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# Cycles of Displacement: the Experience of Immigrants and Refugees from East Africa in Northeast Portland

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Honors Thesis

Cycles of Displacement: The Experience of Immigrants and Refugees from East Africa in  
Northeast Portland

Julianna Robidoux

An undergraduate Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Bachelor of Arts in University Honors and International Studies

Thesis Advisor Hunter Shobe, PhD

University Honors College  
Portland State University  
Spring Term 2019

## **ABSTRACT**

Cultural displacement is an effect of gentrification taking place in North Portland, Oregon. The work of Hyra (2015) and Abrahamson (2005) is applied to the Eastern African enclave in Northeast Portland, which has worked to maintain attachments to their home countries and culture and recreate places of community they had in their homeland. I used qualitative research to collect data in the form of interviews with members of this enclave to highlight the negative consequences of displacement within a community. I also interviewed employees at housing organizations who work with immigrants and refugees, a documentary filmmaker who focuses on issues of gentrification and displacement, and an affordable housing developer.

Having arrived in the U.S. as refugees fleeing war, placemaking has been an essential part in refugees' struggle to develop agency and social solidarity. Additionally placemaking gives immigrants and refugees the opportunity to preserve their country's culture by creating spaces where their heritage is celebrated and actively maintained through the means of socialization and participation in long-held traditions and customs.

The work of Hunter (2016), which describes Black placemaking, is applied to the Eastern African enclave in Portland. The paper seeks to answer the question: In what ways does displacement affect placemaking? Taking away these spaces from immigrant and refugee communities takes away their agency by eliminating the spaces in which they create social ties, memories, and shared experiences. It also takes away the collective power they have developed over time to resist the harmful effects of larger power structures.

### **Acknowledgements**

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She would also like to thank Rahel Gemechu for opening her eyes to the experiences of immigrants and refugees, and for connecting her with IRCO's Africa House. A big thank you to the employees at Africa House, including Dadir Nuur (Kadir) for their help in the process of finding interview subjects, as well as for allowing her to gain a greater understanding of the African immigrant and refugee community in Portland.

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## INTRODUCTION

My goal with this study is to speak to issues related to affordable housing affecting African immigrants and refugees. These are issues not only affecting the city of Portland, but most major cities with rising rents. As Hyra (2015) asserts, “in the last two decades many urban areas irrefutably experienced an influx of people coinciding with widespread neighbourhood revitalisation” (p. 1755). The influx of people in Portland has caused an increase in rents in Northeast Portland, more so than in other neighborhoods.

The Northeast Portland neighborhood has experienced significant increases in rent. Dressel (2018) states, “It is shown that outlying neighborhoods, including East Portland and North Portland neighborhoods, had higher percentages of rising rents than central neighborhoods other than downtown” (p. 31). Increasing rents in Northeast Portland put African immigrants and refugees who live in Northeast Portland at a disadvantage. According to Curry-Stevens (2013), among Africans, “Incomes are devastatingly low at half those of Whites and one-third lower than the average among communities of color” (p. 58). Compared to other populations, this disparity in income inevitably makes it more difficult for the African population to afford housing.

Additionally, immigrants and refugees of color experience many forms of discrimination for a variety of reasons (Curry-Stevens 2013, p. 33-34). The 2017 Executive Order enacted by President Trump, also known as the Muslim Ban, banning foreign nationals from entering the U.S., affected immigrants from predominantly Muslim countries (American Civil Liberties Union of Washington, Inc., 2018). The anti-Islam discourse that has magnified in recent years

has not only impacted Muslims, but all immigrants and refugees of color as well (Dressel, 2018, p. 66-71). With a political climate such as this one, illuminating the experiences of immigrants and refugees of color is a way to fight against the stigma of immigration and to dismantle systems that contribute to their oppression.

In 2017, I conducted qualitative research on Ethiopian restaurants in the Northeast Portland neighborhood for a class entitled Urban Social Science. I examined how the contributions of marginalized members of our community are taken for granted – whether it be in the gastro-cultural community or another form of unequal benefit at play. My assertion was, if we are eager to consume another country’s culture – in this instance culture in the form of Ethiopian food – then those in power must be willing to develop in a way that takes into consideration those providing that cultural experience.

Ultimately, immigrants and refugees are important contributors to society, whether their American citizenship is fully recognized, or is in process. Therefore, their existence within our community benefits us all; and their well being should be considered when undertaking new development projects that will potentially displace members of this population or threaten their ability to form and maintain a sense of belonging.

Urban enclaves are an integral part of city life. They allow residents with similar backgrounds, common beliefs and shared values to form community in a specific place. Abrahamson states, in regard to community formation in urban enclaves: “[...] communities of this type, simultaneously [convey] both physical and social space, [and] can similarly attain very high salience in people’s identities” (2005, p. 10). Urban enclaves are not only labels that define

a given community, but indicate a sense of place specific to people who share a culture defined by their homeland.

As Portland continues to develop, the shared culture an enclave creates becomes more important for immigrants and refugees. It also allows them to share their culture with people who are not part of their enclave. This aspect of shared culture bridges gaps in a time of division and ignorance, especially in a political climate in which the government is inciting racist sentiments.

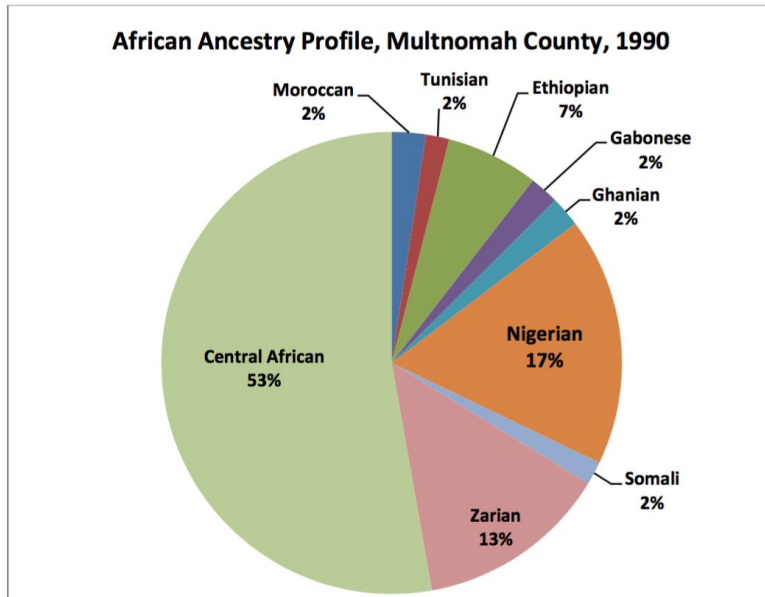
Organizations such as the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) whose funding has been cut at the federal level are striving to maintain these social ties by helping individuals find affordable housing, therefore creating shared spaces in and around the Portland metropolitan area. However, if organizations with values like IRCO are not held at a high level of importance by policy-makers, what Bates (2013) refers to as “equitable and inclusive development”, will fail to be realized in gentrified neighborhoods in Portland and other quickly-gentrifying neighborhoods in urban landscapes across the U.S.

## **CONCEPTS AND BACKGROUND**

### **Enclaves**

Urban enclaves are a pertinent aspect of immigrant and refugee life in cities. According to Abrahamson (2005), urban enclaves are “areas containing residents who share something significant” (p. 9). African immigrants and refugees are mostly clustered in North and Northeast Portland, and are spreading further east and west due to a lack of available affordable housing (Curry-Stevens, 2013, p. 3). According to Wilson (2007) out of the 30 largest refugee-sending countries from 1983-2004, Somalia was number eight with 47,753 and Ethiopia was number ten with 35,144. In 1990, Ethiopians made up 7 percent of the African Multnomah County

population and Somalis made up 2 percent. Eritrea did not become an independent nation until 1993.



Source: Census 1990, drawing from customized data extractions by Joseph Smith-Buani, PSU.

Figure 1. African Ancestry Profile, Multnomah County, 1990. Reproduced from Curry-Stevens 2013.

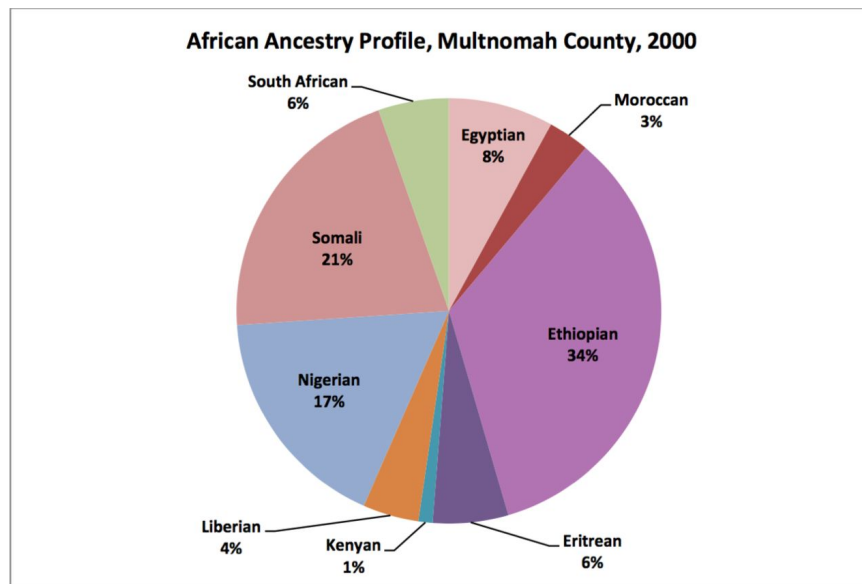
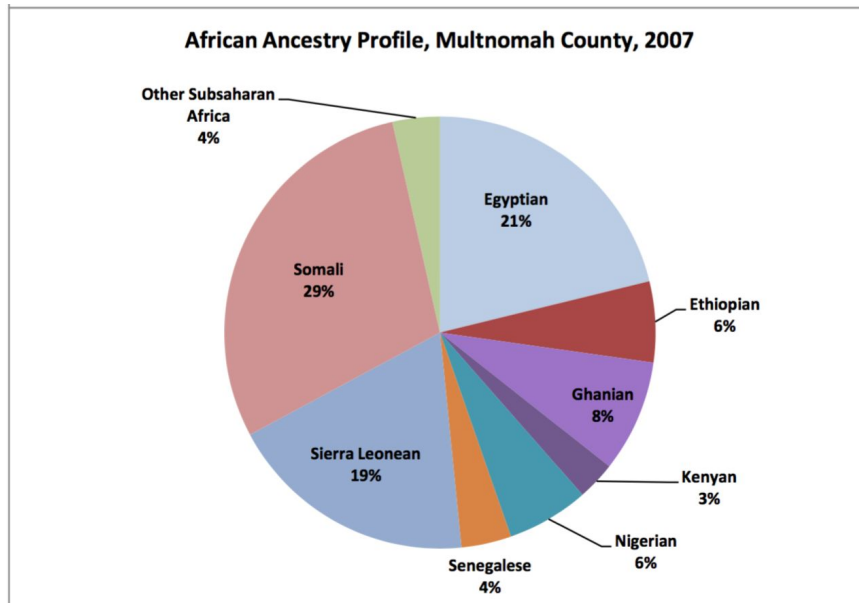


Figure 2. African Ancestry Profile, Multnomah County, 2000. Reproduced from Curry-Stevens 2013.



Source: Census 2000 & American Community Survey, 2007, drawing from customized data extractions by Joseph Smith-Buani, PSU.

Figure 3. African Ancestry Profile, Multnomah County, 2007. Reproduced from Curry-Stevens 2013.

By 2000, Ethiopians made up 34 percent of the African population in Multnomah County, Somalis made up 21 percent, and Eritreans made up 6 percent. By 2007, the number of Ethiopians in Multnomah County was reduced to 6 percent of the entire African population, the number of Somalis had risen to 29 percent, and the percentage of Eritreans was not indicated, (Curry-Stevens, 2013, p. 3).

