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QUEER REFUGEE HOMEMAKING

Lesbian and Gay Refugees' Oral Histories and Photovoice Narratives of Home

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In this chapter, I focus on the oral history and photovoice projects of Juliet, Sara, and Samuel,[1] three lesbian and gay refugees who gained asylum in Canada on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity.[2] Through their selected photographs and oral histories, I explore how queer refugees narrate stories of migration, settlement, and feelings of home through intimacy and queer domesticity. While home is conventionally understood through a heteronormative lens that ties it to the heterosexual nuclear family, this chapter presents an intimate queer archive of Juliet, Sara, and Samuel's narrative constructions of home. Rather than reproduce flattened narratives of refugee victimhood—fleeing persecution to find freedom elsewhere—this chapter understands queer refugees as sexual and emotional beings who express, want to express, or are denied the means to express both their sexual identities and desires and their intimate relationships and domestic needs.[3] Being able to live with their same-sex partners and create a private homelife together, free from heteronormative persecution and violent intrusion, was a motivating catalyst for Juliet, Sara, and Samuel to migrate and claim asylum. Through their oral histories and photovoice projects, Juliet, Sara, and Samuel reveal how their sense of home rests in between national borders and memory, in the intimacy and daily domestic rituals they share with their partners. Their narratives demonstrate that home, as an affective concept outside of state heteronormative and gendered constraints, is a continual process that is as much about intimacy, relationships, and domesticity as it is about a physical dwelling and political asylum. Queer refugee homemaking challenges the conflation of "home" with both "nation-state" and "heteronormative domicile." Migration and settlement are as much "intimate" as they are "forced," as experiences and places that are significant to refugees are remapped onto new locations in their adopted countries, connecting past and present.

Narratives are important for queer asylum seekers, not only to gain asylum but also to build a sense of belonging and home for themselves in the face of instability and precarity. For this chapter, I selected excerpts from the photovoice and oral history interviews that highlight affective relationships. Before migration, Juliet and Sara were in a lesbian relationship with one another, while Samuel had to end his partnership in his country of origin out of fear of violence but quickly found his current husband after arriving in Canada and claiming asylum. Intimacy in this chapter is defined as the private moments or daily actions a person experiences with someone with whom they are in a romantic relationship. It can encompass physical affection and emotion as well as the daily routines, language, and sharing of time and space that people in partnership have with one another. Queer domesticity is defined as the act of creating a domestic space and sense of home outside of heteronormative constraints. Through their stories and photographs, Juliet, Sara, and Samuel reveal that they experienced persecution not only based on their sexual orientation but also for defying gender norms in their private, intimate, and

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domestic lives, as queer couples living together. Thus, creating a private domestic space where they can not only be intimate with one another but also engage in daily rituals of queer domesticity informs the narration of home for Juliet, Sara, and Samuel. It is also an act of resistance against social, economic, and political forces meant to erase them and their relationships.

This chapter uses oral history and photovoice to allow the participants to direct their narratives through storytelling and be active participants in the final analysis of their narratives. Oral history as a methodology has a long history in refugee and diaspora studies.[4] The personal narratives collected from long and extended oral history interviews provide insight into how refugees make sense of their worlds and how they perceive the impact of social, political, and cultural change in their everyday lives. The majority of the oral history interviews were conducted in English. For two of the interviews, they were conducted with the use of a Spanish translator. The interviews presented in this chapter came from the interviews I conducted in English. Juliet, Sara, and Samuel were fluent English speakers. The oral histories were conversational and semi-structured, consisting of three parts: the first on refugees' experiences in their country of origin as well as their journey to and resettlement in Canada; the next on refugees' understandings of home; and the third on refugees' conceptions of belonging. Participants received interview transcripts and were compensated for their time. Additionally, photovoice offers a chance for the participants to further unpack what home and belonging mean to them. Also known as participatory photography, photovoice involves having participants select or take photographs on a key theme or question and then narrate the meanings behind each photograph. For this project, participants were asked to select, or capture using a camera, ten to twenty photographs that represented home and belonging to them. The selection and captioning of photographs allowed the participants to express different kinds of knowledge and affectual experience that may not be readily or easily articulated through interviews or conversations alone. Using oral history and photovoice also allowed Juliet, Sara, Samuel, and I the opportunity to reflect critically together and circle back to key points or insights about their experiences and narrative constructions of home.

