ACCORDION HOMES:
LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANS (LGBT) REFUGEES’
EXPERIENCES OF HOME AND BELONGING IN CANADA

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the homing experiences of LGBT refugees in Vancouver, British Columbia. Using participatory photography, ethnography, and oral history, this project interrogates home and belonging for individuals claiming and receiving asylum based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The issues examined lie at the intersection of two ongoing discussions in migration scholarship: on race, class, sexual orientation, and gender identity in refugee settlement in Canada, and on home and belonging for LGBT refugees. This examination contributes to both of these discussions. The research suggests reimagining refugee settlement in Canada through the lens of sexualized and gendered bodies in order to queer refugee settlement and expand the scope of home and belonging beyond the pragmatic to aspects of relatedness to places, bodies, and persons.

LGBT refugees are caught in between two “(un)homey” places, Canada and their home countries, in which they experience marginalization as queer minorities. LGBT refugees’ experiences challenge the binary between home and homelessness/displacement and emplacement. Home is not cemented in Vancouver or LGBT refugees’ countries of origin. It rests in the attachments LGBT refugees make with different places, communities, and their own bodies. The relationships LGBT refugees maintain between Canada and their countries serves as a necessary means for them to create a sense of home. These transnational relationships push homemaking outside of the heterosexual neoliberal nation-state and challenge static concepts of home. The fluidity of transnational relationships for LGBT refugees challenges the conceptualization of “home” within policy and academic literatures on settlement. This research unsettles homonational narratives around Canada being a progressive safe haven and discourses about “saving” LGBT refugees.

Finally, the thesis reflects on the potential role of the activist-scholar in working with persons living precarious lives in precarious situations, and the responsibilities held by both the researcher and participants in documenting, interpreting, and exhibiting LGBT refugees’ experiences of home and belonging.
PREFACE

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1 Introduction

June 2013
“Welcome to Canada!”

William shouts this into my cell phone. He is talking to Roger, a fellow gay refugee claimant from West Africa. We are standing in the lobby of the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) high-rise on Georgia Street in downtown Vancouver. We have just left his refugee hearing.

I can hear Roger’s excited shouting through the phone as he congratulates William. William hands the phone to me. Roger asks, excited, “Kat, do you think it will be the same for me?”

Roger’s refugee hearing is in two weeks, and I know that he is anxious.

I watch William spin in circles on the granite floors in the sun-streamed lobby. He is shouting repeatedly, “Welcome to Canada!” People entering the building are walking past William and smiling at him. I smile and say to Roger, “Well, we can only hope. Stay positive.”

Roger says, “Yes, I will. I will see you at the next meeting.” We say our goodbyes and hang up.

William stops spinning and says to me, “Is it real? Am I here?”

I nod my head and say, “Yes. You did it.”

William jumps in the air, shouting, “Welcome to Canada.” and starts to spin again, laughing and crying with his arms in the air. (Field notes, June 2013)

The image of William spinning in the lobby of the Canadian IRB building is burned into my memory. It was a significant day for William. It was also a significant day for me. This was the first refugee hearing that I attended alone as a volunteer for Rainbow Refugee. Rainbow

1 William and Roger are pseudonyms.
Refugee is a Vancouver-based organization serving lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans\textsuperscript{2} refugee claimants.\textsuperscript{3} I worked with William for three months at Rainbow Refugee, helping him prepare for his refugee hearing. Through our interactions, William told me his story of being a gay man in West Africa. William shared with me his fear that his refugee claim would be rejected. Homosexuality was criminalized in his country, and if he were sent back he would face imprisonment and possibly death.

When I left William on the corner of Georgia and Granville Streets that day, I was overcome with a feeling of amazement at how much a person’s life can change within an hour. Now that William could remain in Canada, I wondered what would happen to him. Where would his life lead him? How would he create a life here in Canada? What challenges would he face? What new opportunities would he discover? Would Canada be a new home for William?

I called William in the fall of 2014 to ask him if I could share my memory of his hearing in my dissertation. William was living in Calgary and working as a construction worker. He moved to Calgary two months after his refugee hearing for work and the lower cost of living. He was happy to hear from me and gave me permission to write about my experiences of attending his refugee hearing. William said, “It was such a happy day for me, Kat. If that happy day can help you, then I am happy” (William, personal communication, September 2014).

\textsuperscript{2} Trans refers to individuals who do not associate or identify themselves with the gender assigned to them at birth. I use “Trans” as an umbrella term for gender nonconforming, gender fluid/creative, and gender variant individuals (Roen, 2001; Stryker, 2006; Spade, 20087, 2011). It is recognition to the ongoing dialogue within and outside of the larger trans community on the meanings and significances of gender identity terms and politics. Trans is a way for me to note that the terms around gender identity and gender nonconformity are not settled, but dynamic and changing depending on the cultural context and the community involved.

\textsuperscript{3} For more information about Rainbow Refugee, see http://www.rainbowrefugee.ca.
I asked William what he now thinks about his refugee process and his time in Canada. He responded,

I was so worried about the hearing that I didn’t think about life after that. Because if it was a no, I have no life. I would be dead… But, now I see that it was one step in many steps. Canada is difficult to live. I did not know this. It is hard place for refugees. I wish I had known that. I could prepare more. But it’s okay. I am alive here. That’s important. (William, personal communication, September 2014)

It is significant that I start this thesis with one of my memories. To start with a personal memory speaks to the way that memory grounds this thesis conceptually and methodologically. Much of the work presented in this work revolves around lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans (LGBT) refugees’ memories of home and belonging. My memories are also blended into this text as an observer, a reader, a listener, a co-collaborator, and a researcher. Michael Frisch writes that researchers must offer their own experience up to the same scrutiny and rigour that they use for their participants and the knowledge they collect: “You cannot open a question without leaving yourself open to it. You cannot scrutinize a ‘subject’ without being scrutinized by it” (Frisch, 1990, 189). Questioning is never one-sided. As much as a researcher may be assessing and questioning the research participants, the participants are also questioning and assessing the researcher (Best, 2003). I took many twists and turns in my theoretical and analytical thinking as I sought to understand LGBT refugees’ stories of home and belonging. In the following chapters,

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4 I define LGBT refugees as individuals who file refugee claims based on fear of persecution because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. This differs from sexual and gender minorities who file refugee claims based on political, ethnic, cultural, or religious persecution not specifically based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, and from sexual and gender minorities who are granted asylum based solely on living in an area of conflict or humanitarian crisis. This definition is also separate from female-bodied applicants who file refugee claims based on fear of persecution because they are women/female-bodied or because they are escaping gender violence directed at women/female-bodied persons. While these groups share many of the same causes of persecution and experiences, this research focuses on individuals who file refugee claims based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.
I trace those personal, theoretical, and methodological twists and turns, which shaped this research and ultimately led me to focus on the narratives and photographs of ten LGBT refugees living in Metro Vancouver, British Columbia.

Over the past decade, the number of individuals claiming refugee asylum based on sexual orientation and gender identity has risen dramatically, making this one of the fastest-growing refugee populations in the world (Türk, 2015; UNHCR, 2015). In 1991, Canada was among the first Western nation to grant refugee status on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. Since then, Canada has maintained one of the highest refugee acceptance rates in the Global North for sexual and gender minorities fleeing persecution (Lee & Brotman, 2011). While researchers have done significant work on heteronormativity within the Canadian asylum process (LaViolette, 2009) and how LGBT refugee claimants navigate the Canadian refugee process (Jordan, 2010; Lidstone, 2006), very little work has been done on the experiences of home and belonging for LGBT refugees (Murray, 2014a). The dearth of research on how LGBT refugees create a sense of home in Canada leads to a silencing of LGBT refugees in migration research and a critical disconnect in local and national immigration policy and settlement services.

Accordion Homes: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) Refugees’ Experiences of Home and Belonging in Canada examines the homing experiences of LGBT refugees in Metro

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5 Heteronormative refers to the assumption that individuals are naturally heterosexual and that most individuals are heterosexual. Heterosexuality is seen as the norm. Those who are not heterosexual are seen as deviant.

6 It is important to acknowledge the challenge with language regarding sexual and gender identity and orientation when working with refugee persons. All of the participants in this research self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or trans. I identified myself to the participants as a queer cisgender woman. These identity terms should not be seen as universal or monolithic, and particular attention must be paid to the way that persons strategically use identity.
Vancouver, British Columbia. Using participatory photography, ethnography, and oral history, this project interrogates home and belonging for individuals claiming and receiving asylum based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The issues examined lie at the intersection of two ongoing discussions in migration scholarship: on race, class, sexual orientation, and gender identity in refugee settlement in Canada (Jordan, 2010), and on home and belonging for LGBT refugees (Murray, 2014). This examination contributes to both of these discussions.

LGBT refugees’ experiences challenge the binary between home and homelessness/displacement and emplacement. Home is not cemented in Metro Vancouver or LGBT refugees’ countries of origin. It rests in the attachments LGBT refugees make with different places, communities, and their own bodies. The fluidity of transnational relationships for LGBT refugees challenges the conceptualization of “home” within policy and academic literatures on settlement. First, it disrupts homonational\(^7\) narratives around Canada being a progressive safe haven and discourses about “saving” LGBT refugees. LGBT refugees must navigate between ethnic and queer\(^8\) communities in Metro Vancouver in which they experience marginalization as queer, low-income, and racialized immigrants. LGBT refugees face several barriers to housing, employment, and other social services in Metro Vancouver because of their refugee status and being queer immigrants. The research findings challenge the stereotypes that depict LGBT

\(^7\) Homonationalism is a term coined by Jasbir Puar (2007) to describe the use of LGBT identity politics and the LGBT rights movement for nationalistic and militaristic purposes, that is, the state’s or popular culture’s use of LGBT rights rhetoric to evaluate other countries’ sovereignty.

\(^8\) Queer refers to non-heterosexual and/or gender-variant individuals (Phelan, 2001; Luibhéid & Cantú, 2005), as well as an anti-essential theoretical and political approach to sexuality and gender (Epprecht, 2008). To queer something means to destabilize heteronormative and cisnormative social norms and ideologies imbuing it. Queering also involves placing the experiences of non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender persons in the forefront of social analysis.
refugees as being without familial/communal support and their countries of origin as inherently “backwards.” Their stories complicate current legal and social framing of homophobic and transphobic persecution as being based solely on sexual orientation or gender identity. The intersection of socio-economic status and global positioning affects how LGBT refugees’ bodies are made vulnerable to social and institutional violence in their countries of origin. These same factors also regulate queer refugees’ bodies in Canada and contribute to LGBT refugees’ sense of precariousness and vulnerability in Metro Vancouver. In order to navigate their settlement in Metro Vancouver, LGBT refugees heavily depend upon the relationships they maintain in their countries of origin as well as the relationships they create in Vancouver.

Second, the thesis adds empirical and locally grounded evidence in support of a more complicated and nuanced explanation of refugee settlement than is commonly used in the heteronormative and analytical frameworks familiar in forced migration research. It suggests reimagining refugee settlement in Canada through the lens of sexualized and gendered bodies in order to queer refugee settlement and expand the scope of home and belonging beyond the pragmatic to aspects of relatedness to places, bodies, and persons. Through their participatory photography and oral histories, the participants challenge static concepts of home. The participants’ stories and photographs create a new perspective on refugee displacement and homemaking that is nonlinear and non-binary. Instead of being displaced by being forcibly removed from their countries of origin, LGBT refugees experience an “emplaced displacement” that rests on their experiences of belonging and unbelonging between Canada and their countries of origin. LGBT refugees do not replace their homes in their countries of origin with another home in Canada, specifically Metro Vancouver. Home also does not rest strictly in physical locations or housing structures. Instead, it is the moments of attachment and the experiences of
connection or disconnection to the places and people LGBT refugees encounter(ed) that determine LGBT refugees’ sense of home and belonging.

Finally, the thesis reflects on the potential role of the activist-scholar in working with persons living precarious lives in precarious situations, and the responsibilities held by both the researcher and participants in documenting, interpreting, and representing LGBT refugees’ experiences of home and belonging. The evidence collected is a result of reflective engagement with the research participants and the LGBT refugee community as a settlement volunteer for Rainbow Refugee and as a researcher on queer refugee settlement. The way that the participants’ stories and photographs are displayed in the text and interpreted remains an ongoing negotiation of the relationships within the research. This text is as much an analysis of LGBT refugees’ experiences of home and belonging as it is an interrogation of the research process.

This research pushes current work on queer migration to look at the intersections of race, citizenship, gender identity, and class in LGBT refugees’ experiences of home and belonging. Historically, queer migration research has focused on the experiences of relatively privileged queer citizens who have not only the economic resources to move and resettle, but also privileges related to being white, non-disabled, cisgender, and educated (Di Feliciantonio & Gadelha, 2015). Martin Manalansan (2014) writes that while in recent years more attention in work on the intersections of ethnicity and race has been directed to the migration and mobility of queer bodies and communities, more work needs to be done on queer communities that do not have the privilege of citizenship and must live in liminal spaces of existence. This is especially important in regards to LGBT refugees who do not enjoy the benefits of full citizenship or the privilege of stability because of their marginalized status as racialized and low-income refugees.
In exploring how LGBT refugees narrate their stories of home and belonging, I approach home both on a material sense as well as an emotional and relational sense. This involves understanding first the pragmatic concerns or challenges LGBT refugees encounter in obtaining housing in Metro Vancouver. I explore not only challenges around safe and affordable housing, but also employment, access to social services, and community support. In interrogating questions around housing I ask what LGBT refugees’ experiences of home reveal about the socioeconomic and political constellations of power in Metro Vancouver and Canada that may limit LGBT refugees from being able to build a home for themselves. As we will see in this research, home is not restricted to a physical building. There are also the emotional and social aspects of home that equally effect a person’s sense of home and place. I am interested in what constitutes refugees’ sense of home and how they situate themselves in relation to home(s). How is memory involved in the processes of homemaking and what do their stories of home say about their attachments to place(s)? How is home involved in place-making and how is home attached to feelings of belonging? In exploring their stories and photographs I also explore how LGBT refugees’ identities are connected to their sense of home.

In analyzing the participants’ stories and photographs, I explore how practices of relatedness serve as a vital element in their migration, asylum, and settlement processes. Relatedness involves not only the various emotional, personal, and material attachments LGBT refugees create with different people and places, but also the relationships they have and create with their bodies. Relatedness expands and contracts in this work outside of heteronormative, biological kinship structures to consider how people relate and attach themselves to persons, places, and objects through affect, memory, place, embodiment, and intimacy. These attachments inform LGBT refugees’ sense of home and belonging. Relatedness also serves as a window.
Through participants’ perceptions of relatedness, I explore the material, structural, and social worlds LGBT refugees must navigate in their everyday lives. All of the participants approached relatedness in multiple ways, but within each narrative and collection of photographs, I saw a dominant theme of relatedness emerge. These themes were (1) relatedness with place, (2) relatedness with body, and (3) relatedness with partners. Place involves the relationships that participants created with the places around them in Metro Vancouver and aspects of place-making or creating a place for themselves. Body refers to the relationships the participants had to their bodies, and, more importantly, the desire to have control over their bodies in regards to gender expression. Partners refers to the intimate relationships the participants had or currently have with their significant partners and how these informed their sense of home and belonging. These three themes are dominant threads in the narratives and photographs. I decided to structure my thesis along these threads in order to further interrogate relatedness to place, body, and partners. The thesis is divided into three sections, (1) Place, Chapter Three: “Place-Making in Between Two (Un)Homey Places. The Intersections of Race, Sexuality, Gender, Age, and Class in Homing for Racialized Gay Refugees”; (2) Body, Chapter Four: “The Body as a Site for Homecoming. Experiences of Home and Belonging for Trans Refugees”; and (3) Partners, Chapter Five: “Home Is Where We Are Together. The Intersections of Intimacy, Citizenship, and Domesticity in Queer Refugee Couples’ Experiences of Home and Belonging.” Within each section, each of three chapters focuses on the stories and photographs of one of the participants (except section 3, where one chapter focuses on two participants together as a couple).
1.1 What Initially Led Me to Research Home and Belonging for LGBT Refugees

Devran: So why are you interested in us?

Kat: Well, I want to learn about LGBT refugees’ experiences of settlement in Vancouver. There’s so much that needs be known.

Devran: Okay, but why you, specifically? Like, why are you interested in gay refugees like me?

Kat: That’s a good question. Do you have an hour to listen?

Devran: [Laughs] For you, always. (Interview with Devran, May 20, 2013)

The above dialogue comes from a conversation I had with Devran, a gay refugee from the Middle East. My interest in LGBT refugees’ experiences of home and belonging in Metro Vancouver stems from the experiences I gained as a queer oral historian and LGBT activist. I was raised in the presence of working-class Latino, black, and white gay men and trans women in my hometown of Saginaw, Michigan. Their tenacity, bravery, and creativity led them to perform in various small rural and inner-city bars along the Detroit, Flint, and Saginaw highways as drag performers and artists. My grandmother and mother would spend many of their nights helping my “aunts” prepare for performances by applying their makeup and sewing their dresses. I cherish the stories my mother told me about them. Poverty, racial segregation, homophobia, HIV, and AIDS sadly cut their lives short. Their stories and the vibrant social world they created were never recorded and preserved for future generations. They lie in the memories of those left behind. As each year passes, we lose another queer elder and the memories they carry with them of those who have already passed. The tragedy of losing these important stories has stayed with me and led me to be interested in preserving the oral histories of LGBT communities. I wanted
queer lives and magic to be preserved and remembered for future generations. As I grew older, I experienced gay bashing and gender violence as a queer woman, which led me to become a grassroots activist focused on LGBT rights. My activism allowed me to travel throughout the United States and eventually to Central and Western Europe to participate in LGBT pride parades and work on the ground with local LGBT activists.

It was through these experiences that I first learned about individuals claiming asylum based on sexual orientation and gender identity. In Hungary, I worked with LGBT Roma activists to combat racism and homophobia within Europe. Several of the LGBT Roma activists I worked with talked about claiming asylum in Canada because of the persecution they faced on account of their ethnicity and sexual orientation. I learned from them how race, class, gender, and sexuality intersected in their lives and left them not only persecuted in mainstream Hungarian society, but also marginalized within the broader white LGBT European community. I was confronted not only with the racial privilege that allowed me to pass as “European,” but also my privilege of U.S. citizenship, which allowed me to enter and exit Europe and North America with relative ease. I heard from LGBT Roma colleagues about how Canada offered a chance for protection from the racism and homophobia they experienced in their daily lives. However, the financial cost and safety risk to get to Canada were significant. Few of the activists I worked with had the financial means and social support to make such a risky move. It was also during this time that Canada created mandatory visa requirements for persons coming from the Czech Republic, further limiting LGBT Romas’ chances to seek asylum.9

9 In 2009, Canada imposed a visa republic for travellers coming from the Czech Republic in an effort to stop the flow of Roma refugees coming into Canada and making refugee claims. The visa requirement was removed in 2013. The Czech Republic is on the list of Designated Countries of Origin (DCO), along with Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania. Recently, the Canadian state has placed billboards in major city centres in Hungary to warn against making a refugee
This experience stayed with me. I would come to understand more about states’ control of migrants’ bodies through sexuality, gender, and race during my 2008–2010 ethnographic and oral history research on lesbian social spaces in Amsterdam. Spending most of my time in historic lesbian bars and attending lesbian parties in Amsterdam, I experienced a growing anti-refugee and migrant sentiment within these spaces. This sentiment was tied to a larger anti-refugee and migrant discourse happening in mainstream Dutch society. Dutch politicians and popular media were calling incoming refugees and migrants from Muslim-majority countries like Turkey and Morocco potential terrorist threats (Haritaworn, 2012) who were not only a threat to national security, but also a danger to the Netherlands’ tolerance of sexual and gender minorities. Even the socially conservative Dutch politician Gert Wilders painted Muslim refugees as threats to the safety and wellbeing of LGBT communities in the Netherlands (de Jong, 2015). Prominent white lesbian and gay Dutch activists and scholars came dangerously close to repeating this rhetoric by voicing their concerns about incoming Muslim refugees and the need to protect “our queer communities” from Islam’s homophobic beliefs. I saw the stark contrast between my privileged status as a white Western queer activist-researcher and that of racialized queer refugees and migrants from the Middle East. Unlike refugees who were fleeing state and public persecution and seeking asylum in the Netherlands, I was a celebrated immigrant based on my education, my whiteness, and my U.S. citizenship. My skin colour allowed me to pass as a Dutch citizen on the street. My U.S. citizenship and educational background granted me privilege in finding employment, education, and housing. Racialized refugees and migrants coming from the Middle East were constantly harassed at the Dutch border and on the street. They faced daily claim in Canada. The Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) has also increased screening of travellers coming from Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, and the Czech Republic in order to deter persons from coming into Canada and making refugee claims (Kueng, 2015).
discrimination in employment, education, and housing. Whereas no one questioned my acceptance of LGBT human rights, refugees and migrants coming from Muslim-majority countries were automatically seen as the threatening “Other,” bringing with them homophobia and transphobia. The intertwining of nationalistic, colonial, and racist agendas by the Dutch state and the LGBT rights movement reminded me of similar rhetoric around protecting women’s rights in the United States post–September 11, 2001, and the American invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq (Thobani, 2012). It made me realize how important it was to be vigilant about how the LGBT rights agenda was being co-opted by the state to oppress others and reinforce its national borders. It made me critical of the lesbian and gay communities I belonged to and the underlying xenophobia within.

I learned more about LGBT refugee asylum in Canada during the first year of my PhD program in 2011, when I organized an event at the Liu Institute for Global Issues with the Ugandan lesbian activist and scholar Val Kalende to discuss the impending anti-homosexual legislation in Uganda. Rainbow Refugee volunteers attended the event and spoke about upcoming changes to the refugee process that would severely limit LGBT refugee claimants’ ability to have a fair and just refugee process. The presenters from Rainbow Refugee were referencing Bill C-31, which was implemented in December 2012. Bill C-31, now known as Protecting Canada’s Immigration System Act (PCISA), drastically shortened the refugee process from one or two years to four months. The bill also created a list of designated countries that were deemed to be safe and non-refugee producing. Asylum-seekers coming from the designated countries had an even shorter refugee process (three months) and no right to appeal a negative decision. PCISA also gave the Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) more power to arbitrarily detain and deport asylum-seekers. Remembering the lessons I learned from LGBT
Roma activists and the anti-refugee sentiment I experienced in the Netherlands, I wanted to support Rainbow Refugee raise awareness about Bill C-31. I worked with Rainbow Refugee and other refugee activists to organize a widely attended public forum on the impending asylum legislation changes in May 2012.10

The time I spent with Rainbow Refugee volunteers and LGBT refugee members made me want to stay involved and become a volunteer. It was volunteering with Rainbow Refugee and talking with Rainbow Refugee’s board members that led me to change my research focus from the oral history of gay and lesbian activists abroad to the oral histories of LGBT refugees within Canada. I discovered very quickly that Canada was far from the safe haven I had believed. As much as Canada provides LGBT refugees protection from persecution, the state inflicts its own violence on LGBT asylum-seekers through its restrictive asylum process and the cutting of social support directed to LGBT in-land refugees (Harris & Zuberi, 2015; Diop, 2014; Vinokur, 2015; Hari, 2014; Ratkovic, 2013; Dawson, 2014; Marwah, 2014; Warmington & Lin, 2014). LGBT refugees also experience discrimination in finding employment, education, and housing based on their race, sexuality, class, and gender (Brotman & Lee, 2011). LGBT refugees must navigate structural, social, economic, and political barriers in order to settle in Canada and build homes for themselves.

Too often, media attention on LGBT forced migration focuses primarily on the refugees’ countries of origin and the causes for migration (Jenicek & Wong, 2009). It is also important to critically investigate the processes, discourses, and structures of settlement in the places they migrate to. Or, to put it another way, one must ask not only where refugees have come from, but also where they have come to (Haig-Brown, 2011). By focusing only on LGBT refugees’

10 To watch a video of the “Right to Seek Refuge” event, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GUVrBgeYTM0
experiences in their countries of origin, we lose sight of what happens to LGBT refugees once they are resettled in their adopted countries. This has particular significance in settler states like Canada, where research on refugee and forced migration largely ignores the history of colonization that has made settlement possible through the forced occupation of First Nations territories and controlling incoming immigrant groups defined by gender, race, class, ability, and sexuality (Haig-Brown, 2011; Razack, 2002). As I show in the next section, Metro Vancouver holds an important place in the history of refugee migration and asylum policy in Canada.

1.2 Refugee Settlement in Vancouver, British Columbia and The Challenges Faced by LGBT Refugees

Figure 1.1 Map of Metro Vancouver

(Source: Created Using Map Creator).
Metro Vancouver refers to the Greater Vancouver area, which encompasses twenty-one districts, including Vancouver, Richmond, Burnaby, Surrey, New Westminster, and Coquitlam (Metro Vancouver, 2015). As the western hub for migration into and out of Canada, Metro Vancouver serves a critical nexus for refugee asylum and settlement (Hyndman & Mclean, 349). Immigration from outside of Canada is the primary source of Metro Vancouver’s population growth (Sandercock & Attili, 2009). For the past thirty years, refugee immigration in Canada has been highly centralized to urban areas. More than seventy-five per cent of refugees coming into Canada settle in Toronto, Vancouver, or Montreal. The City of Vancouver alone receives more than twenty per cent of all immigrants and refugees. Of those who immigrate to British Columbia, eighty-nine per cent live in Metro Vancouver (Hyndman & Mclean, 2006, 346). In comparison to Quebec and Ontario, which receive larger percentages of Canada’s total refugee claims, British Columbia receives a higher-than-average number of in-land refugee claims compared to government-assisted claims (Rehaag, 2012).

Vancouver is the most densely populated city in the Metro Vancouver area, with the wealthiest residential districts in Canada located in the West End and the western suburbs surrounding the University of British Columbia (Kerrisdale, West Point Grey, Kitsilano, Dunbar). Vancouver houses the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) for British Columbia and the majority of settlement services for Metro Vancouver. The area also holds a significant place in the history of immigration and refugee settlement in Canada. Metro Vancouver serves as the terminus of the modern Canadian state. Settlers did not start arriving in large numbers until the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the late 1880s (Sandercock & Attili, 2009; Kelley & Trebilcock, 1998). The colonization of what would become the Metro Vancouver area by the first white settlers resulted in a displacement of the first inhabitants, the Coast Salish peoples.
Canada’s white settler policy of ensuring an Anglo-Saxon settler majority resulted in the near erasure of the Coast Salish peoples from the physical land of Metro Vancouver through forced displacement, loss of sovereignty, and eugenic policies (Sandercock & Attili, 2009; Regan, 2006). Despite the efforts by the Canadian state to remove and eradicate Coast Salish peoples, many Coast Salish communities continue to resist against erasure and live in the Metro Vancouver area. Fighting for their traditional territory has remained a challenge, especially because of the years of structural violence and social inequality that have caused a large percentage of Coast Salish communities to live in poverty. Despite this oppression, Coast Salish communities maintain vocal and active resistance against income inequality and violence against First Nations people in Metro Vancouver and throughout Canada. Sovereignty over their territories remains the upmost priority for First Nations communities in Metro Vancouver.

The provincial and federal governments’ active continued efforts to erase and remove First Nations communities across Canada went together with the regulation of incoming immigration on the basis of race, gender, class, and sexuality (Sandercock & Attili, 2009; Abu-Laban, 1998; Jiwani, 2006; McDonald, 1996). Immigrants coming from non-European countries, particularly China and India, were faced with repressive and racist immigration restrictions such as the Chinese Head Tax and denial of entry for South Asian wives and children (Shah, 2011; Anderson, 1991; Baldwin, Cameron, & Kobayashi, 2011; Valverde, 2008; Fuller & Vosko, 2008).

In 1914, the Komagata Maru steamship, carrying 376 refugees from Punjab, British-controlled India, was denied entry to Canada (Johnston, 2014; Srikanth, 2002). The passengers were Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu Indian refugees escaping ethnic and religious persecution under British colonial rule. Canada’s immigration policy at the time allowed the Vancouver
immigration officers to force the refugees back onto the steamship to return to Punjab. Many of the passengers died on the return journey, and several were arrested and killed after arriving in Punjab. The Komagata Maru incident would later be seen as a national disgrace and a rallying point for refugee immigration reform (Srikanth, 2002).

