Antonio, Texas. San Antonio is one of the most populous and fastest growing cities in the United States (US), and it is perceived by some to be a bellwether for future urban development due to the city's longstanding majority Mexican American population and the changing demographic profile of the state and nation. Less commonly noted is the history of San Antonio vending practices influencing national and global foodways, from *chile con carne* (beef chili) to sports stadium nacho chips and cheese sauce. Additionally, San Antonio has a complex history of socioeconomic bifurcation, discrimination and spatial inequality, which are evident in some of the city's street food vending practices.

Employing a multilayered and reflexive approach that includes interviews and observation, this study focused on publicly accessible larger vehicle-based (food truck) vending in San Antonio in 2014 and 2015. Vending practices inspired by the national and now global food truck movement since the 2008 Great Recession have been categorized by some San Antonians as gourmet (or foodie, branded or professional) and separate from traditional working-class practices described as neighborhood (or Mexican, unbranded or taco).

In this thesis, I argue that some critical literature and popular depictions of food truck vending in the US have marked neighborhood (working-class and affordable) vending as undesirable and static or stagnant compared to the purportedly more innovative and healthful gourmet (more expensive) food truck trend. Accordingly, I extend the critical literature by demonstrating the capacity of neighborhood vending in San Antonio to be adaptive and creative in response to complex urban conditions and to shape local gourmet and other vending practices.

This thesis makes a distinct contribution to critical urban studies by using food truck vending in San Antonio as a vehicle for perceiving trends towards socioeconomic (re)stratification and the curtailing of class mixing or blurring in the US, and related

patterns of gentrification. These patterns include *vendrification*—the upscaling of street vending, and *gente*-fication—or gentrification practiced by affluent Latina/o populations and sometimes incorporating versions of ethnic foods, as might be epitomized in San Antonio by the expensive taco or *raspa.* The final contribution of the thesis is to identify directions for additional San Antonio-focused research related to mobile food vending, city futures, urban marginality and Latina/o urbanisms.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction: Gourmet taco trucks and suspect Mexican sodas

The food truck vendor appeared embarrassed and somewhat nervous as he remembered the rules for vending at Travis Park, one of the oldest public parks in the nation (Parker 2014a). The park is located a few blocks from San Antonio's famed Alamo mission and near the stations of private bus companies including Greyhound that offer routes to Mexico and elsewhere.[1] The vendor said to me, "I can't let you take the soda bottle or the police will fine me five hundred dollars [USD$500]" and nodded towards a uniformed officer in the park behind me.[2] As I glanced at the officer and noticed a police SUV parked a few spots up the street from the lone food truck, the vendor poured most, but not all, of the purchased half-liter (*medio litro*) glass bottle of a citrus-flavored Mexican soda into a translucent plastic cup to complete my order.

I balanced on top of the flimsy cup a disposable plate containing five *tacos al pastor*—spit-roasted pork "mini" or "street" tacos (*tacos callejeros*). *Tacos al pastor* is a hybrid of Lebanese and Mexican street cuisines (Carman 2009) and is locally a common dish that is used as a judging item for corporate sponsored taco truck competitions held in the city since 2010 (McInnis 2014). Such contests are part of a food truck phenomenon that has been described as migrating to San Antonio from trendier US cities such as Austin, Texas (Davila 2011) and that has reached other nations, including Mexico (Ortega 2015) and Australia (Wright 2012). This national, now global food truck movement is understood to have its origins in California *barrios,* or working poor Latina/o neighborhoods (Diaz 2005; Gold 2012; Brindley 2015). However, the trend in San Antonio has been defined by some locals as apart from and unlike barrio practices.

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[1] Passages in this section (Section 1.1), which are based on reflective writing I completed during my fieldwork, reproduce or closely mirror material published in a chapter (Tirpak 2016) for *Rethinking Life at the Margins* (Lancione 2016).

[2] I did not audio record my field observations. Quotes in this section are reconstructed from memory and fieldnotes. I introduce my methodologies later in this chapter.

Carefully, I made my way towards one of a number of empty and brightly hued café tables placed near the center of the park, overlooked by a City worker at a portable kiosk who offered games and books for visitors to borrow. As I observed, these amenities form some of the furniture and props offered to park-goers during workday lunchtime hours as part of a public-private USD$500,000 "makeover," "rehabilitation" and rebranding of the historic park (Bailey 2014, para. 2; Project for Public Spaces 2014). On my way to a table, I passed the pairing of a new permanent City trash can and separate recycling bin designed and labeled for, amongst other items, glass bottles.

It was mid-day in early summer in 2014, and I was alone in Travis Park except for the police officer and a few City workers tending to new decorative landscaping. The lone food truck parked curbside operated as a private business participant in the City's official Downtown Food Truck Program. As described in published regulations, the City endeavors with this program to "monitor and control the quantity and quality of vendors who desire to operate a mobile food truck vending operation"—in order to "create a sense of place" and "provide a vibrant culinary experience at street level for downtown" (City of San Antonio 2014, pp. 1-2). These objectives suggest the presence and popularity of street food vending in the city, which traditionally has featured Mexican, Mexican American or Tex-Mex foods (Silva & Nelson 2004; Gabaccia & Pilcher 2011; Arellano 2012; Pilcher 2012; Cárdenas 2016; Lomax 2017).[3] More critically, the City's program, which launched as a pilot project in 2012 in response to the national food truck trend (Baugh 2012; Olivo 2012; Elizarraras 2013), places City officials and workers in the unusual role of curating more exclusive street food dining experiences downtown while framing the broad practice of street vending as a problem.

Through the program, which operates at a few sites downtown primarily on weekdays and during lunch hours, City staff members review food truck menus and choose vendors depending on "the truck's appearance, food quality and variety"—

[3] Some of my interview participants emphasized that what is sometimes described as Mexican food in San Antonio is often Tex-Mex (Lomax 2017)—a separate cuisine or local interpretations of foods from Mexico. Like some of my interviewees, I use "Mexican" sometimes in this thesis to describe foods, restaurants and other practices that elicit for locals a sense of how they perceive Mexico or Mexican-ness to be, but that might simply be a local phenomenon or perspective.

aiming for the "avoidance of food redundancy" (City of San Antonio 2014, p. 5). This occurs without clear guidelines as to how such criteria might be judged or possibly challenged in a city known primarily for Mexican or Tex-Mex cuisine. Early reports about the program suggest that the City's selection of food trucks is "unabashedly subjective" (Baugh 2012, para. 11), further suggesting a departure from impartiality and the problematizing of street food vending as a competitive and open practice.

Moreover, the highly regulated program does not appear to improve or be concerned about local access to affordable meals. This is surprising, considering that many program sites also act as transfer points for public buses serving surrounding San Antonio neighborhoods that are defined as areas of persistent and extreme poverty or economic distress (Schwartz 2016; Casura 2017b). Residents of these areas face, amongst other challenges, food access insecurity (Everett 2012; Winters 2016; Stoeltje 2017).

As I observed, the program also does not promote ¡Viva Health! nutritional standards. Responding to overall high diabetes and obesity rates in San Antonio compared with state and national statistics (Stoeltje 2016), ¡Viva Health! (formerly called ¡Por Vida!) is a City-County Metropolitan Health District—"Metro Health"—project to promote better menu options and choices (Johnson 2017). Although it aims to improve local diets generally, the ¡Viva Health! campaign has targeted "mom and pop" (family-run and affordably priced) Mexican food restaurants and predominantly working-class Mexican American neighborhoods within the city's West Side (Robert Woods Johnson Foundation 2012). With other efforts, Metro Health has framed mobile food vending in the broad vicinity of some neighborhood schools as a public health threat (Shields n.d.).

Furthermore, neither Metro Health's ¡Viva Health! campaign or the City's Downtown Food Truck Program appear to address the disproportionate share of poverty-level wage employment offered by the local hospitality and foodservice sector (Sanders 2015), which plays a role in shaping local foodways and choices. For example, workers of participant food trucks are not required to be paid the City of

San Antonio's proposed living wage of USD$13 an hour for employees (Palacios 2015), and food trucks are not required or encouraged to offer items priced for workers earning the more prevalent minimum wages of under USD$10 an hour.

As I sat down with my taco plate and soda cup, a City worker offered to open a table umbrella for me. I commented casually about the absence of other park-goers and with some embarrassment about his offer of assistance, which seemed more akin to restaurant service than what might be expected in a public park. In response, he noted the rainy weather, but he also emphasized his role in the revitalization of Travis Park: "It used to be bad here with drugs. We are trying to give this park back to the people of the city."

I consumed my USD$12 street taco meal while considering the apparent divide between the past and the desired *people of the city*—in Spanish, *ciudadanos* (Diaz & Torres 2012) or *la gente* (the people)—catered to at the reinvented Travis Park and at other Downtown Food Truck Program sites and areas of the city targeted for revitalization. Some locals have described the new trucks as gourmet or foodie, suggesting elite or status-orientated consumption (Johnston & Baumann 2010; Zukin 2010). In years prior to renovations, Travis Park had been a site of everyday and affordable pushcart-based selling of food items such as hot dogs and *raspas*—flavored shaved ice treats (Patoski 1985)—and a place for "regular park visitors" accustomed to spending just a "few bucks on a meal" or snack (Gerlach 2014, para. 2). Noticeable to an eater, the "rehabilitation" of Travis Park (Baley 2014, para. 2), which has involved a heightened police presence to address perceived safety concerns related to visibly economically poorer and in some cases homeless users of the park (Gerlach 2014), has not included the provision of public toilets or even hand washing facilities. This is despite Travis Park's history as a street food site and major transfer point for local buses.

As I sat alone in the revitalized but nearly empty Travis Park eating, I also thought about the more generous and less expensive offerings of this standard local combination of pork mini tacos and a Mexican soda that I had enjoyed elsewhere in San Antonio (see Figure 1.1), including in neighborhoods just on the periphery of the

City's official and expanding downtown zone or business district (Yeager 2015). Typically and noting the city's history of high levels of poverty-related food insecurity, it is a meal served with a glass bottle of soda. This allows an order to be stretched between customers or family members by passing around the soda bottle and using the customary second corn tortilla of each double-wrapped mini taco to create additional tacos. An order of *tacos al pastor* can be a calorically dense meal but also nutritional (with salsas, fruits and vegetables as garnishes and a relatively small portion of meat in each taco), and it might serve as *antojitos*—or a little snack—for more than one customer.

Figure 1.1: A USD$6 neighborhood offering of tacos al pastor; © Mark A. Tirpak 2018

In other parts of the US, Mexican sodas served in glass bottles have gained customers as part of the gourmet food truck movement—which tends to feature foods and drinks that might be novel to a particular region or urban area (Gold 2012; Brindley 2015; Shankman 2015). Despite the ready availability of Mexican sodas in San Antonio and their association with more avant-garde or hip dining practices in other settings (Wong 2013; Cupcake 2017), glass soda bottles are currently forbidden at Travis Park by City rules (San Antonio Parks & Recreation n.d.). However, various public spaces downtown and near Travis Park, as well as some special events held at this park such as fundraising dinners (Rocha 2016) and private galas (Mendoza & Baugh 2017), have been exempted from the City's glass container ban. Although the ordinance against glass containers is not listed in signage stating the rules for Travis Park and appears to conflict with glass recycling efforts there, police enforcement of the ban has apparently disciplined some vendors and customers within this historic public space.

Arguably, such policies and police work at Travis Park represent a new *botellas rotas* (broken bottles) focus downtown that builds from the controversial *broken windows theory* of policing that is dominant in the US (Goldstein 2014). Broken windows and related "stop and frisk" policing—the questioning and searching of those "who look suspicious" as a crime deterrent (Vedantam *et al*. 2016, para. 38)—targets subjective notions of neighborhood and public disorder and "quality of life crimes," and it is often racially and otherwise biased (Goldstein 2014, para. 4; Hermosillo 2010). As I observed, the glass bottle rule was not enforced when Travis Park played host to more exclusive events. Local government efforts to transform street food selling and public life in the center city, and which challenge more inclusive vending practices, helped to shape the focus and form of this study.

1.2 A tasty experiment: An ethnographically informed critical urban study

Gourmet food trucks in San Antonio—as showcased with special events, the City's Downtown Food Truck Program and private *food truck parks* (see Figure 1.2)—have been discussed locally as a "tasty experiment" that migrated to the city from California via Austin (Davila 2011, para. 1), as part of the food truck movement that launched in Los Angeles following the 2008 Great Recession:

Figure 1.2: A commercial food truck park in San Antonio; © San Antonio Current 2015 (SA Current 2015)

In San Antonio, the few private food truck parks in operation during my period of research were described as being "pet-friendly" and child-friendly (offering "games

and children's areas") and often serving "craft beer" (SA Current 2015, para. 9). I noticed similar amenities shaping other gourmet food truck settings including the revitalized Travis Park—with its purpose-built fenced enclosure for dogs, games available to borrow during weekday business hours and alcohol offered at some special events. Reporting about the opening of San Antonio's first food truck park in late 2010 defines these off-street commercial properties, which were later codified as an allowable local land use (Elizarraras 2013), as offering "a smorgasbord of gourmet dishes in an environment not unlike a backyard barbecue" (Davila 2011, para. 2). This statement distances gourmet food trucks and where they operate from the front yard barbecues, porch step socializing and public park grilling that some of my interviewees and I were familiar with and associated with San Antonio's large working-class population.

Gourmet food truck practices have been described in predominantly and majority Mexican American San Antonio (Ioannou 2016) as distinct and separate from existing or legacy food truck operations and related social activities—or not "your neighborhood taco truck" (Davila 2011, para. 3). This framing, which suggests the history and indicates a ubiquity of Mexican or Tex-Mex food street vending locally, prompts inquiry about how the new gourmet food truck "industry" in San Antonio, as it has been called (SA Current 2015, para. 4), might compare, contrast or conflict with older approaches—as well what this binary might signify locally or suggest about transitions in urban culture, governance and development. These are some of the concerns that shaped my ethnographically informed critical urban study of food truck vending in San Antonio, as I introduce with this chapter.

To note, I did not set out with specific theories that I wanted to prove with this study or a desire to become (or role-play being) a vendor or otherwise enmesh with the fine details of (and thus possibly endanger) specific vending operations. Instead, the study was inspired by San Antonio reporting (Chasnoff 2011; Davila 2011), my recollections of life in the city in the early 2000s and noticing how the gourmet food truck trend migrated from the US to Sydney, Australia, as a project of local government place-making and cultural economy planning (Wright 2012)—exemplifying the international transferring of some urban policies and strategies

(Robinson 2011) but also populations as characteristics of the contemporary era. I also did not endeavor to necessarily generate new theory or engage with established or emerging academic debates related to the US food truck phenomenon and urban change. Instead, the study methodology was guided by my understanding of the social and ethical commitments underpinning a critical ethnographic stance and approach (Madison 2012; Jason & Glenwick 2016) and a general concern about the regulation and policing and other cultural dimensions of street food vending in urban San Antonio—noting how San Antonio is one of the most stringently regulated street vending markets in the US (Williams 2013; Arellano 2017a) and also one of the nation's most spatially unequal (Drennon 2012; Smith 2013; Schwartz 2016; Casura 2017a, b; Stoeltje 2017) As I will argue, this thesis makes a distinct contribution to critical urban studies by using food trucks as a vehicle for perceiving in San Antonio trends towards socioeconomic (re)stratification (Scott 2017), as shaped by local government decisions (McCann & Ward 2011; Sandel 2012 a, b), and what could be understood to be "atypical" patterns of urban gentrification in the US, including in breaking from a clearly or primarily "White-led … scenario" (Hyra 2017, p. 8). My research occurred during a period of demographic change nationally driven by the growth of a diverse Latina/o population (Sáenz 2017) and increased movement to and investment in cities following the 2008 Great Recession, as part what has been called the global era of *cognitive-cultural capitalism* (Scott 2008, 2014, 2017).

Geographer and public policy scholar Allen J. Scott (2014) utilizes the phrase cognitive-cultural-capitalism to describe the phenomenon of cities globally increasingly exhibiting and prioritizing "knowledge- and culture-intensive forms of production" (p. 570) such as "business, financial and personal services, and a wide array of cultural industries" (p. 571). As I will discuss, San Antonio embodies some of these elements of a "creative city" (p. 568)—noting the large knowledge-based and defense-related employment sector (Thompson 2010) as well as the city's long history as a host to conventions (Sanders 2014b) and cultural tourism destination that traditionally downtown street food vending supported (Hernández-Ehrisman 2008; Gabaccia & Pilcher 2011; Arellano 2012; Pilcher 2012; McMahon 2013; Cárdenas 2016). Two specific trends or "urbanization dynamics" (Scott 2014, p. 566) that I view as related to the cognitive-cultural economic era that I became aware of in San

Antonio and draw attention to with this thesis are *vendrification* (Schott 2009)—whereby gourmet vending displaces traditional and more affordable and accessible practices and opportunities with the assistance of local government, and *gente*-fication (Sangha 2014; Delgadillo 2016)—or gentrification practiced by affluent Latina/o populations and sometimes incorporating versions of ethnic foods, as might be epitomized in San Antonio by the expensive taco or *raspa.* The vendrification some interviewees and I observed involved the displacement of longstanding and affordable street food options from public sites and areas of downtown targeted by local government and elite interests for reinvention, such as Travis Park. *Gente*-fication was observable with some Downtown Food Truck Program participants and other gourmet vendors selling expensive versions of familiar or comfort foods, such as tacos and *raspa* treats. As I learned, both trends relate to aspects of local history, including the regulation of the Chili Queens downtown vendors (mid-1800s to mid-1900s), which I discuss in Chapter Two.

Another contribution of this thesis is to identify directions for additional research related to mobile food vending, city futures, urban marginality and Latina/o urbanisms utilizing San Antonio as a case study—noting how this rapidly growing, predominantly Mexican American and extremely socioeconomically stratified major US city with importance to national (and thus global) foodways has been "off the … map" (Robinson 2006, p. 101) of much recent critical discourse about food trucks and US urban changes. To begin, I provide some additional background to establish why majority Mexican American San Antonio (Pimentel 2012; Cave 2014) offers a significant study of the post-2008 Great Recession food truck phenomenon and related "peek at … the America of tomorrow" (quoted in Dotan 2012, para. 4), or consideration of US urban conditions and possible futures.

San Antonio is widely regarded to be a bellwether city for the US, due to its longstanding majority, growing and diverse Mexican American population, and given the changing demographic profile of the state and nation (Dotan 2012; Pimentel 2017). San Antonio appears to foreground various aspects of future US urban development given patterns of urbanization nationally that echo San Antonio's rapid and predominantly suburban and car-dependent growth (Kolko 2017) and also

the city's stark socioeconomic bifurcation. As various academics and commentators have described, San Antonio has exhibited throughout much of its history extreme patterns of segregation and disparities of race, ethnicity, wealth, and thus access to education, work, housing and public resources and opportunities (Drennon 2012; Smith 2013; Schwartz 2016; Casura 2017a, b; Stoeltje 2017). Persistent poverty conditions in some neighborhoods close to downtown and the relative clustering of economically poor apart from wealthier residents in the city (Casura 2015) have led to San Antonio being declared "the most spatially unequal city in the country"—where "life in the northerly" and wealthier postal codes has "almost nothing in common" with poorer and predominantly Mexican American areas, including those "just west of downtown and the familiar Alamo Plaza" (Schwartz 2016, para. 24; see Section 1.6). These factors lead various academics and authors to describe San Antonio as a majority Mexican American and deeply inequitable city (Rosales 2000; Pimentel 2012; Cave 2014).

Approximately 57 percent of San Antonio's population identifies as having Mexican origins (Ioannou 2016), while the city's non-Hispanic white population (using US Census terminology) has been less than 48 percent of the population and declining since 1970, and was recorded as less than 30 percent in 2010. This informs San Antonio sometimes being described as a "majority minority" US city compared with national statistics (Pimentel 2012; Cave 2014). Moreover, San Antonio's particular racial and ethnic demographics and extreme economic bifurcation lead local commentator and public policy scholar Lily Casura (2017a) to assert that San Antonio is a bicultural rather than a multicultural city that has "no obvious counterpart" in the US (para. 2).[4] Some residents I interviewed further characterize the city's population as divided between elite working professional and wealthy suburban and urban residents who shape and benefit the most from local governance and live apart from poorer or "regular" San Antonians. These and other descriptions of local conditions offered by interviewees in relation to food truck vending suggest the socioeconomic stratification, differentiation and exclusions that some academics

[4] Comparisons with the municipality of Monterrey, Mexico, might prove fruitful with future research, noting the racial, ethnic and socioeconomic "hidden discrimination" and spatial inequalities observed in that city (Acharya & Barragán Codina 2012, p. 140) and the migration and other ties between Monterrey and San Antonio historically.

discuss as a “new division” of society (Scott 2014, p. 571) or the “New Urban Crisis” in the US (Florida 2017) in the current economic era—which has also been described as a competitive “quest for the creative city” globally (Scott 2014, p. 566).

Although San Antonio practices alone are a significant focus of research, local gourmet food truck vending has been called a “twist” on or interpretation of Austin urban qualities and practices (Davila 2011, para. 1). In San Antonio and elsewhere, Austin is recognized to be a creative and trendy city that has experienced an exceptional increase in food truck activity since 2010—as part of the gourmet food truck phenomenon (Theis 2017) associated with new business investment and population growth there (Kolko 2017). The vending of more than a thousand “artisanal food trucks” in Austin (Lemon 2016, p. 102) prompted one reporter to posit that food trucks have come to define that city’s public culture (Newell 2017). As I will discuss, different aspects of Austin’s history, growth and public life, including the predominance of food trucks and the larger non-Hispanic white population there, led some of my interviewees to emphasize that San Antonio is *not like Austin.*

Yet, San Antonio is like Austin and other Texas cities in that it has grown significantly in population and with investments since the 2008 Great Recession that include new luxury housing developments in the urban core and sprawling into once rural areas (Cave 2014; Beyer 2016; Copenbarger Vance 2017; Kolko 2017; Ura & Essig 2017). San Antonio is the seventh most populous city in the US and the second most populous in Texas (behind Houston) and has experienced rapid population growth since 2012 (Moorman 2013; O’Hare 2017). However, growth statistics and rankings by population obscure how non-urban San Antonio can seem, with the city’s population of over 1.3 million residents spread over an area that nearly matches in size the sprawling city of Los Angeles, California—which has over 3.7 million residents (Parker 2014b; see Figures 1.3 & 1.4):

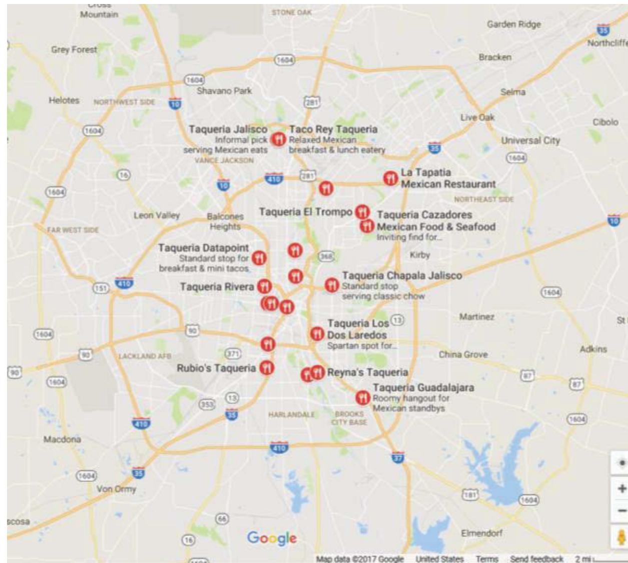

Figure 1.3: Map of San Antonio, with markers indicating some of the city's *taquerias*; © Google 2017 (Google Maps 2017)

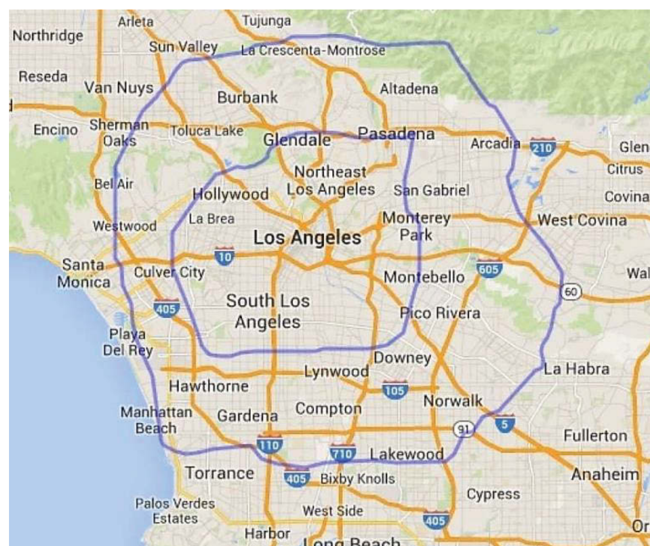

Figure 1.4: San Antonio's Interstate 410 (inner loop) and 1604 (outer loop) roads layered over a map of Los Angeles, California; © Google 2014 (Parker 2014b)

San Antonio has a relatively high birth rate including teen birth rate (Philips 2017). The city's population growth has also been shaped by "secondhand gentrification" (Harrup 2017) as housing prices and traffic congestion have increased in neighboring Austin, encouraging relocation (Kotkin 2016). Additionally, the growth of Texas cities has been linked to the movement or displacement of poorer and less educated residents from cities in California (Reese 2017) and trends of US millennials (the generation born between 1980 and 2000) and retirees relocating to where housing is

more affordable (Robinson 2017). San Antonio's population has also grown as a result of population movement spurred by weather-related disasters such as Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and through diverse migration from Mexico. As some interviewees discussed, this migration has included ultra-wealthy residents from northern Mexico and specifically the city of Monterrey (Hennessy-Fiske 2013; Cave 2014).

Furthermore, large defense-related federal government facilities and investments lead San Antonio to sometimes be declared "the most recession-proof city in America" (Thompson 2010). They also bring numerous young military recruits and professionals at least temporarily to the city and help to maintain the local tourism economy. San Antonio, which owns the trademark to the moniker "Military City USA," has since 1946 been a main location nationally for US Air Force training (Sullivan 2017). San Antonio also houses a major joint-branch military medical facility, a main National Security Agency (NSA) outpost (Hicks 2013) and a burgeoning cyber-security sector involving local universities. Additionally, San Antonio is headquarters for USAA, a financial services provider for "military personnel around the country" (Kotkin 2016, para. 11). The large military presence and investment shapes the local culture that some describe as conservative, and it does not necessarily lesson local poverty conditions—for example, noting the toy drives that occur during holidays to support the families of some active-duty military members. It also shapes the cityscape, such as with purposefully defensive or difficult to access urban design (Savičić & Savić 2012) characterizing sections of the city where major military facilities are or were once located.

Based on local conditions that I discuss in Chapter Four, some residents and newcomers describe San Antonio as being and functioning more like a big small town than a major city, offering little anonymity and more familial engagement with neighbors and strangers (Burroughs 2014). These and other factors shaped how I conducted research and how I present findings—taking efforts to protect the privacy and anonymity of interviewees and other residents and different food truck operations.

Generally, San Antonio exhibited less and otherwise different street food vending activity than has been attributed to other major US cities as part of the gourmet food truck movement, as captured by an expanding body of research.[5] For example, I could not describe any vending vehicle or operation that I observed or that my interviewees discussed as "like a thousand others in the city," or even one of "hundreds"—as one researcher characterizes practices and conditions in New York City and Portland, Oregon, respectively (Koch 2016, pp. 1234 & 1240). A relatively low volume and limited field of publicly accessible food truck activity was one of a number of San Antonio conditions that my research had to adjust for but that was not detrimental to achieving the aims of this study or yielding valid and significant findings.

Reporter Megan Willett (2014) estimates there were only 61 food trucks operating throughout San Antonio in mid-2014 compared with nearly triple this number of trucks and trailers in neighboring (and geographically smaller) Austin. She places San Antonio near the bottom of a ranking of major US cities by food trucks per capita based on data from Roaming Hunger, a company that supports gourmet food truck practices (Pierson 2015). Through my research, which included interviews with a range of local residents involved professionally or otherwise with food truck vending, I did not obtain an official count or estimate of the overall number of food trucks in San Antonio—which the City classifies as *kitchens on wheels* distinct from other types of vending (City of San Antonio, n.d.). As I share in Chapters Four and Five, some interviewees commented about what they described as the lack of forthcoming or assistance by City officials in regards to information about street food vending, and possibly as a means towards hindering some operations. [6] Such observations connect with the City of San Antonio's history of engaging in efforts to discourage broad and especially working-class participation in street peddling, as I

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[5] In addition to other food truck research referenced throughout this thesis, I note the work of Bohlman (2011), Linnekin, Dermer, and Geller (2011-2012), Hidalgo (2012), Rodriguez-McGill (2012), Weber (2012), Liu (2013), and Petersen (2014) as some of the US food truck research that precedes my study.

[6] Without revealing sources, I can state that I engaged with various City of San Antonio officials related to my research and was able to record interviews with some residents whose work for the local public sector intersected with efforts to plan for and regulate mobile food vending. I discuss research methodologies and describe interview participants in Chapter Three.

will discuss and is implied with the stated aims of the Downtown Food Truck Program (City of San Antonio 2014).

Furthermore, the study context was shaped by local food truck controversies and legal challenges of the City's regulation of food trucks which generated substantial media coverage (Parker 2014c; Panju 2015; Panju & Wilson 2015; Danner 2015; Marks 2015b; Kinney 2016) and likely shaped participation in the study and access to information and some informants. Additionally, one vendor interviewed described how San Antonio serves as a licensing body for food trucks operating in West Texas oil fields, far beyond the city limits. This suggests how any accounting of food trucks based on licenses granted (Koch 2016) might not offer a useful depiction of local practices in the case of San Antonio—although Texas oil field food truck vending and connections with San Antonio provides a compelling direction for additional research, as considered in Chapter Six.

As another vender interviewed estimated, there were about 40 food trucks in San Antonio (compared with many more in neighboring Austin) when he considered launching his gourmet food truck business after the migration of the trend to Texas. This corresponds with local reporter Brian Chasnoff's (2011) estimate of there being "nearly 300 kitchens on wheels, about 40 of them selling gourmet food" in San Antonio in contrast with "more than 1,200" in Austin (paras. 25 & 36). Estimates from different sources of there being fewer than three hundred kitchens on wheels throughout greater San Antonio along with observations of less food truck activity than apparent in other US cities such as Austin squares with what I observed—although it was not a study aim to try to account for all or otherwise specify the food trucks in San Antonio.

Research exploring food truck practices in other US cities emphasizes how it is difficult if not impossible (and depending on the aims of the research, not advisable) to try to discern the exact number and location of different types of mobile food vending operations, given that many vendors appear to operate without licenses or official designations, and as local government attention to and reporting about vending activity is not uniform (Ehrenfeucht 2016). My interviews and observations

revealed to me a range of existing vending practices related to food trucks that seem to be outside of the purview of local government and have not received much academic consideration. These outlying practices (which include neighborhood *raspa* vans, as I will discuss generally), as part of San Antonio's long history of street food and public dining innovations (Arellano 2012; Pilcher 2012), further help to mark the city as a significant site for research about street vending and US urban changes more broadly.

As an additional caveat, I do not explore in any depth with the study questions of individual identity. Although I state generalized facts and observations about interviewees (including the approximate age and gender of each participant), I purposely frame information about and conveyed to me by interviewees in ways to help shield the identities of interview participants and others in a close-knit community that I was part of over an extended period. In some instances, I describe interviewees as having moved to San Antonio from Mexico, as they shared with me. This aligns with my attempt to capture the range of experiences and perspectives informing opinions about food truck vending in predominantly Mexican American San Antonio, including comparisons with practices in actual and imagined Mexico. However, I avoided direct questions about immigration status and other aspects of individual identity as outside the study aims, and I share findings with awareness of the heightened policing in Texas against illegal immigration during and following my period of research (CNN Staff 2014; Gehrke 2015; Aguilar 2017).

The everyday "voices" (Boudreau 2010, p. 69) that I engaged with as interviewees were eighteen adult residents with some interest in or involvement with food truck vending and a willingness and the ability to participate in face-to-face and audio recorded interviews. My interviewees represented a balance of female and male adult residents from different parts of San Antonio, and therefore different socioeconomic worlds (Schwartz 2016; Casura 2017a, b; Stoeltje 2017). They encompassed a range of ages, educational and work experiences, backgrounds and tenure in the city. Interviewees included vendors, customers, public sector workers, musicians, laborers, business owners, artists, designers, retirees, military veterans, parents, individuals raised in San Antonio and recent migrants from Mexico and

elsewhere as residents of San Antonio. Noting San Antonio's long history of racial and ethnic amalgamation (de la Teja 1995), I describe the interviewees as predominantly Mexican American, in keeping with San Antonio's overall demographics (Ioannou 2016). This demographic factor emerged from the study methodologies and snowball sampling method (Atkinson & Flint 2001), which I introduce later in this chapter and discuss in Chapter Three.

My interviewees represented a breadth and depth of experiences with local food trucks. Their perspectives, along with my observations and analyses, allow the study to achieve what sociologist Andrew Sayer (1984) deems "practical adequacy" (quoted in Staeheli & Mitchell 2008, p. 169)—or a substantive accounting of local food truck practices and related urban change and consideration of the plausible future of vending based on current conditions and a diversity of local perspectives and data sources. Given my concern about gentrification and socioeconomic (re)stratification in San Antonio related to food truck vending, this thesis necessarily engages with the longstanding racialized and ethnicized local socioeconomic hierarchy—or *casta* (caste) system (de la Teja 1995; Blackwelder 1998)—and other aspects of local poverty politics (Elwood, Lawson & Nowak 2015).

As I share in Chapter Four, the local social order was described by one interviewee as the primacy of "people with money"—which translates as elite interests—in how San Antonio is governed and structured. Her comments suggest more hidden or less "blatant" social segregation, drawing from how others have described changes in a racially and ethnically diverse US (Hyra 2017, p. 78), while also acknowledging San Antonio's long and relatively recent history of legalized racial and ethnic discrimination (Drennon 2006, 2012). Scholar Laura Hernández-Ehrisman (2008) similarly asserts that simple "ethnic binaries" do not adequately capture the social hierarchy in San Antonio in the twenty-first century, noting how an "Anglo business elite" shares political and economic power locally with "an upper-middle class Mexican American population" (p. 197). I consider socioeconomic (re)stratification, privileging and discrimination in San Antonio with a concern about how opportunities for what one interviewee described as upstart (see Chapter Five), or low-cost or working-class street vending might be preserved or enhanced in this US

city that, like others, appears to be concerned about reputation and attracting investment, elite workers, residents and visitors as part of the new economy and economic priorities of local government (Hernández-López 2011; Dunn 2013, 2015, 2017; N. Martin 2014, 2017; Scott 2008, 2014, 2017).

1.3 *Carne asada* is not a crime: Aims and guiding question

As I discuss in Chapter Two, my thesis acknowledges how a working-class *Latina/o threat narrative* (Chavez 2013) has shaped US politics including in predominantly Mexican American San Antonio. This threat narrative is exemplified by the televised statements of Marco Gutierrez, an emigrant from Mexico and founder of the political group "Latinos for Trump," who during the 2016 US Presidential Election warned that demographic change nationally and impositions by working-class members of his "culture" might result in "taco trucks on every corner" of the US, if left unchecked (quoted in Chokshi 2016, paras. 1-2). Such a narrative that frames a predominance or simply the encountering of taco trucks and related working-class Mexican American public activity as a negative urban development or dynamic appeared to drive how street food vending and other aspects of San Antonio's public realm were managed, and especially in the downtown district—in ways that distanced the city from imagined or actual existing barrio conditions, practices and populations (Diaz 2005; Hernández-López 2011).

During my period of research, which took place during a locally declared "Decade of Downtown" reinvention, being economically poor—which some interviewees and others associated with the use of public transit and affordable private bus companies such as Greyhound—was sometimes if not often equated with vagrancy or criminality and described as opposed to the development aspired for and represented with new gourmet food and luxury housing options (Rivard 2014). Various local strategies and campaigns including the City's Downtown Food Truck Program seemed to problematize existing offerings used by and accessible to economically poorer residents and visitors, and to respond to the racialized caricature of San Antonio as a "laggard ... somewhat sleepy Latino town with great [Tex-Mex] food … and a slow pace" (Kotkin 2016, para. 9). As I discuss in Chapter Four, this depiction suggests aspects of local life that some interviewees described positively

and as conducive to creative endeavors, and with awareness of what could be called San Antonio's creative city politics (N. Martin 2014; Scott 2014), or judgements about what populations and cultural and entrepreneurial activities—and specifically which forms of street vending—are celebrated or allowable in the city.

My concern that local working-class street food vending and related aspects of shared public life might be endangered—noting the description of San Antonio during my period of research as a city with "two downtowns" divided economically, with only wealthy residents and amenities described as vibrant and positive (Rivard 2014, para. 7)—predates Gutierrez's widely publicized demonization of street corner taco trucks, and working-class Mexican Americans by implication. It is also informed by the local history of racial, ethnic and economic segregation and stratification. In the early twentieth century, working poor residents were referred to as the destitute and inferior "peon, or laboring class" in predominantly Mexican American San Antonio (Barnes 1913, pp. 17-18). Additionally, Hernández-Ehrisman (2008) describes San Antonio's Mexican American community throughout the twentieth century as being comprised of and exhibiting sharp "class differentiations" between a "large laboring class" of "Mexicanos … living in poverty … with virtually no public facilities" and doing "most of the menial work in the city" and a smaller "middle class of professionals" and a "very small upper class of … ricos" (p. 78). Such historical accounts evoke contemporary descriptions of cities in the US and elsewhere as being characterized by "two-speed employment systems"—with "an army of extravagantly-paid employees" of "high-profile" and knowledge-based employment sectors served by marginalized "minimum-wage workers" providing the "essential social and economic conditions under which the upper half of the system is able to function effectively" (Scott 2017, p. 15). As I discuss in Chapter Two, working-class Mexican American approaches to street food selling have been challenged by local government at different points in local history, including during my research and especially when practiced in spaces downtown where urban change has been desired (Arellano 2012; Pilcher 2012; McMahon 2013; Cárdenas 2016; Arellano 2017a). As my interviewees shared (and discussed in Chapters Four and Five), contemporary San Antonio is characterized by a bifurcated labor force or

economy, which shapes food options in the city, but also ideas about what constitutes or who belongs downtown.

My San Antonio-focused study is also informed by non-Texas developments such as the "Carne Asada is Not a Crime" campaign (Hernández-López 2011; Wade 2011). This campaign, which refers to the roasted beef, *carne asada*, commonly served by taco trucks (while also referencing efforts to oppose anti-skateboarding policing in the US in the 1990s), emerged in Los Angeles in mid-2008, in response to new regulation of street food vending introduced following the birth of the gourmet food truck movement there (Hermosillo 2010; Hernández-López 2011). The Carne Asada is Not a Crime slogan was also apparently adopted by vendors resisting regulation introduced in Charlotte, North Carolina in late-2008—to limit food truck vending generally (as contributing to "noise, garbage and loitering") but mainly discouraging "established" *loncheras* (taco trucks), resulting in some vendors describing the changes as "discriminatory" and "culturally biased" (Wessel 2017, p. 37). There are similar patterns of rule changes and some popular resistance to new regulation in cities as far afield as Mexico City (Ortega 2015) and Bangkok (Poon 2017), given that the gourmet food truck movement has spread to these and other cities with street food traditions.

As I discuss in Chapter Two, my study is influenced by a range of literature that includes studies representative of a growing body of US food truck movement research and concerned with aspects of urban development and social justice. Although my study was not shaped by an organized street labor or "right to the city" movement, per se (Brenner, Marcuse & Mayer 2012; Harvey 2012), I note local legal challenges and everyday resistance to the stringent and uneven regulation of food truck vending in San Antonio that took place concurrent with and thus impacted on the study (Panju 2015; Panju & Wilson 2015; Danner 2015; Marks 2015b; McCoy 2015; Kinney 2016).

With the study, I aimed to share, in part, in the lived realities of local neighborhood and gourmet food truck practices and local urban changes. I did so in order to develop as a researcher and contribute to research about the "situated meanings of

crime and deviance” (Ferrell & Hamm 1998, p. 13), the governance of publicly accessible sites in US cities (Staeheli & Mitchell 2008) and Mexican American place-making practices (Rojas 1993; Villa 2000; Davis 2001; Arreola 2004; Diaz 2005; Lara 2012; Diaz & Torres 2012; Chappell 2012). I also aimed to generate interest in and directions for additional research focused on San Antonio street food vending, public life and local policy, with awareness of the limits of this study. San Antonio has not received much academic treatment in relation to contemporary street food vending practices and urban change, which contributes to the city being perceived by some to be “out of the game” (Robinson 2006, p. 102), stuck in the past, lagging behind or disconnected from other cities and global developments (Chasnoff 2011; Dotan 2012; Casey 2013; Kotkin 2016). Ultimately, the study was driven by a concern about discrimination against working-class street food vending practices and populations—including in predominantly Latina/o cities such as San Antonio.

The study was further guided by the following research question, which emerged from the research process: How do neighborhood and gourmet food truck practices in San Antonio bring to light atypical patterns of gentrification in the US and some of the related differentiated regulation, spatial inequalities and social exclusions shaping this predominantly Mexican American city in the era of cognitive-cultural capitalism? With subsequent sections of this thesis, I contend with this question, which I addressed through an ethnographically-informed critical urban study.

1.4 Theoretical framework

This thesis is situated in critical urban studies (Davies & Imbroscio 2010), and accordingly focuses on neighborhood taco truck vending and related activity in San Antonio as public practices, lifestyles and spaces that are potentially threatened by local government judgements about what constitutes good or bad street food vending and uses and users of public space (Johnston & Baumann 2010). Overall, the thesis endeavors to better understand street food selling in San Antonio and its relationships with what political philosopher Michael Sandel (2012a, b) describes as “skyboxification”—or the “disappearance of the class-mixing experiment” and lost “common life” in the US (Sandel 2012a, paras. 6 & 8), as related to new or resurgent

socioeconomic stratification that is characteristic of cities during the era of cognitive-cultural capitalism (Scott 2008, 2014, 2017).

Geographers Eugene McCann and Kevin Ward (2011), in examining “connections between urbanization and capitalism,” describe “neoliberalization processes” extending “competitive market ideals to all aspects of life” and city governments “behaving like a business to attract and support capital, rather than to promote welfare” (p. xviii). Furthermore, Scott (2014) observes that globalized “neoliberal fundamentalism” (p. 572) as part of contemporary capitalism is intensifying patterns of “socio-spatial segmentation” in many US and other cities, and he notes the “incongruity” and “contrast between the shimmer of … affluent landmark areas” and the “squalor” of “widely ranging tracts where social and political marginalization is the order of the day” (p. 573). As I will discuss, some of my interviewees and I noticed a “dual city” (Harvey 1989, p. 16) and economically “bifurcated” geography and society (Gandy 2005, p. 36) in San Antonio, via the vehicle or lens of food truck vending.

The study was further anchored and influenced by a lived and distinctly San Antonio critical pragmatism (Kadlec 2006, 2007; Forester 2012), or *rasquachismo* (Ybarra-Frausto 1991; Spener 2010). As described by Chicano artist and scholar Tomás Ybarra-Frausto (1991), who was raised in and is a resident of San Antonio (Martin, 2014), *rasquachismo* involves making-do creatively with the materials and resources at hand—in order to overcome economic and other exclusions and to make options, pursue happiness and retain hope in difficult circumstances. Following these scholars, I join efforts with this thesis to “rethink the perceived epistemological variance between critical theory and pragmatism” by recognizing the “transformatory potential” of “everyday lived experience” in shaping the “democratic struggle” or pursuit in US cities like San Antonio (Kadlec 2006, pp. 522-524).

My epistemological position could be understood to be pragmatic and judged as *rasquache* in that I structured and conducted the study by making the most of existing circumstances—including my limited access to resources, past training in

urban planning and knowledge of San Antonio from living previously in the city—to engage with the subject and context of local food truck vending over an extended period and with a critical aim.

This study emerges from a critical urban epistemology (Boudreau 2010) in that I grounded the research in the "ordinary" or everyday unpredictability, interdependencies, language and affects (pp. 67) of local street food peddling practices, while engaging with a diversity of San Antonio residents as interviewees. Sharing some of their words and perspectives about street food selling, including how they described the likely future of vending in San Antonio to be based on existing conditions, comprises a substantial portion of the study findings. I utilized ethnographic fieldwork methods in order to engage not so much with individual actors but with the urban phenomenon of food truck vending in San Antonio. I structured the study in cognizance of how an ethnographic approach allows access to "hidden" or emerging subjects of social research (Atkinson & Flint 2001, p. 1). These methods aligned with my interest in resurgent or new socioeconomic segregation and discrimination in San Antonio's public life related to vending practices, and what this might portend.

The study also demonstrates a critical urban epistemology in that I allowed my experiences, skills, strengths, weaknesses and personal attributes—or "biography" (Boudreau 2010, p. 69)—to be a part of the social fabric of San Antonio over an extended period and thus to shape research questions and approaches. This included navigating various life challenges related to repairing and maintaining an old domicile as a research, writing and family base, joining some of my interviewees in facing housing stock issues more common in the center city. It also involved accepting my limited Spanish language abilities while acknowledging the growing population of Mexican American residents of San Antonio who speak only English (Mejia & Carcamo 2016)—or who may prefer to communicate in English with strangers. However, the study and some interviews occasionally involved *Spanglish*,

the everyday mixing of English and Spanish, which is common in San Antonio (Villa 2012).[7]

Given the aims and theoretical orientation of the study, I could not depend on a rigid research design as I strove for what sociologist Andrew Sayer deems "practical adequacy" (1984; quoted in Staeheli & Mitchell 2008, p. 169). I aimed for a substantive accounting of food truck practices and consideration of plausible futures of vending in San Antonio, based on what a diverse body of interviewees shared and my observations, analysis and engagement with the research context over an extended period. Data source and methodology triangulation (Denzin 1989), including allowing participants to "member check" interview data (Carspecken 1996, p. 89), strengthen the study findings. My practical adequacy also involved responding to actual field conditions along with resource constraints and university requirements that shaped my fieldwork approaches. Overall, the study was guided by an approved protocol designed to help protect the privacy and anonymity of participants and mitigate various tangential risks while conducting robust and transparent research.

Looking at food truck practices and conditions in San Antonio is significant. It is a predominantly Mexican American and fast growing major US city (Ioannou 2016; O'Hare 2017) with an important street food history. Despite these characteristics, San Antonio has not been given prominence in critical literature about informal urbanism, food truck vending and urban change in the US (Chase, Crawford & Kaliski 2008; Bhowmik 2010; Valverde 2012; Mukhija & Laukaitou-Sideris 2014; Graaff & Ha 2015; Agyeman, Matthews & Sobel 2017).

Architectural curator Marina Engel (2012) defines *informal urbanism* as the "ability of communities to appropriate, recycle, inhabit, work in and celebrate within and

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[7] Spanglish was sometimes used in interviews to discuss different foods vended. Other code-switching approaches (Demby 2013), such as adopting different tones of voice or voices, were also used in the eliciting of some observations and to help build rapport. Code-switching between English and Spanish by some interviewees also raised my awareness of remnant Spanish colonial era *sistema de castas* (caste system) terms or classifications (de la Teja 1995; Martínez 2008) still in use by some San Antonians. For a more detailed exploration of the terms code-switching and Spanglish, see Paul Allatson's *Key Terms in Latino/a Cultural and Literary Studies* (2007).

without planned urban structures" and "an alternative form of producing urban space" that perceives cities to be "an organism in constant flux, determined by improvised self-organisation, rather than as the product of an imposed, static vision" (para. 3). [8] Additionally, Engel notes that informal urbanism is often associated with "extreme poverty" but is "increasingly common in more affluent societies" (para. 3). Urban planner and scholar of critical poverty studies Ananya Roy (2005) further challenges the "equation of informality with poverty," perceiving informal work such as street food vending to be an urban "mode" or "a way of being" and "series of transactions that connect different economies and spaces to one another" (p. 148).

Urban planning scholars Ginette Wessel and Sofia Vianco Airaghi (2015) similarly describe a "spectrum of possibilities" and the blurring if not dismantling of distinctions between informal and formal "sectors" in contemporary cities—as exemplified by what they call "Latino" street food vending operations that include pushcarts and taco trucks in the Mission District of San Francisco (p. 265). Informal urbanism is thus comparable with the ideologically infused term *everyday urbanism* (Chase, Crawford & Kaliski 2008) that I discuss in Chapter Two, and which draws from traditions of Latina/o street food selling in Los Angeles as examples (Millar 2008). Separately, urban planning researchers and scholars Vinit Mukhija and Anastasia Laukaitou-Sideris (2014) stress that taco trucks are a main exemplar of informal or everyday urbanism practices that can now be found throughout the US—further suggesting how this study contributes to the critical literature and understandings of US urban changes.

Beyond being overlooked by much recent food truck and related informal urbanism and critical poverty research (Roy *et al*. 2016), San Antonio has been missed by many popular depictions of the US food truck movement— as exemplified by the 2014 film *Chef* directed by Jon Favreau (Strand 2015). In Chapter Two, I discuss the negative portrayal and marginalizing of traditional working-class taco truck vending

[8] I avoid using in this thesis the *term tactical urbanism*—defined as "cheap projects that aim to make a small part of a city more lively or enjoyable" (Berg 2012, para. 1)—to describe everyday or neighborhood street food vending in San Antonio, as it evokes or is associated with professional urban planning and place-making locally (MacCormack 2012). More critically, tactical urbanism activities have been associated with *place-changing* (Rivard & Vinson 2015) locally, a term that is synonymous with gentrification.

presented in this film. In Chapter Six, I provide recommendations and ideas for additional research based on this study, to further attend to some of the gaps in the critical literature and help broaden discussions about US urban change to include San Antonio perspectives and experiences.

1.5 Methodology

I collected data through methods including naturalistic observations of publicly accessible sites where food truck and trailer vending was occurring. My observations took place within a general study area (see Section 1.6) during an 18 month (early 2014 to late 2015) fieldwork period, with some partaking of street vending beyond this study area for comparison and as part of my everyday life. I discuss in Chapter Three my approach to observations, which occurred through meals consumed at locations within especially the historical footprint of San Antonio and generalized as three micro-sites to help shield specific operations.

Additionally, I conducted informal interviews with eighteen adult and volunteer participants who resided in San Antonio and had some interest in or engagement with food truck vending. I also collected data through my everyday participation in public meetings, forums and events where food trucks were featured or considered—such as public meetings about citywide and area-specific urban planning, gatherings of local entrepreneurs and small business owners, food truck competitions and other festivals and special events held at public parks, plaza, libraries and other publicly accessible locations. Residing in San Antonio throughout the study further shaped my research and findings. I analyzed the data through a process of coding and categorization to produce findings grounded in interviewees' perspectives, my observations and analysis of a broad range of critical literature including other street food vending research.

1.6 *Puro* San Antonio: A general study area

As introduced in Section 1.2, San Antonio is a large and sprawling city that nearly matches Los Angeles in physical area despite having a much smaller population size (see Figures 1.3 & 1.4). To manage the scope of the study and based on my research aims, I focused on the central area of San Antonio that is sometimes described

locally as “inside the loop” formed by the US Interstate 410 loop road (Matiella 2009). This area has an approximately eight mile (13 km) radius from the city’s geographical center of San Fernando Cathedral and Main Plaza downtown, and it contains approximately 729,000 residents, or roughly half of the city’s overall population. To further narrow the scope of the study, I focused on food truck activity within a historical (1889) footprint of San Antonio within the 410 loop, an area with an approximately three mile (5 km) radius from the geographical center (Figure 1.5):

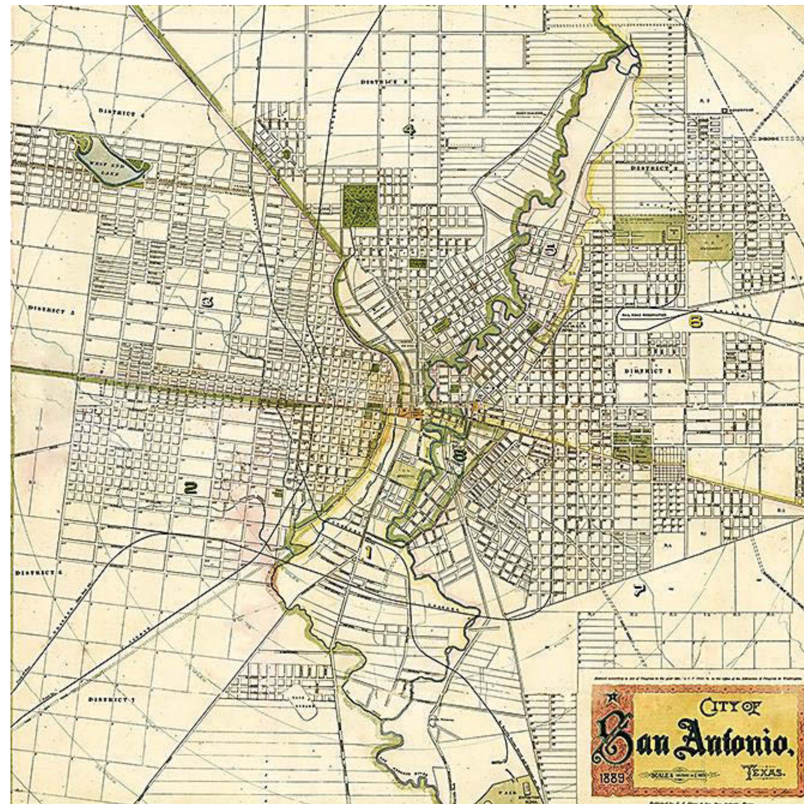

Figure 1.5: Published map of San Antonio dated 1889; © Historic Map Works LLC/Getty Images (Brown n.d.)

This area is comparable to the original six mile (10 km) by six mile (10 km) square city limit established with Spanish settlement in 1718, and it contains neighborhoods that were once racially, ethnically and economically segregated— including San Antonio’s historic “Mexican Quarter,” or *corrales*, west of the city center (Drennon 2006, pp. 574-577; see Figure 1.6):

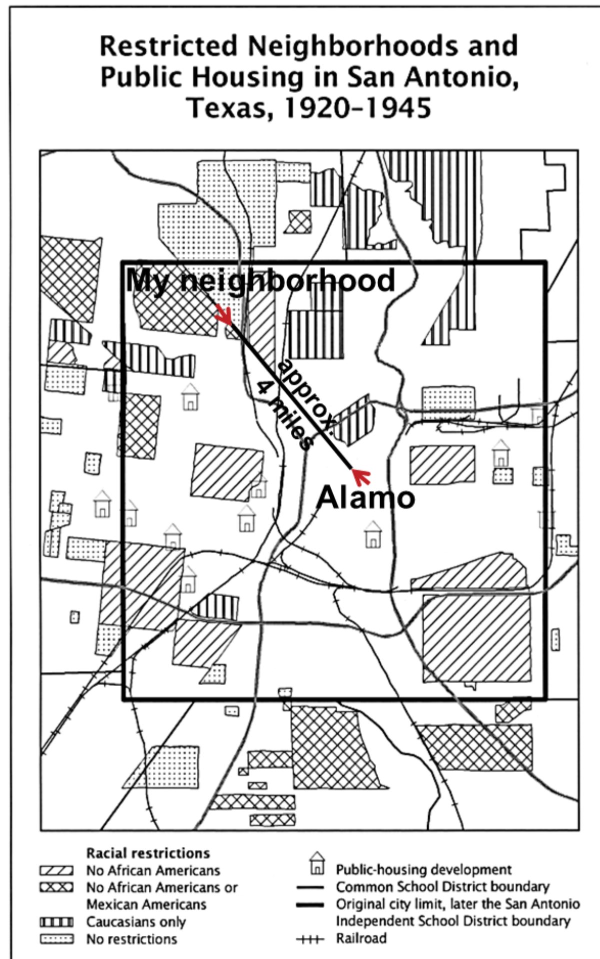

Figure 1.6: Modified version of a published map of San Antonio's "racially and economically" restricted neighborhoods, 1920-1945; © Christine Drennon 2006 (Drennon 2006, p. 577)

Corrales refers to past crowded, corral-like tenement housing for working-class Mexican Americans to the west of downtown San Antonio (Márquez, Mendoza & Blanchard 2007, p. 291). Historically, Mexican Americans were restricted in where they could reside or buy property in San Antonio by housing or deed restrictions, "unless they claimed to be Spanish instead of Mexican" (Hernández-Ehrisman 2008, p. 79). *Corrales* housing was in part cleared and redeveloped as public housing in the late 1930s and early 1940s, resulting in some working-class Mexican American households being displaced further west (Drennon 2006, p. 583).

Historically, San Antonio's working-class Mexican American residents were compelled to reside west of the city center by major transitions in land tenure, new public and private development and discriminatory property restrictions and

covenants established with increased non-Hispanic white, or *Anglo*, settlement in the mid-nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century (Drennon 2006; Márquez, Mendoza & Blanchard 2007). Local settlement patterns also follow the socioeconomic hierarchy and devaluing of land west of downtown established during San Antonio's Spanish colonial era (de la Teja 1995; Márquez, Mendoza & Blanchard 2007).

Although San Antonio's era of racially restrictive property covenants and legalized segregation of public schools and public housing has ended, de facto racial, ethnic and economic segregation continues in some neighborhoods (Miller 2001, 2004; Drennon 2012; see Figure 1.7). Patterns and geographies of concentrated poverty and enclaves of relative wealth have been maintained and in some cases have expanded as Mexican Americans have consolidated their place as the predominant population throughout and beyond the historical footprint of San Antonio (See Figure 1.8).