The population of African immigrants and refugees in Portland has significantly increased over the past 20-30 years. Curry-Stevens (2013) explains that the reason for the dramatic increase in immigrants and refugees in the U.S. starting in the 1980s is related to changes in immigration policies:

A number of favorable immigration policies enabled them to make the journey in much greater numbers than before. For instance, tens of thousands of political refugees from Ethiopia and Eritrea, living under a Marxist regime, were allowed entry in the mid-1980s, and when the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 legalized the status of eligible undocumented individuals, more than 31,000 Africans applied. In addition, the Immigration Act of 1990 established a lottery system that favors underrepresented nations, a category that includes all the African countries. Since 1995, an average of 40,000 African immigrants have entered the country legally every year, but the number increased to more than 60,000 in 2002. (p. 14-15)

With an increase in the number of African immigrants, and especially refugees, from the Horn of Africa, there is a necessity for receiving countries to protect existing enclaves. This is because the existence of these enclaves promotes acculturation. According to Gold (2011) “The tension between assimilation and cultural retention persists today. Contemporary organizations in the Portland metropolitan area seek to help immigrants adjust to life in the United States without being pressured to lose their language, practices, and heritage” (p. 39). While this aspect of the preservation of culture can be bolstered by community organizations, the act of celebrating and maintaining culture happens within urban enclaves.

African immigrants and refugees in Northeast Portland have formed strong ties with one another in order to stay connected with those who share their culture. Curry-Stevens illustrates the importance of individual enclaves within the larger fabric of the African community:

Our African social fabric is one of diversity and multiculturalism. We retain much of our national, ethnic and tribal distinctiveness and rarely combine our identities within a pan-African framework. We have built our own associations and tend to look inside our own cultures for support. (p. 4)

This is apparent in African immigrants’ and refugees’ involvement with organizations such as the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) Africa House, which caters to the culturally-specific needs of African immigrants and refugees. Curry-Stevens (2013) explains the need for culturally-specific services:

And yet, while our differences may be pronounced, we hold a shared identity as African that results in a pronounced need for culturally-specific services for African immigrants and refugees. Africa House has responded well to this need, providing for us (and with us) a wide-ranging array of services. Features of this service that need replicating throughout the state of Oregon include: diverse language capacity, staff to have experienced being refugees, understanding what we have lost through moving away from our homeland, affirmation of our identity and our experiences of racism, cultural supports so that our heritage is not lost, education for our children to both support their US experiences (particularly in schooling) and also in learning their own native languages. The importance of culturally-specific services cannot be stated strongly enough – for issues of trust, understanding, compassion, and acceptance are the foundations of real help and support. (p. 4)

Not only is the creation and maintenance of individual enclaves within the larger East African urban enclave important for its members' day-to-day activities and interactions, it also reinforces their identities as Ethiopians, Somalis, and Eritreans. Abrahamson states that not only are the residents alike in some way, but that they are aware of the commonality and it is important to their identities (Abrahamson, 2006, p. 10). Having been displaced due to war, many refugees were forced to move into refugee camps, and were resettled in the U.S. after living in these camps for years. This initial displacement in itself disrupts their sense of wellbeing and security. Not only do they lose their homes and neighbors – they lose their way of life.

Refugees face unparalleled adversity in attempting to create and maintain a sense of place once they are resettled. Adapting to a new way of life in an unfamiliar place is difficult enough without also dealing with the emotional and psychological effects of displacement from one's home country. Gold (2011) asserts,

... refugees are perhaps the most vulnerable immigrants, facing some of the biggest challenges to integration. According to a report published by the University of Oregon, Oregon ranks 11th among U.S. states in terms of the number of refugees taken in, and Portland has the 12th-largest population of refugees among U.S. cities. (p. 41)

Portland's identity as a major refugee-receiving city gives it an obligation to promote and preserve the interests of its vulnerable refugee population.

The creation of community in the U.S. is oftentimes the most effective way for members of a displaced population to navigate their new home away from home. Hunter (2016) puts it most eloquently in his piece on what he describes as Black placemaking, in which he underscores the importance of social gatherings in order to create spaces in which people of color feel a sense of agency and power. By creating public spaces in which they have freedom of expression and a sense of belonging within the larger community, people of color are creating opportunities for social ties to form and a chance to develop their sense of wellbeing individually and as a community. This aspect of community formation is especially important for immigrant and refugee populations whose unique situations necessitate the cultivation of a home away from their places of origin. Additionally, it gives them the opportunity to preserve their country's culture by creating spaces in which their heritage is celebrated and actively maintained through the means of socialization and participation in long-held traditions and customs.

For example, the Ethiopian enclave's sense of place within Northeast Portland centers around the country's cultural milieus involving the making and eating of food and traditional Ethiopian coffee. Through the establishment of various Ethiopian restaurants located throughout Northeast Portland, Ethiopian restaurant owners have not only created spaces in which Ethiopians can gather to enjoy their culture, but have created spaces which help to bridge the gap between a majority White, Western population and the Ethiopian community. The sharing of culture which takes place in these spaces promotes the understanding of the Ethiopian experience



in the urban setting of Portland, but also gives the Ethiopian community a sense of belonging within the mainly White, traditionally Eurocentric culture that exists in Portland.

As the demographics of a particular population shift, the essence of the community in a given place will inevitably change accordingly. When the population shifts dramatically in a relatively short time period, the existing community is unable to adapt the way it does when smaller changes occur. According to Meiden (2010) a successful community is something organic:

This isn't simply something that can be planned or designed but it is more an originated sociological flexibility, because when the reason to exist is there, a community is able to change and adapt to inevitable sociological evolution. In other words: a neighborhood can cope with changing demographics and society if the greater part of the people that are living there feel solidarity to their living environment. (p. 3)

The organic community that exists in urban enclaves is not easily recreated once it has been dismantled. The community that exists in enclaves is the glue that holds its members together, and helps to perpetuate the sense of place they feel. Abrahamson (2006) discusses the emotional attachment that members of an enclave often feel:

The more enclave qualities that communities have before a flood, landslide, or the like, the greater the long-term depression, sadness and stress former residents report feeling after they are forced to move. Some go through a grieving process for the destroyed place similar to a mourning for the dead. (p. 11)

Abrahamson goes on to relate the impact that urban renewal projects can have on an enclave:

“Residents can also experience emotional aftereffects when urban renewal projects or racial and economic changes dramatically alter a neighborhood's composition” (2006, p. 11). This highlights the impact city-planning projects that are often the catalyst for gentrification can have on existing residents in urban enclaves.

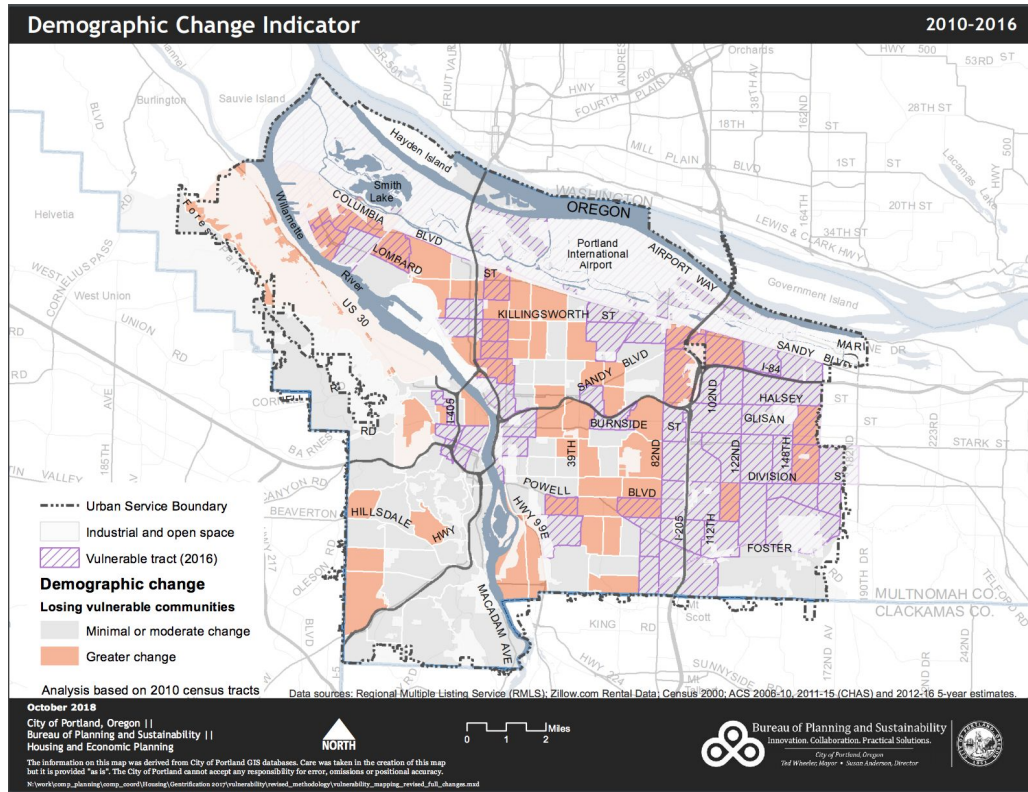


Figure 4. Demographic change in Northeast Portland. Reproduced from City of Portland, Oregon, 2018.

### Gentrification

Gentrification is a social process that marginalizes low-income and minority residents. The process of gentrification is a result of land capitalization. Smith (1979) describes the process of gentrification as a result of significant rent gap caused by multiple actors in the land and housing market:

As filtering and neighborhood decline proceed, the rent gap widens. Gentrification occurs when the gap is wide enough that developers can purchase shells cheaply, can pay the builders’ costs and profit for rehabilitation, can pay interest on mortgage and construction loans, and can then sell the end product for a sale price that leaves a satisfactory return to the developer. The entire ground rent, or a large portion of it, is now capitalized; the neighborhood has been “recycled” and begins a new cycle of use. Once the rent gap is wide enough, gentrification may be initiated in a given neighborhood by several different actors in the land and housing market. (p. 545)

As the price of land goes up in a neighborhood, it becomes lucrative for developers to come into disinvested neighborhoods and profit by selling properties at a significantly higher price to the newcomers. Bates (2013) touches on the multiple understandings of the term in her displacement study of Portland:

The discussion about gentrification is fraught and conflicted, particularly as it relates to race and historical disinvestment. While there are intense debates in academic circles about how to describe gentrification as a process, the common characteristics for defining the effects are: housing market changes, economic status changes, and demographic changes in a neighborhood that alter its character. (p. 9)

Ultimately, gentrification alters a neighborhood's character due to demographic change.

Increasingly, Portland is becoming more homogenous as a result of gentrification. See the work of Gibson (2007), which details the impact of urban renewal projects that caused a change in demographics in Northeast Portland from 1940-2000, and Bates (2013), which illustrates the connection between gentrification, housing and displacement. Hern (2016) explains the problem with deferring to gentrification as an inevitable side effect of modern development:

... a city of difference can only exist where everyday people are not preyed upon and where land is not abandoned to the market – which is why I am tentative about deferring to gentrification as a driving trope of contemporary urban transformations. Antagonism to gentrification all too often strikes me as a defensive action, as working from the presumed inevitability of displacement and dispossession of self-determining subjectivities and then trying to ameliorate the effects. (p. 228-229)

If a city's design does not allow for residents of all income levels to co-exist, those with power – policy-makers, urban planners, developers – are setting the stage for gentrification to occur.

Housing can no longer be looked at as a commodity if politicians, city planners and housing organizations want to promote concepts like equity and diversity. For communities in disinvested neighborhoods, tangible equity can be delivered in the form of economic protections

and regulations. Hern (2016) goes on to point out that cities have the ability to de-commodify housing:

Cities are uniquely constituted to meet that challenge, but demand so much more, and have every ability to aggressively do so, on land that is not reduced to commodity. And we know how to do just that; we know how to effectively remove land from the market – whether it is speculative or Georgist taxes, non-market housing, squatting or co-ops, or any other configurations we can imagine. There is every reason to believe that cities can be remade as socially creative breaches that by definition seek to repair the injustices their existences are predicated on. That is what a city is for. (p. 229)

If cities like Portland recognize the racist policies that led to disinvestment in certain neighborhoods, there must be regulations that not only seek to provide reparations to displaced residents, but major systemic changes in the way the housing market operates.