The Komagata Maru incident was just one of a series in Metro Vancouver in which non-European refugees were denied entry (Silverman, 2014). Until the 1967 immigration reform, which removed many of the racial restrictions on immigration, and the adoption of the UN Convention for Refugees in 1969, the majority of asylum seekers allowed into Canada and given refugee status came from Western and Central Europe. In 1971, Canada became the first country in the world to adopt multiculturalism into its official policy. Multiculturalism began as a bicultural and bilingual compromise between the dominant French- and English-speaking communities. Canada’s multiculturalist policies eventually evolved and expanded to include non-European immigrant communities, allowing individuals the right to retain their cultural practices instead of forcing them to assimilate into the dominant white settler culture (Boyd, 2012; Ray & Peake, 2001). The adoption of multiculturalism into Canadian immigration policy led to the creation of new social services for immigrants and anti-discriminatory policies for immigration and asylum.

One very important consequence of the changing immigration and asylum policies in the late 1960s was the rise of non-European immigration to Metro Vancouver, especially from East and South Asia. Since the 1970s, Metro Vancouver has served as Canada’s gateway to the Asia-Pacific region for finance and investment, travel, and tourism. The Vietnam War and subsequent Cold War conflicts brought a new wave of refugees to Metro Vancouver from South and East Asia and the Middle East. Unlike their European refugee counterparts, these refugees were
routinely referred to and depicted in the media as frivolous refugee claimants abusing Canada’s asylum processes (Silverman, 2014). The creation of the IRB in 1988 brought in more restrictions to streamline asylum processes and discourage “frivolous claims” (Silverman, 2014; di Tomasso, 2012; Li 2002; Bradimore & Bauder, 2012; Olsen et al., 2014).

Over the next decade, Canada’s refugee system expanded to include refugees claiming asylum based on sexual orientation, gender identity, HIV status, and gender and domestic violence. Until the late 1970s, sexual minorities were denied entry to Canada. Following the 1977 removal of the ban on homosexuals’ immigrating and the adoption of same-sex sponsorship in 2002, more lesbian and gay individuals and queer families entered and gained permanent residency in Canada (LaViolette, 2004; White 2010, 2014). Lesbian, gay, and trans individuals are protected from discrimination by the Canadian Charter of Human Rights. In 1993, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in (A.G.) v. Ward that within Canadian refugee law, sexual orientation is included in the parameters of a “particular social group” under the 1951 UN Convention of the Status of Refugees (LaViolette, 1997). Canada remains one of the top countries for LGBT refugee-resettlement in the West and maintains a higher average of positive decisions for persons claiming asylum based on sexual orientation and gender identity than do Western Europe, the United States, or Australia. The city of Vancouver secured its international reputation as a gay tourist destination with the celebration of the 1990 International Gay Games, which highlighted Vancouver’s growing gay district, Davie Village. In 1999, the city recognized Davie Village as the official gay village of Vancouver (Ingram, 2010; Borbridge, 2007).

Canada’s history of acceptance of LGBT refugees has received greater international attention in the past five years with the rise of new anti-homosexual legislation and queer persecution in countries like Russia, Iraq, and Uganda. In response to the 2012 anti-
homosexuality legislation implemented in Uganda and Russia, former Prime Minister Stephen Harper voiced Canada’s moral commitment to the protection of human rights for sexual and gender minorities. Following Harper’s statements, former Minister of Immigration Jason Kenney confirmed Canada’s commitment to helping LGBT asylum-seekers:

As Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, I believe that Canada should always be a place of refuge for those who truly need our protection. That is why we continue to welcome those fleeing persecution, which oftentimes includes certain death, including on the basis of sexual orientation. (Kenney, 2012)\textsuperscript{11}

In 2013, and again in 2015, Chris Alexander, the subsequent Minister of Immigration, reiterated Canada’s commitment to LGBT refugees by stating that LGBT refugees fleeing countries that criminalize sexuality and gender identity would be looked upon favourably by the Canadian state. Canada’s vocal commitment to the plight of LGBT refugees has garnered the country an international reputation as a “safe haven” for LGBT asylum-seekers (Hari, 2014; Dawson, 2014).\textsuperscript{12}

While Canada presents itself as a benevolent nation welcoming LGBT refugees with open arms, it has a long and troubled history of excluding undesirable asylum-seekers on the basis of race, gender, sexuality, and class (Diop, 2014). Although individuals are no longer officially restricted from entry on the basis of race, gender, class, and sexuality, the current immigration system does limit immigration on the basis of income, education, and professional

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\item \textsuperscript{11} http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/jason-kenney-s-mass-email-to-gay-and-lesbian-canadians-1.1207144
\item \textsuperscript{12} After the federal election of October 19, 2015, the Liberal party formed a majority government with Justin Trudeau as Prime Minister. The Conservative Party, led by former Prime Minister Stephen Harper, became the official opposition after governing for nine years, the last five of them as a majority government. The recent change in government has led to some hope within the refugee and immigrant activist community for the dismantling of the more aggressive and restrictive policies against incoming refugees. At the moment of writing this dissertation, it is uncertain if some of the policy measures brought on by PCISA will be re-evaluated and/or removed.
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experience. This has racial, class, gender, and sexual underpinnings, as only individuals who are economically and socially privileged can qualify for permanent residency and sponsorship of their families. Women, trans persons, sexual minorities, ethnic minorities, and working-class individuals must overcome greater obstacles in order to qualify for immigration, as they are given less opportunity to build up social resources, educational experience, and economic capital. Coming to Canada temporarily to work, visit, or study is also restricted by visa requirements and the limited supply of visas for individuals coming primarily from the Global South (Abu-Laban, 1998; Porter, 2015; Tannock, 2011; Lightman & Gingrich, 2012).

In 1999, cargo ships carrying nearly six hundred refugees from China arrived on Metro Vancouver’s shoreline. This event attracted nationwide media coverage and spurred public dialogue about Canada’s refugee system (Bradimore & Bauder, 2012; Silverman, 2014; Macintosh, 2012). The September 11, 2001, attacks in New York added further pressure for the Canadian government to increase border security and restrict immigration. This led to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) of 2001, which brought in stricter regulations on asylum and allowed for the arbitrary arrest and detainment of incoming asylum claimants (Dawson, 2014; Hari, 2014; Jantzi, 2015). Implementation of visa requirements and the Safe Third Country Agreement between the United States and Canada in 2009 discouraged forced migration from the Global South, especially Central and South America (Akibo-Betts, 2005).

13 The Safe Third Country Agreement between the United States and Canada requires refugee claimants to request refugee protection in the first safe country in which they arrive (United States or Canada), unless they qualify for an exception. The Safe Third Country Agreement came into effect December 29, 2004. Currently, the United States is the only country designated a safe third country by the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. For more information on the Safe Third Country Agreement: http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/laws-policy/menu-safethird.asp.
In 2010, on the ninety-fifth anniversary of the Komagata Maru incident, a cargo ship carrying nearly five hundred Sri Lankan refugees arrived in Metro Vancouver. The Sri Lankan refugees were immediately placed into detention. Activists’ outcries over the treatment of the Sri Lankan refugees were overshadowed by the ensuing public discourse on the threat of bogus and criminal refugees abusing Canada’s refugee process (Bradimore & Bauder, 2012; Silverman, 2014). The media frenzy surrounding the incident helped spur the creation and implementation of Bill C-31, an amendment to the IRPA that on the one hand dramatically shortened the refugee process but on the other imposed legislation removing the right for appeal for individuals coming from designated countries. Bill C-31 also gave Canadian Border Services more authority to arbitrarily detain individuals coming in groups of three or more by land or sea. Bill C-31 imposed stricter fines on human smugglers and provided more funding for immigration officers abroad to stop refugees from coming into Canada (Showler, 2012; Diop, 2014; Zimmerman, 2011; “Refugee Health Cuts,” 2012; Levine-Rasky, 2012).

In Canada’s current refugee climate, refugees are not only viewed not only as a threat to Canada’s national security, but depicted as abusers of Canada’s hospitality in popular media and political rhetoric (Dawson, 2014). Sherene Razack writes that asylum-seekers are seen to pose a threat to the dominance of Canada’s white heterosexual settler society as unsolicited and undesired subjects who take advantage of Canada’s hospitality and reputation for humanitarianism (2002). At the same time that Immigration Minister Jason Kenney was

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14 While the immigration reforms of the late 1970s removed immigration restrictions based on ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, their main aims were to attract highly skilled immigrants to Canada and reduce state expenses (Triadafilopoulos, 2013). The adoption of the competitive points system and the creation of new streams of immigration based on income and professional skill were based on the belief that the ideal immigrant to Canada was self-sufficient, personally responsible, and able to efficiently participate in the labour market (Boyd, 2012).
proclaiming Canada’s commitment to LGBT refugees, he was also warning about Canada’s “broken refugee system” and the threat of bogus refugees:

Our generous asylum system has been abused by too many people making bogus refugee claims. Canadians take great pride in the generosity and compassion of our immigration and refugee programs. But they have no tolerance for those who abuse our generosity or take advantage of our country. (CIC, “Speaking Notes,” 2012)

Such framing allows the state to keep asylum-seekers out of the country and encourages the removal of social support for in-land refugees\textsuperscript{15} while promoting its reputation as a welcoming and safe country (Newman, 2004; Every, 2013). Soon after the implementation of Bill C-31, funding for in-land refugee programs and assistance was drastically cut, and additional changes to health coverage were introduced.\textsuperscript{16} These cuts were attempts to stop in-land refugees from “abusing” state resources (Sherrell, 2003; Francis, 2010, 2006; Miraftab, 2000). Organizations that primarily helped in-land refugee claimants in Metro Vancouver had their budgets reduced. The provincial Medical Services Plan (MSP) was cut for in-land refugee

\textsuperscript{15} Canada defines refugees as “people within or outside Canada who fear persecution and going back to their home country” (CIC, 2011). Persons who make refugee claims in Canada are labelled “landed” or “in-land” refugee claimants. An individual can make an in-land refugee claim either through a port of entry or at a Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) office. Those making claims outside of Canada may be government-assisted refugees (GAR) or privately sponsored refugees.

\textsuperscript{16} The cuts to social support and health care after PCISA are another continuation of the neoliberal policies that started in the 1970s. The federal government transferred control of and responsibility for immigration and in-land refugee services to the provincial governments in the 1970s, causing significant differences in social services and settlement patterns across Canada (Hyndman & Mclean, 2006, 346; Sherrell, 2003). The 2004 Agreement for Canada–British Columbia Co-operation on Immigration (CBCCI) turned settlement services into a competitive process in which settlement services were pitted against other provincial and city social services and ranked for their quality and economic efficiency (Sherrell, 2003). As a result, funds allotted to health care, housing, and employment services for in-land refugees have steadily declined over the past decade (Francis, 2006, 59).
claimants, leaving them with only the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) (Stanbrook, 2014). The IFHP covers emergency hospitalization and restricted medical care as it relates to public health. Medications for diseases that are considered a public health risk are covered under the IFHP (including treatment for HIV and AIDS) (Interview with AIDS Vancouver, June 2013). Hormone medications and medications for anxiety, depression, and other mental health risk conditions are still not covered. Hormone, anxiety, and depression medications can cost more than a hundred dollars per month, a considerable burden for those on a limited income.\footnote{On February 18, 2016 several cuts to the IFHP were reversed. Refugee claimants now have access to having some of their prescription medication covered, such as medication for diabetes or blood pressure. These services are similar to what those receiving income assistance would receive.}

Instead of providing protection to refugees, Canada’s current policy and public sentiment focus on protecting the state from refugees (Jantzi, 2015; Olsen et al., 2014; Hamlin, 2014). LGBT refugees coming from the Global South are stigmatized by the Canadian state and popular media as taking advantage of Canada’s refugee process. Labelling refugees as a threat to Canada’s security who take advantage of the country’s hospitality erases refugees’ voices from national discourses and consciousness (Dawson, 2014). This erasure translates into legitimating laws and institutional practices that drastically reduce actual numbers of successful refugees through increased border restrictions, arbitrary detentions, and forced deportations, and the cutting of critical social and health services for in-land refugees. Refugees are placed in positions of disempowerment, uncertainty, and isolation (Macklin, 2005; Dawson, 2014).

LGBT asylum seekers must overcome difficult odds to enter Canada and receive asylum on account of their marginalized position in society as sexual and gender minorities (Jordan, 2010). Within the in-land asylum process, LGBT refugees work with/against Western narratives of LGBT identities for recognition of their “‘membership in a particular social group,’ while
their credibility is scrutinized” (Jordan, 2009, 166). However, unlike other “particular social groups” based on political or ethnic affiliations, the burden of proof of persecution for LGBT refugees relies almost entirely on their testimonies. David Murray (2014b) and Sharalyn Jordan (2009) write that the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) scrutinizes LGBT refugees as potentially fraudulent asylum-seekers. LGBT refugees must prove to a predominantly white, Western, heterosexual, and cisgender IRB that they fit the IRB’s definition of same-sex sexuality and gender variance. Cultural, gender, race, sexuality, and class differences are often erased in order for LGBT refugees to fit the IRB’s heteronormative and culturally biased conceptions about gender and sexuality (Murray, 2014b; Shuman & Hesford, 2014). The IRB’s scrutiny of sexuality and gender causes many LGBT refugee claimants to be rejected on account of IRB doubts about their credibility (Morrissey & Jordan, 2013; Gaucher & DeGagne, 2014).

In order to prove persecution, sexual and gender minority claimants may have to inferiorize and pathologize their ethnic communities and home countries (Murray, 2014b, 2015). This not only silences the complexity of sexual and gender minorities’ experiences, but also ignores how the Global North is implicated in the unequal economic, social, and political practices and discourses that contribute to the marginalization of and violence toward sexual and gender minorities in the Global South (Razack, 1996). The idea of Canada as a progressive and advanced country forces LGBT refugees to prove their desire for Canada’s protection as well as make a case for why they cannot be sent back to their countries of origin. LGBT refugees’ stories are pressured to present a falsely linear and singular narrative of fleeing from “backwards” and oppressive countries and seeking freedom and acceptance in Canada. By focusing on persecution outside of Canada, the IRB can conveniently overlook the violence that many racialized and Indigenous LGBT and two-spirit persons face within the country. The problem of violence
against sexual and gender minorities becomes a problem that is external to Canada. These scripts further support the Canadian state’s nationalistic and racist agendas around the restriction of immigration (Fobear, 2014) and ignore the everyday violence that LGBT communities face in Canada because of racism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia, and income inequality.

More research needs to be done to understand how sexuality and gender shape refugees’ experiences of migration and settlement (Lee & Brotman, 2011). Incorporating a queer theoretical lens in forced migration involves investigating how sexuality and gender are implicated in refugee migration and settlement processes (Luibhéid & Cantú, 2005). Queer theory deconstructs the supposed stability and naturalness of identity categories and norms around gender and sexuality (Epprecht, 2008). By interrogating how gender and sexual norms and identities are socially constructed, queer theory works to challenge underlying heteronormativity that places heterosexuality and cisnormativity as the natural state of being (Halperin, 1997). This is especially significant when refugees are all too often depicted as asexual or assumed to be heterosexual and cisgender in the majority of forced migration research (LaViolette, 2009). The underlying heteronormativity and cisnormativity in forced migration research not only silence the experiences of LGBT refugees, but also ignore how sexualized and gendered relations of power inform refugees’ migration and settlement (Razack, 2002). Andrew Gorman Murray (2007b) and Lionel Cantú (2009) write that sexuality and gender play a significant role in migration not only for sexual and gender minorities, but also for heterosexual migrants. State institutions normalize and naturalize heterosexuality and cisnormativity through immigration policies and procedures (Cantu, 2009, 14). The denial of same-sex partner

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18 Cisnormativity refers to the assumption that all individuals have a gender identity that matches the sex they were assigned to at birth. Those whose gender identity does not match the sex and gender they were assigned to at birth are seen as deviant.
sponsorship and the strict enforcement of a binary gender system (male or female) in visa and citizenship documents are just some of the ways in which states regulate migration and settlement on the basis of gender and sexuality (Bieksa, 2011; Shuman & Hesford, 2014). Migration is itself a sexualized and gendered process in which certain bodies are given easier access to mobility because of the privilege they experience on the basis of their gender and sexuality (Manalansan & Cruz-Malave, 2002). Patriarchy and globalized inequality limit the mobility of women, trans persons, and sexual minorities. Trans, lesbian, and gay individuals not only have less advantage in gaining the social and economic resources necessary to migrate, but also face structural barriers and violence in their migration (Murray, 2014; b Morrissey & Jordan, 2013).

1.3 Recognizing Postcolonial Theory, Postcolonial Queer Theory, and Settler Colonialism in LGBT Forced Migration Research in Canada

Forced migration and refugee settlement cannot be adequately theorized outside of spatialized relations of power that regulate sexuality and gender (Razack, 2002). Refugees are sexualized and gendered beings. The kinds of violence experienced, their migration, and asylum are gendered and sexualized processes, whether a person is claiming asylum on the basis of ethnicity, religion, or political affiliations. Putting LGBT refugees’ experiences at the forefront of forced migration research challenges the underlying heteronormativity and cisnormativity that silence LGBT experiences. Adding a queer perspective to forced migration research pushes researchers to interrogate the political, economic, and social structures that not only regulate migration and settlement, but also enforce and reproduce oppressive sexual and gendered norms that are racialized and classed (Luibhéid, 2004, 2008; Luibhéid & Cantú, 2005, x).
The growing number of LGBT asylum-seekers places new pressure on Western states to offer greater protection and access to asylum. However, with so much attention in Western media and political discourse given to getting LGBT refugees out of other countries, the historical processes of colonialism and imperialism that cause LGBT persons to be forcibly displaced are ignored (Haig-Brown, 2011; Razack, 2002). As Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú argue,

Despite pioneering research about queer migrants’ lives, which has brought sexuality and migration scholarship into productive dialogue, the majority of accounts of queer migration tend to remain organized around a narrative of movement from repression to freedom, or a heroic journey undertaken in search of liberation (2005, xxiv).

This not only silences the voices and complex experiences of LGBT refugees, but ignores how sexualities and genders are implicated for imperialistic, militaristic, and nationalistic aims (Razack, 1996; Lamble, 2008).

Feminist and queer scholars such as Gayatri Spivak (1999), Jaspir Puar (2007), and Chandra Mohanty (2013) urge researchers and activists to be critical in the way that violence against marginalized groups outside of the West is depicted in the international media as an ongoing division between the progressive and neoliberal “West” and the backwards “East.” Sarah Brake writes that within current Western LGBT politics a civilizing mission has come forth that echoes similar rhetoric around saving Third World women (2012). Similar to the narrative of “saving brown women from brown men,” LGBT activists and state politicians have taken up the narrative of saving gay men from backwards and homophobic countries. This narrative reinforces orientalist objectifications of peoples and cultures and further supports the myth of Western exceptionalism. It also creates a postcolonial amnesia that erases how ongoing imperialism creates power hierarchies, vacuums, and inequalities between the Global North and Global South. As Edward Said argues, imperialism did not end with the dismantling of the
classical empires, but instead laid the foundations for the global world (1994, 341). Global
economic superpowers in the twentieth century have simply redrawn old colonial maps of power
and exchange in the interests of economic and capitalistic expansion (Morton, 2001, 207). Anne
McClintock writes that at the time when the “formal age of the empires has ended colonialism
returns at the moment of its disappearance” (1992, p.2). The unequal structures of power,
discourse, and material exchange, the banality of colonized sovereign power, and the continued
use of arbitrary and regulatory violence (Mbembe, 2001) against “othered” bodies brought on by
colonialism continues to be reproduced in the “post” colonial world. The social, political, and
economic structures that were established during colonial rule continue to impact the cultural,
political, and economic lives of the postcolonial world (Spivak, 1999). Instead of dismantling
colonial structures and systems of power and violence, many newly formed “post”-colonial
states inserted themselves into the existing colonial structures of power and practice which in
turn continued to reproduce the very same social and political inequalities that were predominant
under colonial rule (Mbembe, 2001).

Postcolonialism was first conceived by political theorists and historians as the historical
period after colonial occupation and the establishment of independent states. Since then the term
postcolonialism has widened to incorporate more than the historical period after the
independence of former colonized states. Postcolonialism cannot be seen as an all-encompassing
or universalizing process or term. Postcolonialism must account for the specific historical
processes and the manner in which colonialism has affected a particular population. At the same
time, although there are distinct historical, geographical, political, social, and cultural differences
between Western (European and North American) colonial empires, the colonies they created
worldwide, and inside each individual colony, what can be shared is that colonization
fundamentally affects the social structures of both the colonizers and the colonized and altered their histories. It is because of this that Anne Loomba (1998) argues that “it is more helpful to think of post-colonialism not just as coming literally after colonialism and signalling its demise, but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism” (p.12). The “post” in postcolonial research is a challenge to the implied chronological separation between colonialism and its aftermath. Postcolonialism is the “unbroken term” in the long history of colonial consequences (Gandhi, 1998, 3).

Looking at LGBT refugee migration and settlement through a postcolonial lens pushes the recognition of factors that cause persecution to occur and the regulation of migration and asylum from the Global South to the Global North not as isolated or ahistorical events but instead as attached to ongoing systems of inequality and global apartheid brought on by imperialism (Richmond, 2002). As Amal Treacher writes,

Colonialism haunts, it is not in the past but continues to be a serious presence on people’s lived experience, on psychic lives, on matters of globalization and of material relations. There is an enduring issue that centers on how subjectivity is shaped by postcolonial relations and ideologies: for none of us, whatever our heritage or current position, are outside of or immune from postcolonial relations, values, and belief systems (2005, p.49).

Currently, more than one-fifth of the world’s migrants are forcibly displaced (Kissoon, 2010b). The United Nations reports that there are forty-three million refugees in the world. This number is predicted to rise in coming years (UNHCR, June 18, 2015). In 2014, the United States, Canada, Australia, and Western Europe saw their highest levels of refugee claims since the 1980s (UNHCR, June 18, 2015). Global economic, political, and social inequality, unrest, and deterioration have contributed to the increase in the number of asylum-seekers. Researchers and activists have called the past two decades the “age of the refugee,” as international pressure from asylum-seekers reaches unprecedented levels (Said, 2000, 173; Wyschogrod, 1996; Van Hear,
The various practices used by wealthier countries to manage and control migrant populations and enforce national borders have been part of what Anthony Richmond deems a form of “global apartheid” of migration that restricts the mobility of low-income and racialized persons coming from the Global South to the Global North (2002). As much as the number of refugees claiming asylum in North America and Western Europe is making national headlines, the reality is that the overwhelming majority of refugees are stopped from ever entering these areas. Countries located in the Global South, many of them former colonial states, hold the responsibility of housing the bulk of the world’s refugees with very limited resources (Richmond, 2002, 41; Van Hear, 2009). Those who do manage to make it to countries like Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom face a high probability of being either immediately deported to their countries of origin or sent to a “safe third country” (Macklin, 2005).

The situation that incoming LGBT refugees face when entering Canada and claiming asylum is connected to globalized geopolitical and economic systems of inequality historically rooted in imperialism and colonialism. States’ efforts to regulate sexuality and gender are inextricable from the geopolitical and economic forces that cause forced migration to occur (Bell & Binnie, 2000). The geopolitical and economic forces that contribute to the persecution of sexual and gender minorities are not recent developments, but instead are tied to historic and ongoing colonial and imperial processes and relationships. Anne McClintock argues that gender and sexual dynamics were, from the outset, fundamental to the securing and maintenance of the imperial enterprise. Eroticism and sexuality were intimately connected to ways in which the colonizers “oriented themselves in space, as agents of power, and agents of knowledge” (McClintock, 1995, 24). Signe Arnfred argues that metaphors of imperialism and sexuality were
“closely interwoven” as the colonized land was seen as a female body (virgin land) and the female body was seen as “a continent yet to be explored” (2004, 63). Controlling gender and sexuality of the inhabitants was fundamental in the delegitimizing of local cultures and traditions by colonizers (McClintock, 1995). This involved not only the ban on same-sex sexuality through anti-sodomy laws, but also the removal of Indigenous women’s sovereignty through the enforcement of patriarchal structures and laws (Epprecht, 2008; Smith, 2005).

Currently, seventy-five states worldwide criminalize same-sex sexuality, with punishments ranging from several years of imprisonment to immediate execution (ILGA, 2015). The majority of these laws against same-sex sexuality are carryovers from colonial anti-sodomy laws that were never repealed and have since been further enforced (Sanders, 2009). A case in point is the anti-homosexual propaganda law in Uganda that criminalizes not only sexual minorities for being public about their sexuality, but also non-government organizations who assist sexual and gender minorities. Media attention and rhetoric by human rights organizations like Amnesty International have consistently condemned the anti-homosexual propaganda bill as a violation of human rights and a contributing factor to the persecution of sexual and gender minorities. Yet, far too often this discourse has repeated the rhetoric of “saving gays from their backward country” by not situating the anti-homosexual bill in the context of imperialism and global inequality. Ugandan feminist, Sylvia Tamale, argues that Western research on sexuality in Africa continues to be steeped in racist, moralistic, and paternalistic thinking that ignores the complex and varied ways in which sexual and gender relationships, practices, and identities are shaped by social, economic, political, and cultural structures (Tamale, 2011, 20). In order to avoid this, researchers cannot talk about homophobia, anti-queer violence, and anti-homosexual legislation in Africa without first recognizing the impact that European colonialism has had on
African sexual and gender minorities. Same-sex sexualities and gender minorities in these regions were heavily regulated and violently silenced by colonial anti-sodomy and anti-bigamy legislation. These legislations were further supported by the indoctrination of homophobia, patrimony, gender and sexual binaries by Christian missionaries, colonial public education, health, and law. Inequality and the Global North’s exploitation of formerly colonized states have contributed to the increased persecution of sexual and gender minorities, as LGBT persons become convenient scapegoats for social anxiety, conflict, and political corruption (ILGA, 2015). The unequal power and resources between the Global North and Global South reproduce established gender and sexuality hierarchies that in turn marginalize sexual and gender minorities and limit their mobility. To discuss persecution of sexual and gender minorities without understanding the historical and contextual mechanisms of imperialism and colonialism reinforces a post-colonial amnesia and further silences the ongoing colonial violence against LGBT refugees.

Incorporating a postcolonial queer perspective to forced migration involves understanding the counter-hegemonic routes that many LGBT refugees have deployed to redirect power and discourse as they engage in migration and settlement (Manalansan & Cruz-Malave, 2002, 4). Postcolonial queer theory is an engagement between queer theory/research and postcolonial theory/research addressing gaps found within each field. Postcolonial queer theory challenges research on queer individuals and communities to interrogate colonial hierarchies and ongoing systems of oppression. It calls on postcolonial research to address how sexuality and gender are intertwined in past and present colonial projects (Hawley, 2001). Postcolonial queer theory also emphasizes alternative ways of knowing, constructing, and engaging with the world through the experiences and voices of individuals who are often marginalized. It encourages
researchers to further unravel narratives of queer migration by participating in dialogue with queer migrants themselves, asking them questions about identity and migration, power and place, oppression and resistance.

In this “age of the refugee” (Said, 2000, 173; ), it is more important than ever for LGBT refugees’ settlement experiences to be at the centre of our understanding of the economic, social, and political forces shaping refugee asylum in Canada. LGBT refugees’ experiences of home and belonging in Canada provide insight into how refugee settlement is “co-constituted by the intersections of racialization, sexuality, gender, geopolitics, and class” (Jordan, 2010, 12). Understanding how LGBT refugees talk about home provides an understanding of settlement that incorporates structural, political, and material aspects of immigration as well as the relational, emotional, and mnemonic attachments that inform LGBT refugees’ sense of belonging in and outside of Canada.

Settlement can include a wide array of aspects, from access to material resources like food, clothing, and housing to discussions about integration and feelings of belonging. In order to provide a more defined perspective on settlement, I look at settlement through the lens of the feelings and experiences of home and belonging. I use the word “settlement” as a way of describing how sexual and gender minority refugees create meaningful homes for themselves in Canada, how they conceptualize belonging, and how they situate themselves within and outside of Canada. I do not frame settlement as a linear process, a singular and solid event, or an endpoint separate from previous and ongoing experiences of migration and settlement. Instead, settlement is situated in the everyday attachments LGBT refugees make to national and geographical spaces inside and outside of their current locations. Settlement comprises the attachments LGBT refugees make with the various ethnic, political, economic, sexual, and
gendered communities they interact with. LGBT refugees’ experiences of settlement provide a counter-narrative to national and geopolitical narratives that marginalize incoming refugees based on sexuality, gender, race, and class. Their stories provide a disruption of national, geopolitical, and colonial discourses about Canada as an undisputed “safe haven” for LGBT refugees (Regan & Taiaiaike, 2010).