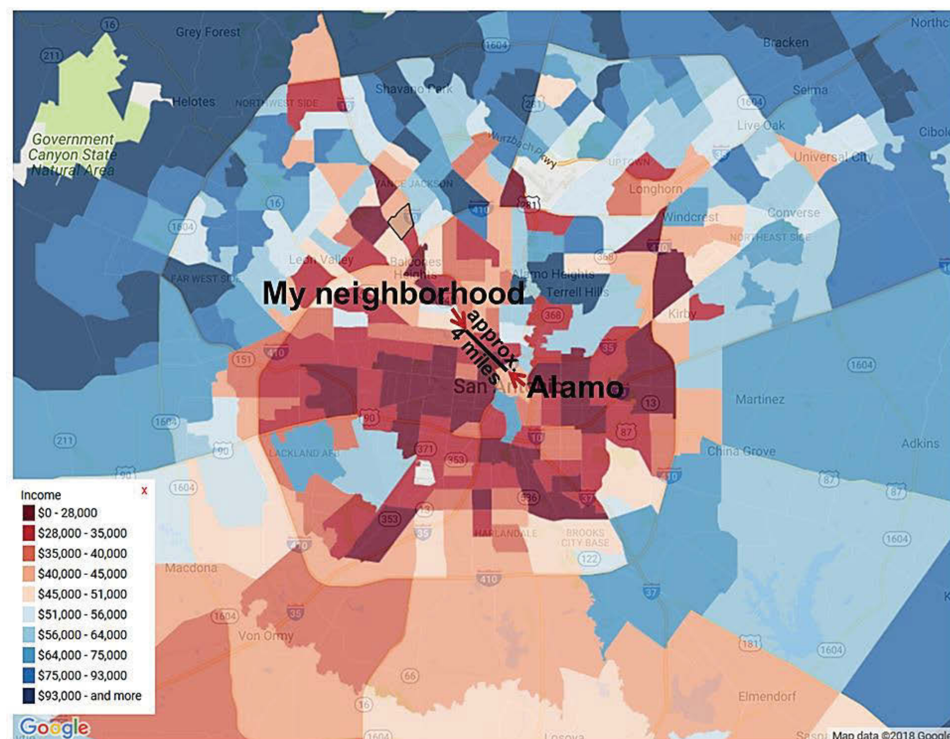

Figure 1.7: Modified version of a published map of San Antonio average income by census block, based on 2012-2016 American Community Survey (US Census) data; © Google 2018 (Kreider 2018)

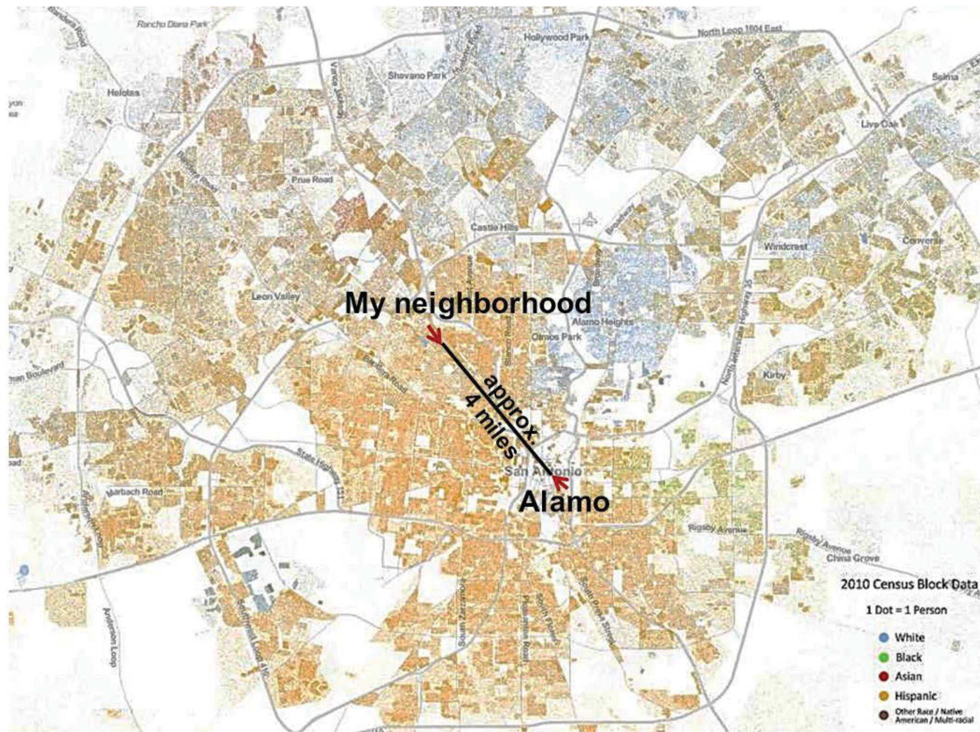

Figure 1.8: Modified version of a published map of San Antonio racial demographics, created by the University of Virginia based on 2010 US Census data; © University of Virginia (Parker 2014d).

It was important based on the study aims that the general study area contain some of the central city's enduring working-class Mexican American neighborhoods or barrios (Diaz 2005, p. 265)—including the historic Mexican Quarter, West Side or "Westside" (Dotan 2012, para. 11) where some interviewees described growing up. Noting the expansion of the City's downtown business district (Yeager 2015) and surfacing urban redevelopment pressures in the center city, some interviewees described the emergence of new interpretations of what constitutes San Antonio's West Side that shift this community further west.

During my period of research, San Antonio was defined by suburban growth or sprawl (Moorman 2013; Kolko 2017; Ura & Essig 2017), but also by new luxury housing and commercial redevelopment projects in greater downtown, as supported with the City's efforts to renovate or dramatically change some downtown public spaces. Center city public spaces and corridors experiencing or targeted for redevelopment included San Pedro Creek (Zielinski 2017)—a socioeconomic dividing line historically (Jennings 1993; Miller 2001; Hernández-Ehrisman 2008)—

and Travis Park, Main Plaza, Alamo Plaza, Maverick Park, Hemisfair Park, La Villita and Hays Street (pedestrian) Bridge (see Figure 1.9):

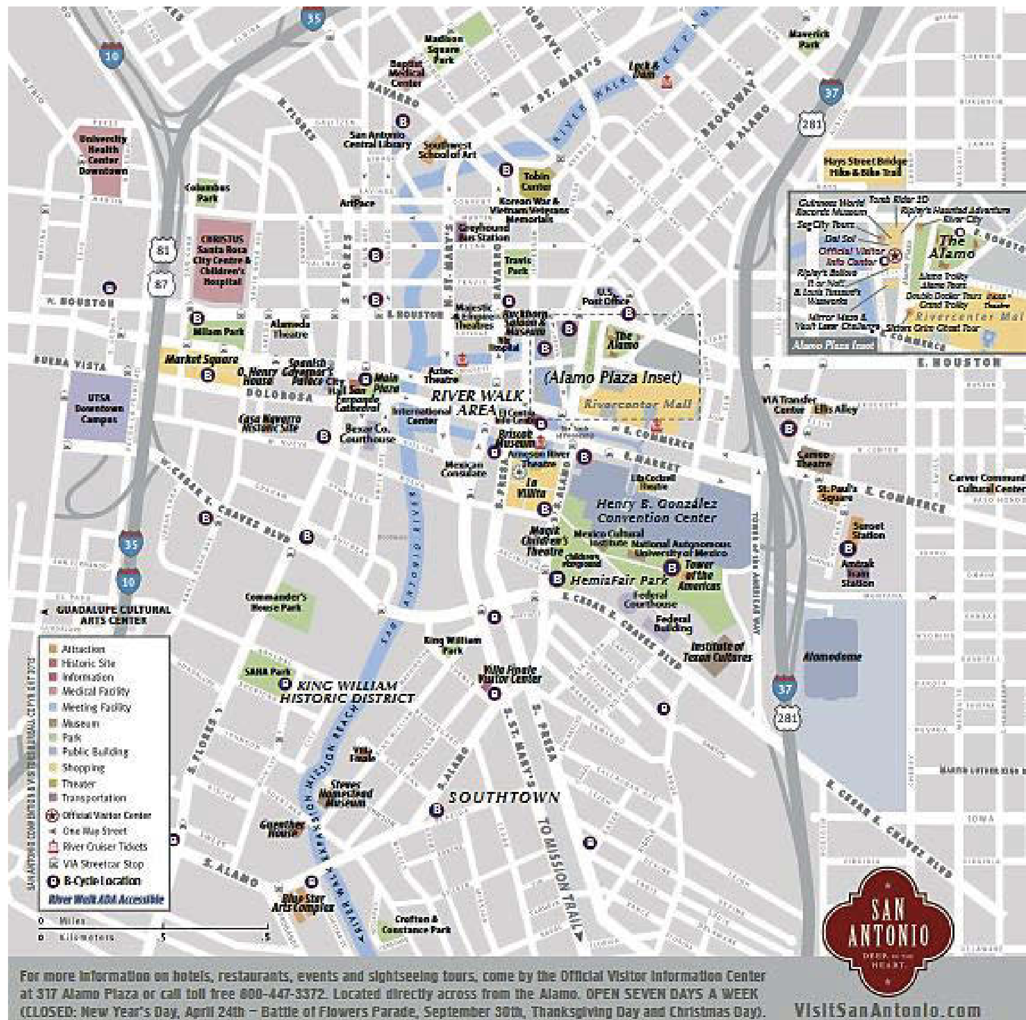

Figure 1.9 Published map of the downtown area. It does not depict San Pedro Creek, which flows just west of Flores Street; © Visit San Antonio 2015 (Visit San Antonio 2015)

Many interviewees and I noted in relation to the gourmet food truck trend new investment in greater downtown neighborhoods such as Dignowity Hill (Reagan 2015a; Davila & Olivo 2015)—historically a more “exclusive” neighborhood in the city’s predominantly “African American and Chicano” East Side (Mahoney 2012, paras. 1 & 6). The pattern of wealthier residents investing and relocating to some center city neighborhoods and new luxury housing projects mirrors development in other parts of the US that has been called a “reclaiming the center” (Ross 2011;

Siegel 2012), "bright flight" (Yen 2010) or urban gentrification pattern (Casey 2013; Florida 2017; Hyra 2017; Moskowitz 2017; Schlichtman, Patch & Hill 2017).

As I discuss in Chapter Two, conditions in San Antonio that some interviewees and I noted exemplify what geographer Matthew Gandy (2005) describes as the "bifurcated geographies of postindustrial cities"—with wealthy enclaves of heightened "connectivity" and public services located within a "wider landscape of neglect and social polarization" (pp. 36-37). Gandy's (2005) perspective reflects anthropologist and geographer David Harvey's (1989) observation of the "dual city" of "regeneration and a surrounding sea of increasing impoverishment" that he contends marks "late" capitalism in various urban areas (p. 16). In contrast to claims of a "retreat of capitalism" or "that the final paroxysm of capitalism is just over the horizon" (Scott 2017, pp 14 & 16), Scott (2014) argues that a "distinctive third wave of urbanization based on cognitive–cultural capitalism" is dividing some US and other cities in the early twenty-first century (p. 570). Moreover, Scott contends that institutions including some local governments are "helping to sustain (or impede) individual creative drives"—and thus are helping to shape cities into a "top half" of workers utilizing "advanced technical knowledge, analytical prowess and relevant forms of socio-cultural know-how" who are supported by a large and low-paid "service underclass" whose members also employ "cognitive and cultural skill" with their work (pp. 570-572). Urban theorist Richard Florida (2017) describes similar dynamics as comprising the "*winner-take-all urbanism*" (p. 6.) of a "New Urban Crisis," with US cities "dividing into large areas of concentrated disadvantage and much smaller areas of concentrated affluence" (p. 7). Such politics and conditions were apparent to some of my interviewees, who described areas like the West Side as so far *untouched* by public-private urban change efforts that they understood were reshaping and gentrifying other sections of the city.

Throughout the course of the study, I lived in a district a few miles northwest of downtown (see Figures 1.6-1.8) that bordered and shared characteristics with the predominantly working-class and Mexican American West Side. The district included family-run and affordable cafés and eateries such as *panaderías* (bakeries), *fruterías* and *heladerías* (fruit and ice cream desert shops). I also noticed

neighborhood or non-gourmet mobile food vending activity—affordable taco trucks, *raspa* vans and *paleteros* (bicycle and pushcart-based vendors of popsicles) and other perambulatory selling. This area is considered to be San Antonio's Art "Deco District" (Reininger 2013) and was comprised of primarily Mexican American households of low to moderate incomes (see Figures 1.7 & 1.8).

The Deco District includes neighborhoods that historically were racially, ethnically and economically segregated by property covenants (Drennon 2006; see Figure 1.6) and that have since been deemed historic districts by the City of San Antonio and which map as higher income areas (see Figure 1.7). Beyond small enclaves of relative wealth such as officially designated historic neighborhoods, wider zip codes inside the 410 loop have been described as economically "distressed" based on factors such as low formal educational attainment and average income, unemployment and high rates of housing and commercial vacancy (Schwartz 2016; Economic Innovation Group 2017; see Figure 1.10).

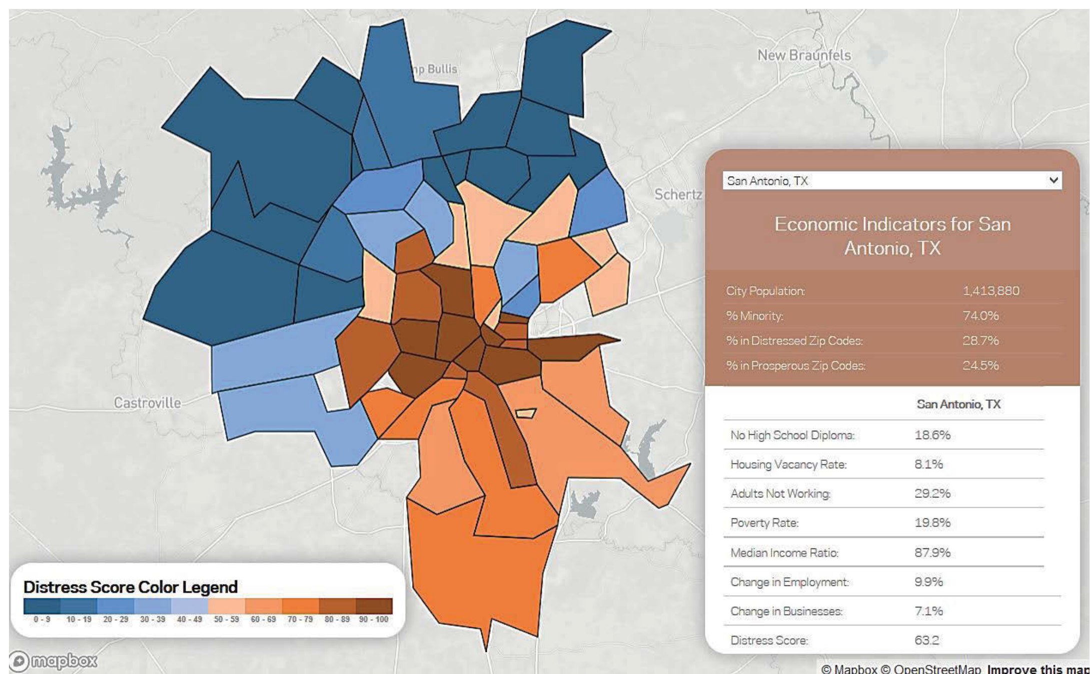

Figure 1.10: Published map showing San Antonio's distressed zip codes concentrated in the city center; © Mapbox 2017; © OpenStreetMap 2017 (Economic Innovation Group 2017)

Ultimately, I determined the general study area with a desire to better understand aspects of "*puro* San Antonio" (Bragg 2009, para. 4; Chan 2014) embodied by some

local street food selling. Akin to *rasquachismo* (Ybarra-Frausto 1991; Spener 2010), *puro* is a term used locally to identify practices and sensibilities that signify working-class or frugal tastes, adaptability and inventiveness. Drawing from how Chappell (2012) discusses lowriders (a kind of custom car associated with barrio practices) in Austin, I consider *puro* San Antonio to be an everyday public place-making approach and "spatial field" or "temporary zone" (p. 23) that shifts with those exhibiting *puro* sensibilities and practices. Moreover, I argue that *puro* or neighborhood food truck vending is discouraged by some local policies and place-management efforts and especially downtown—although *puro* perspectives and approaches are likely to continue to inform local gourmet and wider food practices.

1.7 Significance of the research

San Antonio has been described as a Mexican American "cultural capital" (Arreola 1987) with a historical barrio community second only to that of Los Angeles (Diaz 2005), the birthplace of the now global gourmet food truck movement. Despite growing interest globally in US food truck approaches (Moskin 2012) and the corresponding development of markets around the world for Mexican American foods and foodways—as shaped by San Antonio developments and practices historically (Arellano 2012; Pilcher 2012)—little critical attention has been paid to food truck vending in San Antonio. A notable exception is Norma Cárdenas's (2016) study of one local millennial gourmet food truck vendor, Ana Fernández, and her efforts to draw from San Antonio's past Chili Queens vendors.[9] Various authors have recounted San Antonio's history of the street vending of *chile con carne* (Silva & Nelson 2004; Hernández-Ehrisman 2008; Gabaccia & Pilcher 2011; Arellano 2012; Pilcher 2012; McMahon 2013; Cárdenas 2016; Lomax 2017), but it seems that few have considered the ongoing practice and plight of street food vending in this predominantly Mexican American and fast growing city that embodies extreme socioeconomic stratification (Casura 2015; Ioannou 2016; O'Hare 2017).

[9] I describe Fernández's food truck vending as gourmet based on various factors including the visual appearances of her operation's truck and her operation's use of social media and reported vending at a local private food truck park (Rivard 2012; Mathis 2015). The vending locations, platforms and support that Fernández's operation has had access to locally mark these practices as different from neighborhood street food vending, including legacy *raspa* van vending in the city. However, unlike Cárdenas (2016), I do not endeavor to identify or highlight specific vending operations or actors, beyond noting some published accounts and possible leads for additional and separate research.

This thesis contributes uniquely to critical discourses about street vending and urban change in the US by considering food truck practices in San Antonio at a time of relatively rapid growth, and when the laws, rules and norms related to street peddling and public life have been in sharp transition locally and nationally. Moreover, I draw attention to the atypical patterns of gentrification in the US of vendrification and *gente*-fication, as related to local food truck practices. In doing so, I help to bring to light perhaps more hidden dimensions of socioeconomic stratification and discrimination in the US—and which for at least some San Antonians I interviewed relate, in part, to the class rankings that historically divided the city's Mexican American population but also practices in contemporary Mexico and in other major US cities.

Furthermore, I help to present San Antonio as a city with some food truck practices that embody *rasquachismo* (Ybarra-Frausto 1991) and *puro* maverick proclivities (Inskeep 2008; Schwartz 2008)—or inclinations for rule-bending and outmaneuvering local governance and judgements that interfere with honest livelihoods or opportunities for sustenance, advancement or new junctures. I also consider some local vending operations as an extension of notions or qualities of home or family life and otherwise embodying big small town characteristics (Burroughs 2014). Furthermore, I recognize and attempt to unsettle the perception of neighborhood or working-class street food selling as *infiltrators* or an act of infiltration, akin to a contamination or pestilence (a roach?) or a dangerous element (a stray dog?) in San Antonio.[10] Additionally, I view some local street food vending operations as a potential *bypass*, or a way to survive or buy time, retain hope or create possibilities for improvement in challenging urban conditions. Finally, I consider San Antonio as a predominantly working-class Mexican American city where some local policy-makers and influencers work to distance the city from working-class populations and practices—including with the management of street food vending downtown.

[10] I note the enduring use of the pejorative "roach coach" to describe working-class street food vending in San Antonio and other US cities, as I discuss in this thesis.

1.8 Limitations of the study

As introduced in previous sections of this chapter, this thesis builds from food truck vending occurring within a general study area of San Antonio at a set period in time (early 2014 to late 2015). Drawing from Hyra's (2017) arguments in making a case study of the urban transitions that he notices in specific neighborhoods of Washington, D.C., I hold that this study of food truck vending in San Antonio—another seemingly "irrelevant" major city from the perspective of much urban research (Robinson 2006, p. 102)—contributes to a fuller understanding of twenty-first century US urban life and broader "global-urban assemblages" (McCann & Ward 2011, p. xvi). It joins qualitative research that has focused on the food truck movement in other major US cities, some of which I review in Chapter Two, and that exemplify a growing body of critical literature providing city-specific case studies of street vending and urban change since the 2008 Great Recession.

The study was shaped by my experiences, inhibitions, personal biases and other characteristics. These include my apparent race and ethnicity (white and sounding American if not Texan), economic class based on my experiences and income (lower to middle), age (40s), gender (male), education (high formal), physical appearances (lanky), dress (informal) and place and mobility dimensions (living inside the 410 loop and northwest of downtown; visiting some sites by public transit, bicycle and on foot). My status as an older student, working from home and traveling to and through sites alone and often on foot, seemed to mark me as out-of-step with many San Antonians and narratives of proper or positive adult behavior. In this context, my research activities occasionally led to what landscape architect and anthropologist Gareth Doherty (2017) describes as the "fieldwork blues," or the "emotional and practical" burdens and sense of social isolation sometimes associated with prolonged ethnographic fieldwork (p. 31). Moreover, San Antonio's limited street life and pedestrian infrastructure shaped my mobility choices and perceptions of street food vending and the city overall.

Additionally, my fair use of some public spaces as a pedestrian sometimes attracted unwanted police attention and responses, impacting on my research. For example, I was followed extremely closely by a police officer on foot during one daytime visit

to Travis Park as I read park signage, discouraging my use of the park. On another mid-day outing downtown, I was stopped and questioned by the police for asking directions of a passing stranger who may have been homeless—and thus a target of policing (I was asked by the police if I had been approached about a donation or "panhandled"). Occasionally, I was also confronted and admonished by some neighbors and passing motorists for simply walking in my home neighborhood. Such encounters highlighted for me the emotional work of ethnographic research (Doherty 2017) but also car-dependency as an element of local socioeconomic stratification.

Furthermore, these encounters raised my awareness of the intensity of anti-homeless and anti-poor policing occurring in sections of the study area. As some interviewees and I noticed, new or more extreme policing of local public life and spaces—including the criminalization of those who extend food aid to the poor or homeless (Chasnoff 2010; Garcia-Ditta 2014; Garcia 2015a, b; Reagan 2015b; Marks 2015a, d; Kinney 2016) and the "nonsensical" removal of some public seating downtown (Olivo 2014)—challenged some street vending activity and social life and marked a turn in who might be targeted and marginalized by local government public improvement efforts (Lancione 2016).[11]

As I discuss in Chapter Three, I contended with these and other factors potentially limiting my access to food truck vending through a research protocol allowing flexibility to actual field conditions. This included remaining in San Antonio over an extended period to allow the study to follow the relatively slow local social tempo or speed of life (Levine 1997). Additionally, I gathered interviewees through a snowball (Atkinson & Flint 2001) or word-of-mouth sampling approach that allowed participants at their own pace and timing to opt in or out of the research. I also allowed participants to "member check" interview data by offering them time to review and respond to their transcribed interviews at their choosing (Carspecken 1996, p. 89).

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[11] Such maneuvers by local government have been described as *unpleasant design* and *hostile urban architecture*, and are exemplified by the design but also the management of building facades, public benches and other publicly accessible spaces and furnishings in ways intended to "target, frustrate and deter people, particularly those who fall within unwanted demographics" (Mars 2016, para. 3). For more examples, see Savičić and Savić (2012).

1.9 Summary

I began this chapter with a description of food truck vending and policing occurring in Travis Park downtown (see Figure 1.9), as related to the formal revitalization of the park and involving the City's Downtown Food Truck Program—which was launched in response to the arrival of the gourmet food truck movement to the city. I provided this description to help introduce some of the urban dynamics and conditions that inspired and informed this study and make San Antonio (as a major, rapidly growing and predominantly Mexican American city) a valuable case study of the food truck movement and urban changes since the 2008 Great Recession. Urban factors that I drew attention to include targeted policing in some public spaces, the up-marketing of locally familiar and affordable foods such as tacos and local government programs and strategies that step away from commitments to impartiality or the general welfare in favor of select economic interests (McCann & Ward 2011).

Along with the research aims and guiding question, I introduced the theoretical framework and methodologies and describe the general study area of the study. I also considered the significance and limitations of the study. In the next chapter (Chapter Two), I provide a review of some of the concepts, literature and research informing the study. In Chapter Three, I discuss in more detail the research methodologies. In Chapters Four and Five, I share the main findings of the study. In Chapter Six, I present directions for additional research based on this study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the main concepts, research and literature that inform this thesis, and highlight potential knowledge or information gaps that the study helps to address or draw attention to. I begin with a brief discussion about *rasquachismo, puro* San Antonio, and *mavericks*, and what some have framed as the "urgent imagination" (Cruz 2014, para. 1) employed by some working-class Mexican Americans in making the most of challenging conditions in US-Mexico border communities and cultural borderlands (Anzaldúa 2012).

2.2 San Antonio *rasquachismo* and *puro* mavericks

In his essay "Rasquachismo: A Chicano sensibility" (1991), San Antonio artist and scholar Tomás Ybarra-Frausto summarizes *rasquachismo* as the attitude and outputs of "using everything and not discarding" (quoted in Martin 2014, para. 7). The term is often used to describe the approaches of some working-class Mexican American artists, but Ybarra-Frausto (1991) stresses that *rasquachismo* is also a "way of putting yourself together or creating an environment" (p. 156). For Ybarra-Frausto, to be *rasquache* places a high value on qualities of "making do" while also demonstrating a preference for "the elaborate over the simple," as represented with "bright colors (chillantes)" and piling "pattern on pattern" rather than aiming for understatement or minimalism (p. 157). He further describes *rasquachismo* as an "outsider viewpoint" and "attitude" expressed with practices that unsettle notions of "propriety and keeping up appearances" and "turn ruling paradigms upside down," including views of what constitutes good taste or aesthetics (pp. 155-156).

In the present epoch, "funky, irreverent" local expressions of *rasquachismo* (Ybarra-Frausto 1991, p. 155) and the making-do with limited financial resources and what others throw away as waste might be viewed as a counterpoint to what commentator Kyle Chayka (2016a, b) calls "AirSpace"— or the ubiquitous style of "hipster reduction" marked by "reclaimed wood, Edison bulbs, and refurbished industrial lighting" that has spread through technology to shape upscale eateries, housing and workspaces globally and that Chayka describes as providing "familiar, comforting

surroundings for a wealthy, mobile elite" (2016b, para. 4). Chayka further characterizes Airspace as offering a "faux-artisanal aesthetic" (2016a, para. 3). Others have applied a similar critique to the gourmet food truck trend in the US, lampooning operations with "a shiny paint job, a punny name and a Twitter feed" and serving elevated and expensive versions of comfort foods with dubious health benefits (Shatkin 2011, para. 1). As I discuss in Chapters Four and Five, some interviewees and I observed that local gourmet food trucks often demonstrated what could be called AirSpace "sameness" (Chayka 2016a, para. 7) in their design and marketing to wealthier or status-seeking customers (Johnston & Baumann 2010; Zukin 2010). Furthermore, some interviewees argued that many local gourmet vending operations seemed to offer faux or "cliché" vending—mimicking some traditional forms but missing the point of street peddling and lacking the inventiveness, inclusiveness and accessibility that vendors traditionally have drawn from to make and maintain businesses.

Ybarra-Frausto's (1991) description of *rasquachismo* as environment creation or place-making that embraces a "florid milieu of admixtures and recombinations" (p. 157) is thus important to my study. No less important is Ybarra-Frausto's understanding of *rasquachismo* as the everyday and joyful exercising of rights to public life and inclusion—and opposition to economic and other exclusions—on the part of working-class Mexican Americans, a perspective informed by his experiences in San Antonio (Martin 2014). Ybarra-Frausto (1991) stresses that *rasquachismo* is a "witty, irreverent, and impertinent posture that recodes and moves outside established boundaries" (p. 155). Some interviewees and I associated such a sensibility and urban tactics (de Certeau 1988) with some neighborhood street food vending efforts, which also offered an alternative to the economic exclusion catered to with gourmet food truck vending.

As I also discuss in Chapters Four and Five, some interviewees and I associated *rasquachismo* with the decoration and design of the often repurposed vehicles used in neighborhood vending, and the "admixtures and recombinations" (Ybarra-Frausto 1991, p. 157) of foods and foodways vendors offered to appeal to traditional and broadening customer tastes—from *tortas cubanas* (a version of "Cuban"

sandwiches) to *hamburguesas mexicanas,* versions of hamburgers involving "Mexican" ingredients (Shilcutt 2013, para. 10). As I learned, neighborhood street food peddling also sometimes involves dishes that I describe as "prepped" foods, based on the observations of one interviewee and the handwritten signage ("preparados") I noticed on a *raspa* van.

Prepped foods combine commercially packaged foods with homemade or whole foods, and they draw from traditional Mexican or Tex-Mex dishes while making the most of changing conditions and access to ingredients. This includes dishes such as Frito pie (Bond 2012), which mixes packaged corn chips or crisps with *chile con carne* (beef chili) and other toppings (such as heated cheese sauce and pickled jalapeño slices). It is often served, frugally and creatively, in the bag the chips or crisps were vended in (see Figure 2.1):

Figure 2.1: Published photo of a Frito pie; © Jody Horton 2012 (Bond 2012)

I also view local prepped snack foods as including cold admixtures like "piccadilly" *raspas*—which can combine sweet flavored commercial syrups or drink mixes such as Kool-Aid with shaved ice, pickles, *chamoy* seasoning, hard or gummy candies and other items (Jividen 2014). During my research, *raspa* treats appeared to trend or gain popularity locally and possibly in other US cities, as connected with growing food-related tourism, journalism and media (Johnston & Baumann 2010; Mathis 2015; Shankman 2015). Some interviewees stressed that children locally have long been creating novel food combinations or pairings like piccadilly *raspas* on their own, improvising with different and affordable *raspa* van offerings. As some interviewees and I observed, *raspa* vans and other neighborhood street food

approaches informed some local gourmet food truck offerings in San Antonio—with gourmet vendors selling familiar foods at higher prices, and in contrast to local descriptions of these trucks as being a world apart from neighborhood peddling.

As columnist and author Gustavo Arellano posits, Mexican American cuisines have long involved "cultural appropriation," or the taking of items or inspiration from various food cultures to create new offerings to appeal to customers (Arellano 2017b, para. 1). Arellano describes these practices as good food business but also argues that they represent a "culinary manifestation of *mestizaje*," or welcoming of cultural intermixture (para. 9).[12] Contrasting with professionally decorated gourmet food trucks specializing in particular cross-cultural food items—such as Korean tacos—as a brand or way to establish a market (Gold 2012; Brindley 2015; N. Martin 2017), the neighborhood food trucks that I observed would sometimes bridge cuisines—such as by offering Mexican hamburgers—in order to serve changing or new local tastes while continuing to provide affordable dishes and other qualities of service inclusive of a broad range of customers.

Food fusions inspired by the changing tastes of customers, along with the ways that many neighborhood trucks are assembled and decorated by making-do with the resources at hand, exemplify what Ybarra-Frausto (1991) discusses as *movidas* comprising *rasquachismo*:

> In an environment always on the edge of coming apart (the car, the job, the toilet), things are held together with spit, grit, and movidas. Movidas are the coping strategies you use to gain time, to make options, to retain hope. Rasquachismo is a compendium of all the movidas deployed in immediate, day-to-day living. Resilience and resourcefulness spring from making do with what is at hand (hacer render las cosas). (p. 156)

[12] In this case, Arellano's use of *mestizaje* (Arellano 2017b, para. 9) implies that culinary and cultural hybridizations have long shaped Mexican American foods and foodways including Tex-Mex cuisine (Lomax 2017). For a more robust exploration of the terms *mestizaje* and hybridity, see Allatson (2007); see also Anzaldúa (2012).

Within a framework of *rasquachismo*, to be concerned about or blocked by notions of purity or the "right" or established way of doing things is to limit opportunities not only for growth but survival. Furthermore, a sense of humor or irreverence seems essential to the "edgework" (Lyng 1990), or personal risk-taking and boundary transgressing, embodied in *rasquache* ways of being and place-making and exhibited with some street food selling. As Ybarra-Frausto (1991) writes:

> Rasquachismo is a sensibility that is not elevated and serious, but playful and elemental. … Rasquachismo is neither an idea nor a style, but more an attitude or taste. … Pulling through and making do are no guarantee of security, so things that are rasquache possess an ephemeral quality … here today and gone tomorrow. … Rasquachismo draws its essence within the world of the tattered, shattered, and broken; lo remendado (stitched together). (pp. 155-156)

Ybarra-Frausto maintains that *rasquachismo* as a "taste" or sensibility cannot be codified (p. 156). He further contends that *rasquachismo* reflects a "working-class … lived reality," and includes practices or tactics that particularly middle class Mexican Americans might choose to dismiss, as these maneuvers "too readily evoke the rough-and-tumble slapdash vitality of barrio life-styles recently abandoned in the quest for social mobility" (p. 156). As discussed in Chapters Four and Five, economic segregation or discrimination might be advanced in San Antonio, in part, through such purposeful distancing of middle class residents from the practices of poorer inhabitants, as observable with especially gourmet food truck operations in the city.

Although the term *rasquachismo* was not widely used locally during my research, aspects of this way of being were sometimes referred to popularly as being *puro* San Antonio (Bragg 2009; Chan 2014). Locally, deeming something *puro* draws attention to *movidas* or practices that suggest low-income or poverty and the making of the most of existing resources and challenges. One example of *puro* San Antonio that has traveled widely via social media and global news publishing is an image of a West Side resident who took advantage of a flash flood in 2013 (and poor public

storm water management) to enjoy a float down a street in an inner-tube, with a beverage in hand (see Figure 2.2):

Figure 2.2: A San Antonian makes the most of street flooding; © AP 2013 (Daily Mail Reporter 2013)

During interviews, the phrase *puro* San Antonio was sometimes used by residents to describe not necessarily illegal but clearly edgy (Lyng 1990)—or more daring and unanticipated—public practices. Brenda Muñoz, a local curator of *puro* examples, has further described *puro* San Antonio practices as not Mexican, but rather distinctly San Antonian and based on unique local conditions (Chan 2014). Furthermore, Muñoz associates *puro* examples with local pride and identity: "I embrace our stereotypes. I think we should make jokes about eating tacos because who doesn't love tacos? Get over yourselves, lighten up. Love San Antonio for what it is" (quoted in Chan 2014, para. 14).

Beyond tacos, other local foodways sometimes described as being *puro* San Antonio include consuming Big Red (a Texas soda) and *barbacoa* (calf's head meat). *Puro* eating might also involve barbecuing brisket in one's yard or in a neighborhood park (Bragg 2009; Chan 2014), suggesting the prevalence of beef in San Antonio traditionally. Some researchers connect the US gourmet food truck trend with Texas cattle history, and specifically with the *chuck wagons*, or mobile kitchens, understood to have been invented by rancher Charles Goodnight in the 1860s to support cattle drives (Ibrahim 2011; Hawk 2013; Butler 2014; Strand 2015). However, accounts of the evolution of food trucks in the US often overlook San

Antonio's role not only in Texas cattle drives but as a hub historically for food shipments and passenger movements by rail—and the related long and influential history of the city's downtown plaza Chili Queen vendors in shaping US foodways.

San Antonio's Chili Queens specialized in the selling of beef chili, or *chile con carne,* from mobile carts and stands in different downtown spaces from the 1800s to the mid-1900s (Silva & Nelson 2004; Gabaccia & Pilcher 2011; Arellano 2012; Pilcher 2012; McMahon 2013; Cárdenas 2016; Lomax 2017). The dish *chile con carne* is considered to be a point of culinary origin of Tex-Mex cuisine (Lomax 2017). Furthermore, food historian Robb Walsh (2008) deems the carts and temporary stands that San Antonio's Chili Queens and others used elsewhere in Texas to vend foods as the "taco trucks of the 1800s" (quoted in Lomax 2017, para. 9). Additionally, Cárdenas (2016) describes San Antonio's Chili Queens as follows:

> Between 1880 and 1937, the Chili Queens dished out chili, *picadillo* (ground meat stew), and *fideo* (vermicelli soup) to townspeople, soldiers, and tourists at night on makeshift tables in the open air at Military Plaza. ... Texas Mexican women cooked chili in *cazuelas* (clay pots) at home and reheated it over mesquite wood fires. Illuminated by oil lanterns, the sights and sounds provided a picturesque night scene that marked Texas modernity. … In the 1920s, the Chili Queens were recognized as the originators of Tex-Mex food who modernized the process of selling food to customers in automobiles. (pp. 122-123)

Separately, academic Marci R. McMahon (2013) draws from local reporting to extend San Antonio's Chili Queen era to 1943. She describes the Chili Queens as selling "working-class Mexican foods in the plazas of San Antonio," and experiencing in the 1930s and 1940s their removal from downtown public spaces via the enforcement of "health regulations"—in tandem with local government-supported efforts to "appropriate" their vending as part of city events and marketing (p. 40). As discussed later in this chapter, local regulation of the working-class Chili Queen vendors at different points targeted their practices as a public health risk or opposed to public improvement and displaced these vendors from prime downtown

plazas to marginal spaces such as "vacant lots and backyards" (Cárdenas 2016, p. 124). This history foreshadows some of the regulation of food trucks (equally shaped by economic redevelopment and city reputation and promotion interests) and maneuvering by vendors that I observed and some interviewees discussed, as presented in Chapters Four and Five.

San Antonio's past cattle practices also inspire the use of *maverick* in the US to describe non-conformity or independent-mindedness. The term originates in the unconventional cattle management approaches of nineteenth century San Antonio politician and lawyer Samuel Augustus Maverick, who allowed his cattle to roam unbranded (Inskeep 2008; Schwartz 2008). The Maverick family has long been prominent in local progressive politics and civil libertarian causes (Schwartz 2008; P.M. Marks 2015), and Mayor Maury Maverick played a key in local urban improvement efforts in the 1930s that included the creation of new public facilities and regulation of the Chili Queens (McMahon 2013). Some interviewees suggested that maverick sensibilities can be exhibited with *puro* San Antonio approaches to street food selling that do not necessarily conform to existing conditions.

2.3 Everyday urbanism and New Urbanism

Puro San Antonio street food vending practices are working-class public place-making approaches that are not necessarily recognized or supported by local urban planning or governance. Drawing from examples of *Latino Urbanism* (Rojas 1993; Villa 2000; Davis 2001; Arreola 2004; Diaz 2005; Lara 2012; Talen 2012; Diaz & Torres 2012; Hawthorne 2014), a concept I discuss later in this chapter, some academics and urban planners point towards working-class Latina/o street food selling similar to what I observed in San Antonio as exemplifying everyday urbanism (Chase, Crawford & Kaliski 2008)—or informal, "bottom-up" urbanism (Kelbaugh 2005, p. 8).

Margaret Crawford (2008a) describes everyday urbanism as the "primacy of human experience" in urbanism, which is the broad and "multidimensional consideration of the city" (p. 6). Furthermore, she identifies "shopping, buying and eating food" as patterns and potential points of conflict that characterize everyday urbanism (p. 6).

She also contends that everyday urbanism draws from theorists Henri Lefebrve, Guy Debord and Michel de Certeau and other scholars of everyday life in framing urbanism as socially constructed and inherently contested or polyphonic.

Moreover, Crawford discusses Lefebvre's analysis of everyday life in maintaining that everyday urbanism can direct urban research and practice towards "reclaiming" or unearthing the "timeless, humble, repetitive natural rhythms of life" existing in duality with (and often in the margins of) the "always new and constantly changing" modern city shaped by technology and other factors (p. 7). I draw from Crawford's (2008a, b) notion of everyday urbanism and from urban planning and democracy scholar Mark Purcell's (2014) interpretation of Lefebvre's concept of right to the city as perceiving the urban "society beyond capitalism" in the "little eruptions" of everyday life that "reclaim space in the city" and "assert use value over exchange value, encounter over consumption, interaction over segregation, free activity and play over work" (p. 151). Purcell further maintains that having a right to the city orientation involves the "habit of thinking in terms of urgent utopia," or "a possible world that is keenly attuned to, but not limited by, present conditions "(p. 151). Such a reading of Lefebvre associates his concept of right to the city with a critical pragmatism—or the perception of possibilities within the everyday (Kadlec 2006, 2007; Forester 2012) and a way of being (that includes acting on perceived and feasible possibilities for improvement) that is akin to the *rasquachismo* that Ybarra-Frausto (1991) describes and that some interviewees and I related to some street food vending approaches in San Antonio.

Ultimately, Crawford (2008a) argues that urban design and planning must start with "an understanding and acceptance of the life that takes place" in the everyday spaces of cities (p. 7). Accordingly, I strove to acknowledge and better understand everyday food truck practices in San Antonio during a time of major changes in public customs and life. Specific changes that I noticed included new policing tactics downtown, increased mobile communications and other technology use and the clustering of some wealthier residents—including ultra-wealthy immigrants from Mexico— in select urban and northern suburban locations as part of local growth (Cave 2014; Casura 2015; Beyer 2016).

Overall, my research occurred during a time of heightened economic bifurcation and class hardening between the rich and poor in the US after the 2008 Great Recession (Badger 2012; Melinik & Morello 2013; Smith 2013; Schwartz 2016; Florida 2017). These factors are exemplified with the formation and recognition of so-called "super-zips" (elite postal codes) that represent "the country's most prosperous, highly educated demographic clusters," and enclaves where it is possible to lead a "life surrounded by affluence" only (Melinik & Morello 2013, paras. 7-8). In this context, different working-class employment opportunities (including some street peddling activities) have been adopted or absorbed by university educated and former professional workers.[13] These transitions have been supported, in part, by the new online "gig economy," which some studies suggest has aided wealth clustering and socioeconomic stratification in the US (Schor 2016; Heller 2017).

Descriptions of the modern US city have employed the analogy of an "economic engine" that "seems to run only for the aid of those who need its benefits least," inducing a "cycle of soaring prices and class replacement" that has made "the children of the old white-collar meritocracy … doubly rich from the rising tide of urban renewal" (Bottum 2017, para. 8). Florida (2017) discusses these transitions and processes as encompassing a "New Urban Crisis," and they are urban dynamics that I find to be synonymous with broadened definitions of gentrification (Hyra 2017; Moskowitz 2017; Schlichtman, Patch & Hill 2017) and descriptions of new or resurgent "skyboxification" and the "commodification of everything" (Sandel 2012b, p. 7) in the US. As I argue, gourmet food trucks in San Antonio are part of and a vehicle for perceiving some of the new modes of socioeconomic stratification and discrimination in the US that local government decisions play a role in shaping (Scott 2014).

Crawford contends that the "attitude or … sensibility" (2008b, p. 14) of everyday urbanism, as an alternative to the limits of the formally or professionally planned,

[13] As an example of this, Cárdenas (2016) describes San Antonio food truck vendor Ana Fernández as transitioning to vending after earning undergraduate and postgraduate fine arts degrees, working for an internet-based company in Los Angeles and losing this work as part of the 2008 Great Recession (Cárdenas 2016, p. 125). Some of my interviewees described similar trajectories.

can be found in what she calls “Latino Urbanism” (2008b, p. 13)—based on street food vending and hand-painted storefront signage in the working-class sections of greater Los Angeles. Although Crawford (2008a) stresses that there “is no universal everyday urbanism” (p. 10), some of the examples that she and other proponents of everyday urbanism highlight evoke what I associate with neighborhood or barrio urbanism (Diaz 2005). This includes the reclamation of wasted or abandoned urban spaces by some mobile food vending activities, and other self-directed and relatively “light handed” (Millar 2008, p. 137) if not subtle imprints on the public realm—as job-creation but also broader place-making and civic claims.

Everyday urbanism represents one endpoint of an urban design and management spectrum described by urban planning academic and practitioner Doug Kelbaugh (2001; 2005), whose work has influenced global practices through his involvement in the United Nations Habitat III and New Urban Agenda (Richards 2016). Kelbaugh (2001) depicts “Everyday Urbanism” (capitalized) as one of three “emergent ideologies” or “self-conscious schools” of urbanism—the others being New Urbanism and Post Urbanism—that are shaping the public realm globally (p. 14.1).[14] Kelbaugh (2005) argues that Everyday Urbanism, New Urbanism and Post Urbanism exist “in a continuum, with New Urbanism in the middle”— and within a broader “field” of “market urbanism or ReUrbanism” (p. 9). Kelbaugh (2001) defines market urbanism as “conventional, unselfconscious-urbanism” (p. 14.1). This notion forecasts Sandel’s (2012a, b) observation of the transition to market society in the US, where every decision is shaped by a profit motive—a change which McCann and Ward (2011) describe as the extension of “competitive market ideals to all aspects of life” (p. xviii), including local government built form decisions.

As I observed, market urbanism in San Antonio favors car-dependent new housing development of low to moderate density, including in the city center, with physical

[14] In their edited collection *Writing Urbanism: A Design Reader* (2008), Kelbaugh and McCullough identify Andrés Duany, Ellen Dunham-Jones, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk and Peter Calthorpe as key practitioners of New Urbanism, and, conversely, Rem Koolhaas, Frank Gehry, Peter Eisenman and Daniel Liebeskind as exemplars of Post Urbanism. Giometti (2008) describes New Urbanism as more “Wal-Mart” or mass market urbanism compared with Post Urbanism’s “Gucci,” or elite and context defying approaches, which Giometti describes as depending on wider urban fabrics to appear iconic (pp. 195-197). For further discussions about Everyday Urbanism, New Urbanism and Post Urbanism, see Kelbaugh (2001, 2005).

gates and other visible security measures instilling a sense of enclosure and separation. Various new luxury development projects followed the pattern noted elsewhere in the US of “cities … turned into wealth preserves—the old gated communities of the suburbs, transplanted to the urban core” (Bottum 2017, para. 9). Furthermore, new development generally appeared to utilize a generic contemporary style and inexpensive building materials with limited longevity compared with older building approaches. Such factors, along with intensifying weather and worsening environmental conditions might forecast various urban crises and developments that some interviewees noted in considering the possible future of local vending.

Some interviewees also expressed that San Antonio faces an “identity crisis” as a Mexican American city (see Chapter Four)—one that appears to lead some civic leaders to look to at least aspects of the New Urbanism that Kelbaugh (2001) claims is what “the typical American metropolis needs and would most benefit from” (p. 14.5). Kelbaugh describes New Urbanism as aspiring to “equitably mix people of different income, ethnicity, race and age” in the US, and as eschewing “the physical fragmentation and the functional compartmentalization of modern life” for the form of a “compact, walkable city”—with “spaces that are conducive to face-to-face social interaction” (p. 14.2). In contrast, Kelbaugh (2005) defines Everyday Urbanism as seeking “redeeming qualities in the most mundane and ordinary places, even places we are taught to dislike” (p. 8). Kelbaugh (2001) further describes Everyday Urbanism as “less normative and doctrinaire than New Urbanism, because it is more about reassembling and intensifying existing, everyday conditions than overturning them or starting over with a different model” (p. 14.4).

Kelbaugh’s (2001) notion of New Urbanism as focused on public spaces and social interactions and comprising a bold “starting over” or “overturning” of existing development and practices (p. 14.4) resonates with key public and private redevelopment projects that some interviewees and I observed were part of San Antonio’s declared “Decade of Downtown” campaign (Rivard 2014) and that were sometimes described as *place-changing* efforts (Rivard & Vinson 2015). Other terms that I noted used locally to describe formal efforts to radically change especially San Antonio’s downtown public realm include revitalization, renovation, regeneration,

rejuvenation, rehabilitation and even the recapturing of some sites and areas. The term “recapture” especially—which has been used with redevelopment plans for Alamo Plaza (Byas 2017, para. 8) that threaten the long history of everyday street food selling there (MacCormack 2012; Marks 2016)—evokes the urban revanchism that geographer Neil Smith (1996) identifies as part of some gentrification patterns.

As some interviewees and I observed, City-led attempts to re-make various public spaces downtown, including with the Downtown Food Truck Program, seemed to de-localize and deaden these spaces. Efforts at sites such as Travis Park and Main Plaza seemed to result in the “underused public spaces” that Crawford (2008a, p. 6) describes as resulting from urban planning that is disconnected from, or aimed at thwarting, actual everyday public life and local practices.

Kelbaugh (2001) argues that Everyday Urbanism “makes sense in developing countries … with informal squatter settlements that defy government control and planning and where underserved populations simply want a stake in the economic system and the city” (p. 14.5). Furthermore, he maintains that the “middle road” of New Urbanism offers US cities “the greatest hope for a shared and coherently defined public realm” (p. 14.5). He also contends that New Urbanism “strives for a more balanced and perfect” city (Kelbaugh 2005, p. 8) and that “society must strive to be both tolerant and just enough to allow minority groups and subcultures to coexist with dignity and in peace” (Kelbaugh 2001, 14.5).

Critically, Kelbaugh (2001) defines US urban development as dominated by European American population movements and decisions:

> It has been our good fortune that immigrants from countries with strong public realms … have imported urban and ethnic values for which we are much the richer. But many European immigrants have wanted to leave the public life behind. … African-Americans … have often maintained a strong and rich street life, as have Latinos. But European Americans have continued to flee the public realm—most recently from public city streets to the gated subdivisions of

> affluent, second ring suburbs. They have taken the money with them, and the best schools—without which there cannot be healthy community. (p. 14.6)

This dated view does not anticipate various demographic and urban changes in the US or offer much opportunity for non-European "minorities" except as a "balance" that must be tolerated with the New Urbanism that he advances (pp. 14.2 & 14.8). Moreover, Kelbaugh appears to conflate what he deems Everyday Urbanism—or "the way indigenous and migrant groups informally respond in resourceful and imaginative ways to their ad hoc conditions and marginal spaces," such as by "appropriating space for commerce in parking and vacant lots" and with "public markets rather than chain stores street murals rather than civic art" (pp. 14.1-14.2)—with Latina/o urbanism. Kelbaugh's definition of everyday urbanism, like Crawford's (2008a, b), seems to deny the reality of Latina/o resident involvement in shaping US urban development beyond the re-purposing of marginal city places.

2.4 Beyond barrio urbanism

Leading proponents of New Urbanism (Kelbaugh 2001, 2005) and everyday urbanism (Crawford 2008 a, b) appear to overlook a diversity of possible Latina/o land use patterns or urbanisms observable in major US cities. For example, they appear to miss what urban planner Michael Mendez (2005) calls "Latino New Urbanism." For Mendez, Latino New Urbanism expresses what he views as a distinctly Latina/o desire for more compact urban land use patterns that encourage or support Latina/o "cultural inclinations for social interaction and their adaptive energies" (pp. 33-34). He argues that Latina/o "cultural inclination to a lifestyle supportive of compact cities" can conflict with "city development policies that pressure Latinos to assimilate to the established US notion of appropriate space use"—at the expense of "economic, social, and environmental benefits inherent in the Latino lifestyle" (p. 33). Yet, Mendez's (2005) claims of an inherent and unified Latina/o lifestyle can also be read as denying the polyvocality and dynamism of Latina/o urban populations. Moreover, Mendez appears to miss the sharp socioeconomic and spatial divides that can characterize predominantly Latina/o cities such as San Antonio.

Noting the movement of millennials to cities in the US, young professional Latina/o investment in and redevelopment of “heavily Latino” and formerly predominantly working-class urban neighborhoods (Sangha 2014, para. 3) could be considered one approach to the Latina/o New Urbanism that Mendez (2005) describes. This pattern is sometimes called *gente*-fication—or gentrification, but carried out by “people who care about the existing [Latina/o] culture” (quoted in Delgadillo 2016, para. 4). In San Antonio, *gente*-fication is occasionally further defined as beating outside developers in profiting from a project or product serving wealthier customers and exhibiting an upscale Latina/o aesthetic. For example, Richard Briones, an owner of the luxury bar El Luchador, identifies this project as *gente*-fication and states that the owners “wanted to do it before someone else from Austin or California did it in that space” (quoted in Elizarraras 2017a, para. 4; see Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3 Kat Zuniga’s interior design of El Luchador Bar; © Kat Zuniga 2017 (Elizarraras 2017a)

Other definitions of *gente*-fication also depict the “movement of higher-income” Latina/o residents and developers into “historically working-class neighborhoods,” but stress that it is movement driven by desires to connect with “cultural heritage” and by the quest by some individuals to “return/remain in the area in which they grew up” (Lopez 2016, paras. 1 & 5). Additionally, some authors emphasize that *gente*-fication is not comparable with gentrification—as it is “about building, not dismantling” and not driven by a “pursuit of whiteness” or “rampant luxury development” (Lopez 2016, para. 11). However, others contend that *gente*-fication, “just like gentrification … can lead to displacement” of poorer residents and legacy businesses, and bring “harm” for working-class residents and business owners

including street food peddlers (Delgadillo 2016, paras. 5-10). With this thesis, I acknowledge some of the paradoxes and tensions contained within differing descriptions of *gente*-fication, but I lean towards a definition that associates it with broadening understandings of gentrification in the US and of who might be considered or identify as a gentrifier (Hyra 2017; Moskowitz 2017; Schlichtman, Patch & Hill 2017).

Common depictions of gentrification in the US tend to characterize it as "white dudes with beards riding their fixed-gear bikes into unfamiliar neighborhoods" and "craft beer bars opening up alongside bodegas" (Kinniburgh 2017, para. 2)—to symbolize the "mixture of migration, transformation and reinvestment" suggested with the term (Schlichtman, Patch & Hill 2017, p. 4). Such descriptions have been challenged by some analysts as obscuring the more serious problems of "the increasing isolation of poor, minority neighborhoods and the startling spread of extreme poverty" nationally (Buntin 2015, para. 5). As reporter Colin Kinniburgh (2017) summarizes journalist and author Peter Moskowitz's (2017) depiction of urban change in select major US cities outside of Texas, gentrification is more than just a "cultural phenomenon"—as it is also "about profit and power, racism and violence on a massive scale" (Kinniburgh 2017, para. 2). Academics John Joe Schlichtman, Jason Patch and Marc Lamont Hill (2017) describe gentrification in the US (based on their experiences as self-professed gentrifiers) as shaped by structural factors but also by individual decisions and tastes. Public policy scholar Derek S. Hyra (2017), in exploring what he describes as "atypical" gentrification patterns in Washington, DC, similarly finds that "both production and consumption processes are important in explaining gentrification" in the US (pp. 8 & 12), and he notes that gentrification processes in the US have accelerated and expanded in recent decades.

Drawing from Hyra's (2017) research of urban transformation in Washington, DC, and Schlichtman, Patch and Hill's (2017) more auto-ethnographic accounting of urban changes in neighborhoods in New York City and other municipalities, I do not attempt with this thesis to resolve gentrification debates. Instead, I direct effort to considering the impacts of city changes (shaped by local policy, conditions, opportunities and preferences) related to or perceivable with food truck vending on

lower-income residents and visitors. My thesis adds to extant literature about gentrification in the US if simply by presenting San Antonio as a case study and considering how some local food truck practices reflect urban changes that Scott (2017) describes as the "restratification of urban society" in the US (Scott p. 18).

Others have considered some of the urban dynamics that I noticed in San Antonio, but in the context of Los Angeles (Rojas 1993; Davis 2001; Millar 2008; Bhimji 2010; Estrada & Hondagneu-Sotelo 2010; Hernández-López 2011; Vallianatos 2014, 2017; Muñoz 2015; Tobar 2015). For example and observing commercial *gente*-fication in the former barrio of Highland Park in Los Angeles, columnist Héctor Tobar (2015) argues that "gentrification has produced an undeniable but little appreciated side effect: the end of decades of de facto racial segregation" there (para. 6). He also maintains that an "influx of newcomers with disposable incomes benefits all sorts of Latino people" in Highland Park and especially owners of businesses that cater to what Tobar calls "conspicuous leisure"— such as Latina/o art galleries and cafés serving such *gente*-fied foodstuffs as the "horchata frappe" (paras. 16 & 21).

Although he praises gentrification-led racial desegregation in Highland Park as an improvement, Tobar (2015) also holds that to "see working- and middle-class families driven from their homes by real estate speculators is to witness a kind of cultural murder" (para. 9). Moreover, he decries the loss of the "vibe and ethos" of Highland Park as "a place where Latino people scraped by and took pride in doing so" (para. 16). Observing that a local *panadería* (bakery) has "jacked up the price of the Mexican sweet bread [*pan dulce*]," Tobar further suggests that economic and other neighborhood changes will be contained "for the foreseeable future, in a majority-Latino community" (paras. 16 & 20). Tobar also stresses that aggressive policing targeting young male "neighborhood ne'er-do-wells" has addressed "highly visible urban dysfunction" in Highland Park and marks an acceptable and desirable transition from "ethnic enclave" to American Main Street (paras. 3 & 23).

Tobar's (2015) musings in praise of gentrification in the predominantly Latina/o and formerly barrio neighborhood of Highland Park capture a range of factors that I noticed in San Antonio, including the problematizing of economically poorer

populations and heightened policing as part of targeted urban change. They also suggest the "diversity segregation" that Hyra (2017, p. 9) notes in Washington, DC—or urban settings where "on the surface the community looks diverse, but in actuality is socially segregated" (p. 10). Observing a similar phenomenon in New York City, Schlichtman, Patch and Hill (2017) describe "socially distinct, but physically overlapping, communities" in some racially, ethnically and economically diverse neighborhoods, with distinctions indicated by different "places of . . . consumption, and socializing" (p. 60). In predominantly Mexican American San Antonio, some interviewees and I noticed similar social "microsegregation"—or "subtle (and even not so subtle) forms of exclusion" (Tach 2014, p. 15) perceivable in the distinctions made between classes or "schools" (using the language of one interviewee) of food truck vending, as I discuss in Chapters Four and Five.

According to urban planner Michael Mendez (2005), US Latina/o populations have "continually used adaptive methods to transform their communities to better suit their needs and to promote social interaction" (p. 34). Yet, as others have noted, some "upwardly mobile Latinos" (Sangha 2014, para. 2), including "the sons and daughters of the elite: executives, government officials and the born-rich" (Cave 2014, para. 2), have opted for wealth-based segregation and social isolation in US cities like San Antonio. Similar patterns of economic segregation or enclaving in housing and other aspects of urban life can be found in parts of Mexico (Monkkonen 2011; Saporito 2011; Crossa 2015; Lakhani 2017) and more globally (Geoghegan 2015)—suggesting the "distinctive third wave of urbanization based on cognitive–cultural capitalism" that Scott (2014, p. 570) describes as defining much twenty-first century urban development.

The expansion of wealthy gated communities and luxury development in San Antonio includes suburbs north of the 410 and 1604 loop roads, such as Sonterra (see Section 1.6)—which has been nicknamed "Sonterrey" based on the predominance of ultra-wealthy residents from Monterrey, Mexico who live there (Hennessy-Fiske 2013, para. 4). Car-dependent development in US cities with large Latina/o populations has sometimes been referred to as "Latino Sprawl," but primarily to describe patterns of "more established Latinos moving to suburban and

exurban communities to find affordable housing" (McKone 2010, para. 5). In San Antonio, Latina/o sprawl or suburbanization (McKone 2010; Manriquez 2012), relates to working-class Mexican American population growth and movement or displacement, but also to middle-class and luxury residential enclave formation (Hennessy-Fiske 2013; Cave 2014; Beyer 2016)—with both trends shaping local car-dependency and impacting on food truck practices.

2.5 Taco trucks on every corner: A working-class Latina/o threat narrative

Although there is danger of romanticizing working-class Latina/o conditions and practices, as architect and visual artist Teddy Cruz (2014) warns, there is also the risk of reviling these lived experiences and populations, as past and recent negative political discourses confirm. Anthropologist Leo Chavez (2013) draws attention to how negative stereotypes about Latina/o populations in the US—such as that "Latinos do not want to speak English; that Latinos do want to integrate socially and culturally into the larger US society; that the Mexican-origin population, in particular, is part of a grand conspiracy to take over the US Southwest (the *reconquista*)"—have come to comprise a general "Latino Threat Narrative" that has influenced public policy (pp. xi-x).