### **Displacement**

Displacement is the greatest negative consequence of gentrification. Milligan (2003) states that when individuals experience displacement, which is the involuntary disruption of place attachment, identity discontinuity is the result (p. 384). These residents rarely have the financial means to keep up with increasing rent or to afford homes in these areas where there is a sudden increase in property values. As Milligan puts it, displacement happens when a site is no longer available for expected uses because of destruction, modification, or access limitations (p. 384). Not only are these residents displaced economically, they are displaced from the places where their entire community comes together to create and strengthen the bonds that tie them as neighbors, friends, relatives, or members of the same enclave. This loss of community is a side effect of gentrification for the East African urban enclave in Northeast Portland.

Displacement can take multiple forms, including cultural and economic. According to Hyra (2015), cultural displacement occurs when the norms, behaviors and values of the new

resident cohort dominate and prevail over the tastes and preferences of long-term residents (p. 1754). Cultural displacement is an effect of the gentrification taking place in Northeast Portland currently. Dressel (2018) explains the process that occurs when the demographics of a neighborhood change:

Though the incoming group may not recognize the power or privilege that they hold, the power of their social identities is evident to those who are being forced out of the neighborhood, and no longer able to claim it as their own “territory”. Gentrification can be viewed as a process that allows one group’s definition of a sense of place to eclipse another’s. (p. 16)

The effect of displacement is a lack of secure housing in which residents who cannot afford ever-increasing rents are forced to move constantly, from one housing unit to another. Hern (2016) describes the modern, gentrified city: “The neoliberal city is a vampiric city, constantly sucking the vibrancy out of its neighborhoods, and keeping its most alive residents always on the run,” (p. 228). As an effect of displacement, low-income residents in a gentrifying city must constantly pick up and move, starting fresh in a new neighborhood every time their landlord decides to raise their rent substantially. Therefore, their surrounding community is dictated by the housing market rather than by choice.

### **Lack of Affordable Housing**

The ability to afford housing in a gentrifying city is directly related to economic status. Some can afford to move into a revitalized or revitalizing neighborhood. Meanwhile others are forced to move from places that they have called home for decades, or even generations. A 2018 study on gentrification and displacement showed that displacement is one effect of the lack of affordable housing in East Portland. According to Armstrong, et. al, East Portland is most at risk for displacement:

There are over 14,000 low-income cost-burdened renter households in East Portland (a quarter of the city’s share), and 97% of them live in a census tract that is in early- or mid-stage gentrification. East Portland households endured the fastest rise of housing costs citywide since 2008. Home sale values in East Portland neighborhoods rose 7.0 percent on average, compared to 5.5 percent for all neighborhoods citywide, accounting for inflation. Some areas are already losing shares of vulnerable populations, including Parkrose and Rosewood, although the lag in availability of timely Census data suggests this trend may already be underway in most parts of East Portland. (City of Portland, Oregon, 2018, p. 5)

Affordable housing is a necessity for vulnerable members of a population, such as immigrants and refugees. If the majority of housing that is being built in a given neighborhood is only accessible to high-income renters, vulnerable populations are at a high risk of being displaced with no viable options for residing within the confines of their existing community. Many East African immigrants and refugees arrived in Portland in the 1990s at a time when median home values increased significantly. This increase in housing costs makes it difficult for immigrants and refugees, an already vulnerable population, to afford housing.

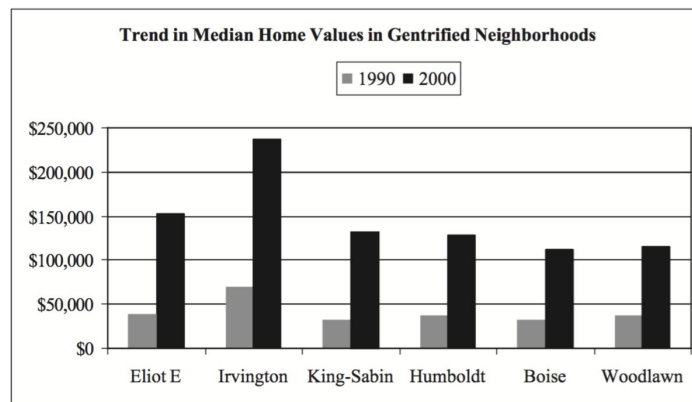


Figure 6. Home values tripled and sometimes quadrupled during the 1990s.

Figure 5. Increase in home values in Northeast Portland in the 1990s. Reproduced from Gibson, 2007.

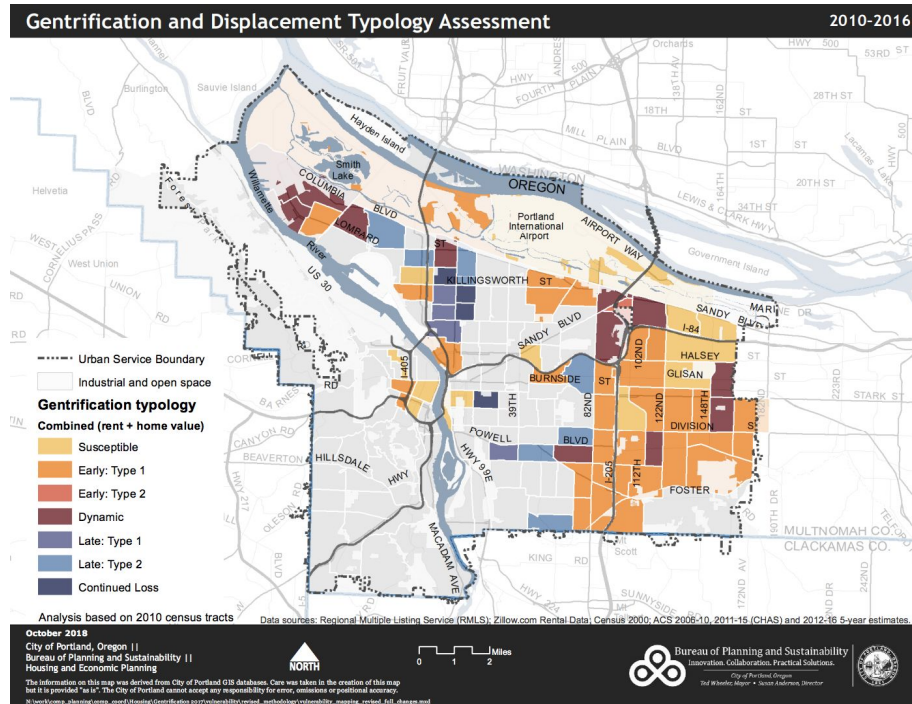


Figure 6. Stages of gentrification based on census tracts. Reproduced from the City of Portland, Oregon, 2018.

## METHODS

### Positionality Statement

As a White, middle-class American citizen, I realize that I hold a position of privilege within the social structure of power under which I am conducting my research. My citizenship status will never hold me back from gaining access to certain legal privileges reserved for American citizens. I will never face prejudice or discrimination due to structural racism for being a person of color, speaking a different language, or speaking with a “foreign” accent. I do not pretend to understand the experiences that immigrants and refugees of color have in this country. I only hope to use my position of power to be an ally to immigrants and refugees of color and do

what is in my scope of power to advocate for their interests, and for structural change when it comes to the housing market.

I spent six months interning at IRCO’s Africa House in 2018 and continue to volunteer with the youth program. I heard the experiences of African immigrant and refugee youth, as well as the experiences of many employees who are immigrants and refugees themselves, including many instances of discrimination and prejudice. Although the U.S. is a nation of immigrants, anti-immigration sentiments are especially prominent in today’s political discourse, which has been increasingly incited under the current presidential administration. This makes sharing the experiences of immigrants and refugees of color living within ethnic enclaves all the more important.

**Interview Process**

I used both personal contacts with members of the African population in Portland and professional contacts from my internship at IRCO’s Africa House to find interview subjects. At the urging of a personal contact who is a member of the African population and a classmate at Portland State University (PSU), I went to the Pan-African Commons at PSU to try and find interview subjects. The most effective means of finding participants turned out to be a snowball technique.

Some of the interview participants have been given pseudonyms (indicated by an asterisk next to their name) in place of their real names in order to protect their privacy. My interview subjects:

*Table 1.* Immigrant/Refugee Interviewee Information

Immigrants/Refugees	Background
---------------------	------------



Joseph*	Eritrean immigrant/employee at IRCO’s Africa House
Sahra*	Somali refugee/former employee at IRCO’s Africa House
Ladan*	Somali refugee/case manager for an organization in Southeast Portland that resettles refugees
Aida*	Ethiopian refugee/employee at IRCO’s Africa House
Maya*	Eritrean refugee
Genet*	Ethiopian refugee/employee at IRCO’s Africa House

Table 2. Employees at Organizations that Provide Housing Interviewee Information

Employees at Organizations that Provide Housing	Background
Pamela Kambur	Community Relations Manager/Home Forward, housing organization located in Southwest Portland
Benjamin Gernert	Program Coordinator for the Refugee Resettlement Program/Lutheran Community Services (LCS) located in Southeast Portland

Michelle DePass	Outreach and Policy Coordinator/Portland Housing Bureau located in Southwest Portland
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Table 3. Other Interviewees

Others	Background
Cornelius Swart	Multimedia reporter and documentary filmmaker/focuses on issues of gentrification and displacement in Northeast Portland
Rob Justus	Affordable housing developer/Home First Development

The questions asked of the immigrant and refugee interview subjects were meant to get a sense of their experience with the housing market and their sense of place in Portland. The questions asked of employees who work on issues related to housing were meant to illustrate the impact of the housing crisis on their clients as well as the services offered to refugees, and whether they offer culturally-specific services. The questions asked of the other interview subjects were meant to shed light on the housing crisis and the impact of gentrification on vulnerable populations in Portland. For a full list of the questions asked see appendix.

The interviews were transcribed and color-coded based on emerging themes. I used Glaser’s Grounded Theory (Glaser 1992) to find common emergent themes in the interviews I conducted.

## **Mind Maps**

As part of my research, I asked interview subjects to label maps of Portland. My goal with this exercise was to create a visual that shows where the subject lives, where their enclave's places of gathering are located, and where the subject goes on a regular basis. Ultimately my goal was to get an idea of where the subject forms community within Portland.

I designed the map to focus on the Northeast region of Portland, as that region has experienced the greatest impact from gentrification, and is where my target research population lives. However, I expanded the map to include part of Southeast Portland in order to see if interview subjects create community spaces in places outside of Northeast Portland. This ended up being beneficial in more than one way; as not all of the housing organizations where I made contact with employees are located in Northeast, this gave the employees who participated in this exercise the ability to label places closer to their homes and place of work. It also allowed interview subjects who do not live in that section of Northeast Portland to label their place of residence on the map, but the map was not expansive enough to include more than one participant's home and places of community formation.

I included only major street names to simplify the map so as not to overwhelm interview subjects with too much text on the page. This also allowed them space to draw on the map in between text. I labeled two landmarks to help situate the interview subjects: Portland Community College Cascade and IRCO's Africa House, as many people who are members of the immigrant and refugee population and live in Northeast Portland are familiar with these two places. I also gave interview subjects the option to create a map with an outline of the city limits of Portland. However, most interview subjects did not feel confident labeling an unmarked map.

## DATA

Six themes emerged when analyzing the interviews I conducted. These themes are: community; housing; displacement; gentrification; communication; and safety. These themes arose across multiple interviews.

### Community

The importance of community was a common denominator across all interviews. According to interview subjects, community formation within the East African enclave occurs in places like restaurants, churches, mosques, and each other's homes. Additionally, according to interview subjects, aspects of their community were lost due to displacement.

Sahra\*, a member of the Somali population, whose family experienced displacement, said in regards to loss of community caused by displacement, "[...] no one wants to leave a place they live forever, like you know, they want to have, um, especially when it's like you're connected to something, a community, you know?". She also said, "The only time we actually find community is when we all meet together at the Masjid," in reference to the Masjid Abu-Bakar, a mosque located on NE 80th Ave. in Portland. This mosque she and her family frequent in Northeast Portland is the place where she feels the most connected with other members of the Somali enclave.

Genet\*, an Ethiopian refugee who arrived in Portland in 1994, explained the importance of the traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony to the Ethiopian enclave's community formation. He stated that when members of the Ethiopian enclave lived in close proximity to one another at

one time in his neighborhood in Northeast Portland, community formation took place in each other's homes three times each day during coffee ceremonies.