The Canadian state’s linear and singular narrative of LGBT refugees fleeing violence and receiving freedom and protection in Canada is challenged as LGBT refugees reveal the contradictions and challenges of settling in Canada as racialized, sexualized, classed, and gendered refugees. Most importantly, LGBT refugees’ stories of home and belonging dismantle the stigmas they experience as refugees and as minorities. Their stories challenge linear and binary modalities of home and forced migration that in turn create a new understanding of refugees’ experiences of belonging.

Postcolonial theory and postcolonial queer theory assists my understanding of violence against LGBT persons and forced migration. It pushes me to be critical of how I frame certain issues around anti-queer violence and to be cautious of how my analysis may also be contributing to furthering colonial narratives of Western exceptionalism and a postcolonial amnesia. It is a framework that I work with as both a scholar and an activist. Yet, it is also important to emphasize that as much as this work recognizes the critiques of postcolonial scholars and postcolonial queer theorists it is firmly based in the context of the stories of the here and now by the participants settling in a white colonial settler nation. This project is therefore not a postcolonial project as it is limited in its capacity to fully interrogate and dismantle larger ongoing and historical intersecting imperial discourses and power hierarchies. Postcolonial and postcolonial queer theory influenced how I analyzed and presented the participants narratives
and stories by emphasizing their agency in the research and centering my analysis on their stories rather than on predetermined conclusions. It is my hope with this work that the voices presented in this text will provide counter-narratives that may in the future challenge national norms and political discourse around LGBT asylum in Canada.

Postcolonialism is useful in contextualizing the globalized imperial forces that regulate forced migration. However, it is limited in regards to understanding refugee settlement in the context of settler colonialism. Anne McClintock writes that postcolonialism in many cases is a premature celebration (1992). As a settler-colonial state, Canada is not postcolonial. It is an ongoing occupation by settlers on First Nations’ lands. Settler colonialism in Canada revolves around the seizing and occupation of traditional territories from First Nations peoples. It is a system of unequal exchanges in which the majority settler population controls and regulates the territory and all that inhabit it (Hunt & Holmes, 2015; Hunt, 2014).

A significant component of settler colonialism is the spreading and enforcing of norms around white supremacy and exceptionalism onto Indigenous and settler populations that in turn is used to create a hierarchical system of subjects. Andrea Smith (2005) and Kim Anderson (2016) write that settler colonialism was and remains a gendered and sexualized system of violence. The 1876 Indian Act stripped First Nations women of long-established rights and left them with fewer rights than First Nations men (Anderson, 2000; 2011). First Nations women were categorically denied the right to vote in band elections, could not hold political office, and would be stripped of rights to their territories if they married a non-First Nations individual. It was not until the 1960s that First Nations women regained the right to vote in provincial and federal elections. The forced removal of First Nations children into Indian Residential Schools was an effort by the Canadian state to destroy First Nations communities, by cutting them off
from their cultural centers and further diminishing the important status of First Nations women as caretakers and teachers (Culhane, 2003; Turnel, 1993). The sexual and physical abuse the children experienced in these schools caused lasting trauma for generations. Kim Anderson (2000) and Sheryl Lightfoot (2016) write that the ongoing policies and practices of the Canadian state against Indigenous peoples has lasting impacts. The enforcement of patriarchy onto First Nations communities by the Canadian state not only had devastating effects on the status of First Nations women, but also for Two-Spirit and First Nations sexual minorities. Christian missionaries and state institutions worked to enforce heterosexist norms on First Nations populations that in turn ostracised Two-Spirit and LGBT First Nations members from their communities. Two-Spirit and LGBT First Nations individuals experienced additional violence by settler communities as Indigenous sexual and gender minorities. Violence against Indigenous women, Two-spirit, and First Nations sexual minorities remains significantly higher than those of non-Indigenous settlers (Scrim, 2016; Gilchrist, 2010; Amnesty, 2014). Aboriginal women are three times more likely to have been victimized compared to non-Aboriginal women (Scrim, 2016). Two-Spirit people are twice as likely to experience aggravated assault in comparison to non-Indigenous LGBT persons (National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2016). Two-Spirit persons experience homelessness and poverty because of poor community support and available resources. This has contributed to a higher risk of suicide for Two-Spirit individuals (Moregenson, 2011; Brotman et.al., 2002).

I recognize settler colonialism in this research in order to situate myself as a white settler doing research on LGBT refugees on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Skwxwú7mesh, Stó:lo and Tsleil-Waututh nations. These territories encompass Metro Vancouver and were never surrendered or relinquished by these nations, but instead were forcibly inhabited by settlers.
Settler colonialism has created a system in which incoming settlers, such as LGBT refugees, are entering a context of First Nations communities being stripped of sovereignty over their lands. First Nations communities remain under-serviced and under-housed, and experience violence by state and society at higher rates than non-Indigenous Canadians. LGBT refugees are also settlers in a settler-state and share certain privileges of state recognition and access to social services that are denied to many First Nations communities within Metro Vancouver and across Canada.

Sheryl Lightfoot argues that Canada is often pictured as a positive example of “various cultures living side by side harmoniously” within Canadian society (2016, 169). At the same time, however, Canada is highly criticized for its continued mistreatment and disrespect of First Nations’ rights and sovereignty. Canada presents itself as a multicultural nation, but in turn works to erase Indigenous sovereignty and ownership of the land because it inherently colonial (Barker & Pickerill, 2012; Haig-Brown, 2010). Adam Barker writes that the essence of settler colonialism is “the appropriation of the land, resources and jurisdiction of the Indigenous peoples, not only for the sake of resettlement and exploitation…but for the territorial foundation of the dominant society itself” (2009, 336). Indigenous peoples face constant threats of erasure, as the Canadian settler nation denies First Nations claims to land. However, despite the fact that settler colonialism is still ongoing, Indigenous resistance remains ever strong (Barker, 2014). Since the 1970s, First Nations communities across Turtle Island have increasingly sought to reclaim traditional territories by protests, occupying lands, staging sit-ins, and taking over government offices (Johnston, 2005; Barker, 2015).

It is important when interrogating settler colonialism and refugee settlement not to attempt to present a uniform experience. Colonialism is not monolithic. Even in the context of settler colonialism within Canada, there is no singular history of colonialism and universal
experience. In fact, the various systems of colonialism that individuals have encountered outside of Canada and within the state create different histories and ongoing effects. As Sherene Razack (2002) writes, while settler colonialism may have allowed certain communities to settle in Canada, their relationships to settler colonialism may be different. This is particularly important for settlers such as LGBT refugees who experience the privileges of settler colonialism that allowed them to settle in Canada through the state’s continued denial of First Nations sovereignty. However, these settlers also experience violence because of xenophobia on account of their race, gender, sexuality, ability, and/or class. Researchers must recognize not only differences in the histories and experiences of refugees in Canada, but also the different historical and contextual networks that draw refugees into collectives and “create micro-circuits of power, locating some in positions of influence and marginalizing others” (Adam, 1998, 400).

When investigating LGBT refugee migration in settler states like Canada, it is important to resist oversimplifying complex migration processes and instead look at how colonialism has routed lives. This means paying attention to whiteness and the racialization, gendering, classing, and sexualization of discourses of inclusion and normalcy, as they play into both defining the in-land refugee process and reaffirming particular sexual, racial, gender, and class politics in Canada (Cantú, 2009, 14; Manalansan & Cruz-Malave, 2002, 4; Luibhéid & Cantú, 2005, x).

Situating LGBTQ refugee migration in the context of racism and multiculturalism, however, has an inherent colonizing effect. Zainab Amadahy and Bonita Lawrence (2009:page?) write that while there are potential points for coalition between racialized settler populations and Indigenous populations in dismantling whiteness and Western exceptionalism, the antiracist praxis is still an active contributor to neoliberalist policies that deny Indigenous peoples of Canada nationhood. Neoliberal identity-based politics around recognition and minority rights
falsely forces Indigenous peoples into being seen as just another minority group wanting state recognition. Taiaiake Alfred writes that the enforcement of neoliberal identity politics on Indigenous communities works to reinforce colonial structures. It is a dichotomizing essentialism that allows Settlers to believe that previous and ongoing injustice against Indigenous communities can be resolved by “the mere allowance of the Other to become one of Us” (2005, 135). This creates a hierarchy of needs and a stratification of power (Coulthard, 2014). This politics of recognition stands in contrast to the reality of Indigenous peoples who are still considered wards of the state and denied nationhood by the continued 1876 Indian Act. Sovereignty, the right to nationhood, and protecting and ensuring First Nations peoples’ connection to land are the pressing issues for most Indigenous persons of Canada (Coulthard, 2014).

As much as recognizing that I am a settler doing research with other settlers on the unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples is important, it is also important to state that this work is not a decolonizing project. It remains rooted in the participants’ stories and photographs of their experiences of home and belonging. Throughout the text I reference settler colonialism, particularly in regards to white settler colonialism and multiculturalism. However, the work is limited in its ability to thoroughly engage with settler colonialism in the context of Indigenous sovereignty and decolonization. There is possibility for future work around decolonization between LGBT refugees and First Nations communities that I will discuss in more detail in the conclusion.
1.4 Exploring Questions of Home and Belonging for LGBT Refugees

**Kat:** So, why are you interested in participating in my project?

**Hector:** Well, I liked your question on home. I think about home a lot. Like, a lot. [laughing] Like, if I will ever find a home for myself here, or is home still back in my country—you know? It’s an interesting question. (Interview with Hector, June 10, 2013)

Home is a useful entry point to engage with LGBT refugees’ everyday experiences of settlement in Metro Vancouver. Metro Vancouver has the highest cost of living in Canada and one of the highest costs of living in the world. John David Hulchanski et al. (2004), Daniel Hiebert et al. (2008), and Jenny Francis and Daniel Hiebert (2014) document increasing wealth and income gaps between incoming refugees and Canadian citizens across Canada and in Metro Vancouver specifically. Few resources are available to assist in-land refugees in obtaining adequate housing, and cuts to social spending have resulted in low-income households being forced to spend the majority of their income on accommodation (Hiebert et al., 2008; Mattu, 2002). The monthly rent for a studio apartment ranges from 600 to more than 1,200 dollars, and the demand for affordable, subsidized, and low-income housing outstrips supply. Competition for the existing affordable units leaves the poorest tenants with few options (Preston et al., 2006; Sherrell & ISS, 2009).

The situation for refugee renters is especially challenging. Francis and Hiebert (2014) showed that immigrant households across Canada experience difficulty meeting core housing needs at nearly twice the rate of non-immigrant households. Refugees from racialized minority groups and those on social assistance are repeatedly denied access to affordable housing (Francis & Hiebert, 2014; Hiebert et al., 2008; Mattu, 2002; Novac et al., 2004.). Exploitation by landlords is another common experience. Because housing in Metro Vancouver is so
competitive, landlords have an unfair advantage over tenants. Refugees are at their landlords’ discretion, never sure whether they will raise the rent every month, keep conditions of the building up to code, or arbitrarily evict them out of the apartment. Under the BC Standard Rent Increase, landlords cannot raise rent more than 2.9 per cent every year (Standard Rent Increase, 2015). However, this does not deter landlords from taking advantage of poorly informed, scared, and vulnerable persons. Undocumented persons and refugee claimants are often too scared to report housing violations to authorities out of fear of detainment or deportation. Francis and Hiebert’s (2014) study on refugee housing issues in Metro Vancouver reports that refugees experience higher eviction rates than do Canadian citizens. Refugees also experience high rates of overcrowding, unhealthy conditions, and inadequately maintained housing. Refugees have the right to lodge complaints with the Residential Tenancy Branch, but many do not do so out of fear of causing trouble and possibly jeopardizing their asylum cases or their applications for permanent residency (Conversation with Rainbow Refugee volunteer, September 19, 2013; Interview with ISS, August 2013; Interview with SOS, May 2013).

Finding safe and affordable housing in Metro Vancouver is one of the toughest challenges LGBT refugees face. The two areas in Metro Vancouver with a long LGBT history and visible presence of gay and lesbian communities—Davie Village and Commercial Drive—are some of the most expensive. While cheaper housing is available in the outlying suburbs, many LGBT refugees feel unsafe living in these areas. Some LGBT refugees have experienced

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19 This is the amount allowed for 2016, but the amount changes every year. See http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/housing-tenancy/residential-tenancies/during-a-tenancy/rent-increases

20 It is important to emphasize again that Aboriginal Canadians experience housing shortages and homelessness at even higher rates than immigrant and non-immigrant Canadian households (Shier et al, 2015).
harassment and hate-related violence living in the suburbs that forces them to leave their newly acquired apartments or rented rooms and seek shelter elsewhere. Living with a roommate is an option, but it is a challenge to find someone who is both LGBT-friendly and willing to rent with a refugee or a person living on social assistance (Conversation with Rainbow Refugee volunteer, September 19, 2013).

As stated previously, the majority of current research on LGBT refugees in Canada remains focused on the asylum process, especially at the level of legal case analysis. This research looks at the asylum process as well, but does not stop there. Canada’s immigration institutions and asylum process are integral to LGBT refugees’ ability to settle in a particular location, build a life, and feel a sense of belonging. But to examine only LGBT refugees’ experiences of the asylum process removes critical understanding of the everyday experiences of LGBT refugees’ lives. These everyday experiences of finding health care, shelter, and employment, as well as making friends and creating a sense of community, affect LGBT refugees’ ability to successfully gain asylum and settle in Canada. Looking only at state institutions silences refugees’ agency in their everyday survival and does not allow researchers to understand the material and quotidian aspects of LGBT refugee settlement (Massey, 1994; Black 2002). It is important for the research to examine how LGBT refugees talk about home and belonging and what their everyday experiences of home are like.

Dai Kojima (2015), Martin Manalansan (2014), and Heather Love (2012) write that scholars need to identify conditions of structural, social, political, and economic inequality brought about by imperialism and globalization without recreating a universal narrative of victimization that fixates solely on examples of oppression of racialized and queer migrants. This creates a moralizing discourse that places racialized queer migrants in Canada as either complicit
with the policies, ideologies, and desires of settler colonialism or under perpetual oppression and exploitation as marginalized queer migrants (Kojima, 2015; Eng, 2001). A return to the “lived experiences of structural inequality” allows researchers to focus on the everyday and quotidian aspects of queer lives in contemporary queer politics and scholarship, rather than on critical judgment and politicization (Love, 2012, 131). By focusing on the narratives of survival and the everyday efforts of living, queer migration scholars can put at the forefront queer migrants’ power, tactics, and counter-narratives that have been left out of queer politics and critical queer scholarship.

Using home as an entry point into LGBT refugee settlement, I interrogate larger structures of state and institutional power while maintaining a footing in the everyday material and social worlds LGBT refugees inhabit. Home refers both to materially, physically, and territorially marked spaces (house, neighbourhood, town, region, or nation), and to the mnemonic, relational, embodied, and emotional processes of attachment. Home comprises an emotional, physical, and relational investment to particular material spaces (Kinefuchi, 2010; Jones, 2007). Home also refers to the personal, mnemonic, and emotional relationships we have with others in a particular material space and those who are outside certain spaces. Homing describes the process of place-making, emotional attachment, and personal belonging to a home space (Toivanen & Kivisto, 2014). Homing is how people make homes for themselves through the rituals they perform inside a space, the material objects to which they emotionally attach, and the stories they tell about home (Walsh, 2006; Hua, 2011).

Home has particular significance in research on migration. Implicit in research about home and migration are the intimate relationships between memory, relationships, and emotion. Brah Avtar writes that the concept of a diaspora implies a desire to feel at home in the context of
migration (1996, 180). Poststructuralist constructions of home and belonging have pushed migration researchers to see home and belonging as dynamic relationships (Wernesjö, 2015). Instead of seeing belonging and home as essential or fetishized notions connected to strictly national, ethnic, or racial origins, Ulrika Wernesjö (2015) argues that the meanings of home and belonging should be seen as shifting and multiple. This does not mean that people never feel uprooted and/or displaced. Steven Taylor (2015) argues that the enhanced mobility of individuals through globalization and faster means of travel has not created more detachment from place or sense of belonging. Rather, it has created an increased desire to search for places of belonging and sites of mooring (Taylor, 2015). Belonging and home remain important as people create multiple senses of home through the attachments they make and maintain with different people and places. Belonging refers to the way individuals see themselves in relation to others and to the places they inhabit or inhabited (Amit & Bar-Levi, 2015). Home can be seen as a desire for belonging that allows people to feel at home in place or to feel a home-like connection with various places at the same time (Amit & Bar-Levi, 2015).

Questions about belonging and home have remained key in research on refugee settlement (Taylor, 2015). Individuals who are forced to relocate to a new country, often living in conditions of poverty and marginalization, face the pressing concerns of displacement, unbelonging, and a loss of home, all of which can determine refugees’ quality of life (Den Boer, 2015). Recent works on home and forced migration have shown that home is more than just the physical dwelling in which one lives (Christou, 2011). Home is both “lived” and “imagined” (Taylor, 2015); refugees can experience both a physical presence of home as well as a yearning for home. Feelings about home are deeply steeped in meaning and sentiment constituted through the multiple lived and imagined relationships refugees have with people and places (Malkki,
Intimately connected to refugees’ experiences of home and belonging are the social relationships refugees make with other people and places (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Malkki, 1995; Rapport & Dawson, 1998). Steven Taylor’s (2015) study of homeless refugee youth in Sweden shows that the ability to interact with other refugees/community members and share in joint activities was equally important to their sense of home in their newly adopted country as having a clean and safe dwelling. It was the relationships the refugee youth made and maintained that informed their sense of home. These relationships helped to anchor them and provide a sense of belonging in an unfamiliar place (Taylor, 2015).

The focus on home in refugee research has predominantly centered on the “loss of home” through forced migration and the integration or assimilation of refugees into their host countries (Simich et al., 2010). Fethi Keles (2011), Etsuko Kinefuchi (2010), Misha Myers (2008), and Robyn Sampson and Sandra Gifford (2010) warn that this focus on the loss of a homeland as the only narrative of home is potentially too bilinear and static. In her research on Congolese refugees in Kampala, Uganda, Roselinde Den Boer (2015) challenges the idea that the link between people and place is essential. “When people become refugees, and ‘move out’ of their nation-state, this creates a challenge to the ‘national order of things’ which usually also passes as the ‘normal’ or natural order of things” (Den Boer, 2015, 487). Confining public conceptions of refugees to specific places or homelands not only reaffirms the false notion that place is unchanging, but also adds to the depiction of refugees as suspicious outsiders, uprooted from their land and infiltrating another community’s land. Den Boer argues that even nostalgia for a homeland is not always best understood as a desire to return (2015, 488). More often, it is a desire for a homeland that is located in the past. “Home for refugees has not simply been left behind in another place; it has also been left behind in another time and is therefore often
experienced as a previous ‘home’, irrevocably lost both spatially and temporally” (Den Boer, 2015, 488). Home can therefore incorporate a multitude of places that involve not just where refugees are from, but where they have travelled to, where they currently are, and where/what they desire their home to be in the future (Den Boer, 2015; Christou, 2011; Keles, 2011; Kinefuchi, 2010; Myers, 2008; Cheran, 2006). Steven Taylor writes that instead of fetishizing home as a place of complete familiarity, researchers must recognize that for refugees, home can also encompass feelings of estrangement and unbelonging (2015). Different visions of home exist in parallel and lead to a multidimensional experience of home (Den Boer, 2015). Refugees can cultivate multiple senses of home and belonging that can change based on context (Amit & Bar-Levi, 2015). It is therefore important not to divorce expressions of home from the social, economic, and political contexts in which they are continually (re)produced (Taylor, 2015).

The discussion surrounding refugees’ experiences of home and belonging reveals multiple definitions of home that go beyond the physical landscape to symbolic constructs and emotional attachments (Den Boer, 2015). During the experience of being forced out of their country, seeking refugee asylum, moving several times, and eventually settling in an adopted country, many refugees have multiple homes along their way. Robyn Sampson and Sandra Gifford (2010) write that refugees carry with them the memory of these previous homes as well as material, affective, and relational attachments associated with them. Homes may offer sanctuary, shelter, intimacy, and feelings of belonging, but they may also be sites of structural, economic, social, and intimate violence. Based on the plurality of refugees’ experiences, contexts, and locations in which the formation of multiple homes and feelings of belonging can coexist, home can be a multiple, fluid, and contradictory place that is continuously constructed and deconstructed through refugees’ everyday experiences (Cheran, 2006).
As much as research on forced migration has shown the ambiguity, contradiction, fluidity, and fragmentation of refugees’ everyday experiences of home, it continues to be rather heteronormative and cisnormative by focusing primarily on heterosexual and cisgender persons (Murray, 2014b). Andrew Gorman-Murray (2011) argues that research on non-heterosexual relationships, expressions, and practices of home are often concealed and ignored because of the predominance of Western constructions of homes as heterosexualized spaces designed to support biological nuclear families (2011). It is because of this that Gorman-Murray (2007a; 2008; Gorman-Murray, Waitt, & Gibson, 2012; Gorman-Murray & Waitt, 2013), Sara Ahmed (1999; 2000; 2005; 2007), Jennifer Petzen (2004), and Anne-Marie Fortier (2001) urge researchers to decentre home from its heteronormative construction and instead look at how non-normative sexualities, desires, and intimacies form new places of belonging and home. For LGBT persons, home can often be a precarious space in which they experience rejection and violence from their biological families and cultural communities. Home can also be a migratory and creative process in which LGBT individuals seek to establish their own homes and sense of belonging outside of heteronormative frameworks (Kojima, 2014; Manalansan, 2014). In this search for home, LGBT individuals may travel great distances, create new relationships, and transform spaces in order to create homes for themselves and their loved ones. For researchers on queer migration, home is a multi-situational space that is contradictory as well as fluid. Queer migrants may experience both dislocation and relocation in navigating the relational and material realities and commitments of family and community back in their countries of origin, and their sexual and personal desires, identities, and relationships within their adoptive countries.

Several queer migration scholars argue around the importance that relatedness has to queer migrants’ sense of home (Kojima, 2014; Fortier, 2001; Manalansan, 2014). Relatedness
involves the emotional, physical, and personal relations individuals maintain with individuals and communities as well as with spaces and objects (Carsten, 2000; Probyn, 2003; Nash, 2005). The importance of relatedness in the participants’ sense of home and belonging is both surprising and unsurprising. Research has shown that refugees maintain and create new relationships between their countries of origin and their adoptive countries (Scannell & Gifford, 2009). These relationships involve both material and emotional attachments to place(s) and to persons/communities. Relationships exist in both the physical present, the past, and the imaginary future (Brun, 2001). These relationships between different cultural and geographical homes help to situate refugees transnationally. Relatedness in refugee studies has often focused on biological kinship and family structures. This work has shown the significance that kinship has played in how refugees experience and conceptualize home and belonging (Van Hear, 2014). The transnational relationships that refugees maintain with families and communities in the diaspora expand home outside of geographical or national confines (Van Hear, 2014). However, research on refugee communities and relatedness has remained predominantly heterosexist and limited its scope to the processes of migration (Murray, 2014b). By focusing on heterosexual biological kinship, we miss the variety of ways in which emotional and bodily attachments, memory, and place-making practices are also processes of relatedness central to LGBT refugees’ sense of home and belonging.

David Murray’s (2014a) discussion on the narrative of home for sexual and gender identity refugee\textsuperscript{21} claimants in Toronto shows that sexual and gender minority refugees maintain intense and emotional connections to their families and communities in their countries of origin. Although sexual and gender minority refugees are grateful for the opportunity to live safely in

\textsuperscript{21} In his work, David Murray refers to LGBT refugees as “sexual and gender identity refugees or SOGI” (2014a).
Canada without the threat of state and societal persecution, they do not necessarily feel completely accepted or at home in Canada. LGBT refugees may experience dislocation in Canada on account of their ethnicity, class, sexuality, and gender identity, and as newcomers in an unfamiliar place. Sexual and gender identity refugees have to downplay these experiences of dislocation and alienation during their refugee hearings in order to argue successfully that Canada would be a better place for them to live. LGBT refugees may also have to selectively silence their feelings of belonging and acceptance in their countries of origin or conceal the connections they maintain with families and friends abroad in order to prove that they are in need of state protection. Murray (2014) argues for a fluid conception of home for LGBT refugees that allows for simultaneous and multiple connections to different homes across transnational fields. He contends that more research needs to be done to show how LGBT refugees navigate home and belonging transnationally in their everyday lives.

Understanding how LGBT refugees talk about home allows us not only to understand the social, structural, and material worlds they must navigate as they settle in Canada, but also to explore the affective, relational, and mnemonic processes that go into LGBT refugees’ narratives of home and their feelings of belonging. This includes understandings about place-making: affective, mnemonic, and relational practices whereby LGBT refugees tell stories about past, present, and future “homes,” maintain links to imagined or actual places of belonging, and reorganize or construct new places of attachment (Keles, 2011; Noble, 2005; Kinefuchi, 2010).
1.5 Thesis Outline

In order to investigate further LGBT refugees’ experiences of home and belonging in Metro Vancouver, I designed the research around the oral histories and participatory photography of fifteen LGBT refugees. My position as an activist-researcher also influenced my methodological choices. I designed the research to be flexible so that I could follow the participants’ stories and where they led me. This flexibility quickly led me to change my research focus to include what happened to participants in their countries of origin and before they had their hearings. In Chapter Two, I go into more detail on the ethical and methodological choices I encountered and the insights I gained in working with LGBT refugees’ stories of home and belonging. Through participants’ perceptions of home and belonging I explore the conflicting relationships LGBT refugees must navigate in their everyday lives. All of the participants approached relatedness in multiple ways, but within each narrative and collection of photographs, I saw a dominant theme of relatedness emerge. These themes were (1) relatedness with place, (2) relatedness with body, and (3) relatedness with partners.

Chapter Three focuses on the relationships to home spaces and the Metro Vancouver cityscape through the stories and photographs of Devran, Mario, and John. I argue that the places and relations LGBT refugees negotiate are highly influential in their settlement experiences. The narratives and photographs provide perspective on the possibilities and constraints that come from being in a particular place, here exemplified by Metro Vancouver’s legacy of settler colonialism, multiculturalism, homonormativity, and neoliberalism. I interrogate the participants’ experience of “emplaced displacement” that comes from not only being displaced from their countries of origin, but also from their experiences of (un)belonging in Metro Vancouver as
racialized gay refugees. Home lies in the in-between, as Devran, Mario, and John negotiate between their current homes in Metro Vancouver and their previous homes in their countries of origin. I thus argue against the static and bounded construction of home and instead highlight the ways in which home can become fluid and non-binary. Home and homelessness, displacement and emplacement, and belonging and unbelonging are unsettled in the stories of Devran, Mario, and John, as their experiences of home rest along a spectrum of possibilities.

Chapter Four explores the narratives of Tiffany, Natalie, and June, and the participatory photography of Tiffany and June. Tiffany, Natalie, and June made refugee claims based on the persecution and fear of persecution they experienced as trans persons. Their experiences reveal how trans individuals and non-normative bodies are hyper-regulated by immigration and citizenship processes in Canada. I explore how home and a sense of belonging can rest in the body and having control over one’s body. Home is an embodied experience. It is being at home with oneself that allows Tiffany, Natalie, and June to endure and continue. A sense of home is intertwined with the ownership Tiffany, Natalie, and June have over their bodies. The relationships they have to their bodies are also influenced by the relationships and interactions they have with other people.

Chapter Five, analyzes the stories and photographs of Tavo, Juliet, Sara, and Samuel. Tavo and Samuel are gay-identified cisgender men from Central and South America who came to Canada and made refugee claims based on sexual orientation. Juliet and Sara are a lesbian-identified couple from Central Asia who came to Canada and made a refugee claim as a lesbian couple. I explore how intimacy and citizenship are cemented together in the refugee process for queer couples making a joint refugee claim. Underlying heteronormative and patriarchal norms around what determines a relationship to be legitimate and recognizable by the IRB causes many
LGBT refugee couples’ claims to be dismissed or seen as not credible. I explore how home can dwell in the intimacy and the domesticity that is created between partners. In Tavo, Juliet, Sara, and Samuel’s stories, domesticity is a site of resistance and validation of their selves as gay and lesbian couples. Yet, finding and maintaining a home is an ongoing challenge for each them as racialized, classed, gendered, and sexualized refugees in Canada.