I come to these stories as an outsider, but also as an active listener and participant in dialogue with Juliet, Sara, and Samuel. The excerpts and photographs selected are heavily curated through my own interpretative authority as a queer cisgender white non-refugee settler academic and activist. I spent four years as a volunteer and settlement assistant for Rainbow Refugee, a non-profit organization based in Canada and dedicated to assisting those claiming asylum on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, and HIV status.[5] I worked with more than a hundred queer refugees claiming asylum in Canada by preparing them for their hearings, serving as an expert witness, assisting with finding shelter and resources, and providing moral support during the entire process and afterward. My interest in home and belonging comes from my daily work with queer refugees and seeing how their experiences complicate national and institutional narratives of refugee victimhood. Homemaking is agentic in that it involves intentional actions and desires. In the face of institutional, political, and material constraints, queer refugee homemaking is an act of resistance against heteronormative repression and erasure across nation-state borders.

Juliet and Sara

SARA: We started to live together. She moved into my place. That way, we could be together and not be afraid. And that's when it all started to become bad. We became targeted. Even when we did not tell anybody. We did not have boyfriends. People got suspicious and found out that we were in a relationship. That's when the violence started.[6]

Sara and Juliet met in 2011 while sharing a train car to the capital city of their country of origin in Central Asia. They quickly became romantic partners and moved in together, hiding their relationship from family members, coworkers, and outsiders. Juliet and Sara experienced heightened surveillance and violence as a lesbian couple, in both private and public spheres. The violence Sara and Juliet

experienced as financially independent women in a relationship was further impacted by strict gender social norms and misogyny. Family members disowned them. Former boyfriends and male friends physically and sexually attacked them. Coworkers refused to work with them. One of Sara's coworkers broke into their apartment and sexually assaulted Juliet and Sara. When they went to the police, they were turned away because they were lesbians. Police officers would also target them and extort money. Sara was raped by a police officer after reporting an attack. Persecution followed them through several relocations within their country. Finally, they were kidnapped and repeatedly sexually assaulted by the husband of a female acquaintance.

The extreme violence Sara and Juliet experienced was motivated by restrictive cultural gender norms, heteronormativity, and homophobia that targeted them explicitly as a lesbian couple. James Wilets writes that violence against sexual minorities should be seen as a part of overarching gender violence and oppression, rather than a separate violence based solely on sexual orientation. Sexual minorities are "gender outlaws."[7] Their persecution involves intolerance of both homosexual relations and defying traditional gender roles. The persecution Sara and Juliet experienced points to the necessity of looking at how anti-queer violence targets not only a person's sexual orientation but also their gender and relationships. Sara and Juliet lived in a country with restrictive gender norms governed by a restrictive gender hierarchy. As queer women, they not only defied gender expectations but were a threat to the hierarchal patriarchal power structure that subjugates women as subservient to men in both public and private spheres. By living together, even discreetly, Sara and Juliet became more susceptible to persecution. Trying to create a home outside of heteronormative and patriarchal constraints made them a threat to the status quo. Wanting to stay together meant that wherever they went within their country, they would be hyper-visible and therefore vulnerable to more persecution.

In their photovoice, Juliet and Sara did not present photographs taken prior to their arrival in Canada. This was partly because they had very few photographs or documentary evidence of their life together in their country of origin. The constant violence and fear made them afraid to go out in public together. Even private photographs, letters, or mementos seemed too dangerous, as their home was frequently broken into. The photographs taken and selected for this project show how home rests in the intimacy they experience in their private dwelling as well as the ability to go out in public as a queer couple. Coming to Canada was not only a way to escape horrific violence but also a means to reclaim parts of their domestic relationship that were previously denied. As much as Sara and Juliet felt safer in Canada as a lesbian couple, they have also experienced heteronormative surveillance by Canadian immigration officials and economic hardship as immigrant women. Sara and Juliet's photographs and story reveal that violence against and marginalization of queer non-white bodies do not stop at national borders. Yet, in defiance of this marginalization, they engage in queer refugee homemaking through their attachment to one another. Juliet and Sara's oral history and photovoice challenge Canadian discourses that depict non-Western queer refugees as gratefully escaping persecution in order to find freedom and acceptance in the liberal West. Instead, they present a much more complicated narrative of love, loss, and longing both for their country of origin and in what they experience in their current settlement.

In Juliet and Sara's narrative and photovoice, we see a queer archive of intimacy in which they frame their experiences through the hardship they endure as well as cherished moments of being together outside of heteronormative constraints. Through their relationship, Juliet and Sara archive not only the facts of their story but also the knowledge of what informs their sense of home and belonging.

JULIET: When we arrived in Canada, we did not make a refugee claim. … We needed to leave as fast as possible. We did not know about the refugee claim very well. …

SARA: It was terrible at the airport. Actually, when we were at the airport they almost sent us back. Because we just wanted to leave [Central Asia]. I don't know why, but we just picked Vancouver. We had no reservations for hotels and no one is coming to pick us up. The immigration officers asked us so many questions. They unpacked all our luggage. They didn't even let us meet. We were in different rooms. We were separated.

JULIET: Yeah, we were separated. It was terrible.