He explained that Dalo's Ethiopian restaurant, which has since gone out of business, used to be a central meeting spot for the Ethiopian enclave. He said, "[...] the reason why I go is just because this a part of the community, to find people to meet, people, that's we go there not to only necessarily to eat." He went on to explain the felt experience he and other members of the Ethiopian enclave had at Dalo's: "We kind of like, we feel as a family, so we go there don't have to eat. You just probably can have whatever drink you can drink, whatever, and then sit and talk. That's what we do there." This explanation illustrates the importance of communal gathering spaces like Dalo's within the Ethiopian enclave. It underscores the function that spaces like restaurants can have, that goes far beyond the preparation and consumption of food and drink.

Aida\* also described going to Ethiopian restaurants as a way to form community within the Ethiopian enclave, rather than simply a place to eat and drink.

Um, so going to an Ethiopian restaurant, for the most part, 'cause we cook our own food at home, so it's not, we don't do it as often, but um, whenever like we're with other friends and just like, decide to go out as a family, um, we go to Ethiopian restaurants or, um, actually a lot when I was in college, my parents would – my parents and my brother sometimes – would come uh, just to see me at the school, and then they'd want to take me out to lunch. And I would always be like, "Let's go to an Ethiopian restaurant," because I'm not cooking for myself that much, I do sometimes but it's like, I'm lacking that like, cultural (laughs) aspect, of just being away. And so, um, they, they would take me to an Ethiopian restaurant. We would sit and eat and talk and it's kind of just like, something we'd normally do at home, but it brings more of that tradition and culture back.

This shows how Ethiopian restaurants are an important part of the Ethiopian enclave's community formation. Rather than just eating, Aida's\* family goes to Ethiopian restaurants to talk and spend time with other members of their enclave. This also highlights how Aida\* connects with Ethiopian culture through going to Ethiopian restaurants.

Cornelius Swart, documentary filmmaker who produced the films *NorthEast Passage: The Inner City and the American Dream*, and *Priced Out*, which document gentrification in Northeast Portland, explained the impact of displacement on communities that rely on one another for support:

You know, what happens when these communities get displaced, whether they were healthy economically or not, you know, from the outside, these communities provide a lot of support and that support gets decimated when gentrification occurs and it's not something that can be reproduced.

Swart is highlighting the long-term impact that displacement has on communities like immigrant and refugee enclaves. Once an enclave has been divided, it is not as easy for its members to support one another.

## **Housing**

When asked whether they felt that it is affordable to live in Portland, all of the interview subjects said no. When asked about the greatest challenges they face, employees at organizations that provide assistance and support to immigrants and refugees cited the lack of affordable housing as a major challenge for their clients. Most interviewees cited the long waitlists for affordable housing, like Section 8, as part of the problem. A lack of understanding about the system was another factor in the challenges that immigrants and refugees face.

Home Forward employee, Pamela Kambur, stated that Home Forward is transitioning out of public housing into what she called a “project-based Section 8” model. Kambur said that this transition is due to declining support for their traditional public housing properties over the last 20 years: “[...] the capital fund to keep up the maintenance has continued to go down while the buildings get older and the needs go up.” The lack of federal funding for affordable housing was a major concern of employees at organizations that provide housing. The strict guidelines to

qualify for Section 8 were also a concern. For instance, one subject pointed out that being a full-time employee or having a criminal record disqualifies people from receiving Section 8 housing.

Eritrean immigrant, Joseph\*, explained that members of the Eritrean enclave often provide newcomers from Eritrea with free housing in lieu of available subsidized housing: “[...] some Eritrean people, they have three, four houses and then for sure, they’re gonna rent. They’re gonna rent them the houses. [...] They let them live there for one, two months for free. Until they make income, until they become a little independent.” With long waitlists for affordable housing, this support network within the Eritrean enclave fills the gap in what the system can provide for immigrants and refugees. Therefore the existence of the Eritrean enclave not only provides members of the Eritrean population with a sense of belonging, but also allows them to feel secure and meet their basic needs of safety and shelter.

Rob Justus, a housing developer who works for Home First, stated that he decided to build affordable housing because he was frustrated with the affordable housing industry in Portland. He said, “I was frustrated with how expensive the so-called affordable housing was. And uh, that there were a lot of private and even nonprofit developers making lots of money in the process.” He explained that the developers he works with take small developer fees, which allows them to rent the units at a lower price than many other affordable housing units.

Ben Gernert, Program Coordinator for the Refugee Resettlement Program at Lutheran Community Services, said that many private housing management companies have lawful discriminatory policies that make it more difficult for refugees to rent. He said, “[...] since our clients don’t have any rental history or credit score because they’re coming from a different

country – they’ll automatically have to pay three or four times the amount for a security deposit, which is unattainable for clients.” This is one form of legal discrimination taking place in Portland that hinders the ability of immigrants and refugees to afford to rent, just based solely on unusually high security deposits.

## **Displacement**

Displacement was a major concern of interview subjects. Most of the immigrant and refugee interviewees had experienced displacement. Sahra\*, a member of the Somali refugee population, said that displacement is not only common in Portland, but intentional as well: “But you’re forced to leave because you can’t afford, you know, anything else, like, so you have to find other ways and means and what becomes really disgusting is when like you constantly have to move because it just keeps on like, going up everywhere you go [...]” Sahra\* is describing what has become a cycle of displacement for many immigrants and refugees. They are first forcibly displaced from their home countries due to war and conflict, and then forced to uproot their lives after they are resettled in a new home, due to raising rents.

While the circumstances of the initial displacement immigrants and refugees experience is most often intensely emotionally and psychologically harmful, the further displacement they experience after being resettled is harmful in a different way. Although it is not due to the violent, harrowing circumstances of war, the circumstances that cause displacement in refugee receiving cities cause them distress as well.

When asked the question: “If you could live somewhere other than Portland, where would you live and why?”, Maya\*, a member of the Eritrean population, said she would move back to the place where her family was initially resettled on SE Stark st. She said:



I would go... I think I would still go back to like, Gresham, Southeast Portland because um, I really felt that kind of sense of community there. There were people that I knew, there were people that like welcomed me, it was close to school, um, close to the library, that really helped me open up and do things. So I'd go back there if I could, so yeah.

Maya's\* desire to move back to the neighborhood she lived in when she first arrived illustrates the importance of the initial community formation that takes place when immigrants and refugees first arrive in their new country after being displaced.

Affordable housing developer, Rob Justus explained what he says is the answer to the issue of displacement: "You can build new housing without gentrifying a community. But you have to make sure that the people who live in that community get to live in the housing you're building." From his perspective, this is the key to avoiding displacement. New housing built in a historically disinvested neighborhood should be priced reasonably for the existing population. Otherwise, families like Sahra's\* and Maya's\* are displaced and forced to live in places where they do not feel safe, or do not feel a strong sense of community or belonging.

### **Gentrification**

Many interview subjects felt that gentrification has had a negative effect on the immigrant and refugee population in Portland. Many subjects cited that gentrification had an impact on raising rental prices in Portland, which has caused displacement for members of the immigrant and refugee population. Some interview subjects expressed that gentrification has also impacted their sense of belonging in their own neighborhoods.

Sahra\* expressed her frustration with the way her former neighborhood has changed over time due to gentrification since she lived there. She explained the process of change and displacement from her perspective from the time she lived there in the early 2000s to now:

It was really dark. It was no life basically. Um, you know, it was trashy, it was, it was just unfortunate but it still had culture then, you know, you could like, feel it, like you

know... I can't express the feelings of like, how African Americans felt, living in these areas. I'm pretty sure like it felt like theirs, you know? And you could see that too, as a recent immigrant, and stuff like that like, it was really cool place to like live, at the same time but it wasn't like really um, safe or nicer than what you see now. It's unfortunate like, why does it have to get nice now and then drive off those people? Like you know, that's what pisses me off about the whole thing.

She went on to explain the racial discrepancies that exist and how the way the neighborhood has been used and who uses it has changed over time:

Yeah, but who enjoys it? Is the problem. You know, which is, it's like, it sucks. I strongly, it makes me angry actually. Um, like when people, you know of color, live in this area, there's no support, there's nothing. It's run down, like you know. Literally there's no shops like New Seasons, nothing like that ever existed like in this area. Grocery stores, all you find is like really bad like liquor stores and stuff like that. Um, and now all you see is like cute shops, coffee shops, um, you know, boutiques and all this stuff. It's a cute place to hang out but you still don't feel like you belong, so you don't, I don't even – even though I live in this area – I don't even try to like, come on this side, deeper North, because it still feels weird to me. Um, it makes me feel – I still feel like it's uncomfortable – like you know, you still stand out, it's like weird you stand out. And that's the one thing I really don't like to feel is really really stand out.

Her sense of belonging in this neighborhood, or lack thereof, is directly related to feeling different from the majority of people who use the neighborhood now. Her frustration comes from a feeling of injustice for the people who were displaced from the neighborhood where she grew up, and the previous lack of resources, like grocery stores, that exist there now due to a change in demographics.

The frustration for people like Sahra\* who are displaced and come back to their previous neighborhood, comes from the realization that the neighborhood that her family was priced out of now has resources that cater to the new population. Cornelius Swart distinguished between revitalization and gentrification, saying:

Revitalization is when there is investment – small amounts of investments – that come into a city that the net effect is a positive for the people who already live there. Gentrification is when investments create a net displacement, and a net negative for the existing residents.

After Sahra's\* family was pushed out of the neighborhood, newcomers came in and new resources, like grocery stores, restaurants, and shops, followed for the new population that were not available to the previous one.

Aida\* expressed her understanding of the impact of gentrification on the immigrant and refugee population in Portland, saying:

it plays such a big role in like, um, who gets certain opportunities and who doesn't, and that can put a lot of people at risk in terms of you know, employment or housing and education, and I think, especially in the refugee/immigrant community, you're already at a disadvantage.

Her explanation underscores the way the process of gentrification affects immigrants and refugees differently than other populations, as they are often initially placed, without much choice, in disinvested neighborhoods where housing is affordable for them. She went on to explain the ways in which immigrants and refugees are placed at a further disadvantage, saying:

... it's easier for you to be put in a community that is gentrified in a way where, um, you may not have like supermarkets or groceries that have like, healthy food, as opposed to, junk food, that is very immediate. Or, you know, you're living next to like, liquor stores as opposed to other things and then education is also like in the community that you're in, depending on how gentrified it is or not, like that are, exposure to education, that impacts people's lives and then so it's like you kind of, like you're stuck in like a box that you can't really get out of, and it's not for lack of trying, but it is just, kind of like, systemically how things are working, working against you at that. So it's like, I don't know, I think it, it puts – it can put a lot of people at a disadvantage – but it can even further put people that are already at a disadvantage, at greater, risk, so, yeah that's all.

For immigrants and refugees arriving in receiving countries, oftentimes with no resources, being placed in a disinvested neighborhood can further deprive them of resources that might benefit them and ensure their success, whether it is through access to quality education or resources like grocery stores with greater food options.

## Communication

Although communication was not an anticipated theme that emerged, many interview subjects brought up what they felt were differences in communication and interaction between members of their enclave and other community members. Differences in day-to-day interactions between people in their countries of origin and people in the U.S. were mentioned across multiple interviews. Communication was also seen as something that can either allow connections to form between immigrants and refugees and other members of the community, or inhibit connection from taking place due to some immigrants' and refugees' lack of English language skills.

Aida\* expressed a difference in communication between her family's neighborhood in Portland versus with people back home in Ethiopia. She explained that the lack of communication was related to a feeling of disconnect and difference with the surrounding community. She said:

Um, I mean, it wasn't like, there weren't a lot of – I don't know, my brother and I never really interacted a lot with our like neighbors and stuff and I think that was just partly because parents that are coming from, like a community where it was so easy to, you know, go to your next door neighbor's home and have your children kind of just like, you know, walk around freely and so it was more an overprotective thing and, and I think that's partly due to like – you're unfamiliar with the community that you're in and the people that um, are in that community don't really reflect like, where you come from, and so I think it's harder for that and that's why like, I don't really remember interacting with, with a lot of people, where we lived. Um, but it was for the most part like a lot of like Caucasians and stuff, so it wasn't, wasn't a lot.