Chapter Six summarizes the overarching themes from each chapter. I review the structural and institutional limitations that in-land LGBT refugees face when settling in Metro Vancouver, especially in terms of housing, employment, and social belonging. I make recommendations to address the need for greater social support for incoming LGBT refugees and the demand for safe and affordable housing. I explore how the participants’ stories and photographs create a nonlinear and non-binary conception of home that includes the intersection of race and socio-economic positioning. From there, I return to the concept of relatedness and its significance in understanding LGBT narrations of home and belonging. I argue that relatedness is an active emotional and material agent in LGBT refugee migration and settlement. Relatedness serves as the binding force in how LGBT refugees survive their migration, asylum process, and settlement. The material and emotional relationships LGBT refugees have with their biological families and cultural communities abroad provide them necessary resources to which they are often denied access in Canada. LGBT refugees’ relationships with various cultural communities and LGBT communities in Metro Vancouver are conflicting and ever-changing. While some of the participants have had positive and affirming experiences in their relationships with individuals within the larger queer community of Metro Vancouver, many of the other participants have experienced abjection and further marginalization based on their race, sexuality, class, and age. LGBT refugees’ relationships to the places and people within Canada
and abroad inform a sense of home and belonging that fluctuates between the physical borders of a dwelling (building, apartment, room), passing through national borders, and emotional resonances.
Research Design and Analysis of Collected Stories and Photographs

2.1 Engagement as an Activist-Researcher

Devran: Coming here, leaving everything behind, coming here, making a refugee claim, and then facing all the isolation, stress, and fear...Well, difficult is not enough to explain it.

Kat: I can only imagine.

Devran: No, you can't. You can’t imagine what it is like. That's okay. But you can’t understand what it is like. (Interview with Devran, May 20, 2013)

Feminist and queer scholars have turned a self-reflexive and critical lens on their research in the past forty years, examining the ways in which feminist and queer research can both reproduce and challenge power relations and inequalities (Gluck, 2008; Gluck & Patai, 1991; Rich, 2003; Bornat & Diamond, 2007; Reay, 1996; Brown, 2006; Filax, 2006; Browne & Nash, 2010; Bowleg, 2008; Ramirez & Boyd, 2012). Queer and feminist research can be a powerful tool for social justice. Yet, what exactly feminist and queer activist-research is and what it entails are questions open for debate. Charles Hale (2008) describes activist-research as aiming for more than understanding or describing social phenomena. Activist-research is politically and socially engaged in dismantling hierarchical and exploitative relations of power (Nygreen, 2006; Janesick, 2010). Activist-researchers cannot be detached from the communities they work with if they want to disrupt colonial-like power relationships and challenge systems of oppression (Marfleet, 2007; North, 1995). Challenging power relations means working with communities to uncover structures of power and unpack relationships and causalities that structure injustice.
(Freire, 1979; 2004). It involves interrogating essentialisms around activist, researcher, and community that may obscure common agendas and opportunities for consciousness-raising and empowerment (Tuhiwai Smith, 1998).

Daphne Patai urges researchers to be critical of their use of the word “activism” and what that might entail for social justice on the ground (1991). Calling research “activist” does not erase power inequalities (Liam, 2011; Silvey, 2004; Nygreen, 2006; Thomson, 1999). Activist-research, like all kinds of research, can reproduce as well as challenge power relations and inequalities. Unequal relations of power between activist-researchers and the communities they work with can reproduce hierarchical relationships within which feminist and queer activist-researchers occupy multiple positions of privilege in relation to their informants, especially in terms of citizenship, education, and employment. Research participants may see their stories advancing the careers of activist-researchers, while they and their communities remain marginalized. Alison Jones and Kuni Jenkins (2008) write that activist-research must be committed to an ongoing dialectical relationship between activist-researchers and the communities they work with so that power relations within and outside of the research can be confronted. Activist-researchers must look for ways to do quality, useful research that challenges power relations while also empowering people to share their experiences and be seen as authoritative knowledge producers (Best, 2003; Greenwood, 2008).

Activism and scholarship have never been separate fields for me. My commitment to LGBT rights led me to pursue higher education in order to better articulate the oppression I experienced and witnessed as a queer woman. Throughout my studies, I continued to work with various LGBT community groups and non-profit organizations as a volunteer and community organizer. I was able to use the knowledge I gained in academia to help queer community
organizations write policy briefs and media reports as well as apply for much-needed funding. As I advanced into my Masters and PhD programs, my position as a graduate student allowed me to tap into additional funding resources. I was able to redirect some structural and economic resources from universities and research foundations to support community-based initiatives and arts projects.

Aziz Choudry (2013) writes that the relationships activist-researchers have with their participants are multiple and constantly evolving. These multiple relationships allow activist-researchers to reflexively probe how their presence affects the communities they work with and the lasting effects of their research (Nygreen, 2006; Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013; Wagle & Cantaffa, 2008). I assume a responsibility to make sure that my work provides avenues for community mobilization, peer-to-peer support, and social justice advocacy. My academic and activist roles blend into and inform one another with difficulty and uncertainty. It is an uncomfortable position, and one in which I try as much as possible not to exhibit hubris or entitlement. My commitment to LGBT refugee rights does not remove the entitlement and privilege I have as a white, Western, queer, cisgender, American settler-researcher. It also does not remove me from the power inequalities embedded between my research participants and me. In many ways, I work the hyphen (Fine, 1994) by using my roles as volunteer with Rainbow Refugee and researcher to connect with the LGBT refugee communities I work with. As much as my volunteerism and research influence and affect the people I work with, their stories, actions, and authority affect me and influence my outlook on the world. The borders between research and activism are sometimes blurred as I work with LGBT refugees in community support and arts-based research. It is a dialectic relationship that requires a commitment to ongoing discussion and shared authority over the research.
The stories and photographs recorded and preserved in this thesis come from three years of volunteering with Rainbow Refugee as a refugee support volunteer and two years of fieldwork in Metro Vancouver using a mixed methodology of formal interviews with refugee settlement workers and oral history and participatory photography with LGBT refugees. I served as a volunteer for Rainbow Refugee from fall 2012 to summer 2015. Rainbow Refugee is a Vancouver-based community group that supports and advocates for people seeking refugee protection because of persecution based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or HIV status. Rainbow Refugee engages in outreach, advocacy, and public education on LGBT/HIV+ refugee issues. I presented the Rainbow Refugee board of directors with my research prospectus in the fall of 2012. Rainbow Refugee board members Chris Morrissey and Sharalyn Jordan provided helpful commentary on my research prospectus. Rainbow Refugee agreed to be a community advisor to my project and provided commentary on the finished dissertation.

My experience as a volunteer for Rainbow Refugee gave me valuable insight into not only the in-land asylum process, but also the everyday challenges LGBT refugees face in Metro Vancouver. As a volunteer for Rainbow Refugee, I contributed to the Rainbow Refugee board of directors and helped facilitate weekly drop-in advisory and counselling meetings for in-land refugee claimants. I worked with in-land refugee claimants to answer their questions about the refugee process. I wrote letters of support to be used in LGBT refugee members’ refugee hearings as evidence for their asylum claims. I attended LGBT refugee members’ refugee hearings as an invited observer. I supported LGBT refugee members connect to service providers. I provided assistance to them in obtaining housing by talking with landlords and working with Inland Refugee Society and BC Housing when housing emergencies occurred.
Although my position at Rainbow Refugee was voluntary, in many ways I served the role of an informal social worker with LGBT refugees. Almost all Rainbow Refugee volunteers serve this role for LGBT refugee members. One of the reasons for this is that there are limited resources in Metro Vancouver to help in-land refugee claimants access information and resources. Rainbow Refugee fills a vital niche, providing LGBT refugee claimants not only emotional and informational support, but also vital social assistance. It is incredible to see how many resources Rainbow Refugee is able to provide to LGBT refugees as a volunteer-only organization.

**Figure 2.1 Hands in Solidarity**

(Source: Photograph taken by Melanie Schambach, 2014)
In addition to the on-the-ground support I provided to LGBT refugees, I worked with Rainbow Refugee to create community resources and public advocacy initiatives. My position as a graduate student afforded me the opportunity to organize community events to discuss asylum legislation, violence against LGBT refugees, and the cutting of social services for in-land refugees. Rainbow Refugee members spoke at these events and were able to connect with policymakers and other academics to engage in combating legislation, policies, and public sentiment harmful to LGBT refugees. I was also able to apply for several small research-based grants that went to funding community arts projects. These events included a participatory theatre performance by LGBT refugees on the 2014 International Day against Homophobia and several public performances by queer refugee artists. In the spring of 2014, I helped to organize a Rainbow Refugee and Queer Arts Festival initiative for an LGBT refugee community arts project called the Painted Stories. The Painted Stories project brought together 15 LGBT refugees to train each other in group facilitation, storytelling, anti-oppression education, painting, and filmmaking. Through a series of five workshops, the participants created a large mural in which they shared their messages and personal experiences of violence and hope. Their stories and messages produced a strong counter-narrative to national anti-refugee sentiments and increasing restrictions against asylum-seekers. I participated in the workshops as a volunteer for Rainbow Refugee and provided support to the LGBT refugee facilitators. The mural was titled “We are all human: Migration is difficult—don’t make it more difficult.” The participants created a short documentary called “Seeking Protection is Not a Crime” in which they shared personal experiences of violence and rejection in their countries of origin and in Canada.
The Painted Stories project led to the creation of a second arts initiative, the Busting Borders Art Show, highlighting queer and migrant artists in Metro Vancouver at the Liu Institute Lobby Gallery. At the opening of the show, we held a public roundtable of activists, scholars,
and academics to discuss the rise of arbitrary detentions of incoming asylum-seekers and the human rights abuses of detention and deportation of refugees in Metro Vancouver. The art show included a public art campaign in which participants wrote messages of hope and resistance related to migration and asylum on images of the Monarch butterfly. These butterflies were movable art pieces that have been used in several protests and campaigns in Metro Vancouver to highlight anti-immigration, racism, and homophobia. The butterflies were most recently used at the 2015 Pride Parade.

The participatory theatre workshop, the Painted Stories Project, and the Busting Borders art show were just some of the projects through which I created opportunities for public dialogue. These projects not only produced critical knowledge and critique of larger systems of inequality surrounding asylum in Canada, but were also opportunities for LGBT refugees to share their knowledge and creativity with a wide audience. My experience working on these projects gave me new understandings of the emotional and relational weight of LGBT refugee settlement. My work as a volunteer and arts facilitator allowed me to expand my research outside the bounds of the research project and before I began to write about my findings. The experiences I gained through volunteering shaped my approach to the research methodology and the final analysis of the collected data. They encouraged me to continue expanding my research outside the boundaries of academia and into projects that advocate for and empower LGBT refugees.

Through talking with Rainbow Refugee board members, I initially shaped my project around the settlement stories and participatory photography of in-land LGBT refugee claimants and what happens to them after their hearings. I wanted to use a mixed-methodological approach that embraces the particularities of LGBT refugees’ lives and allows them to express themselves
as important knowledge producers and authoritative storytellers. My mixed-methodological strategies were informed primarily by critical ethnography (Carspecken, 1996; Madison, 2012), feminist and queer oral history (Gluck, 2008; Frisch, 1990; Janesick, 2007; Portelli, 2003; Wong, 2009; Yow, 1995; Ramirez & Boyd, 2012; Moore et al., 2014), and participatory photography (Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang, 1999), which emphasize collaboration and critical engagement with the research site and participants, as well the importance of participants’ unique viewpoints and voices to the construction of knowledge.

2.2 Critical Ethnography

Ethnography is the observation of social life with the intent of providing detailed description and in-depth understanding of everyday life and practices (Madison, 2012). Sonyini Madison describes critical ethnography as an “ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain” (2012, 5). It is an engagement between critical theory and ethnography in which researchers cut new paths to emphasize critique in ethnography (Noblit, Flores, & Murillo, 2004). Jim Thomas describes critical ethnography as ethnography with a political purpose (1993), that is, using ethnography not only to describe the social world, but also to challenge larger systems of inequality. Critical ethnographers unsettle both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions about the role of researchers as the unspoken authority over social reality and knowledge. Critical ethnographers interrogate power within their research and how systems of power not only determine the relationships researchers have with the participants, but also how knowledge is produced and disseminated. Researchers must be
reflexive and challenge themselves to think beyond the traditional confines of qualitative research, moving to a space of possibility, dialogue, and social change (Carspecken, 1996).

Gary Allen Fine (1993) argues that ethnographers’ aspirations to be precise, objective, and unobtrusive are not only difficult to achieve, but also misleading. To ignore one’s role in the research also creates opportunity for one-sided and misleading conclusions that could unintentionally further harm the participants and the wider community. Ethnographers must be open, present themselves as research participants, and reflect on their roles. They need to be mindful of where their theories and paradigms come from and ask what voices, representations, and experiences are excluded or too quickly universalized (Madison, 2012).

My participatory observations as a volunteer for Rainbow Refugee provided much-needed context to the everyday barriers that LGBT refugees face in Metro Vancouver. My observations would later inform my analysis on the participants’ stories and photographs. I chose oral history as a complimentary methodology to critical ethnography in order to explore the particular experiences of LGBT refugees and to engage with them in dialogue about home and belonging. In my design of the oral history interviews, I drew upon the works of feminist and Indigenous authors who emphasize the need to recognize participants’ agency and the active role they have in shaping the research.

2.3 Oral History

Oral history involves the collection and study of stories about the everyday lives of individuals and communities. Oral history is also a social construction that has been and continues to be a central way of knowing the world and transmitting knowledge for many
communities around the world. Stories and the meanings attached to them change as they are shared and retold. Understanding the telling and sharing of stories reveals the ways in which communities continue to “hold together” and change throughout time (Cruikshank, 2000, 2). Oral history is therefore not just a methodology but an epistemology, a way to understand how knowledge is transferred and transformed.

Paul Thompson writes, “oral history offers a challenge to the accepted myths of history, to the authoritarian judgment inherent in its tradition. It provides a means for radical transformation of the social meaning of history” (1998, 31). Oral history as a methodology has a long history in refugee and diaspora studies (Marsh, 2012; North, 1995; Trower, 2011; Thomson, 1999). 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 (Janovicek, 2006; Chavez Leyva, 1998; Bretell & Sargent, 2006). Oral history can reveal the “hidden history of migration” (Thomson, 1999, 26) by offering insight into the “lived interior of the migration process” (Thomson, 1998, 28). By doing this, the oral histories of migrants challenge monocausal theories of migration and provide a counter-narrative to the ways in which migration and migrants are understood (Thomson, 1998, 28). Refugee oral history confronts misconceptions and one-sided or dehumanizing portrayals of refugees and addresses the imbalance of the under-representation of refugees in public discourse on asylum and migration. Oral history works to present refugees as multilayered subjects (Creet & Kitzmann, 2011; Herbert, 2011). In doing so, oral history not only confronts harmful stereotypes, but also challenges the misappropriation of refugee issues and experiences in harmful nationalistic and imperialist agendas (Hickey, 2005; Hopkins, 2009; Liam, 2011; Marfleet, 2007; Razack, 1996).
Oral history is not a neutral methodology. Some oral history projects may pathologized or depicted the narrators as one-dimensional. Likewise, some oral history projects may silence groups or individuals by not recognizing their agency and authority in the research. Michael Frisch’s (1990) call for the researcher and the participants to share authority over the knowledge created is not automatic or a given.

In my approach to oral history, I draw upon the insights provided by feminist oral historians and Indigenous feminist researchers. Since the 1960s, feminist oral historians have consistently reflected upon their methodological practice and theoretical position(s) (Scanlon, 1993). Because feminist research was founded on the ideal of tearing down exploitative and hierarchal systems of power and knowledge production, the search for finding alternative and empowering research practices is still pressing. The poststructuralist turn in feminist scholarship during the 1980s changed conceptions of power dynamics between researchers and participants, painting them as neither monolithic nor stagnant, but rather a discursive process that flows from shifting negotiations, positions, and outcomes. As a result, feminist oral historians took a more reflective tone in their analyses (Bornat & Diamond, 2007, 27). Feminist framings of oral history moved from the belief in a shared goal of collecting women’s texts to understanding how collaboration in the research is a dynamic process. Before feminist oral historians build a record of the narrators’ lives, the interviewers must position themselves subjectively within the research.

Oral history is now seen as a conversational hybrid in which the oral history interview is a communicated event shaped by the narrator’s and the interviewer’s social positioning (Kratz, 2001). The oral historian is not a neutral party in the interview process; both the narrator and the

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22 For more discussion on this, please see my recent article “Unsettling Interpretative Authority: Connecting Critical Indigenous Methodology with Feminist Oral History” from the Journal of Feminist Scholarship.
interviewer are subjective forces that shape the text. The narrator occupies a position of structural location, and the oral historian’s age, gender, race, sexuality, ability, and class background influence how they interact together, as well as how the interviewer analyzes the text (Yow, 1995). The feminist oral historian Sherna Gluck (2008) writes that oral history is always partial history in which the interviewer will get different partial truths based on positionality. Reflexivity means acknowledging not only that both the researcher’s and narrator’s positionality shape the oral history/text, but also that the oral history is a historical document created through the agency of both the interviewer and the interviewee (Sangster, 1994, 11).

In constantly interrogating power dynamics and my role as an oral historian, I drew heavily on the writings of Indigenous feminist authors. In Decolonizing Methodologies, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) argues that researchers must go further than simply recognizing the effect personal beliefs and assumptions have when interacting with people. Researchers must understand their underlying assumptions, motivations, and values, and the psychological, discursive, and material effects that their research will have (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, 173). Grounding oneself in the location of research sites involves not only gaining knowledge and understanding of the historical and current social, economic, and political environment in which the individuals and communities involved are situated, but also recognizing and understanding participants’ assumptions, experiences, and storytelling practices that inform the research process and the results (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, 186).

Feminist Indigenous scholars argue that empowering collaborative work between settler and Indigenous peoples can be achieved, but it requires a reframing of the field in which researchers actively decentre the “Western academy as the exclusive locus of authorizing power that defines the research agenda” (Swadener & Mutua, 2008, 38). This allows the validity of the
research to be defined, reconstituted, and re-authored by the power of the margins. It calls on the researcher and the participant to rework the “hyphen” in colonizer-colonized, settler-aboriginal, non-Indigenous-Indigenous, majority-minority, and oppressor-oppressed dichotomies (Jones & Jenkins, 2008). Alison Jones and Kuni Jenkins (2008) argue that the hyphen is often softened when researchers seek mutual understanding in cross-cultural engagement, but that this brings an end to empathetic collaboration. In trying to gain a shared perspective, structural power differences, as well as other differences in perspective and history, are downplayed. Instead of being softened, the hyphen should remain nonnegotiable as a positive site for productive and empowering methodological work. The hyphen is not only a relationship between collaborating people, but also their respective relationships to difference (Jones & Jenkins, 2008, 475). Much as in critical race and postcolonial feminist critiques of universalism in Western white feminism, “us” cannot stand in place of the divide, the hyphen, but can only name an “always conditional relationship between” (Jones & Jenkins, 2008, 475). In working the hyphen, researchers need to question what they mean by “shared speaking”; they must not only make room for the voices of others and learn from them, but also recognize the privilege they have in asking for dialogue (Jones & Jenkins, 2008, 478). As Jones and Jenkins (2008) write, “Indigenous access into the realms of meaning of the dominant Other is hardly required; members of marginalized/colonized groups are immersed in it daily. It is the colonizer, wishing to hear, who calls for dialogue” (478). Collaborative research across the hyphen entails the assertion that on some points of the research, the Indigenous, colonized, minority, or oppressed subject will maintain a political and social identity distinct from that of the settler, colonizer, majority, or oppressor subject (Jones & Jenkins, 2008, 475).
Marginality is not monolithic, and we all face inequality and oppression intersectionally; within any research, we are working a hyphen in some form. Working the hyphen “suggests hard work—not the work of face-to-face conversation in the name of liberatory practice, but the work of coming to know our own location in the Self-Other binary and accepting the difference marked by the hyphen” (Jones & Jenkins, 2008, 482–483): “What I learn is not about you, but I learn from you about difference” (Jones & Jenkins, 2008, 483). In the creation of an oral history, interpretative authority is a joint dialogue between the “selves and roles of interviewee and interviewer within an interactive moment of creation” (Stuart, 1993, 81). Empowering collaboration between the researcher and the participants can be achieved through hard-worked dialogue and commitment to understanding difference. This involves not only a significant time commitment involving multiple of meetings, but a willingness on the researcher to not reach a simple conclusion. The difference between me, as a non-refugee white queer settler, and my participants is always present. Instead of seeing this as a disadvantage or something to be smoothed over, I take the hyphen as an opportunity to poke at and ultimately unsettle my position of power to speak next to LGBT refugees in the final text. I see working the hyphen as challenge for me to expand my research beyond the text to other works of social justice through volunteering and collaboration with the LGBT refugee community in Metro Vancouver.

In designing this project, I wanted another avenue for LGBT refugee participants to express their meanings of home and belonging outside the confines of a sit-down interview and a written text. Participatory photography was employed as another medium of communication between the participants and me to help the participants reflect on and illustrate their past, present, and future desires, feelings, and lived realities around home and belonging (Sirriyeh, 2010; Clark-Ibáñez, 2004).
2.4 Participatory Photography

Visual methodologies, particularly photo-voice or participatory photography, in which the participants are given a camera and take pictures documenting their experiences and their surroundings, can be one avenue to understanding the intangibleness of memory and the lived experiences of individuals. Caroline Wang introduced the term “photovoice” in the early 1990s as a participatory health promotion practice in China in which individuals would take photographs to document the reality of their lives (Wang & Burris, 1997). Photovoice is rooted in Freire’s work on critical consciousness, as well as works in feminist theory and documentary photography (Plunkett, Leipert, & Ray, 2012). Freire (1970) stressed that everyone, regardless of their circumstances, was capable of looking critically at the world and engaging in dialogue with others: “With the proper tools, anyone can gradually perceive his or her personal and social reality as well as contradictions in it, become conscious of those personal perceptions, and deal critically with them” (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001, 561). Freire (1970) argued that the visual image was one tool that could be used to enable people to think critically about their community. Feminist theory’s emphasis on the importance of situated knowledge added to the use of participatory photography as means not only to show alternative knowledges and experiences, but also to create a space where that knowledge would be at the centre of analysis (Castleden, Garvin, & Huu-ay-aht First Nation, 2008). Participatory approaches to documentary photography demonstrate the ways in which marginalized communities can effectively use photography as a personal voice and means for advocacy (Wang, Cash, & Powers, 2000).

Through the years, participatory photography has gained attention in social research as a nuanced means to understand peoples’ experiences. Photographs can be used to evoke different
expressions of knowledge and experience than are elicited through interviews or conversations alone (Plunkett, Leipert, & Ray, 2012). Participatory photography can be a mechanism through which the participants can further express themselves and articulate their experiences. Andrew Irving (2007) writes that visual methodologies like participatory photography are another means of performance in which participants selectively engage with different subjects, memories, and meanings and decide what to document with their cameras. The camera is the tool used to take pictures, but it is the participants who frame the images through certain lenses of experiences and intentions (Irving, 2007). Participatory photography’s potency lies not simply in pictures, “but in the dialogical interpretation that occurs between the researcher and those taking the pictures” (Plunkett, Leipert, & Ray, 2012, 159). It is through conversation with the researcher that the participants share their interpretations of not only the pictures, but also the larger social phenomena affecting them. This process can deepen understanding for both the researcher and the participants.

Karin Hannes and Oskana Parylo (2014) write that participatory photography promotes trust and a sense of ownership of the research for the participants: “Having pictures taken by the participants contributes to developing a better understanding of the topic, facilitates discussions, and enhances participants’ research ownership” (258). Caroline Wang’s (1999) definition of participatory photography/photovoice implies that participants are co-researchers. Wang defines photovoice as a “process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique” (Wang & Burris, 1997, 369). The main goals of photovoice are to (a) assist participants in recording and reflecting on specific issues affecting them; (b) encourage group and public dialogue around these issues; and (c) influence policy change and social justice (Plunkett, Leipert, & Ray, 2012). Participatory photography/photovoice
is grounded in respect for autonomy, promotion of social justice, and avoidance of harm (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001).

As much as researchers have expressed the benefits of participatory photography in understanding marginalized communities’ lived realities, Luc Pauwels (2015) warns researchers to be critical about participatory photography’s claims about social justice and the promotion of voice. Simply handing a camera to an individual, having that person take pictures, and then asking about the pictures does not necessarily imply that the participant has authority over the research and its consequences: “Making pictures may be a valuable part of a process to improve the situation of under-represented or marginalized people, but there is nothing intrinsically or automatically empowering in using pictures” (Pauwels, 2015, 108). It is important to make a distinction between offering participants authority in research and the researcher’s interpretative authority over knowledge production (Pauwels, 2015). As much as I am interested in how LGBT refugees express their feelings, memories, and experiences of home and belonging through photography, I hold the authority over how the pictures and the participants’ discussions around them are displayed in the text. As a researcher, I tried to remain critical and reflexive on not only their roles in the research, but also the intended and unintended consequences of using participatory photography with a community (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001).

Karin Hannes and Oskana Parylo (2014) write that research participants may be inadequately equipped or trained to judge the potential ethical risks involved in collecting images and disseminating them for research purposes. The use of images may lead to issues of confidentiality and privacy (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). Taking pictures may be considered intrusive or damaging to the participants and the community, especially when working with vulnerable populations (Hannes & Parylo, 2014). Pauwels (2015) also argues that visual
materials can distort the research process by being ill adapted to the respondent or creating an “all too suggestive, one-sided or incomplete picture of the phenomenon” (98). As a researcher, I tried to be critically aware of the ways in which I may influenced the participants’ interpretation and discussion of their photographs.

Discussion before, during, and after the photo-taking process is one way for the researcher and the participants to not only address questions and concerns that may come up, but also work together to understand their conceptual frameworks. Researchers should be familiar with the visual material used, the manner in which it was obtained, and the possibilities for interpretation of the finished photographs. Having the participants discuss each of their pictures in an individual interview allows for clarification of meaning and the significance attributed to each picture (Plunkett, Leipert, & Ray, 2012). Interviewers should also remain alert for respondents’ reactions and nonverbal cues (Pauwels, 2015).

Researching critical ethnography, feminist oral history, and participatory photography methodology was incredibly valuable in preparing me to research LGBT refugees’ experiences of home and belonging. However, as in many other research experiences, everything changed in the thick of the process. I found myself facing much more complicated aspects, situations, and challenges than were touched on in the methodology and theoretical literature. These complicated situations arose from the specifics of the research and my participation in it. This is one of the reasons that however diligently one may prepare, and regardless of how many books one reads on a particular topic or methodology, inevitably things will be different in the “field.” Thus, it comes as no surprise that my research changed in scope.
2.5 Research Design

The project was composed of four components:

1. Structured interviews with ten refugee settlement workers.
2. Participatory observation as a volunteer for Rainbow Refugee.
3. Extended and multiple oral history interviews with fifteen successful in-land refugee claimants.
4. Participatory photography with ten of the LGBT refugee oral history participants.

The first step in the research involved understanding the political, economic, and social environment LGBT refugees navigate as they go through the refugee process and settle in Metro Vancouver. Before conducting formal interviews with refugee settlement workers, I met with immigration lawyers and refugee settlement workers informally to talk about the refugee process and the challenges in-land refugee claimants face during and after their refugee hearings. I attended several workshops on refugee asylum, as well as training and information classes on immigration housing. These experiences informed me of the complex social, political, and economic situations in which LGBT refugees find themselves once they make refugee claims in Metro Vancouver.

I conducted formal interviews with ten refugee settlement and immigration workers based in the Metro Vancouver area. The purpose of the interviews was to gain knowledge and understanding of the institutional and practical aspects of the housing situation in Metro Vancouver for in-land refugee claimants and what happens to refugees after their refugee hearings. I contacted each organization directly by email and telephone and requested an interview with one of their settlement workers. I emailed the organizations a copy of the consent
form so that they could familiarize themselves with my research and the interview process. Each of the workers signed the consent form at the start of their interview. The formal interviews lasted approximately an hour each and were voice-recorded. The settlement workers’ names and any other personally identifiable information were removed from the finished transcripts; only the organizational names were used in reference to the interviewees. Once the written transcripts were completed, each interviewee received a copy of their transcript and their signed consent form to keep for their records.