The 2016 US presidential election built from and intensified a negative narrative about working-class Mexican Americans when candidate, now President, Donald Trump accused Mexico of exporting problem populations to the US en masse (Chokshi 2016). This campaign position, which included President Trump's pledge to build a massive US-Mexico border wall if elected, led to the development of a "Latinos for Trump" group that attracted national attention when group co-founder Marco Gutierrez shared as part of a televised panel discussion the warning that the US would experience "taco trucks on every corner" if the wider "culture" was not somehow contained (quoted in Chokshi 2016, paras. 1-2).

Gutierrez's comments exemplify aspects of the Latina/o threat narrative that Chavez (2013) identifies and also coded or dog-whistle (López 2014) discourse against the growing Latina/o population in the US. I noticed similar anti-Latina/o discourse traveling as far as Australia, and specifically with use of the pejorative "roach

coach" (Hermosillo 2010, p. 51), suggestive of contamination and invasiveness, to describe the Latina/o street vending practices that inform the global gourmet food truck movement. Furthermore, Guiterrez's comments indicate the marginalizing of working-class Latina/o populations specifically within many anti-Latina/o discourses (Hernández-López 2011).

Gutierrez's interview comments (Chokshi 2016; Machhaus 2016), as exemplary of a working-class Latina/o threat narrative, intersect with some of the themes I explore and question with this thesis. They include the idea that working-class communities and practices need to be uniquely structured or governed for fear of spread or contamination, and the view that neighborhood street food peddling is a forced employment choice and an archaic economic model somehow less desirable than gourmet or corporate food businesses. Gutierrez's statements also suggest a disdain for what he describes as the "Hispanic thinking" that inspires everyday place-making practices like neighborhood taco truck vending (quoted in Machhaus 2016, para. 20).[15] Generally, Gutierrez's statements highlight some of ways in which poverty politics (Elwood, Lawson & Nowak 2015) are framed in the US, including in cities with predominant and diverse Latina/o populations.

2.6 Poverty politics, policing and enclave urbanism

Researchers Sarah Elwood, Victoria Lawson and Samuel Novak (2015) describe poverty politics as the "imaginaries, representations, and judgment of who is poor and why, as well as laws, rules, policies, and everyday practices" that shape cities and socioeconomic distinctions (p. 124). This thesis draws, in part, from their research into poverty politics and place-making in US cities amidst an overall "context of rising inequality and economic vulnerability" following the 2008 Great Recession (p. 123). They define place-making as "the activities through which residents work to produce the neighborhood they want," such as by participating in community groups and local politics, and "interacting with … neighbors" in person and online (p. 123). With this study, I examine food truck vending as a local government-regulated but also resident-shaped and sometimes led place-making activity that is enmeshed in local poverty politics.

[15] For another critique of notions of "Hispanic" ways of thinking and acting, see Pimental (2013a).

Exploring poverty politics and place-making in San Antonio requires an awareness of the city as having long exhibited enclave or gated urbanism (Miller 2001; Low 2001, 2003; Roy 2005; Drennon 2006; Schuermans 2016). For geographer Nick Schuermans (2016), enclave urbanism represents "extreme segregation" or the "spatial separation of the privileged" from other residents (p. 183). As Schuermans notes, enclave urbanism can be actualized with the "walls, fences and booms" of gated communities and private sites, and through technologies such as "CCTV cameras, private security personnel" and other methods (p. 183). In San Antonio, I observed how local traditions and sensibilities of enclave urbanism—or desires to minimize or altogether bypass "encounters with the poor" (Schuermans 2016, p. 190)—shaped the design and management of some publicly accessible spaces (Staeheli & Mitchell 2008), impacting on street food vending. Additionally, some interviewees described and I also noticed how street food vending could sometimes lead to positive "visual and physical encounters" across socioeconomic divides (Schuermans 2016, p. 190), in spite of local efforts to curtail such interactions.

2.7 Street vendors in the global urban economy

In a compendium of research about street vendors in the modern global economy that focuses on practices in Asia and Africa, sociologist and activist Sharit Bhowmik (2010) identifies three theories of street vending that underpin most vending research. Drawing from the foundational work of economic anthropologist Keith Hart, Bhowmik describes a "dualistic approach" or theory of street vending, which holds that street peddling will decline or disappear as the *formal* economic sector—defined by greater "permanency" of employment and the potential for retirement benefits—grows or absorbs informal practices (pp. 3-4). Bhowmik contends that modern economic conditions have disproven a dualistic theory, as the informal economy has expanded in "all countries" where the formal economic sector has expanded (p. 4).

Bhowmik (2010) also notes a "structuralist theory" (p. 4), of street vending, which perceives informal economic sector work to be in a symbiotic or parasitic relationship with the formal economic sector exemplified by street vendors re-selling

or relying on massed produced goods or ingredients, or mass produced products designed or packaged for re-sale by mobile vendors. Additionally, he observes a "legalist theory" (p. 4) of street peddling, based on the work of Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto, which maintains that individuals seeking informal sector work such as unlicensed street vending do so because existing laws are too complicated or cumbersome to follow. For Bhowmik, a legalist theory best explains informal street peddling activity and urban planning responses to it, given that street vending is often treated as a nuisance or intrusion by authorities who seek to limit if not end these practices

Furthermore, Bhowmik (2010) draws from economic anthropologist Keith Hart's description of the "four basic features" of informal sector work to consider the following common characteristics of street vending: low level of skill, easy entry, low pay and the employment of a largely "immigrant" workforce (pp. 2-3). He identifies two distinct types of street vendors: those who "squat"—or in San Antonio parlance, *post-up*—and those who are more mobile as they roam wider areas in search of customers, but with both street vendor types exhibiting limited "permanency" in claims to physical space (p. 6).

For Bhowmik (2010), the growth and practice of street peddling globally intersects with the migration of poor rural populations to cities. He observes that street vending activity often clusters around "natural markets" (pp. 13-14) in urban areas such as mass transit stops. Of direct relevance to my research, Bhowmik stresses how the regulation of vending is sometimes used by authorities to exclude economically poorer people from certain public spaces and resources enjoyed by wealthier populations, such as beaches and parks.

While Bhowmik's (2010) edited compilation of street vending research provides useful frameworks for understanding street food selling generally, the collection does not include studies of practices in the US. Some of the findings of my research complicate some of his assertions about street peddling practices globally, such as his contention that urban enforcement against street vendors is mainly complaint-driven and limited towards where vending is occurring.

As I discuss in Chapters Four and Five, private and commercial and not necessarily complaint-driven governance of wealthier neighborhoods and gated communities has challenged some mobile food vending activity in San Antonio—and not where vending has taken place, but rather where a food truck has been temporarily parked. Moreover, the regulatory tools that municipal authorities use to restrict access to some public spaces by economically poorer people seem to have expanded beyond the outright banning of street peddling that Bhowmik (2010) notes as a possible local governance response. For example, City-supported vendrification downtown—with gourmet food trucks and farmer's markets replacing traditional and more affordable offerings at sites such as Main Plaza, Travis Park and Alamo Plaza (Patoski 1985; MacCormack 2012)—appeared to work in tandem with other measures aimed at displacing economically poorer populations from some public spaces and opportunities.

Academics Kristina Graaff and Noa Ha (2015) describe street vending as an "informalized" practice "situated between avoiding and complying with governmental interference" (p.3). Moreover, they associate this precariousness with "(neoliberal) capitalism" and describe the regulation of street vending as being shaped by "global economic trends" that include "competition between cities" and the "growing commodification, touristification and (semi)-privatization of urban space" (p. 3). Additionally, they observe in cities as diverse as "Berlin, Los Angeles and Mexico City" various "mechanisms of exclusion" employed by local governments to refashion the public realm in ways meant to attract "business investment"—and which often negatively impact on vendors who serve "lower-income populations" (pp. 3-4). Furthermore, Graaff and Ha (2015) note "discreet noncompliance" rather than "outspoken protest" by some food truck vendors as a means towards gaining "access to opportunities and public spaces that state-sanctioned constraints would deny them" (Graaff & Ha 2015, p. 7). Some interviewees and I noticed similar factors and maneuvers or tactics (de Certeau 1988) shaping some food truck practices in San Antonio—and which seem to have precedents in the history of the city's downtown Chili Queens.

2.8 Chili Queens and the illusion of inclusion

In his book *Taco USA, How Mexican Food Conquered America*, journalist and food scholar Gustavo Arellano (2012) describes San Antonio in the 1870s as an "essentially Mexican" street market city:

> [It was] a frontier town where cattlemen ruled and beef was as common as water. Coming to a town that was essentially Mexican, curious tourists happened upon makeshift markets across San Antonio, vendors huddling in plazas from morning to the late hours. Baskets, blankets and other merchandise were exchanged between peddlers and visitors, but what struck the national fancy was *chile con carne* hawked by a specific gender: women. (p. 32)

Arellano (2012) emphasizes the importance of San Antonio's Chili Queens and the city's informal street markets in the development of some US dining and vending practices—in part, based on the city's history as s a key tourism destination and waypoint on transcontinental rail journeys. Moreover, Arellano (2012) describes the Chili Queens as being negatively affected and targeted by shifting local regulation (shaped by redevelopment and tourism interests) throughout their history:

> Dozens of these *mujeres* [women] arrived to the plazas—Milam, Military, Alamo [see Figure 1.9], the scenes changed with the tolerance of city fathers over the years—at dusk, with precooked meals in sturdy cauldrons placed over roaring fires. Each brought tables, stools, lanterns to light the booth, and their fetching selves. Accompanying the ladies were musicians to play for customers. It wasn't just Mexican food on sale, but rather the romance of a vanquished people, a slice of Old Mexico in a state that hadn't yet fully joined the Republic. (p. 32)

Arellano's (2012) descriptions of the Chili Queens identify the importance of early evening ("dusk") street food peddling and outdoor dining in San Antonio historically. He also draws attention to the Chili Queens' selling of pre-made food items, utilization of various self-determined place-making props (music, lighting and seating) and attentiveness to interactions with customers. I noted similar details and

factors shaping and defining especially neighborhood food truck vending, as I discuss in Chapters Four and Five.

As Arellano (2012) discusses, downtown redevelopment interests at different points in San Antonio's history have framed working-class street food vending and related public life as an obstacle to be removed. For example, he describes a "building boom" in San Antonio in 1889 connected with a national "City Beautiful" urban reform movement that resulted in Mayor Bryan Callaghan driving the Chili Queens out of downtown plazas with new regulations.[16] Moreover, Arellano notes how the Chili Queens returned "with no license, thus beginning a cat-and-mouse game" (p. 32) between local regulators and vendors—and which some interviewees and I noticed as continuing with some local food truck and other vending practices. Academic Marci R. McMahon (2013) similarly describes the history of the Chili Queens as involving episodes of being "removed to facilitate construction … or incorporated into plazas to serve tourists" as part of "revitalization projects" that "augmented racial and economic segregation" and made it "difficult for Mexicanos to use the plazas as public sites of gathering" (p. 34).

Additionally, Arellano (2012) contends that the "death knell" for the Chili Queens came with the progressive reform and tourism promotion efforts of Mayor Maury Maverick in the 1930s, who "forced" the vendors "into screened tents" and to "register with the health departments, insisting that crowds desired to see such a seal of approval" in order to "allay any hygienic fears" (p. 32). McMahon (2013) similarly describes the eviction of "hundreds of Mexicana female chili vendors" from specifically Haymarket Plaza downtown by order of Mayor Maverick in 1936 due to "sanitation fears" (p. 28), with Maverick later restoring a narrow form or "caricature" of Chili Queen vending to promote downtown revitalization projects such as La Villita and as part of special events (p. 39; see Figure 1.9).

McMahon (2013) describes the Chili Queens as traditionally peddlers of "tamales, enchiladas, chili con carne, tortillas, and coffee" at affordable prices whose offerings attracted and mixed "a diverse population of natives, tourists, Anglos, Germans and

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[16] For a discussion about the City Beautiful movement in the US, see Petersen (1976).

Mexicanos of all classes"(p. 74). According to McMahon, the City's regulation of the Chili Queens responded to tourism and elite interests—including desires for cosmopolitanism but also concerns about working-class vendors "invading the city in large numbers" (p. 28). Additionally, she presents the history of the Chili Queens as one of casual resistance to regulation and the "spatial marginalization" of working-class Mexican Americans generally (p. 75). Moreover, McMahon describes how some Chili Queen practices were appropriated to serve a downtown tourism identity based on a fantasy "Mexican atmosphere" (p. 37), suggesting the importance of and efforts by local government to shape the cultural economy historically.

As Arellano (2012) identifies, more "makeshift" (p. 32) street vending practices historically have conjured for some visitors and residents notions of "old San Antone" and a "slice of old Mexico" (p. 32)—romanticized imaginaries of local working-class conditions and "Mexican" qualities of life. According to McMahon (2013), street vending downtown traditionally was a way for many of San Antonio's working-class families to supplement low-wage employment and combine child rearing and socializing with peddling to visitors but also local workers. This occurred until local government regulation discouraged street vending as a broad or everyday practice, aiding in the transition of some Chili Queen practices towards restaurant and other work. As McMahon suggests, a desire by local government to sustain and promote tourism during and after the 1930s Great Depression and address the "exaggerated public sanitation and public health concerns" (p. 35) ascribed to specifically to working-class Mexican Americans (as part of the xenophobic discourses of that day) fueled the increased regulation of street food vending and its transformation from a more self-directed practice to a closely managed performance serving local elite interests. These interests were predominantly Anglo in San Antonio in the 1930s through the 1970s, but they included, as McMahon notes, a "rising middle class" and economically elite Mexican Americans (p. 36).

Historically, the regulation of street food vending in San Antonio through the displacement of non-elite vendors from certain public spaces targeted for reinvention drew customers including Anglo tourists to "the margins of the city" where such

vending was at the time tolerated or overlooked—such as in plazas west of San Pedro Creek downtown (Hernández-Ehrisman 2008, p. 29). Descriptions of a marginal or second and differently regulated downtown for and comprised of the economically poor in San Antonio (Rivard 2014) align with Gandy's (2005) characterization of "postindustrial" cities being defined by large expanses of poverty separated from new "nodes" of "premium service provision":

> The multi-lane flyovers [of roadway development] … enable a literal as well as metaphorical lifting of the new middle-class elites out of the … poverty of the city. … The centralized modes of universal service provision associated with the development of the modern city have been replaced by a new logic of differentiation and exclusion. Many former sites … have merged or melted into a proliferating zone of urban 'non-space' that is disconnected from contemporary patterns of economic production. … And the hidden city, exemplified by nineteenth-century water and sewer networks, now faces the prospect of extensive collapse. (pp. 36-37)

Gandy's (2005) vivid depiction—which evokes other observations of the "dual city" of "late" capitalism (Harvey 1989) or the predominant urbanism of contemporary capitalism (Scott 2008, 2014, 2017; Florida 2017)—captures some of the public infrastructure decay and other challenges observable in sections of my study area (see Section 1.6). This includes the role that elevated highways and other mobility infrastructure have played in creating or maintaining spatial marginalization in San Antonio (Miller 2001; Hernández-Ehrisman 2008).

As urbanist Charles Montgomery (2013) writes, car-based "dispersal starves the budgets of cities forced to spend sales tax dollars on roads, pipes, sewage and services for the distant neighborhoods of sprawl, leaving little for the shared amenities that [can] make central city living attractive" (pp. 76-77). As I experienced living in the historic footprint of San Antonio (see Section 1.6) but separated from downtown by limited footpaths and various highway flyovers serving the sprawling city, it was routine to encounter serious public water infrastructure failures such as major leaks and flooded street segments that did not seem to elicit adequate

responses by local government (see Figure 2.2). Other troubling factors that affected the study and my sense of place included a stray dog and dog attack epidemic (Baker 2017) and high rates of pedestrian death and injury from traffic (Schmitt 2015; Reagan 2016).

Engaging with food truck vending within the historic footprint of the city over a prolonged period and from the vantage point of an economically distressed zip code (Schwartz 2016; Economic Innovation Group 2017) allowed me to consider some of the multiple dimensions of poverty that can "stack up" against poorer residents (Rodrigue, Kneebone & Reeves 2016, para. 1) and contribute to a sense of feeling marginalized or excluded. As suggested by one interviewee in describing the regulation of food trucks in San Antonio as regulators and mobile food vendors "bullshitting each other," local government is perceived by at least some residents as promulgating the "illusion of inclusion" (Rosales 2000). According to political scientist Rodolfo Rosales (2000), since at least the 1950s there has been at best the "accommodation" of the interests and concerns of working-class and middle-class Mexican American residents with local policy that has been largely set by and has prioritized select "business interests" that he describes as "Anglo" (pp. 1-2). Writing for *The New York Times*, reporter Damien Cave (2014) describes twenty-first century San Antonio conditions as embodying for wealthier residents, including some ultra-wealthy migrants from northern Mexico, perhaps the ambience but not the reality of urban equality.

Moreover, Cave (2014) notes that majority Mexican American San Antonio remains "a city of wrenching differences where the fault lines of class and identity are visible and raw" (para. 6). As I argue, some of these distinctions and inequities shape local responses to the food truck trend.

2.9 Commodification and contamination

In his book *Planet Taco: A Global History of Mexican Food*, food historian Jeffrey Pilcher (2012) explores the evolution and globalization of Mexican American fast foods, highlighting the critical role that San Antonio practices and approaches have played historically in this ongoing development. For example, he notes the role

played by “Anglo tourists” traveling by rail to or through San Antonio after the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) in popularizing some local dishes nationally and in the mass production of foods and ingredients such as canned chili (pp. 115-117). Additionally, he draws attention to “Anglo” stereotypes about “Mexican” street food selling in San Antonio that exaggerated the “dangerous” qualities of these practices, including in advertising some mass produced food products (pp. 11 & 110-111), Furthermore, Pilcher describes San Antonio as a city that has historically attracted wealthy migrants and temporary expatriates from Mexico, a population that he contends held a “sharp aversion” to “the Americanized” foods sold in local parks and plazas—with concerns about food quality but also this vending’s association with laboring classes (pp. 10-11).

Pilcher (2012) also discusses the history of San Antonio’s Chili Queens as being shaped by elite interests and as influenced by national and international trends. For example, he describes Mayor Callahan’s 1889 City Beautiful movement efforts as an “urban hygiene campaign” that involved “transforming … Spanish colonial plazas” and “closing off traditional uses of urban space” downtown, in response to changing tastes and new business demands (p. 109). Moreover, Pilcher observes that vendors were removed from public spaces including Alamo Plaza to “make way for construction” with the promise “that the change would be temporary” (p. 110). I noticed similar discourses shaping the management of street food vending downtown and resulting in the displacement of some longstanding practices. As examples shared by some interviewees, I discuss in subsequent chapters the Travis Park hot dog cart, the Hemisfair Park (and later Travis Park) Popcorn Wagon and the tradition of *raspa* cart vending at Alamo Plaza, including in presenting in Chapter Six possible directions for additional research.

Pilcher (2012) further describes San Antonio’s street vendors historically as being treated with local regulation like “prostitutes … illicit but nonetheless tolerated,” with vendors “defying city authorities with the support and patronage of tourists and boosters” and “staking out their places of business without municipal authorization”

(p. 114).[17] Such actions by the Chili Queens could be viewed as an antecedent to *posting-up* —a term used by different interviewees to describe venders who claim and remain within specific spaces over extended periods, and in some cases over the years (in the words of one interviewee, "like a piece of furniture"), to attract and serve customers. To post-up is terminology from basketball and refers to how a player, as an offense move, positions themselves rigidly to take and hold space, creating options to outmaneuver defenders in scoring points. Posting-up might be understood as vendors striving to establish or elicit "permanency" (Bhowmik 2010, p. 6) and the opposite of *pop-up* activity—or randomly turning up at a location and notifying followers by social media, which some interviewees explained defined gourmet food truck vending at least at the start of the movement.

Posting-up, which I observed was exhibited by some neighborhood and legacy downtown vending practices, also contrasts with the strict time and place limits and scheduling imposed by the City's Downtown Food Truck Program (City of San Antonio 2014). I discuss the program in Chapter Three in describing fieldwork methods, and in Chapters Four and Five, in regards to how the program was described by interviewees. As I observed, the program limited the overall number of participating trucks and contained vending downtown to primarily weekday lunchtime hours (11am-2pm)—with normally no more than four trucks or trailers (but often just one) allowed at sites (approximately nine across downtown) that, except for Travis Park, typically allowed vending only one or two days a week. The difficulty describing the program succinctly suggests how specifically it was structured and managed. Some interviewees perceived the program as forged through compromises favoring San Antonio's elite business interests that included more upscale restaurants and aimed at discouraging especially working-class vending downtown.

[17] San Antonio's Chili Queen era coincided with the city's history of maintaining a large and renowned "Sporting District," or red-light district, of gambling and prostitution, in an area west of San Pedro Creek downtown (Sanders 2014a; J.M. Scott 2016). I note how San Antonio's Sporting District neighborhood area was largely demolished in the 1950s with the construction of an elevated highway, Interstate 35 downtown (see Figure 1.9), that also cuts the inner West Side off visually and physically from other parts of downtown.

Historical accounts of the discouragement of working-class food peddling by local regulation shaped by and catering to elite interests—and some popular resistance to such governance (Hernández-Ehrisman 2008; Arellano 2012; Pilcher 2012; McMahon 2013; Cárdenas 2016)—foreshadow some of the observations I document with this thesis. For example, some vendors I interviewed identified with or expressed taking a "Wild West," "pirate," or maverick approach with at least some of their vending activity, as supported by their customers and knowledge of legal loopholes or oversights. As one interviewee quipped, San Antonians are not necessarily a people known for rule-following. As I also share in Chapters Four and Five, access to street vending and resisting local government injustices relates to how some of interviewees imagine or describe public life to be in Mexico.

Pilcher (2012) contends that street food selling in Mexico is typically from a "simple cart" that takes on elements of "a comfortable restaurant," such as by providing temporary seating, and he contrasts these approaches with the "fancy taco truck" of "polished chrome" that he envisions frequenting "street corners and work sites" in the US (p. 2). Some of my interviewees similarly described *tiny* approaches to neighborhood street food vending in San Antonio—carts but also small trailers, vans, storefronts and shacks—that they linked with practices in Mexico and viewed as inspiring US food truck practices.

Additionally, Pilcher (2012) identifies stereotypes of "contamination" that have historically been ascribed to working-class Mexican American street food peddling approaches (p. 110), and which I observe continue to circulate. For example, the US film *Chef* (Favreau 2014), which interprets aspects of the US food truck movement, depicts an egregiously filthy taco truck scrubbed clean by the protagonist chef (with the help of family, friends and a crew of Latino workmen) and transformed into a Cuban gourmet food truck. Hand-painted signage including food icons on the truck advertising tacos, burritos and *tortas* are visible beneath the grime. As part of a road trip from Miami to Los Angeles that skips San Antonio (detouring north to Austin), the de-Mexicanized and de-contaminated gourmet truck in the film pops up to vend briefly in trendy urban areas across the country, gaining customers with the help of social media and successfully navigating encounters with local law enforcement.

Along with highlighting some of the urban neighborhoods, eateries and foods forming the racially and ethnically diverse but economically segregated US "gourmet foodscape" (Johnston & Baumann 2010, p. 14), the film *Chef* (Favreau 2014) contributes to a narrative of gourmet food trucks as apart from and superior to the apparently decrepit neighborhood taco trucks that inspired the trend. It also suggests how San Antonio has been missed or avoided with many accounts of the food truck movement.

2.10 Food truck movement research

This thesis adds to a growing body of critical literature and research about informal urbanism and mobile food vending (Chase, Crawford & Kaliski 2008; Mukhija & Laukaitou-Sideris 2014; Graaff & Ha 2015). This includes emergent critical scholarship about food truck practices in the US and Canada that considers community and economic development and the cultural identity aspects of food truck vending in specific urban contexts, and potential conflicts between street food peddlers, local governments and other actors (Valverde 2012; Agyeman, Matthews & Sobel 2017). This study adds to the extant critical literature by bringing a range of San Antonio perspectives to critical discourses about food truck vending and urban change. Additionally, it considers unique urban conditions and distinct local practices that inform the food truck movement locally. These include icehouses, *raspa* vans, food carts, *pulgas* (flea markets), *tienditas* (tiny shops) and various perambulatory approaches to street food selling including *paleteros* and cooler box vendors, as discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

The US gourmet food truck movement is a relatively new phenomenon and one that has targeted younger consumers. Much of the academic research related to this topic is thus comparatively recent and includes student work. I review in the following sub-sections some additional key recent writings that represent the growing body of critical literatures exploring the US food truck movement and to further help introduce some of the findings of this study. To begin, I consider aspects of the US history of public dining that relate to food truck practices in San Antonio and that scholars of the food truck movement sometimes miss.

2.10.1 The Cart War to food truck associations

Various researchers of the US food truck movement trace the history of "mobile eateries" in the US to Texas, and specifically to West Texas rancher Charles Goodnight's mobile kitchen "chuck wagons" of the 1860s as a point of origin (Ibrahim 2011 p. 3; Hawk 2013; Butler 2014; Strand 2015). This overlooks San Antonio's role in Texas cattle drives and the related long history of the Chili Queens vendors, whose practices are understood to have preceded the invention of chuck wagons (Lomax 2017). It also misses the Texas "Cart War" of 1857 (Weber 2010; Lomax 2017). During the Cart War, poor or peon *Tejana/os* (Mexican Texans) using oxcarts to move food and other goods to San Antonio street markets from some Gulf of Mexico port communities were attacked, robbed and often killed by Anglo vigilantes—violence encouraged by national nativist politics of the time and "white anger over Mexican sympathy with black slaves" (Weber 2010, para. 1). Texas reporting of the day envisioned the Cart War possibly leading to attacks on German immigrant settlers (who were considered foreigners) and escalating into an overall "war between the poor and the rich" in Texas (quoted in Weber 2010). This period was also marked by the expulsion of landless Mexicans from Austin in 1854 (Carrigan & Webb 2013, p. 44)—by "Anglos of social standing" as a means to "curtail the movement of transient Mexican laborers" and address elite concerns about Tejana/o peon interactions with black slaves (Rodriguez 2008, p. 85). This history suggests how class divides and efforts to curtail the mobility of poorer residents have long shaped street vending and other facets of urban development in a racially and ethnically diverse Texas.

Also important in the history of US public dining culture and informing the food truck movement is the Harvey House chain of rail depot restaurants and hotels that developed in the late nineteenth century along rail lines from Texas to California, in response to the racial and ethnic mixing (including through prostitution) that occurred in major rail hubs and frontier towns such as San Antonio (Eckhardt 2006; Pilcher 2012; Rhodes 2013; Sanders 2014a).[18] The Harvey House chain aimed to

[18] Historically, San Antonio ranked downtown houses of prostitution by economically, racially and ethnically coded letter grades A to C (Eckhardt 2006; Sanders 2014a).

civilize and discipline Southwestern cities including Los Angeles during the rail era and into the twentieth century, with practices that included employing only young white and unmarried women—called Harvey Girls—as servers (Rhodes 2013).[19] According to one account, “Mexican and African American customers were commonly served in separate facilities, usually behind the restaurant, or with paper sacks to be consumed outdoors” at Harvey Houses (Garcilazo 2012, p. 144). Generally, the history of the racial and ethnic segregation of public dining in the US is not well attended by food truck movement research. It is a substantial oversight as this history, as some of my interviewees expressed, can inform opinions about “eating on the streets” in US cities like San Antonio.

Various researchers associate the US food truck movement with younger populations and the growth in use of social media. For example, public relations student Noelle Ibrahim (2011) discusses the role of food trend “influencers” as an industry of professionals in the US “securing coverage, reviews, editorial spreads and other forms of public visibility” for different gourmet food vending approaches and appealing especially to college students and young professionals (p. ix). Doctoral candidate Edward Whittall (2017) describes gourmet food trucks in Toronto, Ontario, using social media platform such as “Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest” to “generate mobility” or “communicate location”—drawing a similar demographic of younger and more affluent customers to temporary sites of vending (p. 195). Geographer Nina Martin (2017) observes that despite the association of food trucks with social media, “only a selection” of vendors utilize it, noting that especially vendors with “Spanish-language names” or employing traditional approaches such as pushcart vending seem less apt to use social media (p. 218).

My research did not explore social media use beyond noting some general practices and discussing with some interviewees the City’s use of social media to promote the

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[19] According to Rhodes (2013), “Harvey Girls were forbidden to wear jewelry and makeup. They wore a conservative uniform: black ankle-length dresses with Elsie collars, white bib aprons. Waitresses lived in a dormitory supervised by a matron who strictly enforced a ten o’clock curfew. Working 12-hour-shifts six and seven day weeks, when a waitress wasn’t serving a customer, she was busy keeping the dining room spotless. In this way, the Harvey House functioned as a corporate chaperone that was able to provide the waitressing profession considerable social respectability” (para. 3).

Downtown Food Truck Program. However, local food truck practices are influenced by local “tastemakers” (as one interviewee described influencers), including individuals active on online platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. As I observed and some interviewees discussed, local vending has also been shaped by growing use of portable technology including smart phones and mobile credit card readers such as Square (Moore 2017).

In exploring food truck practices in other parts of the US, different researchers also note how gourmet food trucks are often “wrapped” in “professional and colorful company branding” that expresses “a specific theme” and addresses a food “niche” (Ibrahim 2011, p. 7; Dunn 2013; Hawk 2013). Furthermore, some researchers express how food trucks in the US can be perceived as “classed” (Strand 2015, p. 36) or bifurcated between “gourmet” and “traditional” practices (Vallianatos 2014, p. 209; N. Martin 2017, p. 216)—and they observe how gourmet food trucks are often positioned to appeal specifically to young professionals and university students (Ibrahim 2011; Dunn 2013; Hawk 2013). As I discuss in Chapters Four and Five, these observations are compatible with what some interviewees and I noted about local gourmet trucks, including the positioning of some of the City’s Downtown Food Truck Program sites to serve as de facto open-air food courts for specific office buildings. Additionally, some interviewees described enjoying food truck vending as part of young adulthood and often car-based evening social outings in car-dependent San Antonio.

Perhaps different from the findings of other food truck research exploring practices in other cities, some of my interviewees shared a strong dislike for the elusiveness of some gourmet trucks, emphasizing a preference for trucks that could be relied on to be at certain locations at times convenient to customers—in part, based on local traditions of vending. Although some researchers and popular depictions of the food truck movement emphasize the “thrill of the chase” novelty and “insider culture” trendiness aimed for or created with some gourmet truck operation (Ibrahim 2011, p. 37; Favreau 2014), my interviewees expressed disapproval of operations that chose to limit access and possibly as a means towards appealing to more status-orientated customers (Johnston & Baumann 2010). I present these and other perspectives

shared by interviewees in Chapters Four and Five, and which compare with the findings of some investigations of food truck practices in Los Angeles and other major US cities with long traditions of working-class Latina/o street food vending.

2.10.2 The loncheras of Los Angeles

Different researchers note the role in Los Angeles that Latina/o family-run *loncheras*s—more "stationary food trucks" or "taco trucks" that offer "affordable, hearty meals" and snacks (p. 6) to working-class and other customers—have played in shaping the US gourmet food truck movement (Hermosillo 2010, p. 6; Hernández-López 2011; Vallianatos 2014, 2017). For example, policy analyst Mark Vallianatos (2017) traces the history of the *loncheras* that inspired the creation of gourmet kitchens-on-wheels to the "cook-aboard hot trucks" catering to worksites in the 1960s and to older local practices such as late nineteenth century "tamale wagons" and early twentieth century food delivery trucks (Vallianatos 2017, pp. 70 & 76). Urban planner Jesús Hermosillo (2010) similarly depicts *loncheras* as an "offshoot" of "industrial" or worksite mobile catering, which he describes as trucks that "operate on fixed routes making multiple … stops to serve factory and construction-site workers" (p. 7).

Furthermore, Hermosillo (2010) depicts *loncheras* and industrial food trucks as distinct from what he calls "Twitter trucks" or gourmet food trucks, which he characterizes as the "tiny yet highly visible group of mobile kitchens" that use social media and vending temporarily from trendy locations to target "a relatively hip and affluent clientele" (p. 10). I utilize these three classifications of food trucks—gourmet, neighborhood and industrial—in discussing San Antonio practices and based on what my interviewees shared, although I did not explore industrial practices directly, given the research protocols I discuss in Chapter Three.

Additionally, Hermosillo (2010) describes *loncheras* as typically "staking out a single spot where they do business the entire workday on a daily basis for years on end"—locations that are often in "their own neighborhoods" or "low- and moderate-income areas lacking in adequate food options" (p. 7). Vallianatos (2017) observes that food trucks generally in the 1980s and 1990s "became heavily identified with

Latino customers, drivers and neighborhoods" and followed "rapid demographic shifts that turned formerly white areas into Latino-majority communities" (p. 79). Vallianatos also notes that *loncheras* have historically served some nightclubs in Los Angeles. However, Hermosillo (2010) stresses that *loncheras* are "not known for directly competing with brick-and-mortar restaurants" (p. 6). Vallianatos (2014) adds that a diversity of broadly accessible "street foods help to make Los Angeles a more casual city" and can establish "an air of cultural solidarity" (p. 210). Some of my interviewees similarly discussed especially neighborhood food truck vending as a positive social and place-making activity that can help to bridge some local divides.

Different researchers have considered traditional *lonchera* and related pushcart and more perambulatory street food vending in Los Angeles as acts relating to Latina/o cultural identity, agency, and sense of belonging and place (Bhimji 2010; Estrada & Hondagneu-Sotelo 2010; Hernández-López 2011; Vallianatos 2014, 2017; Muñoz 2015). For example, Hermosillo (2010) identifies the aim of many *lonchera* operations to create or re-create the performative "Mexican" qualities of street food peddling:

> [T]they stopped for tacos at a trailer. … Its windows were large and reached low enough for customers standing on the sidewalk to see the taqueros in action. It hit them that the excitement that comes with watching the cooking process reminded them of the street-food experience throughout Mexico's towns and cities, where loncheras don't exist but where vendors set up sizzling griddles, tables and benches every night on the street, sometimes even blocking cars, to cook and eat in the open air, becoming neighborhood centers of social interaction. (p. 34)

Geographer Lena Muñoz (2015) also stresses how "nostalgia" for or perceptions of "traditional Latin American food" and foodways, or "home-cultural practices," influence "vending practices and consumer tastes" in Los Angeles (pp. 102 & 105). Some of my interviewees expressed similar themes of cultural place-making and nostalgia shaping their impressions of especially neighborhood food truck vending in San Antonio, and also the business approaches of some local gourmet vendors.

Additionally, Hermosillo (2010) reports that the operators of *loncheras* whom he engaged with were predominantly "Mexican" and from "plebian backgrounds" (p. 27)—employing family members in operations serving affordable and fresh "fare based on Mexican recipes" to a diversity of Latina/o but also other customers. Furthermore, he depicts these vendors as connecting with a "food chain" of "large and small suppliers" of foods and ingredients that include "mom-and-pop *tortillerías* [tortilla factories], bakeries and produce stores," and also corporate wholesalers and chain stores (p. 6). Additionally, he describes how *loncheras* necessarily engage with local health departments, commissaries and policing. As I share in Chapters Four and Five, some interviewees and I observed similar networks shaping local food truck vending.

Hermosillo (2010) also identifies possible "nuisances" associated with l*onchera*s or taco trucks—such as the "seeping of food odors from a mobile kitchen into one's home … or late-night noise outside one's bedroom" (p. 12). He describes *lonchera* operators as avoiding "neighborhoods where they are not wanted" (p. 58) and otherwise seeking to mitigate conflicts with their location and vending choices—with the process of finding and building successful sites sometimes taking "months or even years to complete" (p. 26). As Hermosillo (2010) warns, gourmet trucks can create problems for traditional food trucks by competing with restaurants, including in urban areas that are "trendy or gentrifying" (p. 12)—upsetting "powerful actors" (Wessel 2017, p. 41) and triggering or excusing increased regulation of street vending generally.

Also drawing from practices in Los Angeles, food law academic Ernesto Hernández-López (2011) describes a "war" having been waged by local authorities against *loncheras* and other traditional street food vending through new regulations and enforcement in predominantly and diversely Latina/o neighborhoods east of downtown, following the launch of the gourmet food truck movement. He contends that regulations have been enacted and enforced based on quality-of-life and public safety concerns—as influenced by "nationwide anti-immigrant sentiments" but also resident concerns about "neighborhood identity" and a desire by some for economic redevelopment or gentrification (p. 241 & 245). Noting the involvement of some

restaurateurs and “longer-term” Mexican American residents in efforts to attract “residents with higher incomes,” “new businesses” and “more expensive stores” to their neighborhoods, Hernández-López observes that anti-immigrant discourses in the US can serve as “political proxies to voice anti-Latino sentiments” that often translate into “socio-economic prejudices” against “the working class” (pp. 242 & 245). As I discuss in Chapters Four and Five, some interviewees and I perceived that the regulation of food trucks in San Antonio was shaped by similar elite business or economic redevelopment interests and by views of working-class street vending practices as incompatible with the urban changes desired by some residents and powerful local actors.

Additionally, Hermosillo (2010) spoke with some police officers about their views of *lonchera* practices, and their responses indicate how public safety policing can be used to criminalize working-class Latina/o vendors and their customers. He shares how some police officers expressed that “vendors contribute to blighted conditions in neighborhoods and … a decline in the quality of life”—with some referencing the “broken-windows theory” of policing with their reasoning (p. 44). These officers also indicated that vending could generate “nonmoving crowds” on sidewalks, encourage littering and possibly “attract prostitutes or drug dealers” and “customers in an intoxicated state” (p. 44). Furthermore, they suggested that simply vendor and customer “chatter” could present a public nuisance, and that peddling might encourage pedestrians to cross streets “without looking out for cars” (pp. 44-45).

Hernández-López (2011) describes such policing of *loncheras* in Los Angeles as part of “food culture contests” that involve local government judgements (influenced by residents and business interests) about “who can operate legitimate businesses and what should not be eaten”—as shaped by “concerns for what is foreign or immigrant, with its racial undertones, and the local economics of gentrification and recessionary pressures” (pp. 258 & 261). Although my research did not include interviews with residents identifying as police officers, some of my interviewees described the local regulation of food trucks and some public spaces as also shaped by economic and reputational concerns and biased against working-class vendors.

Other researchers describe similar "cultural negotiations" (Hernández-López 2011, p. 258) influencing the regulation of food trucks and other street food vending in other major US cities outside of the southwestern region—such as in Chicago (N. Martin 2014, 2017) and New York (Devlin 2015; Dunn 2013; 2015; 2017; Zukin 2010). In the next section, I consider some of this research to further foreground the findings of this San Antonio-based study.

2.10.3 Differential regulation of food trucks in New York and Chicago

Sociologist Kathleen Dunn (2017) finds that food truck and related street vending practices in New York City are "deeply stratified" and "profoundly shaped by … class and race"—perceiving that "affluent" and "upscale" gourmet trucks "using comparatively expensive foodstuffs and selling … at higher price points" are welcomed by city officials while the "overwhelming majority of street food vendors [who] are poor and working class immigrants and people of color" find that their practices are discouraged and criminalized (pp. 47-48). Additionally, she observes that, in New York, gourmet truck owners "tend to be white and native-born (with some notable second-generation immigrant truck owners as well) and highly educated" (p. 57). In Dunn's dissertation (2013), she describes the workers of the gourmet trucks that she engaged with in New York as primarily "under forty years old, and mostly white" (p. 7).

In contrast, Dunn (2017) characterizes working-class street food vending in New York as "the neighborhood ice cream trucks, the lunch trucks catering to construction workers and other laborers, the fruit and vegetable vendors by the subway exits, or the tamale and taco cart vendors waiting outside the stadium" (p. 47). Other researchers describe similar practices as Latina/o and immigrant when observed in the context of major cities in California (Wessel & Airaghi 2015; Vallianatos 2014, 2017). In other writing, Dunn (2015) focuses on traditional (dating to the 1970s) working-class Latina/o and family-based street food vending operations in the Red Hook neighborhood of New York—which she describes as, in some instances, passing within families from generation to generation. She notes their efforts to organize and resist initially street crime and later gentrification and

local government measures aimed at "suppressing the entrepreneurialism of the urban precariat who rely on public space to earn a living" (pp. 24-25).

Dunn (2013; 2015) contends that local government approaches to regulating street vending in New York represents what geographer David Harvey (1989) identifies as a shift in urban governance from a "managerial" to an "entrepreneurial" and economic development orientation (pp. 4-5). As a main thrust of her dissertation, Dunn (2013) argues that street food regulation practices in New York "reveal how the governance of post-industrial urban space reinforces the criminalization of poor and working-class people of color, while facilitating the advancement of more affluent and predominantly white professionals"—with city "streets … *policed as a border* for immigrant vendors, and … *pioneered as a frontier* by native-born food truck owners" (p. v). Nina Martin (2014) describes a similar transition towards more entrepreneurial local governance in Chicago resulting in "differential regulation" that supports gourmet food truck vending that "appeals to young urban professionals" while "marginalizing" and criminalizing working-class street vendors—who she characterizes as Latina/o and "dressed modestly, and pushing carts that are often quite ramshackle" (p. 1867 & 1872-1873).

Additionally, Nina Martin (2014) depicts Chicago and other more entrepreneurially governed US cities as following "a suite of policies designed to boost tax coffers, cut social welfare bills and attract investment" and pursuing the "cultural economy" with "downtown redevelopment strategies" and "place marketing" aimed at "rebranding … places of leisure, tourism, adventure and consumption" (p. 1870). She perceives that use of these approaches "has accelerated since the 2000s," and that they are often shaped by underlying (if unspoken) racial and ethnic "stereotypical attitudes" and biases against economically poorer populations and entrepreneurs (p. 1870 & 1873). Furthermore, she describes how the "largely white, native-born, culinary-school-trained" gourmet food truck operators in Chicago since 2012 have been rewarded as part of city redevelopment efforts and with regulation changes, while the working-class "immigrant (Mostly Mexican)" street food vendors who have operated in that city for "decades" face marginalization and criminalization (p. 1868).

Nina Martin (2014) also asserts that “consumer identity” (p.1871) and city reputation and competition concerns can influence local vending policy—with some city governments such as Chicago’s driven by the sense that they “must have the same food trucks that comparable cities have” (N. Martin 2017, p. 212) and also, that they must remove street vending viewed to “embody economic and social marginality that is not ‘cool’, ‘hip’, or ‘creative’” (N. Martin 2014, p. 1873). She describes this as part of the “politics of the creative class” in the US (p. 1868), which involve local government judgements about what creative and entrepreneurial outputs are valued, welcomed, or simply allowed in cities. Furthermore, she argues that these politics are driven by economic interests and discourses about race and ethnicity but also by factors such as an individual’s “style of dress, comportment and attitude, the labor they conduct and the products they produce and consume” (p. 1872).

Nina Martin’s (2014) concept of creative class politics thus is compatible with the “food culture contests” that Hernández-López (2011) observes in Los Angeles and the urban change dynamics that Dunn (2013, 2015, 2017) associates with street food vending in New York. They also connect with Scott’s (2014) assertion that “creative city policies help to turbo-charge gentrification processes … exacerbating the exclusion of low-income families from central city areas” (p. 573). As I discuss in Chapters Four and Five, local government practices that discourage working-class street food vendors (and economically poorer people generally) downtown where apparent to many of my interviewees—with some relating these politics to the socioeconomic class distinctions that divided San Antonio’s Mexican American community historically and others comparing them to conditions in cities in Mexico.

2.11 Local *castas*, legal challenges and controversies

Unlike how Dunn (2013, 2015, 2017) characterizes practices in New York and Nina Martin (2014, 2017) describes vending in Chicago with the arrival of gourmet food trucks in these cities, I could not generalize the food truck practices that my interviewees discussed or that I observed in San Antonio as a neat divide between primarily affluent and white non-immigrant vendors owning and running gourmet trucks and immigrant Latina/o vendors conducting traditional working-class

operations. However, my research findings compare with Dunn's (2013, 2015, 2017) and Nina Martin's (2014, 2017) and other researchers in observing local government waging a "war" (Hernández-López 2011) or campaign against working-class street food vendors and economically poorer people generally through differential regulation and policing within urban areas targeted for redevelopment. Aside from the city's majority Mexican American population, another factor differentiating San Antonio from the conditions that Dunn (2013, 2015, 2017) and Nina Martin (2014, 2017) observe in New York and Chicago, respectively, is the remnant Spanish colonial *sistema de castas* (caste system) rankings and divisions (de la Teja 1995; Martínez 2008) that influence the local socioeconomic hierarchy, as some of my interviewees noted.

Historian Jesús F. de la Teja (1995) describes eighteenth century San Antonio's "frontier" interpretation of the Spanish colonial *casta* system as "subjective and arbitrary," portraying the city's founders as a "racially mixed group" where "Europeans do not appear to have enjoyed higher status" (p. 24). As an isolated settlement, colonial San Antonio experienced, according to de la Teja, "broader, ongoing racial amalgamation," where individual "racial backgrounds" were intentionally misrepresented (p. 25) and racial and ethnic "mixing was so thorough and … labels so confused" that categorizations could "be considered little more than a social label" (p. 28). However, de la Teja also notes that colonial San Antonio was "not an entirely color-blind society" (p. 26), since "separate and more severe punishments for law-breakers of mixed race" influenced wealthy or more influential families to take steps to be classified as "lighter racial categories" (p. 29).

Additionally, de la Teja (1995) notes the historical privileging of *Isleño* (Canary Island) heritage families in San Antonio, and how their control of land resources and local governance positions influenced San Antonio's urban development and the composition of the city's elite:

> The *Isleños*' early monopolies of town council posts, farmland, and water endowed them with high social status. … [T]he small size meant that marriage partners had to be sought from the larger, American-born population. …

> Consequently, over the course of three generations, a substantial portion of Béxar's population [Spanish colonial-era San Antonio] could and did claim Canary Islander descent. (de la Teja 1995, p. 24)

Locally published tourism literature from the early 1900s highlights how Spanish colonial era *casta* divisions continued to inform San Antonio's social structure into the twentieth century. For example, Barnes (1913) notes:

> While the architecture is interesting and quaint, the populace is still more so. … [T]he Mexican race, who predominate … are descended principally from the Indians of Mexico or Texas. Just now, San Antonio, being a refuge for many thousands of political exiles from the Republic of Mexico, has a much greater proportion … but under ordinary circumstances the Mexican predominates. … Caste is also sharply defined in several nationalities and racial distinctions always closely drawn, between the Caucasian and the African. Among the Mexicans there are two well-defined castes, the Hidalgos, or Caballeros, which is the patrician, and the peon, or laboring class. The former always is educated and refined and generally wealthy, while the latter is ignorant and always poor and often dissolute. (pp. 17-18)

Additionally, Hernández-Ehrisman (2008) describes San Antonio's Canary Islander descendants as "integrated into San Antonio's 'white' society rather than the Mexican one" by the mid-twentieth century (p. 98). As I observed, renewed interest in people of *Isleña/o* heritage (Mette 2015) and of *Isleños* comprising the original *hidalgo* (elite) population of San Antonio, coincided with growing use of the terms *empresarios* and "Mexican nationals" (Pimentel 2013b; Beyer 2016) to describe wealthy entrepreneurs and investors from Mexico visiting or residing in Texas. This movement, for some, has been prompted by fear of crime and violence in Mexico (Cave 2014; Brezosky 2015), but it also reflects historical migration patterns, as some of my interviewees noted.

The term *empresario* was used in Texas during the Spanish colonial era to describe colonizers of settlements like Austin and San Antonio who had nearly dictatorial

control over their appointed land holdings and the families working and settling their lands (Robenalt 2011). Spanish colonial era social rankings and divisions thus mix with the nineteenth and twentieth century segregating practices of San Antonio's Anglo elite in shaping the city's socioeconomic hierarchy (Blackwelder 1998; Drennon 2006, 2012; Hernández-Ehrisman 2008). Some interviewees alerted me to how considerations of *casta* or class categorizations might emerge or become apparent with street food peddling in San Antonio.

Unlike recent food truck research that has involved researchers embedding for days or months with identified street vendor support organizations (Dunn 2013; Devlin 2015; Koch 2016), this study did not involve aligning with any organized street labor or "right to the city" movement (Brenner, Marcuse & Mayer 2012; Harvey 2012)—although I observed that a right to the city sensibility (Purcell 2014) might be understood and demonstrated by some local vendors and customers. I also noted the successful efforts of an outside national group, the Institute for Justice (IJ), to organize taco truck and trailer vendors as plaintiffs in a lawsuit against the City, as this challenge surfaced and was resolved in late 2015 (Panju 2015; Panju & Wilson 2015; Danner 2015; Marks 2015b).

The threat of an IJ lawsuit resulted in substantial changes to the City of San Antonio's proximity rules for food truck vending outside of the downtown central business district (Marks 2015c). Moreover, IJ's actions in San Antonio challenge some of the assumptions that Dunn (2013) makes about the practical outcomes that this particular organization has achieved for working-class vendors in the US, as she describes as follows:

> Gourmet food trucks do not embody a right to the city demand because their claim to urban public space is based quite directly on their relationship to the market: they claim space as business incubators and job creators, and they ask the state to shore up this class position. Small wonder that the Institute for Justice, the main public interest law firm of the Libertarian party, has in recent years litigated several cases against protectionist street vending regulation …

> eschewing questions of social justice in favor of advocating for free market competition—the very ideology that has steadily increased inequality. (pp. 24-25)

In contrast, IJ's 2015 legal petition against aspects of the City's regulation of mobile food vending makes arguments based specifically on the understood civil rights of San Antonio's traditional working-class mobile food vendors. This is evident in IJ's legal complaint, which is worth citing at some length:

> This lawsuit seeks to vindicate Plaintiffs' economic liberty rights under Article I, § 19 of the Texas Constitution, so that they may operate their businesses free from unreasonable and protectionist government interference. Plaintiffs challenge the constitutionality of a San Antonio law that bans mobile food vendors, colloquially known as "food trucks," from operating anywhere within 300 feet of a restaurant or brick-and-mortar business that sells food. To have any chance of operating within 300 feet of their would-be competitors, San Antonio forces food trucks to get written and notarized permission slips from the very brick-and-mortar food businesses the law was designed to protect.
>
> 1. Plaintiffs operate traditional food trucks and serve their customers freshly cooked food using recipes inspired from different regions of Mexico. Their food truck businesses allow them to support their families and also employ others who seek to support theirs.
> 2. Mobile vending has long been an entry point to entrepreneurship in cities across America. This is especially true in San Antonio, Texas, where traditional food truck vendors support their communities by serving snacks, treats, and ethnic foods at low prices and convenient locations for busy customers. But through the adoption and enforcement of an anticompetitive restriction on where vendors can operate, the City of San Antonio has made it very difficult for mobile food vendors like Plaintiffs to operate and grow their businesses. …
>
> 7. Defendant's actions deprive Plaintiffs of their right to pursue a lawful occupation free from unreasonable government interference, and violate the guarantees afforded Plaintiffs by the Due Course of Law Clause of Article I, Section 19 of the Texas Constitution. Accordingly, Defendant's 300-foot

> proximity ban against mobile food vendors should be declared unconstitutional and permanently enjoined. (Panju 2015, pp. 1-3)

This constitutional challenge to, and subsequent ending of, some of the longstanding City proximity rules governing mobile food vending (Marks 2015c) marks a substantial social justice achievement in deeply and historically socioeconomically stratified San Antonio. The decision benefits and helps to legitimize and preserve traditional working-class street food practices—although it does not alter the City's Downtown Food Truck Program and rules for vending in the downtown business district (City of San Antonio 2014). Moreover, the concern of IJ's legal suit with "unreasonable government interference" (Panju 2015, p. 3) describes how some San Antonians construe right to the city and social justice. This involves the necessity and reality of everyday resistance to socioeconomically discriminatory local governance since San Antonio's founding. Such resistance is reflected in local efforts during the city's Spanish colonial era to outmaneuver the inherently unjust *casta* system (de la Teja 1995), and also in the long history of a "cat-and-mouse" (Arellano 2012, p. 32) relationship between local regulators and some street food vendors that is still prevalent.

Furthermore, some interviewees described vending in downtown San Antonio at the start of the food truck movement and prior to the City's Downtown Food Truck program as like the "Wild West"—evoking the imagery of an "unruly and uncooperative" wilderness or frontier that geographer Neil Smith (1996, p. xv) describes as used by some in the US to disparage some inner city areas and populations and to justify gentrification. I noticed this language was instead used by some vendors to describe some vending activity in wealthier and highly regulated sections of downtown San Antonio that outmaneuvered existing regulations, as supported by customers—with the City's regulation framed as uncooperative and purposefully stymying (Chasnoff 2011).

As I learned, some regulation of street peddling is perceived by many locals to be a misuse of public authority and resources, and at odds with San Antonio's street market history, cultural practices and understood urban rights and roles—as

summarized by the following published quote from a working-class street vendor in protesting local regulation changes that adversely affected his efforts outside of downtown: “This road started off like this. … So what’s different now? That’s all we’re doing, giving people quality prices. Why doesn’t the city pick on people who are doing illegal things, like doing drugs? We’re just trying to make an honest living” (quoted in Kwak 2010, para. 11). Furthermore, City vending regulation changes and policing were described by some of my interviewees as discouraging vending generally and targeting working-class vendors especially—and part of efforts to end the use of some public spaces by the homeless and economically poor.

To note, the City of San Antonio police issued a reported more than 12,000 citations over an eighteen-month period between 2013 and 2014 “aimed at discouraging the homeless and poor from hanging out downtown or asking for donations” (Garcia-Ditta 2014, para. 1). As I gathered from some interviewees and observed, this policing also involved targeting individuals and organizations providing food and other aid to the poor and homeless—as exemplified with the USD$2,000 citation issued against a “licensed commercial mobile kitchen,” or food truck, called the *Chow Train*, for offering free meals in Maverick Park, an area experiencing gentrification and targeted for rebranding by local government (Kinney 2016, para. 15). The citation, as a part efforts to “criminalize” the economically poor and those who make “street donations to the homeless and panhandlers,” resulted in the operators of the Chow Train at least contemplating “filing a lawsuit against the City of San Antonio” on the grounds of violations of freedom of religion and other civil liberties, as protected by the Texas state constitution (McCoy 2015, paras. 4 & 13). This published legal challenge and national media coverage of the incident resulted in the City dismissing the citation but enacting new rules to regulate and restrict “charitable feeding” (Marks 2015d).

Further shaping the study context, Texas Governor Greg Abbott and some members of the state Congress took severe stances against illegal immigration (CNN Staff 2014; Gehrke 2015) while also advancing state law supportive of what IJ describes as “economic liberty” (Panju 2015, p. 1)—or “the right to earn an honest living in the occupation of one’s choice free from unreasonable government interference” (p.

26). Additionally, the Texas Constitution was amended in 2015 to symbolically "codify the right to hunt, fish and harvest wildlife" throughout the state, as a means towards self-preservation and maintaining some cultural food practices (Wogan 2015, para. 1). Texas also passed statewide cottage food laws that minimize legal restrictions on the selling of some foods baked and cooked at home and ban the use of municipal zoning to end or interfere with some home-based cottage food businesses (Sibilla 2014).

Responding to the home food business trend and preservation movement, the City of San Antonio changed its Unified Development Code (UDC) to set residential market gardens as a permitted land use across the city, which establishes residents' legal right to grow and sell produce on private land (Hagney 2016). As some interviewees noted, home gardening and also the keeping of hens and other livestock are longstanding practices in many local working-class neighborhoods. However, the UDC change does not override the restrictions that can be placed on use of residential property by private Homeowners Associations (HOAs), which tend to apply to wealthier areas and new developments in US cities (McKenzie 2011). As expressed by one interviewee, HOA restrictions and heightened policing and enforcement of wealthier local areas can challenge both neighborhood and gourmet food truck vending practices.

Finally, different researchers describe the emergence and activities of new professional food truck organizations shaping local regulations and practices in some US cities (Ibrahim 2011; Dunn 2013 Esparza, Walker & Rossman 2013; N. Martin 2014; Strand 2015; Wessel 2017). As I share in Chapters Four and Five, the San Antonio Food Truck Association (SAFTA) was discussed by some interviewees, including in regards to how the city's only food truck organization lobbied to change some local vending rules and seemed to influence the City's Downtown Food Truck Program.

Additionally, SAFTA was involved in a local controversy that made national news related to a member food truck calling itself *CockAsian*. Described by local media as being run by a white woman and specializing in Korean fried chicken, the

CockAsian gourmet truck was barred from Port San Antonio—a large, publicly managed commercial property and former military installation that employs more than 12,000 workers—when managers there objected to the truck's name (Parker 2014c). SAFTA was asked or ordered to select an alternative vendor for Port San Antonio's publicly accessible food truck park, effectively banning the CockAsian truck. SAFTA complied, and within months of the controversy, the offending truck was listed on the internet auction site eBay for sale for USD$80,000, with original chicken recipes included in the sale (Parker 2014c).

The trajectory of this particular gourmet truck might illustrate what Dunn (2013) describes as the "appropriation of immigrant … culinary traditions" and the potential "whitening" of street food vending as part of the food truck trend (p. 25). Although I follow Arellano (2017b) in recognizing that culinary appropriations and hybridizations have long shaped food businesses, including Mexican American cuisines, and thus may be positive, the CockAsian example demonstrates how flippant, pun-dependent, intellectualized and potentially culturally insensitive branding characterizes some gourmet food truck practices.

In a published interview responding to the controversy and decision to close, the owner of the CockAsian food truck, Candie Yoder, describes the truck as an "experiment" intended as a side-business that proved to be too great a time-commitment for her family (quoted in Parker 2014c, para. 5). Interestingly, this accords with Dunn's (2013) suggestion that gourmet truck vending is sometimes a "short-term response" for those who can afford to make this vending a temporary "lifestyle choice" or part of a larger business model (p. 141). As I discuss in later chapters, short-term interests in gourmet truck vending was a factor that some interviewees also noted, and that shaped some of their perceptions of the possible future of local vending.

2.12 Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the key critical literature, research, concepts and contextual factors that shaped this study. This included discussing the *rasquachismo, puro* San Antonio and maverick sensibilities and practices or tactics (de Certeau

1988) that inform some local vending—and that can suggest a critical pragmatism (Kadlec 2006, 2007; Forester 2012), and right to the city orientation (Purcell 2014). I also discussed broader US-specific concepts of urbanism that influence local food truck practices, including various Latina/o urbanisms beyond barrio urbanism. This includes *gente*-fication—or Latina/o-led and -themed urban redevelopment projects and commercial offerings catering to wealthier customers and sometimes drawing from working-class and affordable comfort foods, such as tacos and *raspas.*

Additionally, I reviewed research about street vendors in the global economy and writing that depicts the history of street food vending in San Antonio, focusing on descriptions of the local regulation of the Chili Queens that suggest a history of working-class vendors and customers being displaced from downtown areas targeted for redevelopment and as part of city branding efforts. Furthermore, I drew attention to how San Antonio has been overlooked by various narratives about the food truck movement, despite different researchers describing Texas as the originating point of US food trucks and despite San Antonio's important street food vending history. I also discussed San Antonio's Spanish colonial-era *sistema de castas* (caste system) and legal privileging to help bring to light socioeconomic class distinctions within San Antonio's predominantly Mexican American population and the apparent primacy of elite economic interests in local government historically.