She went on to express that when her family moved into a condominium in Troutdale that was more diverse than the apartment complex around SE Powell & 136th where they were placed in Portland, she felt less isolation from the surrounding community. She explained that after

moving from Troutdale, when her family moved into a house around the same neighborhood in Portland, at SE Powell & 143rd, she felt a similar sense of isolation once again.

Ladan\*, a Somali refugee who works as a refugee resettlement case manager, explained that communication is an issue when it comes to access to resources for immigrants and refugees. She explained, “[...] the information in Portland is not like that, reaching to the community. It reaches to the mainstream community, but it's not like the refugee community because of less outreach.” She said the lack of communication between the mainstream community and the immigrant and refugee community has caused people to move out of Portland: “Yes, because housing too expensive. Resources are not reaching to them. There are a lot of opportunities. People can assistance, but if you don't know how can you get it? So, information is not shared.” She expressed the need for better outreach to the immigrant and refugee population.

Ladan\* went on to explain the necessity for effective communicators from the immigrant and refugee population on boards that make decisions regarding housing policy in Portland:

You know the housing authority in Portland, I don't know Washington County, but I think like, Portland has an authority, they have like board members who can advise um, they have their own people. People they should be having community people so they can hear the voice from the community, not like policy-makers. So their advisory board is not like board with the community and the one they say, we enroll the community, is like the person just representing us in community, but there is no voice because most of the people they put into there, they don't speak English or they shy, you know? Or there's someone who doesn't want to get in trouble. But they have to really recruit the real people who [are] facing the issue or people who knows how to talk.

This illustrates the need for accurate representation of immigrants and refugees in public spaces where someone who speaks English and understands the needs of their community can communicate effectively with the larger population.

Joseph\* outlined the connection between language and economic success, explaining how important the ability to communicate is for newcomers. He said:

And they don't know everything, I wanna say everything. They don't know everything. They don't language. If they don't know [the] language they just be a huge problem. They cannot communicate. And those people, if they don't know [the] language, it's not easy for them to find [a] job. And then if they don't have [a] job, they don't have income. If they don't have money, they don't have [a] place to stay, to pay their rent.

Joseph's\* assertion underscores the fact that until new immigrants and refugees develop the ability to speak English, it is difficult for them to achieve economic independence. Further, some are too busy working low-paying jobs to support themselves and their families that English language acquisition is nearly impossible due to time constraints or lack of resources.

### **Safety**

Although safety was not an anticipated theme, it was also mentioned across multiple interviews. Some immigrant and refugee interview subjects stated that they felt a lack of safety in places that they live in Portland, and in the U.S., in comparison with their countries of origin. The feeling of safety, or lack thereof, that subjects expressed directly connects to their living situation.

Maya\*, who moved from her initial placement on SE Stark to an apartment complex on 60th & Killingsworth in Northeast Portland where Home Forward provides her family with rental assistance, expressed that she does not feel safe where she lives now. She said:

Yeah, uh, I don't, I say I don't feel a great sense of community because like, um, the apartment complex looks really good from the outside but then inside there's like a lot of drug dealers, yeah a lot of police officers coming in and stuff so it doesn't – first that doesn't make me feel safe, and like, that apartment is where I first had to like, uh, experience, you know, a connection, like, a relationship with the police officers, law enforcement, like, before I moved to this um, place that I live in now, I didn't – I never talked to a police officer, or like, I never had any kind of experience with them.

While the apartment complex where she and her family live now is affordable with the assistance of Home Forward, it is not an ideal living situation for Maya\*. She went on to say, “So I don't – I don't really feel like...like I belong there or anything. I just live there because my family are there, so like, might as well just stay with them.” For Maya\*, the lack of safety she feels directly relates to her sense of belonging where she lives. She says the reason her family moved to the apartment complex they now live in is because of the assistance they receive from Home Forward. Her family may have been able to remain in their initial placement in a neighborhood where she felt connected to the community if it were still affordable for them.

Sahra\*, who lives in the same area at 60th & Killingsworth expressed similar safety concerns. She said, “My neighborhood was actually like a lot violent-er. Like, it was, yeah. I mean now I'm kind of settled but there was a lot of, we had some issues. Um, back in like the early 2000s. Um, Killingsworth area. 60th and Killingsworth?” She went on to say that shootings were a normal occurrence in this neighborhood in the early 2000s and that it was something that her community was used to taking place.

Joseph\*, who lives on SE Powell & 136th expressed a feeling of an overall lack of safety living in the U.S. compared with his home country of Eritrea. He said, “When you walk outside your home or wherever, you safe, you feel safe over there. Or wherever you go over there you feel safe. You're safe. But here not like that, it's a little bit not similar, you know what I mean?” He connected the sense of safety he felt in Eritrea to the community he had there, saying, “[...] another thing, if you ask [for] help over there, everybody will help you.” He expressed not having that same feeling of ability to receive help from the community where he lives here in the U.S. He also connected the lack of safety to the legalization of guns in the U.S., saying “There

are a lot of things going on here. A lot of crazy things. First, one the most that I don't like is this um, uh, what do you say this, oh yeah, legalized gun.” When asked if the police presence in the U.S. made him feel unsafe, he said, “I don't scared, I don't scared from police. I scared from other civil people they have uh, the gun. There are a lot of crazy people, you know.” He went on to explain that the only time civilians use guns in Eritrea is during war time.

Safety is an important aspect of belongingness. The lack of safety that many immigrants and refugees feel can directly affect their sense of belonging within a community. If they do not feel safe in the neighborhoods where they live, which are oftentimes the only places with affordable options available to them, it will be more difficult to form connections with their neighbors and surrounding communities. This is often due to a lack of trust of the larger population, underscoring the need for enclaves within which immigrants and refugees feel a greater sense of belonging.



Mind Maps



Figure 7. Sahra's\* mind map of places her home, where she grew up, places she has worked, and forms community.

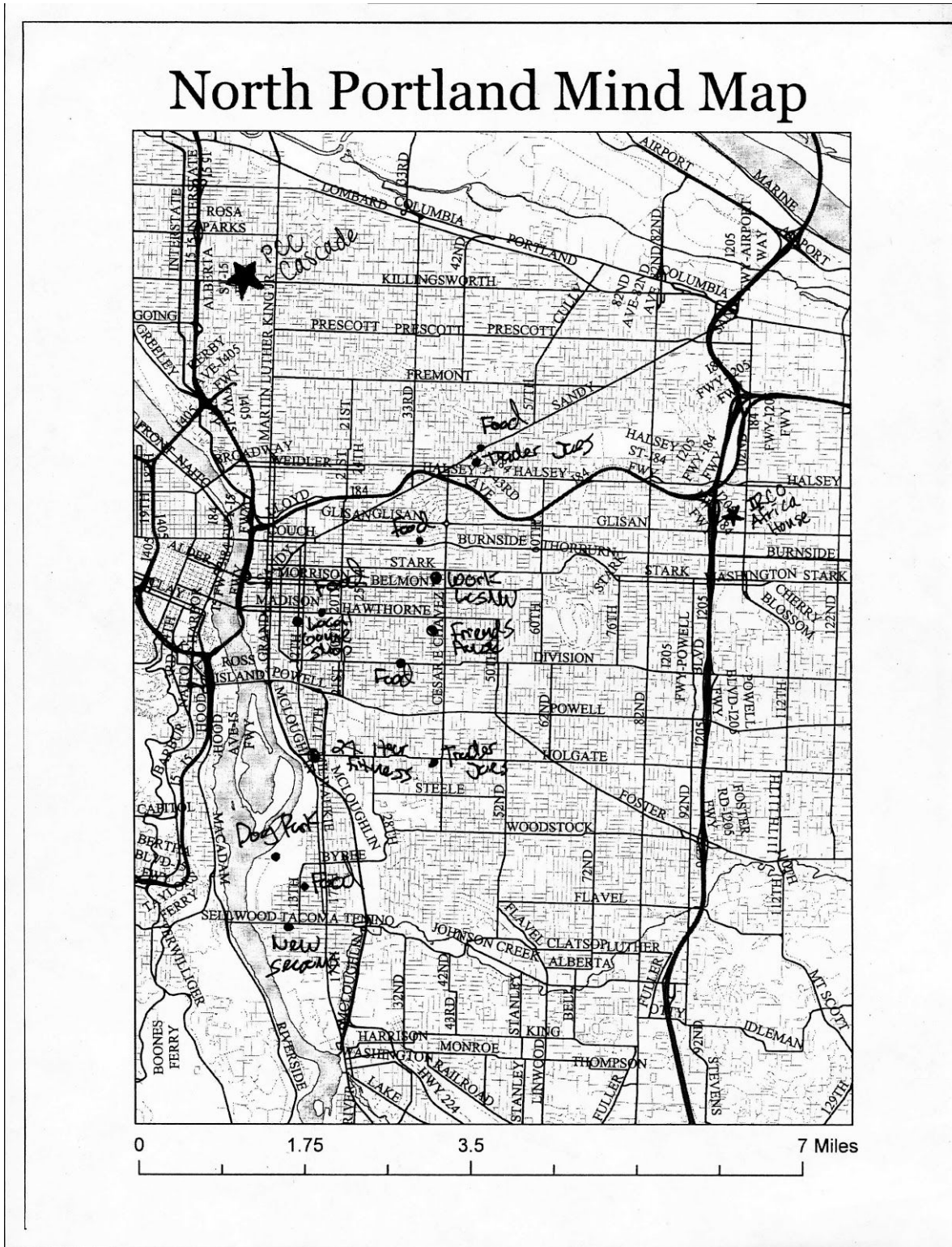


Figure 8. Ben Gernert's mind map of the places he frequents.

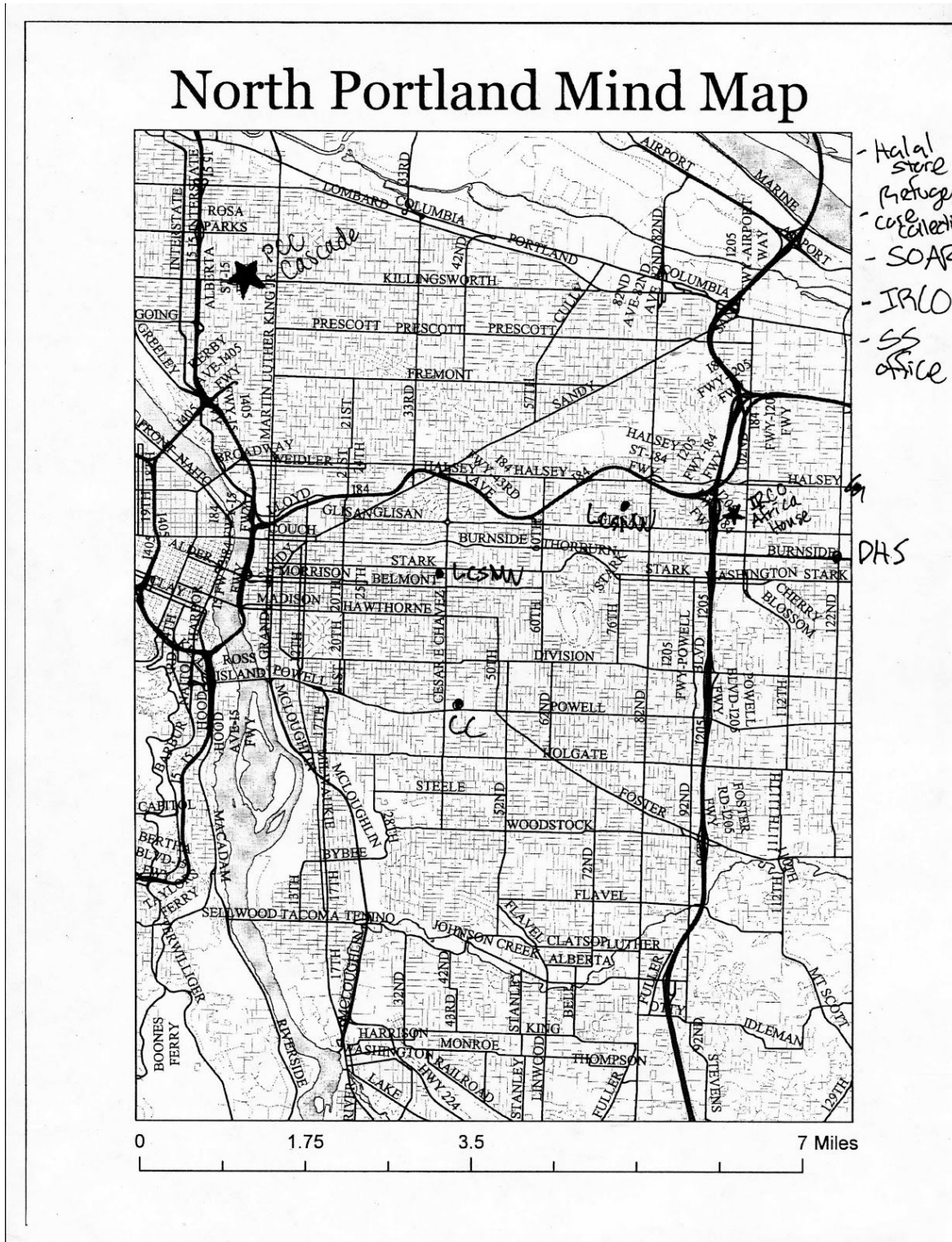


Figure 9. Ben Gernert's mind map of places his clients at Lutheran Community Services frequent.