My interaction with LGBT refugee claimants as a volunteer and my personal experiences navigating various social services and institutions gave me practical and grounded knowledge about the everyday realities of LGBT refugees in Metro Vancouver. Because I was working very intimately with LGBT refugees as a volunteer, I felt that it was important to make sure the people I engaged with knew about my dual position as a volunteer and researcher. As a volunteer for Rainbow Refugee, I signed a confidentiality form that prohibited me from directly talking to anyone or writing about specific stories I heard or I encountered as I assisted LGBT refugees. Every volunteer for Rainbow Refugee signs this confidentiality form. However, I was allowed to write down my personal experiences and any general or personal insights I gained about the refugee process and LGBT refugee settlement. I kept my observations and insights in a notebook that I would write in when I was at home. This notebook was only accessed by me. I did not take notes or directly recruit participants during Rainbow Refugee drop-in meetings or at any other engagement with LGBT refugee members. During my time at Rainbow Refugee, I was serving in the role of a volunteer. LGBT refugee claimants were coming for assistance, and I felt that writing down my thoughts and personal insights at our meetings would not make the space safe.

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23 For example: “Inland Refugee Society,” “MOSAIC,” “Settlement Orientation Services.”
and comfortable for them. I also felt that it would be a violation of trust. When I was volunteering, my attention was primarily directed at assisting persons in the moment. However, my position as a researcher was never removed. When I came home, I would reflect on my experiences and insights in my notebook. When LGBT refugee members asked about what I did in Metro Vancouver, I replied that I was a doctoral student doing research on LGBT refugee settlement in Metro Vancouver. I would provide more details about the project if prompted. If someone expressed interested in the project, I would arrange a separate introductory meeting to talk about the research and their participation in it.

The oral history interviews and participatory photography started in the spring of 2013 and continued through the spring of 2015. I recruited participants through fliers posted at Qmunity and notices posted on Facebook and online queer and immigrant service listservs, including Rainbow Refugee’s email listserv. Potential participants could contact me by phone or email. Once participants contacted me, I emailed them a copy of the consent form and an introductory letter about the research project. We then met at a nearby coffee shop or a convenient location for them. At this meeting, I explained the project. I covered what would be expected of them and answered any questions they had about my research or about me.

There were three criteria for participation in the oral history interviews and participatory photography: The first was that the participant made an in-land refugee claim based on sexual orientation or gender identity and received Convention Refugee status. The second was that our

24 Qmunity is an LGBT community centre located on Davie Street in downtown Vancouver. Qmunity houses several LGBT-focused services and initiatives, including Vancouver Pride, the LGBT youth service, Rainbow Refugee, LGBT counselling, and the Trans Health clinic.

25 The Qmunity, Settlement Orientation Services, MOSAIC, and Immigration Settlement Services public listservs were also used.
interview had to take place a minimum of six months after their refugee hearing. The third was that the participant had to be living in the Metro Vancouver area. My reason for the first criterion was that the in-land and out-of-state refugee processes were too different to combine in my research. Focusing on individuals who made in-land refugee claims allowed me to gain a critical understanding of a particular asylum and settlement process. The second criterion was to ensure that I could talk to participants about what happened after their refugee hearings. I imposed the last criterion because I wanted the research to be site specific. My experience in volunteering with Rainbow Refugee taught me that refugee settlement experiences varied dramatically across Canada depending on the location. Focusing on individuals who live in one geographical area would allow me to situate their settlement experiences and connect them to the particular settler history and social, political, and economic landscape of Metro Vancouver.

In addition to these three criteria, I decided to limit participants based on sexual orientation and gender identity because I wanted to hear from underrepresented groups in the LGBT refugee population, namely lesbian women and trans persons. However, the majority of the participants in this research identified as gay cisgender men. One reason for this is that the majority of refugee claimants in Canada are cisgender men. This speaks to the gendered nature of migration, which privileges cisgender male bodies (Pessar, 2005). Given that this project was specific to Metro Vancouver, I could not limit the participant population to being from one

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26 In-land refugee claims are done within Canada. Individuals are given temporary status and receive restricted work permits and reduced healthcare benefits, and are not able to access the majority of resources available to landed immigrants. Out-of-state refugee claimants or government-assisted refugees are individuals who make claims outside of their countries of origin (but not in Canada) and receive refugee status. These individuals are then “sponsored” by the Canadian government to resettle in Canada. Once they arrive in Canada, they receive permanent residency and are able to access the full array of resources that landed immigrants receive.

27 I explain this in more detail in the following chapters.
country of origin. As much as possible, I tried to have a diverse representation of persons coming from different geographical areas. The selected group of participants is reflective of the dominant geographical areas people come from to claim asylum and settle in Metro Vancouver. In conversations with settlement workers and volunteers from Immigration Settlement Services and Rainbow Refugee, I learned Metro Vancouver generally receives more refugee claimants coming from Eastern and South Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America, whereas Toronto receives a higher population of refugees coming from Africa and the Caribbean (Interview with ISS, May 2013). One reason for this is the particular settler history of Metro Vancouver: There is a long and well-established history of migration and settlement between Metro Vancouver and South and East Asia. Vancouver also has a well-established migratory relationship with Central and South American states, in particular for temporary farm workers. Within the last twenty years, Metro Vancouver has become a major settlement area for people coming from the Middle East, especially Iran and Turkey.

Because I originally wanted to know the settlement stories of LGBT refugees after their refugee hearings, I planned to work with a population that had already carefully crafted and told their stories in order to receive refugee protection. They would have told their stories multiple times in a multitude of settings to a wide array of persons in positions of authority. I would not be the first person to whom they would tell their stories, and I most likely would not be the last. It also became apparent early on in my volunteering with Rainbow Refugee that the only thing the LGBT refugees that accessed their services had in common was that they went through the in-land refugee process in Metro Vancouver. Their experiences in their countries of origin, their means of migration to Canada, and even their experiences of being refugee claimants were remarkably different. This heterogeneity of LGBT refugee experiences continues when talking
about what happens to LGBT refugees after receiving their refugee status. To talk about LGBT refugees as a united community would be misleading and would ignore the shifting and ever-changing landscape of a diverse group of people who are connected to multiple social worlds (Appadurai, 1996). I was open to changing the way I conducted interviews and the questions I asked if needed.

**Kat:** Thank you so much for sitting down with me to talk about your experiences after your refugee hearing.

**Tavo:** Yes. Sure.

**Kat:** First, I would like to start off from the time period when you got your positive refugee decision and then go on to what happened after.

**Tavo:** Okay, sure... But, I need to start from the beginning first. Because it won’t make sense if I start there.

**Kat:** From the beginning?

**Tavo:** When I was in my country. Let me start there. It will make more sense. Trust me. (Interview with Tavo, August 2013)

Very early on in the process of interviewing the participants, I realized how much their previous experiences in their countries of origin and their experiences migrating to Canada and going through the refugee process affected their experiences after their refugee hearings. The excerpt above comes from one of the first interviews I conducted. Tavo is a gay cisgender male refugee from Central America and one of the participants included in this dissertation. His request to start his story when he was still living in his home country speaks to how much the experiences before coming to Canada and through the refugee process play a role in not only what happened to the participants after their hearings, but also how they situate their stories in a much longer timeline than I had originally intended. What happened after the hearing had to be placed in context with what happened previously and what the participants expected in the
future. This made me broaden my scope of analysis. Instead of planning to start their interviews from the point of getting their positive decisions, I let the participants decide in what time period to start their stories. Almost all of the participants started from when they decided and/or were forced to leave their countries of origin. This timeline was always shifting and was not always in chronological order. More recent events or discussions would eventually lead to talking about experiences before the participants’ refugee hearings and in their home countries. Some of the participants spoke in detail about what happened to them in their countries of origin, while other participants did not want to revisit past experiences and said very little. It was up to the participants to decide how much they wanted to talk about their experiences in their home countries and before their refugee hearings.

The oral history interviews were semi-structured in order to provide a few opening questions, but flexible enough so that the participants could direct the interviews. The interviews were designed to be conversational. The first interview with each participant provided a general timeline of their experiences in their country of origin, their migration to Canada, the refugee process, and what happened after. This interview was usually the longest, lasting two to three hours. The next interview focused on housing and home and addressed key areas of interest and/or questions raised from my analysis of the first interview. These conversations often followed a timeline of the various houses, apartments, and shelters the participants stayed in. The interview then addressed any questions I had from the first interview or from our conversation about housing. The final interview was the least structured: we reviewed the second transcript and any questions that were raised. At a final concluding meeting, we reviewed the third transcript and addressed any follow-up questions if needed. After each interview, I transcribed the voice recording and analyzed the transcript for areas that needed clarification, meta-
statements, repeated narrative themes, and interesting arguments/conclusions raised. I followed Dana Jack’s (1999) method of narrative analysis that has the reader read the transcript in three different ways. The first is reading the text and looking for meta-narratives. Meta-narratives are points at which the interviewee reflects critically upon what they said, indicating to the listener that this is an issue involving conflicting aspects or special meanings. The next reading involved looking at the logic of the narrative. This involves looking at repeated themes in the text and how they are related to one another. The last reading is looking at the moral language, arguments, or conclusions the person is expressing in their story. I would then write these down to share at the next interview (Anderson & Jack, 1991; Green, 2004). Throughout the interviews, the participants and I engaged in conversations about topics or ideas raised. I asked the participants how they felt about my research. I also asked them for their opinions on any theories, arguments, or conclusions I was making as I read and reread their interviews.

Fifteen LGBT refugees participated in the oral history portion of the project. The participants were interviewed three to four times, with each interview lasting two to three hours. At our introductory meeting for the oral history interviews, I explained that the project involved having three sit-down voice-recorded interviews at a location of their choice. After each interview, I transcribed the voice recording and emailed the participant a copy of the transcript. I brought a printed copy of the transcript to the subsequent interview for review with the participant. In the transcription, I tried to limit my editing of the participants’ responses to removing false starts and significant grammatical errors that would distract from what the person was saying. Participants had final approval of the transcripts and were encouraged to edit the transcripts. On the consent form, the introductory letter, and in my initial meetings with

28 Except for one participant, whom I was able to interview only once.
participants, I made it clear that their involvement with this project would not affect their relationship with Rainbow Refugee or any other refugee settlement service providers, and that the participants’ names and countries of origin would not be included in the finished transcript. Pseudonyms and general geographical regions are used to refer to the participants. The participants determined how I refer to them in the transcripts in regards to their gender identity, sexual orientation, age, class, and ethnicity.

All of the interviews but one were conducted in English. Translators were available if needed. However, most of the participants felt comfortable conversing in English and wanted to conduct the interviews in English. I organized the interviews to have several “check-in points” at which the participants and I could assess our feelings, answer questions, and adjust the conversation if needed (Klempner, 2000; Rickard, 1998; Etherington, 2006; Connolly & Reilly, 2007; Ghorashi, 2008). The participants had the option of stopping the interview and/or leaving the project at any time. I told participants that if they decided to leave the project, the collected transcriptions and voice recordings would be destroyed and not used in the thesis or any other subsequent work without the participant’s permission. At every interview, I had information about counselling services and contact numbers for Vancouver Survivors of Torture and Qmunity’s free counselling. At the end of the final interview, participants received a $25 grocery store card as a small token of recognition and appreciation for their knowledge and time contribution they donated to this research.

**John:** What kind of pictures do you want me to take?

**Kat:** Well, that depends on you. I am more interested in what you come up with. What kind of photographs would show home and belonging for you?

**John:** I think it would be good to show my story.

**Kat:** Okay. Sounds good. Tell me more. What are you thinking about?
**John:** Yeah, because home is like connected to my story. And I think I could take pictures of things that represent my story. What I felt in my country and what happened to me here. I want to show the hopes I had and all the unwelcomeness I experienced as a refugee. I have a couple ideas for images.

*Like flowers and green grass showing my hopes for a better future and garbage or a person sleeping on the street for what happened...* (Interview with John, April 2013)

The excerpt above comes from a photography-planning meeting I had with John, one of the oral history and photography participants. In designing the photography portion of the research, I wanted the participants to dictate what photographs were produced and the meanings behind them. The only request I made was that the photographs speak to the participants’ feelings and experiences of home and belonging. The project was open to the participants in terms of how they wanted to frame “home” and capture it in their pictures. At the introductory meeting and throughout the picture-taking period, I talked with the participants about how they would go about taking pictures around the themes of home and belonging. I was interested in how the participants approached home and belonging and how they then interpreted these themes through their choice and design of pictures. I made sure not to provide too much concrete direction on what the participants should take photographs of. Instead, I would listen to the participants talk about their ideas for pictures and what they wanted to convey in their pictures. What came out of these conversations was a wide array of different approaches to and reflections on home and belonging. The participatory photography allowed the participants to express their conflicting and complex experiences of home through personal and subjective visual accounts. In doing so, the participants were able to express their agency in constructing and sharing their experiences of settlement as well as their feelings related to home and belonging (Datta, 2013).
Ten participants completed the photography portion of the project.\textsuperscript{29} Other than one person, who contacted me directly from an online advertisement,\textsuperscript{30} the participants were former oral history interviewees to whom I reached out and asked if they would be interested in participating in the photography portion of the research. The participants were asked to take a minimum of 15 pictures. Participants were given access to a camera or had the option of using their own cameras. They had six weeks to take pictures. I emailed or sent text messages to the participants throughout the weeks to check in with them and see how they were progressing, letting them know that I was happy to meet with them to talk about the assignment and answer any questions. After all of the pictures were taken, I sat with each participant individually to discuss the pictures and understand the participants’ intentions and meaning for each photograph. I received a copy of the photographs to be used in the research, and the participants kept the original photographs. The meetings to go over the photographs were voice-recorded. We met for a follow-up meeting to go over the transcription to remove errors or points of confusion. Participants had final approval of the transcriptions.

\textbf{2.6 \textit{Your project looked interesting}}

\textbf{Engagement with the Participants}

Soon Nam Kim (2008) and Soyini Madison (1993) write that people who occupy a marginalized position in a society are the most astute to the workings of both the dominant culture and their own marginal one. As mentioned previously, the LGBT refugee participants in

\textsuperscript{29} Two other oral history participants wanted to participate in the photography portion, but had to cancel part way through because of time constraints.

\textsuperscript{30} This person would later take part in the oral history interview portion of the project.
this research were already experienced in telling their stories to the IRB in order to get asylum. Participants came to this project for many reasons based on multiple personal and public desires. These desires informed their narratives and creative output and shaped the research and our relationship within and outside of the research.

**Kat:** What are you hoping to get out of this project?

**Tiffany:** Well, for me, I am not really expecting anything personally. I just wanted to tell my story. Maybe my story will help other transwomen refugees like me.

**Kat:** What would you like this project to do?

**Tiffany:** Well, I guess if it can be used to help inform people about what we go through as refugees, that would be good. I’m not sure that my story will help another refugee learn from my mistakes. But maybe if other people, people who aren’t refugees, could listen to my story, maybe they will think differently about refugees.

They would see that Canada has a lot of problems still around trans and gay people. It isn’t what I thought it would be. Maybe they will see how hard we work. They won’t see us like as abusing the system... So, yeah. If my story can change one person’s idea about transpeople, refugees, that would be good. (Interview with Tiffany, January 2015)

Tiffany’s answers to my questions speak to her desire for this research to address social injustice. She wanted her story to address the invisibility of LGBT refugee issues as well as the negative depiction of refugees in Canada. The particular needs and concerns of LGBT refugees are underrepresented and underserved in both public policy and social services. As Tiffany states, Canada is not always a safe haven for LGBT persons. This is especially the case for newcomers and racialized queer persons. Tiffany’s observation about Canada is echoed in many of the participants’ stories and pictures. In addition to providing greater visibility to LGBT refugee issues, Tiffany wanted her story to provide a counter-narrative to the idea of refugees as people abusing the immigration and welfare systems. Tiffany’s statements reflect an important desire expressed by many of the participants who volunteered their time and energy for this
research. Many of the participants said that they wanted to change the negative depiction of refugees in Canada. They wanted to tell their stories in order for non-refugee citizens and permanent residents of Canada to learn about the difficulties they faced as LGBT refugees.

My responsibility to Tiffany and the other participants is to respect and recognize in this work that many of them were speaking to intended audiences. One of the intended audiences was non-refugee Canadian citizens and permanent residents. This audience also included me. One of the most common questions the participants asked me in the oral history interviews and participatory photography discussions was “Do you understand?” They asked this because it was important for them to have me understand their stories in order for me to write about their experiences and be responsible to the political and social weight their stories bring forth. They also asked this of me to get assurance that what they were saying made sense to a person who has certain privileges granted to them because of their whiteness and their citizenship. “Do you understand?” was not only a request for me to pay attention, but also a reflection of the struggle they have gone through not to be misheard. In their questioning of me, they were confronting the unequal racial, gendered, and sexualized structures of knowledge production that silence and disregard their own important knowledge and voices. By doing this, they were challenging my role as an outsider and the position of privilege I held in speaking and being listened to by people in power about refugee issues and concerns (Best, 2003).

At the start of this chapter I shared an excerpt from a conversation I had with Devran in which he said, “No, you can’t. You can’t imagine what it is like. That’s okay. But you can’t understand what it is like” (Interview with Devran, May 20, 2013). His response to my comment “I can only imagine” speaks to his and many of the other participants’ awareness of the gaps of understanding and possible (mis)hearings that come about as I engage with their stories. Their
stories and photographs also reflect our collaboration. My questions and interests in home and belonging were taken up by the oral history participants and reflected in the ways they told their stories and in our conversations with one another. My presence is reflected in their narratives. I am not only an audience, but also a co-collaborator in their storytelling (Ong, 1995; Frisch, 1990; Bornat, 2001; Sitzia, 1999, 2003; Yow, 2014; Alcoff, 1991; Manning, 1992).

“Do you understand?” was a way of speaking towards power, showing me that I was and am held accountable for my actions. One way that I have tried to honour the responsibility I have been given is to make sure that the knowledge produced in this research is distributed in a variety of media. One such medium is academic work: this dissertation and published academic articles. Another medium has been public advocacy for LGBT refugee housing, including a soon-to-be-published policy report, *Access to Housing in Metro Vancouver for LGBT Newcomers*.31 These are just the beginning, and my responsibility to the participants will remain long after these works are completed.

Kat: *So, why are you interested in participating in this project?*

Samuel: *Well, I saw your ad at Qmunity about wanting interviewees and the possibility of doing photography. I’m an amateur photographer, and I liked the idea of telling my story of home and belonging through pictures. So, I don’t know, but it sounded fun to me. I thought, why not?* (Interview with Samuel, April 23, 2014)

Samuel’s answer to my question speaks to another popular sentiment all of the participants expressed in the oral history interviews and participatory photography. Being able to share their stories was seen as an important chance to reflect on their lives and express themselves. The ability to craft their narratives outside the rigid confines of the refugee process

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31 *Access to Housing in Metro Vancouver for LGBT Newcomers* was created in partnership with MOSAIC, PRISM, ISS, Rainbow Refugee, Qmunity, Battered Women’s Support Services, Vancouver Survivors of Torture, and the I Belong campaign. The report is expected to be finalized and available to the public by the summer of 2016.
was seen as an opportunity to tell or retell their stories. Many enjoyed the chance to reflect on their experiences and talk about their journeys to an outside audience (non–LGBT refugees).

Some of the participants came to the project because they liked the research focus on home and felt that it would be interesting to talk about and explore through pictures what home meant to them. As Hector explained in a previous section, he had thought about home a lot before coming to this project and was attracted to this research because of its questions about home. Many of the participants found the research questions relevant to their lives and wanted to address them.

The majority of the participants who undertook the participatory photography portion of the project came to it because they enjoyed the previous experience of the oral history interviews and liked the prospect of undertaking an artistic project. Many agreed to participate because they simply liked taking pictures and thought it would be fun. Without their enthusiasm and interest in expressing themselves, this project might have turned out very differently. These participants volunteered their time and energy to explore new ways of expression and share their creative talents with a wider audience.

**Kat:** *What are you hoping to get out of this project?*

**John:** *I want to be remembered. It’s, how you say, “I have more days behind me than in front of me.” I am getting older. I am alone. I am away from family. Who will remember me when I am gone? I want my story to be remembered. I want to tell my story.*

(Interview with John, August 17, 2013)

John’s response speaks to a shared desire by some of the participants to be remembered and have their stories preserved in text and photographs. It also speaks to the right to memory that many LGBT refugees are denied. Because they are marginalized, LGBT refugees’ stories are absent from the national histories of both their countries of origin and Canada. Their stories are not recorded and preserved in national archives. Instead, they must rely on being remembered
by their friends and loved ones. This can be a great challenge for LGBT refugees, who may be isolated and marginalized in the predominantly white and middle-class LGBT community of Metro Vancouver. John D’Emilio (2002) writes that the right to be remembered and the right to memory have been denied to most queer persons because of the heterosexism, transphobia, and homophobia present in society. The refusal to include queer voices in national archives has led many queer communities to develop their own archives (Robinson, 2014). Yet, these archives are not neutral collections (Marshall, 2014); they are often only the voices of public figures or persons who did extraordinary deeds. There is also the question of privilege and access to resources and means of documentation. The majority of queer archives in Canada and in the United States include only the voices of white and middle-class queer citizens and communities (Boyd, 2008; Ramirez, 2002). LGBT refugees are not only removed from relationships of memory with family and loved ones in their countries of origin, but also denied participation in relationships of memory and community archives within the larger queer community of Metro Vancouver (Chambon, 1995; Bhati & Ram, 2001). The fear of being forgotten is very real for many LGBT refugees.

Jacques Derrida (1987), Achille Mbembé (2002), and John D’Emilio (2002) have argued that archives are invested in authority. Archives can be sites of power and a vantage point from which to promote social justice and ethical responsibility. Agreeing to participate in this project was a way for the participants to fight against their silencing and to preserve their stories for future generations. By doing this, the participants were forging new relationships of memory with me and with a wider audience. Through their stories and photographs, the participants were placing themselves as historical subjects and fighting against the archival dearth (Robinson, 2014; Marshall, 2014; Madden, 2013; Clarke, 2004; Perez, 2003). Their stories and photographs
are also an archive of feeling that represents the emotions and meanings embedded within them. Instead of static physical documents of text and photographs, the stories and pictures collected represent the dynamic actions taken by the participants and by me. The participants gave me the responsibility to be an archivist and a reader of their stories and creative products. Judith Halberstam (2005) argues that the archive is not a neutral repository, but a place of theory of cultural and historical relevance, an ongoing construction of collective memory, and a complex and contradictory record of queer lives and activity. The archive requires users, readers, interpreters, and historians to interact with and analyze the material to create an ongoing dialogue (Halberstam, 2005). As an archivist and reader, my role is not neutral, passive, or apolitical (Mbembe, 2002). The interviews and participatory photography are products of my interactions with the participants. My goal for this project was as much a documentation of LGBT refugees’ stories as a production of critique and knowledge. The stories and photographs collected therefore require analysis and interpretation.

2.7 Analysis of the Data and the Structuring of the Thesis

June: So, what will your paper look like finished?

Kat: To be honest, I am still figuring it out. Do you have any suggestions?

June: I don’t know. Maybe be like displays of people. Displays of stories. Different stories. Different pictures. Like a gallery?

[laughs] But I don’t know how you would write that... I’m glad I am not a writer. I am an artist. (Interview with June, September 2013)

Some researchers make a geographical and physical distinction between “the field” and the place where they write their findings; my separation between “in the field” and “out of the
field” was less distinct. I continued to be actively engaged with my participants and the larger LGBT refugee community as a volunteer and researcher throughout the research; the participants and I would frequently meet over coffee. We also worked together on other arts-based community projects addressing refugee legislation and better visibility and services for LGBT refugees in Metro Vancouver. Several of the participants came to the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University with me as invited guest speakers in women’s and gender studies courses. Together, we worked as guest speakers and organizers for several community events at the Queer Film Festival, the International Day of Refuge, and local Pride parades. I also continued my weekly volunteering with Rainbow Refugee.

Every time I would meet or work with the participants, the research would inevitably come up. They would ask me about my progress. I would talk about the stage I was at in analysis or writing. I talked about any conclusions or insights I was forming, and they provided critical feedback. These conversations and interactions were incredibly helpful to me, and I cannot express the extent of my gratitude. The participants went above and beyond what was required of them.

After two years of data collection, I was left with more than twenty hours of formal interviews with settlement workers, more than sixty hours of oral history interviews with LGBT refugees, more than fifty photographs taken and/or donated by LGBT refugees, and three years of field notes. My analysis was directed primarily by the photographs and narratives collected. What came out of my reading, rereading, and multiple discussions of the data with the participants was the importance that relatedness has to their sense of home and belonging.

Through participants’ stories and pictures of settlement, I interpreted how their feelings about home and belonging were situated within interconnected webs of relationships.
Relatedness was a multi-sited and multi-temporal endeavour in which the participants situated themselves between their past countries of origin, their present settlement in Metro Vancouver, and their future desires. Feelings around being at home and belonging were dependent on the relations the participants made and maintained with different places in Metro Vancouver and abroad, as well as the connection participants had to their bodies and to significant others. Relatedness was also very relevant to the material aspects of immigration and settlement for the participants. It was through familial, romantic, and communal relationships that the majority of the participants were able to migrate to Canada, make asylum claims, and access housing and work. The multiple barriers the participants faced in obtaining adequate housing and building homes for themselves in Metro Vancouver were negotiated through concepts of relatedness. In this way, relatedness involves the relationships with other persons, places, and objects that individuals create and maintain with their bodies and emotions, as well as the material and structural aspects of migration and settlement.

Relationships serve as the overarching umbrella that connects the participants’ stories and photography in this work. Within the participants’ stories and photographs, I saw three narrative themes emerge: (1) relatedness with place, (2) relatedness with body, and (3) relatedness with partners. These three themes were present in all of the stories and were directly connected to the material, physical, emotional, social, and mnemonic relationships the participants had with other persons, places, and objects. Participants spoke about their settlement experiences through their relationships to place and their attachment to certain spaces. Participants talked about home and belonging through their relationships to their bodies, describing home as an embodied place of belonging and unbelonging. The intimate relationships participants had with their romantic
partners informed their reasons for making refugee claims and settling in Metro Vancouver. These intimate relationships continue to inform participants’ sense of home.

In organizing the material for this dissertation, I grouped the participants based on the dominant narrative theme (place, body, partner) present in their stories and photographs. This left the dissertation with three sections with three to four participants’ stories and photographs in each section. While the selection and placement of the participants reflects the dominant narrative themes present in their work, this placement is a structure imposed by me as the author. Relationships to place, body, and significant partners bleed into one another when talking about relatedness. However, by focusing on one dominant narrative theme as it relates to the participants’ stories, I am able to engage in these larger concepts around relatedness on an intimate and critical level.

I had initially intended to incorporate all of the participants into the final dissertation. However, as I continued to read and reflect on the participants’ stories and photographs, I realized that it was important for me to keep their stories as intact as possible in order for the complexity of their stories and pictures to be seen and for me to engage in critical discussion and reflection. I felt that exploring one story at a time gave me an opportunity to go into much more depth on the circumstances of each participant’s situation. Focusing on one story at a time also allowed me to be reflexive about my role in the storytelling and my interpretation of the stories. By arranging the dissertation around the participants’ narratives and the dominant themes found in their stories, my aim is to show their agency in crafting their stories as well as our involvement together as producers of knowledge. In many ways, the participants and I were sharing authority over the research as co-producers. However, in very fundamental ways, the power dynamics between us were unequal. I hold the interpretative and editorial authority of the
written dissertation as the researcher and writer. In this position, I have had to make some very difficult decisions about which stories to include and which not to include. The limited space meant that I had to make cuts, and this was by far the most difficult part of writing this dissertation. I sacrificed valuable, highly informing stories of people who generously gave their time and energy to this project. I am firmly accountable for their silencing in this work because of this. My ethical responsibility to them is to ensure that the time and energy that they donated will not be wasted, and that their stories will be used in future publications and advocacy projects.32

I decided to focus this dissertation on ten LGBT refugees who participated in the oral history interviews and the participatory photography. Two of the participants participated in just the oral history portion of the project, while the rest participated in both the oral history and the participatory photography. Narrowing the dissertation to this group of participants provided me the rare opportunity to critically and intimately engage with and reflect on each of their stories and photographs. My selection was based on the different and unique perspectives their stories brought to investigating relatedness in home and belonging. Similar to an artistic exhibition or a museum display, I consciously selected and placed participants under one of the three sections because their stories brought interesting and different perspectives to relatedness, home, and belonging as they apply to place, body, or partner. What came out of this were three chapters within each section, each focused on the stories/photographs of one participant (except in the case of Juliet and Sara, a couple whose stories and photos are shared together in one chapter).