Finally, I discussed local food truck controversies and legal challenges of the City's regulation of food trucks that shaped this study and relate to efforts to discourage the presence of economically poor people downtown and in local public life more broadly. I also explored some of the emergent research about the US food truck movement that identifies local government efforts to marginalize and criminalize working-class Latina/o street food vending while welcoming gourmet food truck vending in Los Angeles, New York and Chicago, respectively—to further introduce some of the findings of this study and demonstrate how it add to extant critical literature. In the next chapter, I describe the methodologies guiding the study.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This thesis engages critically with food truck vending in San Antonio in the years following the arrival of the gourmet food truck movement and aligns with various reports about increasing socioeconomic stratification in the US (Badger 2012; Smith 2013; Melinik & Morello 2013; Schwartz 2016; Florida 2017)—and about San Antonio as one of the most economically segregated and unequal of US cities (Drennon 2012; Smith 2013; Tuma 2014; Casura 2015, 2017a, b; Florida & Mellander 2015; Schwartz 2016; Economic Innovation Group 2017; Stoeltje 2017). It also follows emergent research that discusses the acceleration and broadening of gentrification processes in major US cities where local government has pursued policy that is regressive towards working-class street vendors while welcoming the gourmet food truck trend (see Chapter Two). In this chapter, I build from the aims, questions, general study area and limitations presented in Chapter One to further elucidate the research methodologies of this study.

3.2 Research framework

I selected a qualitative research framework based on the aims and questions shaping my study as elaborated in Chapter One. As a critical urban study, this thesis is interested in the "generative power of cities" (Soja 2011, p. 451) and, in particular, the "spillover effects" of a large and longstanding concentration of predominantly Mexican American working-class residents within the center city of San Antonio (p. 465). That community has historically influenced and informed San Antonio's and broader foodways and some vending practices—as exemplified by the nineteenth and twentieth century Chili Queens, who introduced Tex-Mex foods to the nation via street peddling operations in downtown San Antonio, and who prompted the industrialization of different Tex-Mex foods and ingredients, with San Antonio as a base for many of these operations (Silva & Nelson 2004; Gabaccia & Pilcher 2011; Arellano 2012; Pilcher 2012; McMahon 2013; Cárdenas 2016; Arellano 2017a). My thesis can also be understood to be multi-disciplinary or transdisciplinary (Soja 2011), drawing from critical literature and research from across disciplines related to the study of cities and urban dynamics. Furthermore, it is "non-reductionist"—that

is, I accept that cities and urban phenomena such as street food selling provide avenues in which "a multitude of contexts, structures, changes and situations mutually influence each other," thereby requiring "frames of understanding, concepts and knowledge from many different disciplines" in order to study (Næss 2015, p. 1230).

My thesis is situated in critical urban studies (Davies & Imbroscio 2010), as it focuses on neighborhood food vending including taco trucks in San Antonio as potentially endangered or threatened patterns of public life (Chappell 2012). My study was informed by reporting about the arrival of the gourmet food truck trend in San Antonio that is dismissive of neighborhood truck practices, and that raises questions about how neighborhood vending compares with gourmet offerings (Davila 2011). As discussed in Chapters One and Two, my study was inspired, in part, by descriptions of the gourmet food truck movement's impacts on traditional or legacy street food peddling in other cities, the indebtedness of the movement to barrio practices in Los Angeles and descriptions of San Antonio's working-class Mexican American street food vending as shaping national and global foodways while being challenged by local government at different points historically.

My epistemological position with this study is pragmatic not only in how I structured and conducted research but in that I focused on what research participants and I perceived to be the real-world consequences of the City's management of vending and plausible future development based on local conditions and broader trends. My study also demonstrates a critical urban epistemology in that I attempted to ground the research in the "ordinary" and everyday unpredictability, speed, mobility, interdependencies and intense emotions or affects (Boudreau 2010, pp. 67-69) of local foot truck practices. This included situating myself as a researcher in spaces and practices where "various axes of oppression" (p. 69) related to mobile food vending intersected, such as Travis Park downtown.

Furthermore, this thesis contributes to the critical literature and demonstrates a critical urban epistemology in that I allowed biographical factors to shape the research questions and approaches while seeking to engage with "the voices of

people that are often not considered interesting to study" (Boudreau 2010, p. 69). As another contribution to extant research, this study includes interviews with and the perspectives of mobile food vendors, customers, former City workers, musicians, laborers, public health workers, artists, designers, retirees, veterans, and migrants from Mexico and elsewhere. Sharing only their residency of San Antonio, these interviewees were interested in and had direct experiences with local food trucks and other street food practices. I describe these participants more fully—but with the aim of protecting their and others' privacy and anonymity in a close-knit community—later in this chapter.

3.3 Research methodology

This thesis utilized an ethnographic methodology including observations and unstructured interviewing to engage in a critical (Madison 2012), "reflexive" (Saukko 2003, p. 62) and "diagnostic" (Duneier 2001, pp. 341-343) urban study of mobile food vending in San Antonio. I did not set out with specific theories that I wanted to prove with my study; nor did I endeavor to generate new theory with my research or to necessarily engage with the emergent body of critical literature making case studies of the gourmet food truck movement and urban change in US cities. Instead, the study methodology was guided by my understanding of the social and ethical commitments underpinning a critical ethnographic stance and approach (Madison 2012; Jason & Glenwick 2016). That methodology was also impelled by my curiosity about cultural criminology (Ferrell & Hamm 1998; Ferrell, Hayward & Young 2008; Valverde 2012), democratic theory and US urban planning (Friedmann 1998; Staeheli & Mitchell 2008), and various theories of spatial justice and lived space (Fainstein 2010; Soja 2010; Brenner, Marcuse & Mayer 2012; Harvey 2012). Furthermore, the methodology arose from my concern about the potential future of neighborhood food vending and related patterns of public life in San Antonio.

My thesis can be understood as demonstrating what sociologist Andrew Sayer calls "practical adequacy" (1984; quoted in Staeheli & Mitchell 2008, p. 169), in that the findings are grounded in the diverse perspectives of my interview participants who opted into the research at their own accord and were offered the opportunity to review transcriptions of their interview to help validate this data. The findings are

also grounded in my independent observations, analysis and engagement with the research context over an extended period. My practical adequacy also involved responding to actual field conditions as but also resource constraints and university requirements that shaped my fieldwork approaches. Ultimately, the study was guided by key research aims and generative questions and an approved research protocol designed to ensure the privacy and anonymity of interviewees (within a close-knit community with a comparatively low volume of food truck activity) while supporting transparent and robust research.

3.4 Data sources and methods of collection

Through this study I engaged with primary and secondary qualitative data sources common to ethnographic and other urban studies, including interviews, field observations and published documents related to the research topic. Following an approved research protocol, I have taken steps to protect the privacy and anonymity of research participants and to preserve and securely store data. I have saved this data primarily for my personal research and writing use. Eventually some data will be made available by request to support additional research if there is interest. In the following sub-sections, I describe my sources and methods of data collection.

3.4.1 Interviews

I conducted informal interviews with eighteen adult volunteer participants who resided in San Antonio. These participants were interested in or experienced with mobile food vending locally and were willing to participate in my thesis via face-to-face audio recorded interviews that I later transcribed. Participation in interviews followed a snowball sampling strategy (Atkinson & Flint 2001), or word-of-mouth sampling approach, with a general invitation to participate in topical interviewing (Madison 2012, p. 28) spread by participants at their own prompting and through my everyday interactions and social contacts. I adopted this sampling approach as it is understood to benefit qualitative studies seeking to "access difficult to reach or hidden populations" (Atkinson & Flint 2001, p.1) or to explore "lifestyles" marginalized by public policy or "outside mainstream social research" (p. 4). This approach also supported rapport building (Madison 2012) by allowing interviewees to opt into the research and to set the terms and timing of their participation.

Without endangering the privacy and anonymity of interviewees, I can share that interviews were conducted throughout 2015 within publicly accessible spaces (including courtyards and cafés) within the general study area on dates and at times nominated by each interviewee. My thesis protocol encouraged interview participants interested in concealing their identity and participation to establish a designated email address to interact with me. In turn, I limited my interactions with interviewees to my university student email address and face-to-face encounters. Interviewees primarily chose to be interviewed during lunch and early afternoon hours, although some elected to meet in the morning and some in the evenings. Interviews occurred within the fieldwork curfew of no activities before 6am or after 10pm, to help mitigate tangential risks and ensure attentiveness to the interviews.

Prior to each audio recorded interview, I provided interviewees with a copy of a plain English Research Information Sheet and a Consent Form to keep and that they could review away from my gaze. They were also provided time to ask me any questions before and after each recorded interview. Prior to each audio recorded interview, participants were reminded of the general aims and approaches of the study and their rights to revoke their consent and to end participation. This included the right to "go off the record" or otherwise stop audio recording at any time. I also reminded participants of their right to contact my research supervisors or my designated independent local ombudsperson if needed, their contact details detailed on the Research Information Sheet.

Most of the recorded interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes as determined by the participants—with one interview running close to two hours. Interviews were unstructured and conversational in nature. However, I sometimes prompted conversations with questions related to my study aims, while conforming to the "Spradley (1979) model" of descriptive, explanation and contrast questions (Madison 2012, p. 31). I also drew from other ethnographic interviewing approaches to sometimes pose advice, sensory and value questions. For example, advice questions I sometimes posed included asking interviewees about some of their favorite food truck sites or to offer advice that they might give to a new resident or

wish that they had been given as vendors. Value questions sometimes included asking interview participants their opinions about food truck regulation or specific types of vending. Descriptive questions included asking interviews to describe their earliest memories of food trucks in San Antonio. Contrast questions involved asking interviewees to compare neighborhood with gourmet food truck practices. Explanation questions included asking vendors to explain aspects of their work, including regulation processes in San Antonio.

I endeavored to conduct one-on-one interviews in order to protect the privacy and anonymity of participants. However, in four instances interviewees had adult colleagues (no more than two) join their interviews at their invitation. In keeping with building rapport and allowing fieldwork to adjust to field conditions, I allowed these colleagues to join or observe the interview, and each provided informed consent to participate in an audio recorded interview.

To accommodate my limited Spanish language skills while also acknowledging the growing population of residents in San Antonio who speak only English (Mejia & Carcamo 2016) or who prefer to communicate in English with strangers, I provided information about the study in English, participant consent was confirmed in English, and the interviews were conducted in English. However, Spanish and Spanglish terms (Villa 2012) were sometimes utilized by participants, and mainly to describe different street foods. In one interview, some questions or ideas were discussed briefly in Spanish amongst participants before English language responses were provided, and I only transcribed the English language response.

I audio recorded interviews utilizing an affordable (AUD$20) AAA battery powered digital audio recorder and USB drive device. I selected this tool based on my familiarity and experience with this type of digital recorder and its affordability and security as a non-“smart” (no internet or Bluetooth connectivity) device. Moreover, the minimal profile of the device and the ability for new batteries to be easily added made it a useful and less invasive tool for research. I transcribed recorded interviews manually using desktop word processing, referring to my brief handwritten interview notes in some instances. The process was assisted by a free desktop application

called Listen ‘n Write Free, which includes audio player tools designed to assist with transcription work. I prioritized with the written transcriptions capturing interviewees’ words, pauses and emphases. I did not transcribe commentary that I deemed off-topic or identifiable.

As data validation and rapport building strategies, I provided interview participants the opportunity to “member check” interview data (Carspecken 1996, p. 89). Specifically, I offered interviewees the time and encouragement to review and respond to their transcribed interviews if they chose to. Although no interviewee followed-up on this offer, having a member check process likely increased my attentiveness when transcribing and otherwise benefited the research.

To help to protect the privacy and anonymity of interviewees, they are described only generally and with some ambiguity in the table below (see Figure 3.1); any errors are mine and not intentional. As discussed in Chapter One, to offer more specific details about interviewees would not serve the aims of the study and could risk interviewees’ and others’ privacy and anonymity in a close-knit community and city with a relatively low volume of food truck activity. As described, the residents I interviewed encompassed a range of ages, backgrounds and tenure in San Antonio and experiences with different types of local food trucks. Interviewees included vendors, customers and public workers whose employment engaged with local food truck practices—neighborhood, “industrial” (Hermosillo 2010, p. 6) and gourmet. The interviewees represent a breadth and depth of experience with local food trucks and regulating bodies and their perspectives help to provide a substantive accounting of local practices and conditions:

Adrian	A man in his 30s who grew up in San Antonio and in recent years became a gourmet food truck operator.
Beth	A woman in her 50s who has lived most of her life in San Antonio and in recent years became a food truck operator.
Ben	A man in his 20s who grew up in San Antonio a customer of neighborhood food trucks and in recent years became a gourmet food truck operator.
Danica	A woman in her 20s and a City employee who grew up in San Antonio and has long been a customer of neighborhood food trucks.
Daniel	Aa man in his 30s and a local artist who has lived mainly in San Antonio and has been an occasional customer of various mobile food vending operations, neighborhood and gourmet.
Gil	A man in his 30s who grew up in greater San Antonio and has been a customer of a range of local food trucks via construction work, professional employment downtown and partaking of the city's bar and club scene.
Greg	A man in his 40s who has in recent years become a mobile food vendor and who assisted with a worksite mobile food vending business in San Antonio as a youth.
Justin	A man in his 40s and a former local sanitarian (food business inspector) who grew up in San Antonio.
Karen	A woman in her 20s and a former local public health worker who grew up in San Antonio a customer of neighborhood food trucks.
Lina	A woman in her 20s who grew up in San Antonio a customer of neighborhood food trucks and is a participant in the city's recent "culinary revolution" (discussed in Chapter Four).
Louise & Ed	A woman and man in their 40s who are food truck vendors who operate near bars, nightclubs and churches and are interested in vending downtown.
Max	A man in his late 30s who was raised in San Antonio and has been an occasional customer of a range of local food trucks.
Nolan	A man in his 20s with family experience with worksite food vending and who has considered starting a gourmet food truck.
Reina	A woman in her 20s who moved to San Antonio from Mexico as an adult and has been an occasional customer of food trucks and some gourmet food truck parks in the city.
Rene &Vin	Two men in their 20s who spent at least some of their childhood in San Antonio and are neighborhood mobile food truck customers and participants in the local music scene.
Rob	A man in his 20s or 30s who moved to San Antonio from Mexico as an adult who helps run a family gourmet food truck.

Figure 3.1: A summary of the interviewees (names are aliases)

I triangulated data from recorded and transcribed interviews with data from separate field observations, off-the-record conversations with some local residents and a

review of literature and resources including local news, City ordinances and maps. In the next section, I summarize the observation data I collected.

3.4.2 Naturalistic observations and reflective writing

Based on my research aims, I limited the formal observation component of the study (noting how I lived in the study area throughout the research process) to publicly accessible sites of food truck vending primarily within the historic footprint of San Antonio (see Section 1.6) over a period of eighteen months (early 2014 to late 2015) and between the hours of 6am and 10pm daily. This allowed my fieldwork to take in a range of both neighborhood and gourmet food truck practices as they occurred throughout the day and into the night, and to adapt to evolving conditions. A key development was the City's formalization of and experiments with a multi-site Downtown Food Truck Program that coincided with the reopening of the revitalized Travis Park in early 2014 (Bailey 2014; Project for Public Spaces 2014) and was in operation throughout my fieldwork period.

Figure 3.2 presents one weekly schedule for the Downtown Food Truck Program published online by the City of San Antonio (but with the names of individual food trucks redacted). The schedule suggests how the program was typically structured in 2014 and 2015—with no more than four trucks (and often just one) scheduled for any particular weekday site, and primarily during lunchtime hours—with the exception of evening hours (no later than 10pm) at some sites some weeks and during special events. Such schedules were published weekly, and the scheduling was not regular. Additionally, some food trucks were scheduled repeatedly throughout a week, indicating a limited number of participating trucks—noting how the pilot stage of the program envisioned accepting a total of only 15 applicants

Vending Schedule for March 16th – March 20th 2015

Serving from 11am– 2pm unless otherwise noted

For questions please contact Downtown Operations at 207-3677

www.sanantonio.gov/ccdo

Location	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Main Plaza					
211 N. Main (across Frost Bank)					
Soledad St. (at Weston Centre)					
Downtown Library					
Milam Park					
Madison Park (Baptist Hospital)					
Madison Park (Baptist Hospital) 7pm-10pm					
Travis Park					
Across UTSA					

Figure 3.2: Modified version of a published weekly schedule for the Downtown Food Truck Program; © City of San Antonio 2015 (City of San Antonio, n.d.)

As I observed, program sites that the City experimented with included the following (see Figure 1.9): Main Plaza; 211 North Main Avenue (Frost Bank building offices), 200 South Presa Street (La Villita and CPS Energy offices), Soledad Street (Weston Centre offices), Madison Park (Baptist Hospital), Travis Park, San Antonio Police Department Headquarters (Nueva Street at Santa Rosa Avenue), Covent Street (Bank of America offices), Milam Park, 315 South Frio Avenue (University of Texas at San Antonio's downtown campus), the Central Library and Savings Street. As some interviewees discussed and I observed, the City's experimenting with Savings Street as a site seemed aimed at incorporating into the program the Taco Truck Friday lunch offerings at Artpace gallery (Bruce 2011). Taco Truck Friday featured an affordably priced neighborhood taco truck, and it preceded the City's gourmet food truck efforts, including the pilot stage of the program (Baugh 2012; Olivo 2012).

Local reporting describes the City running a six-month pilot project in 2012 specifically for "foodie" and "high-end" food trucks (Baugh 2012, para. 2). The pilot project included offerings at a City Hall parking lot but also at Maverick Park and Hemisfair Park—two sites targeted for redevelopment (Kinney 2016). Furthermore,

the pilot program, which was described as being a part of the City's "culinary master planning" efforts for downtown, was limited to fifteen spaces—with applicants judged based on photos of their trucks, sample menus and the objective of avoiding "food redundancy" (Baugh 2012, para. 12). Additionally, the pilot project required that selected food trucks each pay a USD$225 fee to participate in addition to other licenses required of all kitchens on wheels. Describing the purposes of the program, one local politician was quoted as quipping that the pilot program would help the city's "sizable underserved foodie population," while Mayor Julián Castro asserted that the program would help San Antonio "catch up" with other US cities, in regards to having gourmet food trucks downtown as an all-day place-making activity (quoted in paras. 4 & 15).

The pilot program—which was reported months after its launch as having had a "tumultuous start" and transitioning to Travis Park, Main Plaza and Weston Centre as sites, with no regular evening hours (Olivo 2012, para 5)—informed the Downtown Food Truck Program ordinance formalized by the City in January 2014 and that limited food truck vending in the central business district to sites, days, times and vendors approved by the City (City of San Antonio 2014). The program also requires an annual USD$100 program fee for each selected food truck, with trucks accepted into the program based on City staff member judgements about the "truck's appearance, food quality and variety" and with the goal of the "avoidance of food redundancy" (City of San Antonio 2014, p. 5). Some interviewees and I observed that food trucks would not necessarily be present as scheduled by the City, and that the program did not allow vending at key times when customers might seek food trucks—such as at the end of the school or work day or during weekends. As discussed in Chapters Four and Five, some interviewees and I perceived that the program was directed mainly towards serving downtown office workers lunch as a core customer base. Moreover, the program appeared to be designed to direct food truck activity in the central business district towards public sites where changes in the "clientele" were desired (such as Main Plaza and Travis Park) and towards competing against affordable lunchtime cafés downtown, further suggesting how elite business and redevelopment interests shaped the program.

To obscure the practices of individual food trucks, I describe my observations across Downtown Food Truck Program sites as one of three micro-sites at which I focused my attention. Additionally, as a second micro-site I studied two distinct clusters of neighborhood food truck vending outside of the downtown business district but within the historical footprint of the city and not far from my home (see Section 1.6). I compared and contrasted observations of these two micro-sites with observations of a sampling of other food truck and street vending activity throughout San Antonio that I group and obscure as a third micro-site. The third micro-site was comprised of a range of publicly accessible food truck activities (including at some gourmet food truck parks) that were recommended or discussed by interviewees or that I noted as I traversed the city and in reviewing local news coverage. The study also included my brief observations of food truck operations in downtown Austin, Dallas, and Laredo, Texas, and in other US cities—and my occasional casual observation of some street vending in San Antonio after 10pm and through other meals—as part of my everyday life in the general study area over an extended period.

To minimize intrusions, the observation approach involved noting what I could about the setting during the process of ordering and consuming a street food meal, while focusing on the overall space and not on particular actors. I primarily consumed meals alone and sometimes jotted down notes causally as I ate, aiming to capture context details that caught my attention and that I could expand upon with reflective writing when away from the site. My observation data collection approach met a desire to minimize the Hawthorne, or primary "observer" effect (Carspecken 1996, p. 52), and to not overwhelm or endanger the practices and sites I observed. In keeping with the "middle ground" aims of the study (Duneier 2001, p. 344) and a desire to mitigate research risks, I followed an observation approach that allowed me to avoid becoming too entwined in or dependent upon any specific vending operation or individual vendor. Additionally, the approach enabled the fieldwork to adjust to the realities of a relatively small and closely-knit body of food truck operations and minimal pedestrian activity or street life.

Other unpredictable factors that impacted on observations included periods of extreme weather (including flash floods, hail storms and tornadoes) and

unforeseeable patterns of vending activity—such as special events and vending at some sites going dormant for long stretches, if not ceasing altogether. The flexible observation approach also supported a less regimented observation schedule (Carspecken 1996, p. 88), which allowed me to consider practices at different points in the day, week and year, and for observations to be grounded in the spontaneity and impulses of everyday urban conditions and daily life.

As I discuss in Chapter Six, very late night to early morning street food vending that caters especially to San Antonio's latest night revelers and service workers (as described by one vendor interviewed) might make for a direction for additional research. In the case of this study, a curfew of no fieldwork activity after 10 pm or before 6 am helped to mitigate tangential risks and allowed the study to be approved. In retrospect, the curfew was justified considering local reporting about taco truck late-night armed robberies (Webber 2014; Wilson 2015) and dangerous conditions for pedestrians after dark related to drink driving (Moravec 2014). Furthermore, the approved and generous curfew allowed for a broad range of local food truck vending practices to be observed, including nighttime gourmet and neighborhood activities. To further help to mitigate some risks, I alerted a local contact person (the independent ombudsperson for this study) of my field activities and carried a phone.

I did not attempt to hide my observation activities and carried identifying information and written information about the study with me. Additionally, I followed American Sociological Association (1999) ethical standards for conducting research in and about public places and using publicly available information. My less obtrusive approach meant I was not liable to be perceived as seeking research participation via intercept methods that mimic nuisance or criminal behavior such as "aggressive panhandling" in San Antonio (Calberg 2016).

I recorded my observations with handwritten, mainly descriptive and often shorthand notes. I found that typing handwritten notes shortly after an observation was a good means to store and protect data and an opportunity to summarize the activity and plan the next steps of fieldwork. I also wrote longer and more comprehensive "in-process memos" (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 2011, pp. 123-5) about field experiences

and key events, to further shape my analyses and plan next steps. Additionally, I occasionally drew quick sketches of some locations and took some photos of public places and streetscapes, taking care not to photograph individuals. These photographs, sketches and notes helped me to become more aware of the differences between neighborhood and gourmet food truck vending discussed by interviewees. The data I collected through observations supported data source and methodology triangulation (Denzin 1989) that strengthened the findings.

Between early 2014 and late 2015, I documented one hundred meals from a broad cross-section of publicly accessible food trucks operating in areas of San Antonio generalized as three micro-sites. Without revealing specific sites or operations and to indicate how the observations took in a range of temporal and spatial variabilities in practices, I can share that of the one hundred documented meals, I ate 36 during Winter (described by one interviewee as a high season for street food selling), 16 in Spring (when extreme weather conditions such as flooding and hail storms are more common locally), 28 in Summer (when temperatures can be extremely hot) and 20 in Autumn months (when temperatures can be high but variable). Additionally, I had 62 meals on a week day (Monday through Thursday) and 38 on a weekend day (Friday through Sunday). Of these meals, 64 took place during mid-day hours (10 am through 5 pm) and 36 meals during evening hours (5 pm through 10 pm).

Furthermore, 66 meals could be described as neighborhood and 44 meals as gourmet, based on factors discussed in Chapters Four and Five—and that include the appearances of vehicles, the pricing and descriptions of food items, the sites of operation and characteristics such as payment methods accepted and promotion approaches. Of the 44 gourmet food truck meals, 34 were consumed from Downtown Food Truck Program participants—considered as one micro-site. The majority of the 66 neighborhood meals were consumed from two distinct clusters of neighborhood food truck vending not far from my home and within the historic footprint of the city but outside of downtown—considered as a second micro-site. The third micro-site took in a range of other gourmet and neighborhood food truck activity, including a few meals at gourmet food truck parks, trucks at special events and from trucks at some bars.

These documented observations were supplemented with other meals that I had as a resident of my study area. This included regularly dining at "mom and pop" cafés (Robert Woods Johnson Foundation 2012) and *taquerías* (also sometimes called taco shops or taco houses)—affordable Mexican American restaurants and family businesses that tend to operate during the local construction work hours of approximately 6 am until 3 pm. At some cafés and *taquerías*, I experienced perambulatory food peddling separate from the foods offered by the establishment, such as men and women selling table-to-table cups of cut fruit with seasonings. On the street, I also sometimes purchased items from neighborhood *paleteros*—bicycle-based or pushcart vendors specializing in *paletas* (popsicles) but also sometimes selling food items such as bags of *chicharones* (fried pork rinds) with seasonings.

The study did not involve observations of what has been described in other research as "industrial" food truck vending (Hermosillo 2010, p. 6)—the vending occurring at limited access worksites such as warehouses, construction sites and some closed professional campuses. However, some interviewees talked about industrial vending in relation to neighborhood and gourmet food truck practices and trends, as shared in Chapters Four and Five. As discussed in Chapter Six, practices related to gourmet and neighborhood food truck vending including more perambulatory and industrial street food vending provide directions for possible additional research.

3.4.3 Prolonged engagement

I achieved prolonged engagement with food truck vending in San Antonio by being based within the general study area during nearly all stages of the study. This allowed me to return frequently and less predictably to the field, including when following-up on ideas or locations suggested in interviews or emerging through data analysis. It also enabled me to attend various local public meetings and events where food trucks were featured or considered— such as public meetings about citywide and area-specific urban planning, gatherings of local entrepreneurs and small business owners, food truck competitions and other festivals and special events. Attending such meetings and events allowed me to build social contacts that in some cases led to interview participation. Furthermore, making a home and life in the

general study area over an extended period allowed me to participate in some of lived experiences of food truck vending and urban change in San Antonio.

As a US citizen and former San Antonio resident, I had lived within the general study area some ten years prior to conducting fieldwork, at a time in my late twenties that was characterized by low paying manual work, poor living conditions in an older unit (no heating or air conditioning and problems with rats) and some interactions with neighborhood street food selling. As a return resident of San Antonio—a pattern I shared with some interviewees—I brought an outsider or etic perspective to the study, but some familiarity with conditions inside the 410 loop.

Early in my research, I noted a reverse culture shock period (Anjarwalla 2010), which heightened my awareness of aspects of local public life. Relocating to San Antonio from Sydney, Australia, I noticed a slower local social tempo (Levine 1997)—as reflected with patterns of speaking and even walking, the duration of some personal exchanges and approaches to customer service in cafés and stores. I also observed different norms in neighborhood eateries (such as paying at the counter after a meal and the allowance of some secondary table-to-table perambulatory peddling and busking at some locations). Additionally, I noticed copious food service-related waste (with disposable products used everywhere, including at restaurants and as part of home life). I also noticed differences in uses of publicly accessible spaces—including different driving norms (drivers stopping mid-block to talk with neighbors and yielding longer at intersections), bicycling norms (some cyclists riding against traffic) and walking norms (walking at a slower gait and less walking overall). Such social characteristics might be described as "American" or "Southern" suburban and big small town (Burroughs 2014)—with factors such as table-to-table peddling and busking in some cafés representing for locals "Mexican" qualities of San Antonio life.

My return to San Antonio also included becoming reacquainted more directly with dimensions of poverty (Rodrigue, Kneebone & Reeves 2016). For example, during the fieldwork, the value of the Australian dollar plunged more than 30 percent compared to the US dollar, contributing to my household living below the median

income for our economically distressed zip code and for San Antonio (and the state and nation) overall (Schwartz 2016; Economic Innovation Group 2017; see Section 1.6). This helped to concretize some of the challenges and pressures faced by working-class San Antonians—which can include poor neighborhood conditions (infrastructure problems, crime, stray dogs, etc.) and increasing housing, insurance, medical, food and fuel costs (Rodrigue, Kneebone & Reeves 2016). It also helped me to conceive of neighborhood vended foods differently, to the point of rejoicing in the dense, flavorful, nutrient-rich and affordable taco meals often served with familial warmth—as part of, or in conclusion to, a physically demanding day or week of work or a financially difficult stretch. Critically, (re)living these San Antonio neighborhood and household conditions over a prolonged period—as summarized by Ybarra-Frausto (1991) as an "environment always on the edge of coming apart (the car, the job, the toilet) (p.156)"—helped me to avoid either romanticizing or reviling working-class populations and practices. Likewise, past professional work and living in comparatively expensive Sydney enabled me to approach the prices and offerings of local gourmet food trucks with an additional point-of-reference.

3.5 Ethics considerations and data analysis

I was the sole person with access to confidential information about participants. I followed approved protocols related to the study aims to minimize the collection of identifiable data from participants, store data securely and mitigate various tangential risks. I engaged with participants in ways that accorded them due respect and protection as outlined by the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (Australian Government 2015). Participants consented to participate with the understanding that the collected data could eventually be made accessible to others. They also understood that research findings could be globally accessed and distributed via inclusion in the UTS online collection of theses. My research methods included allowing interviewees to review and respond, if they chose, to what I wrote as the transcript of the interview, as a form of "member checking" or participant validation of the data (Carspecken 1996, p. 89). I understood the ethical considerations of the research to be a process or performance involving constant deliberation and exercise of judgement and appreciation of context.

Furthermore, a local and independent contact, or ombudsperson, with advanced academic training was made available to participants. This person provided a local contact for any questions or possible complaints about the research in addition to my doctoral supervisors in Australia. The ombudsperson also helped to mitigate some of the tangential risks by being aware of my daily field whereabouts and activities. I conducted the study in publicly accessible locations and focused on public practices and spaces in the city and not on individual actors or vending operations.

It was not the intent of the study to try to elicit possibly harmful revelations from participants or generate any discomfort, and I was careful to remind participants of their rights, the study aims and possible data uses at various points during interviews. I stopped recording in a few instances when I felt the conversation becoming too revelatory or removed from the study aims. Moreover, interviewing techniques that included a member check of transcribed interviews (Carspecken 1996, p. 89) helped to assure that the information I collected adequately reflected participants' statements and perspectives and was accurately coded to reduce risk of inadvertent identification. In summary, with the study, I adopted a minimally intrusive observation approach, separated observational data collection from interview data collection and transcribed and coded interviews to remove reference to specific operations or actors.

Furthermore, data analysis was an iterative process involving reviewing various data during and after the fieldwork, with data and methodological triangulation (Denzin 1989) helping to strengthen the findings. Data were analyzed for patterns including themes, similarities and different descriptions and perceptions. While I considered and experimented with utilizing database software platforms to assist with data analysis, I ultimately relied on more tactile approaches to sorting, comparing and searching for patterns in the interview data. I cut and pasted, grouped and sorted blocks of transcribed interview text by hand to gradually uncover findings and themes related to the study aims.

As part of the slow process of transcribing interviews and analyzing data more manually, I listened to interview recordings and read and re-read transcripts, notes and other texts, heeding similarities and differences in content and perspectives amongst the participants. The information I gathered through interviews and other sources helped me to formulate responses to the question guiding the study and consider possible additional research, as summarized in Chapter Six.

3.6 Limitations of the study

It would be impossible to replicate many of the conditions and variables shaping my ethnographically informed urban study of food truck practices in San Antonio in 2014 and 2015—including my biography as a researcher and noting how street vending can be a more ephemeral urban phenomenon. For example, at the time of writing, some food truck sites that I observed have ceased operation while new sites have emerged. The study methodologies, as described in this chapter, anticipated and adjusted for some of these limitations and allowed me to take in a range of practices without embedding with, burdening or being reliant on any specific operation, site or program. They also allowed for data and methodological triangulation (Denzin 1989) that help to ensure the validity of the findings.

Overall, the findings contribute to a fuller understanding of twenty-first century US urban life and changes by presenting San Antonio as another case study of the food truck movement. The study joins other research that has drawn from ethnographic methods to explore aspects of food truck vending and urban change in the context of specific other major US cities following the 2008 Great Recession. As I present in Chapter Six, it also offers direction and resources for future San Antonio-based research, to further attend to some gaps in the critical literature.

3.7 Summary

In this chapter, I further described the research methodologies and some of the contextual factors guiding the study, expanding on discussion from previous chapters. In the next chapter (Chapter Four), I begin to present the key findings of the study to further elucidate and interrogate some of the conditions that shaped neighborhood and gourmet food truck vending.

Chapter Four: Interrogating Mobile Food Vending in San Antonio

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present findings that help to contend with the guiding research question that emerged from the study: How do neighborhood and gourmet food truck practices in San Antonio bring to light atypical patterns of gentrification in the US and some of the related differentiated regulation, spatial inequalities and social exclusions shaping this predominantly Mexican American city in the era of cognitive-cultural capitalism? Specifically, I consider in this chapter some of the local social and urban conditions and practices that inform food truck vending generally and that help to bring the light some of the perceived differences between gourmet and neighborhood food trucks discussed in Chapter Five.

4.2 Local social and urban conditions

In this section, I explore key local social and urban conditions informing neighborhood and gourmet food truck practices, as identified by interviewees and I observed. I begin with a discussion about San Antonio's slow social tempo or speed of life (Levine 1997).

4.2.1 Slow social tempo and "flow"

In order to complete this qualitative study, I had to adjust to and consider San Antonio's slow social tempo (Levine 1997) and other conditions. Interviewee Max described the local speed of life: "I like the laid-back kind of slow pace of it, which a lot of people hate. They want the progressive things that California or Portland or places are doing. It's a trade-off, you know? Low cost of living versus having all those things given to you."

Max's comment suggests various social truths, drawing attention to San Antonio's more conservative culture and relatively affordable costs and also to some holding low opinions about aspects of the city. As discussed in Chapter One, large defense-related federal government facilities and investments result in a more forced and often temporary relocation to San Antonio for a large population of military trainees

and professionals (Thompson 2010). This influences some of the design and management of the city and may, in part, explain why "a lot of people hate" San Antonio, as Max put it. Websites like Sperling's Best Places (n.d.) detail various opinions about San Antonio via online reviews from longtime residents, newcomers and others—including individuals describing being compelled to relocate to the city by work or training requirements. These reviews, good and bad, tend to reference the city's climate, slow pace and Mexican or Tex-Mex cultural attributes

Moreover, Max's view of San Antonio as a city where "things" and progression are not easily obtained or "given" is suggestive of the different *movidas* or tactics (Ybarra-Frausto 1991; Spener 2010) that working-class and other residents must employ to buy time or make incremental progress in "an environment always on the edge of coming apart" (Ybarra-Frausto 1991, p. 156). Other interviewees discussed pacing oneself with local endeavors as essential to avoid exhaustion, giving up or making conditions worse in an understood challenging environment—and to achieve what social psychologist Robert Levine (1997) describes as "flow" (p. 45), or the balance between too little achievement and too much pressure or stress. For example, Greg described achieving a state of "flow" with his street food vending:

> So, there was just a period where I couldn't push myself any more … I was kind of happy with the outputs I was getting. … I needed that. Because, in that time when I wasn't pushing—where I wasn't having my elbows sharp, ready to go—some movement happened. Some people opened up. … Deals take place. Well, for me, that just … hits me on the inside. (Greg)

Greg's comments indicate how urban conditions are always in flux, and they also suggest maneuvers or tactics for advancing in San Antonio's challenging environment. Outside of interviews, some of my day-to-day colleagues (from home remodelers to urbanists) similarly described having to stop "pushing" at times as a form of self-preservation and to achieve progress towards larger goals locally. Adding to these considerations, Adrian described how San Antonio's extreme environmental conditions can shape work approaches that might seem lazy to outsiders or newcomers and tempt some to try to "power through" with poor results:

> A lot of the other [gourmet] trucks … think they're going to somehow beat God at His own game, you know? Like, "oh, we're gonna power through the summer." Well, good luck, man, you know? Like, we probably both will end up breaking even … but you will have worked so much harder. (Adrian)

Long summer days and late afternoon hours (which in other parts of the US might be understood to be normal or even preferable manual work times) can be dangerous locally due to high temperatures and ground ozone levels that climb towards the end of the day and are responsible for an estimated 52 deaths locally each year (Gibbons 2016). Max described San Antonio's typical manual work hours based on his experience working on local constructions sites: "Yeah, it was one of those 6:30 [am] to 3:30 [pm] jobs, because it's just so hot here. Try to get out early."

These manual work hours, influenced by the local environment, shape the operating hours of mom and pop cafés and *taquerías* in San Antonio, including those located downtown. In turn, mom and pop café hours appear to inform the structure of the City's Downtown Food Truck Program—which I discuss later in this chapter. Generally, factors such as hot weather (and other extreme climate conditions) and a slow pace make San Antonio comparable with other cities in the region, as reflected by some interviewees comparing San Antonio to Austin but also parts of Mexico.

4.2.2 Not Austin and almost Mexico

As I discuss in Chapter One, different local reports describe gourmet food truck practices as migrating to San Antonio from trendier Austin (Chasnoff 2011; Davila 2011), where food truck activity is more abundant or apparent (Willett 2014; Lemon 2016; Newell 2017; Theis 2017). The embrace of gourmet food truck vending as part of a wave of *yuccie* (economically motivated "young urban creative") entrepreneurial efforts in Austin (Webb 2015, para. 2) led some San Antonians I interviewed to express concerns about perceived commercial and other gentrification in Austin and urban changes perceivable in San Antonio. For example, Rene shared these views: "Flat out, I hate Austin; because to me it's the embodiment of gentrification. … They support everybody who comes there to do music, but they

won't support the people who actually grew up there." Rene's perception of gentrification as privileging newcomers while disregarding the outputs and interests of local residents was echoed by other interviewees, as I discuss later in this chapter.

As a vendor, Rob described other urban and social conditions that mark Austin as different from San Antonio:

> Austin has a very foodie scene. And it's … more … densely occupied in the center, right? And it's mostly young professionals and … young people for school. … So, that's going to drive a different market than a city where everything is so spread out and it's … more family-oriented, right? So, that weighs a lot on … how the city eats. … In San Antonio, a lot of people still feel it's a roach coach. Because of the history that San Antonio has with food trucks, the taco trucks and all that. So, breaking that barrier has always been a hard thing. (Rob)

Describing local legacy food trucks as *roach coaches*, Rob joined other interviewees in applying this disparaging term to non-gourmet local vending. Moreover, his comments suggest that working-class Mexican American ("taco") vending practices and tastes present a "barrier" that gourmet food truck vendors had to break to be successful locally—a view that other interviewees also expressed. Additionally, Rob described San Antonio as an easy city in which to launch a food truck business, but a challenging market in which to profit quickly, placing San Antonio practices and conditions at odds with the accelerated economic growth and wealth that cities like Austin embody. Rob also observed that the gourmet food truck trend seemed to be ebbing locally:

> Honestly, we've actually seen a slow-down of food trucks coming into the business, you know? The last few years, there was a huge influx. … And some lasting … six months and they were out. ... Austin really supports and has the dedicated to be able to provide enough business for all those food trucks to really thrive. … [H]ere in San Antonio, it's not so hard to establish yourself; like, Austin is so oversaturated. … But … the business is not there to be able to be

> quick, you know? So, a lot of trucks are really having a hard time. (Rob)

Rob's comments suggest short-term interests or commitments fueling some of the gourmet food truck trend locally. They also help to describe the reality of a slow economy of low profits and laboring for many San Antonians. Moreover, like Rob, I noticed how San Antonio seemed to lack the "densely occupied" street life of other cities including a rapidly changed Austin. Additionally and as a returning resident of the city, I noted that new regulation of San Antonio's below street-level downtown River Walk attraction (see Figure 1.9)—which channels much pedestrian activity away from the street to an area dominated by hotels and cafés—has limited more perambulatory and table-based vending in this downtown space, further constraining the encounters that visitors and locals might have with street vending (Olivo 2011).

Separately, Adrian identified differences between Austin and San Antonio as a vendor. He noted the relatively small number of food trucks and trailers operating in San Antonio compared with Austin, but he also described the city experiencing a "renaissance":

> [W]e were deciding on whether we wanted to open in Austin or San Antonio. And … San Antonio had forty registered food trucks at the time and Austin had fourteen hundred. And I grew up here, you know? I wasn't super excited about coming back. … I'm really glad I did, and not just for the business, 'cause this town is absolutely in the midst of a renaissance. (Adrian)

Adrian, like other interviewees, depicted San Antonio as experiencing commercial and food-related changes, in alignment with a declared "Decade of Downtown" reinvention (Rivard 2014) that responded to perceived advancements in or competition with other cities (Chasnoff 2011). Considering practices and changes downtown, Danica described some of the differences that she observed between Austin and what she regarded to be more closely-regulated San Antonio:

> What I saw yesterday was more tables … that were, you know, really inviting, really colorful. It made it look, like, "officially unofficial." … I have mixed

> feelings about Austin, too. … And even though we're both doing the food truck stuff—completely different. … Like, here [at a Downtown Food Truck Program site] there's a new food truck every day. There's a schedule. … Where in Austin … thinking that it feels like a food truck "home"—it's the same truck every day. It's the same … owner coming out there every day. (Danica)

Danica attributed some of the differences in food truck and public place-management approaches to Austin having a larger customer base for gourmet food trucks:

> And obviously these people have a huge clientele if they can just post-up, you know, for a long time. …Versus here; if the truck's not making it [as part of the Downtown Food Truck Program], they can leave, you know? Versus being stationed somewhere [in Austin] and … being put up on bricks. Here, the City would never allow some stuff like that. And in Austin … it was too cool, you know? It was so … anti-"the man" [laughs]! (Danica)

Additionally, Danica emphasized that San Antonio's socially conservative culture and stringent local governance approaches shaped food truck vending:

> I think San Antonio is … trying to be so prim and proper. … And … doesn't get the leeway that I feel like Austin gets. … Because Austin is weird and San Antonio is lame and we're super historic. And so anything that happens—especially downtown—has to go through the … historic society. Through City Council. And in Austin … it's just not the same feeling. (Danica)

Furthermore, Danica described Austin's welcoming of street art as another indicator of how San Antonio is not like Austin:

> Like, in Austin there's graffiti and street art and … wheat glue posters everywhere …. And it's encouraged to be creative like that. … Where in San Antonio, there's graffiti somewhere and here comes somebody sandblasting it off. … [I]t's totally against the law to have that. … [A family member] had a mural on the side of her building; these guys came and tagged it up. She got a

> fine. She had nothing to do with the tagging. … Of course, in Austin it is different people doing that than who's doing it here.

Danica's comments about graffiti abatement suggest the uneven and "nonsensical" (Olivo 2014) policing that some local residents have experienced and that my fieldwork sometimes brushed against. Her comments also indicate how less affluent residents have traditionally led some local creative efforts, including the creation and funding of public murals (Pimentel 2016). Critically, Danica's comments suggest local creative city politics (N. Martin 2014; Scott 2014) or cultural contests (Hernández-López 2011) whereby local government ("the man") makes judgements about local artistic and entrepreneurial outputs, as influenced by different interests and the kinds of "people" involved in these activities. Without mentioning race, ethnicity or class directly, Danica alludes to these factors and suggests how they shape local government responses to activities such as street vending.

Danica's "mixed feelings" about Austin—an idea expressed by other interviewees—suggests how some Latina/os can feel marginalized there (Texas Monthly Staff & Ballí 2013). Danica's descriptions also highlight the blunt ways in which San Antonio can be governed, with the police "sandblasting" away perceived blight and issuing sizable fines for activities that in many communities would not be considered an offence, such as being the victim of graffiti or "tagging."

Considering practices in Austin, Ben observed that food truck vendors there have been able to collaborate to a degree that he has not experienced in San Antonio, with vendors in Austin forming food truck parks structured more like cooperatives—compared with the landlord-tenant relationships defining San Antonio's food truck parks, as some interviewees discussed and I share in Chapter Five. Separately, Daniel marveled at the ability of Austin to create value out of "run-down"—sometimes described as "Texas chic" (Texas Monthly Staff & Ballí 2013)—commercial properties and businesses, appropriating conditions that in San Antonio are more apt to be associated with poverty and considered blight:

> I don't know how Austin does it. … [A]nd that's the truth for their free standing buildings and their mobile trucks. … [T]hey're able to harness this, like, run-down look and feel but cultivate a following for it that it perpetuates the business. In a way that San Antonians don't seem to know how to do. A bunch of legendary Austin businesses … were established in these … old, decrepit buildings that the business is able to utilize … as charm. (Daniel)

Furthermore, Daniel contended that San Antonio is a city with an identity conflict when compared to Austin:

> I think Austin feels very clearly south Texas. And then San Antonio, which is even further south … is conflicted between do we want to be just American, or do we really want to be also a part of Mexico? It's definitely a tremendous amount of pride … of Mexican heritage in this town. But they also don't want to be so prideful as to appear to be abandoning their actual country. (Daniel)

Daniel's comments suggest that San Antonio during my period of research was a city struggling to maintain what Hernández-Ehrisman (2008) discusses as San Antonio's "dual identities" historically (p. 107). She describes San Antonio as a politically American city that has been defined culturally as Mexican and that has also long exhibited tensions between notions of "the modern versus the antiquated city" (p. 107). Additionally, she considers San Antonio to be city that has since the 1970s broken away from its racial segregationist history to have established the inclusion of Mexican Americans in local governance and public culture—but she notes "a widening gap" that excludes a large population of "poor and working-class Mexicanos … from these benefits" (p. 168). Her observations suggest the socioeconomic stratification that I observed and that some of my interviewees referenced, including in comparing local conditions with Austin.

Although local residents including some politicians sometimes advance narratives of San Antonio being culturally or otherwise behind cities like Austin (Chasnoff 2011), Daniel noted that San Antonio is a place that some Austinites visited to enjoy neighborhood foods and possibly to scout food ideas or trends: "I've had people

from Austin who come down … and they're like 'I love that place' [a neighborhood *frutería*]. And this was before shaved ice was a big thing. They were into it."

Daniel's observations suggest growing food tourism in the US (Johnston & Baumann 2010; Shankman 2015) and an apparent interest by some Austinites in "authentic" urban experiences (Zukin 2010) or appropriating working-class Mexican American foodways (Texas Monthly Staff & Ballí 2013). In Chapter Five, I return to the "big thing" of *raspa* vending in San Antonio during my period of research (Jividen 2014) that Daniel and other interviewees noted, in considering how this vending practice embodied for some San Antonians patterns of gentrification and *gente*-fication.

Along with comparing local food truck practices with efforts in Austin, my interviewees sometimes discussed street vending and conditions in Mexico as a point of comparison. For example, Reina described how San Antonio has more appeal than Austin for families visiting from Mexico, due to cultural familiarity—with visitation and temporary resettlement from Mexico being a major driver of local and state economic development historically (Hennessy-Fiske 2013; Cave 2014):

> San Antonio is special. It's … this place for us of Mexico. 'Cause it's …where you go for vacation. But when you're here, you kind of … feel like you're home. Because so much of the culture is familiar. But it still feels different from us. … [M]ost of the people coming have families; Austin is not a family-friendly city. … If you're traveling on your own. … Austin is maybe a base for that. (Reina)

Greg also regarded families from Mexico to be a key visitor and customer demographic. Additionally, Greg described San Antonio as struggling with identity and exhibiting a deeply bifurcated local economy:

> San Antonio has always been San Antonio. But I think that chip on our shoulder about us being "small time: has fallen off. I think San Antonio as a city is trying to identify "oh, we're like this, we're like that." No. We're unlike anything else. … Because, you may have Austin being weird and you may have Dallas being

> wealthy but everybody in San Antonio is *puro*. Everybody here is real. Whether they're on the high economic level or the low economic level. (Greg)

As some interviewees also observed, conditions in San Antonio are not "Mexican" per se, but they can seem familiar to those from Mexico, as some journalists have explored (Dotan 2012; Cave 2014). For example, Reina discussed elements of the local "Tex-Mex" culture that she noticed

> We don't have taco trucks in Mexico. … It's a completely different culture. Yes, Tex-Mex food has Mexican influence. But it's a completely separate cuisine. The spices are different. The flavors are different. It doesn't make it less important. … You have Tex-Mex restaurants in Mexico. But it's labeled as Tex-Mex. Because it's not Mexican food. (Reina)

Reina also described differences in patterns of living between Mexico and San Antonio, including housing displacement and gentrification pressures that she considered to be unique to the US:

> You can move into the middle class, but it's tiny; it's basically non-existent in Mexico. There is one big difference between middle and poor people in Mexico compared with the US. Most people [in Mexico] are land owners. If you work and you pay taxes, the government will give you credit for mortgages that are extremely … low to help you buy a house. … [Y]ou might be dirt poor but you own where you live. Renting apartments is only seen in big cities; where there are so many people that you have to build apartments. And even then, owning a condo is preferred over renting. (Reina)

Moreover, Reina addressed the topic of perceptions of crime in Mexico and the US, and the history of the temporary resettlement of wealthier "Mexican nationals" (Pimentel 2013b; Beyer 2016) in San Antonio, and especially from Monterrey:

> San Antonio for the longest time had higher [crime rates], but now I think it is about even. Or Monterrey is now slightly higher? In the US, you have insane

> homicide rates. … The view of the US in Mexico is that it is safe, but you have a ton of freaky people that can shoot you at any time. … I know people who left [Monterrey] because they tried to kidnap part of the family … but they've moved back home; this happens throughout Mexico. Like, something goes wrong with the government. Have the money to leave the country, okay. It's back, we're going back. People don't leave—they temporarily take long vacations. It's how it's been described. (Reina)

Reina also discussed responses to government corruption in Mexico, and also notions of Mexican "pride of place" as other differences:

> [W]e all know the Mexican government is corrupt. So we … don't actually expect anything to get fixed! But I expected San Antonio government to at least have a better care of the people. … Yes, the people are poor [in Mexico], but they are very proud of their space. And it's theirs and they own it. And … their house may be tiny. And they may have twelve people living in the space that's meant for four. But they'll go out and they'll buy paint. … Or, like, they'll make sure that you see that outside of it is clean … and … have this pride of place. … I kind of don't see it [in San Antonio]. When, like, they're renters. Or they're in transition and they don't know how long they're going to be there. … I'm Mexican and this is just different. Because all these people, this is not going to be their house. … Or they may have just have gotten here, so they don't feel like they have the right to demand anything better. Back home, it's: "Look, if the government isn't going to fix it, we're going to go get cement and we're going to fill it in ourselves." And that's been done. … And if anything needs taken care of, then I'm going to make sure the people know you're [the government is] disrespecting my place. … [P]eople are like it's their infrastructure. (Reina)

Other interviewees also discussed San Antonio's "Mexican"-ness or near-Mexican identity, including as manifest in uses of property. For example, Max described neighborhood traditions of urban agriculture within the 410 loop: "The Mexican culture does that; you have lots of fruit trees. … My neighbors all have—if they're from Mexico, they're gonna have limes, oranges, lemons—everything growing.

Avocado trees. Everything they eat.” Separately, Lina described San Antonio’s flea markets, or *pulgas* (Mendoza 2016; Mejorado n.d.), as predating and different from the more upscale farmer’s markets that I observed in sections of San Antonio, including sometimes held at Main Plaza: [20]

> [F]armer’s markets were … not what we see today …. What I think of as a farmer’s market was … like, in the South Side; the flea market. They sell livestock there. They sell, like, chickens, you know? All kinds of stuff. … Anything and everything you wanted. … It’s still very old school. (Lina)

Furthermore, Danica expressed how the number of Mexican food outlets in San Antonio, including affordable mom-and-pop options downtown, also represented local demographics, food preferences and traditional cultural practices: “I would think that the majority of restaurants downtown are Mexican restaurants. Just because of who we are.”

This idea conflicts with notions of the need to curb “food redundancy” suggested with the City’s regulation of food trucks downtown (City of San Antonio 2014, p. 5). Separately, Greg explained how, as a vendor, he drew directly from traditional or “Mexican” street food vending approaches:

> [O]ne thing about the Mexican street food vendor that I really try to capture, and it shocks people—and, of course, people from Mexico are comfortable with it; when you go to a street vendor in Mexico, you get your food, you get your drink, and then you sit down and you eat. And if you spill your bottle or drop your food: “Oh, here’s another one.” Or if you drink your soda and need another one, you grab another one. And then at the end, when you’re done eating, that’s when you settle up [pay]. And our society is not like that, our society is “pay me first, pay me first, pay me first.” So, when we work [vend] … we tell people, “are you

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[20] Photographer Arlene Mejorado (n.d.) has helped to document “the daily resilience, thriving community, and vibrant beauty that exist in the *pulga*s on the outskirts” of San Antonio (para. 1). Main flea market sites or *pulgas*—such as the Poteet Flea Mart south of the 410 loop—were outside of the boundaries of my general study area and protocols, as most are accessible only by car and charge an access-fee.

> gonna eat here?" Because we have a couple of tables. …"Eat," you know? One, I've gotta line [of other customers]. Two, you're not going anywhere, you're gonna eat. I'm gonna get your money in a little bit. Enjoy yourself. (Greg)

Greg's comments were supported by other interviewees who suggested that most neighborhood and some gourmet food truck approaches could be understood as Mexican street food-inspired or "Mexican"-like—even as the City took efforts to discourage a working-class Mexican urban identity or working-class practices downtown. For example, Vin challenged what he observed to be efforts to define San Antonio as having a "Latino" identity—along with local government failing to engage with or welcome local working-class Mexican American offerings with official programs:

> My friend was asking me why we don't have more festivals of different cultures. Like, Latino stuff. I'm like, well, one—those Latino festivals. … I'm like, dude, we're a bunch of Mexicans first off. Two … those festivals aren't really Mexican, to be honest. Like, it will always be their idea of what we should be, as opposed to what we actually are. I get mad at it because, dude, it's not hard to reach out and get us involved. (Vin)

Despite many interviewees identifying with Mexican culture, some expressed a fear of and limited experience with Mexico itself—a local social factor that *New York Times* reporter Damien Cave (2014) also observes.[21] For example, Rene described his reasons for not traveling to Mexico, despite there being affordable means of travelling there:

> I've been afraid these past couple of years. Like, past ten or twelve years. Because of all the shit that's been going down in Mexico. I don't speak Spanish,

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[21] Cave (2014) relays this interaction with a corner store manager in a neighborhood in my general study area and not far from my home, to help illustrate how San Antonio is linked with but unlike Mexico: "I pointed across the street to La Michoacana Paleteria y Neveria—an ice cream shop in an old gas station repainted in bright colors, with a sign on the window offering 'churros con cajeta' and one above the door trumpeting 'ice cream, fruit cups, snacks.' With its eager capitalism and dual-language pitch, it looked like nothing I've ever seen in the Mexican state of Michoacán. 'I don't really know if it looks Mexican,' Mr. Avalos acknowledged. 'I don't remember; it's been a long time since I've been'" (paras. 14-15).

> so I feel if I were to go to Mexico, and I speak English, I'd be an automatic target. … And then … the way I dress, yeah. (Rene)

Greg also discussed how he perceived himself to be viewed differently in Mexico:

> Although I am Latin descent … down there, I might as well be a gringo [an Anglo American]. I mean, they see a big gringo. But it was … awe-inspiring to see just the amount of street food. And the smells and the sounds and … the quality of the food. (Greg)

Based on his childhood in Laredo, Texas, Daniel discussed some of the "cultural realities" of Texas-Mexico border city life and described the street vending that he recalled while also sharing that had not spent much time in Mexico:

> [I]n Laredo, Texas. … [T]hat was limited to ice cream trucks, *raspa* trucks. Not—certainly not—gourmet food. I don't recall, like, even taco trucks. … I was born in the '70s. … I'm sure they were there [taco trucks], but for whatever reason my parents didn't frequent them and neither did I. … Generally, not brand new vehicles. So, yeah, they would be re-purposed. … That was kind of the cultural reality of Laredo of the time. Everything was used, and it's so close to Mexico. … Not until I was a teenager [did he cross into Mexico]. … It did kind of feel different. Yeah … just across the border. Went to a restaurant, ate, drank, came back. … So, my experience with … Mexico was really limited up until—like, I did my first major Mexico trip last year [laughs]! (Daniel)

For Karen, local taco trucks and working-class neighborhood conditions helped to trigger memories of Mexico and make places in San Antonio "almost Mexico":

> In the West Side, I can usually identify someone and just based on their dialect say they are Mexican—like even … a region. … Like, everywhere you go, it's Spanish and it looks, like, almost Mexico … like, all the storefronts. … [T]he food trucks that are, like, the late night ones … I would say they're Mexican. … I love those food trucks because … so, my parents are from Mexico. So, when we

> go to Mexico … we eat from food trucks; or from sidewalk street food. … I always love those because the spaces there … it's like you're in Mexico. … [I]t becomes a space. For people to gather and talk and kids to play and—even if it's just a parking lot. But there's something about the food. And the … loud, blaring music. I think it makes people—other people that are not from here—feel like a little piece of home. (Karen)

These perspectives suggest a local urban culture that to some San Antonians and visitors seems almost Mexican—or how they imagine Mexico to be, but that is also different from conditions in Mexico. Likewise, San Antonio is comparable with but also distinct from other US cities such as neighboring Austin. National political icon and former mayor Henry Cisneros references these conditions in describing the local culture as distinctly "San Antoniano" (quoted in Cave 2014, para. 17) and in flux. As some interviewees and I noticed, car-dependency is another aspect of local culture that shapes food truck practices.