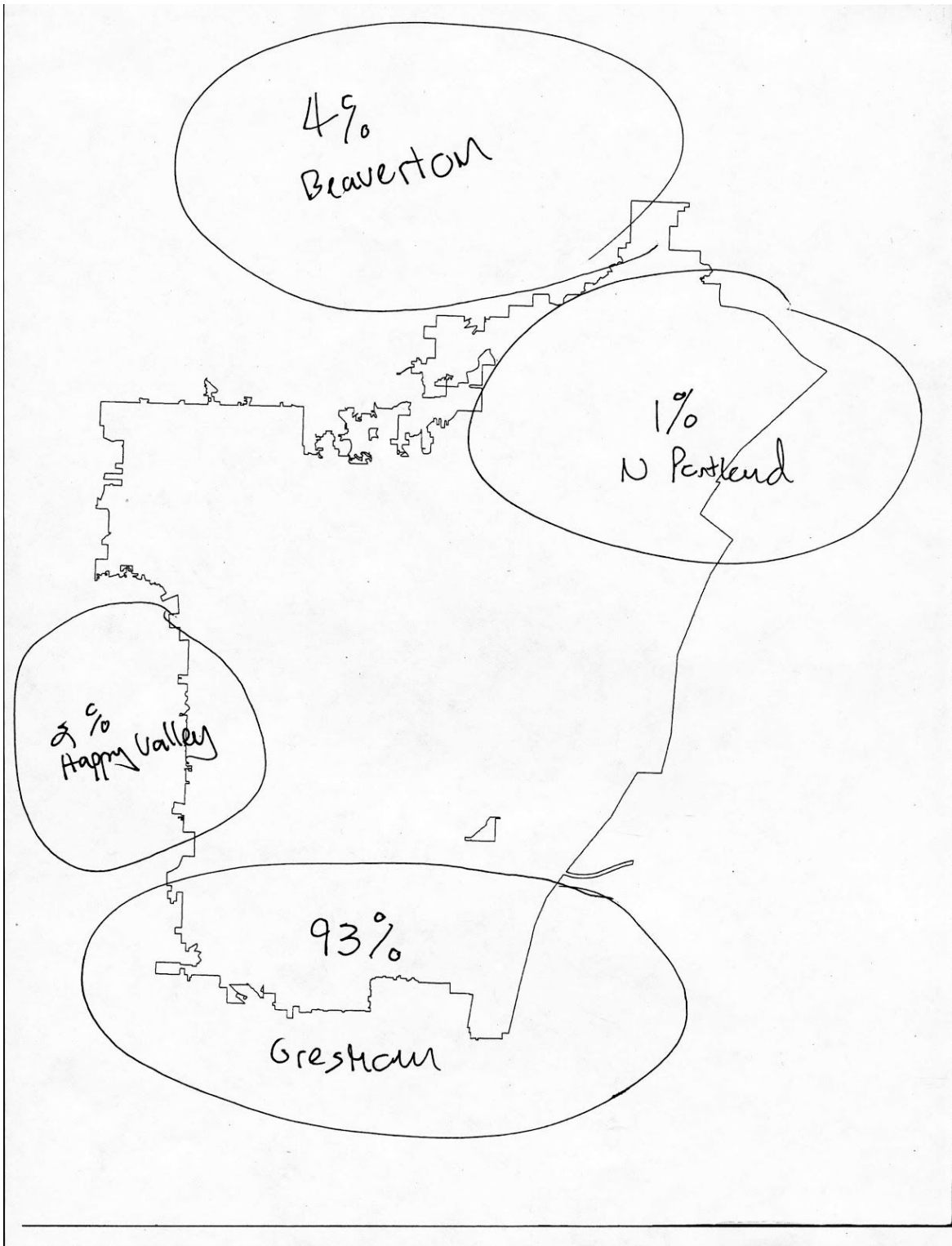


Figure 10. Ben Gernert's mind map of where his clients are resettled.

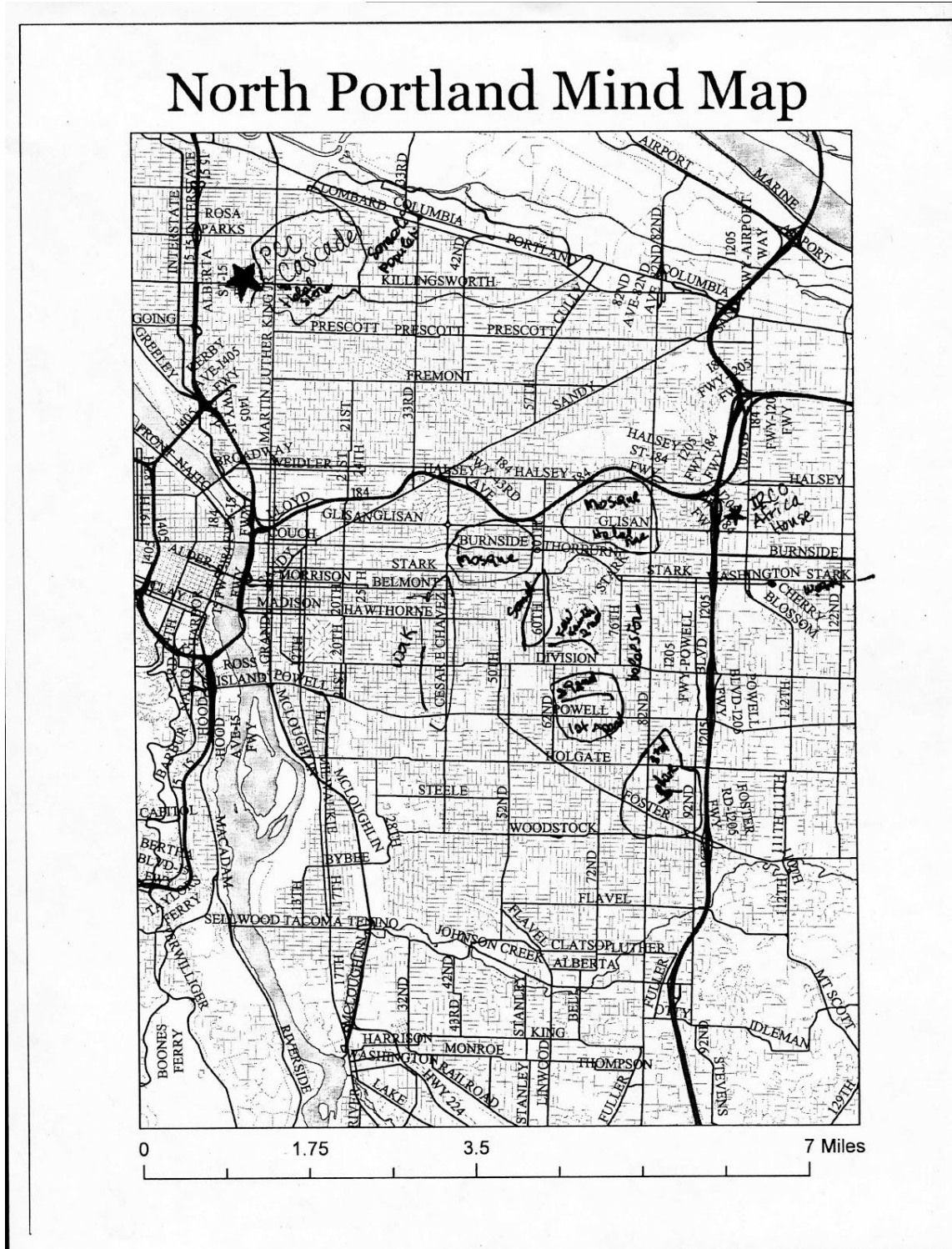


Figure 11. Ladan's\* mind map of where members of the Somali population live and places where they form community.

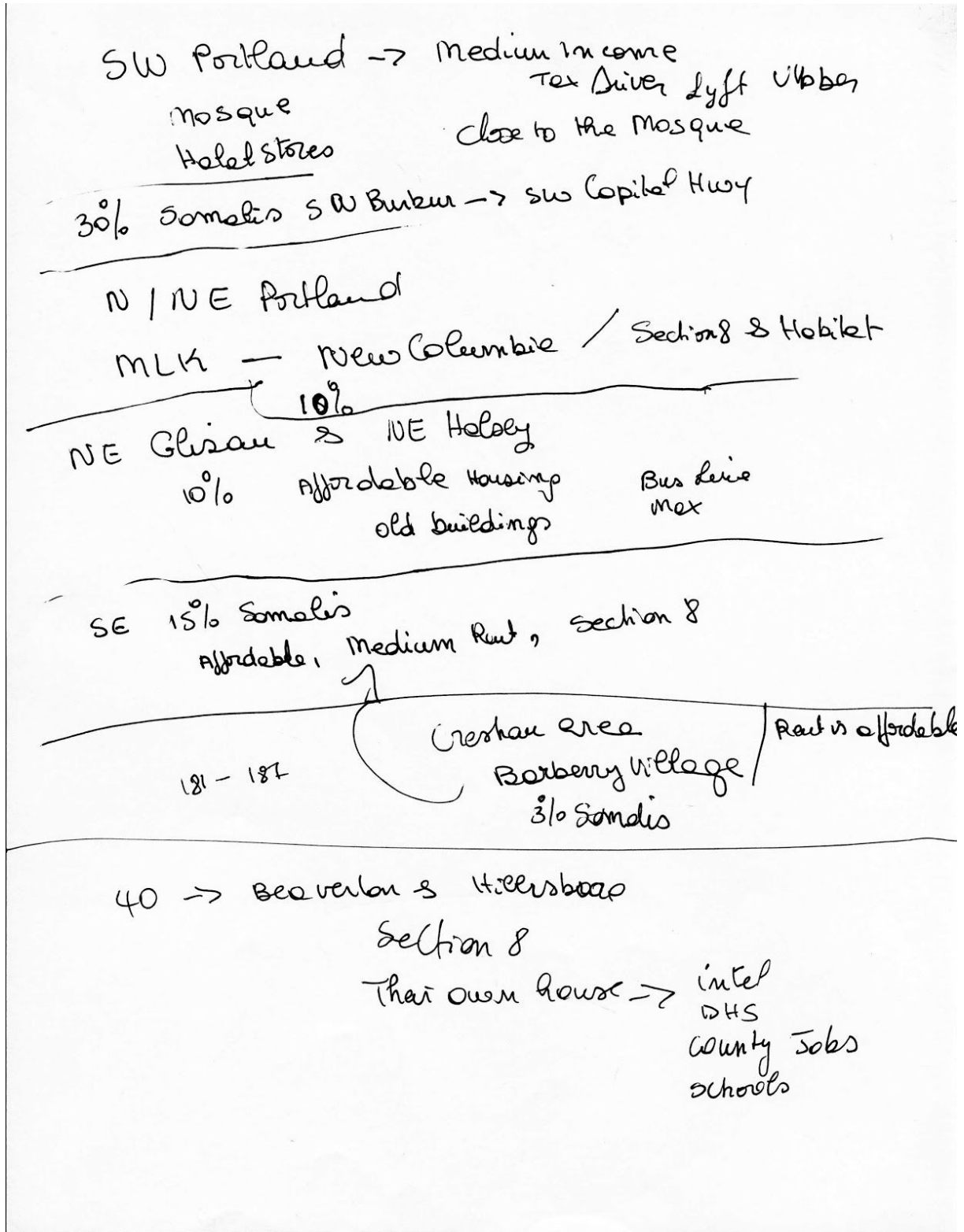


Figure 12. Ladan's\* breakdown of where the Somali population she works with live.