32 Several of the participants’ excerpts not presented in this dissertation have already been presented at the Social Practice of Human Rights conference (2015) and the With/Out Borders conference (2014), and are soon to be published in upcoming articles and in the Access to Housing in Metro Vancouver for LGBT Newcomers report.
My analysis of the participants’ stories and photographs is analytical, theoretical, and reflexive. I engage in “generous contextualization” (Dossa, 2004, 28; Razack, 1998; Smith, 1999; Brotman & Kranio, 1999) by citing relevant literature in the body of the narrative texts in order to unmask systems of complicity and oppression that marginalize LGBT refugees. I also explore relevant theoretical arguments about relatedness, place-making, embodiment, performance, emotion, affect, and memory. Long block quotes, photographs, and participatory observations are employed in this text as a way to avoid creating a finite conclusion or outcome of the participants’ narrative (Kojima, 2015). I employ Trinh T. Minh-ha’s (1990) format of “speaking nearby,” in that I do not speak for or over the stories and photographs present here (Chen, 1992; Wood, 2001). I encourage the reader to engage with them as well as with my interpretation of them. Ruth Behar (1996) advocates showing the seams in the research; as much as possible, I try to show my presence in the text by making it clear where I am interpreting and where the participants are interpreting. This recognizes the multiple knowledge producers in this text and offers the opportunity for readers to engage with the participants’ stories from their own viewpoints.
3 Homing in Between Two (Un)Homey Places: Relatedness and Place for Racialized Gay Refugees

Stories of Devran, Mario, & John

In this section, I explore place-making and relatedness in home and belonging through the narratives and photographs of three refugees presently living in Metro Vancouver who made asylum claims based on sexual orientation. Devran, Mario, and John have different migratory journeys and experiences of settling in Metro Vancouver based on country of origin, period of arrival, educational background, age, class, and ethnicity. Devran is a gay/bisexual-identified cisgender man in his early thirties who immigrated to Metro Vancouver from the Middle East with a student visa in 2010 and received his positive refugee decision in 2012; he is now a permanent resident. Mario is a gay-identified cisgender male refugee in his mid-thirties who immigrated to Metro Vancouver from Central America in 2000 as a student and received his refugee status in 2004; he is now a Canadian citizen. John is a gay-identified cisgender man in his mid-forties from East Asia who came to Metro Vancouver on a visitor’s visa in 2011 and received his refugee status in 2012. John is now a permanent resident.

Relatedness and place form a central narrative thread in each of Devran’s, Mario’s, and John’s stories of home and belonging. I argue that the relationships are central elements that shape LGBT refugees’ experiences of home and belonging. Devran, Mario, and John approach aspects of relatedness through different avenues, such as their relationships to family and culture abroad and relationships with various communities in Metro Vancouver. Their social positioning in Metro Vancouver affects the kinds of relationships that Devran, Mario, and John (re)create.
These relationships also inform their sense of being “in place” or “out of place”. Home is informed by the social, emotional, and mnemonic relationships that they attach to certain places within Metro Vancouver and abroad. All three of the participants experience being simultaneously at home and not at home in Metro Vancouver because of their social positioning as racialized gay refugees. They experience social isolation as well as acceptance in both their countries of origin and their current location in Metro Vancouver, which makes them feel that they are dwelling in the in-between of different homes.

Research on place-making and home for refugees has revealed the dynamic relationship between people, spaces, and places (Brun, 2001). Home is a boundary-making exercise in which individuals enhance awareness of themselves and their sense of order in the world (Valentine, 2007). Knowing where you belong, what places are “homey” and “unhomey,” and who you are in relation to your home(s) involves making decisions about points of connection to or disconnection from ideas, objects, spaces, and other people (Elwood, 2000). Spaces refer to the physical locations and landscapes (buildings, streets) as well as geopolitical sites (cities, states) with which refugees interact in their daily lives. These spaces include sites that refugees currently inhabit and physically engage with, but can also be locations refugees have inhabited or passed through, and/or have strong social, emotional, material, or relational connections to. Place refers to the emotional, social, and material meanings attributed to a particular space and individuals’ connections to them (Massey, 1994). Doreen Massey’s (1994; 2005) analysis of space and place as being continuously constructed by social interactions and relations serves as the basis for my understanding of how LGBT refugees’ relationships to space/place are changing, intersectional, and highly contested. Instead of providing a descriptive, static, and ahistorical analysis of space and place, Massey urges researchers to see space and place as
always being “constituted through complex social interactions, power, and local/global contexts” (1994, 3; Lee, 2003). This calls for a relational sense of space and place in which both are constructed from the multiplicity of social relations: “Place is the particular articulation of those relationships, a particular moment in those networks of social relations and understandings” (Brun, 2001, 15). Thinking of space and place in this way implies that they are open and porous. Individuals holding different positions in relation to a particular place experience and interpret the social relations to that place differently. As products of ever-changing relations, the meanings and identities attached to a place go beyond the particular area or space. Individuals and communities continually constitute and contest the meanings and significances of place within local, national, and global contexts. The identities and meanings of place are unfixed and changing because the social relations out of which they are constructed are dynamic, mobile, and shifting (Lee, 2003). There is no authenticity of place. Places are not timeless (Massey, 1994, 121). The past is not more fixed than the present. The identity of any place, including a place called home, is always open to contestation (Calvez & Ilves, 2009, 169). Place is therefore an active process (Massey 1994, 141; Lee, 2003) constituted by people invested differently in relation to a particular space, each other, and other geographies. Understanding what it means to be situated in a particular place and how refugees are attached and attach themselves affectively in the world allows researchers to interrogate refugee settlement beyond the confines of national boundaries (Waite & Cook, 2011; Baldassar, 2008).

Building on this literature, I seek to address the particular experiences Devran, Mario, and John faced as gay refugees settling in Metro Vancouver. Elspeth Probyn (2004a; 2004b), Andrew Gorman-Murray (2009; 2008; 2007; 2006), Natalie Oswin (2008), Anne Marie Fortier (2003; 2002; 2001), and David Bell and Gill Valentine (1995) argue that subjectivities are
inherently spatial in that we orient ourselves to space and are oriented in space: “Subjectivities are always constituted in situ, through what people do, think and feel within social relations and structures of power that comprise different spaces, such as homes, schools, pubs or sports fields” (Waitt & Gorman-Murray, 2011, 1383). This idea is very important as it relates to sexual and gender minorities, for whom many spaces are off limits because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Boyd, 2010; Bell, 1995; Hubbard, 2000; Myslik, 1996; Nash, 2005). David Bell (1991), Jon Binnie (1997), and Gill Valentine (2007) write that space does not have pre-existing sexual identities; it is not “naturally” or implicitly heterosexual, but rather actively produced and regulated by state and society to normalize and privilege heterosexuality. The presence of non-normative sexualities and queer bodies in spaces, or their taking over of spaces (such as in gay bars), forces researchers to interrogate how “the city streets, the malls, and the motels, have been produced as (ambiently) heterosexual, heterosexist, and heteronormative” (Bell & Valentine, 1995, 18).

Through a focused exploration of their narratives and photographs, I look at how Devran, Mario, and John relate their sense of home to relationships they reconstruct in and to place(s) in Metro Vancouver and elsewhere. The narratives and photographs provide perspective on the possibilities and constraints that come from being in a particular place, here exemplified by Metro Vancouver’s legacy of settler colonialism, multiculturalism, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism. This facilitates critique of the political, economic, and social systems surrounding refugee settlement in Metro Vancouver and offers much-needed insight into the intersections of race, sexuality, gender, and class as they apply to research on place-making and constructions of home for LGBT refugees. Home for Devran, Mario, and John lies in the in-between, as they negotiate the relationships between their current homes in Metro Vancouver and their previous
homes in their countries of origin. I thus argue against the static and bounded construction of home and instead highlight the ways in which home can be non-binary and fluid through queer refugees’ social, emotional, and mnemonic relationships.

3.1 Devran

Figure 3.1 Devran in the Garden with Smokey

(Source: Picture Taken by Katherine, February 2014)

Notes from May 9, 2013: “Meeting Devran”

When I first met Devran, the Rainbow Refugee drop-in room at Qmunity\textsuperscript{33} was filled with people going through the refugee process, for whom a drop-in information meeting was about to begin. Although it was cold, dark, and rainy outside, it was warm and bright in the cramped room, with people talking to one another excitedly before the start of the meeting. As people came into the room, others ran up to them to hug, shake hands, or introduce themselves. When the room began to quiet down, one of the Rainbow Refugee volunteers asked everyone to introduce themselves to the group. As each person started to talk, listeners leaned on the edges of their chairs or craned their necks in order to see and hear.

Devran was sitting on a chair by one of the two windows in the room. When it was his turn to introduce himself, he leaned backward, put his arms around his chest, and smiled.

\textsuperscript{33} The Rainbow Refugee drop-in meetings are held at the Qmunity queer resource community centre. Qmunity is located at the corner of Thurlow and Davie Streets, in Vancouver’s Davie Village, the historic gay district of Vancouver.
“Hello. My name is Devran. Most of you know me by now. I made my refugee claim last year. I was successful.”

The group started clapping. Some of the people whispered to one another. Many were smiling and shouting congratulations to Devran.

Devran waved for them to stop. He nodded to the group, smiled, and laughed: “Yes, well, it was last year that it happened. So you don’t need to congratulate me anymore. Now the real work for me begins.” He looked at one of the volunteers and shook his head, laughing.

“But don’t worry about that now. For those of you making your refugee claim, this is what is most important. I am here to help.”

One month after this meeting, I advertised for interview participants on my Facebook page, the Rainbow Refugee email listserv, and the Qmunity message board. Devran was the first to respond. He had already participated in another PhD student’s research on queer refugees’ hearings, and when we met to talk about the project and sign the confidentiality forms, Devran said he was “very familiar” with being a “research subject” and felt comfortable participating. Knowing that I was interested in LGBT refugees’ experiences of home and belonging, Devran wanted to participate in this project because he felt that sharing his experience could help other LGBT refugees. As he said at our first interview, “We only think about the refugee hearing, but it doesn’t stop once you get your positive decision. I think it gets harder in some ways” (Devran, May 20, 2013).

This section focuses on Devran’s settlement in Vancouver through his oral history and photography. The first part follows Devran’s arrival to Canada, his refugee process, and the post-refugee experience. In this part, Devran talks about the financial difficulties and discrimination he experienced as a refugee claimant and after his refugee hearing. Devran’s story then shifts from the financial and social difficulties he experienced to talking about the emotional and
relational aspects of trying to create a home for himself between two unhomey places (his country of origin and his current home in Vancouver).

I explore how Devran’s feelings of belonging are situated within relational attachments and his connection to place(s). I focus on how Devran negotiates his sense of duty and commitment to his family living back in his country of origin while also creating a new life for himself as an openly gay man in Canada. His stories, experiences, and practices of kinship show a far more complex consideration of family and kinship than has been previously described in research on LGBT refugees. I explore Devran’s homing narratives and practices with his current home in Vancouver. Devran’s home in Vancouver is both a material space and an emotional place grounded in social relationships and cultural attachment. Home is created through a series of homing practices that help Devran gain a sense of familiarity in an unfamiliar place. These practices include the cooking and sharing of food from Devran’s home region and smoking a hookah. Devran’s apartment and the cultural practices he observes contribute to both settling and unsettling Devran in his current home in Vancouver as well as his previous home in the Middle East.

3.1.1 “Because in Canada people actually don’t like refugees.”
Devran’s Immigration to Canada and Post-Refugee Process

Devran had lived in Canada for almost three years when I first sat down to interview him. He was in his early thirties and identified himself as “someone from the Middle East,” and as both a gay and a bisexual cisgender man who “leans more on the gay side.” Devran came to Canada in the fall of 2010. He wanted to leave his Middle Eastern country because he was “tired
of having to act straight all the time in order to survive” (Devran, May 20, 2013). Devran’s family did not know that he was gay, and only a few of his closest friends knew.

Devran was also experiencing pressure from his country’s government to fulfil his mandatory military service. He was able to get his military service deferred for several years because of school and various medical problems, but Devran was fearful for his safety as a gay man serving in the military.

Kat: Why were you forced to leave your country?

Devran: I wasn’t forced. I decided to come to Canada.

Kat: Well what made you decide to come to Canada?

Devran: Kat, I chose Canada. I decided to leave the Middle East because it was just torturing me to live as a gay man in a Muslim country.

I wanted to be free. I was checking different countries online. I was between United Kingdom, USA, and Canada, and my final decision was Canada because I was doing lots of research. I found out that Canada had a lot of protection and rights for gay people.

I also found out that Canada doesn't have a Canadian profile. So it is easier to fit in, because it has lots of Asian people, lots of Middle Eastern people, lots of African people, blah, blah. People are not really looking to Middle Eastern people as a second-class people.

I learned now that that’s not true. But then I thought it was. I thought that Canada doesn't have a history, doesn't have anything. It’s a young country. No thousand year grudges like in my country and all the violence because of religion. I thought I’d be more comfortable here, that was the thing. I thought I could be free to make whatever life I wanted.

But, I always wanted to leave the Middle East, actually. I didn't want to just come to Canada for a year's stay. I wanted to find a place to live permanently where I could be myself.

Most people thought that it was just something that I was dreaming about. They thought it wouldn’t happen, because it's not really easy to leave a country in the Middle East to come to North America because it costs a lot, and people think that it could cost a lot to live here too. Also it is difficult to even get into the country. Like to get a visa to come here. Especially from my country.
They just assume that you can't work; you need lots and lots and lots of money. But, I was sure that if I came here, I could easily find a way to live here. So I just thought that I had to worry about the cost coming here.

[laughs] I was so stupid (Devran, May 20, 2013).

Devran’s response, “Kat, I chose Canada,” speaks to his educating me about his experiences as well as complicating the narrative around his migration. My initial question was informed by my experiences as a volunteer at Rainbow Refugee and observing refugee hearings. The IRB routinely asks, “Why were you forced to leave your country?” I usually ask this of refugee claimants while preparing for upcoming refugee hearings to ensure that they are ready to give a clear and concise answer. Devran’s response to my question pushed me to reconsider how I engage the participants in their stories and to think about the ways in which the language of being “forced” may create a flattened narrative that silences refugees’ agency in their migration. Instead of talking about his migration to Canada as a single narrative of being forced to leave, Devran unsettled my initial framing of his story by emphasizing his choice in his relocation. Devran’s ideas about Canada also speak to how Canada is portrayed internationally as a young, progressive, peaceful country accepting of immigrants and minorities. Unfortunately, this popular image hides Canada’s real history as a settler colonial state whose immigration policies continue to follow hierarchal racial, gendered, classed, and sexual lines.

Devran decided to come to Vancouver because of the warmer weather and the large and active gay community. It took months of preparation and waiting before Devran was able to get his student visa to come to Canada. Devran’s socioeconomic position as a cisgender, middle-class, university-educated, able-bodied man provided him the opportunity to learn English fluently and work at several well-paying jobs in his home country. This allowed Devran to pass the English language requirements to qualify for an international student visa, and to save
enough money for the cost of tuition and travel. Devran’s ability to get a student visa in a relatively short amount of time (though considerably longer than for those applying from the United States or Europe) speaks to the larger political and socioeconomic forces that privilege cisgender men, non-ethnic minorities, and middle-class individuals wanting to migrate (Baldwin, Cameron, & Kobayashi, 2011, 1-19; Li, 2003, 100-122, 124-144; Jakubowski, 1997, 15; Fuller & Vosko, 2008).

Devran planned to use his student visa to enter Canada and to find a path to permanent residency after arriving. After six months in Canada, Devran left the university he was attending and tried to find a permanent job in Canada. Despite an extensive job search, Devran could not find an employer that would sponsor him for a work visa. He looked for other options for residency and eventually learned through Internet research that he could make a refugee claim in Canada. While searching the Internet, Devran learned about Rainbow Refugee and their monthly drop-in information meetings. Devran went to Rainbow Refugee’s drop-in meeting the following month.

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34 It is not commonly known outside of or even within Canada that it is possible to claim asylum in Canada on the basis of sexuality and/or gender identity. Media reports on asylum claimants and research on refugees remain largely heteronormative, with the focus on heterosexual and cisgender male and female individuals and families. It is common for individuals escaping persecution because of their sexual orientation or gender identity not to know that they can make a refugee claim at a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees office in a neighbouring country or at the Citizenship and Immigration Council office in Canada.
Figure 3.2 Rainbow Refugee Meeting Room

(Source: Photograph taken by Devran, February 2014)

Figure 3.3 View of Davie Street from Rainbow Refugee Meeting Room

(Source: Photograph taken by Devran, February 2014)
Devran: This picture is someplace which feels like a little bit friendly or more like home.

Kat: Do you remember your first Rainbow Refugee drop-in?

Devran: Of course! I came a little bit early, as usual. I met a volunteer there. She [the volunteer] was with me. Yeah, I came in. I talked about my situation. I did my refugee claim without getting any help from anyone—the claim part, the first part. I didn’t even have a lawyer. I did everything by myself. I was reading stuff online, but then I came here to get some help. I wasn’t expecting much from Rainbow Refugee, and I was feeling negative about my refugee claim as well because it wasn’t very easy to believe that the country might give me citizenship, at least a way to get citizenship just because I’m gay and it’s so hard to live in Middle East as a gay person. So I was just expecting to be rejected, and people told me that Canada accepts people if they have a good claim. I just really, I just couldn’t believe. But it was good. I don’t remember how my first feelings were about Rainbow Refugee, but I wasn’t even going there to get lots of help. I was just going there to belong to somewhere. I needed a place to call home. (Devran, February 15, 2014)

Devran waited a year for his refugee hearing. His health began to deteriorate because of stress and he was not able to work or support himself. Devran went on social assistance, which provided him with five hundred and forty-six dollars a month on which to live. This amount was not enough to cover the cost of Devran’s rent (seven hundred dollars) and other living expenses.

Devran: There's no way for you to imagine that kind of stress without getting in that process yourself. I got sick several times. I got ZONA, which is a very very painful version of shingles. I couldn't move my body for over two months. I was sitting like a corpse. And when I move my body, my back and my stomach was hurting a lot. So I couldn't work.

I got into a lot of debt actually because Vancouver is a very expensive city to live in. Especially if you are not working. It's not possible. I was just getting welfare and welfare doesn't cover even my rent. So I was getting into debt. Deep and deep and deep into debt. I felt like I was lost. I felt like I was drowning. It was a terrible place to be. I thought it was over for me. (Devran, May 20, 2013)

There were few social services that Devran could obtain help from as an in-land refugee claimant. Currently, four institutions in Metro Vancouver primarily serve in-land refugees: Legal
Aid, Bridge Clinic, Settlement Orientation Services (SOS), and Inland Refugee Society. Bridge Clinic provides free health services to refugee claimants (Interview with SOS, May 2013; Interview with ISS, May 2013). Settlement Orientation Services and Inland Refugee Society provide basic support, helping refugee claimants get in touch with Legal Aid and find emergency shelter, assisting with work permits and permanent residency applications, and providing a limited clothes and food bank. In-land refugees do not have access to the majority of federal and provincial immigrant services, such as MOSAIC or Immigration Services Society, which provide free ESL courses, job-training and -finding services, housing assistance, housing advocacy, temporary housing, food banks, health care, community support, and counseling, until after they receive their permanent residency.

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35 Legal Aid, provided by the Legal Services Society in British Columbia, provides funding for approximately nine hours of representation for eligible refugee claimants, including legal counselling, refugee claim preparation, and attendance at the refugee hearing. The Legal Services Society may also provide legal services to refugee claimants to appeal a negative decision. The Legal Services Society determines eligibility for Legal Aid based on the claimant’s income status and proof that the claimant has no funds to pay for a legal representative.

36 Bridge Clinic is a free health clinic that services refugee claimants and government-sponsored refugees in Vancouver.

37 SOS is a provincially funded organization that assists in-land and government-assisted refugees. SOS provides advisory and counselling support to in-land refugee claimants in applying for Legal Aid, work permits, and permanent residency.

38 Inland Refugee Society is the primary service provider for incoming refugee claimants, and the oldest in Vancouver. Inland Refugee Society addresses basic needs (food, clothing, shelter) and provides orientation services to help claimants understand the refugee process.

39 MOSAIC is a provincially funded organization that provides counselling, education, and training to incoming permanent residents of British Columbia.

40 Immigrant Services Society is a provincially and federally sponsored program for incoming government-assisted refugees. ISS provides housing, income support, counselling, job training, and education.
Devran’s refugee hearing was held in December 2012. He described his hearing as a chance to be “fully honest and tell his truth” to the refugee board member (Devran, May 20, 2013).

Kat: What was your refugee hearing like?

Devran: It was really great. My friends from Rainbow Refugee were observers. My lawyer was next to me. I was very straight with the judge. Like I said before, it was my truth. I had to tell the truth. I told him why I couldn’t go back to [country of origin]. I said they would arrest me at the airport because of evading military service. I told him how I couldn’t live there as a gay man. That’s all true. There’s no lie.

After the judge asked me a few questions, I think he was ready to give me a positive decision. The lawyer didn’t have to ask me questions. We took a break and came back. The judge gave me a positive decision. He thanked me for giving such a straightforward testimony.

I shook the judge’s hand. It was a great day...a really great day. One of the proudest days of my life. I will always remember it (Devran, May 20, 2013).

When I asked Devran what he thought his future would look like after the refugee hearing, he said that at the time, he thought the hard part was over. Throughout his year of ill health and trying to support himself before the hearing, Devran had worried that he would not be able to build a life for himself in Vancouver. After the hearing, Devran wanted to finally start “settling down” in the city. He was eager to find a well-paying job and work to pay off his debts. He adopted a cat, Smokey, as a celebration, and wanted to start buying better furniture for his apartment and inviting friends over for dinner. Unfortunately, Devran continued to struggle with unemployment and ill health.

Devran: Well, the thing is that I was being a child, and I was just saying that as long as I get accepted, everything will be solved. Everything else is pretty easy. It’s just about the hearing. So some part of that thought is right because the hearing is the most important part. And if you don’t get accepted, there’s no logic in making plans for anything else in Canada. But I wasn’t expecting for life to be so hard after the hearing. And nobody does, actually. People think that after the hearing that everything will be just very easy. But it’s not.
Because in Canada, people actually don’t like refugees. People see refugees as...I don’t know, like...who are going to just abuse the social system and try to live on welfare and use the health care without paying back to the community.

Some part of it is true because there are some refugees doing that. There are also a lot of people who are born here that do that, too. But just because of these negative opinions, you can’t easily find jobs. You can’t build a future for yourself here. You can’t even have a proper home. And I don’t understand that. (Devran, May 20, 2013)

Devran tried for more than three years after his hearing to find a stable job that would pay enough for him to live on. His permanent residency application was delayed for two years because he could not afford the application fee and medical examination. The application fee for permanent residency is five hundred and fifty dollars for the principle applicant, with each additional member costing another five hundred and fifty dollars.\textsuperscript{41} Medical exams can cost over two hundred dollars not including additional fees for x-rays or specialized tests. Police certification can range from less than twenty dollars up to one hundred dollars depending on the country or countries required. The total can add up to over eight hundred dollars. The fees required for permanent residency, medical exams, and police certificates are especially difficult to pay for those living on social assistance. Further, the waiting time to receive permanent residency is one to two years. Without his permanent residency, Devran was ineligible for many of the free job training and counselling services offered to landed immigrants. He could only be assigned a temporary work permit, which created difficulty in finding employment, as employers were reluctant to hire him. His limited Canadian work experience meant that Devran was constantly being rejected for job opportunities in fields for which he had education and work experience.

\textsuperscript{41} Cost of permanent residency for a child under 19 years is one hundred and fifty dollars.
In the highly competitive Metro Vancouver job market, a dependable professional and social network is a necessary part of the employment search. WorkBC offers free professional services to immigrants, refugees, and unemployed persons, helping them to create their resumes and prepare for job interviews, and posting job advertisements. These services are helpful, but WorkBC rarely finds a person a job directly (SOS interview, May 2013). Social networking is usually the key to finding and maintaining a job in Metro Vancouver (Fuller & Vosko, 2008; Zuberi & Ptashnick, 2012; Teelucksingh & Galabuzi, 2005). In an atmosphere highly saturated with anti-immigration and -refugee sentiment, refugees must put a considerable amount of effort into trying to build their social networks (Ivanova, 2011; Ley & Lynch, 2012; Fielder, Schuurman, & Hyndman, 2006). An already established ethnic or cultural community in the area is a key resource for refugees in finding housing, employment, and other social support (Goldring & Landolt, 2012; Lightman & Gingrich, 2012; Interview with ISS, August 2013). However, LGBT refugees may not be able to connect to and rely on their ethnic or cultural communities to help them get settled and find jobs. LGBT refugees may face discrimination, harassment, and even violence from their cultural and ethnic communities. The larger LGBT community in Vancouver can be a resource for some LGBT refugees in their search for work, housing, and social support. However, LGBT refugees may face racism, classism, and transphobia within the predominantly middle-class queer community.

In trying to find a job, Devran reached out to people from his country of origin living in Metro Vancouver. He was afraid to tell these people he was gay because he feared harassment and news getting back to his family. Devran also kept secret that he was a refugee in case they asked him about the grounds for his refugee case.

Devran: Well, I had no success finding a job. Like, I sent my resume everywhere. Everywhere! So I started to engage with [country of origin] people. Because I need to do
lots of social networking to get a job. It is a small community here. And if I wasn’t trying to stay away from Middle Eastern people, it would be easier for me to find a job. I would use some connections with them. And it would be easier to find a job for sure. But there are negatives and positives coming at the same time. That’s why I am being a part of this [country of origin] community, and actually they want me to be kind of active with them. I volunteered at two events and now they really want me to be a part of their management of the community.

I am not sure if I want to do that because these are the people that I actually fled from. I am hiding from them that I am a refugee and I am gay. I am still acting like I am in my home country when I am with them. So I am not really happy around them.

Kat: Outside of this specific community, are you hiding your refugee status and sexual orientation?

Devran: No. Like, with other gay people, I tell them that I am a refugee. They don’t usually care. They get interested in my story. But it’s not like there are any jobs in the gay community. They don’t help me that way. That’s not the way that community is. Okay, well, gay refugees, well, that’s another thing. We do help each other. But we don’t have anything. So what can you do? [laughs]

Kat: What about the larger straight community? Do you feel that you have to hide your sexuality or refugee status?

Devran: Well, it depends. For white people, I don’t tell them all the time that I am gay. Because it really isn’t important. Like, I am not into gay pride. I don’t feel being gay is a pride thing. It’s just who I am. Who cares? I don’t talk about my refugee status. Because I know that Canadians don’t like refugees. They don’t like immigrants. So I don’t usually say anything.

So I don’t feel like hiding, actually, but I still keep my sexual identity secret from the Middle Eastern community because I am trying to survive. I learned how to survive as a closeted gay man. I didn’t go through rapes, torture, lots of beating because I was very careful. Because I was really good at hiding it in [country of origin], so I knew how to hide. I learned how to live like a straight person. Hiding is also a very tiring experience, and this is what I run away from. It wasn’t a choice of death, but it was the, I don’t even know how to put it into words, I was exhausted.

Yeah, so this why I came to Canada. I told you this before. I ran away from that hiding, and, unfortunately, here I still have to hide it from the Middle Eastern people because they gossip, they humiliate, they talk, they talk, they talk. That’s why I don’t tell them that I’m refugee. So I try to save it from Middle Eastern people, like, I don’t really have Middle Eastern friends other than one person. But the fact that I have to hide from the Middle Eastern community puts a limit on me. It forces me to have such a limited space.