4.2.3 Driving, not walking, to a culinary revolution

During my period of research, San Antonio was not a city for walking pleasantly or safely (Schmitt 2015; Reagan 2016)—a condition noted by many interviewees as an obstacle for food trucks generally. For example, Rob described how local conditions challenged the "classic" model of pop-up or more random gourmet food truck vending:

> In cities like Portland … Denver, where people live in the center … it's a much denser populated area. And people are used to doing that, it works. In this city, people love driving everywhere, right? So, the classic food truck business model … "find us on our social media," you know, "you can go to our spot"— it doesn't really work. … It's not somebody getting … their bike and going to that spot. Or somebody getting out of … their office building and walking over; they're not going to do that. San Antonio culturally doesn't have that. (Rob)

Nolan also described San Antonio as a sprawling city that lacked "foot traffic" and street life comparable with even other neighboring Texas cities:

> I mean, San Antonio is such an urban sprawl … the [food truck] park scene is really something that has taken off in Austin. … I mean, San Marcos [a smaller college town located between San Antonio and Austin] has a food truck scene … and it's successful for them because they're centrally located around a college campus. Austin kind of similarly has a very … urban populated scene. And … it makes it sustainable … where there's enough foot traffic or enticement by design. … San Antonio's food truck parks are so spread out and really in remote areas. (Nolan)

Additionally, Greg depicted San Antonio as sprawling, with new growth most noticeably "bulging" north towards Austin:

> It's just the way we're built. … [W]e're a big spider web. … [L]ook at a map of downtown. … [B]etween downtown and the North Side is … 50 miles, 40 miles [more like 20 to 30 miles, or 30 to 60 km]? But the space between downtown and [loop] 410 south is like maybe 15 miles [more like 8 to 10 mile, or 12 to 16 km]? So you got this bulging growth. … [T]hey were talking about this the other day on the radio that the car traffic. … They weren't expecting it to be this bad for ten years. (Greg)

Other researchers trace San Antonio's history of sprawl especially north as a legacy of white and wealth flight from center city conditions, taxation and integration—as enabled by car use and highway development (Miller 2001, 2004; Hernández-Ehrisman 2008). Moreover, these patterns of car-dependency set expectations about driving in the center city that have led to substantial public investment in additional car parking when other infrastructure needs seem to be far more pressing, as some interviewees asserted.

For example, Reina contended that San Antonio's poor pedestrian infrastructure is a condition that marks the city as different from Mexico and challenges street vending but also public health and safety and social mixing. As she described and I experienced, the design of many streets within the 410 loop leads to situations where

“you’ll be walking and … there will be no sidewalk; people will be like ‘oh, I’m just walking in the street now’”—presenting risks and barriers to accessibility and discouraging walking as a form of mobility.

Also considering how local pedestrian infrastructure impacts on food truck vending, Danica described riding and waiting for public buses as challenging. Moreover, she described the design of new bus stops downtown as aesthetically pleasing but not providing comfort or service to those who might actually use local transit:

> So they did these structures [bus stops]. …Which is nice … for the look of it … but for the people waiting for the bus, it’s still getting rained on. There’s still no protection from the wind. Or the sun. In the summer it’s like … Hell here, you know? The sun is just glaring down on them. … I don’t know… who it was supposed to benefit. I don’t think the people riding the bus, though. (Danica)

Separately, Karen critiqued recent public design efforts in terms of their public utility or usefulness for “local citizens,” and she used these examples to describe how efforts like the City’s Downtown Food Truck Program appeared to be aimed at competing with other cities and attracting “hipster” residents rather than providing useful local services:

> My problems with … these kinds of things the City does. It’s meant to be cool and hip and, like, contemporary and progressive, like other cities. And kind of match other big cities. But I don’t think we do a good job of taking care of our local citizens. For example … the bus stops; the accessibility of that. And crosswalks and … when you do that, it’s still good for tourism. … I don’t know why we don’t … get that stuff. … [W]e’re not thinking about them. We’re thinking about, you know, hipster culture. (Karen)

Max offered a similar critique of the redesign of Main Plaza—a Downtown Food Truck Program site where, as with Travis Park, sizeable public resources have been spent aimed towards revitalization:

> [N]othing is designed well. It's not a walkable surface. There's no one place for people to gather. There's limited seating. It's not comfortable. And then you say … five years later, well "let's get some food trucks here," and park them on this one lane of traffic. Well, they're not next to anything people can sit at—like, that whole plaza is a failed solution. … Nothing was designed together and so people don't want to use them [gourmet food trucks]. And people that do are wealthy, business bankers that walk up to 'em, pay ten dollars [USD$10] for whatever and carry it back to their office. (Max)

These perspectives depict San Antonio as limited in street life and foot traffic in comparison with other cities. They also describe various public improvement projects downtown—from new bus stops to the design and management of some Downtown Food Truck Program sites—as competing in appearance with offerings in other cities but not providing much actual utility for "local citizens." Apart from these critiques, some interviewees described San Antonio as being in the midst of a positive culinary and cultural transition relating to new urban investments but also drawing from traditional neighborhood practices. For example, Lina described a local "culinary revolution" in these terms:

> It's … a culinary revolution. Uh, urban agriculture, you know? That goes into farmer's markets. And community gardens. Like, the food court they just built in my community (inside the 410 loop); it's gonna be an amazing asset for the community, because we're gonna be able to sell things that we grow right there for next to nothing. My neighborhood … used to be an orchard. It used to be a pecan orchard. It used to be a celery garden, apparently. (Lina)

Additionally, Adrian discussed an interconnected local culinary and cultural movement and "industry" involving some gourmet trucks and dependent on local relationships:

> [Gourmet food truck vending is] closely connected with the greater culinary industry. … [W]e like to be friends with people like brewers and other chefs. And music venues and art galleries … that's really where we shine, you know?

> … [T]he trucks that sit at food truck parks are never going to make those relationships. For that matter, the truck that goes and parks at a bar … and just sits on the truck the entire time hoping people will come out also will never make that relationship. (Adrian)

Separately, Nolan discussed the frugality of San Antonio's customer base generally, and how this factor can conflict with gourmet vending practices and business models aimed at quickly scaling or accelerated profits, using the example of a taco truck:

> [T]he expectations of the San Antonian on food costs or pricing, I mean it's getting better, but on a general scale … they probably would say it's way too expensive, so that's probably limited the market unless you happen to be the cheap option. The cheap doesn't really point itself well to scaling. If I want to launch my second version … it's not really gonna help because if I'm only making two dollars [USD$2] on … every taco I sell. … [H]ow many tacos is it going to take me to … get to my next truck? (Nolan)

Nolan also emphasized that many San Antonians need to be "broken" of various habits for them to buy from gourmet trucks. He also described some of the city's spatial inequality:

> The food trucks, the general connotation especially if you're talking branded [gourmet] trucks— is going to be … more costly. … [I]f the side of town is just not socioeconomically there, then they're just not going to buy into it. There's a cultural factor … because there's not a lot of money … and because, you know, most of the stuff … is relatively similar in styling. You'd really have to break their habits to get them… to eat from a [gourmet] truck. (Nolan)

Beyond observing that gourmet food trucks shared or imitated the "styling" of neighborhood trucks, Nolan discussed how the relative affordability of vended foods locally was a "problem" for gourmet vendors but also for San Antonio generally:

> You come to San Antonio, you're like "oh my God—things are so cheap." … I

> mean, property's cheaper. … Food is cheaper; I mean, nice food is considerably cheaper. A comparable meal in New York, right? It might be two, three, four fold more expensive in New York than it is here. And if you're from New York and come to San Antonio, you're like "oh my God, this is great!" You go from San Antonio to New York, you're like "oh my God, these people are crazy! I can get this for waaaaay cheaper in San An"—and that's just a general problem. (Nolan)

Together, these perspectives help to capture some of the "food culture contests" (Hernández-López 2011) and gentrification pressures shaping San Antonio, including the desire by some long-term residents for culinary change and the problematizing of affordable options. These views also suggest that the City of San Antonio has invested in some public works based on how these projects present and compare or compete with offerings in other cities—and not necessarily with a concern about how they function for local residents. Moreover, these opinions reveal aspects of San Antonio's socioeconomic stratification and spatial inequality, as shaped by car-dependency and as some observe in differentiated approaches to food vending across the city.

4.2.4 Socioeconomic markers: loop roads and grocery stores

San Antonio is sometimes described as having a very different culture and urban form outside compared to "inside the loop" (Matiella 2009), meaning the city's US Interstate 410 loop road. As the city has expanded especially north towards Austin, these differences are sometimes framed as life inside versus outside the *loops*—referring to a second outer ring road (1604) that is emerging (Parker 2014b). For example, Max described life inside the loop or loops: "I like the history of it; the downtown urban planning nature of San Antonio is really nice. You lose it as soon as you leave the four-ten. But, I don't go out there so it doesn't matter to me [laughs]!"

Conversely, Vin discussed some of the day-to-day challenges posed by living inside the loop or historic footprint of the city:

> People are like "why don't you move closer to the city?" 'Cause it's old. … It's cold and it's old. And some things just are just not up to code anymore. So, like, you'd have to deal with a lot of wear and tear. … And, like, rat infestations and … snake infestations. … I'm just not built for that kind of stuff!" (Vin)

Such living conditions have prompted some long-term residents and newcomers to choose a life outside the loop or loops in favor of newer housing construction. For example, Max shared with me how his parents invested in a "new home" north of the 410 loop, describing the neighborhood conditions there:

> My parents wanted to give that suburban dream. Move out to the suburbs in the new home. So, I grew up out there but never knew any of our neighbors. Never … did anything outside of the house. … I don't think gated neighborhoods were really around yet back then, but certainly today everything is [gated]. … I could never be able to live out in that … environment again. The idea of sitting in a car at traffic lights and not knowing any neighbors does nothing for me. (Max)

These two perspectives suggest two patterns of movement in San Antonio: First, more affluent suburbanites moving into the city, and second, some economically poorer and middle-class residents abandoning older neighborhoods and properties exhibiting extreme decay. Additionally, Max discussed the impact of sprawling suburban development on farmland and natural areas outside of the 410 loop, suggesting possible future challenges for the city:

> Well, they had just clear-cut all the oak fields; they were putting the neighborhoods where all the oak trees were. … And so it was really taking over nature and expanding the city. And then it took them another ten years to start building on all the cow pastures and the farmland. (Max)

Additionally, Nolan talked about the impact of a few independent municipalities within and outside the 410 loop on some food truck activities. Independent municipalities developed in greater San Antonio historically just outside of the city boundary as a means for some local residents to segregate themselves from racial,

ethnic and economic integration (Miller 2001; Drennon 2012). Independent municipalities such as Alamo Heights also mark some of the areas within the 410 loop that are economically prosperous compared with neighboring distressed zip codes (Schwartz 2016; Economic Innovation Group 2017; see Section 1.6). Nolan suggested that independent municipalities can add another layer of licensing for some food truck operations interested in working in these areas (such as at some food truck parks), with the license fees helping to fund the governance of the independent municipalities:

> [T]hare a lot of small municipalities within San Antonio that you might have to get another permit for. … [Y]ou have to … give them their piece of the sales tax. You probably have to get a Windcrest permit—to whatever degree that is. Because Windcrest wants some money, just like … you, know, Balcones Heights or Leon Valley, or any of these small little … towns want their money. (Nolan)

Considering local trends in housing and development, Adrian described how local elite preferences might be changing—noting growing interest in the more walkable neighborhoods of the urban core:

> There are just some neighborhoods that are better than others. Like, we're gonna do better at … a bar in, you know, in the … greater downtown area. … [W]e're gonna do better at that bar than we're ever gonna do at a North Side bar that you have to, like, drive to—you know what I mean? (Adrian)

Additionally, Daniel suggested that some suburban areas might be losing wealthier residents. He also described the absence of food truck vending in wealthier suburbs of San Antonio historically:

> [I] hadn't had a taco truck experience or a food truck experience up until, geez, graduate school? Either I didn't seek it out or it never sought us out. … I wasn't living in the environment where that might occur. … [T]here were no taco trucks nearby there. I do vaguely remember, like, ice cream trucks; like, every neighborhood has ice cream trucks. … [I]t was not gated, but there was definitely

> more money than there is now. (Daniel)

Separately, Greg commented that local gourmet food offerings should be understood to be primarily a wealthier northern suburban phenomenon—with vendors commuting into downtown and to other sites of gourmet vending, such as to food truck parks: “You gotta know that most of your food truck operators live in the great north or northwest. So, you know, if they’re coming downtown, they’re coming downtown hot and loaded and ready to serve.”

This notion of gourmet food truck vendors commuting long distances to reach sites of gourmet food truck practices further suggests the car-dependency that defined San Antonio during my period of research, including in the downtown area. I noticed how driving separated wealthier populations from economically poorer areas, and how urban design encouraged driving for everyday tasks such as grocery shopping—even downtown. In San Antonio, grocery shopping is largely defined by H-E-B, a locally headquartered grocery store chain with operations throughout Texas and in some parts of Mexico. In various ways, H-E-B shaped local food truck practices.

For example, I noted H-E-B sponsorship of an annual gourmet food event featuring food trucks called *Culinaria*, and I observed food truck operating in some H-E-B store parking lots (Danner 2015). H-E-B stores also served as outlets where vendors might purchase ingredients, bottled propane and other supplies. Furthermore, H-E-B stores served as another marker of socioeconomic class distinctions and spatial inequalities.

Locally, the terms *Gucci-B* and *Ghetto-B* are sometimes used to describe different H-E-B stores located short distances apart but serving radically different socioeconomic realities—and often stocking very different products. For example, Vin described some of the differences between stores:

> [D]ude, we all have to eat. … H-E-B, I guess their market research is, like, really, really important. They’ve got stuff at, like, the South Side H-E-B that you won’t get at the West Side. You won’t get at Stone Oak—shit you will not get on

> the North Side at all. Like, each H-E-B has their own—they know their market really, really well … so they can … maximize their profit and serve their customers as best as they can. (Vin)

Vin's comments suggest choice, supply and income factors shaping grocery shopping and eating habits in San Antonio. Additionally, I noticed how the differences in stock depending on the H-E-B store (along with local urban design, traffic management, and public transit services) encouraged me to drive to more than one store to complete my household's shopping—a practice that some interviewees and neighbors also described engaging in. I also noticed that H-E-B sold gasoline (petrol) as a key aspect of their business model. Furthermore, I observed that H-E-B exerted considerable influence over the built form of San Antonio. For example, H-E-B representatives in late 2013 successfully petitioned the City to permanently close a downtown street —a section of Main Avenue a few blocks south of Main Plaza (see Figure 1.9)—to consolidate and gate their large headquarters, and for the approval of a new downtown store designed with a large surface parking lot and petrol station (Salazar 2015), challenging urban walkability. In subsequent sections of this chapter, I explore other local patterns of influence and urban change that interviewees and I noticed and that shape local food truck practices.

4.2.5 Microsegregation and gentrification

Longstanding and intertwined racial, ethnic and economic segregation and discrimination in San Antonio (de la Teja 1995; Blackwelder 1998) has been described as a local urban condition that residents sometimes fail to talk about or consider critically (Cave 2014). Counteracting that neglect, Lina discussed the "millennial" or new segregation that she observed:

> I was at a party—this is recent. … [Y]ou could see the segregation amongst the groups of, like, millennials there, too, you know? You see all the white kids with the white kids. You see all the brown kids with the brown kids. If they were Asian, they were either with the white kids or with each other. And I just thought that was weird. … [D]o we make each other feel uncomfortable or do we not welcome each other? The adults were even growing up [with racial and ethnic

> segregation in San Antonio]—but now, like, the younger generation growing up—their kind of segregation. And maybe it's not because they're racist. I think it's because they're not comfortable and ... don't know how to approach someone else? (Lina)

Lina's contrasting of a past generation's segregation with today's more close-in and less flagrant "microsegregation" (Tach 2014) indicates how conditions have changed in San Antonio—and are similar to what other researchers have noted in other major US cities (Hyra 2017; Schlichtman, Patch & Hill 2017). Her comments also suggest some of the impacts of younger San Antonians having grown up with more extreme patterns of segregated living, as enabled by car-dependency and in some case with neighborhood gating (Low 2001, 2003; Melinik & Morello 2013). Furthermore, Lina described how historically San Antonio's Mexican American community has been divided by class distinctions:

> It's also sometimes segregation amongst … the same … race. … I saw it as a child when I used to go with my grandfather to Alamo Heights; where they used to cut this one lady's grass. And I just saw the treatment he would get sometimes talked down to. And he spoke no—my grandparents spoke no English. So, I would, like, translate. … And so I would just be like "wow, these good, humble people … how can you treat them like they're scum? … [T]hey're your equal whether you have a million dollars in the bank and they have a thousand. (Lina)

Separately, Reina compared social ordering in Mexico with what she observes in San Antonio:

> [Y]es, skin color matters. But not to the extent that it does in the US. … There was so much mixing when the Spanish were here. … It's more socioeconomic classes than it is races. 'Cause when you're in Mexico you see—it's people. Unless you're from the indigenous population—in which case that is a race. … [F]rom a very specific indigenous tribe and you still live that way. … [I]t will be more about your cultural-economic class and the way you dress and act. Instead of about the color of your skin and your features. (Reina)

Reina’s observations about “cultural-economic class” distinctions in contemporary Mexico suggest the judgements about “dress, comportment and attitude, the labor they conduct and the products they produce and consume” that Nina Martin (2014, p. 1872)) describes as defining creative class politics in US cities such as Chicago, or how local government responds to different populations and practices based on economic interests (2014, p. 1872). In San Antonio, I noticed how similar considerations and interests shaped local governance in terms of decisions about which areas of the city received basic services like sidewalk repair as other areas demonstrated often grand public investment and expenditures. Reina also noticed some of the incongruities in the management of San Antonio’s public realm:

> Like, you just walk and the … actual infrastructure feels sad. I don’t know how else to describe it other than … everything seems to be a little deformed. … The buildings are just a little bit more grey. … The environment you live affects how you feel. And when your environment seems totally broken, you can feel that way. (Reina)

Vin also observed that physically poor public infrastructure could add to the burdens faced by less affluent families in San Antonio. Additionally, he described how the aging of the city’s building stock could steer entrepreneurs towards mobile businesses:

> [A family member] wanted a brick-and-mortar [restaurant]. … [S]he had to put so much money into getting it up to code and up to par that it just broke her financially. She blew, uh, I think at least ten grand [USD$10,000] trying to get it all set up; it was so torn down inside. … It was because it was just so old. Time had passed by without stuff getting fixed. So, yeah, it’s a really big issue. That’s why taco trucks are a lot more, uh, welcoming? To, like, new business owners and stuff like that. … If a taco truck goes bad, you just … get rid of the truck and buy a new one. As opposed with a brick-and-mortar. You can’t move a brick-and-mortar. You’re kind of stuck with the shit. (Vin)

As Vin suggested, less affluent local families can be financially or otherwise broken by relatively modest but not insignificant outlays of funds, such as USD$10,000 to maintain or improve their properties or investments. As I experienced, the decay of private property by age but also by limited funds for maintenance over time can be worsened by extreme and intensifying climate conditions and by limited local government investment in some areas of the city. Additionally, as I noticed, lack of basic public maintenance in some areas, including downtown, could sometimes signal processes of "demolition by neglect" (Davila & Olivo 2015, para. 20)—or the City intentionally helping along the decline of some areas and properties in order to encourage new investment and justify major changes.

For example, Hemisfair Park downtown (see Figure 1.9) is a public space that was formed for the 1968 World's Fair with the clearing of a racially and ethnically mixed and primarily working-class neighborhood—which was defined as blighted to help justify the clearance (Wolff 2004). During my research, Hemisfair Park was targeted for major redevelopment, with efforts to expand conference facilities and add new luxury housing there generating concern about loss of public space, facilities and access (Baugh 2017). Additionally, I noticed how various monumental and public buildings from the World's Fair era (such as the Women's Pavilion) were left to decay, and sections of the park targeted by redevelopment lost frequent public transit access. Max considered projects like the redevelopment of Hemisfair Park in describing local gentrification processes and the desires by some for segregation:

> We have a history of gentrifying neighborhoods and pushing people away in order to create something new. Even though something needs to happen … we clear it out instead of embrace and infill with it. … I don't know if anyone does it much better, but I think we probably do it as one of the worst. … And that Texas mentality that exists here. Even though there's so much more culture in San Antonio, we're all still Texans in a way. And feel like we need to be separate from others. And that comes down to cultures, I think. (Max)

Danica also pointed to downtown's Hemisfair Park redevelopment as an example of a negative change downtown for some local residents:

> [F]or Hemisfair [Park] they keep saying they want to take it pre-[19]68. … I'm all about moving forward. … But I feel like '68 was such a huge thing for San Antonio [celebrating the city's 1718 founding and San Antonio as a confluence of civilizations and cultures]. That they're not giving it the credit that that event deserves. That's where the Tower [of the Americas building, a space needle] came from. … San Antonio kind of got put on the map when the World's Fair decided to come here. And now they want to go pre- that? And I feel like, I hope they don't wipe out that important history of '68. (Danica)

Additionally, Max described gentrification in San Antonio as wealthier residents and economic interests attaching to and transforming once low-cost and inclusive endeavors, including beer-drinking:

> I think a lot of how this … starts is when … young artists and young professionals come in and they try to do something dynamic and they make it into a scene. And they do it with no money. They buy really dirt cheap housing and buildings. Make them cool. And then everyone with money follows. And "oh, we love [a specific neighborhood] now!" It used to be you were scared to drive near it. And now you're buying eight dollar [USD$8] beers there. (Max)

Max also described housing displacement and insecurity as a reality that many San Antonians are facing within the 410 loop: "Just eight years ago [in 2007] … I got priced out of [a downtown neighborhood] even though I was living with homeless people on my front porch."

Separately, Lina depicted recent changes in another center city neighborhood as exemplifying gentrification:

> [T]hey move into a community that's cheaper. And then they think that by fixing things up there … by moving in there, they think they're helping the community. And they are, to an extent, but then it also hurts the community. Because, you know, that person has more of a high income and it affects the property values,

> you know [and related property taxation]. And people can't afford to live there anymore. (Lina)

Furthermore, Lina described San Antonio as following a "Brooklyn" trajectory of displacement in some neighborhoods, but at a slower pace and as encouraged by local government:

> Puerto Rican communities. … Dominican communities get pushed out. People moved to Jersey. People moved to Baltimore [describing trends in New York]. … I feel like it's coming here*,* it's just not happening as quickly as it did in Brooklyn. And that's just the reality. Because I just don't think—I'm not sure what the City is trying to do … but it's become very apparent that they're trying to develop communities for other people. Not for the people that are living there; it's obvious! … [T]he poor people that live there … that think that place is going to be their home forever—don't realize that they might not live there forever, you know? … Yes, the vast number of people moving into Brooklyn were white. But there was that community of Indians, Asians that were mixed up in there. So, I always like to say: people with money—not necessarily people of another race. … And so I now see it—my opinion about gentrification is that it's people that have money. (Lina)

Lina went on to describe how individual residential improvement (including "green" or sustainable design) efforts could trigger housing pressures for neighbors by raising property values and thus annual taxes:

> I have a friend … the other day was telling me, like … "I'm really trying to get a promotion at work because our [property] taxes went up." … [A]nd I know the guy that built the [USD]$400,000 house … an all … green house. … I'm just like "okay, whatever." I'll never be able to afford that, but that's great that you can. … His house has affected a lot of the properties around him. He doesn't really get it. … And, I don't like to have arguments with people … that are A, not from here. That move here, thinking that … "well, you know, there's those [public housing] projects down the way." … [T]he belief that, you know, the

> "trash" needs to be taken out. … I learned not to be so judgmental. I think I've been in situations before where I was not doing well. … "Well, we [new residents] came … to clean it up and make it nicer." Yeah, but not for the people that live there already. You did it for you. (Lina)

Other interviewees also mentioned significant urban changes (including housing and other cost increases) that they noted in San Antonio, in considering local food truck practices. For example, Adrian identified a number of areas inside the 410 loop that he described as "coming up," or experiencing new investment and interest. Separately, Danica talked about noticing how downtown San Antonio was losing its appeal for many local residents due to the increasing costs for once more broadly accessible local attractions, such as the River Walk tour boats. Separately, Beth discussed, as a concern, how the downtown area seemed to be expanding—as fueled by developments such as the expansion of San Antonio's River Walk path network north and south:

> I wouldn't call this [area of San Antonio] downtown. Because if you're a tourist, and you're trying to find the Alamo and you walk all the way up here … you're really lost. We made a purposeful decision to stay out of the downtown. … [T]hey … re-created the downtown business district in order to… get more fees for food trucks. (Beth)

Also observing shifting interpretations of what constitutes downtown San Antonio, Ben discussed gentrification as "knocking on the door," or beginning to encroach upon, the West Side:

> I think they're on the fence line of the West Side already. Because they built … [new luxury apartments] that are right there. And that's like, whoa! That's real—that's knocking on the door right there. … There's a lot of people that are like, "nah. They're at our doors now." This is when we have to stay the strongest, you know? (Ben)

Furthermore, Ben described the imagined boundary of the West Side as expanding or shifting further west and northwest towards the 410 loop:

> [T]he West Side, now it's like this, you know [gesturing outward]? Sometimes you'll hear on the news: "Oh yeah, this happened on the West Side." Nah. Because we grew up central West Side. We grew up closest to downtown, right? So, when they say "West"— they're … way over by Marbach and 410, that's not the West Side. So, what me and a lot of people consider the original West Side is—ask … almost any older Hispanic person which high school they went to, they probably went to Lanier High School. … And you had these big rivalries and things like that. (Ben)

In contrast, Karen did not view the West Side as facing gentrification pressures yet, describing the area as "untouched." Like other interviewees, she linked gentrification trends in San Antonio to the actions of local government, and she also associated gentrification with some food practices:

> I think, into that neighborhood—it's fine. Because that neighborhood is still sort of untouched when it comes to City influence and public health influence. … [U]nder-served, under-privileged, low socioeconomic status; there is usually at the end of the [gentrification] movement. … [Y]ou're not going to mess with their nachos or *raspas*, yeah. (Karen)

Overall, my interviewees expressed an awareness of urban transitions involving individual investments and choices but also the work of local government and patterns of neglect—a combination sometimes framed as "place-changing" locally (Rivard & Vinson 2015), with impacts on local food truck practices.

4.2.6 Downtown gourmet food trucks and other public place-changing

The migration of the gourmet food truck movement to San Antonio in late 2009 and 2010 (Castillo & McInnis 2010; Chasnoff 2011; Davila 2011) led to what was described by some interviewees as a "Wild West," "pirate," "cowboy" or otherwise more frontier period of vending in greater downtown. Greg, like other venders

interviewed, described outmaneuvering competitors and existing vending rules as part of the new trend: “When I came through downtown and was being a cowboy, they hated me. Because I was setting up and doing things they just would never think to do.”

Greg went on to describe how these self-directed practices, as supported by customers, resulted in the City developing the Downtown Food Truck Program:

> The City didn’t know how to keep up with what people were doing. I mean, they were used to just … the roach coaches staying in the neighborhoods. But when they [food trucks] started coming into more visible spots, they [the City] had to deal with it. So, they initiated a pilot program, and that worked out. And then the pilot program was passed full-on. (Greg)

Greg’s comments suggest that local neighborhood food trucks (in his words, “roach coaches”) have generally avoided conflicts with their site selection processes, similar to what Hermosillo (2010) observes about *loncheras* in Los Angeles. Moreover, Greg described the City’s Downtown Food Truck Program as developing in response to food trucks moving into more “visible” sections of the city, suggesting the problematizing of street food vending in targeted areas of the city historically. Max shared a similar view about the program:

> [W]hat’s interesting, I think, is San Antonio’s reaction to it [the gourmet food truck trend’; ‘cause the whole nation embraces it. But then in San Antonio there’s this kickback [resistance], because we’re such a tourism town; where all the downtown restaurants are fighting back. And, you know, they try to do a campaign where food trucks can park around downtown. But then the restaurants say: “No, we don’t want them there; they’re going to take away from our business.” So, they prevented ‘em for a couple of years. And then [the City] finally started this pilot program where you have ‘em parked in front of Main Plaza. Or pulled up in just a few designated locations. … Nothing there for the nightlife when people are getting out of the bars …. Which I think is when you’d make even more money. (Max)

Max, like other interviewees, suggested that the City's regulation of food trucks and structuring of the downtown program is informed by select business interests that include the concerns of evening restaurants about competition. Nolan, for example, argued that the program is structured to compete more directly against San Antonio's working-class Mexican American lunchtime cafés downtown:

> AT&T leaves. Now there's a void. All these restaurants that were, you know, getting tons of business during the day now have to … scale back. And they still have to pay the rent. … And rent prices didn't go according with the economy; so when you have the downturn recession … you have these restauranteurs going out of business. … [E]specially the low barrier-to-entry restaurants, uh, primarily Hispanic restaurants. … I have heard … that they are not super excited about it because they rely on the lunch crowd as well. … [T]he downtown [program] rotation—it is a rotation. … I'm sorry, but [if] you're only open to two [pm] or something like that. I mean, that sucks; I get it …. [I]t's just a matter of—people don't live around downtown that much. (Nolan)

Nolan's comments help to draw attention to the departure of telecommunications company AT&T's headquarters from downtown San Antonio and relocation to Dallas in 2008. The move reportedly shocked local government leaders who described the departure as ruinous—given the loss of about 700 well-paid executive positions (described as comprising the city's non-profit board sector and fueling the luxury housing market) and damage to the city's reputation and business recruitment efforts (Poling & Pack 2008). As Nolan described, the departure hurt various services businesses downtown, but especially "low-barrier-to-entry" Mexican American restaurants. While Nolan suggested that the Downtown Food Truck Program was managed to minimize major impacts on lunchtime cafés with a "rotation" of sites, Beth argued that the program could be best understood as structured with the interests of more influential downtown businesses in mind:

> I think it was a compromise with the restaurant industry—the bricks-and mortar, the San Antonio Restaurant Association. And there's limits on the number of

> food trucks that can be downtown. And that kinda goes against what America is all about [laughs]! Competition is healthy. … If the restaurant is closed, people still need to eat. … People who are living downtown are asking: “We’d like a food truck here.” (Beth)

Beth’s comments indicate a view of the program as not serving the interests of costumers or vendors. Separately, Greg maintained that some program sites—which he called “parks”—selected by the City were undesirable for vendors and not where or when vendors would elect to operate if given a choice:

> There’s actually more parks, but no one wants to go to them. They tried to have all of them be food truck parks, but it didn’t work out. … Milam Park over by Santa Rosa [see Figure 1.9], they set it up. … But they weren’t getting the traffic. So, it’s basically been Main Plaza and Travis Park. … [T]hey tried to expand. But I think just the customer base—the market if you will—is deciding it’s here and it’s there. (Greg)

Greg’s comments suggest some aspects of the City’s program that I also observed—with food truck activity mainly concentrated at Main Plaza and Travis Park and adjacent office building sites, reflecting how the pilot stage of the project transitioned to focusing on these two particular areas (Olivo 2012). Moreover, Greg raised my awareness of the City’s use of the program to assist with place-changing work (Rivard & Vinson 2015)—or efforts to start “over with a different model” (Kelbaugh 2001, p. 14.4)—at key sites but in downtown more broadly. Greg described some of the downtown conditions that appeared to be targeted with the program:

> People would stand there and pee; drug deals would go down. Prostitutes would work. … Well, it’s not like that now. I mean, the homeless are now directed to Haven for Hope—that’s another paper [research topic] all unto itself. … [T]hey [local government] utilized … resources … to funnel and direct the homeless. … If there’s any sign of an uproar, you’ll see policemen coming out of trees. I mean, they’re driving unmarked cars. They’re dressed in plainclothes. (Greg)

Greg, like other interviewees, discussed San Antonio's visible homeless population in the center city when considering local food truck practices. Specifically, he mentioned Haven for Hope—a large facility providing services to the homeless that was built within the west side of downtown near the County jail. Haven for Hope is also near the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) downtown campus (see Figure 1.9), where the City' Downtown Food Truck Program occasionally scheduled trucks (see Figure 3.2). Additionally, Haven for Hope neighbors Centro Plaza—a major local bus terminal constructed in 2015 (Blunt 2015) and that different interviewees and contacts described as planned to host gourmet food trucks, as I discuss in Chapter Five.

Wedged next to an active freight rail line and sections of elevated highway, the USD$100 million Haven for Hope facility has been depicted as being like a "junior college campus" with various services on site (Smith 2017, para 11). However, the facility is anchored by Prospects Courtyard or PCY. As reported, PCY is an "expansive slab of concrete where those who are not ready for 'transformation' sleep," and where each evening, approximately "750 people crowd into an open-air space that was designed for 400" and "find a spot" on the concrete as their bedding (para. 15). Clients apparently face various dangers and threats of crime in the open-air PCY, which is sometimes patrolled by off-duty police officers and where the average length of stay for clients is approximately 104 days, reflecting the lack of alternative spaces for these clients in the city (Brodesky 2015; see Figure 4.1):

Figure 4.1: Prospects Courtyard (PCY) at Haven for Hope; © Matthew Busch 2017 (Smith 2017)

Haven for Hope has received international attention as an experimental public-private and Christian faith-based approach to providing homeless services (Smith 2017). It features prominently in a 2010 episode of the television series *The World's Strictest Parents* (2010). The episode depicts San Antonio as a conservative Christian community, "the buckle of the Bible Belt," while not discussing that an estimated half of the population is Catholic (Archdiocese of San Antonio 2016) and that the majority of residents are Mexican American. In the episode, two unruly British youths are required to stay with a wealthy Anglo family living in a luxury suburb north of downtown near the community of Boerne. The youths are driven into downtown to serve the poor and homeless as a form of strict parenting, and they enter Haven for Hope via a security inspection point equipped with metal detectors.

This episode thus helps to depict San Antonio as a city sometimes employing the bluntest approaches to public service when engaging with economically poorer residents and visitors. It also suggests efforts to recast San Antonio overall based on the demographics and ways-of-life of wealthier residents living in suburban areas far north of the city center. As I experienced via my fieldwork, the police intercepting homeless or visibly economically poorer individuals and directing them towards Haven for Hope coincided with various efforts to revitalize or reinvent different downtown sites by changing the clientele using these spaces. Greg discussed some of the changes he observed:

> I don't want to say they [the City] ignored the [downtown] parks but certainly there's new attention. Maverick Park, which is just off of Broadway [see Figure 1.9] … was a haven for the homeless. It's slowly being transitioned to a dog park. … What the opinion is [about Main Plaza] … it was just never done right. … I think they went too minimalist. And with fountains. And then the fountains didn't work. Because you have to understand. … Well, if there's a fountain in San Antonio and you're a *puro* San Antonian, your butt is going to be in that fountain as quickly as you see it. So, the fountains became a waterscape for the regular citizen. … They [the City] didn't want that. The City is trying to … push people to where the playscapes are. … As far as … Main Plaza, you have to

know that it was done and re-done five different times. What you see out there now is like the fifth renovation. And I don't think they're happy with it in its current state. (Greg)

The fountain jets springing from the grounds in front of San Fernando Cathedral that Greg mentioned were the USD$2 million "centerpiece" of the City commissioned revitalization of Main Plaza completed just prior to my fieldwork commencing (Olivo 2013a). The fountains were envisioned and designed by Project for Public Spaces (PPS), the consultants hired by the City for the project, to be a public playscape (Project for Public Spaces n.d.). However, as Greg suggested, the fountains at Main Plaza apparently attracted the wrong sorts of public use—which he described as too "*puro*"—and the fountains were turned off for a period (Olivo 2013a). Greg went on to describe Main Plaza as traditionally an important Mexican American working-class social space, which redesign efforts inexorably changed.

Greg took time to explain to me how, prior to revitalization work, the plaza east of San Fernando Cathedral functioned more like a traditional plaza in Mexico, a public space to gather and promenade (including by car), anchored by worship services and special events at the cathedral. Such uses are evident in published photographs of the cathedral grounds from the 1980s, and that show street food peddling there during special events (J.M. Scott 2015; see Figure 4.2):

Figure 4.2: Friars from the San Fernando Cathedral bless food booths along Main Avenue (now Main Plaza) as part of a *Cinco de Mayo* festival; © San Antonio Express-News 1985 (J.M. Scott 2015)

Greg's and other interviewee's observations about Main Plaza and other sites downtown highlight how some of the City's efforts problematize traditional uses and "regular" citizens, or economically poorer locals and visitors. They also draw attention to aggressive policing of homelessness and efforts to steer—or, in Greg's words, "push" or "funnel"—undesirable activity away from select downtown sites. As an example of this, City Manager Sherryl Sculley (the City's chief executive) was accused in 2016 of ordering local police to "devote officer manpower to sweeping homeless people out of the area surrounding her luxury condominium building" downtown. A police officer interviewed as part of this reporting said that they "'don't just sweep people out of an area,' but also offer rides to the city's $100 million Haven for Hope homeless-aid campus" (Garcia 2016).

Furthermore, Greg compared downtown parks and public spaces with "funny" or challenging neighborhood parks such as San Pedro Springs Park—the city's first municipal park and one of the nation's oldest public spaces (Stover 1996; Gonzalez 2015). Located in an economically distressed area just north of the city center, San Pedro Springs Park was not considered part of downtown during my period of research, despite historically serving as the city's main park. Greg described San Pedro Springs Park as culturally a neighborhood park, given how the surrounding area is defined by lower income households but also due to the provision of public barbecue grills there:

> San Pedro [Park] is kind of a funny place. You have to understand that culturally parks aren't going to be as successful for food vendors because people barbecue. You know, they go to the park, they're loaded up; they've got their picnic or whatever. … But I do know as far as regulation-wise, if the park [is outside of the downtown district and] doesn't have its own vending concession stand [or vending requirements], that as long as you're legal [a registered vendor], you can park there. So, it's first come, first serve. (Greg)

Greg went on to compare San Pedro Springs Park with Travis Park:

> You have to know that Travis Park … was for meth-heads [drug users], homeless people. … Travis Park was really lost. … [T]hey revitalized that park; a lot of outdoor art. And the [Downtown] Food Truck Program really allowed them to develop that. And now they actually do movies in the park; art exhibits at night. So, it's a thriving, living park. … I don't want to give you the sense that Travis Park was dangerous in the sense that you got mugged, but that very well could have happened. But if you were looking for a fix, if you were looking for a connection, if you were looking for something off the market, Travis Park is where you went. (Greg)

While Greg and other interviewees noted past criminal and "off the market" activity at Travis Park, alluding to the park's history as a drug market but also a gay cruising spot (Olivo 2013c), Karen remembered the park as a peaceful space. Her recollections contrast with official narratives that describe Travis Park as "barren" prior to revitalization (Project for Public Spaces, 2014):

> Travis Park… I didn't go there a lot [growing up]. I do remember … five years ago [in 2010] when … all of this change started to come in place. And feeling like that was the whole, like, gentrification thing that happened. … I mean, there was, like, homeless and that sort of thing. But then there was … some people that used it … like a quiet walking space—like, when you were walking through downtown … a quiet, peaceful place. And now it's like a—I don't know, like a tourist attraction almost. I'm not taking anything away from that, but it is different. (Karen)

Karen's observations echo local reporting about the revitalization of Travis Park in which some users of the park describe the renovations as largely "unnecessary" and serving primarily nearby hotel and other "money" interests (Olivo 2013c, paras. 23 & 250). Furthermore, this reporting suggests that the City's efforts to revitalize Travis Park were a means to try to "ameliorate" the park's "sketchy" history and dissuade longtime users of the park from returning (paras. 20 & 21). Karen considered efforts at Travis Park in critiquing the City's Downtown Food Truck Program and place-changing projects more generally:

> [T]he things the City does, I feel like … they wear blinders. Like, they're very silo-ed, and including the food trucks. Because I feel like they don't look at the whole thing. … [Y]ou create Travis Park, but what about the surrounding areas, you know? And, um, Greyhound people [bus riders]. It's interesting … sometimes they stick, like, this big … shiny thing in the middle of … a space where it doesn't fit. … Like, "oh, let's make these really cool food trucks!" Okay, but where are we gonna put them? … And they're trying to create gathering spaces now. But I think the approach that the *taqueria* [neighborhood] trucks have is better because they go to places where people gather. … And that's why a lot of these trucks fail. (Karen)

Danica also shared the view that the City's efforts at Travis Park, including the Downtown Food Truck Program, were aimed at changing the "clientele" of the park:

> [W]ith the combination of the [new] tables and chairs, the food trucks—I mean, it has brought a completely different clientele … you know? You're not going to come out … and think to get a free … sandwich. Or, you know, a brown bag lunch or something. When there's ten, fifteen dollar food trucks. It's a different … crowd that comes through now. … They wanted to change it. (Danica)

Danica's comments suggest the "charitable feeding" (Marks 2015d) exercises that traditionally have occurred at Travis Park, and which have been discouraged since the park's revitalization (Chasnoff 2014; Garcia 2015a).[22] Additionally, Danica shared with me some of Travis Park's history as a street food site:

> Well, there was … a hot dog stand. … The same man for, like, twenty years. … I remember buying food from him [growing up]. Now, looking back … and knowing … the other "info" I know about it, I probably shouldn't have bought that food. But I lived [laughs]! I didn't get sick, so. And—you know, that's so

[22] For example, Calvary Chapel of San Antonio has "devoted the last Saturday of October to handing out food and clothes to the needy in Travis Park" for nearly twenty years, but the Chapel was blocked in efforts to do so by Park managers in 2014, until a City Council member intervened on the church's behalf (Garcia 2015a).

> San Antonio; to have something like the little *raspa* vendors that pop-up everywhere. And … he was so successful. … He was from a time before the smart phone. … It wasn't like … a highlight of San Antonio. But it was one of those, like, photo essay moments. Like, "you're only going to find that here" sort of feeling. Um, and he was real, like, kind of ghetto fabulous. Barely skirting by. Had his little illegal side business going on at the same time. … Well, what I've heard about him was he was selling drugs on the side. And the hot dog was a front, but it was successful. Because it was at a major bus stop. … It's been a major bus stop for … my whole life that I can remember. (Danica)

Danica's comments suggest that encounters with economically poorer residents and entrepreneurs including street vendors have historically made for authentic San Antonio experiences (Zukin 2014). An article published in the magazine *Texas Monthly* in 1985 (Patoski 1985) that describes downtown San Antonio's street food scene supports observations that working-class cart-based food peddling has long been on offer downtown, with hot dog cart and *raspa* vending at Travis Park a noted feature—along with similar vending at Main Plaza and Alamo Plaza. In contrast, place-changing efforts at Travis Park and other public spaces have limited street food vending and emphasized planned family and more elevated cultural activities, including a now annual formal "Dinner en Blanc" fundraising banquet at Travis Park (Rocha 2016) and the occasional hiring of the park for major private events (Mendoza 2017a).

As I experienced, Travis Park was a highly staged and closely policed space, with policing seeming to target homeless or less affluent park-goers. Beth, along with other interviewees, noted excessive policing at Travis Park and in other parts of downtown, including at some restaurants. For example, she described one situation relayed to her by an acquaintance that echoes local reporting about the stringent policing of homelessness activity (Garcia-Ditta 2014):

> [T]here was this guy that obviously was panhandling or looking for money. And he said to this guy "you know, I'm not comfortable giving you money, but I'll go buy you a burger."

> The gal at the counter [of a local fast food restaurant] got all nervous and said “oh, I’m sorry. I can’t serve you.”
>
> “What do you mean? I wanna buy a burger for him [the panhandler]?”
>
> “No, no. Let me call the manager.”
>
> The manager came over and said “I can’t serve you.”
>
> “Why not?”
>
> And he [the manager] said “the cops [police] come by here … once a week telling us that’s against the law.”
>
> I thought we got rid of this with the [racial desegregation of] lunch counters [in] in the ‘60s [including in San Antonio; see Mendoza 2017b]! I mean, what I want to do is go and sit in Travis Park dressed normally and sit next to [a homeless person] and both of us read *War and Peace*. And see how long before he’s asked to move. Because I know it's going to happen. … Who’s the park for? You can’t say the park is for this class of people; I mean it’s a public park. City, it’s not your park. It’s our park. We own it. (Beth)

For Beth and other interviewees, local policing efforts downtown amounted to a pushing or “shuffling” approach meant to move economically poorer people out of sight or away from places targeted for change, such as Travis Park. Different interviewees saw this aim as being assisted by gourmet food truck vending. Moreover, Karen summarized the City’s efforts at place-changing as a transition in local government away from serving the general welfare and the interests of economically poorer residents:

> That’s why for me I think the [gourmet] food trucks kind of turn me off. … I feel like the City, when they do these kinds of programs, they make it very stupid.

> And they create barriers for … the people that, I think, need it the most. But then again, if their mission is just to create some trendy new thing, then that's not their intention. That's not their mission. (Karen)

Together, these viewpoints suggest, on the one hand, concerns by some interviewees about street crime including street prostitution and drug dealing downtown, and, on the other hand, empathy for "regular" users of public spaces, including the homeless and economically poor. They also pose questions about the City's management of the Downtown Food Truck Program and other place-changing efforts that are focused on transitioning the clientele of public spaces. These observations also indicate the loss of some traditional working-class mobile food vending offerings downtown, including the legacy of affordable hot dog cart peddling at Travis Park (Patoski 1985). Additionally, they highlight distinctions between neighborhood public spaces and "downtown" parks and plazas that are being transformed via public interventions and blunt policing that directs homelessness and poverty to marginal sites such as Haven for Hope—reflecting and reinforcing the city's stratification and segregation.

4.2.7 A bifurcated local economy

Nolan especially took time to describe San Antonio's economy when considering local conditions that shape food truck practices. He described it as an "an old dog's economy" dominated by oil-based companies like Valero and Tesoro, which are headquartered north of downtown near the 1604 loop. Nolan also observed that the local economy was divided or bifurcated, as exemplified neatly in the city's offering of only "two types" of dining experiences, expensive and inexpensive:

> So, you have two types of food in San Antonio; I really feel like there's not a mid-market option. … You have very expensive or not very expensive. You have high-end lunch areas, whatever, hotel restaurants … and then you have low-end Hispanic fare. They close down at two o'clock, you know? [T]hey don't go past the lunch hour. … [W]hich, I guess, works for them. … Like, AT&T was in downtown. … There was money in downtown. Well, now there's no real major company in downtown San Antonio. I mean, you have smaller companies. …

> [P]rimarily you have a lot of legal [services]. … [P]robably the highest employer downtown is government workers. (Nolan)

Nolan also discussed how new technology companies were shaping the local economy and downtown food offerings, by attracting new residents as higher paid "techie" workers:

> Rackspace is kind of the newest company. And they have … more progressive people working there. So, food trucks to them are not outside the realm of reality. A lot of techies, you know? … Rackspace employs 4,000 people [at offices downtown and at a large campus north of the 410 loop]. I can guarantee you that not all the developers that they have are from San Antonio. … I mean, we … didn't, you know, ten years ago … [have] multiple programs for education in how to be a developer, right? More than likely, you moved here from some other place to get a job at Rackspace. But you brought with you those notions of whatever the place you moved from were. (Nolan)

Nolan's comments suggest how San Antonio's professional workers are often defined locally as migrating to the city and apart from residents who grew up in San Antonio. Greg also described the city's bifurcated economy as shaping the dining market downtown, and he used Rackspace workers as an example of wealthier local customers:

> [Y]our customer base will break into different demographics. Now, you got your … eaters that will "hey, I'm buying from food trucks. It's trendy. It's in. I'm gonna shell out twenty bucks [USD$20]—ain't gonna change my life here or there," you know? "I work at Rackspace; I'm making six figures," you know? That's that realm. They flock to the [gourmet] food trucks. … They identify with that culture. … But the bulk of our customer base are local San Antonians. So, right down the middle, half of them are like "why am I gonna pay fifteen dollars [USD$15] for something in the street?" … [M]ost people here cook at home better than you can eat in the street. … [T]he other half of that group are locals that say "well, yeah, it's expensive but they [the gourmet vendors] gotta pay for

> gas. And they gotta pay for … being in the truck," you know—they convince themselves of the price. But when your customers have to convince themselves of the pricing of your food, you're overpriced. (Greg)

Greg observed that San Antonio's population within the historical footprint of the city is mainly working-class— which he defined as being a "local." His comments also suggest various working-class realities, such as a USD$15 meal being considered to be expensive, and especially for food served on the "street." Furthermore, his comments indicate that some diners of gourmet food trucks in San Antonio are aspirational and "convince themselves" of the value of paying more for gourmet food truck meals.

Different interviewees perceived that an advantage of food trucks for operators is being able to reduce or avoid some operating costs, but noted that gourmet food trucks do not necessarily pass any savings to customers. For example, Beth compared the cost of a gourmet food truck with brick-and-mortar restaurant costs:

> It's [USD]$60,000 versus [USD]$250,000 for a brick-and-mortar restaurant. … I think you can make a good living [with food truck vending] by not putting much money up front. I mean, [USD]$50,000 … is a lot of money; but it's not opening up a restaurant. And you have the ability to go where the people are, which is great. So, especially for chefs that have been in the restaurant business. And they know they're not going up. It's either "okay, do I open up a food truck" or "do I just do the same old, same old?" (Beth)

Beth's comments suggest a number of local social truths—such as the reality for many in San Antonio's foodservices industry of "not going up" or progressing with work for others, and that the estimated USD$50,000 cost of a gourmet food truck is comparably less than the cost of a local brick-and-mortar restaurant but still a sizeable sum (if not out of reach) for many San Antonians. Overall, my interviewees described San Antonio's economy as divided between the wealthy (those earning USD$100,000 or more annually) and the economically much poorer "regular" or "local" San Antonians who comprise the majority of the city's population within the

410 loop (see Figure 1.7)—and who, as suggested by some interviewees, might critique not only the price but the quality of gourmet food truck offerings.

In the next section, I consider other local factors that neighborhood and gourmet food trucks share in common. These characteristics and considerations shape vending practices overall, but also views about the differences between neighborhood and gourmet food trucks that I discuss in Chapter Five.

4.3 Common vending characteristics and considerations

This section describes some of the shared characteristics of mobile food vending that I observed and interviewees noted. These include aspects of local regulation and various considerations shaping vending operations generally in San Antonio.

4.3.1 Location considerations

Many of my interviewees associated food truck vending generally with San Antonio's evening and night time economy. For example, Vin discussed food trucks vending at local music venues and neighborhood "dive bars"—which I also experienced with my fieldwork. Gil talked about food truck vending happening along a specific neighborhood bar and club cluster, the St. Mary's Strip north of downtown, where some perceived gentrification (Saldana 2015). Separately, Greg described occasionally vending near nightclubs, which helped to improve the ambiance and attract more interest in the clubs. Greg also talked about how evening vending supplemented daytime vending efforts:

> Initially I thought of … day spots… but what eventually happened is I just started moving towards the night. … And, I mean, this is actually a comfortable day here. … In 2011, we … had three months of over 100 degrees [38C]. And it's just—you know… hot. … [T]he numbers were dead. So, it really forced us to look into something to do at night. (Greg)

Greg's comments suggest the extremity of local weather conditions, including long months of excessive heat. Additionally, he described some street food vending

occurring into the early morning hours, serving the city's "drinking crowd" and a range of lower paid service workers that he aligned himself with:

> Ten to twelve [o'clock at night] are people who are, you know, a little older and they want to enjoy themselves with their families a little bit later. But once eleven o'clock comes around, it's a different scene. And eleven to twelve [o'clock at night] is the closing of the old scene and now it's the drinking crowd. And then there's the night push, and you build up 'till 2 [am]. And then two o'clock is the last big push. … [A]t that time, we're serving the bar backs, the waitresses; because they tip out [finish work and divide their tips]. By the time they come out, I'm not gonna put a foot in their ass—"hey, hurry up." Hey, we're the same; we're in the service industry. Yeah, this is their time to unwind, smoke cigarettes, drink whatever sodas are left. … The hospital … so, you got their shift people coming through. So, 3:15 [am] is a beautiful thing, because it's when the faces now start appearing again, you know? (Greg)

Greg, like other interviewees, argued that evening and night time street food peddling benefitted San Antonio overall by assisting with sobriety:

> We're trying to sober people up. We're trying to get them ready for that drive home. And to be honest with you, the people that are in line [for food], you know, especially at night—they're staggering. But when they're done, they're awake. They're full. They're back. And they're able to get in their car and go home. And that's why the cops don't give us too much trouble. (Greg)

Greg's comments further suggest the car-dependency shaping San Antonio's social life, and also the dangers locally posed by drink-driving (Moravec 2014). Additionally, other interviewees stressed the importance of daytime food truck vending near schools that they were familiar with as another positive vending practice. For example, Rob talked about the vending that he remembered occurring near his school in Mexico:

> [M]y apartment was about four blocks away from … the school. So, I would walk every day. And there was a little truck. That served breakfast tacos. … [T]hey had five different kinds. … So, you know, every morning I would walk by and eat a breakfast taco and talk to the people that were there. And it was kind of like a nice routine to … interact with people and get your mind going …. Which is different than … a [gourmet] food truck, you know? (Rob)

Separately, Karen discussed food truck vending that took place near her school in San Antonio growing up:

> [W]e always had … a *raspa*, nacho, Cheetos [a type of packaged crisp] truck outside of our … school. … So, you know, we'd walk to it, and it was always, like, the thing. … [Y]ou hung out after class because most kids … had parents that worked, you know? Two jobs or whatever … so, they [the kids] had no place to go. … [T]here would be, like, this huge line. … And we all… knew the lady [the vendor]. And she knew what we wanted. (Karen)

Karen's comments suggest traditional street food vending in San Antonio appealing to young adults and fostering relationships over time—similar to how Rob perceived street food vending near his school in Mexico. Separately, Daniel also observed that local mobile food vending can appeal to children or young adults, and described street food vending as a rite of passage: "My kids haven't yet discovered that food can magically appear from a vehicle [laughing]! If they hear ice cream trucks rolling by, they don't get super excited and ask me for money… not yet. That awareness is coming, I'm sure."

Additionally, daytime vending near work sites was described positively by some interviewees. For example, Nolan talked about neighborhood food trucks and trailers operating near lower wage employment centers such as neighborhood retail shopping strips and call centers. Furthermore, Greg discussed food truck activity occurring at limited access work sites, including gourmet food truck vending at Rackspace headquarters north of downtown. He described Rackspace as having "six or seven trucks there at one time" on their closed campus, but by invitation only.

Additionally, he talked about access to toilets as a requirement of vending in San Antonio (but noting access issues at some Downtown Food Truck Program sites) and as another factor influencing vendor location choices.

Overall, these perspectives suggest some of the more "natural" mobile food vending market areas (Bhowmik 2010, pp. 13-14) in San Antonio (such as near schools, places of employment and bars and sites with access to toilets), and possibilities for vending throughout the day. Other potential vending sites identified by interviewees include near churches, bus stops and some parks and public recreation facilities such as sports fields and pools. As some interviewees discussed, climate conditions and vendor powering needs and considerations also shaped local food truck practices.

4.3.2 Climate and food truck power considerations

Climate conditions and approaches to powering operations were also noted by some interviewees as factors that shape food truck vending activity and vendor choices. For example, Rob emphasized how pivotal local climate conditions are to his vending:

> I've never looked at the weather as much as I do now because of the truck. I'm more constantly on my phone looking at the weather because that dictates how much food we need to buy. … [W]e try to … gauge our sales based on weather and temperature and cloudiness and all that kind of stuff, alright? Where we're gonna be at. … And so sometimes we get surprised. … [On one occasion] I didn't even check because I didn't think it was gonna be busy. … I go outside, and there's seriously like fifty people at lunchtime [lined up for food], with really crappy weather. … So, that's the unpredictability, you know? … [T]hat's … been the hardest thing to figure out. (Rob)

Beyond describing this one occurrence, Rob shared that poor weather conditions such as rain typically negatively impacted on his food truck business, and he noted a prolonged rainy season as a new development in San Antonio. Separately, Greg observed increasingly and surprisingly cold weather locally during winter months as climate changes that he viewed as beneficial to his business. Supporting this

perspective, Justin shared with me how he avoided buying from food vendors or even picnicking during hot weather and seasons, stressing: “I don’t want to be sweating when I’m eating.” Additionally, Adrian described not vending during summer months, to avoid working “twice as hard” in “terrible” conditions to “make half the money.” Climate conditions in San Antonio can thus impel some food truck vendors to adopt seasonal strategies—hence some local vending sites were inactive for parts of the year, as I noticed.

Extreme weather conditions and flexible approaches to vending can also present opportunities for food trucks to assist in natural disaster and other emergency relief work, as exemplified by the efforts of food truck vendors in New York following Hurricane Sandy in 2012 (Sheekey 2013). As another example, Beth described serving meals after a regional weather-related disaster: “We stayed there for three days. And that’s when I realized that a food truck could be more than just taking care of the people in our community.” As Beth explained, shew has been able to assist with emergency relief in the region as her operation is completely mobile, meaning it can operate at sites without access to electricity and other utilities.

Varying approaches to powering food trucks became apparent to me through fieldwork and interviews, with some vendors expressing a preference not to operate completely mobile or “off the grid.” For instance, Adrian described seeking to vend where higher voltage electrical outlets or plugins have been installed for food trucks:

> And that has a lot to do with why when [a specific venue] calls and says “do you want to be here tonight?” Or [another specific location] calls—any place that puts in that infrastructure. Yeah, because you just saved me a bunch of cash. And not… running a loud-ass generator that costs me money, you know? (Adrian)

Adrian also described some of the challenges of operating a petrol powered generator as a power source, which is a typical practice when connecting to the electrical grid is not possible: “I probably got to put five gallons of gas [petrol] in that thing. And they smell. And they’re large. And a lot get stolen.” Other interviewees also mentioned generator theft as a challenge faced by food truck

vendors generally, noting the "cages" or "housing" sometimes added to the exterior of vehicles to secure generators.

Furthermore, Greg described generators as temperamental and nearly a disposable product for vendors, stating: "I probably go through them every four, five months." Separately, Ben discussed other challenges of petrol generator use:

> [W]hat we're actually still dealing with right now is … finding a generator that's big enough. And not super-loud. And not crazy fucking heavy. … We're on our fourth generator now. … I've been to two events where, dude, the generator didn't work—it wasn't strong enough. … Who would have thought? And then … I might be at locations where I don't want a generator on. … [I]t was just like … seventy-five people out there? Hanging out? And I didn't want to have the generator there, like rrrrrrrrn, you know? (Ben)

Rob also described preferring not to operate a generator as a vendor. Like other vendors I interviewed, Rob talked me through some of his operation's power needs, and how they shaped different vending choices:

> [W]e're always plugging in. Unless we do an event where they don't have [plugins]—and our generator has been broken for nearly a year now. So, we hardly do business outside of food truck parks. … Well, when we need one [a generator], we rent it. From Home Depot [a national chain hardware store] or something. … [I]f I'm running my truck full capacity—AC [air conditioning], you know, refrigeration, lights and then all the plugs … I'm pulling about 26 amps, so I gotta be on a 30 amp … otherwise I won't be able to operate. … We wanted to implement solar panels just to run our basic electric—not run, like, refrigeration or anything like that but run our lights. And then provide power for our POS [point of sale or register] system, our kitchen printer and stuff like that. … Never got to it. (Rob)

Rob's comments suggest that especially gourmet food trucks can have a large energy footprint, as shaped by features that some vendors might consider non-essential, such

as running air conditioning or a “kitchen printer.” We also talked about the use of bottles of propane by some vendors as one of the potential fire risks associated with vending. Additionally, Rob described more ad-hoc approaches to sourcing electrical grid power for street vending operations that he had experienced in Mexico—such as clipping cables onto city power lines or otherwise wiring without permission into municipal power supplies. Rob called these practices “*diablitos*” (little devils), and I sometimes noticed similar practices in San Antonio.