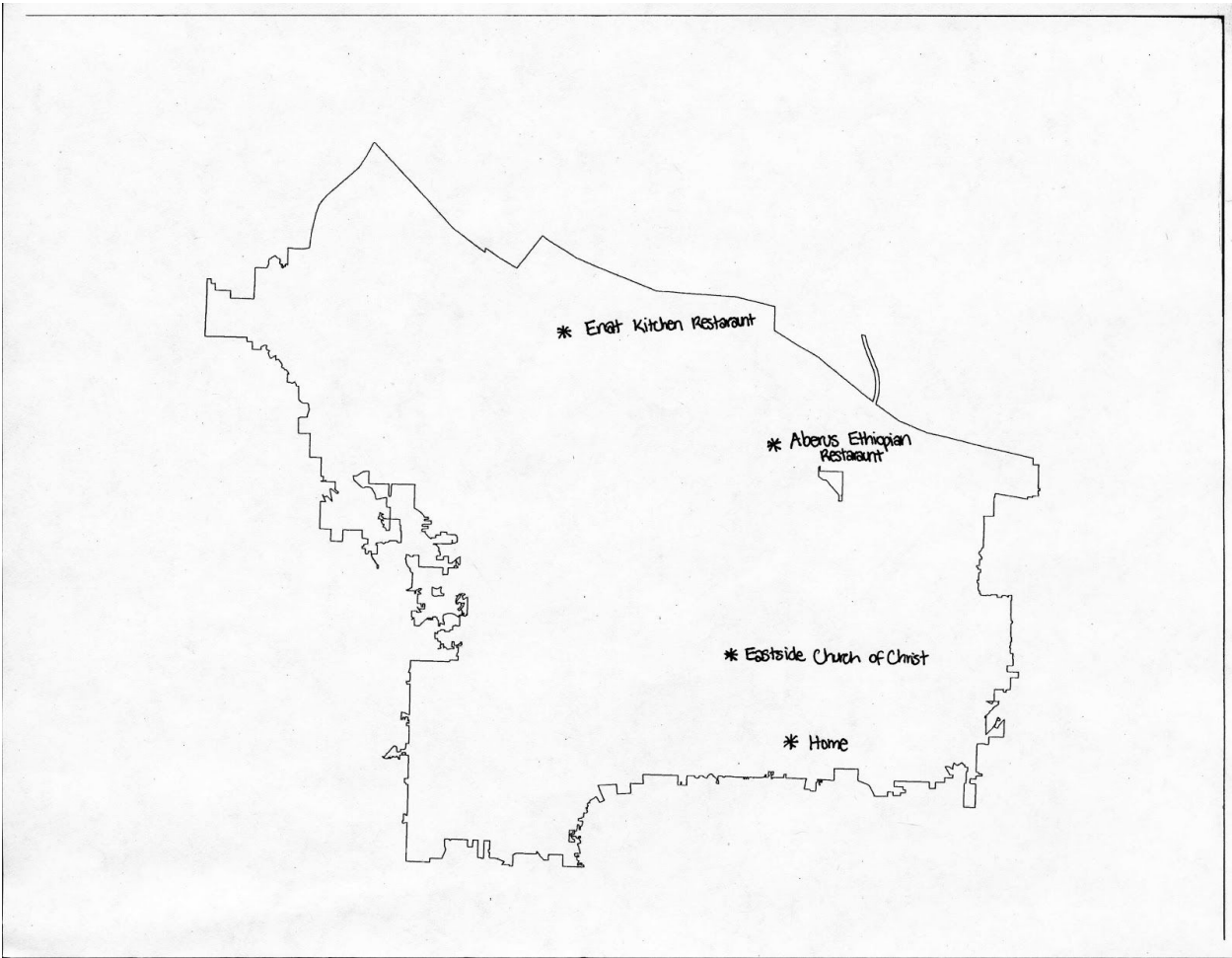


Figure 13. Aida's\* mind map of her home and places where she forms community.

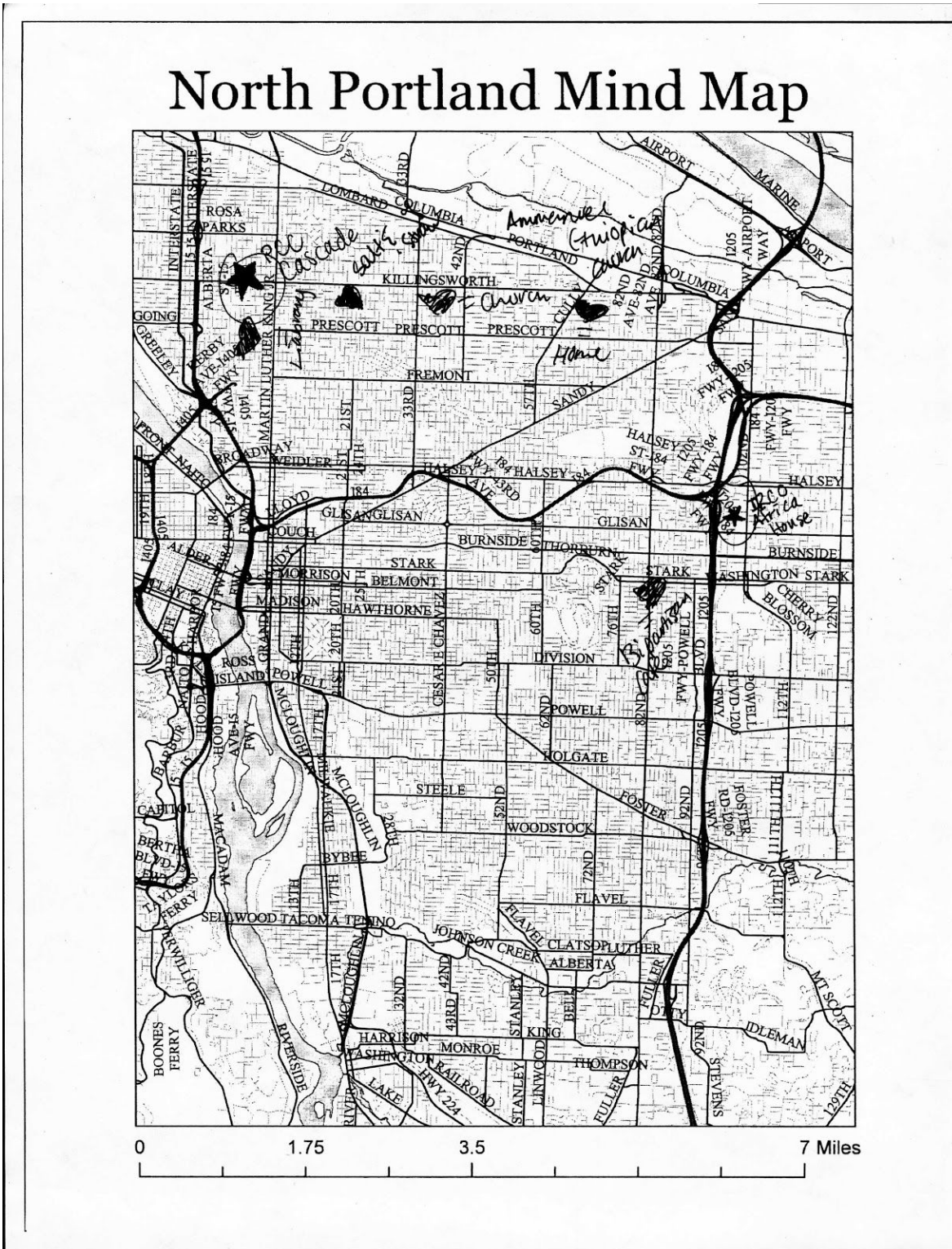


Figure 14. Maya's\* mind map of her home and places she frequents.



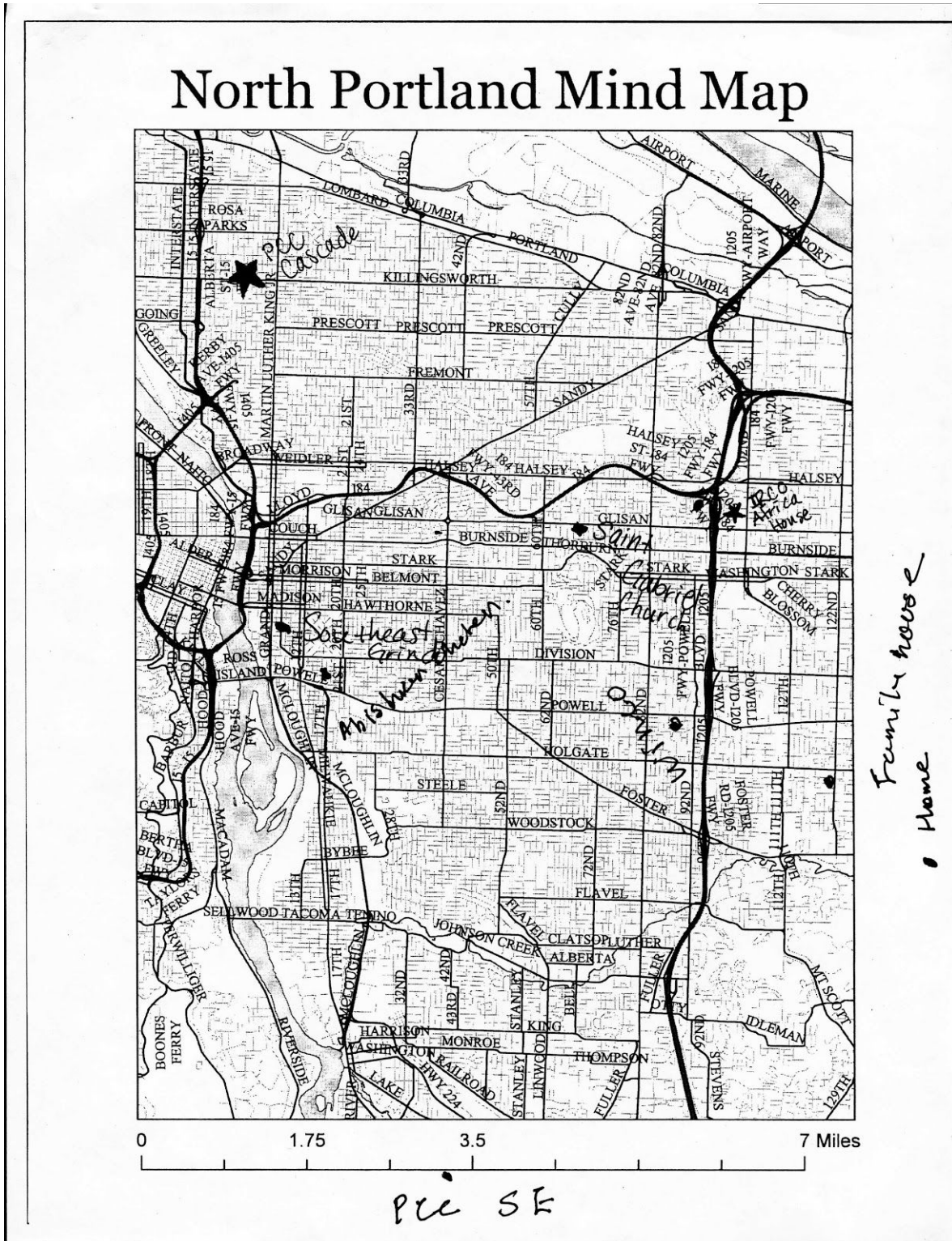


Figure 15. Joseph's\* mind map of his home and the places he frequents.