SARA: I couldn't breathe. I don't know. I was crying. I couldn't breathe. Because I was not able to breathe they let us be in the room together. I was sitting on the floor and she [Juliet] was sitting on the chair. And she [Juliet] said, "Come sit next to me." I sat next to her.

But, the customs lady came in and saw us and she was so mad. She said, "Who told you that you could sit together? You have to get back here." We didn't even have the chance to talk together. We couldn't touch.[8]

This is the first experience Sara and Juliet had in Canada. In researching how to leave, they found a news article about a gay man from their country successfully claiming asylum in Canada. Juliet reached out to a former acquaintance who had relocated to Toronto. The person agreed to be their contact for their visitor's visa. Once Sara and Juliet arrived in Canada, they were detained and questioned for eight hours by the Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA). Eventually, CBSA officers managed to talk over the phone with Juliet's acquaintance. The phone call convinced the officers that Juliet and Sara would not be a flight risk, and they were allowed to leave the airport.

Juliet and Sara's oral history of coming to Canada speaks to how national security borders threaten queer bodies and relationships. People crossing borders become highly surveilled; governments' control of immigration and mobility infiltrates every aspect of their daily lives. For those who have already crossed many borders in their countries of origin, particularly social boundaries of sexuality and gender, feelings of precariousness may only intensify once they cross into another state.[9] CBSA officers have the authority to detain and question incoming migrants they think are suspicious. As two non-white women coming from Central Asia with little knowledge of Vancouver, little money, and no hotel reservation, Sara and Juliet were immediately suspected. They did not fit the CBSA officers' definition of a legitimate visitor to Canada. Canada has a long history of regulating immigration based on race, gender, and class. Migration is built upon a Western white male model of privilege.[10] It can be more difficult for women, especially non-Western and non-white women, to accrue enough financial and social support to qualify for a visa to enter Canada, and they experience policing of their race, gender, and class on entering the country.[11] Assumptions and norms surrounding race, gender, and class determine who is allowed entry into a state's territory and given the right to stay.[12] Women applying for a visitor's visa must prove attachment to their country through financial and relational ties. Independent female migrants from outside the West and unaccompanied by a male companion are heavily scrutinized and policed at the border on the suspicion that they are being trafficked. This has not only restricted non-white and low-income women from coming to Canada but also reinforced heteronormative norms of gender and sexuality for incoming migrants. Bodies coming through borders are deemed heterosexual and cisgender by default, and queer bodies are either erased or made hyper-visible.[13] As non-white and non-wealthy women traveling to Canada, Juliet and Sara were deemed suspicious upon arrival. CBSA officers did not recognize their queer relationship. The officers never questioned them about their relationship to each other and why they were traveling together. Being detained by the border guards further traumatized Juliet and Sara and made it difficult for them to seek help from the CBSA. Juliet and Sara left not knowing how they could make a refugee claim in Canada. The experience made them afraid to tell people about their situation and seek assistance.

Unsure about the asylum process and fearing deportation, they became more and more distressed about finding a way to stay in Canada before their visas expired. Eventually, Sara and Juliet grew to trust the manager of a local hostel they were staying at and confided in her about their situation. The woman told them that they could make a refugee claim and gave them the phone number of a lawyer. The lawyer got them in contact with Legal Aid, and they started their refugee claim. This lawyer also connected them to Rainbow Refugee, where volunteers helped them prepare for their hearing.

When Juliet and Sara's asylum hearing finally came, it was a mixture of relief and catharsis. They testified together about their experiences and fear of being further targeted if sent back to their country of origin. The immigration officer listened carefully to their story, asking them clarifying questions

to look for any inconsistencies. After finding them both credible and their fear of persecution evident, the officer granted them asylum. In many ways, Sara and Juliet were lucky. They were able to work with Rainbow Refugee and their lawyer to prepare for their joint hearing. This meant they were clear and consistent and felt more confident in telling their queer refugee narrative in a way that would be legible to the Canadian settler state. Many refugees do not have access to these legal and institutional supports. Sara and Juliet's hearing took place on February 14, and Juliet would later recount it was the best Valentine's Day they ever had.

Juliet and Sara's oral history reveals a counter-narrative to Canadian state discourse surrounding queer asylum seekers that depicts them as finding automatic safety, acceptance, and freedom in the neoliberal West. As much as Juliet and Sara were escaping persecution, they also experienced precarity and trauma in Canada. During their asylum hearing, Juliet and Sara could not speak about the hardships they were experiencing in Canada as non-white queer refugee women. Instead, their narrative had to be constrained in order to make their case to the Canadian Immigration Board member as to why they needed to stay in Canada and could not be deported. They could not speak about the trauma they encountered entering Canada or their struggles in finding safe and stable housing or employment.