Kat: What do you mean by limited space?
Devran: Well, space may not be the right word. But hiding is not really difficult, but more annoying. I get annoyed. If someone asks you what you are doing here in Canada...well, if someone asks you that, then they actually expect an answer more than, “I am working here.” They want to know about your situation and stuff. So I am avoiding that question and acting like I am regular immigrant. I never lied. I never told them a lie, I just don’t answer the question. I told one girl that I am a refugee. There’s nothing to hide, actually, but I don’t want people I don’t even know to judge me.

It’s just that I don’t care if they judge me, but I just don’t want to give them reasons to judge me, too. (Devran, July 9, 2013)

Devran’s description of the Middle Eastern community in Vancouver as homophobic and not accepting is not representative of the entire Middle Eastern community in Metro Vancouver. Like many other communities, the Middle Eastern community in Metro Vancouver is diverse and has within it many LGBT persons and allies. The same can be said for Devran’s portrayal of the larger white and heterosexual population of Vancouver as anti-refugee and anti-immigrant. However, it is important to recognize Devran’s perspective of the social world around him and the way he navigates it. Racialized LGBT refugees like Devran face the intersection of class, racial, sexual, and gender politics and discourses between their countries of origin and their countries of arrival. LGBT refugees must negotiate and maneuver through various communities in order to find resources and build social networks (O’Neill, 2010). Devran has to negotiate not only the anti-immigrant and racist sentiment present in mainstream Canadian society, but also the particular cultural, sexual, and gendered discourses and practices found in various ethnic/cultural immigrant communities in Vancouver. In order to navigate conflicting social attitudes and norms, Devran strategically hides his sexuality, ethnic identity, and refugee status as he tries to build contacts and a social network. This causes a lot of stress, as Devran must always be on guard when interacting with other individuals and communities.
3.1.2 “A very short little window…”
The Emotional and Relational Construction of Home(s)

Figure 3.4 of Smokey Staring out the Window

Figure 3.5 Smokey in the Afternoon Light

(Source: Photographs taken by Devran, February 2014)
Kat: So, what are these two pictures about?

Devran: Well, you could get very philosophical with these two pictures, but I chose them to show what life is for me in Canada. Well, I see here is like, this is what I could give him [Smokey]. A very short little window. Space, little window, because if I took the blinds higher than this, my privacy’s exposed, because I’m on the garden level, so this is the most I can give him, and...it is like somehow connected to my, my own situation because most of the refugees, not only me, we are not having everything this country offers to people who born here. We are facing barriers, as you know. Mostly, uh...well, people are not as accepting here as it is promoted for sure. This country, even though there aren’t any natives of Canada, other than a small bunch of people, they extend judgments about immigrants, not thinking that actually all immigrants came here from Europe, a number of centuries ago. But, like, they make it hard on you to plan for a future here. You just can’t do it.

The thing is, Canada, it’s not limiting my lifestyle as a gay man. The thing is with society’s opinions on refugee people, how hard it is to get a job, how hard it is to overcome the financial debts, and how hard it is to make friends. That is limiting the life. Like, without that, I cannot make a proper home for myself here.

Because these pictures are also very lonely. There are times that I stand there and I am watching outside myself and...I don’t know. I have a few friends, I know people, I don’t need to feel like really lonely, but the thing is, it is, it can never be the same kind of relationships you have with your friends who you grew up with. It’s impossible to have that kind of connection, so if I miss something, I miss that kind of connections. There is something there that cannot come here. (Devran, February 15, 2014)

In February 2014, Devran and I met at his apartment to talk about the photographs he had taken for the research project. We had met three times beforehand to do interviews and discuss research findings, and so that I could give Devran the camera to take the photographs. Devran was unemployed at the time of our interview and photography meetings. He was very worried about paying his living expenses and was experiencing increased stomach pains and anxiety. Devran felt that he had wasted almost three years of his life trying to find a job and build a future for himself, but had “nothing to show for it.” He considered going back to the Middle East and trying to survive there again as a closeted gay man. Devran thought that at least he would not have to worry about being homeless in the Middle East. He felt that he would be able to get his
old job back and support himself financially again. The thought of going back to the Middle East was very upsetting for him. Devran left his country of origin because he had to hide his sexuality, and he did not want to return and have to hide all over again. However, after almost three years of working to make ends meet, Devran felt that he hadn’t built a life for himself in Canada.

Devran adopted Smokey after his positive refugee decision as a way to celebrate and start his new life in Canada. Smokey represents the high hopes Devran had about his future in Canada. However, these hopes have now changed. What Devran thought Canada would be for him and what he actually experienced in Vancouver changed his perspective on home and his sense of belonging. Devran’s pictures of Smokey looking out his bedroom window represent his frustration at being unemployed. The pictures also represent the inequality and discrimination he experienced in the job market as a refugee, as a sexual minority, and as a racialized immigrant.

The pictures of Smokey carry meanings that are connected to and, at the same time, extend beyond Devran’s financial and material difficulties. As Devran explains, there is a feeling of loneliness in these photos. This loneliness is attached to Devran’s longing for the relationships he had back in his country of origin, as well as his desire for similar connections in his current home. Home is in flux between the spatial “here” of Vancouver and “there,” his country of origin, as well as shifting between past, present, and future. Yet, his past home came with its own alienation based on Devran’s being a gay man. The home Devran wanted to create for himself in Canada has not emerged in the way he imagined it would. The altering of what he thought his future would be in Canada affects how Devran sees his home in the present as well as in the past.

At the time these photographs were taken, Devran did not see a future for himself in Canada because of the discrimination he faced. Without a proper job and a stable income,
Devran could not financially and emotionally invest in his current home and did not feel “at home.” I see Devran’s efforts to create a sense of home and belonging occurring between two unhomey or inhospitable places: his country of origin and his country of arrival. It is in between these places that Devran must negotiate a sense of home and belonging.

Devran’s description of the Smokey pictures shows both the practical and material realities of his life, as well as his emotional and relational experiences post–refugee decision. These two aspects cannot be separated, as each informs the other. Studies on the affective realities of migrant worlds show how senses, feelings, and the material practices of travel and place collide, converge, and collapse in different ways (Madsen & Naerssen, 2003; Gray, 2008; Gilmartin, 2008; Quayson & Daswani, 2013; Beatty, 2013; Csordas, 1994:). Migration consists of emotional encounters formed through social interaction as well as by memories, imagination, expectations, and aspirations (Svašek, 2008, 218; Tonkin, 2006). Emotions are seen not as secondary or as separate from the economic, political, material, and social forces of migration, but as intricately connected in the ways that individuals experience, shape, and interpret the world around them, anticipate future action, and shape their subjectivities (Svašek, 2008, 218).
Devran: I took this picture because I used to drive out to Stanley Park a lot. It’s really beautiful at night. I would sit in my car and watch the city...I don’t know...I sometimes feel very trapped here. I can’t move forward in my life, so that’s one thing. But also, I can’t go home and visit my family. I haven’t seen my mom in over three years. I can’t help her or my sisters. So it’s like I can’t go anywhere. It’s very stupid because without my PR card, I can’t get my passport back. Without my passport, I can’t see my family. Every Canadian here has the right to leave the country and come back, but we can’t because we are refugees. I can understand why the Canadian government is doing this, but they should at least give you the chance for them to check your claim and see what you are making your claim on.

Like on my claim for refugee there was nothing saying that I can’t go back to my country at all. My claim was about that I can’t live in my country as a gay person. But I can definitely go back there and act straight in public for two weeks. Then I can go and support my sisters and my mother. Just the chance to hug my mom. It’s very simple. (Devran, February 15, 2014)

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42 The Figure of the Man Running is a statue on the beach.
When an individual makes a refugee claim, Citizenship and Immigration Canada takes custody of the person’s passport. The passport is returned once the person has permanent residency. The loss of a passport has profound emotional and practical effects on many refugees. The decision to come to Canada and make a refugee claim is a considerable sacrifice because of the financial and emotional burden of leaving families and friends behind. Refugees leave their countries of origin because of direct persecution and/or fear of persecution, but many still want the opportunity to return and visit family members and loved ones. Once the passport is returned, refugees are strongly advised not to return to their country of origin out of threat that they will be denied re-entry at the Canadian border. This same threat is also applied to refugees who travel too frequently outside of Canada. Until refugees receive their citizenship (and sometimes even after), they can still be removed from the country or denied entry by the Canada Border Services Agency (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2014). Refugees need to wait three years after receiving permanent residency before applying for citizenship.

The travel and financial limitations preventing refugees from seeing and supporting loved ones and friends force refugees to work through increasingly stricter migration and border controls to maintain contact with their respective kin (biological or non-biological) living abroad (Baldasser, 2008; Wilding, 2006; Binder & Tošić, 2005; Al-Ali, 2002; Doraï, 2003; Van Hear, 2006). For LGBT refugees, there is an additional layer related to sexuality and gender. LGBT refugee claimants like Devran make their refugee claims because they cannot live their lives safely as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or trans persons in their home countries. They have had to hide their sexual orientation and gender identity from their families and the outside world in order to avoid acts of violence against themselves and their families.
Canada is one of the few countries in the world that recognizes being forced to hide one’s gender identity and/or sexual orientation as a form of persecution (LaViolette, 2014). LGBT refugees do not necessarily have to experience direct corporal violence by the public or state in order for their claims of persecution to be accepted. The fact that these persons must hide their sexual orientation and gender identity for fear of persecution is supportive grounds for their refugee claims. The Canadian Refugee Board cannot demand the asylum claimant return to their country of origin and hide their sexual orientation and gender identity in order to avoid persecution. This means that LGBT refugee claimants can be accepted for asylum without ever having to reveal themselves or be publicly outed as gay, lesbian, or trans to their families, the public, or the state. In these cases, LGBT refugees can choose to reveal or not reveal their sexual orientation or gender identity to their families and friends back in their home countries. Some LGBT refugees eventually tell their families and friends that they are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or trans once they are accepted as Convention Refugees and can safely reside in Canada. Others do not for fear of rejection or because they do not want to cause unnecessary harm or danger to their family and friends.

Devran: The thing is that I’m the only son. My father passed away when I was young. And my sisters are married. So my mother is alone. And in [country of origin] culture, the son takes care of his parents. But, I can’t do that here. I am stuck here [Canada]. It makes me really depressed because I can’t do anything for her. I want to send money. But, money can’t replace a son.

Kat: Does your mother know that you are gay?

Devran: No. There is no reason to tell her. That is stupid. I did not leave the country because of her. I left my country because I would be killed or raped if I did not hide. I would be in jail because of the military. She knows that I am a refugee. But, she thinks it is about not wanting to serve in the military. Not about being gay. She does not need to know about the people I have sex with. That is not important. Why does that matter? I am her son. That is what matters. But, coming here has meant that I had to abandon her so that I could live without hiding. (Devran, February 15, 2014)
Devran’s situation with his family back in his country of origin speaks to the tension that many racialized queer migrants face, as they are caught between the predominantly Western queer rhetoric/ideology of being public about their sexuality/gender identity and the commitment to and care for their biological family and culturally gendered roles. In his work on the queer Asian diaspora in Vancouver, Dai Kojima writes that Asian queer male immigrants face the pressures of Western queer liberatory rhetoric that labels the closet as something shameful and characterizes their Asian traditional cultural norms and practices of family and gender roles as homophobic, culturally backward, and patriarchal. Some may choose to keep their sexuality secret from their families living abroad not out of shame, but out of care and consideration for their families. It is a way for them to maintain close connections with their families and culture without having to face judgment and cause unneeded separation. Kojima writes that in many instances the distance between queer Asian male immigrants and their biological families allows for closer relationships that may not have developed if these persons were still living in their homelands. Queer Asian male immigrants can explore their sexuality and have queer relationships without the immediate social pressures of family and gender norms. At the same time, these men can honor and practice their familial and cultural gender roles as sons and male providers (Kojima, 2014).

Experiences of home are shaped not only by sexuality, but also by gender, age, class, and ethnicity (Fortier, 2003; Eng, Munoz, & Halberstam, 2005; Nero, 2005). Mobility is another factor that highlights the different attachments to place and individuals’ feelings of home and connection to place (Kojima, 2015). This is especially important for LGBT refugees, as many do not migrate by choice, but are forced to flee because of persecution. Their migratory experiences differ from other queer experiences of migration because of the different state and institutional
structures they must navigate (such as the refugee process) in order to successfully resettle in a new location (O’Neill, 2010; Luibheid, 2004). Queer migration scholars Martin Manalansan (2003; 2010), Lionel Cantú (2009), and Gayatri Gopinath (2003), show that racialized or ethnic minority queer migrants do not simply reject one kinship for another when they move away from their biological familial homes and homelands. Instead, racialized queer migrants negotiate various kinships and cultural identifications that span cultural and geographical lines. This is significant for LGBT refugees, as the relationships and attachments they have to their families, their countries of origin, and their past are not easily separated from the relationships and attachments they have to their current locations (Kojima, 2014; Gopinath, 2003). When Devran talks about his family, he has not replaced one family and kinship attachment with another. Instead, he negotiates between his homeland, where his biological family lives, and his new home in Vancouver, where he can live openly as a gay man.
Devran: This is a picture that I took when I was doing my tax return. I was coming back from North Vancouver. I try to take the SeaBus whenever I can. I really love it because… uh, this thing is a reminder of [Country of Origin]. I used to get the Seabus…well, it has a different name in [Country of Origin], but….

Well, it’s better to have this trip in [Country of Origin] because you can be outside. It doesn’t have to be in an enclosed area. You can actually smell everything. You can smell the ocean. Still, it’s close enough.

Kat: What else does this picture remind you of?

Devran: Mostly it makes me remember spending good times with friends. I rode on these things a lot with friends and my family. These are the memories you have to give up on.

Kat: What do you mean by the memories you have to give up on?

Devran: If you are coming to this country, leaving your own country and coming to this country to live your entire life here, then you are erasing your memories from your old life, right? You have to do this in order to have the willpower to fight for yourself.
**Kat:** What do you mean by erasing the memories of your old life?

**Devran:** Well, you are not really erasing them, but you are giving up on them. You are not…[long pause]…there are some happy memories that you like to repeat time to time, right? You don’t have the chance to do that anymore.

You are just giving up what you really loved there. You are trying to avoid the terrible situations in your own country, but nobody cannot tell me that they didn’t have one good memory in their own country, right? Everybody has bad memories and good memories. Just depends on how many good memories you have over the bad memories.

**Kat:** Do you feel like that you have to give up on the good memories?

**Devran:** Of course! Like I told you, I had lots of friendships there. Like, it just hurts sometimes to think about it. Hurts sometimes and I don’t really care. I am not overly emotional or anything. But I know that I actually made a big sacrifice, too, to be able to stay here. Some people don’t understand that I gave up a lot to come here. I gave up on the good memories. (Devran, February 15, 2014)

Devran’s picture of the SeaBus and its connection to the people, objects, and landscapes of his homeland show how the intertwining of emotion and relatedness is a dynamic process “continuously under construction through everyday acts” (Carsten, 2000, 18). Devran’s experience of riding the SeaBus has a spatial dimension that is intertwined with the temporal past and present (Carsten, 2007). The routine trip on the SeaBus comes with memories and sensorial and affectual attachments that are situated within relationships to other persons and places. The SeaBus represents Devran’s attachment to his homeland as well as his situation in his present home. It is a form of relatedness in which the past, present, and future are happening simultaneously (Riaño Alcalá, Colorado, & Díaz, 2008, 80).

Devran’s description of the SeaBus picture also shows how his relationship to different places is both rooted and unrooted. Janet Carsten writes that place cannot be divorced from the persons and relations within it (Carsten, 2007). Places cease to be places without people, and, in turn, relationships are based in place. Place is therefore seen as deeply relational, as it is formed...
out of the social and emotional relationships we have with others in place, as well as those who are out of place (Kinefuchi, 2010). Devran’s pictures complicate this relationship between people and place as being cemented to certain relationships or stuck in a specific time/place. The SeaBus is a reminder of Devran’s past experiences with friends and loved ones. It also serves as an orienting device to Devran’s current situation in Vancouver. The Vancouver SeaBus ride can never be the same as the one in his country of origin. The sights and smells different, as are the relational and affectual attachments to the SeaBus ride. Likewise, the Seabus in his country of origin changes meaning as Devran’s memory of it is informed by his current location in Vancouver. This leads Devran to talk about how he has sacrificed his positive memories of home in order to live as a gay man free from persecution. “Erasing your memories from your old life” is an act of sacrifice and loss for Devran. At the same time, “erasing your memories” can also be seen as an act of reinvention and agency. It is a constant negotiation between emotional and relational attachments and commitments. Devran navigates all of this despite the limitations placed on his mobility by the Canadian state.
“There was closeness there that will never happen here. A different feeling…”

Settled and Unsettled: Homing Narratives and Practices

Figure 3.8 Devran’s Apartment Door

(Source: Photograph taken by Devran, February 2014)

**Devran:** When you asked about taking pictures of my home and what home meant to me, whatever you want to word it, I can’t come up with anything because since my refugee hearing I still couldn’t start a life in Canada for myself. It makes me embarrassed and a bit sad.
[opens the picture of the apartment door on his laptop]

Ok, sooo, yep. I couldn’t find what kind of pictures to take, not because I’m stupid, but because it was about home and I don’t have a home yet. This apartment is not a home. I can’t afford to have decent furniture or cook for friends here. I can’t afford to invest in this place. It’s too dark and tiny. So it doesn’t feel like home. It still feels like my home is still in the Middle East.

Yeah, but back to this picture. So, this door to my apartment is what I have to call home here. There’s not much to talk about it. I told you before this place where I’m living still don’t feel like a home to me. There’s something missing. Probably it’s about my lifestyle, my poor life standards, not having friends over. Once I find the proper job and get some money, I will probably move. I really want to build a proper home for myself. (Devran, February 15, 2014)

Devran’s description of his apartment illustrates that what makes a home may not necessarily be the physical house or apartment, but the relational meanings endowed on the place. Trinh T. Minh-Ha writes that “‘home’ in itself has no fixed territory; depending on the context in which it appears, it can convey the concept of settlement or unsettlement” (Minh-Ha, 2011, 53). Devran’s homeland and his current home in Vancouver are both places of feeling rooted and not rooted. Devran feels attachment to his homeland because of shared cultural understanding, history, and kinship. He feels attachment to his current home because of the opportunity it provides him to live openly as a gay man. These homes are also unhomey places where Devran has experienced discrimination and constraint. What I see in Devran’s story and photographs is that home for him is not a static place of rootedness, but a constantly shifting terrain that is attached to his social relationships.
Devran: This is a picture of the garden. I took this picture because I spend a lot of time here. I spend a lot of nights here smoking hookah and reading on my Kindle. I can see downtown Vancouver from the garden. At night it is really beautiful. I don’t know. This garden is the one thing I really like about my apartment. You don’t get spaces like this in Vancouver...

It would be so nice to share this space with friends. But, the thing is that I don’t have that many friends. It’s hard to make friends here when you are not born here. And I am not alone in saying this. Other refugees and immigrants say the same thing. Like, everyone is friendly here, but it’s actually really hard to make a friend. You know? Like someone coming over and having dinner with you. Canadians never do that. It is a waste of a good space. I wish that my situation here was different. (Devran, February 15, 2014)

Etsuko Kinefuchi writes that if emotional and relational ties with people are salient to the notion of home, a space that is not conductive to nurturing such ties fails to be a home (2010, 242). Home is intimately connected with understandings of identity and belonging (Fortier, 2003; Svašek, 2008, 215; Relph, 1976, 43; Imrie, 2004; Kinefuchi, 2010). All migrants face the question of identity and home, but experiences with these concepts vary immensely depending on the political, economic, cultural, and personal circumstances of their immigration and post-
migration lives. Identity and belonging are not fixed, but instead are in flux between different attachments. As Elspeth Probyn (1996) explains, identity and desire encompass a “desire for some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places, or modes of being, and the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fuelled by yearning rather than the positing of identity and belonging as a stable state” (Probyn, 1996, 19). The garden is a place where Devran can retreat and reflect during periods of stress in his life. It is also a place of yearning. Devran’s talk about the garden shows his yearning to belong and the social isolation he experiences as an immigrant.

Janet Carsten writes that home spaces “[offer] us a way of grasping the significance of kinship from the inside, through an exploration of the everyday intimacies that occur there” (2007, 206). Home is an “emotional investment in a particular material space” (Jones, 2007, 55). House and home have cultural meanings and feelings attached to them. Houses provide physical shelter, but they are also used to demarcate space, express feelings, situate individuals, and provide arenas for culturally defined activities. Migrants inhabit spaces through set practices and attachments that transform or (re)produce feelings of home (Sirriyeh, 2010). Fortier (2006), Sirriyeh (2010), and Probyn (1996) argue that home can be created through a set of practices that can offer more permanence and more shelter than any lodging. This concept of home as a set of practices is useful in thinking about how individuals create homes in seemingly unhomey spaces, or spaces they do not necessarily identify as being a home (Radley, Hodgetts & Cullen, 2005; Sirriyeh, 2010). Devran has difficulty emotionally investing in his apartment because of material and relational challenges that cause the space not to be a proper home. Yet, even within this unhomey space, Devran engages in homing practices, activities that create a sense of familiarity
in an unfamiliar space. For Devran, these homing practices involve the cooking of food from his home region and smoking a hookah.

**Figure 3.10 Devran’s Hookah**

(Photograph taken by Devran, February 2014)

**Devran:** This is a picture of my hookah. I took this photo because it is a little way for me to feel home in this place. I got the hookah around two and a half years ago...

I got the hookah because I realized that I was really missing to smoke hookah. I tried a variety of places. I actually tried every single place that serves hookah in Vancouver. [laughs] Seriously, every single one. And each one was crap. Terrible. Terrible. They weren’t clean. They were using the worst quality of tobaccos and everything was mixed up. You were ordering something but you were smelling something else and tasting something else because they weren’t cleaning the hookah from previous tobaccos. It was like whatever you order you were tasting the same things, a mix of everything. So it was terrible, so I decided to start doing it myself. It’s not very easy.
Back in the Middle East, you go to special places and they do it for you. There are great hookah places there. It takes preparation and least like ten minutes and you have to prepare fire. You have to prepare the tobacco and make sure that it doesn’t burn. It takes time and effort, but it is much better considering how terrible in Vancouver the hookah cafes are. [laughs]

I buy tobacco from a speciality store. It is very expensive here. It is a lot cheaper in the U.S., but I can’t go there because I don’t have a passport. Even with the tobacco, it is different.

Kat: What do you mean? Why is it different?

Devran: Well, the tobacco is not exactly the same that you get back in the Middle East. So there is a taste thing. But mostly, yeah, it’s because of the feeling you had with friends when you smoked hookah. We played backgammon and drink many cups of tea. It doesn’t have to be tea, but it has to be some kind of hot beverage, not coffee for sure, a tea or herbal tea or something like that, and hookah. The three together is a cultural thing. It wasn’t a big deal to go for a couple hours every night or every other night to smoke hookah. I went with regular friends. Some of them were gay. Some of them were straight and knew me as a straight man. Maybe some of the straight ones were gay, who knows, most people are hidden there. I used to go with a gay friend. I don’t know. There was closeness there that will never happen here. (Devran, February 15, 2014)

Sara Ahmed writes that “the journeys of migration involve a splitting of home as place of origin and home as the sensory world of everyday experience” (1999, 341). Devran’s discussion of the hookah speaks to how the sense of home and belonging is embedded in the sensory world of everyday experience. Research with refugees has shown that everyday practices and interactions with material objects can create a sense of home (Carsten, 2007). Material objects help situate or resituate individuals in particular locations, creating emotional attachments that connect different spaces and times together. In leaving a place, refugees carry parts of it with them, which are reassembled in the form of tastes, scents, and sounds—reconfiguring the place of arrival both figuratively and imaginatively (Hannam, Sheller, & Urry, 2006, 11). Activities like smoking the hookah carry sensory meanings. The hookah represents material objects, cultural practices, social connections, and sensory experiences that help situate Devran between
his current home in Vancouver and his past home in the Middle East. Devran engages in these activities in his new home, but they are intertwined in the memory of doing these things in another environment. Through these activities, old and new environments become vivid and occur together (Brooks & Simpson, 2012, 19). The smell and taste of the tobacco bring a sense of familiarity as well as feelings of loss. Devran carefully prepares the hookah to get back the smells, the tastes, and the sensory experiences that he had back in his home country. But, like all reproductions, the smell, the tastes, and the experiences are different. In each new environment, the meanings behind material objects and practices are transformed. However, in this alteration, new meanings and attachments can be made. Through these homing practices, home and what it represents can be reclaimed differently (Fortier, 2003). Devran can never exactly reproduce the sensory experiences and social interactions of sharing the hookah. Smoking hookah and cooking traditional dishes remind him of desire for social belonging and attachment. In performing these activities, Devran creates a new sense of familiarity with his current home. There is a particular sense of achievement for Devran in being able to reproduce the smells and tastes of the hookah in his current home. He can boast about his newfound expertise in creating a good hookah. This achievement helps to orient Devran to the environment even when he does not feel “at home” in his current location. These homing practices help create a sense of home for Devran that is both rooted and unrooted.

Devran’s story shows that how we view, construct, and experience home helps to shape us and informs who we were, are, and will be. The relationships that Devran maintains, as well as the new ones he creates in both his country of origin and his current home, will shape how he orients himself and creates a sense of belonging. The “here” and “there” of what home means to Devran are not mutually exclusive and do not reside solely in bounded geographical locations or
a linear timeline. These attachments are both settled and unsettled, as Devran must negotiate between gender, sexual, and cultural norms stemming from his country of origin and his current location. When Devran talks about his current home, he simultaneously invokes his past home as well as what he wants his future home to be. His future home rests in the relationships he hopes to make in Vancouver. Home shifts between the past, present, and future—but these temporal shifts are always tied to some kind of relationship to another person, place, or practice.

3.2 Mario

Figure 3.11 Day of the Dead Doll

(Source: Photograph Taken By Mario VLGC Facebook Page)
Mario: It took a long time to fall in love with this city. But! Yeah, I remember when I finally fell in love with Vancouver. And it was amazing. It was like being in love, it was like falling in love with somebody. It’s the same. And when that happened I felt really safe. I mean, I feel relieved, convinced that I want to be here, so that was important for me...to have that attachment to the city.

It doesn’t matter where you are, if you don’t have that attachment to where you are, then you are lost, you know? So for me, that was, that was a, like, oh, “I’m a winner now!” Like, I win having the feeling of love in the city. So that was what I needed.

I fell in love with it in my own way, you know? And that makes me proud. Because it was my own way. I love my [Central American] culture.

It’s important to keep our tradition like we were back in our country. It’s important also to speak our language. Many people, they become great translators. They are able to switch between languages and cultures. Amazing. Beautiful. So it’s important for us to keep practicing and never forget who we are and where we come from. It doesn’t mean that when we move here we don’t want to learn the culture. But, we don’t have to forget our culture. We can have both. We have two lives in one. (Mario, August 20, 2013)

If Mario were to write a book about his life, he said that the title would be “Two Lives in One,” representing the push and pull Mario experiences as a gay refugee from Central America who has lived in Vancouver for more than ten years. It represents the shifting relationship Mario maintains in order to keep and uphold his culture and language, while at the same time adapting and feeling a sense of belonging to his new home in Vancouver. Two lives in one also represents Mario’s activism as a gay Latino activist and community organizer in Metro Vancouver. Mario organizes and hosts gay/queer Latin-themed parties at popular gay bars in Davie Village, Vancouver’s historic gay district. He also worked to create a visible online presence for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and trans Latin American in Metro Vancouver. This has resulted in the creation of a Facebook page, queer Latino/a pride events, and a popular gay Latin American party scene.

The above photograph comes from Mario’s preparations for a Día de Muertos or “Day of the
**Day of the Dead** is a Mexican national holiday celebrated around the world in other cultures. The holiday focuses on gatherings of family and friends to pray, remember, and celebrate loved ones who have died.

Dead
due to his activism, Mario celebrates and supports the LGBT Latin community within Vancouver as well as creating a transnational virtual community through maintaining a Facebook page.