Reina also shared memories of mobile food vending approaches in Mexico in considering food truck practices in San Antonio, noting innovative uses of bottled propane that could make operations incredibly portable:

> This I saw in other parts of Mexico. They would straight off the propane grill. … Not a grill but like a burner? And they would do *tacos normales*, *tacos al pastor,* like, bean tacos. And basically, they would pre-make them somewhere. And it’s like in a big pot. And there’s water at the bottom and there’s like this grate. And the tacos sat over it and they were all wrapped in aluminum foil. … It’s … kept warm. You don’t even need a truck to move it. You could probably carry it yourself. … Like, you could probably pull this off on a bicycle. (Reina)

Reina’s comments suggest that a key characteristic of Mexican street food vending is making the most from the least, and that this vending sometimes involves simply reheating foods prepared at home or elsewhere. Generally, I observed that neighborhood food trucks in San Antonio seemed to have a much smaller energy footprint than gourmet trucks, with operations rarely using a loud generator. They also tended to generate less food service waste depending on the order, relying on paper bags and aluminum foil especially for tacos. I also observed that both neighborhood and gourmet food trucks would look to attract customers based on perceptions of food quality.

4.3.3 Supply chains and perceptions of food quality

Some interviewees suggested some of the public health and other benefits of mobile food vending in terms of perceived food quality. For example, Gil described a typical meal from a neighborhood taco truck outside of a bar or club:

> You know, like, Mexican style street tacos where you get four mini tacos on a plate? … [W]ith a bunch of limes, and you squirt all the lime juice all over it. … [A]nd it has all the raw onion and the cilantro; it's … amazing [see Figure 1.1]. Especially … if it's, like, two in the morning. And you're just walking out of the bar. And you need to eat something before you make any other choices in your life, you know? (Gil)

Gil's description captures some of the qualities of the meals that I often, but not always, experienced from neighborhood vendors as part of my field observations. I also noticed that although some interviewees joked about or stressed not getting sick from taco trucks and other neighborhood food vendors, none suggested that it was possible to get sick from gourmet food truck items, as I unfortunately experienced. Asked about the possibility of food-borne illnesses associated with his work, Rob mentioned that no one ever questioned the quality or nutritional content of the foods he vended from a gourmet truck.

Rob also described selling food items that his family enjoys eating, dishes prepared with ingredients sourced from grocery stores and wholesalers, as he did not have the time to "make more stuff from scratch." The supply chain that Rob shared with me stressed suppliers that some neighborhood vendors also use, such as H-E-B. Depending on what items they sell, vendors in San Antonio also have access to locally produced Mexican or Tex-Mex ingredients and food products. For example, Max noted that neighborhood taco truck vendors might source ingredients from Sanitary Tortilla Factory and other local suppliers:

> They're probably hitting the little produce *tiendas* [shops] on the South Side. To get all their onions and garlic and, you know, the vegetables. And they're maybe getting their bacon from H-E-B. But, yeah, the good ones should be making their

> own tortillas in the truck. I don’t know if they do or not. … They’re probably going to Sanitary to get their tortillas [if not making them]. (Max)

The Sanitary Tortilla Factory opened in San Antonio in 1925, and it continues to grind corn into *masa* to make tortilla products for local grocery stores and *tiendas* (shops) and other customers including some restaurants and vendors (McInnis 2011; Pilcher 2012). Local *tiendas* include chains of small shops such as La Michoacana Meat Market and La Fiesta Market that provide fruit, vegetables, meats and other groceries through outlets that cater to working-class Mexican American customers and areas of the city. Vin discussed relying on *tiendas* and preferring local suppliers in these terms: “my life is sponsored by the people at H-E-B or the people at La Michoacana …. I straight-up never shop at Wal-Mart.”

The name Sanitary Tortilla suggest concerns that have historically existed in San Antonio and elsewhere in the US about the health risks of homemade Mexican foods and reflecting biases against especially working-class Mexican American households (Pilcher 2012; McMahon 2013). Justin, a former sanitarian (food business inspector), discussed local efforts to improve food hygiene more broadly:

> Justin: What you find … as an inspector is varying levels of understanding of what makes people sick. … [E]ven though from a business perspective you’re not going to do good business if you’re getting people sick. … I think a lot of habits are driven … by how you normally do things at home, you know? How you learn. So, not everybody learns to wash their hands. … [M]anagers are now required to take a two-day food safety course. … [T]hey are required to … pass the test. … So, I would say the level of knowledge has increased.

Justin also shared with me his definition of what he considered to be “quality” vended food in San Antonio: “Quality is overcooking, undercooking. Maybe not having a good spice. Didn’t have a good flavor. … It’s more of the culinary side. … I think a lot of quality issues like that are solved by business. If your quality’s not any good, then you’re not selling and you’re going out of business.”

Additionally, Karen, another local public health worker, discussed with me how a less affluent local customer might approach a meal from a vendor differently than a wealthier customer, and thus might define food quality differently: “They’re not going … to eat the ‘healthy’ menu item. They’re going to get full because they’re hungry, because their next meal isn’t for, you know, the next day. Or the one time they go out, they’re gonna have like a big, dense, calorie dense, plate.”

These perspectives suggest the reliance of gourmet and neighborhood food truck operations on a local supply chain that is often held in common. They also indicate the subjectivity involved in defining the quality of vended foods in San Antonio, with these definitions sometimes exhibiting a bias against working-class Mexican American practices. As some interviewees discussed, such biases could also be expressed with the local regulation of food trucks.

4.3.4 Regulation and commissary

Some interviewees regarded the regulation of mobile food vending locally as narrowing who can possibly be a licensed vendor. For example, Justin noted how local regulation prioritizes public health and safety concerns but also feeds the professionalization of food truck vending—with various fee-based trainings and certificates introduced in recent years presenting significant barriers of entry for some vendors. Drawing from his past experiences as a sanitarian, Justin described how food health and safety rules are constantly evolving—in some cases based on changing environmental conditions and farming practices:

> The Conference for Food Protection [a national body] every year looks at the current rules [which shape state rules that dictate municipal rules]. They look at new information that’s come about—like, a change that has occurred in the past four years is that cut tomatoes require refrigeration; so, prior to that, it wasn’t a requirement. But they noticed that, with research done, that cut tomatoes grow bacteria well; they’re not as acidic as they used to be. Probably due to farming practices, you know, and changes in the attributes. (Justin)

Justin also discussed how food truck regulation in San Antonio includes an annual inspection of vehicles, as scheduled by the vendor but dependent on the hours and availability of local government. He also mentioned that vehicles could face unscheduled inspections during the years, which tend to occur during special events or to be set in motion by customer or other complaints:

> I think the City … has probably done a better job by asking for a sticker [displaying that the food vending vehicle has been inspected for the year]; so that they can, if they need to … find that owner. … [N]ot knowing where a food truck might be at a given time, they are not searched out by the City … Health Department on a regular basis. It's the locations [where food trucks operate that can trigger more random inspections]. … [T]hat initial approval was the definite one time the health inspectors would take a look at the vehicle. (Justin)

Furthermore, Justin drew attention to some of the challenges posed by the City's evolving water requirements for food trucks:

> So, they're required to have hot water on the truck. For washing dishes. … [W]ashing their hands. So, that water—once it runs, you know, through the sink and into the waste receptacle. It has to be dumped somewhere. It's supposed to be at a commissary [or other approved facility]. So, I would say … if a truck was doing it down a storm drain or something and somebody saw it … that might be a time [that a complaint is made, triggering a City response]. (Justin)

Justin also described how water requirements for food trucks intersected with San Antonio's commissary, or food truck storage and servicing, regulations:

> [I]t's a requirement through the Texas Food Establishment rules that mobile food trucks [and some pushcarts; see City of San Antonio n.d.] return to a commissary once every 24-hours. So, a part of … [annual] inspection would be that they have to come in with the location of their commissary; usually they come in with a letter that said that … they are signed up for that [commissary] service … that

> they can come and wash the truck, get rid of refuse, refill water, stuff like that. (Justin)

Commissary requirements were a common point of discussion in my interviews with vendors. They tended to express that local commissary rules are a necessary but not an especially practical or useful requirement. Rob, for example, noted how local commissary requirements and interpretations of these rules are changing—based on the demands of new gourmet vendors and the actual conditions at, and use of, local commissaries:

> [Y]ou're required to have a commissary to be able to pull a health permit. Commissaries provide you a letter saying they're your commissary for [USD]$200. … But … most of 'em are not used by the trucks. And that's why the City … allows food trucks to now use … RV [recreational vehicle or camper van] service stations for dumping water. And for refilling freshwater tanks. … [T]hey understand that the City of San Antonio does not have the infrastructure to serve the new generation of food trucks, you know? The food trucks that are actually pulling permits. That are on Twitter and Instagram and Facebook, you know? The more gourmet, you know, the more legit. So, in that respect, that's why they are more flexible with some of the rules. And you just can't obviously cook there [at registered RV service stations]. You can't detail [clean] you're truck there. … [Y]ou still gotta go to a commissary to do that kinda stuff. (Rob)

Rob's comments further suggest San Antonio is a city where the rules governing food truck vending might be applied subjectively. Separately, Greg talked about his experiences with local commissaries positively, but he also suggested that few vendors follow local commissary regulations:

> So, when I go to the commissary, I go when my equipment is pretty much done for the run. … And I'm cleaning … dumping the wastewater and getting everything clean. … It's gated; it's air conditioned. … It's one of the older ones. Nobody uses it—nobody uses it. (Greg)

In contrast, Adrian shared the perspective that local commissary requirements and procedures are “a joke”:

> Commissary is still a joke. … It’s not at all dumb to ask food trucks to go to the commissary regularly. That’s just good … practice. But I don’t even think City Council—I don’t even think the [state] legislators realize that the commissary that we’re supposed to go to doesn’t exist. Like … they have a checklist of things that a commissary should have, you know? Greywater and freshwater and electricity and a place to prep food and store food. … That does not exist in San Antonio. So, any time we go get our thing signed off for that commissary, we’re really kind of all bullshitting each other. The City is bullshitting themselves about—they’re bullshitting us about whether that actually exists. And the commissaries are like “yeah, oh, we’re doing that.” And the [food] trucks are like “yeah, we go there. And do all our work there.” Every—it’s a big ring of bullshit. (Adrian)

Beth also criticized San Antonio’s commissary offerings as not matching official descriptions or providing practical services:

> [C]ommissary is stupid. I mean, if it’s really a commissary, then all these commissaries should provide a commercial kitchen. … [T]he City is so weirded out [concerned] about food safety. … [G]o to the restaurants that are breaking all the rules. That are charging people and inflicting pain. … So, the commissary, I don’t really know what the purpose is. Except for getting rid of oil and getting rid of trash. (Beth)

Moreover, Beth described the current commissary system as appearing to represent local corruption if not simply subjective interpretations of the requirements, based on the example of one commissary:

> “Where you were supposed to put your [dirty] water was just this little bucket. It was—somebody was paying someone off. There was no—there

> wasn't anything … but it was a requirement. So, I felt like somebody was getting a kickback from this." (Beth)

Likewise, Ben indicated that some local commissary practices could seem "shady" or questionable, but they are a necessary obstacle for local vendors to navigate in order to obtain City permits: "The guy [commissary operator] was like 'bring cash.' And I'm like, well, this is already sounding shady. But I need that permit—I need that notarized commissary letter so I can get my permit."

Additionally, Nolan shared the view that neighborhood food trucks on the West Side likely do not follow commissary requirements:

> "I don't know much about the commissary model …. I mean, they're going to fill up fast because I think there are a handful. … I can guarantee that not all food trucks park at commissaries. … San Antonio is not necessarily renowned for following every rule in the book. … [A]nd, especially, you know, the West Side taco truck. Yeah, I … really doubt they're parking there." (Nolan)

Nolan's comments draw attention to the reality of there being only eight recognized commissaries in San Antonio during my period research, with none located in the city's West Side (City of San Antonio n.d.). They also suggest that some working-class practices seem to exist outside of the City's purview, until those moments when they intersect with more elite interests—such as when neighborhood vendors move into more "visible" spaces in the city, as Greg described wealthier areas of San Antonio, or when a formal complaint is lodged with local government. As Justin shared, official complaints (such as lodged through a phone call or online form) must be responded to, at least procedurally:

> I think it's normally customers [who lodge complaints]. Bad experience or got sick. Maybe one or the other. … [A]nd the City of San Antonio and other health departments have a responsibility to follow-up on every complaint that comes

> out; you can't let them go. They have to be investigated and addressed. So, any complaints that come in … they're going to pursue 'em. (Justin)

Justin also made me aware of some of the limits of local regulation, including the challenges of enforcing existing rules when vending takes place on closed private worksites:

> [T]hey had a complaint and they needed to do an inspection of the truck. But they couldn't get on the property; it was private property. … It was a fenced-in, gated warehouse property. And so the only people allowed in there were the workers, you know? … [T]hey didn't have approval to go on the private property. … This truck would go from commissary or wherever they were located, drive on to the property and then drive back—but they were never anywhere else in public where they could inspect them. (Justin)

Justin's comments indicate the "closed" or non-publicly accessible nature of commissaries and some worksite vending in San Antonio—sites that I did not attempt to access through the study based on the approved research protocol, but that might offer directions for future research, as discussed in Chapter Six. Separately, Greg suggested that the City appeared to not have the "capacity" to keep up with the demand for licenses, presenting challenges to vendors:

> Metro Health comes through and they inspect my equipment. There's a fire inspection at the same time there is an equipment inspection. So, you get two stickers. … The administrators are still on South Alamo [Street] but the actual nuts and bolts of it is waaaaay down Houston Street on the East Side. … [T]hey are already over capacity. … [W]hen I went to go get inspected, there were, like, seven trucks. … [I]t's five hundred bucks [USD$500] for Metro [Health annual inspection]. Two hundred bucks [USD$200] for the fire [permit]. The fire [permit] never existed prior to … 2011. (Greg)

Greg drew my attention to new regulation requirements and fees that he associated with the arrival of gourmet food truck movement in the city—and specifically to the

addition of fire inspection permits. Separately, Rob described new water testing and other water requirement as obstacles and challenges faced by food truck vendors:

> [W]e gotta get our water tank … our fresh water, tested every month. … I mean, some people use it for cooking, but it's mainly for washing. … To renew your permit, you've … gotta keep a log of your water tests. And then when you renew your permit, now you gotta go get a little container that has some powder chemical in it. … [A]nd then take it to a testing facility. And they provide the results and then you gotta send it back to get your permit. (Rob)

Furthermore, Adrian talked about the past police background check requirement for mobile food vendors, a change that he and other interviewees attributed to the lobbying efforts of SAFTA: "Everybody that works on a truck has to have a federal police background check. That cost [USD]$60 per employee and takes, like, six weeks to get. So, I can't tell you 'hey man, I need help tonight'—can't do that. That's bullshit, you know?"

Beth also regarded the former police background check requirement as a barrier, and another example of local government seeking to collect fees from vendors without apparent concern about how such fees or mounting requirements might narrow participation in licensed vending:

> [T]he City wants to put their hand in every pocket. And they keep generating these fees for silliness. … Everybody on my truck had to have a criminal background check. And they wouldn't take a criminal background check if you worked at [another place requiring one]. They … wanted their own money. (Beth)

Moreover, Beth challenged the City's proximity rules for food trucks outside of the central business district (City of San Antonio, n.d.)—rules that were, in part, overturned late in 2015 based on a legal challenge brought by the national group Institute for Justice (IJ) (Panju 2015; Panju & Wilson 2015). Gil also discussed the

City's proximity rules, and how they negatively impacted on neighborhood food truck vending.

> [T]here's a new restaurant opening up. … And they supposedly contested the … taco truck across the street. And what I heard was … that it [the taco truck] actually got shut down for an evening; they weren't allowed to operate. And then some agreement was come to. … This is [the influence of] a restaurant that doesn't even exist yet. (Gil)

I observed that SAFTA largely did not engage with IJ's legal challenge of some of the City's proximity rules, which IJ described as targeting laws favoring brick-and-mortar food businesses at the expense of traditional street vendors (Panju 2015; Panju & Wilson 2015; see Chapter Two). Beth, along with other interviewees, discussed how street vending rules seemed to change frequently since the arrival of the gourmet food truck trend, and based on the influence of more elite local business interests—to the detriment of some vendors and in the interest of customers:

> Ridiculous. You outta be able—these are public streets. … I mean, I understand not being across the street from a restaurant; I mean, I do understand the brick-and-mortar thing. But, you know, we have bars that don't serve food. … So, with the regulations, some of them make sense. Like being 300 feet from a school. … But what happens when the restaurant is closed? … I constantly drive around to make sure there are no new signs [posting restrictions against vending]. (Beth)

Louise, another vendor interviewed, also criticized local regulation as too restrictive and, especially downtown: "There's too many codes downtown. … I think it's just not right. There's too many things we have to do to be able to sell. And when we find somewhere to vend. … [T]he location is usually a parking space … it's hard. It is hard."

Additionally, Rob described downtown as over-regulated for food truck vendors and purposefully limiting vending to a handful of trucks:

> I think they are trying to control it too much. And the food trucks that are in the Downtown [Food Truck] Program are the same over and over and over. … [P]eople are going to start getting tired. [And] some of the locations are not as successful as the others. I mean … where they're sometimes really, really bad for the food trucks. (Rob)

Rob's comments suggest an awareness of the Downtown Food Truck Program as determining locations or sites and operating times based on factors other than necessarily the interests of customers or vendors. Rob also discussed how vendors can be challenged by heightened informal policing and surveillance of some wealthier residential areas—as enabled by formal Homeowner Associations (HOAs) in gated communities (McKenzie 2011) but also by the de facto neighborhood associations established or emerging in other sections of the city:

> I didn't know how our HOA functioned. But the HOA … we [as resident members of the HOA] hired a completely separate company. … [T]here's a lady [company worker] that drives through neighborhoods and spots things that she writes up. And then sends letters, like, "your trashcan is out at this house," you know? "You need to put it in your garage or in the backyard"—that sort of thing. Well, the whole time I was thinking it was my neighbors reporting me [about having a food truck parked a few days in the neighborhood]. It wasn't. … I finally find out … it's that lady. … And I was like "you had me thinking that people were—like, good neighbors were reporting me when it was really you." … I told her …"look, we pay you to do this job. … [T]he truck hasn't been parked there for over a month; we removed it. It was temporary. … Just drop it and move forward," you know? And then we didn't hear from her ever again. So, I think she was just kind of, like, flexing her muscles, you know? (Rob)

Rob's comments suggest some of the pitfalls with the private and commercial regulation of some neighborhoods in San Antonio, including potential abuses of power by those enforcing the rules. As a resident of a non-HOA governed area, I also observed how the informal policing of neighborhoods—as empowered by neighborhood social media platforms such as Facebook and NextDoor, in concert

with formal complaints filed with the City—could have negative impacts on some mobile food vending practices. For example, I noted comments in a neighborhood Facebook group about an H-E-B branded food truck parked legally on a neighborhood street. The food truck might have been placed as advertising or parked there simply because the driver of the truck lived in the area. Regardless, online discussion led to engagement with H-E-B management and the City, and it resulted in the removal of the food truck from the neighborhood.

As discussed by some interviewees, virtual and actual social networks can have powerful impacts on local street food vending practices, even shaping how some operations are approached by City regulators. Additionally, vendors' interactions with customers can help make or change local places.

4.3.5 Family work and making familiar, comfortable places

Different interviewees described local food trucks as at times exhibiting family-like interactions between vendors and customers, which could be understood as in keeping with the city's big small town social dynamics (Burroughs 2014)—and also with the tradition of street food vending locally often being family-run and part-time businesses. For example, Rob described vending with his wife and interacting with regular, repeat customers:

> It's funny, because I've worked the griddle all the time. … [M]y wife works the window. So, my back's always to the window, so I don't really interact with the customers as much as she does. And we'll be sitting on a slow day and somebody walking up and she's like "start making [an item]." … She knows them [the customers]. Yeah, so I get up and start putting it together. And, wow [it's what the customer orders]! You … you start learning the regulars. (Rob)

Rob also talked about the challenge of finding anyone other than family members to assist with food truck vending:

> [I]t's so hard to find … people that are willing …. I mean, for us it's a part-time job, you know? … And then it's hours that are difficult for them [hired workers]

> to get another part-time job. … [I]f you hire someone to run the truck during the week … for lunch … that's like a big chunk of the middle of the day. … So, it's been difficult. (Rob)

Separately, Greg talked about the challenges he faced running a family-based street food business, as supported at least in part by regular or repeat customers:

> The business was like another child. And so there was no separating it from my personal life. … And when times [sales] were slow, we'd have [unsold food] for dinner, you know? More than once a week. … [W]e're blessed to be in San Antonio. Where the locals will latch on to things that are real and push you when you get tired. … I've gotten tired. But it has been my locals saying "hey, you're not out here." Or, like, when you take a few days off and then you get set up and everybody busts your chops [chides you] because "hey … you're slacking," you know? So, it's just that organic very real feel that changed my life. Changed my whole way of thinking. Not just the entrepreneur aspect, but just my place in the world. My consumption, my waste, my interaction. (Greg)

Danica shared a similar viewpoint as a regular customer of a specific family-run neighborhood taco trailer over time:

> I mean, they're cheap tacos. They're good; they're consistently good. It's a family-owned. … [I]t's a real small food truck; like, super small. … It's a trailer. They bring it on [tow it with] a truck. … I've watched a little girl … she was probably about six or seven [years old]. Coming and taking our orders to the cars. And now she's, like, fourteen [years old]; got a little boyfriend over there. And I feel like, when I see her—I know when the family goes on their trips—where their family's from. … You get that sort of feeling. … It's, like, a total family operation. (Danica)

My observations indicated that both neighborhood and gourmet food truck operators will sometimes run trucks as family businesses. Likewise, both neighborhood and gourmet food truck vendors could strive to create atmosphere and encourage return

business via their interactions with customers—although I noticed that the staffing of some gourmet food trucks was less constant, as some interviewees also observed. For Greg, vending consistently, engaging with regular customers and setting affordable prices helped to create "an 'ease' environment" for customers. He also talked about how he worked to heighten the "experience" of his street food vending:

> Well, it's about the taste and the experience. … I mean, if you stand too close, you're gonna get splattered with some of the grease popping off this grill. … If I showed you what I do, you could do it—you could go off to Australia, you could do it, and it [the food] would probably come out the same. But what we go after is the experience. It's the "hey, how are you doing?" If you need to find something, we can help you find it. … And … you're really experiencing what you would in New York or Chicago. … It's like the street traffic sucks you towards the curb. Because there's so much energy swirling around you. And were just right there. (Greg)

Furthermore, Greg discussed "latching" on to specific buildings, spaces or street corners over time, a practice that other interviewees called posting-up. Greg described this approach as collecting "trickles" of sales over time, improving otherwise wasted or vacant urban spaces through constant presence, or grinding:

> I found out that, in the east coast, you latch yourself to a building—whether that be an apartment building or a bank. … [Y]ou really gotta be a piece of furniture; you gotta be there. And you gotta be there every day. And you gotta smile. And you gotta make eye contact. And they're not gonna buy in a month or two months. But once they do, they will be your customer. … I gotta grind, I gotta be out there. … [I]f I just go weekend to weekend, it hurts my brand. And it hurts my customer base that wants to see me. And not only that, you know, trickling … water collects in a bucket real fast. … I made a spot that wasn't being used—they couldn't [even] park a car there. And I turned it into money. (Greg)

Daniel similarly stressed that the environment immediately around a street food vendor can generate interest and helps to make urban spaces:

> It seems to me … that a lot of the experience of eating at a food truck is … you don't get to go inside of it. You're ordering at the window. And you either have to sit outside or take it some place more comfortable. So, the external environment—like, the actual environment outside of the truck, matters a great deal. And because it's so hot down here. … So, I think if you want the food vending to really take off you have to create pleasurable environments. To which people can go to these trucks and sit comfortably to enjoy their food. … But of course that requires them to carry a bunch of extra stuff, right? (Daniel)

Beth also noted how props (such as seating and even resources for dogs) could assist vendors in creating ambience for customers around their operations. Additionally, she stressed that food trucks improve places by being more stationary and exhibiting permanence: "The City doesn't really acknowledge—if you're a food truck, you're not like the ice cream … truck that goes all around the neighborhood; you stay in one location. You know, you don't … just drive around."

For Max, food trucks made his greater downtown neighborhood more walkable:

> I'll cook a meal every single day. And I'll eat leftovers for lunch every day. … But, yeah, there are those times when I don't want to cook. And I want to be able to stop some place on the way home. And I would actually stop at a little food truck if the price is right. … Like, can I eliminate the car and just walk? I don't want to drive. (Max)

Overall, my interviewees suggested that some local food truck vendors strive to make the sites where they vend more comfortable or "home"-like. Food trucks achieve this by being a more constant presence in a location, positioning in sites that are easy to access and improving conditions for pedestrians—such as by providing seating and resources for kids and dogs and minimizing noise pollution from power

generators. My interviewees also expressed that especially neighborhood vendors often employ low-cost tactics to attract and improve conditions for customers.

4.3.6 Vendor rasquachismo and clustering

Some interviewees described some local vendors as embodying *rasquachismo* (Ybarra-Frausto 1991) or elements of *puro* San Antonio (Bragg 2009; Chan 2014)—or the sensibility of making the most from the least or from what others might discard or not consider. For example, Nolan described food truck vendors as entrepreneurs and generalists who are constantly making-do:

> Entrepreneurs tend to be jacks-of-all-trades; they have to. I mean, like, if I'm running a truck. … Or, if I'm doing any business—if it is starting out, it's me. … And I gotta be the front of house, the back of house … from accounting to janitor. … So, I mean, yeah, you have to be dynamic if you're gonna make it work. (Nolan)

For Nolan this making-do approach was evident in the different ways of launching a food truck business that he had observed locally, such as starting from scratch and creating a food truck by hand as opposed to purchasing a brand new food truck that is fully equipped and "pre-figured out":

> [Y]ou have people who are entrepreneurs that don't understand entrepreneurship. Or, you know, how to think quickly or creatively and stuff like that. … Just, like, buying an [USD]$80,000 truck; it's pre-figured out. … [O]n the other hand … [a local vendor] physically welded, made his truck. …The truck … is valued by insurance as four grand [USD$4,000]; who knows how much he put into it, right? … It can be a … low-cost entry. …I mean … you drive down Culebra [a major West Side street] … and I've done this, because there was I time I thought about starting a truck. … Pulled off, you know, at a used car lot. There's a truck there. … Well, at the time, I had no money. So, [USD]$2,500 was a lot, but that's not a lot. … Now, the inside was terrible; there's a lot you have to re-do about it. … I mean, you got to get a lot of approvals and all that; there's more cost associated. Can you do it for less than eighty grand [USD$80,000]? Of

> course. … I mean, the barrier to entry to a food truck can be as low as you can find it. (Nolan)

Danica also described some of the different approaches to starting a food truck that she noticed, and she emphasized that neighborhood vendors often exemplify traits of do-it-yourself entrepreneurship:

> For me, it's money. Maybe this truck had [USD]$10,000 to start up his business. The one in my neighborhood? They just pulled the stuff together, you know? Maybe they had 500 bucks [USD$500]. And that was including getting the meat, the to-go plates. Getting all of that, you know? (Danica)

In my interviews, estimates for the cost of launching a food truck business locally ranged from USD$500 for the most makeshift or *rasquache* neighborhood efforts (such as converting a personal vehicle) to USD$80,000 for a new and custom-built gourmet truck. Searches of the web platform Craigslist during my period of research supported interviewee claims that food trucks could be purchased locally within this price range, and searches also drew my attention to the availability of used newer model and custom-built food trucks for sale, as some gourmet food truck operators presumably exited the market.

Additionally, food truck and trailer building or making—the retrofitting of new and old vehicles for mobile food vending purposes—was discussed by some interviewees as local practices that could embody vendor *rasquachismo*. For example, Rob spoke with me about local builders sometimes using former delivery vehicles, including step vans, as a starting point:

> [T]here are some guys on the South Side—some brothers. …You can tell they build their trucks by their interior finishes. … [E]verything is custom built; they don't buy anything out-of-a-box. … Which eventually has its issues, right? And then all the … aluminum that they use in the interior. … [T]hey use it in a certain way so you know … just by looking at that … who … built the truck; which is kind of interesting, you know? Like, I've walked into … trucks and I'm like "oh,

> did so-and-so build your truck?" You can tell by how it's built. …There's [also] Cruising Kitchens [a San Antonio builder]; and there's another guy in New Braunfels [north of San Antonio] who builds trucks as well. There's a couple of trailers that folks have built themselves. (Rob)

Rob's descriptions of local food truck builders suggest directions for additional research, which I discuss in Chapter Six. Moreover, Rob indicated how the local construction of food trucks could influence local practices:

> I've heard complaints about certain builders and stuff like that. … And also [about] users, you know? … I know of one truck that had a lot of problems and it's been through multiple owners, you know? So that truck's already kind of blacklisted. … [W]ell, it's a nice truck and the equipment is nice but the owners just did not … take care of it. You know that that truck—if you know of anybody thinking of buying it. … It's just interesting because you start get to know trucks. And who they go to. And who sells it. And so, you know what trucks are good and what trucks are not in that good of state, you know? (Rob)

Rob's comments suggest how closely-knit San Antonio's food truck vending community was during my period of research, and also the potential for individual vendors and other actors to be "blacklisted" or marginalized. Although some interviewees expressed an appreciation and respect for more *rasquache* or maverick approaches to vending, Adrian shared that other vendors questioned his more daring or entrepreneurial tactics when he first started out: "We would occasionally have other food trucks call and be like 'you gotta stop doing that stuff, man, you're making us look bad.' We didn't do anything wrong—you guys just aren't hustling like we are, so. You know? … [W]e were way more pirate-y about it."

As part of "pirate-y" vending approaches, Adrian, like other vendors I interviewed, talked about bending or "milking" some of the existing rules to his benefit, and to the annoyance of some of his competitors:

> [I]f you're on public property—the street—you can park right in front of a restaurant. You shouldn't, you know? It's unethical and not nice. But you can; it's not illegal [barring the rules governing the downtown business district; see City of San Antonio n.d.]. And that was something that we did … we definitely milked that rule for ourselves when we started. … [W]e wouldn't park in front of people [restaurants]; we'd park right down the street from them. And occasionally … they'd bitch about it. But we never got sent packing by the cops. Because we absolutely were following the law. (Adrian)

Greg similarly talked about how he would find loopholes in the City's rules or spots where regulation was lax, especially when he first started out as a vendor:

> I wasn't supposed to be there; I knew I wasn't supposed to be there. But it's the 'Wild West.' Listen, I've gotta make a living; this is what I choose to do. And I need to make some money. I'm loaded up … I'm legal [operating with permits]. Let's see what I'm gonna do. … And I actually worked that spot for about four months. And I will tell you, it was fun. … And … we were getting slammed. … [A]n immediate success. (Greg)

Nolan argued that the capacity of food truck operations to claim spaces could be confronting to local restaurants:

> I would like to know from your research what … downtown restaurants think of the growth of food trucks? They have to be pissed off. … I would be fighting it tooth and nail, because that's taking away from your business. How can you compete with … in and out in ten minutes, got your food and gone? (Nolan)

Additionally, Nolan speculated about the possible advantages of mobile vending compared with brick-and-mortar investments, particularly given the growth of "e-commerce" (online sales):

> Food trucks are … a great mode. … Brick-and-mortar. … It's stuck in the ground. It's not moving anywhere, you know? … I mean, location for stores is a

> big thing … and this will be an interesting study later on—how e-commerce and the internet will affect retail. Because brick-and-mortar restaurants traditionally have been located near shopping centers. … [R]eally, food trucks might be a better option as this takes on; because I can … locate to where things are. … A [single] truck does not function well as a destination. Unless you happen to be that damn good. And that's hard to come by. … But … you're not a truck if you sit. You have wheels for a reason. (Nolan)

Like other interviewees, Nolan drew attention to changing consumer trends and options including e-commerce as shaping local food truck practices. He also discussed the capacity of food trucks for movement and relocation and their dependency on surrounding urban conditions (including the prevalence of and customer familiarity with street food vending) to draw customers. A technique that I noticed some vendors using to sustain or improve their businesses and nurture street food vending could be deemed *vendsharing*—when a single vehicle is used by more than one vendor at different times. For example, Ben described a vendsharing arrangement that he was familiar with:

> And people … other food trucks are actually asking them, "aren't you scared that they're taking away your business?" … They were like "we have our business. We're established. We've been here. So, actually, we're just taking more business away from y'all." … It was a collaboration. … Pretty much two trucks with two menus in one truck (Ben)

Overall, these perspectives indicate a penchant by some local food truck vendors to make the most of existing possibilities. Although my interviewees expressed that both gourmet and neighborhood food truck could sometimes exhibit these sensibilities, they also described neighborhood and gourmet food trucks as two distinct classes or schools.

4.4 Gourmet and neighborhood: Two different schools?

My fieldwork took place approximately four years after the arrival of the food truck movement in the city (Castillo & McInnis 2010; Chasnoff 2011; Davila 2011).

Interviewed in 2015, Nolan observed that gourmet food truck vending in San Antonio could no longer be considered a fad locally, and I noted that gourmet vending continued as I wrote and edited the thesis in 2018. Separately, Daniel described a "bandwagon" of interest in gourmet food trucks when the trend first arrived in San Antonio. Hel also observed that gourmet food truck offerings have, from his perspective, homogenized: "If I see four … trucks in front of me, I bet they all serve pretty much the same thing; it doesn't matter which one I choose." Daniel's comments suggest the commercial sameness and "homogenizing forces" that sociologist Sharon Zukin (2010, p. xi) observes in New York as part of gentrification processes there.

Daniel, like other interviewees, also depicted gourmet food trucks as not the same as neighborhood trucks. Moreover, some interviewees described neighborhood and gourmet food trucks as existing in separate socioeconomic classes—or, as Rob suggested, in "two different boxes" or "levels":

> [T]here's Mexican trucks … that try to play at a different level, you know? And there are some that have been very successful—I mean, they're just two different boxes, you know? … I mean, I love taco trucks. There's one that I always go to. … I grew up with that in Mexico; I'm a street food type of person. …But the dynamic and what a taco truck represents, I think, is completely different than what a food truck, a gourmet truck—or I may say gourmet but not really gourmet. It's a different business model. It's a different approach. That how you serve food, how you interact, how you … intermingle with the urban fabric, you know what I mean? There is a difference. (Rob)

Nolan also noted clear distinctions between neighborhood and gourmet vending, which he described as separate "industries":

> All of the food [truck] people fall into two industries. The ones that use social media and have a brand and they're doing it legally and trying to build something. And then you got those that—"hey, I get off of work. I gotta ice cream truck. … I'm gonna go work this … part-time. But I'm not trying to build

> anything. I'm not trying to get two trucks; I'm not trying to get a building," you know what I'm saying? "This is just passive income." (Nolan)

Nolan further described neighborhood food trucks as "unbranded"—evoking for me the development of the term maverick locally (Inskeep 2008; Schwartz 2008). Moreover, Nolan linked the differences between neighborhood (unbranded) and gourmet (branded) food truck vending with San Antonio's observable extreme spatial inequalities: "I'm saying that depending on where the economic level is of the side of town you are on, that will tell you whether or not if you find … a branded truck versus an unbranded truck."

Likewise, Adrian shared with me his view that neighborhood food truck vending is a different "school" compared to gourmet truck vending, and that neighborhood practices would likely continue into the future:

> I don't think that those are ever going to go away. … [A]s long as there are Mexicans living in San Antonio, there will be people buying tacos out of food trucks. … [W]ith *raspa* stands and taco trucks … the vibe at those spots really, really does match what you would see on the street in Mexico. It's a different school, you know? So, as long as there's a Latino population here, there's going to be that. For sure. (Adrian)

Together, these perspectives indicate the stratification of food trucks locally and the city more broadly, ideas that I interrogate further in the next chapter (Chapter 5).

4.5 Summary

In this chapter, I shared perspectives about some of the local social and urban conditions shaping food truck practices generally during my period of research—to help to contend with the guiding research question that emerged from the study. Specifically, I drew attention to descriptions of San Antonio's bifurcated economy, spatial inequalities, gentrification and patterns of microsegregation (Tach 2014) offered by different interviewees in relation to local food truck practices. I also highlighted comparisons of San Antonio with conditions in Austin and Mexico made

by interviewees to suggest how local practices reflect but also differ from developments in these and other areas during the era of cognitive-cultural capitalism, or the “quest for the creative city” (Scott 2014, p. 566).

Additionally, I shared how interviewees described the regulation of food trucks locally, along with other factors they observed shaping food truck practices generally—such as local climate, supply chains and areas of the city where vendors might find customers. Furthermore, I drew attention to aggressive policing of the public realm downtown that some interviewees noticed and described as biased against economically poorer visitors, residents and vendors. Linking this policing with the structuring of a gourmet Downtown Food Truck Program, these perspectives help to capture the local obsession with “shopping and security” that Zukin (2010, p. xi) describes as defining contemporary US cities and challenging the “ideal of open access” and democracy in the current economic era (p. 129).

In the next chapter (Chapter Five), I build from these findings to investigate and problematize the social segregation and ranking of gourmet compared with neighborhood street food peddling in San Antonio.

Chapter Five: Food Truck Vending and Possible Futures

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I build from preceding chapters to present findings that help to demonstrate how neighborhood and gourmet food truck practices in San Antonio bring to light atypical patterns of gentrification in the US and some of the related differentiated regulation, spatial inequalities and social exclusions shaping this predominantly Mexican American city in the era of cognitive-cultural capitalism. I describe neighborhood and gourmet food truck vending in San Antonio as distinct and separate practices to help illustrate how neighborhood (or working-class) street food peddling was perceived by some to be stagnant and undesirable in comparison with more expensive and purportedly more innovative and healthful gourmet vending.

Furthermore, in this chapter I present possible directions or futures for local street food vending, as suggested by interviewees in considering local food truck practices and broader trends. I do so to challenge perceptions of San Antonio generally, and economically poorer areas and residents of the city especially, as irrelevant and disconnected from national and global developments—and to further position San Antonio as a case study that can inform fuller understandings of US urban life and changes in the twenty-first century.

5.2 Neighborhood vending

In this section I plot what neighborhood mobile food vending in San Antonio signifies to venders and customers alike, with a focus on some of roles that neighborhood vending can play for working-class residents and visitors in the city.

5.2.1 Feeding San Antonio's workers and old world economy

As different interviewees expressed, what has been called neighborhood taco truck vending locally (Davila 2011) connects with San Antonio's history as a predominantly working-class Mexican American city. Gil, for example, described how taco trucks connected with his past work in the local construction industry:

> I don't know if I can … remember, like, the first food truck. … I know it was definitely a taco truck. … My … family … we're all involved in construction work. … And, so, I think my first experience was the food trucks coming to job sites. … [T]hey weren't … necessarily always taco trucks. But they almost always had breakfast tacos, you know? (Gil)

Gil's comments suggest the importance of breakfast tacos locally, a hearty and affordable food item that can fuel physically demanding work. Various interviewees mentioned the importance of breakfast tacos to local cultural identity. For example, Rob discussed breakfast tacos as a daily ritual in northern Mexico, and I noticed how San Antonians responded when breakfast tacos were described as an invention of neighboring Austin (Chandler 2016). Additionally, Max shared his experiences with a neighborhood truck offering tacos for breakfast and lunch and otherwise operating in ways aimed at appealing to local laborers and repeat business:

> [T]hey … started parking [a] taco truck there [in a parking lot]. And it's a hit. And you get everyone … that's going to work stopping there. You've got [a construction company] a couple blocks away; I always see a truck stopped there on their way out to the job. So, I finally—took me like a year—I never have cash …. And I pull in and … ordered. … It was dirt cheap—I mean a dollar [$1USD] a taco. Just like a good price and made-to-order right there. They're heating up the tortillas on the *comal* [grill]. And … it wasn't fabulous tacos, but they were just workin'-class, fill-your-belly, big-ass tacos for a dollar. (Max)

As I observed, neighborhood food trucks offered large, dense and "made-to-order" food portions at low prices and served at hours and locations convenient to low-wage workers. Ben shared a similar view, based on his experience catering a worksite lunch as the operator of a gourmet truck:

> [O]ne time we got to do this lunch … and they said … if we can keep the price around seven-fifty [USD$7.50 per meal], and it includes chips and a drink. … And we did it, and even then it was too expensive. It was really blue collar workers, and they might get … twenty bucks [USD$20] for the week for all their

> food. There’s a taco truck there, which is clearly it—like, $2[USD] hamburgers … and there’s a taco line. I’m not competing with that; this is not ours. This is not our … area. Which is fine. We have no problem with that. … And that’s why you have different food trucks and restaurants and locations. (Ben)

Reina also expressed awareness of the financial realities that local working-class residents including some vendors face: “When you’re trying to stay alive, you're trying to sell enough to make rent this month. … It’s: ‘I make it or I don’t have a house to live in.’”

These perspectives indicate how high the stakes and close the financial margins can be for some local neighborhood food truck businesses, which impacts on their vending approaches. As Max and other interviewees noted, neighborhood food trucks tend to accept cash payments only, although I did encounter some operations able to process credit and debit card payments—suggesting broadening access to payment technology and changing local tastes. Nolan suggested that cash-only payments and other practices such as marketing with “flashing lights … on the side of the street” mark taco truck vending as an “old world economy” approach employed in “lower socioeconomic” and “undeveloped” areas of the city. Furthermore, Greg described neighborhood peddling as following an “old Mexican” model that gourmet food trucks had “switched the game up on” or outmaneuvered.

These perspectives help to connect neighborhood food truck vending with what some academics document as old San Antonio street market practices (Arellano 2012; Pilcher 2012)—such as enhancing customer access to the cooking experience, peddling from underutilized but accessible and trafficked spaces where they are welcome and advertising not with conventional branding but through more immediate props and cues such as use of light sources and music. They also associate neighborhood vending with San Antonio’s working-class tempos, low wages and making-do tactics.

Adrian joined other interviewees in asserting that gourmet food trucks do not necessarily compete with neighborhood trucks, and further contended that

neighborhood trucks do not consider gourmet trucks to be a threat: “Most of them couldn’t give a damn. Because they're like ‘we already have our people. And we make a good little living by ourselves. And it’s delicious. And people like us. We don’t need Facebook,’ you know?”

To exemplify this, Adrian described sometimes operating in close proximity to neighborhood trucks, without conflict or rancor:

> [T]hat place [a neighborhood taco truck] is just packed every night. Because … they’re the post-up mentality, and their food is cheap and consistent. … They’ve been there forever. We even used to park, like, right around the corner. … And they never had any beef [problem] with us whatsoever. Like, we used to buy their food, and we’d bring them food, you know? And they were like “this is our spot and we’re just gonna make money here whether you’re here or not. So, I’m not really concerned about it.” (Adrian)

In contrast, Rene and Vin discussed how they were opposed to—and not indifferent about—gourmet food trucks entering working-class areas of San Antonio or posting-up where neighborhood food trucks have traditionally operated, such as near some bars:

> Rene: I kind of give them the side-eye [a sign of disapproval].
>
> Vin: Straight up, I don’t like it.
>
> Rene: I don’t like it. I would rather see a beat-up, mobile food truck.
>
> Vin: Yeah, like, we’re like the salt of the earth. … [T]hey [gourmet food trucks] feed … the more hipster crowd. … I’m like, you’re diluting it a bit; you’re not as in tune with the culture. You don’t get why food trucks are that way; like, why they’re there. What purpose they serve. … They [gourmet food trucks] just want to make a quick buck, you know? (Rene & Vin)

Interviewees including Vin and Rene made me more aware of how some San Antonians scorn what they perceive to be the “quick buck” approach and cultural or socioeconomic disconnectedness of some local gourmet food truck efforts. They also helped to raise my awareness of a wider field of neighborhood food vending practices interacting with and informing local food truck operations.

5.2.2 Other neighborhood approaches

The links between food trucks and a range of neighborhood food vending approaches became more apparent through my interviews, observations and everyday life in San Antonio. To help frame discussion about other forms of neighborhood street food peddling beyond the taco truck or trailer, Figure 5.1 depicts a San Antonio *paletero* pushing a bicycle propelled cooler cart with a large bag of *chicharones* stacked on top. Figure 5.2 depicts what could be described as a *raspa* or snack truck selling to local school children (although the *raspa* vehicles that I encountered were typically converted step vans or passenger vans):

Figure 5.1: A *paletero* participating in San Antonio’s annual César Chávez March for Justice; © Jose Arredondo 2017 (Arredondo 2017)

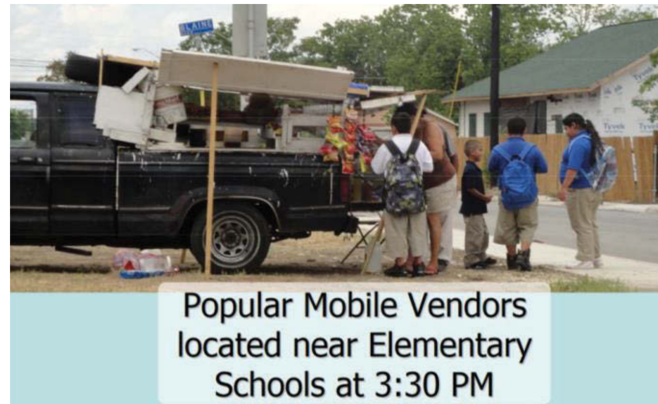

Figure 5.2: Image from a Metro Health presentation of a *raspa* truck; © Kathy Shields (Shields n.d.)

The sights and sounds of *raspa* van and *paletero* vending have a long history in the city, as many interviewees noted and Ben recalled from his childhood:

> [I]t was all, like, *raspa* trucks. Or the guy with the bicycle selling *paletas.* … I don't remember too much except going out to the flea markets and seeing the taco trucks there. … But it … was more on the *raspas*, you know? Because, no matter what, you hear that ding-ding-ding. … and you just run, you know? So, then you … have a party, and you have seventy-six freaking dollars [USD$76] that you got to pay. Because all your nieces and nephews—or my cousins now want, everybody wants a *raspa.* But that's really what started it all, you know? (Ben)

Ben's comments suggest the importance of family connections locally while sharing two practices that he felt best captured traditions of street food vending in San Antonio—*raspa* vans and *paleteros*. Max also referred to *paleteros* and *raspa* trucks and vans when considering local food truck practices, and he shared with me how he characterized the typical local *paletero*, invariably a man:

> I would say—and to this day still—usually Mexican or Central or South American immigrant …. [M]ale. Probably, you know, between [ages] 35 and 50; sometimes 60. Um, just trying to hustle [work] and … sometimes he's doing it as a side-hustle. Like, they have their real job and then they have that as their side gig. (Max)

Max contrasted his childhood experiences growing up in the city's northern suburbs with what he has observed as an adult living inside the 410 loop and east of downtown, describing the intensity of *raspa* van activity in his working-class but changing neighborhood:

> [T]he ice cream truck that comes through the neighborhood …. [E]ven out on the North Side there was, like, one ice cream truck per week that would come through. … [A]nd then I moved downtown and especially the East Side—where we have about ten trucks per day that come through. … Mornings … and they even come by at 10 o'clock at night—you know, just that last dessert. Or that last treat somebody wants. … People stop [use] them constantly. … [Y]ou can get everything, from … *tamarindos*—salty, sour-y, different types of foods. To your Frito chili pies [see Figure 2.1]. … I mean, even microwaving up frozen food out of a box. … You can get a corn dog. Really, just [an] all-around full-service kind of ice cream truck. It's almost a food prep truck. … They just go down every street. And … each one has its own signature sound, you know? One'll have the theme from [the films] *Rocky* and *Scarface*. And the other will have warped Christmas music that's just an old tape that rrrrrrrrrrrr. … [S]o you can identify what truck's coming and what you want to get. (Max)

My observations confirmed that neighborhood *raspa* vans will, in some instances, roam neighborhood streets and advertise with recorded music and other sounds (bells and horns). They also often offer an expanded menu of dishes beyond *raspas* and packaged ice creams. As Max suggested, they tend to avoid wealthier and more formally and informally policed areas of the city, such as the North Side. As I also observed, San Antonio's *raspa* vans and trucks will sometimes post-up or be stationary, operating as a more constant and regular presence at locations including parking lots and some neighborhood parks.

As Max observed on the East Side, neighborhood *raspa* vans seem to specialize in "prepped" foods, such as chips or crisps served with hot cheese sauce (see Figure 2.1). They also tend to serve cold treats beyond packaged ice creams and the typical

raspa or sno-cone—creating treats with shaved ice that combine savory and sweet flavors and ingredients including shaved ice, syrups, fruits, pickles and candies. Ben described some of the items that he enjoyed from a local *raspa* truck as a youth:

> [I]n the parking lot, there used to be this truck. And I remember it, because I was like "ah, man, Mom, can I … get an extra 50 cents or a dollar or two to get hot Cheetos [a type of packaged crisp] with cheese?" And then like a nice lemonade or Coke, or whatever the lady [vendor] has. … My favorite was always the chip cup spirals … with cheese. … And I might get a cucumber with the chili [powder], but it was the spirals with the cheese. … [T]hat's what I wanted. That's what all the kids had. … [I]t was like a Frito pie-type thing where you open up the bag [see Figure 2.1]. … [T]hey call it in other places a "walking taco." I'm like, who the fuck calls it a walking taco?! (Ben)

Additionally, Lina recalled *raspa* van vending from her childhood in San Antonio:

> Those were a significant part of my childhood. Running into the street. … And in my grandmother's neighborhood, which is on the West Side. … Man, they would come by once every half-hour. So, it was super common to have an ice cream truck there. … Especially in summertime. … [Y]ou knew that if you missed one, another one would be coming really soon. (Lina)

However, Lina was critical of the foods that youth might access from *raspa* vans and other neighborhood vendors, especially when snacks form the main part of a young person's diet:

> I really do hate that the kids are eating Takis [a type of packaged chip or crisp] and all that other stuff. But it's hard when you don't have money. And that sometimes was the kids' dinner. … Because … their parents were at work all day. Or they didn't have their parents at home. Or they were latch-key, you know? There were so many different variables behind why these kids ate that food. And so it's just become a staple, and it's become something that is like

> “oh, I can just go get that for a few bucks [dollars]. And I’ll be good. For the rest of the day,” you know? (Lina)

As Lina’s comments suggest, the items vended by neighborhood *raspa* vans tend to be affordable and feature packaged foods as ingredients. Additionally, I observed that *raspa* vans could offer the easiest and most affordable access to a hot or cool treat in some neighborhoods in my study area—with vans in summer months circulating slowly through some residential streets or posting-up next to public sports facilities. I found that *raspa* van foods could make for a snack, but I would not want to depend on these heavily processed food items as my main nutrition or as a child. Similarly, I would not want to exist primarily on duck fat fried potatoes—as an example of a local gourmet food truck offering, as I discuss later in this chapter.

Considering neighborhood *raspa* vans, Karen shared her preference for locally made Ricos cheese sauce (White 2015) when occasionally purchasing hot snacks from these vendors as an adult—a practice cultivated in her youth:

> [T]he funny thing that we always remember is … they [a specific *raspa* van] used Ricos for the cheese. … [W]henever we have a craving for nachos, it’s like “Ricos nachos?” Or, like, “regular cheese nachos?” You know, there’s a total difference there. … It’s that bright orange, yellow [commercial cheese sauce]. … Yeah, and actually Ricos I think is local. … It’s kind of part of the culture here. (Karen)

As I observed at some *raspa* vans, Ricos and other industrial cheese sauces sold in large containers can be pumped onto (or heated and ladled over) corn chips or other food items. Ricos, a company dating to 1909, is credited with having invented the “stadium nachos” served with hot cheese sauce that spread through sales at major sports and other events in the 1970s and 1980s, and that is a food item now available globally through venues such as chain convenience stores (White 2015). Beyond drawing my attention to Ricos as an example of a San Antonio food product and vending practice that has influenced national and global foodways, Karen also noted that the typical *raspa* van or truck is smaller than most neighborhood taco trucks or

gourmet food trucks or trailers: "The way I remember it, it was like a … classic ice cream truck style. … Just kinda small and short. And like a little box or cube. … Yeah, you walked up to the back." I noticed similarly configured *raspa* vans, but also trucks that operated from a side window.

Despite the fond memories and observations of neighborhood *raspa* vans and *paleteros* shared by some interviewees, San Antonio's public health department, Metro Health, has targeted this type of activity near schools as a potentially dangerous environmental element with negative impacts on public health (Shields n.d.). Such targeting has occurred even when the vending seems to abide by City rules of no selling within 300 feet (90 m) of school property during or immediately before or after school hours (City of San Antonio, n.d.).

For example, Figure 5.2 shows a slide from a Metro Health public presentation (Shields n.d.) and depicts what appears to be a neighborhood *raspa* truck at the intersection of Blaine Street and Gevers Street on the East Side. This location is outside of the downtown business district where food truck vending is governed by the City's Downtown Food Truck Program (City of San Antonio 2014). Although the location photographed is along a potential pedestrian route to a school, this intersection is nearly 500 feet (150 m) from the nearest school property line.

In the presentation (Shields n.d), Metro Health positions the image of a *raspa* truck vendor (a woman) possibly serving young students as customers (although none appear to be holding or consuming food), as part of a series of slides that present this vending as one of a number of problematic neighborhood condition or factors—comparing it with stray dogs, litter, and advertising for cigarettes. A similar logic was not applied to gourmet mobile food vending. Indeed, the Metro Health presentation (Shields n.d.) includes images of gourmet farmer's market stalls to suggest a neighborhood improvement, disregarding the food items that I observed are sometimes actually sold at these markets locally (such as artisanal cupcakes, as one example) and how a steady diet of gourmet comfort foods or snacks, for those who could afford such a diet, might also be detrimental to one's and a community's health.

Contrasting with Metro Health's presentation (Shields n.d.), some interviewees suggested that neighborhood mobile food vending not far from schools and when schools are not in session could have benefits. For example, Karen spoke positively about the raspa van or truck that served her San Antonio school:

> [T]here was an ice cream truck lady. Before it got "food truck" in San Antonio. … [T]here was [also] a *paletero* that would ride around. And actually we made friends with him. And … he would come every day after school …. [W]e [students] would just talk to him. And he would sit out there with us … until we had to go home. Or until it got dark. And … we'd help him sell his—you know, just jokingly—like, "come buy stuff." … I mean, for the most part, people have real respect for those guys and what they do. And like the integrity of working. … [T]hey're just part of the culture. (Karen)

Karen's comments indicate the idea of the "integrity of working" that various interviewees attributed to neighborhood street food peddling. However, Greg described being offended by practices such as *raspa* vending when they appeared downtown—and specifically due to marketing approaches that he described as aimed directly at attracting children and that potentially infringed on copyright: "They've only until recently had their feet held to the fire as far as, you know, copyright infringement laws. You know, you can't have a big Bugs Bunny or Tweety Bird [cartoon characters] on your cart. That's copyrighted." As I observed, local neighborhood *raspa* and *paleta* vending often does involve imagery such as cartoon depictions of ninja turtles, bumblebees, bunnies, monkeys, toucans, spaceships, kittens and other symbols that appeal directly to children, and that in some cases potentially violate copyright laws. However, children are also targeted by local gourmet food truck vending, noting how some are adorned and how they often vend in areas that include playscapes and games (McInnis 2010; SA Current 2015).

Ben also described the appeal of mobile food vending traditionally for children in San Antonio. Moreover, he suggested how nostalgia shapes various local food vending practices:

> [W]hen you hear the music from the ice cream man. Or the ringing of the bell from the *paleta* guy. You know, it just takes you back. … [I]f you haven't seen your nieces and nephews in a while—like "hey, look, the ice cream man. Let's all get something," you know what I mean? It's just … amazing. … Yeah man, that's nostalgia at its best. … People grew up eating those things. And if you didn't grow up eating those things, you've heard people talking about things, and now you want to try it out, you know? (Ben)

Separately, Lina described how the *raspa* and ice cream vans of her youth in San Antonio seemed to have "paved the way" for gourmet food trucks locally, including for operations specializing in nostalgic local foods such as *raspas.* Additionally, Reina considered the selling of *elotes* (cooked cobs or ears of corn) in Mexico to be another practice informing food truck vending practices generally in San Antonio:

> [T]here was people who made *elotes* [in Mexico]. And that—that I would not even consider "food truck," but it is the most mobile food I've ever seen. It's literally—like … this little propane gas burner and a pot. And the people would come out and they would set it up. … It would just be like the person, the pot of boiling water, small table … and that would be it. Mayo, cheese, chili, lime, salt [as toppings for the corn], okay? (Reina)

I observed that some neighborhood *raspa* vans offered a version of *elotes*, with cooked or heated canned corn served in styrofoam cups and garnished with some of the toppings that Reina described. Thus, the traditional street food vending practices of Mexico seemed to shape neighborhood vending that in turn informed local gourmet vending approaches—a pattern noted by Adrian and other interviewees when describing new gourmet *raspa* sales that they and I noticed:

> *Raspa* trucks … I have a personal … thing about that. And I'm never going to give anyone any duff for making a good living, you know? Um, but … fucking *raspas*, man. … I guess what I'm saying, if you give me the old New Orleans sno-cone, that's in the flavor of a Boston cream pie, I see goodness in that. But if

> you hand me something that has, like, gummy worms [candy] coming out of it. And *chamoy* [a sweet and savory seasoning] poured over the top of it that rots people's teeth—I mean, like, it kills, and I just hate it. … [Some vendors in San Antonio] saw a bandwagon and jumped on it. … [L]ike I said, I hate *raspas*; ice are not my thing. I grew up here—I still don't give a shit about *raspas* [laughs]! But people do. … They kill, dude. … People love 'em. (Adrian)

Separately, Greg also suggested that neighborhood *raspa* van products were being appropriated by some local gourmet food vendors:

> And all this *chamoy* [a sweet and savory seasoning] stuff that they're doing, and food trucks with the pickles and stuff—you can't do that off a [traditional *raspa*] cart. Because you're limited [by dimensions but also regulation; see City of San Antonio n.d.]; just ice and syrup. … You can change the [flavoring] syrup, but how much cheaper can you get? I mean, you're buying it in a gallon, you know? It's pennies per squirt. … I'm not a *raspa* person; I've never enjoyed any of those treats. I don't like *chamoy*—I don't eat that stuff. I don't identify with it culturally. … It'*s puro* San Antonio, the Chinese candy, you know? … I think it's called Chinese candy because maybe it originated like that, but that's a Mexican candy. And *chamoy* is like a Latino … delicacy; it's like the *tres leches*—the caramel, that's totally Spanish. It's old school. … What you're seeing is they're taking the *raspa* and making it more of a food. By shoving, you know, dill pickles in it and covering it up with the *chamoy*. They're using coconut—they're really expanding it. … The *raspa* scene has really blown up. (Greg)

Affordable *raspa* flavoring syrups, sold in gallon containers that can fit a plastic pump ("pennies per squirt"), are products made in San Antonio by Ricos and Jell-Craft—another legacy local food company that has specialized in the industrialization and exportation of food ingredients common in some traditional San Antonio street food vending and concessions (Jell-Craft n.d.). Furthermore, the expression "Chinese candy" suggests the history of Chinese grocery stores in San Antonio dating to at least the early 1900s—as exemplified by the Wong Grocery

Company building south of downtown that some neighbors remembered visiting as kids to buy candy, and a structure that was targeted during my research for conversion into an upscale bar and restaurant (Lucio 2014b).