Yet, in their oral history, Juliet and Sara talk about these experiences not in terms of being better or worse in Canada or their country of origin, but connecting all of these experiences as part of their story of migration and survival as a couple. Likewise, their photovoice around home provides additional complexity that goes beyond the limited narrative demanded by the Canadian Immigration Board to make a credible asylum claim. Their pictures and narration of home reveal how home is both a place of queer affirmation as well as a place of precarity.

AUTHOR: What do you need to have a good feeling of home?

SARA: Love. You need love. Happiness. I feel that when we are together in our place. It is much better than before.[14]

Getting asylum meant that Sara and Juliet would not be sent back, but it did not guarantee them survival or living well in Canada. Even with asylum and work permits, they struggled to financially support themselves because it was difficult to access stable employment and well-paying jobs. Affordable housing in Vancouver was scarce. The constant moving and fear of homelessness caused considerable stress and anxiety. Renting a room with roommates and surrounding neighbors also created anxiety, as they continued to fear being attacked or harassed. Most of the time, Sara and Juliet stayed in their bedroom, not enjoying the rest of the house and the yard. Yet, even within this darkness there is also light. As Sara commented, "Happiness. I feel that when we are together in our place." The ability to share a living space together, despite the struggle, is where happiness and hope are located. In reclaiming this space of intimacy, Sara and Juliet affirm their relationship to one another and hold hope for better days. In the moments of intimacy in this private shared space, Juliet and Sara feel a sense of home.

AUTHOR: How do you feel when you two are alone together in your room?

JULIET: I think we feel safe, mostly. Sometimes I feel scared, but that is mostly outside [of their apartment]. Here I feel good. We can be close.

SARA: It is safe here. But there were times where we felt very afraid. But I think it is because of the fear we have. Sometimes loud noises or people scare us. And that's because we had to always be afraid. Always had to keep watching. Could not trust anyone.

We never got a chance to get used to holding hands or kissing on the street. We only could do that alone in our room. So home is that special place where we can be together. I am happy to come back here when I know she is here. This room is special.[15]

While the physical place that Juliet and Sara were staying in did not feel fully like home, they felt at home together in their room. Juliet and Sara purposely did not take pictures of the room they shared.

Figure 26.1 Picture of Grouse Mountain, photograph by Juliet, April 2015.

That was their private space that was special just to them, and in maintaining that privacy, they maintain a sense of home for themselves. This feeling is reminiscent of bell hooks' conception of "homeplace", which is not just a physical dwelling but also an affective and relational space that resists the objectification and erasure of minoritized bodies, such as Black or refugee bodies.[16] It is an affirming space of care and love. Sarah Elwood writes that for "many lesbian communities, the act of creating a homeplace is a refusal to be silenced in the face of a rigidly heterosexual culture."[17] By constantly working to maintain this private domestic space, this space of queer intimacy, Juliet and Sara resist gendered power structures that threaten to suppress their relationship and existence.

JULIET: This picture is special because we are together. It is our first hike together here. It was beautiful. We wanted to go to Grouse Mountain. It was a special day for us. It reminds me of my country, what I love about my country. The mountains. We love the mountains.

SARA: It looks so magical. The clouds and the sunlight. Yeah, I miss the countryside. The goats and the sheep. All the green and the mountains. And it gets so quiet there. It is very peaceful. Yeah, I wish we could see this more.

JULIET: This was a way for us to experience that just a little. What is different is that we could not enjoy the countryside in our country because of the violence. But here we can experience it a little. We can go on a hike together. It is peaceful. We can finally share this together. This mountain is now our mountain.[18]

The photovoice of Grouse Mountain enables Juliet and Sara to represent a queer remapping of a public location that crosses national borders and time. Juliet and Sara were denied public displays of

affection and access to public spaces in their country of origin. Moreover, they do not feel completely safe or welcomed in Canada. As non-white refugee lesbians, they experience multiple marginalizations that make daily living a struggle. However, even in this struggle, there are points of reaffirmation and reclamation. They frame Grouse Mountain, a very popular tourist destination in Vancouver, in relation to what they were denied in their country of origin. Visiting public places affirms their relationship and creates a sense of intimacy in public. By loving each other, Juliet and Sara create a radical space of intimacy that challenges static notions of home outside of heteronormative and national boundaries. Grouse Mountain transforms into a domestic and intimate queer space for Juliet and Sara. Their narrative of Grouse Mountain queers the boundary between public and private, remapping home as something they create with one another even if the house in which they were renting a room did not make them feel at home. Through Juliet and Sara's affectual attachment and narrative remapping, Grouse Mountain becomes more than just a physical location. In this space of here and there, past and present, Juliet and Sara reclaim moments of intimacy that were previously denied.