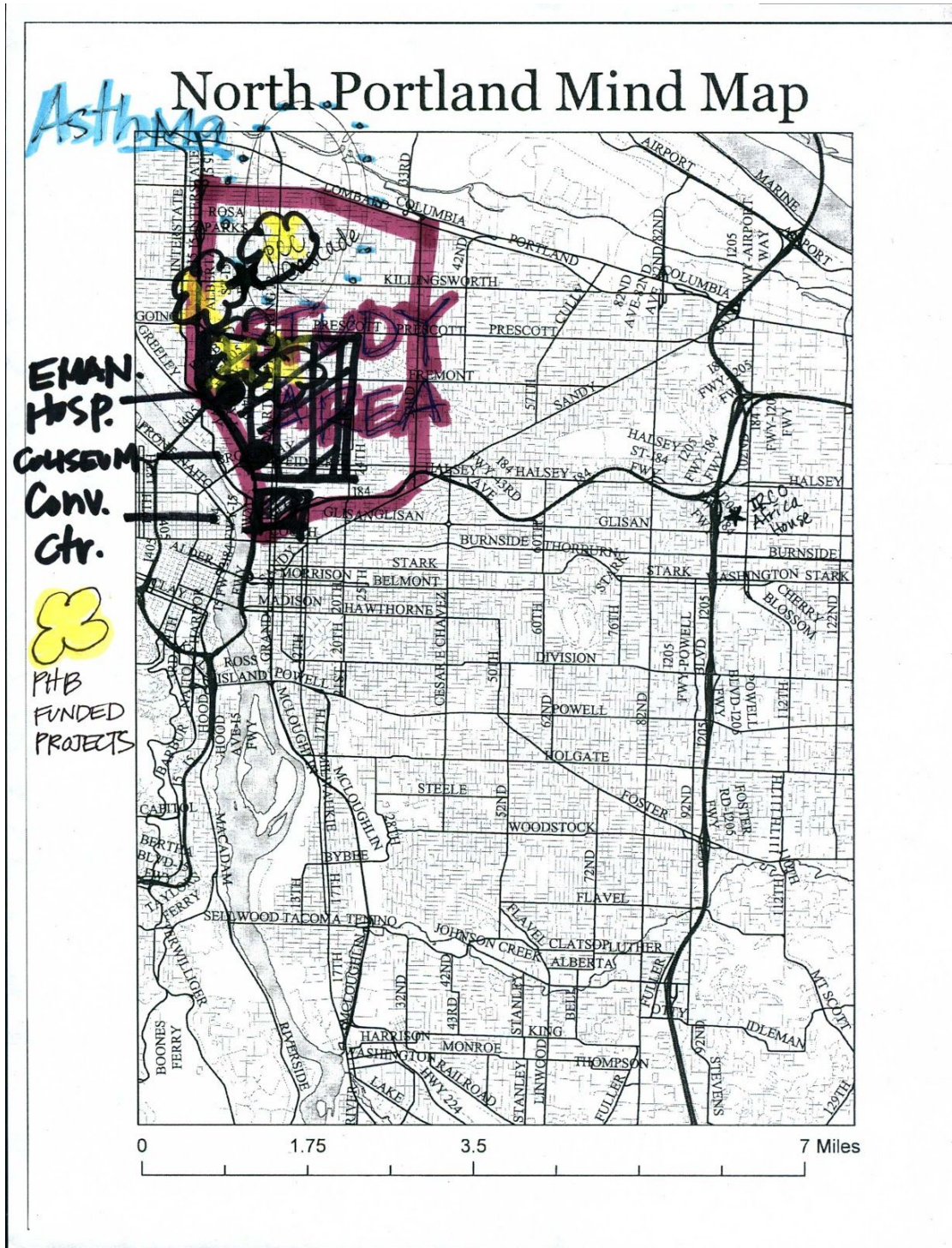


Figure 16. Michelle DePass' mind map of the area she is studying for the Portland Housing Bureau.



Figure 17. Genet's\* mind map of places where he has lived and formed community.

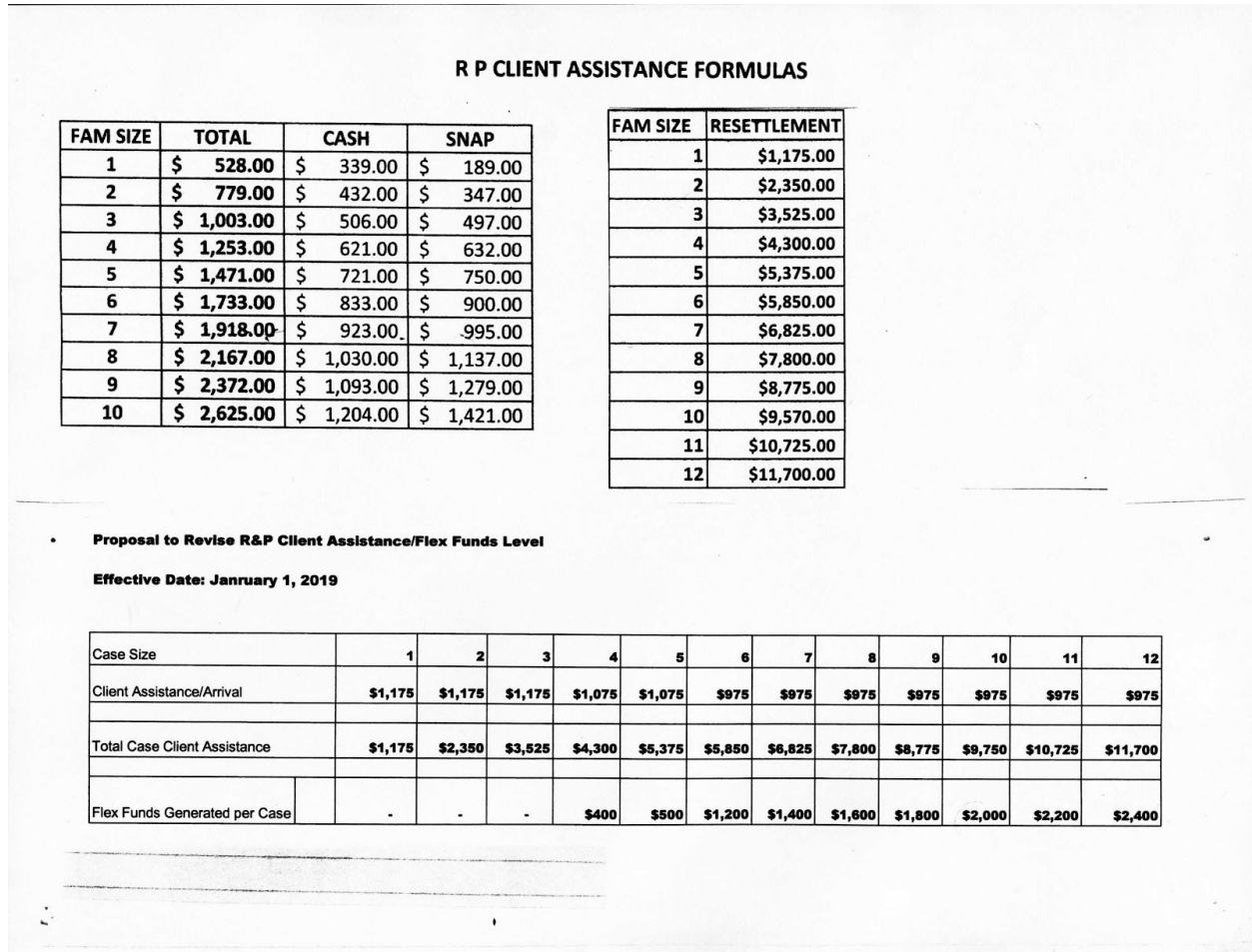


Figure 18. How much assistance refugee clients at Lutheran Community Services receive based on family size.

**CONCLUSION**

East African immigrants and refugees thrive in communities that include other members of their enclaves. In order to maintain these enclaves, accessible affordable housing must be a priority in the city of Portland. Current federally-funded affordable housing is not accessible to newcomers due to oftentimes years long waitlists. Newly resettled immigrants and refugees need access to housing immediately and cannot wait years to finally be housed. The existence of urban

enclaves allow members of the East African enclave to support one another when other forms of assistance are not available.

Furthermore, the existence of the East African enclave facilitates the formation of community, which supports a sense of belonging among East African immigrants and refugees. Providing assistance to immigrants and refugees helps to support them economically, but having the ability to form social ties with one another supports their emotional and mental wellbeing, and helps to solidify their sense of place. This is especially true for vulnerable populations like refugees, who are already displaced due to conflict in their countries of origin.

In order for immigrants and refugees to feel like they belong in Portland, their base level needs of safety and housing first must be met. These are needs that will continue to be essential for new immigrants and refugees due to their unique circumstances, which often put them at an economic disadvantage when they first arrive. These needs must also be met for immigrants and refugees who come without the language skills necessary to find work, making it difficult to generate income that is high enough to pay for ever-increasing rents.

Solutions to the housing crisis in Portland are needed to support members of vulnerable populations, like immigrants and refugees. Greater regulations within the housing market and caps on rents would help to mitigate some of the negative effects of the housing crisis on vulnerable populations. As Curry-Stevens (2013) asserts, “It is important that housing is understood as a human right instead of a consumption item to be purchased in the private market and vulnerable to the practices of landlords,” (p. 10). Greater support for immigrants and refugees in the form of increased resources and financial assistance, as well as increased

community outreach would also help to mitigate the economic difficulty they experience while living in Portland.

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### **Appendix. Interview Questions:**

For general participants:

- 1.) Where are you from?
- 2.) When did you come to the U.S.?
- 3.) Since you have moved here, what organizations and resources have offered you assistance or support?
- 4.) Did you get to choose where you live?

How did you choose where to live?

- 5.) If not, where were you placed and what organization placed you there?
- 6.) How did you afford to live in the housing you were provided when you first arrived in Portland?
- 7.) If you moved since, where did you move to and why? Have you moved since you arrived in PDX?



- a. Was the price of housing a factor in your decision to move?
- 8.) Do you feel that it is affordable to live in Portland?
- 9.) Has your rent been raised since you have moved here?
  - a. If they have, how much has your rent raised?
  - b. Were you ever offered financial assistance for housing or utilities from IRCO or another housing organization in Portland (ie. Home Forward, Prosper Portland, Lutheran Community Services etc.)?
- 10.) Do you remember what the neighborhood you lived in was like?
- 11.) Were there a lot of other immigrants/refugees?
- 12.) Did you feel a strong sense of community where you lived?
- 13.) How long did you remain in this housing?
- 14.) If you had to move, did you find a similar community to the one you moved from in the place where you moved to?
- 15.) If you had to move, what kinds of gathering spaces did you have in your original neighborhood in Portland?
- 16.) What kinds of gathering spaces do you have in the place you live now?
- 17.) If you had to move, do similar activities take place in the new gathering spaces as did in the old ones?
- 18.) Have any of your friends or members of your community had to move from Portland?
- 19.) If yes, where did they move to?
- 20.) Why did they move there?
- 21.) If you could live somewhere other than Portland, where would you move and why?

- 22.) Do you feel like you have a strong sense of belonging where you live? Why/why not?
- 23.) Do you feel like that makes it more difficult for you to maintain a sense of community?
- 24.) Do you feel like this is because of gentrification?

For employees at various housing organizations (IRCO, Home Forward, Lutheran Community Services):

- 1.) What kind of services does your organization offer for refugees?
  - a. Are any of these services culturally specific?
- 2.) What have some of the most challenging issues been with your work?
- 3.) What kind of support can the government give to help alleviate the stress of raising rents for refugee families?
- 4.) Have you met very many refugees who have been affected by raising rents? What do you usually do to address this issue?
- 5.) Do you know many people who have moved from Portland due to the rising rents?
  - a. Where did they move to, and why did they consider that area?
  - b. Have any of them come back?
  - c. If so, why?