Separate from *raspas*, *paletas* were another neighborhood food item appropriated (and in some cases *gente*-fied) by some gourmet vendors locally. For example, I noted the selling of "handcrafted" *paletas* downtown in new purpose-built stores (Ramirez 2017, para. 3). I also spotted one operator using a bicycle cart as a stationary prop when vending artisanal *paletas* at Hemisfair Park. This draws directly from neighborhood practices (see Figure 5.1)—such as the work of El Paraíso and El Paraíso de Mexico (Barbacoa Apparel 2016), two legacy and affordable *paleterías* (popsicle manufacturers) in the city's Deco District that also manage pushcarts and bicycle carts.

Additionally, some of my interviewees described more permanent carts, booths and tiny shops, or *tienditas*, as related to local food truck vending, and also drawing from or referencing traditional street peddling practices in Mexico. For example, Reina shared how such "tiny" neighborhood vending reflected the "taco stands" that she experienced in Mexico:

> Back home … it was literally like a stand that was bolted into the floor … on the sidewalk. … It kind of resembles a food truck in that it's a very small kitchen. … [T]hey serve the same type of clientele, but it doesn't move. … Pretty much open on all sides. (Reina)

Separately, Daniel talked about "taco stands" in Laredo, Texas, as enterprises not unlike food trucks, but more enclosed than the operations that Reina remembered from Mexico:

> I just regard them as kind of mom and pop, just very small businesses. We didn't really question the health quality of the establishment [laughs]! … I would say it's probably. … Ten foot by forty [foot]? So, yeah, like, very one or two person. … You're standing outside it. … You might have a waiting area right at the

> front. But you open the door, walk in, order your thing, they make it up for you—or they already have it made. It's tacos, taking it to go. (Daniel)

Justin also recalled with fondness from his childhood the "tiny room" selling of *raspas* in downtown San Antonio:

> What I remember as a kid is always going … into a building somewhere; I remember similar type of set-ups to what would work on a cart, but it was always in a building. Even if it was a small, tiny room. My grandfather used to take me to a place where you could get a *raspa* with ice cream on top. And this was … the bomb [good]. It was at Market Square [downtown west of San Pedro Creek and south of Milam Plaza; see Figure 1.9]. (Justin).

Additionally, Rob compared local practices with the distinctive burrito stands of Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, while mentioning that gourmet food trucks also now operate there. He also described typical or traditional taco truck trailer operations in Monterrey, Mexico:

> [I]t was a trailer [in Monterrey] … [A] little trailer. All four sides opened up. Cooking, cooking. So, there was people all the time all the way around. So, you see through [the trailer]; I mean the thing … was probably ten feet by four feet, you know? So, you're standing there, and the guy's [vendor's] right there making food. You're talking with him and there's another guy next to you, you know? It's a different … interaction with the public, than a [gourmet] food truck, you know? (Rob)

Considering local practices, Max identified a neighborhood taco truck that utilizes the outdoor seating area of a neighborhood bricks-and-mortar restaurant that only operates during the day, and that seems similar to the taco stands in Laredo that Daniel discussed. As Max described and I later observed, the restaurant operates from a counter window and has no indoor seating:

> [I]t was great—five bucks [USD$5] for a whole meal. … It's a little corner with an old building. … And they've just converted it with the tables [outside]. …

> And the truck just jammed in the corner of the sidewalk. … You walk up to the window [describing the night-time truck or the day-time restaurant]. You order. They yell out your name. And hand you the food. … [T]he cross between the icehouse and the food truck is what these are—which I like a lot. (Max)

Max's comparing of neighborhood taco trucks with the city's traditional icehouses is significant, considering how both forms and practices have influenced the shape of gourmet food trucks and food truck parks, as I discuss later in this chapter. San Antonio's traditional icehouses are beer bars with outdoor seating and located along or near rail lines. Historically, icehouses were where blocks of ice could be purchased for home refrigeration use, along with other goods including beverages. Icehouses and ice manufacturing emerged in rail communities in Texas cities like Galveston, Houston and San Antonio in the 1800s as part of the growth in shipments of foodstuffs, and they are thought by some to be the origins of US convenience store approaches (Hisbrook 1984; Nelson & Silva 2006; Lucio 2014a). Max described local icehouses for me, and noted their gentrification in some cases:

> Invented in San Antonio. Well, you know the good example—La Tuna, down there for so many years? That's a good example of a gentrified icehouse [laughs]! But just that tradition of … you know, take advantage of the weather. We get good evening breezes here; super-hot all day. You want to cool down. So, you go get a nice brew [beer]. Hang out with your neighbors at the icehouse. … Isn't that how they happened? (Max)

For Max, San Antonio's traditional icehouses showcase qualities of local working-class life that different interviewees expressed are also represented with neighborhood street food vending.

5.2.3 Frugality, generosity and other qualities of home

As discussed in previous sections, frugality is understood by many San Antonians to be a respected and necessary local trait and a defining element of being *puro*. For example, Max explained that the affordability of items sold by neighborhood food trucks is appealing for many locals:

> You know, I've tried a few [gourmet food trucks]. … And it's far too much for your normal everyday worker. Unless you're a banker downtown. I mean, I can't afford it. … I think there's the good kind of family-run taco trucks that keep it affordable. Because they know where they're going and the people they're serving. But even when they go to a bar, they're still keeping the same pricing that they have. (Max)

However, affordable prices are only part of the generosity typically experienced when purchasing food from neighborhood vendors. For example, Vin emphasized the importance of the customer service that he associated with neighborhood mobile vendors and restaurants alike:

> [Y]ou can stay very faithful [to Mexican vending approaches or qualities] very quickly … while still being affordable for … the people you want to serve. … [T]he customer service is usually what makes it authentic. … [T]he customer service is really, really beautiful—really important to us, for whatever reason. The whole personal factor. To, basically, take care of the people. That's a really big thing. (Vin)

Vin went on to describe some of his extended family's dining and give-away traditions (sometimes hosting elaborate extended family and community meals) in sharing his perspectives about generous and "beautiful" customer service in neighborhood food vending. Separately, Danica observed how some local gourmet food truck operators draw from these neighborhood approaches and sensibilities:

> [W]hen you give your clienteles that feeling—like [naming a specific vendor]. He always gives his customers a free [sample, described as a sizeable portion]. … He just wants to pass on that—you know, kind of like, be the flow. … And … I think that's where, like, the heart of a lot San Antonio is—good little businesses like that. … [L]ittle taco stands. And the hot dog stuff. The ice cream truck. When you feel that you want to go back, you know? …Versus, you know, "I'm

> gonna weigh this out exactly. And you're not getting any more than that. Because I can't afford … to hook you up." (Danica)

As I discuss later in this chapter, local gourmet food truck vendors tended to follow neighborhood vendors in offering substantial meal and snack portions, but at much higher prices. Danica's comments also indicate how more corporate approaches (such as closely measuring and monitoring ingredients and portion size) seem contrary to neighborhood street food selling approaches. Furthermore, Danica stressed how neighborhood food trucks were less expensive than gourmet offerings and also often more affordable than corporate fast food meals. As Danica also stressed, neighborhood food trucks can become part of a community's identity, with vendors helping to make community through their interactions with customers.

Rob also described neighborhood food trucks as having a different relationship with communities and customers than offered by gourmet operations or corporate outlets:

> [T]he difference between, like, a taco truck and … how we operate [as a gourmet food truck] is we are removed. You know, there's still a trickle effect, but … I think a taco truck has a way bigger impact on the community. Because of the … approach that the business has … with the customer, you know? And it's not just ordering your tacos and sitting down. But ordering your tacos and talking. … So, a taco man [vendor] starts to know everybody that goes there. And how that effects and how that filters into the urban fabric? I don't know, because … I've never worked … in that manner. But to me, that's always been a very interesting part of this, you know? (Rob)

For Rene, eating from neighborhood food vendors also represented a choice to support local business efforts and to engage in mutual aid:

> My grandma … was the one who was always there around for me; my mom always used to go to work. …That's really common throughout here [the West Side] …. That's why whenever we … do something like taco trucks. …That's why we gravitate to the people who are smaller. Because we know that that's

> how they have to maintain … the family. If they don't sell enough food for the day, they might not eat. (Rene)

Rene indicated that his supporting of neighborhood food truck vendors was a conscious choice that he discussed with his friends and that became more apparent when he gained access to his own car and finances as a young adult:

> I started getting heavy into [neighborhood] food trucks like four years ago. That's because I started having my own car. … [S]o, I was getting used to going out and just enjoying myself. Also, so I had a friend. … [H]e broke down to me why it is so important to support local foods instead of going out and eating at, like, McDonald's or like Burger King and Taco Bell [corporate fast food chains]. (Rene)

Danica also expressed enjoying mobility as a young adult and preferring to support neighborhood food vendors who conveyed a sense of love and family with their operations. As an example, she discussed the family-run food vending she had experienced in the rural, predominantly German and Czech settled communities located north of San Antonio in the Texas Hill Country (Hessong 2017):

> You know, the little white old lady that has the accent. And her knuckles are all … big because she's been working there for so long? You know you wanna give her the money; you want to do business with her. Hear her stories. You feel like there's love put into it—that's what I feel like. And the food trucks I know. … I … will spend my money at … the ones that I feel like are in love with their business and in love with their clients. (Danica)

Additionally, Danica suggested that mobile food vendors might struggle to reach older—or "old-school"—people in San Antonio, and she also shared that Mexican American residents might support vendors of their "culture":

> The people from that neighborhood are old-school people; they don't want to be eating on the streets. Like, how my grandmother says it … "why are you going to

> give your money to a fast food place? You don't know what's in there. You don't know what these people are doing." … And she would rather give her money to a guy that looks like her culture. Where she's from. That's making tacos that she's familiar with. At a cheap price. (Danica)

Critically, Danica talked about how her perceptions of local *casta* or caste—and how the sense that some vendors appeared like family members—thus shape her choices as to which vendors to support as a customer. Exemplifying this is her description of the past legacy of hot dog cart peddling at Travis Park:

> This guy at the hot dog stand. … [H]e was in this corner [of Travis Park]. … It felt like someone down the road from your neighborhood that you knew. You know, why would I give my dollar to Walgreens [a corporate store] … when I could give it to this guy that feels like family almost? You know? And I'm not dark. And he—*Indio*—he was dark, but it made me feel like someone, you know, I wanted to do business with. (Danica)

When asked to discuss the term *Indio*, which relates directly to Spanish colonial *sistema de castas* (caste system) rankings and divisions (de la Teja 1995; Martínez 2008), Danica explained the term, while emphasizing that she supported the vendor also because he was an older man:

> He [the hot dog vendor] was a dark guy. Dark Mexican. … Older. … To me, it feels like you're buying something from your grandparents. So, you'd want to give him that dollar. Like, even if you didn't need that bottle of water, because it looks like the little *viejito* [old man] from your neighborhood, you know? … It's a little old man. Or a little old woman. Like … that sells flowers or … like the guy on the *paleta* bicycle that … rings the bell. … Goes around the neighborhood making his dollar. … It's like even if you don't need it—like with my grandmother. … She's always against it [buying street food]. … [B]ut when this little old man would come around ringing his bell, Grandma would go out there and get three ice creams; we would all get it. And it wasn't about the ice cream. It was about giving … the money because he needed it. (Danica)

Additionally, Danica talked about specific neighborhood vending operations being so family-tied, that they are sometimes passed down as inheritances. Separately, Vin also discussed neighborhood vending as ingrained in local families and culture. He also talked about how neighborhood food trucks would post-up and sometimes cluster together to create vibrant gathering spots in otherwise underutilized spaces, such as the parking lots of stores and closed businesses at night:

> Now, they [food trucks] move around a lot more. But whenever … I was younger, they would always pick one spot and there would be, like—there used to be a strip [of vendors along a shopping corridor]. …Like, on Sundays, we'd go there and just … chill. Get all of our cool stuff [shopping]. …Whoever came by would just be like—"oh, I want the tacos. I'm gonna go here." Or "I want a *torta*," "I want some flan," "I want … *tres leches*, I'll go here." But now they're a lot more mobile. (Vin)

Karen also stressed that neighborhood vending sometimes forms spaces for socializing for young adults, using as an example a *raspa* van that she would visit after school and functioning like a "family style … little gathering":

> There would be a big line. So, as a result, you would just hang out there. And you had your snack. And you shared … probably, like, in a way that's not hygienic. … But everyone shared. …Yeah, family style—like, little gathering. It was, for a lot of kids … their dinner. … So, they'd get … these big cheese, uh—there's like popcorn and they'd put cheese all over it. And you just ate it, and it was like your dinner—your *raspa* and your cheese thing. That was our nutrition. (Karen)

Karen observed that this particular *raspa* van still operates in the same general location and could be considered a neighborhood "fixture" based on its apparent permanence:

> She's still there. I don't know her name. But she reminded us of, like, someone's … older Mexican mother. Like, she wasn't quite a grandma; but she was like an

> elder. Someone's mom. Spoke Spanish only. … And she was always—it was almost like her truck was like permanently parked there. Cause it's just like a fixture there in the neighborhood. (Karen)

Separately, Gil also commented about the locational certainty of some neighborhood vending operations as part of their attraction:

> [T]he taco trucks, the food trucks that I've been familiar with … they don't, they never roved around. They were just, kind of, always in a place where you could find them. Which is … usually at the outer edges of … shopping center parking lots, you know? … And you always just knew, like, "let's go to that taco truck," 'cause you knew it was there. (Gil)

Gil also described experiencing a sense of constancy and family in his interactions with some neighborhood food vendor:

> I guess I have … a fondness … for the trucks … I can kind of say grew up with, you know? … [J]ust something about it seems more down home or more family, you know? I … feel like, you go to this taco truck, it's always this woman; it's almost always that man. But you go to … the exact opposite of the spectrum [listing gourmet food trucks]. … It's whoever he sends of his employees in the truck that day, you know? So, you don't … really develop that relationship. (Gil)

Additionally, Ben shared some of the neighborhood and family food traditions and "close-knitted" practices that can inform neighborhood vending, and that others have equated with *puro* San Antonio (Bragg 2009; Chan 2014):

> [E]erything has been touched except the West Side. That's still … deeply rooted. You still have all those deep family traditions out there. You walk around, you still see families barbecuing in the front yard and guys—old men—sitting down in the front yard drinking. … I think the West Side just, in a good way, sticks to themselves. And they're very close-knitted, you know what I mean? (Ben)

Ben's identification of outdoor and front yard drinking as a positive aspect of neighborhood culture is significant, considering how quality-of-life policing (Goldstein 2014) might perceive these activities, and also how outdoor drinking and socializing has been commodified with gourmet food truck parks and other local venues, as I discuss later in this chapter. Ben also stressed that collective and family efforts that he experienced growing up in San Antonio's working-class West Side shaped his gourmet food truck vending:

> My family growing up were always involved in helping and always giving back, and … if one person got in—good thing we're not in the Mob [organized crime], because then we'd all be killers [laughs]—but if one person gets involved [in a business or activity], … it's understood that we all got to do it. Man, I was little—in elementary and middle school [helping out]. … No matter what, if one person gets involved, then we're all part of it. … And I've seen a lot of families—I'm not gonna say especially on the West Side, but, I mean, a lot folks where I grew up like that; not selfish—you know? The more you can help, the more you can give, it's gonna come back tenfold. (Ben)

Separately, Greg also described being part of a family business growing up in San Antonio, and how it shaped his vending as an adult through a family business that involves his children:

> [A family member] was in the catering business. You know, that was what a roach coach was back in the day … truck in the front, big box in the back. Construction sites [were where they operated]. When [a large development] was being built, we hit [vended at] it. …I was on the truck five in the morning. … [F]rom age thirteen. … You know, I see parallels [with his current vending]. I hated it. My favorite part was eating [laughs]! (Greg)

Additionally, Beth iterated how operating a food trailer was part of her family life and parenting, including teaching her kids about outreach and service to others: "I needed to teach my kids some lessons. … [T]he best way to teach your children is,

you know, modelling for them. My parents did. And my grandparents. It wasn't just something that came out of me."

Other ways that San Antonio's neighborhood food trucks exhibit home and family qualities include the use of homemade vehicles and vending approaches that stress making-do and building business and relationships with customers slowly over time.

5.2.4 Homemade, improvised and building as you go

A characteristic of neighborhood vending that many of my interviewees noted and that I observed was the use of more homemade or makeshift vehicles. For example, I encountered the following neighborhood food trucks in my general study area—which, while neatly presented, embody elements of do-it-yourself entrepreneurship, frugality and making do with the resources at hand, such as home window air conditioning units (see Figure 5.3)

Figure 5.3: Photos of neighborhood food trucks—a taco truck (top) and a *raspa* van (bottom); note the hand-painted advertising and makeshift air conditioning; © Mark A. Tirpak 2018

Nina Martin (2014) describes similar vehicles as "ramshackle" in observing cart-based working-class Latina/o street food vending in Chicago (p. 1873). In San Antonio, Gil noted that even former ambulance vans might be converted into neighborhood food trucks. He also observed that more handmade vehicles could attract unwanted police attention in some areas, suggesting that "a vehicle like that" would probably be "pulled over" downtown.

Nolan also described neighborhood vending vehicles downtown as an understood trespass or infiltration:

> Me: I've … noticed more, kind of, Mexican food trucks—
>
> Nolan: That infiltrate the downtown area? … You go to the … whitewashed taco truck, I expect to spend six bucks [USD$6]. I go to [a gourmet truck], maybe fifteen [USD$15]. But that's because I'm looking at the [gourmet] truck and I'm saying "wow, this is actually a really developed truck." (Nolan)

I also noted how the appearances of some vending vehicles could set my expectations for the cost of their items. Additionally, I observed that neighborhood food trucks often included prices listed prominently and more permanently in hand-painted signage on their trucks (see Figure 5.3). Moreover, I noticed that neighborhood food vending downtown was an uncommon sight, and taking place in more marginal spaces downtown when I did encounter it.

Beyond talking about food trucks, Greg shared that informal ice chest or cooler box vending also sometimes infiltrates downtown. I observed low-key and fleeting cooler box vending occurring at some bus stops downtown similar to the activities that Greg described:

> [Y]ou got people with ice chests selling tamales. Selling tacos, you know? … That's totally illegal. But it happens downtown. … It happens after midnight; it happens at one in the morning. … [I]t's not like they're walking around saying

> “tacos, tacos”—no. They … know what restaurants to go into. … They go in and serve, like, the workers. This isn’t for a customer. This is for … the service industry. (Greg)

Separately, Karen observed that cooler box or similar vending might be a starting point for economically poorer residents to launch a food truck business:

> [Y]ou build as you go. You don’t get a big loan, but you just kind of build your truck and meet its needs as you go. Which is the entrepreneur model. I think it is the American dream model. … You don’t … get here as an immigrant and then … pick out a [USD]$50,000 loan for something. You do what you can—you sell tacos out of an ice chest … for a dollar. And then when people are like … “so and so’s tacos are the bomb” [good]. … [Y]ou build off of it. … And that’s what I like about those things. … I like to support those kind of entrepreneurs that are just hustling. (Karen)

Max noted the simplified and homemade branding of neighborhood trucks as another indicator of build-as-you-go approaches. Additionally, he observed the staking of family reputation with the naming of some neighborhood food businesses:

> It has their name on it—but it’s not like the “foodie” food trucks you see today; where it’s all about the graphic representation. And the logo. And the website and all of it together. Not a catchy name; it’s nothing like that. Just—probably, a woman named [x] started it, and so that’s the truck [name]. … [W]ith no real logo. But you know they’re gonna have tacos. (Max)

Max also linked perambulatory vending with possible efforts to build towards food truck operations. Additionally, Max described neighborhood vending as drawing from simple but innovative approaches that can be found in Mexico:

> In Mexico City, all you need is a cauldron—you know, a hot plate and a chair or a stool. And maybe not even a stool. And you can make money. … You need to

> go on the South Side [of San Antonio]. … Every corner, like, they've got their cardboard box. … And right on the box: Candied Apple, [USD]$1. (Max)

I also encountered such vending outside of downtown and not far from my home neighborhood, and it was a particular practice that worried Justin. Lina described growing up with family members and friends in San Antonio who similarly *hustled*—or engaged in multiple small scale efforts (including market and street vending) to meet family needs or get ahead:

> [T]hey would sell plants. … And he would make little rocking chairs [to sell]. … I remember going to the dump with him to pick up [electric] fans that people would throw out. … [H]e'd fix them and resell 'em at the market. … That man had so many side jobs. … And they had a very modest home. … [T]hat guy recycled cardboard [for payment]—I remember that. … And I was between [ages] 5 and 7; I was with him all the time. He'd recycle cans, scrap metal …. [H]e'd do lawns [landscape maintenance work]. … [H]e made sure they [his family] never went without. (Lina)

These perspectives suggest how local neighborhood vending often involves creative practices that exceed resource limitations by drawing from family or collective strengths, wasted opportunities or resources and wider urban conditions to pursue self-improvement but also inclusivity.

5.2.5 Spanglish and junctures

Vendor use of Spanish and Spanglish in advertising and communications with customers seemed to differentiate neighborhood from most gourmet food truck vending operations I observed in San Antonio. For example, Gil described using Spanglish to access neighborhood vending:

> You know [a specific vendor], their English is limited, but. … Like, you saw me try to say "chili with rellenos" [*chiles rellenos*]—I can never get that; it's the double "L" that always throw me. … And … they laugh when I say "re-eno" and "re-ain-yo," and then they just say it so beautifully and quick. Like, "yes, but I

> can't make my mouth do that [laughs]!" … Like, one of my best friends is … a local chef. … [H]e doesn't speak, like, fluent Spanish. But he knows … San Antonio Spanish. And he knows how to … ask for what he wants … when it comes to food. (Gil)

I also encountered similar situations where Spanglish helped to navigate ordering from neighborhood vendors. As Nolan noted, English language proficiency might be one of several barriers preventing neighborhood vendors from participating in the City's Downtown Food Truck Program and other opportunities more or less designated for gourmet vendors. To illustrate this, Nolan discussed a neighborhood truck that he perceived to be trying to bridge the separation between neighborhood and gourmet vending:

> They're kind of that mid-tier, "I'm selling tacos, but I also want to be part of … a food truck scene. I don't want to be the generic," you know? "I want to be an actual food truck." So, they're really cool. … They also speak Spanish primarily. … There was an education barrier for them. … They're different from most [gourmet] trucks because most trucks now are on the Square [a portable payment platform; see Moore 2017] economy. … With that, they accept credit card swipes. … [T]hey actually only accept cash. (Nolan)

Nolan's comments draw further attention to the stratification of local food trucks that different interviewees noticed—with operations positioning to bridge the divide between the "generic" (neighborhood) and "actual" or acknowledged (gourmet) trucks described by Nolan as "mid-tier." As I experienced, use of Spanglish can assist neighborhood vendors in efforts to include a broad range of customers, including a growing body of English-only speakers in San Antonio (Mejia & Carcamo 2016). In contrast, I observed that gourmet truck vendors typically conducted business in English, although some could code-switch to Spanish to accommodate some customers.

Additionally, I noticed that some neighborhood mom and pop cafés could be influenced by changing local conditions and customer tastes. For example, I noted

that some cafés responded to the local gourmet *raspa* fad by suddenly offering versions of treats such as *mangonadas* (a beverage mixing mango and *chamoy*) that before the trend were associated with *raspa* vans and neighborhood bricks-and-mortar dessert shops (*fruterías* and *heladerías*). Max drew my attention to other bridges or relationships between food truck and bricks-and-mortar food businesses—such as when neighborhood trucks use restaurant facilities after-hours as a space for vending. Separately, Daniel observed that neighborhood trucks sometimes latch on to bars—that during the day might serve other purposes, such as act as flea markets:

> I remember ordering the tacos, and then we walked inside some kind of, like, ballroom or something. It was giant, it was huge. It was almost like some kind of flea market courtyard. … It was weird. … And we ate our tacos there and then went across to a place called "El Bar" [laughs]! Had some more drinks and then went home! (Daniel)

Moreover, Justin observed that neighborhood trucks sometimes attach to and resuscitate abandoned or vacant structures as a build-as-you-go strategy and way to transition from vending to restaurant ownership: "I've seen food trucks start at locations. And so they're on this lot. There's a building going there. And the next thing you know they buy the building. And they open their restaurant. And they've already got their clientele."

I return later in this chapter to some of the characteristics of neighborhood compared with gourmet food truck vending identified by interviewees, in considering possible local futures for mobile food vending that interviewees also suggested.

5.3 Gourmet vending

In this section, I explore some of the defining characteristics of gourmet food truck vending in San Antonio. To help frame this discussion, Figure 5.4 shows several gourmet or "foodie" trucks at a special event at Alamo Plaza in 2012 (Baugh 2012):

Figure 5.4: Gourmet food trucks at Alamo Plaza; © Billy Calzada 2012 (Baugh 2012)

As the photograph indicates, local gourmet trucks have in some cases been adapted from the delivery or utility step vans that have also been used by some neighborhood truck (see Figure 5.3). As my interviewees suggested, the use of large vinyl graphics as truck decorations or wrapping can lead to these trucks having a distinct but also somewhat uniform appearance.

5.3.1 Magazine qualities: conspicuous production and consumption

Many interviewees discussed gourmet food trucks based on how they looked different from neighborhood vehicles. For example, Max regarded gourmet trucks as different from neighborhood trucks in that they offered "magazine quality" branding and appearances, sometimes at the expense of their offerings to customers:

> The branding and the marketing and the image that are created with a foodie truck are a different level … that you get … I think, from national attention in the movement. And the idea that you have a brand, and almost like magazine quality. … And you hope that translates to the food, but I've noticed a lot of time it doesn't. There's almost more attention put into the logo and the graphics and the truck then there is in the food. … And the price reflects the image, not the food. You get these family-run little trucks. … And it's not about image anymore. It's about what's in that truck. And people want it—whether it's bubble gum or Frito pie [see Figure 2.1]. It's just there and it's affordable. (Max)

Gil also observed differences in the visual appearances of gourmet food trucks compared with neighborhood trucks:

> It's different in the food. But it's also different in the visuals, too. Like, you can look at this [neighborhood taco] truck. And then you can look at a [gourmet] truck. … [A]nd you can obviously tell they are coming from two totally different places, alright? At least … to me it feels obvious. … It seems like almost everything you see around downtown looks brand new or custom-built, you know? … Whereas, what I remember … like, in the parking lots of bigger shopping centers kind of out on the periphery. … You would see these sometimes … really unique, handmade food trucks, you know? (Gil)

I also observed uniquely "handmade" or home constructed neighborhood trucks [see Figure 5.3] outside of downtown, along with gourmet Tex-Mex and Mexican food operation similar to what Gil noted operating as part of the City's program:

> [Y]ou probably wouldn't see a taco truck that looks like this in Travis Park. You probably won't see one at the cathedral. … Main Plaza. … [T]here's that one [gourmet] taco truck … and it's got a giant … *luchador* [cartoon depiction of a Mexican wrestler] on it, but it doesn't look, you know, like this at all (Gil)

For Danica, San Antonio's downtown gourmet food trucks had a "corporate" and uniform appearance, and she further asserted that the trucks "don't need to look a certain way, but all of them—conveniently, all of them—do." Based on my observations, the "corporate" look or "magazine" qualities that some interviewees including Danica noticed involved the use of large, multicolored vinyl signage and graphics applied to large sections of trucks and trailers (see Figure 5.4). The look often involved use of what might be called hipster or folksy fonts and graphics, and it contrasted with the hand-painted approaches to decorating neighborhood food trucks and trailers that I noticed (see Figure 5.3). However, I also observed that neighborhood vehicles sometimes also incorporated vinyl printed banners and stickers, suggesting how these practices respond to changing conditions.

Additionally, I noted that while gourmet trucks would sometimes utilize A-frame sidewalk signage as another indicator of their hipness or artisanal quality (see Figure 5.4), neighborhood trucks did not. I also noticed that gourmet trucks typically refrained from using the scrolling or active electronic signage and sometimes strobing lights that marked some neighborhood operations. Furthermore, although some gourmet trucks that I observed exhibited intentionally homemade or shabby appearances, Daniel suggested that such an aesthetic might be a liability for gourmet truck operators locally:

> It feels to me … like there's this growing expectation that the truck … if it's going to call itself gourmet—it has to be, like, pristine and super clean. … Like [a specific truck] is actually really good food; it's in a very old truck. … And it—you know—it's got rust on it. … Its generator housing is all home welded together and stuff. And when you put that truck—again, which has very good food—against a newer truck … it seems to me to be more people who will visit the other one at least initially. (Daniel)

As my interviewees noted and the ordinance defining the program specifies (City of San Antonio 2014), the City's Downtown Food Truck Program has been governed in part by official judgements about the appearances of individual food trucks and what constitutes food "redundancy" (p. 5), with the aim of creating a "vibrant culinary experience" downtown (p. 1)—further suggesting how local government has attempted to cater to foodie interests (Johnston & Baumann 2010) with the program, and how creative city interests (Scott 2014) have shaped local urban planning and public space management. The program objectives and operations exemplify a more entrepreneurial orientation of local government (Harvey 1989; Dunn 2013) while also demonstrating how city governments help to determine what "kinds of diversity are furthered while others are blocked" (Valverde 2012, p. 141)—in regards to street food offerings, but also who can act as a street vendor downtown. As my interviewees and I noticed, the City of San Antonio was actively engaged in what other researchers have described as "food culture contests" (Hernández-López 2011) or creative class politics (N. Martin 2014) involving local government

encouragement of gourmet food trucks and the marginalization of traditional Latina/o working-class vending in the context of other major US cities.

For Karen, the Downtown Food Truck Program could be understood as a local government social media campaign to make San Antonio and some of its key downtown sites attractive to young professionals and private development. Moreover, he observed that the program encouraged local elitism while promoting (and reducing urban life to) a professional "live, work, commute" lifestyle:

> I think it's … bells and whistles to get young professionals to move downtown. … Like, "hey, look at our shiny trucks; look at our new urban parks," you know? … They're serving the same thing; you're gonna live and you're gonna work and you're gonna commute. But what's it look like, and what is your experience going to be when you're there? And I think what they're trying to sell … [is that] it makes you part of some elite group. That "I'm part of this," or "this is my playground, and there's food trucks … I can impress my friends with." … That's what I feel … the City does; they do things …that will photograph well. But when you look at … an aerial view, it looks terrible. But if you look at it … from an Instagram … view, it looks so amazing that you want to go there. (Karen)

Beyond shaping some social media representations of San Antonio for visitors and residents, gourmet food trucks were also sometimes used as part of architectural renderings and development proposals—as a way to generate interest in and support for these projects (Baugh 2012; Olivo 2013b). For example, Ben spoke with me about launching a gourmet food truck business and choosing a vending site based on an architectural rendering for a new commercial development:

> [W]e were there before it opened. And I saw this artist rendition of how it was gonna look, and I saw a food truck. And I was like … no-brainer. I said to my partner, let's just do a food truck. … [O]n the artist rendition it just looked like "why not," you know what I mean? This is a … beautiful location. This beautiful architecture, why wouldn't I be here? You know? (Ben)

For Karen, gourmet food trucks can cultivate interest in new local development, but also to serve as spaces in which people can be "seen" spending excessively on common foods such as tacos:

> I mean, the gourmet trucks are selling the same taco but it's the presentation. And the space where you get it, you know? So, it's a space where you can be seen buying a [USD]$10 gourmet taco. … [The neighborhood taco] probably tastes much better but is given to you in a piece of foil. And, you know, it's not trendy to hang out there. … Honestly, that [Downtown] Food Truck Program … I went to the food trucks—the gourmet type; I was really turned off by them. … [T]hey do not, in my opinion, create the space that the Mexican—like, you know, under [USD]$10, under [USD]$5—carts provide. … [I]t seems like people go to be seen. Or to be … part of an "experience." And, it's no longer … familiar. Or, I don't know, down to earth. (Karen)

Karen's comments suggest dimensions of street food authenticity (Johnston & Baumann 2010; Zukin 2010) in San Antonio, including the availability of USD$5 taco meals served in tin foil that some local customers can compare more expensive gourmet food truck offerings with. They also suggest how gourmet food trucks can help to construct a wider "gourmet" or luxury environment. For example, Ben described San Antonians as being prepared by gourmet food truck vending to spend more for other familiar items—such as beer, clothing and apartments— on offer at new venues near where these trucks have been positioned in San Antonio, suggesting wider patterns of gentrification and commodification. Moreover, the idea expressed by some interviewees that gourmet food trucks feed local traditions or comfort with very public or observable conspicuous or invidious consumption could be understood to aspects of the city's history of socioeconomic ordering traditionally. That history includes long, evolving and extreme patterns of wealth segregation in housing (Low 2001, 2003; Drennon 2006, 2012) but also the showcasing and flaunting of wealth and related privilege in publicly accessible spaces, as sometimes encouraged by local government.

To exemplify the impacts of this history, Travis Park and some street segments were closed for nearly a month in early 2017 when the park was booked for a private "extravagant debutante party" for an estimated 1,200 guests, with entertainment involving "exotic animals and circus performers" (Mendoza & Baugh 2017). Another example is the local annual Spring Battle of Flowers, a public parade tradition originated in 1891 that is now part of the City's weeklong annual Fiesta celebration (Hernández-Ehrisman 2008). During my research, I attended a Battle of Flowers parade and witnessed through the event aspects of the local socioeconomic hierarchy that Blackwelder (1998) describes as defining the city in the 1930s:

> The staging of the Battle of the Flowers … revealed the complexities of the city's socioeconomic structure in a single shared experience. On San Antonio's North Side grand houses … testified to the persistence of ease. … From among the daughters of San Antonio's business and professional elite … a queen and a court of princesses [were selected] to reign over the … event. The[y] … rode flower-decked floats through the heart of the city to the Alamo. … Behind the scenes black and Mexican American women cooked, cleaned, and served. … Mexican American men pruned shrubs and manicured lawns and gardens. … [T]he Battle of the Flowers reminded residents of their lot. (pp. 4-6)

I watched the public Battle of Flowers parade as a guest of San Antonians privileged with or paying for bleacher seating immediately at Alamo Plaza, complete with porter drink service. I noted a racially and ethnically mixed (but predominantly lighter or whiter skinned) conglomeration of mainly older parade-goers in the bleachers, including local politicians, business leaders and members of prominent families that were also represented within the court of young princesses passing by on floats (women who were urged by the crowd to "show their shoes" as a local and more conservative version of the Mardi Gras traditions of New Orleans). I also noticed that some of the traditional *raspa* cart peddling at Alamo Plaza was displaced by the parade. I perceived, similar to Blackwelder (1998) in describing conditions in the 1930s, that the "place" for San Antonio's regular or less affluent residents and visitors during the event was "on the sidelines, observing from the

sidewalks as the more fortunate passed by"(p. 6) and enjoyed other privileged access to the city's public realm.

For Karen, gourmet food truck vending was another way for some locals to publicly parade or flaunt wealth and status and create or reinforce a local socioeconomic hierarchy, and she wondered what forces might be enlivening these practices:

> I … consider myself a young professional targeted for this. … I don't go. … Honestly, I don't know a lot of my friends that are in the same … income bracket and social status that go. … I just wonder … who is keeping these things alive? Because they're really expensive. I feel like they're … twenty percent or thirty percent overpriced. And if they brought it down [the price], they could be really successful. … And maybe it's because they have to pay fees for the City, but I don't know. I feel like they're really … limiting themselves. And there is a really cool potential for them. But … right now? They are selling at Austin prices but to San Antonio incomes—which are different. (Karen)

Internalizing the gap between his income and the cost of foods vended by gourmet trucks, Gil described himself as not being "successful enough" as a young professional to afford these offerings regularly:

> I've tried a couple of them, but it's just. … I appreciate, like, gourmet food and I appreciate really good food … but it's not … my day-to-day food. I'm not exactly successful enough to treat myself so well on a regular basis. … It's really hard to go to any of those trucks without spending at a minimum [USD]$10. (Gil)

Gil also emphasized that local gourmet trucks, including those participating in the City's downtown program, could be difficult to access—given their limited days and hours of operation, rotating sites and dependency on social media. He stressed "you have to go online [and have this access] to find out where they are."

Other interviewees stressed that gourmet trucks seemed to tantalize customers with limited operating hours and small batches of goods as part of their business models. For example, Danica described a customer buying from a gourmet truck at Travis Park in these terms: “She was like ‘they don’t sell this anywhere else in San Antonio.’ … And it was some fancy [food item]—it was [USD]$12. … [S]he was like ‘only—well, you know—certain places carry it, and I can’t find it anywhere. And here it is.’”

Additionally, Daniel observed how the visible interest of a few individuals or a crowd in a gourmet vending operation or product could generate a public response: “Suddenly you see all these people … and you’re like ‘well, what’s going on?’ And you’re like ‘well, I gotta go. I gotta go figure out what this is about.’” However, my interviewees generally stressed feeling frustrated by gourmet trucks that made access too difficult. Representative of these views, Reina discussed the “hassle” of gourmet truck vending: “Sometimes you don’t want to go on social media. And you’ll be like ‘okay. …Are you still running? Are you taking a break? Are you going someplace new?’”

Furthermore, Karen observed that the structuring of gourmet truck vending locally seemed to mock less affluent customers and miss the purposes of street vending:

> I feel this pretentiousness about it, and I just could not get over it. Maybe it’s because I have the perspective of the *raspas*, taco trucks to draw from. … [F]or me … it’s almost mocking. Mocking for people who are really hungry and need food, and this thing is mobile. (Karen)

As some of the venders I interviewed helped me to understand, the reliance of some local gourmet trucks on social media and the irregularity of some vending activity—including as structured by the City’s program—could expose individual trucks to risks not shared by neighborhood vendors, such as the posting of bad online reviews that could shape customer or client choices. For example, Adrian described how gourmet vendors could lose opportunities for catering or special events by not

monitoring and managing their online presence, compared with neighborhood food trucks that he perceived as not needing or using Facebook and other social media.

These views indicate some of the precariousness faced by gourmet food trucks when they are dependent on social media, such as when they participate in the City's downtown program and weekly publishing of schedules (see Figure 3.2). Moreover, they draw attention to how some local gourmet food truck operations are positioned based on appearances, media representations and relationships with local government representatives and other members of the city's elite—and sometimes at the expense of attention to quality dining experiences for their customers, which for many local customers is shaped by the cost of meals.

5.3.2 Drawing from neighborhood approaches and charging more for health

During my research, some local gourmet trucks capitalized on traditional neighborhood street foods and vending approaches. For some interviewees, this was exemplified by the local gourmet *raspa* trend that Cárdenas (2016) helps to document. Beyond *raspas*, Greg summarized local gourmet food vending generally as having "taken what is traditionally Mexican vending and just five-starred it up."

Additionally, Greg described gourmet peddling as a process and "struggle" to move San Antonians towards accepting paying more for generous portions of street vended foods: "I had to not only break the definition … but let them know 'you gotta pay for this.' You know, this is what costs money. To get all of this, it's gonna cost extra."

Ben also indicated that he perceived a wide array of neighborhood street food vending practices as having been "knapsacked"—stolen or appropriated—by gourmet vending, including the notion of gourmet truck followers or regulars:

> People now, they "follow" food trucks. And they have those apps. ... I was a "regular," too. ... And all my friends and cousins were regulars to that [neighborhood truck], you know what I mean? … And those *raspa* trucks are now something "knapsacked," and things like that. (Ben)

Karen also described the *raspa* van practices of her youth as having been appropriated locally:

> [S]o, the *raspas* are, like, a mainstay in our culture. … They're completely capitalizing on this one cheap thing that probably costs twenty-five cents [USD$0.25] to make. And they're making these huge, elaborate things … that cost [USD]$8, you know? It's like just a pickle and *chamoy*. … [W]hat we did, we would take our *raspa* and stick, like, a pickle in it—so, we were already doing that [as kids]. But they just … make these beautiful things that picture very well. And with social media, I mean, it ties those in. And people are just advertising for you [with social media use]. Because these things photograph so well. And they're amazing —these elaborate things. They literally sell them for [USD]$8. (Karen)

An extreme example of the gourmet *raspa* treats emerging locally during my research is evident in Figure 5.5. This massive gourmet *raspa* treat—complete with pickle slices, candy worms and seasoning—was vended in San Antonio as part of a new annual "Raspa Fest" event (Mathis 2015):

Figure 5.5: An extreme gourmet *raspa* treat; © Kay Richter 2015 (Mathis 2015)

Although it is difficult to perceive snacks such as *raspas* as anything other than a refreshing treat in a hot climate or a comfort or nostalgic food, Lina rationalized the high cost of some gourmet food truck items such as *raspas* in terms of "paying" for personal health:

> I love them. And I love what they're doing [a specific gourmet food truck]. And I understand why they charge what they have to charge. But a lot of people can't afford it in my neighborhood—I know people have complained to me: "That's a lot of money; [USD]$5 for a sno-cone."
>
> I'm like, yes, but you're paying for your health, you know? So, that's always my argument with them. … And those trucks that you see in the neighborhood …. [Gourmet trucks are] just a different animal. … Because they're promoting health. And not putting high fructose corn syrup [a sweetener] in your stuff, you know? (Lina)

Lina's comments indicate "foodie" discourses and judgements about ingredients and what foods constitute a healthy diet (Johnston & Baumann 2010). Separately, Adrian equated his sourcing and use of certain ingredients with the healthiness and value of the foods that he sells as a gourmet food truck vendor—describing using some "Texas grown" ingredients and maintaining a "close relationship with the farm" as helping to distinguish his operations.

In contrast, Daniel described the typical offerings of local gourmet food trucks as comfort or fast foods, but with perhaps novel ingredients or pairings: "[W]e had … gourmet hot dogs, which was really good. And then … another taco. … [D]uck [fat fried potato] fries [chips] … I think I had those."

Additionally, Ben suggested that the tacos offered by some local gourmet trucks can be viewed as simply more expensive versions of what can be purchased in San Antonio's working-class neighborhoods:

> [Y]ou can do Mexican food … you know, upscale. But it's gonna cost me $15[USD] for mini tacos? Or I can go to the West Side or South Side and get the same shit. Cooked for pretty much the same people for a fraction of the price, you know what I mean? And he's [the neighborhood vendor's] gonna have that love that's usually in there; not … just busting out fuckin' tacos. … [A]nd just

> because it has organic cilantro, now you're gonna charge me an extra ten bucks [$10USD], you know what I mean? (Ben)

Furthermore, the apparent quest by some gourmet trucks to be first to the local market with a food specialization led Max to speculate that perhaps they have run out of new concepts, aside from mining neighborhood practices:

> I don't know if they're running out of what individual item they want to specialize—like, everyone's done, you know, the fancy hot dog. … It's kind of like what the [gourmet] *raspa*, the *chamoy* is—take this one thing everyone has known their whole lives and dress it up and make it expensive. You have the [gourmet] pizza truck. You have the [gourmet] taco truck. You have all of 'em. (Max)

As Max and other interviewees suggested, the hunt for new or novel foods by gourmet vendors could lead them to adopt seasonal vending strategies and to engage in travel for research. An example is Ben's approach:

> [W]hen winter comes … it's the slowest time of the year for food trucks. So, actually my partner and I are going to go to [other US cities] just to kind of see what they're doing … there, any ideas we can do. Kind of bring stuff back because we want to have … different to what other people are doing. (Ben)

Moreover, Gil helped me to perceive that efforts by gourmet vendors for innovative food products to distinguish themselves locally can lead to trucks selling items that no longer qualify as "street" food, as these offerings are difficult if not impossible to eat while walking or standing (see Figure 5.5):

> [T]he trucks that I … was always used to … were street foods, you know? Things that you could walk around with in your hands. So, tacos, hot dogs, sausages, burgers; and sometimes turkey legs, you know? That was … the thing; and now you are seeing, like, you can go get a seafood platter, you know? (Gil)

Considering local practices, Rob observed that gourmet trucks that try to serve small and more refined portions fail locally:

> [T]rucks here that try to do food, you know, that's just way too elevated? At a high price with small portions? Never succeed. There's been multiple trucks that do that, and they don't last more than six months. San Antonio food trucks—people still see 'em as roach coaches; they see 'em as comfort street food. So, the trucks that come in and start pricing food at $15 a dish, and it's … small portions. They don't make it. (Rob)

Overall, my observations supported the perspectives shared by interviewees that eating from local gourmet trucks often involves paying higher prices for interpretations of familiar comfort foods that are sometimes framed as "healthier" based on the ingredients. I also noted the belief by some locally that healthy eating should cost more, and the assumption that meals out costing more somehow equated to eating healthier than foods on offer from neighborhood establishments.

Additionally, I noticed the use of pun names by some gourmet trucks to highlight their food concept or niche. Through observation meals, I also became aware of the challenge of consuming some gourmet food truck items on-the-go—with unwieldy servings and the meals often packaged with copious use of styrofoam and plastics, like restaurant take-away and suggesting that the meal should be taken somewhere else (such as an office) to be eaten. I also noted the absence of seating and other facilities, including toilets and handwashing stations, at some Downtown Food Truck Program sites. Moreover, I observed that most trucks participating in the City's program used petrol powered generators, as the City did not provide utility connections.

I also observed a "pay me first" approach used by most gourmet vendors, as Greg described it (see Chapter Four), and that gourmet truck card-based payment systems were often set to request a substantial tip as part of simply placing an order. Cumulatively, these factors resulted in meals that I could not describe as better or healthier dining experiences than I had from neighborhood vendors.

The gourmet truck offerings that I observed along with the City's governance of street vending "downtown" (as defined by shifting redevelopment interests) seemed to deter more affordable and traditional street vending offerings for customers throughout the day and week. Overall, interviewees indicated that the low-barrier and more makeshift and familiar vending of and supporting San Antonio's working-class neighborhoods had once again lost some footings in the city (noting the history of the displacement of the downtown Chili Queens vendors discussed in Chapter Two) to make way for more "Trumped-out" or expensive approaches and a narrower interpretations of what constitutes appropriate street vending.

5.3.3 "Trumped-out" approaches to street food vending

Different interviewees described local gourmet food truck vending as having experienced an initial "boom" period of interest and investment based on the national trend, and showing signs of "bust" or decline at the time of my research. For example, Adrian talked about how "romantic" notions about food truck vending had resulted in a local "bubble":

> I think it's on a bubble right now. I think it's going to become a lot less attractive; get rich quick thinking—which it's not, you know? … [A] lot of people have very, very romantic ideas of what it's like to run a food truck … so, I think for that reason, we're probably going to see a leveling out. … [B]ut as that leveling out happens, and as the hardcore people that want to open restaurants and want to continue to push things forward … we'll continue to see a higher level of quality across the board, you know? (Adrian)

Furthermore, Adrian offered the view that gourmet trucks only succeed when their owners work with an "exit strategy" in mind, such as transitioning to a bricks-and-mortar restaurant (Elizarraras 2017c):

> A food truck by itself with a good product and a good following and good management … will break even in the long run—that's what it's going to do. You're not going to get rich off running a food truck. And if you're not using it

> to promote your own brand—whether it's a truck or it's your personal brand—and you do not have some sort of profitable exit strategy, then you're really spinning your wheels. How's that for a soundbite? (Adrian)

Adrian's comments suggest a more aggressively entrepreneurial orientation that others have associated with "young urban creative" endeavors (Webb 2015, para. 2) but that older interviewees also sometimes expressed. Additionally, Adrian shared with me how he financed his gourmet food truck business via a sizeable family investment:

> [A family member] was looking to invest in something. … And … I had been throwing around the idea of a food truck. ... I think when it was all said and done, it was around [USD]$75,000. … I could have done it cheaper now. Not because the market has changed, but I know what I'm doing, you know? … [I]t hasn't held its value, in the sense that I could sell it for [USD]$75,000. I'll probably get thirty [USD$30,000] for it if I sold it, I think. … I would like more, obviously, but I think that's probably a reasonable estimate. (Adrian)

Considering that many households within San Antonio's 410 loop have incomes below USD$28,000 annually (see Figure 1.7), spending tens of thousands of dollars to launch a mobile food vending business would amount to what Nolan deemed (in 2015) to be a "Trumped-out" or incredibly expensive approach to launching a food truck business—referencing billionaire developer and business mogul President Donald Trump. Nolan also observed how rapidly the value of expensive custom-built or "Trumped-out" food trucks can decline in San Antonio, possibly creating opportunities for some in the used vehicle market:

> [T]here are going to be guys that have "Trumped-out" and spent … thousands of dollars. And "oh man, I thought this was going to work out for me, and I blew 80 grand [USD$80,000USD] on this truck …. [I]t wasn't doing well," you know? …. You're going to get that re-sale truck that's in great condition for … a Hell of a lot less than that guy spent. … [T]here is a re-sale market. … [S]ome people are going to look at it from a … franchise model. Like, "I'm gonna spend the 80

grand [USD$80,000 USD] to get the pre-done look of the truck and all this, and it's going to be perfect." … [B]ut now you're out 80 grand, you know? (Nolan)

Separately, Beth indicated that she followed a more "Trumped-out" pathway to launching a mobile food operation by buying a new vehicle and then paying a local operation that "tricked it out"—prepared it for use. Various interviewees including Beth expressed how such an approach to starting a business would not be available to economically poorer vendors in San Antonio. For interviewees like Danica, gourmet trucks demonstrate how some San Antonians "have more money to start off with" and thus have access to the "fancier" vending vehicles that she and other interviewees perceived to be the style favored by the City's Downtown Food Truck Program and special events (see Figure 5.4).

Furthermore, Vin observed that gourmet trucks did not demonstrate the innovation, creativity and personal investment evident in neighborhood vending practices. He drew attention to San Antonio's economic bifurcation and spatial inequality, noting that on the city's West Side, "we have to make things work on, like, the most shoestring of budgets." Additionally, Vin decried the gourmet truck "vibe" as "a bunch of hipsters" who "don't give a fuck" about local conditions and who will ultimately "make their money and bounce"—suggesting "get rich quick thinking" that Adrian also described driving some local gourmet food truck practices but also the mobility of wealthier populations.

In contrast, Rob shared how as a local gourmet truck vendor he operated with other objectives than simply a profit motive:

> I started the food truck business with my wife. … So, for her it was making money. … For me, I was thinking, well, it's gonna be cool … how we impact where we're at, you know? How we can conform a corner in the urban fabric. And bring life to that—that would never happen, you know? And what can that trigger down the road? … [A]re we just a food truck that parks and gets by? Or are we a food track that parks and has a bigger ripple effect on that community in that corner, you know? (Rob)

However, Rob also stressed that he vended mainly at private gourmet food truck parks (see Figure 1.2)—sites that were closely managed by the owners, and where options that might be deemed too affordable or to be the wrong appearance could be barred. Rob described how local food truck parks selected vendors:

> [T]he first time [a food truck is] there, they request a menu. It's one thing they want to avoid is having two trucks that are serving the same type of food on the same day. Um, and they also want to look at price point for your menu to make sure that you're not way under or way above. They want to keep it fair. (Rob)

Rob's comments suggest a vendor screening process shaping San Antonio's "handful" (SA Current 2015, para. 3) of private food truck parks not unlike the judging criteria that determined the City's Downtown Food Truck Program—which also aimed to contain competition. Additionally, I observed that most food truck parks could only be reasonably reached by car. Furthermore, Rob explained that different food truck parks are designed and managed to cater to specific customer demographics:

> I mean there's trucks that their menu just don't fit the demographics that go to those parks. … [L]ike one park is more young people, younger families. Some other park could be … tends to be a lot more mature. … Families that have kids that are already teenagers … and their taste in food is different than the other place …. [W]here a truck that has hamburgers does great. … [S]o, it all depends on where you're at. (Rob)

Separately, Nolan offered that local food truck parks were sometimes used as platforms for "cross-promoting" different businesses and services, including food truck building and maintenance. He also suggested that park owners succeed by having a "monopoly" on drink sales including alcohol. My observations supported that food truck parks were typically anchored by a central and more open-air bar—similar to the icehouses that Max discussed. Furthermore, Max described food truck

parks as “kinda cliché”— based on his familiarity with local icehouse traditions and also the long practice of some bars and clubs being served by taco trucks.

Additionally, Karen criticized food truck parks for eliminating the mobile and more adaptive aspects of food truck vending. She argued that people who go to food truck parks locally “don’t need anything mobile” as patrons typically drive to these parks. Additionally, Adrian discussed some of the costs and challenges of operating at local food truck parks from a vendor’s perspective, such as high rents and “non-compete clauses” at some parks:

> [I]t varies park to park. … Like anything, it’s always about who you know. … I think they charge [USD]$1,800 to [USD]$2,000 a month. I can open a new brick-and-mortar [restaurant] for that. … Some of the other parks are cheaper. And there is a half-time, a part-time [rate] and all of that. … [W]e couldn’t park at [a particular food truck park] right now if we wanted to. … [T]he only time we can park there is when [another food truck] is not there. … Because they [the park operators] have non-compete clauses about the type of food, you know? (Adrian)

Moreover, Adrian regarded operating at food truck parks as somewhat “stupid”—equating it with paying to compete and “be right next to” other vendors. Adrian, however, raised that food truck parks might be good spaces for vendors to stage media and other promotion:

> [W]hen there’s an event. Or when there’s a reason that I can distinguish myself. Things like … where I want to make sure nothing goes wrong. Like … TV [coverage]. … Because it’s gonna look busy. And electricity is plugged in; water is plugged in, you know? You can minimize your snafus. (Adrian)

Adrian’s comments suggest some of the utilities that are typically available to vendors at local food truck parks, and also how these parks can present a desirable image for media purposes (see Figure 1.2). Separately, Reina offered that local food truck parks can provide a variety of foods and more certainty for customers,

although the parks did not necessarily provide the best dining experiences, from her perspective:

> [T]here were lots of food trucks. Which is nice—but it kind of spreads stuff out. … It's also nice because when you're going with five other people; no one can decide what they want to eat. … It was okay. Parking was a little difficult. I wouldn't say the food was amazing. … [I]t was pricier than other food trucks. It was convenient that … we knew there was going to be food trucks there no matter what. Sometimes hunting down food trucks can be a hassle. (Reina)

Overall, these perspectives suggest some of the costs of gourmet food truck vending in San Antonio—with tens of thousands of dollars spent on bespoke vehicles and high monthly rents paid at some food truck parks representing a more "Trumped-out" or very expensive approach to food truck vending. They also indicate that local sites of gourmet truck vending such as food truck parks are closely staged and managed environments, where utilities are often provided but also where competition between vendors is shaped by the owners or managers. As local food truck parks predate the City of San Antonio's Downtown Food Truck Program (Chasnoff 2011; Davila 2011), the structuring and developers of these parks influence how local government has responded to the gourmet food truck trend.

5.3.4 Downtown food truck vending

As discussed in earlier sections of this thesis, my period of research coincided with the City's formalization of a Downtown Food Truck Program in early 2014 (City of San Antonio, 2014), which followed the program's pilot stage (Baugh 2012; Olivo 2012). For some interviewees, that pilot stage was a response to the migration of the gourmet food truck movement to the city in late 2009 and 2010 (Castillo & McInnis 2010; Chasnoff 2011; Davila 2011) and resultant "Wild West" street vending practices in or near downtown that threatened some local interests.

This period was also marked by the development of SAFTA in 2012, which is similar to member-based professional food truck organizations that other researchers note in other US cities as part of the gourmet food truck movement (Ibrahim 2011;

Dunn 2013; Esparza, Walker & Rossman 2013; N. Martin 2014; Strand 2015; Wessel 2017). Although the Downtown Food Truck Program is governed by a City ordinance (City of San Antonio 2014) and managed by City staff members (City of San Antonio n.d.), my interviewees (who included some SAFTA members) described the program as more or less run by SAFTA. Moreover, as interviewees and my observations indicated, parallels can be drawn between San Antonio's private food truck parks and the City's program, as both could make judgements about food redundancy, work to limit competition and be criticized as demonstrating favoritism or bias in selecting and placing food trucks while generally presenting barriers to the participation of economically poorer vendors and customers.

For example, Nolan described SAFTA and the City's program as operating in unison and blocking part-time vendors from operating downtown. He stressed that SAFTA members must be "full-time" vendors (which he described as "professional" food trucks), and that there is an annual fee to be a member. Documents posted to SAFTA's website (safta.net) detail the organization's commitments to professionalizing local practices and improving the image of food truck vending locally, and they describe various requirements for membership including two tiers of annual dues—USD$150 for basic membership and USD$250 for membership with voting rights. Furthermore, Nolan described SAFTA as operating to "pool the resources" of members and to approach private businesses and the City as a broker for member food trucks. Nolan emphasized that SAFTA's approach could be "less intimidating" for site managers and City officials, as it could address some uncertainties and discomforts associated with working directly with individual vendors:

> I get solicited by a guy that's a part of an association of food trucks, and he's saying … we can try it out. … And we can start you out with things that are comfortable for your … employees … barbecue, pizza, you know, hamburgers, things like that. Much more approachable. … "I don't know if my company is going to be interested in Pakistani food," you know? "That's really weird." (Nolan)

Nolan went on to say that the SAFTA structure could help food trucks selling foods that are more novel locally—such as Pakistani cuisine—but that the arrangement only "works out … if you're part of the Association."

Nolan's description of SAFTA and gourmet food truck vending generally as broadening local cuisine options was echoed by other interviewees, and it was a view shared by some local politicians in justifying the launch of a pilot food truck program downtown (Baugh 2012). However, as some interviewees and I noticed, the actual range of food offerings resulting from the City's program was mainly limited to what Nolan suggested were less "weird" gourmet truck items—such as barbeque, burgers, chicken, seafood and "Asian" inspired comfort food fusions—and with few trucks scheduled per site and overall during the week (see Figure 3.2). Additionally, some interviewees such as Danica observed that the program appeared to define the broadening of cuisine options as limiting the involvement of trucks and trailers serving Tex-Mex or Mexican foods.

As Nolan stressed, the program experimented with and constrained operations overall to the point that it made it difficult for participating trucks to reach and serve customers in an already challenging downtown market:

> [T]they have maybe five or six locations. … [I]t's all really trial and error for them. … [I]t goes with the fact that there's just not a whole lot of employment options downtown. And then you also have to deal with the preconceived notions of food trucks. … [L]ike, "I'm wearing this suit; I'm not going outside—I'm going to cater." … [T]here's [also] a complete lack of promotion [of the program] occasionally that is a detriment to the trucks. (Nolan)

Separately, Rob also noticed problems with the City's management of the program from both a vendor and customer standpoint:

> [I]t happened at least six times where I went to a food truck, or to a location because there was a food truck [listed to be] there. … And I show up and they're not there. But on the schedule and on their [the City's] Facebook page, they're

> [listed]. … And the guy [a program representative] responds … very dismissive. Saying "well, you should check every morning on our Facebook page." … [S]o those things … attention to detail …. I mean, imagine … for me, I go from my office park and walk over. That took thirty minutes. My lunch is done. How many people does that happen [to]? … [H]ow can a truck get a really great following? And six times in three months, it's a lot of mistakes. (Rob)

As Rob suggested, the City's scheduling mistakes or inaccurate information could harm specific gourmet trucks and discourage food truck and street food customers generally. I also experienced sometimes traveling to program sites only to find no gourmet trucks as scheduled. I also noticed how some scheduled trucks would arrive late to or depart early from some sites, suggesting low sales but also further discouraging the development of a customer base at these sites. Some interviewees indicated that participation in the primarily lunchtime program (with SAFTA playing some if not a large role in the scheduling of trucks at specific sites) was for operators who could afford to weather bad daytime sales to gain favor with the City to vend at more lucrative special events. Overall, my experiences at Downtown Food Truck Program sites raised my awareness of various missed or avoided opportunities and the lack of easily accessed street food alternatives beyond the program as scheduled.