Samuel

Like the stories and photographs provided by Juliet and Sara, Samuel's oral history and photovoice highlight the importance of queer intimacy, specifically through domestic artifacts and rituals. Although Samuel did not migrate to Canada with a queer partner, his migration and subsequent claim for asylum were motivated by a desire to build a domestic homelife with another man without fear of persecution. His relationship with his current husband, Allen, whom he met shortly after arriving in Canada, informs Samuel's experience of belonging and home.

SAMUEL: My partner, Allen, and I love to go on this walk on the weekends with our dog. … This walk is special. But it is also special because a lot of these places have deeper memories to me. Like, you will see this later on, but, like, for some of these places, they were the first things that I ever saw when I arrived here. So it's like past and present meets when I walk with Allen. I always remember these places for their memories. It's a good visit. Like a visit with family. There's good times and bad times, but most importantly you are experiencing them with the person you love.[19]

Samuel's photovoice is a carefully cultivated collection of staged photographs representing the intimate and private homelife he has with Allen. In discussing the photographs, Samuel recounts the loss of a private queer domestic homelife in his country of origin while also cherishing the one he currently has with Allen. The everyday rituals and objects that make up his domestic life are also a way for Samuel to create a home after multiple displacements as a queer refugee. Home is created in the daily domestic intimacy he shares with Allen.

SAMUEL: This is a picture of our little dog. She will be eight years old in April. Adopting our dog was really special to me. I had a dog with Leo [Samuel's former partner in his country of origin]. I loved her so much. We would go on walks together as a family. We would take her on vacation with us.

It's sad. The neighbors in my building found out about us [Leo and Samuel]. They decided to poison our dog in an attempt to get us to move out of the building. Losing my dog was devastating. It just was more proof that I would never be able to live the life I wanted for myself.[20]

Samuel lived in a large metropolitan city in Central America. He enjoyed a successful career and a loving family who accepted his queerness. Prior to coming to Canada, Samuel was in a relationship with a man named Leo. They lived together in a small apartment and kept to themselves. Despite their attempts to stay discreet, their relationship was discovered by neighbors, who sent a priest to perform an exorcism in front of their home. Samuel would find graffiti outside his apartment door, with homophobic slurs and messages telling them to leave. Feces and garbage were thrown at their windows.

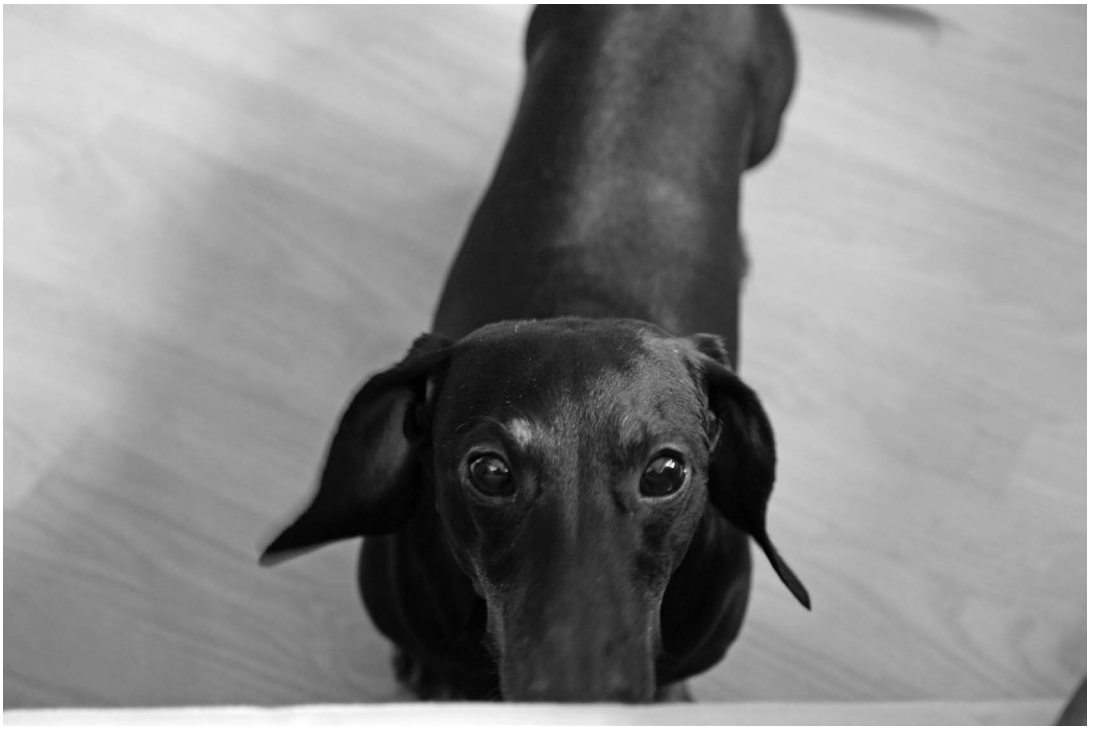

Figure 26.2 Picture of small dog, photograph by Samuel, May 2014.