The Downtown Food Truck Program, as described by some interviewees and I observed, appeared to succeed in the City's stated aim to "control the quantity" of trucks in the downtown business district (City of San Antonio 2014, p. 2), as aligned with other efforts to restrict street vending downtown (Olivo 2011)—and to the point that a visitor could easily leave with the impression that San Antonio does not have much of a street food history, culture or scene. Generally, downtown offerings did not meet expectations that street food should be affordable, easily accessed, consumable on-the-go, and available throughout the day, week and year.

Moreover, different interviewees emphasized that the involvement of SAFTA in the City's program and the predominance of member trucks in program scheduling and City special events blurred distinctions between local government and this private fee-based organization, as apparent with Danica inadvertently calling SAFTA the

“Downtown Food Truck Association.” However, despite criticisms, some interviewees spoke more positively about the work of SAFTA. For example, Adrian asserted that SAFTA had improved some conditions for all food truck vendors, citing the ending of the background check requirement for food truck workers based on SAFTA lobbying local government for the changes. Beth also discussed efforts by SAFTA specifically to end the City’s police background check requirement for food truck operators, describing this change as a social justice victory:

> San Antonio Food Truck Association. … I think it was forty … food trucks [as members] … started looking at the regulations, and one of them was that everyone on the food truck had to have … a finger print, a federal and state [police] background check. Well, they don’t require that in restaurants. And they don’t require that at kiddie [amusement] parks. … And you know, one of the issues also is when people come out of incarceration or whatever, one of the jobs they can do is work in a restaurant or work on a truck. … So, it was a chilling effect. It really impacted the food trucks’ ability to hire people. (Beth)

Beth’s estimation of about 40 food trucks comprising SAFTA align with the fluctuating number of trucks listed as members on SAFTA’s website (safta.net) during my period of research, and suggest an organization with some representational clout locally. As reported, there was also some crossover between the leadership of SAFTA and the San Antonio Restaurant Association—the local arm of a state foodservice industry association with a history dating to 1938 of successfully lobbying local government for policy changes favorable to members (Tijerina 2016). Despite SAFTA’s apparent success in lifting the police background check requirement and the existence of a Downtown Food Truck Program, I often observed downtown—including at officially revitalized public spaces such as Travis Park and Main Plaza—a public realm largely devoid of food trucks and other street food vending outside of special events. As some of my observations and interviewees made me aware, much of San Antonio’s food truck activity occurs within the margins of downtown and on private property. This included gourmet vending catering to and advertising for new luxury housing or “condos” for young professionals, as Ben described:

> [T]hey have a [food] truck pretty much every day. Because of the people that live in the condos there. … [T]hey want a snack before they go out. Or, they skip lunch so they want to eat right away so then they can have their dinner—like, late night dinner. So, everybody there is kind of young; so, they don't eat dinner at 5 [pm]. They eat, like, 9, 9:30 or 10 [pm]. … But they want their snack or whatever right now. … [P]laces where lots of people go are not just bars; it's also these condos. … And for just opening, to actually have a plugin, that's pretty awesome. (Ben)

Ben also drew my attention to the fact that new luxury housing in San Antonio is sometimes built with utilities and site planning for food trucks as another amenity for residents. As Adrian discussed, food trucks at such sites could support regular gatherings of residents but also special events. Echoing other interviewees, he stressed that different catering opportunities (such as weddings, birthdays and corporate gigs) were a "money-maker" for gourmet trucks locally, and that these opportunities generated leads for additional catering work. Separately, Greg described catering some private events, but as an activity he engaged in only when the profits were guaranteed to be high.

Following the research protocols I discuss in Chapter Three, I did not observe food truck operations within gated condominium developments or at house parties or other sites that were not publicly accessible—suggesting some directions for additional research that I discuss in Chapter Six. However, I did sometimes have meals from gourmet trucks that catered special events that were open to the public, such as evening markets and art walks. As I experienced, item pricing could send the message that gourmet trucks and the events overall were not seeking working-class patrons.

5.3.5 Not for neighborhood vendors or customers?

As some interviewees and I observed, gourmet truck operations often sought higher prices (and up front) for versions of comfort foods, such as hot dogs, hamburgers, tacos, fried chicken, barbecue and *raspa* treats. For example, Lina offered that

gourmet trucks serve customers with “higher income” in San Antonio, and she described neighborhood *raspa* vans as a “lower class version of the food truck”:

> I don’t think everybody can afford those trucks … I think ice cream [*raspa*] trucks are, like, a lower class version of the food truck. … Because people can afford a few bucks [dollars] for hot Cheetos or a sno-cone. … Maybe the food trucks are meant for people with … a little higher income. (Lina)

As I noted, such affordable *raspa* vans could not be found downtown, and likewise, the activities of neighborhood *paleteros* and taco trucks were not encouraged there (although I occasionally noticed these practices at the margins of downtown). Separately, Greg described how he noticed less affluent customers sometimes saving for gourmet street foods, further suggesting the reframing of street vending in some sections of the city as a luxury item: “If it is someone with economical issues, well, they’ll wait until the first of the month. … And you better be there. And it better be fresh. And it better be good.”

Moreover, Adrian shared with me that as a gourmet food truck vendor he was occasionally asked for tacos by some customers. This is apparently a common occurrence for gourmet truck vendors in San Antonio, as reported locally (Castillo & McInnis 2010). Adrian described how he typically responded to such queries: “We don’t have tacos, but we have this—check this out. … If you don’t think they’re worth the nine bucks [USD$9], then don’t pay for them.”

Adrian went on to describe neighborhood food truck vending as “basic” and apart from gourmet food truck operations:

> [I]f I … owned a taco truck … your basic neighborhood truck, I would keep that and then try to do something [else]. … [M]aybe open a different concept, if I wanted to jump over to the gourmet side of food trucking. … [B]ecause there’s always going to be a place for that taco truck. … There always will be. (Adrian)

Overall, interviewees' perceptions and placing of two "schools," "levels," "boxes," "sides" or "classes" of food truck vending in San Antonio, drawing from their words, help to reveal the economic bifurcation and more subtle (or not so subtle) discrimination (Tach 2014) that others have noted shaping local government responses to the gourmet food truck trend compared to the treatment of traditional working-class peddling (often framed as immigrant Latina/o) in the context of other major US cities (Hernández-López 2011; N. Martin 2014; Dunn 2015). San Antonio's long standing as a predominantly Mexican American city and the inadequacy of simple racial and "ethnic binaries" (Hernández-Ehrisman 2008, p. 197) and assumptions about nationality and migration in describing who comprises the city's local government, elite business interests, gourmet vendors and working-class peddlers are factors that mark San Antonio as different from other case studies of the US food truck movement and related urban changes during the era of cognitive-cultural-capitalism (Scott 2008, 2014, 2017). San Antonio's status as one of the nation's most spatially unequal cities (Casura 2015; Schwartz 2016) and its relative proximity to and cultural and other ties with Mexico might encourage comparisons with the socioeconomic discrimination and urban marginalization that researchers have observed in cities in Mexico (Saporito 2011; Acharya & Barragán Codina 2012) and that some of my interviewees discussed, in relation to local food truck practices. Moreover, the interplay and the divide between neighborhood and gourmet food truck vending that interviewees and I observed add to broadening and more global understandings of gentrification and socioeconomic (re)stratification processes in US cities (Hyra 2017; Florida 2017; Moskowitz 2017; Schlichtman, Patch & Hill 2017) and which can include local government judgements about what constitutes "good" street vending—which some have framed as urban "food culture contests" (Hernández-López 2011) or creative class politics (N. Martin 2014) .

As I have discussed in this chapter, local gourmet food truck operations sometimes follow and support patterns of appropriating ("knapsacking") and displacing ("sandblasting") local working-class street vending practices as part of "unabashedly subjective" (Baugh 2012, para. 11) downtown renewal efforts and public improvement projects—as notions of what constitutes "downtown" expand or shift geographically but also narrow to exclude working-class vendors and customers or

to marginalize them to a second or other downtown (Rivard 2014). I consider these and other observations in turning to discuss possible futures for local mobile food vending.

5.4 Vending futures

In this section, I share possible near futures for local mobile food vending suggested by interviewees. This discussion is valuable given San Antonio's status as the fastest growing major city in the US and the city's history of influencing national and global foodways, from chili to stadium nachos. It also helps to bring San Antonio perspectives to discourse about twenty-first century US urban changes. I begin by considering local foot truck vending potentially narrowing or becoming more restricted in the future.

5.4.1 Vendsharing and other opportunities for improving mobile vending

When considering the possible future of local food truck vending, Daniel suggested that the field of food trucks might further narrow due to challenges for "upstarts" or new operations:

> I do think at some point the market is going to be so saturated that you're going to see it dying off—hopefully, at the redundant parts of it. So, maybe not as many regular taco trucks; maybe they start to become more individually specialized. And hopefully that creates some interesting variation and … "follow-ship" to those different vendors. … I don't think food truck vending is ever going away now. I think it's just going to evolve. … The regulations … are probably going to become more strict. Or the bureaucracy … is probably going to become more complicated. So, people are going to have a harder time getting into it. The kinds of trucks you need in order to operate are going to have to … meet more criteria. So, that's definitely … going to keep a lot of people—upstarts —out. At least from the beginning. So, that's what I think is gonna happen. (Daniel)

Daniel's view that food truck vending locally will narrow not only as the trend fades but as regulation or bureaucracy "becomes more complicated" echoes the

perspectives of other interviewees, who alerted me to what they noted as increases in the regulation of food trucks. Specifically, they described new water and fire inspection requirements—but also local government judgements about what constitutes the right number of food trucks and good truck aesthetics and cuisines, along with changing technology use effecting regulation. These factors, as Daniel noted, could contribute to vendors having "a harder time getting into" an occupation challenged rather than assisted by local regulation.

Daniel's observation that there might be fewer "regular" or working-class taco trucks in the future is also possible, considering that these trucks are already discouraged from operating in an expanding downtown area (Yeager 2015) and as new development targets the city's historically working-class Mexican American West Side (Magdaleno 2017). However, as interviewees alerted me, the imagined boundaries of the West Side are changing, expanding or shifting further west, as the city follows a sprawling suburban growth pattern (Kolko 2017; Ura & Essig 2017) but also as various greater downtown redevelopment interests and plans surface (Magdaleno 2017). San Antonio's longstanding and extreme spatial inequality (Schwartz 2016; Casura 2017a, b; Stoeltje 2017), and the sheer size of the city (Parker 2014b) and continued growth suggest there will remain areas where regulation and other public investment is weak and demand for affordable neighborhood taco trucks is high, although the locations of these areas might shift. In short, center city residents might lose access to neighborhood taco trucks as other areas experience this activity.

Furthermore, I observed smartphones being used by many in my study area. Along with shaping the policing of street peddling, wide access to smartphones might open up new options for food truck vending even if the actual number of kitchens on wheels is narrowed or constrained by regulation. There could be more opportunities and new platforms for vendsharing (the sharing of vending vehicles) and vending space sharing—noting trends of, but also concerns about, the emergent "sharing" economy (Schor 2016). Such trends might support "upstart" vendors, who have not been supported by the City's Downtown Food Truck Program or the creation of private food truck parks. For example, Louise described approaching a food truck

park but being told that they did not have space for her. She also offered that the City does not help venders locate spaces, emphasizing “you really have to by yourself look” for places to vend.

Additionally, Louise observed opportunities for more daytime food truck vending downtown, but noted how existing regulation or structuring of the Downtown Food Truck Program curtailed this activity:

> You don’t see too many during the day. … And that’s why trucks look for bars and clubs to fill in the gap. And that’s kind of bad ‘cause during the day there are a lot of people. … It would be good if they could do a change in the policy. So that people can … have … an in- and-out. Like, if you buy from a Chick-fil-A [a fast food restaurant], it’s more convenient. (Louise).

Louise’s comments echo the perspectives of other vendors I interviewed who expressed wanting assistance from the City in securing sites and vending opportunities where “there are a lot of people” or potential customers. Local regulation that is supportive of additional sites and hours of operation and a wider range of affordable street food vending could support various City aims. These aims include encouraging active transport (walking, cycling and public transit) and wider use of public spaces, supporting small and local business and neighborhood economic development, promoting tourism and improving social equity and cohesion (Casura 2017a). Additionally, the City could support food truck vending as a vehicle for addressing some of the City’s food access insecurity (Everett 2012; Winters 2016; Stoeltje 2017) and also issues with drink driving (Moravec 2014).

Moreover, some vendors I interviewed described the challenges they faced in outfitting and maintaining their vehicles. These challenges include plumbing vehicles to meet City standards and sourcing appropriate generator and power sources for their operations. Vendsharing and vending space sharing might be embraced by the City, as these activities could support vendors in accessing safe vehicles and better spots.

City approaches to vendsharing and vending space sharing might also appeal to vendors' desires to improve the local urban fabric and extend notions of family and hospitality. For example, Ben shared that he observed vendsharing to be a mutually supportive approach that could nurture new vendors and improve existing operations, citing a local example:

> [T]hey were doing so well in their little trailer that they were able to save up enough money, they were renting the trailer. They got enough money … to save up and bought a little truck. …And that's when they were like [to a vendor]: "you know what? You can sell anything out of the truck that you want. And then you go from there. … [Y]ou try out some foods." … And people loved it. …And why wouldn't I want to do that for others, you know? (Ben)

While I noticed vendsharing occurring locally, it was not clear that the City's existing regulations supported or even envisioned these practices— just as local regulations did not anticipate non-food related and more elite mobile services (such as bicycle repair, pet grooming, clothing boutiques and barber shops on wheels) that popped up near some luxury housing (Oberhofer 2017). Mobile boutiques in San Antonio follow practices in other US cities inspired by the gourmet food truck movement. They also echo some working-class neighborhood practices I observed in passing, such as truck-based undergarment and plant sales and small engine repair services from the back of trucks in some strip mall parking lots. The City could look to build upon and improve these practices with new public infrastructure, such as plugins and public toilets. This infrastructure itself might be configured as mobile, opening up additional opportunities for public vendsharing and vending space sharing.

Vendsharing and vending space sharing directed or supported by the City might also encourage innovations in mobile signage, such as digital facades or otherwise changeable signs. Such signage could support various City public communication aims, including related to public health, safety and input or consultation. However, direct City involvement in vendsharing could also lead to an even more narrow range of food truck activity, considering the example of the City of Toronto aiming to

contain street food peddling to a small number of expensive and highly specialized vehicles that participating vendors had to pay for (Alcoba 2011; Valverde 2012). To avoid further narrowing the local street vending market, the City would need to be attentive to and strive to break from the history of approaches to regulating street food selling that have discouraged more inclusive and self-directed activity (Arellano 2012; Pilcher 2012; McMahon 2013; Cárdenas 2016).

5.4.2 Tiny food vending, catering, delivery and corporate involvement

Physically small or tiny shops—along with cart-based and more perambulatory peddling—were referred to by some interviewees as traditional local practices also likely to shape future vending. For example, Rob described a diminutive vending trailer approach that he admired:

> It's … like 6 feet [2 m] by 5 feet [1.5 m]. All four sides open. He's got a [customer] shelf all around. He's got … music playing the whole time. … [T]here's always people standing around him. And he's always talking with the customers. … I mean you're literally right there, you know? So, it's a whole different dynamic between that and the food truck. (Rob)

Small trailer and food cart activity was relatively uncommon downtown—with the exception of the *raspa* cart vending tradition at Alamo Plaza and a few hot dog carts, along with booths at farmer's markets and special events at sites such as Main Plaza and La Villita (see Figure 1.9). In the recent past, cart-based food vending downtown was more common (Patoski 1985). It is possible that there will be a resurgence of this approach locally, considering this history but also the trend of food cart vending in other US cities (Sawyer 2017).

As I experienced and some interviewees described, smaller footprint local vending has also traditionally involved bricks-and-mortar *tienditas*—small enclosed shops and walk-up windows (apparently called taco or burrito stands in other parts of Texas) that reference vending practices in Mexico. These forms and practices evoke the history of working-class "house-restaurants" in greater downtown San Antonio, or the front or main room selling of *chile con carne* to visitors and locals in the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These practices likely birthed the expression "chili parlor" in the US (Lomax 2017, para. 15) and also suggest the origins of some legacy neighborhood *taquerias* being called taco houses.

Tiny vending in San Antonio has also included more perambulatory sales of items such as candied apples, *paletas*, cups of cut fruit, *tamales,* bottled water and soft drinks from cooler boxes. Tiny vending might become more prevalent as a result of increasing or changing regulation of food trucks. It might also expand as more local vendors become aware of the rapid decline in the financial value of food trucks over short periods and other challenges with this vehicle-type.

Furthermore, tinier mobile vending might allow street food peddling to reach more remote areas of San Antonio where "natural markets" (Bhowmik, 2010, pp. 13-14) form—such as at entry points to San Antonio's expanding network of recreational creek trail paths (Heidlbrink 2016). It might also further shape event catering in San Antonio, noting that the neighborhood *paletería* El Paraíso (Barbacoa Apparel 2016) already rents stocked small cooler carts of *paletas* for parties and events. For example, Rob described some of the possibilities for vendor catering that he observed:

> I think a lot of trucks are looking more into catering. … It's a minimal amount of hours, and your ticket per person is a lot higher usually [than public sales]. And you're only working three hours, you know? … A catering day, there's always going to be an up-charge [higher price]. Because you're taking your … [vending] day off. … [Y]ou will require more manpower. … [T]he same amount of people you're serving throughout a whole day, you're serving in an hour and a half, you know? …. [W]e don't offer everything on our menus. Some items take a lot longer to make them, so you just want to be productive. (Rob)

Rob's observations suggest some of the factors that vendors might consider in taking up catering, such as devising specific catering menus and having access to temporary workers. Furthermore, Greg noted the promise of new e-commerce delivery options in helping vendors to increase their business, including towards more catering work.

I also observed the growth of e-commerce in the US, including online booking platforms for food truck catering such as Roaming Hunger (Pierson 2015). Additionally, I noted how companies like Amazon and Uber developed food delivery applications (Daniels 2017; Kashyap 2017) that some neighborhood cafés began to utilize as I edited this thesis—following the lead of corporate fast food chains and more upscale local restaurants. Although the trend of engaging food trucks for event catering (including weddings) might fade, food delivery applications will likely soon extend to food truck and other street vendors locally, as has already occurred in other US cities. Through these and other platforms, vendors might also be better engaged in San Antonio's longstanding and substantial convention center economy (Sanders 2014b).

Another practice that has emerged in other US cities that might have local impacts could be the use of food trucks by some public school lunch and feeding programs (Wong 2015). In San Antonio, some schools could follow this trend and engage with neighborhood vending that already serves students and staff members. Such a partnership between schools and vendors could result in work-study or service-learning programs for students, and it could lead to items being vended that meet ¡Viva Health!'s nutritional standards (Johnson 2017). However, such partnerships might require changes to the City's remaining proximity rules against selling at and near schools when they are in operation (City of San Antonio, n.d.).

Generally, trends indicate a future of greater corporate involvement in mobile food vending in San Antonio. For example, Justin described H-E-B's major investment in large food trucks—in response to the gourmet food truck trend but also to be able to serve during emergencies (Winters 2013).

Separately, Nolan observed corporate restaurant chains investing in "super deluxe" food trucks as a trend that could have larger impacts on practices in San Antonio:

> So, Steak'n Shake [a fast casual restaurant chain]. …Well, they've recently spent a handful of money buying and making a super deluxe truck. And that's cool. … I think it really only helps the guys in other trucks …. But it would be a great

> entry-level for somebody who has undefined tastes—you know, is less cultured in the truck scene. … "I can buy at Steak-n-Shake; I've had Steak'n Shake at a brick-and-mortar … and it's parked at a truck park." (Nolan)

I noted the presence of new corporate food trucks at special events including the annual *Culinaria* event in San Antonio sponsored by H-E-B. I also observed at and outside of this event the use of food truck-shaped or -appearing vehicles in some non-food advertising such as for internet and phone services. This is a practice that some have called "food truck takeovers" (quoted in Pierson 2015, para. 18) and reflects a marketing approach that researchers have observed in other US cities (Ibrahim 2011; Dunn 2013). As surmised by some interviewees, the City of San Antonio is increasingly looking to opportunities to fund public work with branding, marketing and direct private investment, as suggested with the renovation of and new opportunities to rent Travis Park. It is likely that additional public-private partnerships and planning for food trucks will shape the City's future.

5.4.3 Commissaries and other planning for mobile food vending

As I shared in Chapter Four, some interviewees discussed with me the challenges of powering food trucks. Some expressed a preference for operating where access to utility power is available. For example, Ben:

> It's just so easy. … [I]t helps everybody out. You don't have to worry. … I don't … have to fill up my propane tank [or worry] that I have enough gas [petrol] for … my generator. Where am I gonna put it? You know, like so freakin' loud. And if you're the only one there, okay. But if then there's ten trucks … you have this ambient noise that's like rrrrrrrrrrrn! (Ben)

Additionally, Rob iterated how planning for food trucks influenced the design of various new sites locally, from private housing and bars to new public facilities such as bus transfer stations:

> [T]he new transfer station that's being built for downtown. … [T]hey designed six spots for food trucks. And they have everything like a food truck park. So,

> they're providing power—everything. Which is something I find interesting. …That infrastructure. … Now, you gotta think about how a transfer station works, right? …. And … what type of food are you gonna serve, you know? The … socioeconomic level of people that use that station? (Rob)

Rob and other contacts in San Antonio drew my attention to plans for food trucks at Centro Plaza, a transfer station for local buses which opened to the public in late 2015 and not far from Haven for Hope. Published plans and renderings for Centro Plaza, which was initially called the "West Side Multimodal Transit Center" (Olivo 2013b, para. 3; Ayers 2014), depict relatively affluent users and gourmet food truck vending there. The opening of Centro Plaza was hailed by local politicians both as "a new beginning" for the area and also as a means to separate "business people downtown" from bus passengers by relocating routes and passengers away from sites such as Travis Park—with bus circulation and waiting passengers blamed as causes of downtown congestion (Blunt 2015, paras. 3 & 5). Reporting about the opening of Centro Plaza thus provides another example of "two downtowns" discourse (Rivard 2014, para. 7) and some of the microsegregation (Tach 2014) shaping San Antonio during my period of research, with business workers presumed to not use public transit and mixing or encounters across the city's economic divide considered by some to be a problem.

Like Haven for Hope (Smith 2017), Centro Plaza has been called a "transformation hub" for clients but also for the West Side of downtown (Blunt 2015, para. 10). Although Centro Plaza did not ultimately include a selection of food trucks or other market activity as suggested with project plans and renderings (Olivo 2013b; Ayers 2014), the ideal of food trucks and other commercial offerings and related social interactions as a part of using public transit captured the imaginations of at least some of my interviewees and other local residents. Considering this one example, urban planning that showcases food trucks or other mobile vending will likely continue to influence San Antonio's future built form, even if just when used to gain support for proposed projects.

Some of my interviewees also offered that San Antonio is likely to have new approaches to commissaries in the future, as shaped by vendors' experiences with existing offerings and local government commissary requirements. Ben, for example, shared his vision for a new commissary approach that would include equipment rental and the facility for vendors to safely store foods and vehicles:

> Lock your truck up there … and stay plugged in [to electricity for refrigeration]. Have an actual dish washer. Have actual dry storage. … [H]ave stuff for rent; like, extra tables and chairs. Extra generators. Extra … wires [electrical cords]. …Things like that. (Ben)

Separately, Greg envisioned San Antonio's commissaries as being more open to the public in the future and possibly operating like an airport waiting lounge, where customers could perhaps have a meal or drink and watch vending vehicles "getting cleaned up," "re-purposed" and "shipped back out again." Furthermore, Greg described how San Antonio commissaries might function more like icehouses or private food truck parks in the future, while retaining or improving their utility for vendors and potentially allowing the public to access a range of commissary activities or resources—such as access to commercial kitchens, storage, supply rental and culinary training. Noting trends in other cities but also practices of growing fruit and vegetables and keeping some livestock in San Antonio' working-class neighborhoods, local commissaries might also in the future include urban farming (Conte 2012).

Beyond potential commissary changes, Karen discussed how food trucks might otherwise be employed locally to improve public access to healthier foods:

> Because they're going where the people are. And they're going where H-E-B or other groceries are not going. …So, how do we incentivize … those people to sell other things? Or replace some … things—you know, like fruit cups or something else. It's really difficult because I feel like the nachos and the *raspas* and the pickles—that's like hard, deep San Antonio culture that you may not

ever take away. Or, you might supplement it, but … it might never go away. (Karen)

As I observed, San Antonians have access to fruits, vegetables and other whole foods and ingredients via H-E-B and other grocery stores, but these stores are typically car-dependent, enclosed and otherwise not designed to support walking or the type of sidewalk shopping that can be experienced in other major cities. For example, an estimated only nine percent of San Antonians live within a five minute walking distance of a grocery store compared with 36 percent in Los Angeles and 72 percent in New York (Johnson 2014). As a model that might improve access in San Antonio, Reina described produce and grocery trucks that she had observed in Mexico, and which are also apparently common in parts of California (Karlamangla 2014): "There's … people who … drive around. And they would … have a song playing. … And it was like a pickup truck. And they were selling … cabbage, apples and corn. They also did tortillas."

I did not witness anything comparable during my period of research, but I did occasionally see produce being sold on some street corners from temporary tables or the backs of trucks west of downtown. Additionally, after my research, the San Antonio Food Bank launched in mid-2016 a mobile *mercado* (shop) food truck that sells groceries and some prepared foods at Centro Plaza downtown (Lloyd 2016)—but only one day and a few afternoon hours each week. I also noticed that the *mercado* truck was powered by a loud portable generator, suggesting a lack of infrastructure for food trucks at Centro Plaza despite the promises of these amenities with planning (Olivo 2013b; Ayers 2014). Furthermore, the San Antonio Food Bank's *mercado* truck cost a reported USD$100,000 for local builders to construct (Lloyd 2016), which resulted in a truck comparable with the look favored by the City's Downtown Food Truck Program but representing a "Trumped-out" or very expensive approach that would be difficult for many San Antonians or local organizations to follow.

Additionally, I observed that Centro Plaza attracts spillover from the Haven for Hope facility, given the proximity and as homeless clients are discouraged from using

other publicly accessible spaces downtown by policing. As Rob suggested, the lower incomes of individuals using Centro Plaza could make it a difficult space in which to operate a gourmet food truck. However, I could perceive different approaches to neighborhood vending potentially succeeding at Centro Plaza and other major bus stops downtown—such as *raspa* van, taco truck and *paletero* vending, and considering the history of hot dog cart vending at Travis Park, a major bus transfer point (Patoski 1985).

Beth also observed that the City could do more with mobile food vending to encourage mass transit use, and specifically to engage food truck vendors in addressing the local drink driving epidemic (Moravec 2014):

> From a police-safety / alcohol issue, it's really important to have food trucks outside bars. Because it helps people soak up the alcohol. And people don't drink as much if they're also eating. … [I]t's a good thing. … [B]ars can't get enough food trucks to go there. I think in the beginning they were … charging them and then they were like "no, you're helping us. We're not helping you." (Beth)

As Beth and other interviewees suggested, the City could encourage vendors to operate near venues where alcohol is served (Everett 2012). Moreover, Beth described the potential responsiveness of food trucks to local emergencies as another way that vendors could help serve and improve San Antonio in the future. These perspectives suggest some of the ways that the City might engage with a broader network of local vendors in planning focused towards addressing critical local public health and safety concerns.

5.4.4 Payment innovations and service automation

Food truck payment approaches appeared during my period of research appeared to be limited to cash and Square (Moore 2017) or similar manual card reading approaches. Although some interviewees expressed being challenged or concerned when vendors accepted cash-only, Greg described the problems that local vendors might encounter from existing card payment approaches:

> Credit cards? They make sense during the week, but they don't make sense during the weekend. … I've experienced it at the farmer's market. You know, you swipe it and then you sign it, and depending on their network [internet or mobile phone service] strength, sometimes it doesn't go through. You gotta swipe it again. … I don't want there to be a line. (Greg)

In San Antonio, I did not observe "tap" or contactless forms of electronic payment beyond mobile phone payments occasionally at some corporate chain food outlets. However, I noted card-based payment approaches used by some neighborhood and nearly all gourmet vendors locally. Often, these payments were enabled by Square, a small and affordable device developed in the US that attaches to smartphones to accept payments through a card wipe or a dip (Moore 2017). As Greg suggested, such card payments are often followed by details entered manually, such as a pin code or signature and inclusion of a tip.

The digital payment approaches that could be used locally with mobile food vending in the near future likely are already in practice elsewhere. However, it is also likely that many customers will remain in the cash economy in San Antonio, based on current conditions but also concerns about privacy and cybersecurity. Regardless, local customer service interactions are apt to remain more time-consuming than in other places even with changes in payment approaches, given the city's slow social tempo (Levine 1997) and big small town dynamics (Burroughs 2014) that encourage informal interactions and lingering.

Another possible direction for food truck payments in San Antonio is meal subscription networks. Meal subscriptions or plans are already offered by some cafés in the US, and many customers are familiar with these approaches as a result of university meal plans—which in other US cities sometimes include food trucks (Nash 2016; Szymanski 2017). It is possible that in the near future local universities and employers will extend their meal plans to food truck and other mobile vendors, noting how San Antonio's Trinity University has extended their "Tiger bucks" plan and card to the ride hailing platform Uber (Creedon 2017).

As another possible payment innovation, Gil described "pay-what-you-can" approaches in Austin and other cities. He stressed that pay-what-you-can vendors serve "impoverished neighborhoods in a really unique way" but that they relied on customer who "can afford to pay you."

I did not observe locally pay-what-you-can or pay-it-forward food trucks— where patrons "gift" meals for unknown other customers (Huda 2016). However, some interviewees and I did note the City's efforts to curtail charitable feeding, or food giveaways downtown (Chasnoff 2010; Garcia 2015a, b; Marks 2015a). In the future, pay-what-you-can or pay-it-forward approaches might offer vendors and customers the means to outmaneuver these existing regulations.

Separate from but related to payment innovations, it is probable that other aspects of street food vending in San Antonio will become more automated or less manual. For example, Rob explained to me some of the physical challenges of his work as a vendor and his thoughts about automating some of the work: "I don't think I have any fingerprints. …Griddle burns. … I'm sure at one point I started thinking, how could we build something that would just automate it?"

Beyond automation in food preparation processes, Nolan considered vending machine approaches to selling street foods as potentially shaping San Antonio's future, including based on the local history of vending machines displacing some worksite food trucks. During my period of research, news of food service automation breakthroughs circulated via social media, including reports of robotic approaches to taco and other food preparation and delivery (Spiegel 2017). In some cases, this news coverage positioned increased automation as a response to organized efforts to increase minimum wages in the US for foodservice workers (Hu 2013), suggesting some of the tensions and interests shaping discussions about technology use in vending.

As I completed my research, I noted in San Antonio the trialing of new self-service checkout systems including "micro markets" (Montano 2017)—a practice that generated controversy nationally when a concept called Bodega was announced,

raising concerns about the loss of actual working-class bodegas or *tienditas* in some US cities as a result of gentrification (Segran 2017). However, as Nolan suggested based on his familiarity with vending machine repair, increased automation in food preparation and sales could support local service work and industrial design. As I observed and some of my interviewees expressed, San Antonio is a city where street food vending already exhibits high-end or "Trumped-out" food truck fabrication work—as exemplified by the efforts of local food truck building company Cruising Kitchens for clients such as H-E-B and the San Antonio Food Bank (Lloyd 2016)—but also a wide local culture of *rasquache* design and building that is likely to continue to shape the city's food vending practices.

5.4.5 Supportive businesses and clustering

In considering the possible future of vending practices locally, Ben described the challenges of finding licensed workers to upgrade and repair food truck plumbing—water and gas lines—to meet City requirements. Ben also talked about the growth of food truck financial and professional services locally, mentioning a resident who invests in trucks and "coaches them on the accounting side." I also noticed in San Antonio different efforts geared towards "incubating' foodservices related businesses (Thomas 2014). Additionally, Rob discussed the use of older model trucks and vans locally as food trucks vendors and raised my awareness of the demand for mechanics, describing the typical San Antonio food truck—neighborhood or gourmet (see Figures 5.3 and 5.4)—as a "1993 [model]. … Like 120,000 [miles on it]" and probably a former "delivery truck."

As I observed, at least a few vendors in San Antonio have adapted newer vans for vending, moving away from the step van or "delivery truck" form that are associated with US food trucks. Specifically, I noticed the use of "European-style" tall vans (Jaffe 2014), which have entered the US market and are in use in Mexico—suggesting what might become an iconic form of food trucks in the future.

As Nolan stressed, future vending is likely to include more operations "clustering" together in San Antonio, whatever forms these vehicles take:

> [F]ood trucks only, in my mind, really … work … if they are located centrally together …. That's why you see them grouped together. I'm not going to go to really fancy food trucks parked out where ever. Because it's a single—it's an island … it's a pain for me to go there. And if they happen to be closed. … [N]ow I'm pissed [angry]. …And that might not be their fault. … I go to a park. Or, I go to where there is a consortium of food trucks, I have multiple options. And this works out, and they all feed off each other. (Nolan)

My observations support the view that food trucks in San Antonio attract customers when stationed by brick-and-mortar businesses such as bars, music venues, dessert shops, grocery stores and shopping outlets. Other venues that food trucks might latch onto that I noted and some interviewees described include parks, recreation facilities, employment centers and institutions like churches, schools, universities and hospitals.

5.5 Summary

In this chapter, I drew from the study findings to bring to light atypical patterns of gentrification and some of the related differential regulation, spatial inequalities and social exclusions that my interviewees and I observed in the local distinctions between neighborhood (working-class) and gourmet (more expensive) food truck vending. These patterns included the "knapsacking" (appropriation) by some local gourmet vendors of neighborhood street foods including tacos, *paletas* and *raspa* treats, but also the gentrification of icehouses (with the form influencing gourmet food truck parks) and "Trumped-out" or very expensive approaches to building food trucks that create a vehicle aesthetic that some interviewees described as favored by local government or simply the style of "downtown" food trucks. As interviewees also expressed and I observed, the inadequacy of simple racial and "ethnic binaries" (Hernández-Ehrisman 2008, p. 197) and assumptions about nationality and migration in describing majority Mexican American San Antonio's socioeconomic stratification and who comprises the city's "powerful actors" (Wessel 2017, p. 41) further helps to mark some of the patterns of gentrification observable with local food truck vending as atypical in the US. Additionally, some interviewees and I noticed local government efforts to transform San Antonio's downtown public realm

to discourage the mixing of business workers and local bus riders (Blunt 2015)—as another way of describing San Antonio's socioeconomic stratification —at sites such as Travis Park and Main Plaza. These sites were targeted with the City's Downtown Food Truck Program and related regulations and other place-changing efforts, which resulted in the loss of more affordable and accessible (throughout the day and week) street food vending that occurred at these sites historically (Patoski 1985).

Furthermore, in this chapter I present possible directions for local street food vending, as suggested by interviewees. I do so to challenge perceptions of San Antonio generally, and poorer areas and residents of the city especially, as irrelevant and disconnected from national and global developments—and to further position San Antonio as a case study that can inform fuller understandings of US urban life and changes in the twenty-first century. In the next chapter (Chapter Six), I provide an overview of the study and summary of the major findings before offering ideas for additional San Antonio-focused research.

CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the study and summarize key findings before offering recommendations for additional research. As I have argued in this thesis, San Antonio offers an important case study of the gourmet food truck trend and related urban changes and "food cultures contests" (Hernández-López 2011) in the US during the era of cognitive-cultural capitalism (Scott 2008, 2014, 2017). San Antonio is significant as it is one of the nation's largest and fastest growing cities—and given the city's majority and socioeconomically diverse Mexican American population, extreme spatial inequalities and history of influencing national and global foodways. The thesis at once notes and interrogates the local divide between gourmet (or foodie, branded or professional) food trucks and traditional working-class vending sometimes described locally as neighborhood (or Mexican, unbranded or taco). I have argued that some of the pivotal critical literature and popular depictions of the US food truck movement have made similar stark distinctions between working-class vending as undesirable and static or stagnant compared to the purportedly more innovative and healthful gourmet (more expensive) food truck trend. Accordingly, I have extended the critical literature by demonstrating the capacity of neighborhood vending to be adaptive and creative in response to complex urban conditions and to inform gourmet and other vending approaches. Additionally, I have shown how practices in San Antonio demonstrate atypical patterns of gentrification (including vendrification and *gente*-fication) that broaden understandings of twenty-first century US urban conditions and who might be perceived or identify as a gentrifier (Hyra 2017; Schlichtman, Patch & Hill 2017) or targeted as a problem demographic by public improvement efforts.

My thesis makes a distinct contribution to critical urban studies by using food truck vending in predominantly Mexican American San Antonio as a lens or vehicle for perceiving trends in the US towards socioeconomic (re)stratification (Scott 2017), microsegregation (Tach 2014), the curtailing of class mixing (Sandel 2012a, b) and local government decisions about what constitutes good street vending, as shaped by economic interests and biases against economically poorer vendors and their

customers (Hernández-López 2011; Dunn 2013, 2015, 2017; N. Martin 2014, 2017). Additionally, I offer possible near futures for street food vending suggested by interviewees, to further help bring San Antonio perspectives to discourse about contemporary US urban changes. The final contribution of this thesis, which I elucidate in this conclusion, is to identify possible directions for additional research into mobile food vending, city futures, urban marginality and Latina/o urbanisms.

6.2 Overview of the thesis

With this thesis, I have endeavored to encapsulate a critical urban study concerned with local resident perspectives and observations about the significances, challenges and possible futures of food truck vending. Specifically, the study focused on food truck operations that some San Antonians have categorized and classed as either newer gourmet or older neighborhood practices. My research was guided by four aims: I endeavored to share, in part, in the lived realities of food truck vending in San Antonio; to contribute to research about US public life and Latina/o urbanisms; to gain experience with ethnographic and other qualitative research methods used in urban studies and planning; and to generate interest in and directions for additional research related to San Antonio street food practices, public life and local policy.

My study was further guided and shaped by the following research question that emerged from the study: How do neighborhood and gourmet food truck practices in San Antonio bring to light atypical patterns of gentrification in the US and some of the related differentiated regulation, spatial inequalities and social exclusions shaping this predominantly Mexican American city in the era of cognitive-cultural capitalism? These aims and questions are addressed throughout this thesis, including with the findings shared in Chapters Four and Five and the recommendations for additional research presented later in this chapter (Section 6.4).

This study is situated in critical urban studies (Davies & Imbroscio 2010) and utilized an ethnographic methodology involving observations and unstructured interviewing to engage in a critical (Madison 2012), "reflexive" (Saukko 2003, p. 62) and what some might call a "diagnostic" (Duneier 2001, pp. 341-3) urban study of food truck practices in San Antonio. The study methodology was guided by my

understanding of the social and ethical commitments underpinning a critical ethnographic stance and approach (Madison 2012; Jason & Glenwick 2016) and a concern about the potential future of neighborhood vending and related patterns of living. Additionally, it was informed by and interested in distinctly San Antonio and working-class Mexican American critical pragmatism (Kadlec 2006, 2007; Forester 2012) or *rasquachismo* (Ybarra-Frausto 1991)—the making-do with the available materials and resources at hand, including as a form of resistance to economic and other discrimination or exclusion. Generally, the study was shaped by my concern about new or resurgent socioeconomic stratification in San Antonio and a working-class Latina/o threat narrative shaping US politics (Chavez 2013). This thesis adds to critical urban studies and extends the critical literature by bringing to light some aspects of "the food culture contests" (Hernández-López 2011) or creative city politics (N. Martin 2014) and more hidden or less "blatant" (Hyra 2017, p. 78) social discrimination shaping and reflected with the divide between gourmet and neighborhood food truck practices.

6.3 Summary of the key findings

Overall, my observations, interviews and review of different literature allowed me to perceive, via the lens or vehicle of food truck vending in San Antonio, the entrepreneurial or economic development shift or focus in urban planning that Harvey (1989) identifies and that informs what Kelbaugh (2001) describes as the "unselfconscious" market urbanism (p. 14.1) underpinning various urban development approaches and decisions in the US. It also enabled me to perceive the "dual city" that Harvey describes as part of "late" capitalism (Harvey 1989, p. 16) but that Scott (2014) contends is simply a "distinctive third wave of urbanization based on cognitive–cultural capitalism" dividing US and other cities in the twenty-first century (p. 570)—similar to the "bifurcated geographies of postindustrial cities" that Gandy (2005, p. 36) discusses and that Florida (2017) describes as the "*winner-take-all urbanism*" (p. 6) of a "New Urban Crisis" in the US.

However, the commodification of aspects of local government and socioeconomic stratification are not new developments in San Antonio. These longstanding local urban conditions connect with Spanish colonial but also Anglo-favoring nineteenth

and twentieth century patterns of racial, ethnic and economic discrimination and segregation that still shape the city, as my interviewees expressed and I observed. Local conditions that make predominantly Mexican American San Antonio comparable with urban areas Mexico as well as celebrated "creative" US cities like Austin and Los Angeles indicate the importance of San Antonio as a site for city futures research and broadening understandings of what can constitute gentrification and Latina/o patterns of urbanization in the US.

6.4 Recommendations for additional research

As I discuss in Chapter Three, this study was bounded by various factors, including the aims and approved protocol guiding the study and my limited resources, skills and "biography" as a researcher (Boudreau 2010, p. 69). In the course of completing the study, six potential directions for additional research became apparent.

First, my observations occasionally took me into San Antonio's historically African American East Side, located within a few miles of the Alamo. This included partaking in a barbecue plate meal served as part of a fundraiser for a neighborhood motorcycle club that was held on New Braunfels Avenue—the closest practices that I could find to the pit barbecue or smoker truck vending that Max described to me:

> [W]hat's really big on the East Side is the pit barbecue truck. You know, a lot of African American guys that's their job. … [R]un a pit truck, pull that smoker [a type of grill] around and set it up. So, you just go all the way up … to New Braunfels [Avenue] and there will be a … triple bay smoker. … And he just parks there all day and flings burgers, hot dogs, sausages, brisket, you name it. And it's excellent smoked food. … I think there is a difference between, you know … the Hispanic families that are driving the food trucks and the *paleta* carts and then the African American guys that are running these pit smokers. Um, but they're catering to, I think, different needs. They're totally different needs. You're not gonna have, necessarily, the people that go to the ice cream [*raspa*] truck every night go to the pit smoker. (Max)

The inner East Side, as defined to the east by New Braunfels Avenue, represented some of the furthest expanses of my general study area as a resident of the Near Northwest Side, or Deco District (Reininger 2013). I chose not to devote considerable focus to vending occurring in the East Side due to the distance from my home, but also as it was an area that was experiencing rapid residential and commercial gentrification (Reagan 2015a). The East Side was also perceived, by some San Antonians, to be a dangerous area, but similar narratives were sometimes shared about sections of the West Side and downtown that I engaged with more regularly.

Although not vended by a smoker truck, per se, the barbecue plate meal that I had on the East Side at a temporary roadside pit smoker set-up was a fundraising approach that I also sometimes experienced in my neighborhood but conducted by church and school groups. Additionally, I ate from a similar daytime street corner barbeque plate fundraiser in a working-class and predominantly African-American neighborhood of Oakland, California as a visitor—run by a man originally from East Texas who talked about wanting to start a smoker truck there. Although I once spotted in San Antonio a parked vehicle like the smoker trucks that Max described, I was not able to find any activity or documentation of East Side pit barbecue or smoker trucks, further suggesting that they might be a valuable subject of research, and especially given rapidly changing East Side conditions. It is possible that pit smoker truck vending is taking place beyond my general study area, such as along stretches of New Braunfels Avenue or within the inner East Side during hours that were outside of the scope of this study.

Second, although research about *paleta* practices seems limited, this type of pushcart or bicycle based vending in the US has received some media attention (Lam 2015) and has also been the subject of a short film created by Pablo Véliz (2010) that is set in parts of my general study area. Some interviewees and other San Antonio contacts discussed a long local history of *paleta* vending in considering local food truck practices. For example, a colleague shared with me a photo of a bicycle-based vendor from the 1950s that she described as an image of a West Side *icecrenero*—neat proof of a history of bicycle-based street food peddling and use of Spanglish of

possible interest to researchers of Latina/o urbanisms and other aspects of US urban development.

Furthermore, Max talked about *paleta* vending as potentially an important gateway job for immigrants:

> A lot of the people that become the *paleteros* do it because that's an easy way to support the Green Card [US permanent residency visa]. It's an easy, like, first job to hold. …And you can be that *paletero* for … however long. And, it's, you know, it's a job that you can get and it's … more legal than …day labor or whatever. I don't know how true that is. (Max)

Research focused on San Antonio *paleta* vending could explore patterns of vendrification and *gente*-fication but also vendsharing. For example, El Paraíso and El Paraíso de Mexico, two separate legacy *paleterías* in operation on Fredericksburg Road in San Antonio, have bicycle coolers and pushcarts that appeared to be shared amongst vendors (Barbacoa Apparel 2016). Additionally, the arrival of Steel City Pops in San Antonio—a company founded in Alabama and "known for its small-batch organic popsicles" (Elizarraras 2017b, para. 4)—suggest how *paleta* offerings locally are transitioning.

Third, not much has been written to date about San Antonio's history of *raspa* vending, including the manufacturing of shaved ice flavoring syrups locally since the mid-twentieth century (Ricos n.d.; Jell-Craft n.d.). This history includes the *raspa* wars—apparent fights between vendors that took place at Alamo Plaza in the 1980s (Patoski 1985) and whose legacies continue to shape how *raspa* vending is managed downtown.

Raspa vending was a key point of discussion for many interviewees in considering local food truck practices and related urban development trends. *Raspa* selling at Alamo Plaza, specifically, is potentially of interest to researchers of street vending and urban change, as the City of San Antonio is advancing plans to redevelop the plaza in ways that some perceive as threatening the long history of *raspa* and other

working-class Mexican American street food peddling there (Marks 2016). For example, local reporting describes the displacing of legacy *raspa* vending at Alamo Plaza in 2012, as part of a City place-changing event led by urban planning consultants:

> City officials expressed satisfaction … with the event, but not all of the strategies being explored to boost patronage there were as well received. Besides bringing live music, food and alcoholic beverage sales to the plaza … the demonstration led by Dallas consultants Team Better Block included closing the west end of Alamo Street so vendors of arts, crafts and food could set up shop there. … Longtime raspa seller Mercedes Prieto said city officials moved her stand to the sidewalk by Rivercenter Mall. "Over here, there's nobody," said Prieto, 81. (MacCormack 2012, paras. 5, 6, 24 & 25)

Two published sources (Miller 2004, p. 20; MacCormack 2012) indicate that the Prieto family of *raspa* vendors could be key informants in any research of San Antonio *raspa* vending practices. Another source (Marks 2016) identifies the Villareal sisters as *raspa* vendors with over twenty-seven years of family history peddling at Alamo Plaza.

Fourth, although other researchers have explored some of the relationships between "industrial" (closed worksite food truck vending) and neighborhood practices in other US cities (Hermosillo 2010, p. 6), I did not explore worksite vending with this study beyond noting what some interviewees shared. For example, Greg suggested that industrial food truck vending practices related to West Texas oil development has added to regulation challenges for local food truck vendors:

> [S]omething that I was not aware of … was … big full commercial kitchens that are on semis that go down to the oil rigs. Since there's no entities down there … inspecting and supervising, implementing the health code … the closest is San Antonio. So, they come, get it [annual licenses] here and then they go operate there. ... [B]efore, you could go any time [for an inspection]; now you have to schedule. … I really don't know who operates them, but that's a whole world in

itself. … [I]t's cafeteria food on wheels. So, they have a bunch of them. … [I]t's about getting food out quickly, lowering costs as much as you can, and hitting as many spots as possible. (Greg)

Separately, Max discussed the importance of what he called "super wagons" in vending to some worksites in San Antonio. I noticed minimally marked food truck driving through San Antonio like the ones that Max described:

> [It] would pull up during lunch and it's that [USD]$300,000 super wagon, you know, with the sunroofs [a row of roof air vents opened at an angle] … full-on. They'd hit every construction site in town. And they had it worked out with the superintendent and the contractor. Who said "yes, I want you to come at this time. And you're gonna give me my free lunch every day. And you're gonna be able to sell to fifty other guys." And it worked out, and it was just like clockwork. They come in—everyone knows they're coming. They all go on lunch break and they hit that truck up. (Max)

Additionally, Gil talked about a "fleet" of food trucks serving construction sites that he was aware of in San Antonio, noticing the distinct roof air vents:

> Yeah, when I was doing construction work. … So, there were sites where there would be, like, a hundred people working on that site at any time. So … twice a day, the trucks would show up at six in the morning. They would leave about 8:30 [am]. Show up again at noon. … But it was from a fleet, you know? They… had, like, eight of those trucks. And they would go to job sites all around. … [T]he ones that have the, like … four blue panels on the roof? (Gil)

Beyond these "super trucks," a study of industrial or work-related food truck vending in San Antonio could include an exploration of the gourmet food trucks and trailers serving closed technology campuses such as Rackspace, as discussed by some of my interviewees (see Chapter Four). It could also take in very late night to early morning vending catering specifically to San Antonio's foodservice and other shift workers—including sometimes behind-the-scenes in non-publicly accessible

spaces (such as in kitchens and breakrooms)— as Greg discussed. Additionally, future research could explore "Trumped-out" or very expensive custom-built trucks owned by local grocery chain H-E-B to assist in regional emergency response but also marketing campaigns (Winters 2013). Local food truck building practices generally could inform industrial or work-related food truck research. For example, Gil talked about a neighborhood approach to vehicle construction that he had observed:

> [I]t's in the middle of … the neighborhood with all the houses, but there's a few industrial-sized places. There … you would always see—they were, like, chopping up old, uh—either U-Hauls [moving vans] or other trucks, and they were converting them for either food truck use or other kinds of work, usually. You could see it happening. (Gil)

Considering local food truck builder Cruising Kitchens' creation of a Chili's (a corporate restaurant chain) food truck for operations in Kuwait (Petty 2016), a related research direction could be exploring San Antonio's exporting of food truck vehicles. San Antonio's custom and more industrial-scaled food truck building has potentially played a role in the migration of different food truck vehicle-types to Mexico (Ortega 2015) and other regions that additional research could explore.

Fifth, the Popcorn Wagon at Travis Park—a more stationary food vending vehicle with an electric plugin provided by the City of San Antonio and that vended throughout the day during my period of research—was a feature that I noted and sometimes drew from, such as on occasions when the City's Downtown Food Truck Program did not function as promoted. Danica also regarded the Popcorn Wagon as an important downtown amenity:

> [T]he Popcorn Wagon is always here. The people always know that they can get a drink, a Frito pie [see Figure 2.1], popcorn, you know? … It's a female owner. And she gets enough business to … keep it going. … [A]nd she's going to have a second truck at Hemisfair, which is where she was from. She was there twenty-five years. So, when she left Hemisfair because of the construction there … it

> was … coming into a new market [at Travis Park], not knowing how it was gonna go. But she did great. … I always see people over there. She started with a new marketing campaign. But people wanted to know [at Hemisfair Park] where's the Wagon? … Someone owned the Wagon before she did, and then she stepped in and bought if from them. (Danica)

The unannounced closing and removal of the Popcorn Wagon from Travis Park as I completed this thesis marked the disappearance of one of the few remaining legacy street food operations predating the City's Downtown Food Truck Program—aside from the *raspa* cart vending at Alamo Plaza that appears to be threatened by plans for "recapturing" that public space (Byas 2017). From my perspective, the Popcorn Wagon at Travis Park improved upon the City's program by operating daily and across extended hours and with an electrical plugin, a convenience not offered to gourmet food truck vendors. As Danica observed, the Wagon offered items beyond popcorn, including hot sandwich meals that I noticed were more affordable than items on offer from competing gourmet food trucks. Like many neighborhood food truck operations, the Popcorn Wagon helped to create amenity and advertise by playing recorded music and by being stationed near seating.

A City Ordinance describes the Popcorn Wagon as dating to 1989 at Hemisfair Park, and it names the business owner as Ann Braley (City of San Antonio 2005). The displacement of the Popcorn Wagon first from Hemisfair Park and then from Travis Park due to construction at these sites echoes the history of local government using "temporary" measures and displacements to permanently end mobile food vending practices that are no longer in favor or presumed to interfere with urban redevelopment efforts (Pilcher 2012, pp. 108-11). After ceasing operations at Travis Park in 2017, the Popcorn Wagon vehicle was apparently purchased by San Antonio's University of Incarnate Word (UIW) and is stored on that campus. Research involving owners and operators of the Popcorn Wagon could provide another frame for studying street vending and the changing of public spaces and life in downtown San Antonio.

Finally, San Antonio has an important history and culture of icehouse operations (Hisbrook 1984; Applebome 1986; Eudaily 2015) that merit additional study. Traditional icehouse practices and forms appear to influence various emerging mobile food vending and other dining trends in San Antonio and elsewhere, including the shape and function of some private food truck parks. Additional icehouse research could investigate concerns about potential icehouse gentrification in San Antonio (Elizarraras 2017a) while also drawing further attention to historic neighborhood venues such as Contreras Ice House (Texas Monthly 1976; Applebome 1986)—a closed venue located on the West Side that is threatened by stalled revitalization plans (Olivo 2015).

Additionally, there is opportunity to investigate San Antonio's *molinos, fruterías*, *panaderías*, taco houses and other working-class or neighborhood food establishments and businesses. These investigations could extend to San Antonio's traditional flea markets or *pulgas* (Mendoza 2016; Mejorado n.d.) and the City's legacy food factory operations such as Ricos, Jell-Craft and Sanitary Tortilla. Such investigations could bring additional San Antonio perspectives to research and discussions about Latina/o urbanisms and US urban futures.

6.5 Summary and conclusion

This thesis, including the recommendations for additional research it contains, adds uniquely to the research and literature that explores urban change, marginality and the "food culture contests" (Hernández-López 2011) or creative city politics (N. Martin 2014) shaping US cities following the 2008 Great Recession and involving judgements about street food vending. In the case of San Antonio, these judgements have been influenced by urban redevelopment aims, established local elite interests, the gourmet food truck trend and a desire to compete or compare with other US cities—but also by a working-class Latina/o threat narrative (Chavez 2013) that has underpinned some US politics and is sometimes advanced by wealthier Latina/os. These judgements also reflect local historical precedents, noting the treatment by local government of the downtown Chili Queen vendors at different points in their nineteenth and twentieth century history by San Antonio's predominantly but not exclusively Anglo elite (Silva & Nelson 2004; Hernández-Ehrisman 2008; Gabaccia

& Pilcher 2011; Arellano 2012; Pilcher 2012; McMahon 2013; Cárdenas 2016; Lomax 2017) and given the sharp class or *casta* divisions that have in the past stratified San Antonio's Mexican American population (de la Teja 1995; Hernández-Ehrisman 2008).

As I have argued in this thesis, the classing or ranking and segregating of neighborhood and gourmet food truck vending practices in predominantly Mexican American San Antonio offers a unique vantage point for perceiving aspects of the socioeconomic (re)stratification of US society and division or bifurcation of the labor force—urban characteristic that so far define the era of cognitive-cultural capitalism (Scott 2008, 2014, 2017). The findings of this study support other food truck research that has found that local government in some major US cities has welcomed the gourmet food truck trend and discouraged working-class and traditional street vending practices as part of the latest "wave" of urbanization (Scott 2014, p. 570). However, the findings problematize assertions that Latina/o street vending in the US is limited to working-class practices (sometimes framed as immigrant, generic and static if not stagnant), and that gourmet food truck vending is solely the domain of affluent young non-Hispanic white and native-born residents, and the only wheelhouse of creative vending practices. The findings also challenge claims of an inherent and unified Latina/o urban lifestyle and suggest atypical patterns of gentrification in the US, based on food truck vending in San Antonio—a major and fast-growing city offering important if overlooked perspectives about US urban conditions and changes.

As I observed in San Antonio and others have noted elsewhere, my research coincided with "narrowing" or changing "definitions of who belongs" (Rasmussen 2017, para. 4) in US cities and public life, definitions that align with efforts globally to curb migration and urban mobility as options for less affluent individuals. This, in turn, is paralleled by the interlinked commodification and brutalization of some migrant pathways, leading to Texas-Mexico border crossing and policing approaches that some Texans describe as "death by policy" for economically poorer migrants and residents (Buch 2017).

As an example, during and after my period of research, hundreds of immigrant women and children asylum seekers from Central America and Mexico were routinely dropped off with one-way bus tickets and scant other resources at San Antonio's downtown Greyhound bus station, not far from Travis Park, as part of being released from privatized US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) approaches to family detention in Texas (Buch 2015; Davies 2015; Guenther & Biedeger 2017). These drop-offs parallel how different US cities have tried to dispatch and exclude their homeless and less affluent populations, including with one-way bus tickets (Gee 2017). As local academic and public policy expert Rogelio Sáenz (2016) writes, the "incarceration and detention" (para. 8) and related relocation of immigrants and other vulnerable populations has become a major industry in Texas. As I observed, this has had negative impacts on San Antonio's public life, including in terms of how regional bus passengers ("Greyhound people") and otherwise visibly economically poorer or more frugal residents or visitors are treated downtown by local regulation and public realm improvement projects.

This thesis contextualizes such broader urban conditions, contributes to understandings of Latina/o urbanisms and extends the critical literature by focusing on food truck vending in San Antonio as a way to perceive some of the broadening and intensifying patterns of gentrification and commodification following the 2008 Great Recession and related to the era of cognitive-cultural capitalism and the practices and orientation of local government. As some of my interviewees and I observed, some traditional street food items and practices have been appropriated by some local gourmet operations, as supported by City of San Antonio efforts to remake sections of downtown into a no-poverty, no-frugality, no-charity and, arguably, no-*puro* zone. Much can be gained from considering the perspectives, sensibilities and contributions of San Antonio's "regular" or working-class food vending entrepreneurs and customers and how they are challenged by local "food culture contests" (Hernández-López 2011) or creative city politics (N. Martin 2014)—with San Antonio conditions and perspectives adding to fuller understandings of urban conditions and change in the US if not providing a glimpse into possible urban futures.

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