A neighbor started a petition to have the police arrest Samuel and Leo for indecency. While these acts of violence were upsetting, Samuel felt determined not to be bullied. It was not until Samuel and Leo's beloved dog was poisoned that Samuel became fearful for their lives. They decided to end their relationship and move out of the apartment.

SAMUEL: It was time to leave. … What kind of life was that? I spoke with my mom that night, and she said that she didn't want me to end up murdered, basically because of being gay. It was a very difficult decision, but that's basically when I decided to leave. I decided to sell whatever I had and just got on a plane and came to Vancouver. I just wanted to live a normal life.

AUTHOR: What is a normal life for you?

SAMUEL: To be able to be in a relationship with the man you love and not have to worry about someone harassing or beating you up. Not having to constantly hide who you are. Enjoy moments with friends and boyfriends without having people harass you or worse. You know, be able to share a life with someone. Live together and build a life.[21]

The violence Samuel experienced is similar to what Juliet and Sara experienced in that he was targeted not just because of his sexual orientation but also because of his relationship with Leo. Their relationship defied gender norms by not conforming to culturally specific versions of heterosexuality and masculinity, specifically machismo. Machismo is a cultural construction of masculinity found in Hispanic and Latinx communities that largely emphasizes male dominance, heterosexism, and a rigid gender hierarchy. Queer men, effeminate men, men who do not live up to the tenets of machismo are situated near the bottom of the gender hierarchy and are seen as a threat to the gendered order and male dominance. Two gay men building a home together, sharing domestic tasks often assigned to women, and creating a family unit directly challenges machismo and makes them vulnerable to

further persecution. While Samuel and Leo were not physically assaulted, the violence they experienced was specifically targeted at their home and the domestic life they had built together. With the encouragement of Samuel's family, especially his mother, Samuel researched relocating to Canada and learned that he could claim asylum based on the persecution he experienced as a sexual minority. He emailed Rainbow Refugee and they connected him with a lawyer. Within a couple of weeks, he booked a plane ticket and left for Vancouver. After arriving in Vancouver, Samuel applied for asylum.

While waiting for his asylum hearing, Samuel met Allen, who would later become his husband. Their relationship quickly developed and Allen gave Samuel a place to stay while they waited for the refugee hearing. Although not knowing if Samuel would be able to stay in Canada was stressful for them both, they supported each other. Samuel believes that he would not have been able to get through his asylum process without Allen's love and support. Allen testified about their relationship at Samuel's hearing. Samuel shared the story of his previous relationship and his past experiences of violence. The judge listened attentively and granted Samuel asylum. This meant Samuel could stay in Canada and build a future together with Allen. Not long after, they were married.

SAMUEL: This is a picture of our two teacups. Allen loves tea, so I learned to enjoy tea. I love drinking tea together and reading a book. It is our special time together. It makes me feel at home.[22]

SAMUEL: These are pictures of our belongings. We love to read, so that's our bookshelf. It is interesting how we have moved so many times in seven years, but we still have a few things that we take with us everywhere. It makes wherever we go home.[23]

Maddan Sarup writes, "particular objects and events become the focus of a contemplative memory, and hence a generator of a sense of love. Many homes become private museums as if to guard against the rapid changes that one cannot control."[24] The loss of domestic artifacts and precious mementos through

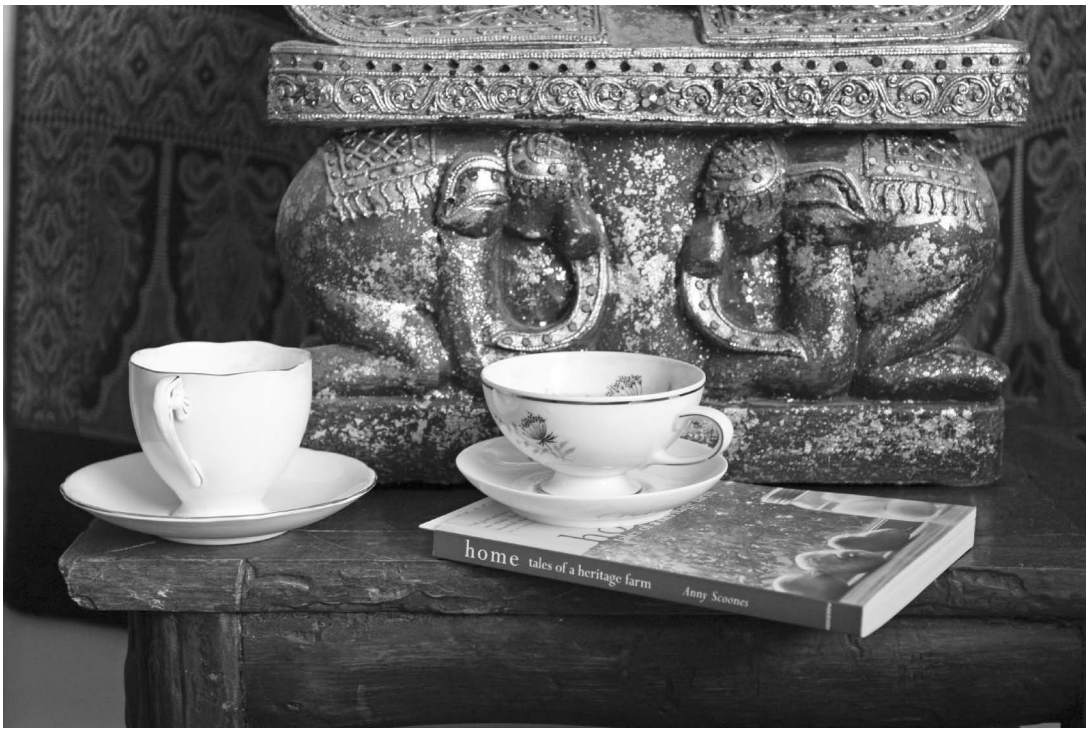

Figure 26.3 Picture of teacups on a book, photograph by Samuel, May 2014.

Figure 26.4 Picture of a bookshelf and books, photograph by Samuel, May 2014.

forced migration can feel like an added layer of displacement. For queer refugees like Juliet, Sara, and Samuel, who were denied safety in their private dwellings, domestic artifacts and mementos become symbols of a hopeful future in which they can build a home away from heteronormative persecution. The teacups, the bookshelf, and the living room furniture are material touchstones to the affectual and relational aspects of home and belonging. These objects tell a story for Samuel. Like for Sara and Juliet, for Samuel home is not a final destination but a living process of construction that changes as he moves forward in his life with Allen. His stories and photographs reveal how homemaking practices are deeply connected to his sense of self and placement. Through the everyday rituals of drinking tea, reading, and taking walks with Allen, Samuel creates a sense of home in displacement. The objects serve as a queer mnemonic archive that roots Samuel's narrative of migration and settlement. They are imbued with affectual rituals that root his sense of home. They are a reminder of what he was denied in his country of origin but also reaffirm Samuel and Allen's commitment to one another. They represent both the past and the present for Samuel.

While research has looked at how domestic rituals, objects, and relationships impact refugees' experiences of settlement, very little work has focused on queer refugees. This is partly because of a general overlooking of the lives of queer communities at the domestic level.[25] Andrew Gorman-Murray and Rebecka Sheffield write that the majority of queer research has examined lesbian, gay, and trans lives outside of the domestic sphere, in the social world of predominantly gay/lesbian bars and parties.[26] Less research has been done on the intimate and domestic spheres of queer lives.[27] Gorman-Murray

writes that domesticity and homemaking practices help queer individuals develop a holistic sense of self that embodies their public and private selves simultaneously.[28] Queer domesticity challenges sexual and gender norms that relegate the domestic sphere to the domain of heteronormativity and patriarchy, guided by a strict gender binary, a gendered division of labor, and the dominant heteronormative ideals of family production. The queer individual is placed outside of the domestic, as if not wanting or belonging in this realm. Queer refugees are placed even further outside of this narrative, often framed as family-less or domestic-less due to their cross-border migration. Being displaced does not always mean that the connection to family and home is gone. Queer refugees may experience rejection from family and displacement from the domestic as they are forced to relocate. Many also maintain strong connections either to their biological families or homelands. Many also create new connections, new families, and new domestic configurations within their countries of arrival. Samuel's pictures speak to the importance of recognizing and acknowledging the complexity that personal and familial relationships play in queer migrants' lives. The objects Samuel displays speak to the necessity of the domestic as both a driving force in his forced displacement and a core component of his sense of home and belonging. Queer domesticity is an intimate archive of identity construction and reconstruction as queer persons work to affirm their public and private lives and resist heteronormative and patriarchal norms that dehumanize and delegitimize them.

Conclusion

Queer refugees' narratives reveal the emotional and relational experiences of migration that are outside of state heteronormative constraints. Juliet, Sara, and Samuel orally and visually narrate queer refugee homemaking as a process of forming intimacies with significant partners and close companions. Queer homemaking is an act of resistance against societal and state control, creating an intimate act of defiance against erasure that spans across state borders. The combination of extended oral history interviews and photovoice provides a unique opportunity to explore the ephemeral aspects of home that may not be captured in textual narrative alone. Being able to return to ideas of home through their migration narrative as well as through photographs allowed me—as well as Juliet, Sara, and Samuel—to think about how home is a constant creation and how their relationships and emotions orient their stories of forced migration and settlement. This mixture of methodologies also allows refugee participants to challenge the linear narratives often forced upon them through state institutions in the process of asylum. Rather than the constricted narrative of fleeing and persecution required for asylum claims, oral history and photovoice allow refugee narratives to jump back and forth in time, allowing them the opportunity to add additional details of struggle as well as moments of joy. Juliet, Sara, and Samuel never said they hated their countries of origin, only that the lives they wanted to live with their current or future partners were not possible there. Canada offered protection but also brought with it other experiences of precarity and trauma. Connecting photovoice and oral history centers their voices and agency in navigating restrictive institutions and material constraints in order to create a home outside of heteronormative oppression.

Juliet, Sara, and Samuel's narratives provide a nuanced understanding of queer refugee experiences of home and belonging. For Juliet and Sara, their current dwelling—a rented room in a house shared with others—is not a home because of political and material constraints. They struggle to survive as queer immigrants. Yet, they create a sense of home through their shared intimacy. It is an affective home outside of heteronormative and neoliberal citizenship that the Canadian state does not provide. Samuel also does not feel that his current dwelling is a home. For him, home is less about the physical building and more about the daily rituals and objects that serve as a living queer archive of the life he builds with Allen. Through their oral histories and photovoice, Juliet, Sara, and Samuel reveal that home is not settled in one particular place or location. Instead, it is a transnational and continual process of queer refugee homemaking, "evoking the sense that one can feel 'at home' in any number of spaces, relationships, and conditions."[29] Home is a place where one can dwell, "to be who one is" as well as to

"imagine, to pine for or to claim agency as a creative practice despite others' opinions that one's biological makeup, sexual desires (or lack thereof), or affective affinities frustrate tradition."[30] Sara, Juliet, and Samuel pursue spaces of affirmation, intimacy, privacy, and love—all the elements they describe as constituting a home—to ground their lives in the face of forced displacement. Regaining this intimacy and creating a space of affirmation and homemaking allows for a sense of queer refugee belonging.

Notes

1 Juliet, Sara, and Samuel were participants in my 2012–2016 research on forced migration and settlement in Canada of sexual and gender minority refugees. The names used in this chapter are pseudonyms and the names of their countries of origin are omitted in order to ensure confidentiality. While this chapter only focuses on Juliet, Sara, and Samuel, the larger project, on how queer refugees experience and articulate their sense of home and belonging, involved 15 other LGBT refugees.
2 I use the phrasing lesbian or gay, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, or trans), or "queer" refugees to refer to individuals who file a refugee claim based on fear of persecution because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The participants referred to in this chapter self-identified as lesbian and gay. "Queer" is also used as a way to recognize the diversity of sexualities and gendered experiences and expressions that sexual and gender minorities engage with around the world.
3 Mai and King, "Love, Sexuality and Migration," 296.
4 Trower, "Regional Writing and Oral History," 87–105.
5 For more information about Rainbow Refugee, please visit: https://www.rainbowrefugee.com/.
6 Interview with Juliet and Sara, February 21, 2015.
7 Wilets, "Conceptualizing Violence," 990–1049.
8 Interview with Juliet and Sara, February 21, 2015.
9 White, "Archives of Intimacy and Trauma," 75–93.
10 Razack, "Race, Space, and the Law".
11 Mahler and Pessar, "Gender Matters," 27–63.
12 Keenan, "Safe Spaces for Dykes in Danger?," 43–61.
13 Lewis, "Deportable Subjects," 174–94.
14 Interview with Juliet and Sara, April 13, 2015.
15 Interview with Juliet and Sara, February 21, 2015.
16 hooks, *Belonging a Culture of Place*.
17 Elwood, "Lesbian Living Spaces," 17.
18 Interview with Juliet and Sara, April 13, 2015.
19 Interview with Samuel, May 17, 2014.
20 Interview with Samuel, May 17, 2014.
21 Interview with Samuel, April 23, 2014.
22 Interview with Samuel, May 17, 2014.
23 Interview with Samuel, May 17, 2014.
24 Sarup, *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World*, 88.
25 Gorman-Murray, "Reconciling Self," 285–303.
26 Gorman-Murray, "Reconciling Self;" Sheffield, "The Bedside Table Archives," 108–20.
27 Manalansan IV, "The 'Stuff' of Archives," 94–107.
28 Gorman-Murray, "Que(e)rying Homonormativity," 149–62.
29 Bryant, "The Meaning of Queer Home," 263.
30 Bryant, "The Meaning of Queer Home," 263.

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