I follow Mario’s refugee story and the creation of gay/queer Latino parties within the Davie Village gay scene. I first examine Mario’s immigration to Vancouver and the process of getting his refugee status. I explore the barriers he encountered as a gay Latino refugee in regards to employment and feelings of belonging in Vancouver. In this exploration, I begin to unravel the underlying racial hierarchy and class inequality that frame multiculturalism discourse and ideologies in Canada. As a gay Latino refugee, Mario experiences isolation, objectification, and discrimination not only from Metro Vancouver’s mainstream heterosexual society, but also from the dominant middle-class and white gay community in Davie Village. Mario talks about the sexual, gendered, classed, and racial negotiations/maneuvers he and other gay Latinos must perform in order to enjoy and achieve their desires within the larger gay community. Mario experiences rejection and fetishization within the gay community. At the same time, he resists and plays with stereotypes and objectification of gay Latinos in the creation of queer Latin parties and community resources for LGBT Latin American immigrants. The final section looks at relationships and place-making, as Mario talks about situating himself in the “memory” of Vancouver and how this allowed him to create a sense of belonging to his current home.
3.2.1 “My goal is to be happy”
Refugee Process and Cracks in Multiculturalism

I first met Mario during one of the Rainbow Refugee drop-in meetings. He would regularly come to share his experience and serve as a Spanish translator for incoming refugee claimants. Mario would also advertise and promote upcoming queer Latin parties at popular gay clubs in Davie Village. He often worked out a special deal with the club owners so that members of Rainbow Refugee could enter for free or at a discount. Allowing refugee claimants entry to the clubs was important to Mario. Most of the gay clubs in Davie Village were off-limits to queer refugees and those living on social assistance because of high cover charges.

Mario approached me at one of the drop-in meetings and asked if I would like to interview him. He knew from previous conversations that I was doing my research on LGBT refugees. He hoped that sharing his story would help other refugees who experienced similar challenges. Mario believed that his story offered queer refugees a sense of hope for their future. Despite the difficulties he had going through the refugee process, Mario said that he now lives a very happy life in Vancouver. While Mario agreed to be part of the photography portion of this project, he was unable to take photographs specifically for the project because of his work and school commitments. The pictures used in this chapter, which Mario gave me permission to use, are from various queer Latin parties and LGBTQ Latin Pride advertisements.

Mario: I arrived here in September 2000. I arrived here as a student. I basically left my country because I was having issues regarding my sexuality. I was involved in my country as a gay activist. That was one of the main things that made me move to another country.

I also chose Canada because of it being gay-friendly. I knew it would not be safe for me as a gay man in the US. So Canada was it.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{44} Anti-sodomy laws in the United States were not officially dismantled nationwide until 2003.
Once I arrived here I found more people like me who were activists from my country and who were applying for refugee status. However, I was afraid to apply because I felt that I couldn’t trust the authorities. I couldn’t trust the authorities in my home country. Why would I trust them here?

I was afraid that they were going to send me back to my hometown. I didn’t want that. I waited a few months. After I got to know the system and I could trust the authorities, I decided to apply for refugee.

Many of my friends here had applied already. And the evidence they had was not as strong as mine. My reasons were really strong because I was involved in gay activism in my home country. I had newspapers with my picture on it back home as a gay activist (Mario, August 20, 2013).  

When Mario first arrived in Vancouver, he experienced isolation as a new immigrant not fully fluent in English. Rainbow Refugee had yet to form, and there were no publicly available social services or information for queer immigrants. Mario was left with few resources to navigate residency and citizenship options. He waited more than two years for his hearing. During that time, Mario supported himself through various cleaning and dishwashing jobs. He moved in with a boyfriend he met very soon after arriving in Canada. Mario’s partner helped him with living expenses and supported Mario through the long wait for his refugee hearing. Mario described his ex-partner as a very caring and special person. Mario said he would never have survived the first two years of his refugee process without his ex-partner’s financial and emotional support.

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45 Mario migrated prior to the 2009 Canadian visa restriction that limits entry to Canada from countries outside of the United States and Western Europe. He also migrated prior to the “Safe Third Country” policy that was implemented in 2004. It would be very difficult for Mario to get into Canada to make a refugee claim if he were to do it today. In addition to the visa restrictions, the current refugee system has officially and unofficially listed several Central and South American countries as being “non-refugee producing countries,” or Designated Countries of Origin. For example, Mexico is currently listed as a Designated Country of Origin. Individuals making a refugee claim from Designated Countries of Origin are put through an expedited three-month refugee process, have no right to appeal their decision in the Refugee Appeals Court, and face immediate deportation. Other countries listed as Designated Countries of Origin include South Korea, the Czech Republic, and Hungary.
Mario had his refugee hearing in 2002, but his claim was denied. The IRB member believed that Mario was a gay man and a queer activist. The member even believed that Mario had experienced violence because of his sexual orientation and LGBT activism. Yet, the IRB member decided that the violence Mario experienced was not enough to warrant protection by the Canadian state on the grounds of persecution.

Mario was able to challenge the IRB member’s negative decision through the Canadian Federal Court. This option for refugee claimants, but the success rate to first be granted leave to appeal and then have your case appealed is very low. The process is also stressful and confusing for many refugee claimants, as their legal representatives and the Federal Court handle their appeals without the claimants’ direct involvement. Refugee claimants must simply have faith in the review process for a fair outcome. It can also be expensive: Legal Aid does not always cover appeals to the Federal Court, and refugees must often cover the cost for a lawyer to write and submit the appeal, which can be as much as five thousand to ten thousand dollars. The wait for a Federal Court’s decision can vary from six months to two years. The Federal Court can decide to uphold the original IRB’s decision or reject it and immediately give the claimant Convention

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46 The Federal Court is the national court in Canada. The Federal Court is different from the Immigration and Refugee Appeals Division. The Federal court primarily handles judicial reviews of immigration, intellectual property, and federal employment disputes related to decisions by federal boards and tribunals. In 2004, the Immigration Refugee Board created a new refugee appeal process called the Refugee Appeal Division. The Refugee Appeal Division was finally implemented in 2014. The Refugee Appeal Division only handles asylum appeal cases and has specialized experts evaluating asylum cases. This is very different from the Federal Courts that deal with a broad range of cases, not just asylum. Incoming in-land refugee claims must appeal their negative decisions first at the IRB Refugee Appeal Division. However, individuals coming from Designated Countries of Origin are not allowed to appeal their decision in the IRB Refugee Appeal Division. Several claimants have been denied access to the Refugee Appeal Division. They can however try to have their case heard in the Federal Court. However, the success rate for their case to be approved and altered is much lower than in the Refugee Appeal Division.
Refugee status. The Federal Court can also ask for a new refugee hearing, in which case the claimant must go through the entire refugee process again from the start.

The Federal Court decided to give Mario a new refugee hearing. He had to wait another two years for another hearing. Mario continued to work odd cleaning and retail jobs in order to support himself. The legal cost of the Federal Court appeal and his new hearing caused him to go deeper into debt. As a refugee claimant, Mario was ineligible to go to university and was not eligible for the majority of English courses and immigrant services offered by Immigrant Settlement Services. All Mario could do was wait.

**Mario:** *I was in the process for four years total. So it was a long stressful process. I just wanted to give up. I thought that I was wasting my time. I wanted to go to school. I was twenty-five years old and I wanted to be involved in more things. I wasn't basically anything here. I wasn't doing anything in the community. I wasn't an activist. I wasn't an immigrant, but I wasn't a resident. I was nothing here. I felt like a ghost. I had nothing.*

*By the end of it, I had broken up with my boyfriend. I sold all my belongings. I was living out of a suitcase. I had no hope that I would get a positive decision. I had mentally prepared myself that I was going to be leaving. It was a lot of stress for four years in order to get my landed immigrant status* (Mario, August 20, 2013).

Fortunately, the new refugee hearing was successful, and Mario was granted Convention Refugee status. He was in shock when he received his positive refugee decision, and was ecstatic that he could stay in Canada. However, he had little hope of finishing university, as he was left with a considerable amount of debt from legal expenses. He did not want to go further into debt with student loans, and he wanted to be able send money to his mother, who was very sick at the time. He wanted to get his citizenship as soon as possible in order to visit his family again.

Mario said that finding a job in Vancouver was very difficult as a refugee claimant. Because of his refugee status, he was only able to get cleaning and temporary retail jobs. Larger companies did not want to hire him because his work status was deemed temporary. When Mario
received permanent residency, he still had difficulties finding a stable job. He experienced discrimination in the job market as a racialized immigrant with a “thick accent” (Mario, October 10, 2013). During his search for permanent employment, Mario said that he was conscious of his race and citizenship background for the first time in his life. Back in his country of origin, Mario came from a middle-class family. He never experienced racial discrimination or xenophobia. The violence he experienced was directly related to being an outspoken LGBT activist. However, in Vancouver, Mario was reminded every day that he was not Canadian (Mario, October 10, 2013), meaning not white, middle-class, or a citizen. During the time of our interviews, Mario had a job at a large cellphone company in downtown Vancouver, where he had worked for twelve years. He felt incredibly lucky when he secured this job, but he continued to experience challenges in his workplace because of his ethnicity and immigrant background.

**Mario:** Finding work was difficult. I’m an immigrant here. I have an accent. And that makes it difficult for me to get a job. I see that. I’m lucky to have the job I have. I am grateful. I see so many refugees and immigrants who can’t get jobs. It is so sad. We want to work hard. Just like other Canadians.

But, again, I’m very lucky. I have little complaints. I like where I work. And, you know, I may not get a higher position. Like in management. Because of my accent. It can be hard for people, Canadians, to understand me. And managers work with people, with customers, with employees. So they may not want someone like me in a position where customers don’t understand me because I don’t sound Canadian. Because it can be hard to understand me. It is hard to relate.

But I don’t let it bother me. I like my accent because that’s telling people that I come from a different country. So half of my life is done in one country and the other half is done in Canada. And I love both countries. But, you know, I have to accept who I am. I am proud of what I am. And if I don’t get to do those kind of management jobs…well, I am happy anyways. My goal is to be happy. (Mario, October 10, 2013).

Reports on the effects of race and immigration status on employment levels from the early 1990s to as recently as 2014 consistently show that even though non-white, racialized, and/or “visible minority” immigrant populations are growing faster than the Canadian national
average, racialized groups do not advance proportionally in the labour market and continue to have higher rates of unemployment/underemployment and experience a double-digit percentage income gap (Teelucksingh & Galabuzi, 2005; Banerjee, 2009; Reitz & Banerjee, 2007; Lightman & Gingrich, 2012; Brunner, Hyndman, & Friesen, 2010; Stewart, Simich, Shizha, Makumbe, & Makwarimba, 2012; Adyemir & Skuterd, 2005). Mario’s experience of being unable to find work as a racialized immigrant in the early/mid-2000s is identical to Devran’s experience more than thirteen years later. Despite Mario’s education, long-time work experience, and even becoming a Canadian citizen, he was still passed over for higher job positions because of his ethnicity and immigrant background.

Mario’s belief that he will be passed over for a promotion because Canadians are unable to understand and relate to him speaks to the racial, class, and gender inequalities underlying liberal multiculturalism in Canada (Riaño Alcalá, Colorado, & Díaz, 2008, 95; Levine-Rasky, 2012, 12-14; SOS, June 2013). The establishment of multiculturalism as an official policy in the 1970s helped to promote Canada as a benevolent, tolerant, and hospitable nation (Razack, 1998; Reitz & Banerjee, 2007; Bannerji, 2000; Thobani, 2007). However, despite efforts to promote cultural diversity, immigration policy and discourse, especially in terms of forced migration, continue to be divided along racial, sexual, gendered, and hierarchical class lines (Goonewardena & Kipfer, 2005; di Tomasso, 2012) Himani Bannerji argues that Canada’s multicultural policies work to obscure Canada as racist, sexist, and hierarchically class-based (2000). Canadian multiculturalism is built on an “Us/Them binary” in which whiteness is not racialized but normalized (Boyd, 2010). Racial, gender, and class hierarchies are masked in the context of tolerating and accommodating a very select expression of cultural diversity (mostly food and cultural holidays). Non-white immigrants are perceived to be ruled by their culture, always
separate from “Canadian culture,” which is based on whiteness and the ability to accrue wealth through capitalism (Mitchell, 1993). The conflation of race, class, and culture reinforces neoliberal and hegemonic whiteness by perpetually relegating racialized people and lower-class persons, including First Nations citizens, to outside of and ulterior to “Canadianness” (di Tomasso, 2012). Cultural identities become uniform and fixed, and in turn allow dominant groups to naturalize their own differences and condemn racialized and lower-classed persons as outsiders and Other (Anthias, 2002).

Martin Manalansan writes that racialized migrants face multiple cultural, political, and economic displacements that can cause them to feel out of place from the dominant host society. Racialized and queer migrants are marginalized in multiple ways (2003). They not only face cultural, political, and economic displacements as newcomers, but also confront another set of oppressive regimes in mainstream and gay communities (Manalansan, 2003, 185; Kojima, 2015). Several queer and critical race scholars have shown how race, sexuality, gender, and social class converge in North America, where mainstream gay culture, popular gay spaces, and the overall depiction of the gay community and gay politics rest on the normalization of whiteness, heteronormativity, and middle-class lifestyles (Boodram, 2003; Crichlow, 2004; Walcott, 2006; Warner, 2002; Woodruffe, 2008; Giwa & Greensmith, 2012; Jordan, 2010). They are displaced not only from mainstream heterosexual society, but also from the larger gay community (Kojima, 2014). Yet, within this displacement, there is always resistance and creativity (Fung, 1996; Teengs & Travers, 2006; van der Meide, 2001, 2002). In the next section, I explore double displacement and resistance through Mario’s experiences within the gay scene in Davie Village and the creation of gay Latino nights.
3.2.2 “We exist, you know?”
Race and Class in the Gay Bar and the Creation of Gay Latino Parties

Figure 3.12 Day of the Dead Dolls in a Row

Mario: It is a good memory for me, the first time that I went out to a gay bar. It was on Davie Street. I could not speak English. Guys were talking to me and I did not know what they were saying.

With that memory, I can see how much I grow, how much I changed, and what I have done. It makes me proud. That was when I first met Spanish people here. There were not too many. But I met two guys there. And they said to call them, and that’s how it started to get to know everything. The first night that I went to a nightclub, it was the second night I arrived here. (Mario, August 20, 2013)
On the second night that Mario arrived in Vancouver, he went to a gay bar. Mario would often socialize in the small gay social scene in the West End of downtown Vancouver, known as Davie Village. Mario felt that the gay community was more publically open than in his country. He enjoyed attending the popular gay bars that line Davie Street, the main thoroughfare of Davie Village. He participated in Vancouver’s Gay Pride Parade and volunteered at Qmunity and the Health Initiative for Men. Mario described the gay scene at the time as relatively small and mostly made up of white men. The bars catered to a mostly white and middle-class male clientele. It was hard for Mario to make friends in these places as a newly arrived immigrant. He felt ostracized and eroticized because he was Latino and could not speak English. The white gay men Mario met were interested in taking him home for the night. After the night was over, however, these men were no longer interested in him. Mario missed the community of activists and friends he had in his country. He missed dancing to Latin music, being politically active, speaking Spanish, and participating in the cultural traditions and holidays of Central and South America.

The experience of eroticization and objectification in the predominantly white and middle-class gay community of Davie Village continued for Mario long after he learned English and became a Canadian citizen.

Mario: I don’t experience as much as other people do. But, yeah, there are rude people. At the gay bars, I have heard or have heard from friends, some of the guys say to them, “Go back to your country.” Or not racist things, but things where they don’t want you to feel welcome. You just get the feeling.

One time...this was more recent, but one time, I had somebody harassing me and following me all the time in the club. He was a white guy. I tried to be nice. I say, “You know what, leave me alone.”

And then that person keeps following me, so I had to tell the manager. I don’t want to talk with him. I’m talking with my friends and he’s interrupting me. He becomes really angry verbally.
And then that guy, you know, he starts to tell me, “Show me your passport and show me
this and show me that!”

And I was just laughing. He says, “Oh, I’ll send you back to your country.”

I was like, you know what, I have my Canadian passport. I have Canadian citizenship. It
was kind of funny for me that some people when they don’t know anything, they are
generalizing. They think, “Oh, nobody has documents here,” or “The Latino doesn’t
have documents.” And I’m like “No, no, no!” I didn’t take it like too deep. I was not
surprised when it happened. I laughed at the guy. (Mario, October 10, 2013)

Lionel Cantú writes that Latino/as in Central and South America are often objectified by
white tourists as the exotic “Other” (2009). These ideologies of Latino/as’ sexualities and
otherness abroad carry over for queer Latinos migrants in Canada, who are depicted as
hypersexual and overly desiring for gay white men’s attention. José Muñoz writes that gay
Latino bodies are either ignored or eroticized within mainstream gay communities in North
America (1999). They are either invisible or exist only as objects for white male erotic
consumption (Carrillo & Fontdevila, 2014; Ibanez, Flores & Millet, 2012; Ramirez-Valles, 2007;
Gutiérrez, 2011; Ocampo, 2012; Thing, 2010). At the same time, Latino/a migrants are
increasingly depicted as “bogus” immigrants who present a threat to Canadian border security
(Harris, July 11, 2014). The white gay man’s sexual harassment after Mario refused his sexual
objectification involved questioning Mario’s right to inhabit the gay bar and the Canadian state.
The statement “Show me your passport” reveals the underlying racial, sexual, and gendered
politics surrounding gay spaces in Canada. Mario’s agency and citizenship were refuted by the
white male gay gaze.

Gill Valentine (2003) argues that colonizing space has proved to be an important tactic
for queer mobilization and community building in Western countries like Canada. This
colonization, however, has never been uniformed. The meanings behind queer spaces and
membership to them are always contested (Knopp, 1998). Recently, geographers of sexuality and space have urged researchers to go beyond sexual exceptionalism that defines a certain place as being simply gay or queer. Instead of solidifying and universalizing the idea of space being heterosexual or homosexual, these researchers suggest that sexuality should be seen as part of a set of broad constellations of power embedded in the particular history of the location (Oswin, 2008). This is particularly important in terms of race, gender, and class. Scott Morgensen (2011) and Umut Erel et al. (2010) write that queer politics in Canada have either ignored or erased ongoing inequalities and differences in terms of race, gender, and class, which in turns allows for the marginalization of racialized, Indigenous, low-income, trans, and queer persons outside of mainstream gay communities and spaces.

Michael Jackman and Nishant Upadhyay (2014) write that mainstream gay rights politics in North America have ignored the needs of racialized, low-income, trans, Indigenous, and immigrant queer persons by focusing primarily on the desires of gay white and middle-class citizens for gay marriage. The right to marry a same-sex partner is a far lesser concern for those who are subjected to violence by the Canadian state and society on account of their race, class, gender, and immigration status. Race and class are conflated so that only issues affecting white, middle-class men are viewed as “proper” and important gay subjects (Greensmith, Giwa, & Wolfe, 2013; Puar, 2007). Those outside this narrow perimeter of gay subjectivity are cast aside, erased, or deported (Chavez, 2010a, 2010b; Manalansan, 2005). Within popular gay spaces in Davie Village, whiteness, citizenship, gender, and class are maintained through the act of active exclusion of those who are Indigenous, non-white, trans, immigrant, and lower income. These exclusions range from the high cost of cover charges and drinks to strictly catering to an upper-middle-class gay white clientele through advertisements, the bouncers at the door, and the music
played at the club. White gay male patrons of gay clubs also work to make sure those who are
unwelcome stay unwelcome through racist remarks, looks, and refusing to interact with
individuals they feel do not belong.

Mario explained that when he first arrived in Vancouver, a small community of gay
Latino men lived in the city. They would often go together in a large group to popular gay bars
in Davie Village. However, many of them felt uncomfortable at these spaces and wished that
they could listen to Latin music. The few bars and social spaces in Vancouver that supported the
larger Latin community felt too dangerous to attend as gay men. Mario and his friends would
host parties at their homes in which they could play Latin music and dance until morning. The
first gay Latino dance night at a Vancouver gay club took place in 2005, when a well-known
Vancouver drag queen hosted a Cinco de Mayo party at a club in Davie Village. Mario
attended the second night of the club’s Latin-themed party and found it almost empty. The disc
jockey (DJ) was playing a mixture of French, Spanish, and Italian music. The only decorations
were a piñata that was very hard to break open in the middle of an empty nightclub. Mario told
the DJ that he could bring in some popular current Latin music. The DJ referred Mario to the
club manager, who then asked him to DJ for another themed gay Latin night. Mario refused at
first. He was working three different jobs and had to take several different buses to his various
jobs. He thought the work would be too much. However, the manager continued to ask Mario to

47 In the late 1990s and early 2000s, there was a small, but very active group of LGBT Latin
American activists called Somos. Mario would often attend their meetings.

48 Drag is a performance art in which an individual wears clothing associated with one or more
gender roles – usually (but not necessarily) related to the other gender. “Drag queen” is the
popular term for someone who performs a female impersonation act at a performance venue.

49 Cinco de Mayo is the commemoration of the Mexican’s army defeat of the French Army in
1862. Cinco de Mayo is marked in many countries around the world as a celebration of Mexican
culture.
DJ the night, and Mario finally agreed. Mario’s first party was a success, with a large number of people attending and responding positively to the music.

**Mario:** People really responded very well to the first night. I was happy to have another option. I am happy that you can hear different music in Vancouver. So that’s what Vancouver is all about: Multiculturalism. There are so many different cultures here, but you need to see it. Pushing things so that we can have everything in Vancouver. To experience everything in Vancouver. Not just one type of music. Pushing for more variety.

The parties got more and more popular. We were the only club at the time who had Hispanic music. And we found out that there are a lot of Canadian people who like it. They go often to Central America and to Mexico and they like the Latin nights. I told them that you don’t have to pay too much to enjoy Hispanic music in Vancouver. You don’t have to go all the way down Puerto Vallarta to see the culture. The culture lives here, too. There is a gay Latin community here, too. We exist, you know? (Mario, August 20, 2013)

After the success of the Mario’s first Latin night, he quickly began to take more control of the once-a-month gay Latin parties. Mario met more and more gay, lesbian, and trans Latin Americans at his parties. Many of the persons he met were attending a gay bar in Vancouver for the first time. The lure of Latin music and the promise of meeting other queer Spanish speakers encouraged many gay, lesbian, and trans Hispanic and Latin Americans to come to Davie Village, a space that previously felt off limits to them. Mario realized that the Latin nights addressed a vital need in the queer Latino/a community. He created a Facebook page for the Latin LGBT community in Vancouver and has now been organizing queer and/or gay Latin nights at popular gay bars in Davie Village and around Metro Vancouver for almost ten years.
Mario: I sometimes get e-mails from couples all over the world. You know, asking me about Vancouver. Spanish-speaking people. They tell me that they are going to visit Vancouver. They ask how the gay community is here. Some have asked about refuge. They tell me about the problems they are experiencing. I’ve been really happy helping others abroad and helping to start a community here. It’s like I connect both of my lives together: my life in [Central America] and my life here. (Mario, August 20, 2013)

Through the gay Latin nights, the Latin LGBT Facebook group, and his ongoing activism with Rainbow Refugee and various queer events in Metro Vancouver, Mario plays with gay Latino stereotypes for humour, pride, and empowerment. The fliers and online advertisements for his queer Latin nights provide a great example.
On one hand, Mario and his fellow organizers of the gay Latin parties may reproduce stereotypes of gay Latinos as sexual “eye candy” in their advertisements. Mario has talked with me about the delicate balance of not going “too far” with stereotypes so that the ads become a hateful exaggeration of gay Latinos. On the other hand, using a stereotype for community pride and empowerment can deconstruct racist and sexist stereotypes. Through the use of humor, the gay Latin party advertisements subvert the racial, sexual, class, and gender hierarchies that perpetuate the objectification and marginalization of gay Latinos. By showing attractive gay Latino men having fun and playing with their sexual appeal/objectification on the gay Latin night advertisements, Mario and the other organizers of gay Latino parties are challenging their invisibility in white mainstream gay society as well as “looking back” (Razack, 1998; Fanon, 1967) at the white male gaze in playful defiance.
This is a strategy I see as falling in line with José Muñoz’s (1999) theory of disidentification, in which racialized queer persons (specifically queer artists of color) negotiate relationships of survival and empowerment with dominant cultures by strategically performing or taking on ideologies, discourses, and stereotypes, as well as resisting and subverting these through performance. Muñoz argues that Latin queer artists such as Vaginal Crème Davis disidentify with cultural images of Hispanic masculinity and homophobia while also disidentifying with racialized and sexist depictions of queer Latino/as and Latin American migrants within mainstream white society (Muñoz, 1997; 1998). By disidentifying with both dominant cultures, queer artists of color can subversively rearticulate these images in order to transform and reinvent new cultural paradigms of identity for queer Latino/as. Racialized queers strategically negotiate hegemonic ideologies that work against them and their attempts at socio-political mobilization and representation (Eguchi, 2014; Medina, 2003). “Disidentification,” Muñoz argues, is a model of dealing with dominant ideologies and discourses that neither seeks to assimilate within structures of dominance nor strictly opposes them. It is not simply a choice to identify or not identify with ideologies, discourses, and stereotypes. Instead, it is about bringing similarities and differences simultaneously to bear on one’s identity and socio-political action. Disidentification is a space beyond the binaries of assimilation and counter-identification (1998). It is very much about the relationships individuals have with each other and to dominant cultures that may objectify or erase their different presence (Medina, 2003; Eguchi, 2014). The queer Latino party advertisements both play into and resist dominant ideologies about race, sexuality, and gender that portray Latin American communities as hyper-masculine and homophobic, and gay communities as strictly white and middle-class.
Mario: The parties and the Facebook are all about celebrating who we are. But it’s also about community, care, support. You know, I’m an activist. Even though these are parties, they may not look like they do that much…but they are important, too. We may not be, like, shaking our fists, but we also support our community and others. We all need to dance. That’s important, too. We need to be happy. The Facebook works to bring people together, so that we are not alone. (Mario, August 20, 2013)

By framing the parties and the Facebook page as a celebration of queer Latino culture and mechanisms for community building, Mario challenges mainstream LGBT activism that has largely ignored the everyday realities of racialized queer communities. Critical race scholars and feminist scholars have written extensively about how political activism and mobilization in North America have been framed by a limited group of mostly white, able-bodied, cisgender, and middle-class actors. Because of their relatively privileged positions, these individuals are able to access resources and mobilize on a large scale for political action and social change. They also have the advantage of being able to separate out differences in identities, social positions, and life experiences to focus on a single identity and public cause (Thompson, 2002; Basu, 2000; Nicholson, 2010). Audre Lorde reminds us that for many marginalized individuals, survival is resistance (1983). Mario’s statement that the gay Latino parties and Facebook group are political offers a different way to name political acts. To live in the face of repression is an act of resistance. Experiencing and celebrating joy in one’s life is also a political act. Dancing can be an act of resistance. Bringing people together through the gay Latino parties and the Facebook group fosters community empowerment that leads to social justice. They prevent queer Latino/a lives from being erased from public consciousness, especially within the larger gay community in Metro Vancouver. Preventing this erasure and providing opportunities for LGBT Latino/as to connect works to empower Metro Vancouver’s queer Latino/a community. They are a strong
testament to the creativity, vitality, and tenacity of marginalized queer migrant communities in Vancouver.

**Kat:** I’m curious about how hosting and running the Latin Nights affected you and maybe your sense of home or belonging?

**Mario:** The parties are really important to me. They help me feel connected. Now it is a lot of work and I actually don’t do them too much. [laughing] I am getting old. I can’t do the late nights. Maybe I am becoming more Canadian? I don’t like going out too late at night. There is also so much work in planning. Other people have stepped in to help. And that is great. It is amazing to see how the city is changing. Like there were so few Hispanics here. And now we have a community.

I’m very grateful. The parties helped me to connect to the city. During those years when I was waiting for refugee, I could not do anything. I was not an activist. And that made me feel like I did not have anything invested here. Nothing was holding me here. But, the parties helped me to build something here. I made so many good memories here.

And it has spread around the world. People from places like Mexico or Spain want to know other gay Spanish speakers in Vancouver. And they can come here and find each other. I have met refugees at these parties and helped them get connected to Rainbow Refugee. That is amazing. I love it. We have people asking about things that they don't feel comfortable asking about gay life in the straight Latin American community, they are able to ask questions with a lot of freedom in our community. (Mario, August 20, 2013)

The gay Latin parties serve as a bridge between Mario’s activism in his country of origin and his current home in Vancouver. In hosting these parties Mario is able to connect to a part of his identity that he felt was subdued during his time as a refugee claim. The parties serve as an orientating device for Mario that help him connect to his surroundings as well as to his country of origin. The gay Latino parties and Facebook group are not just social events/resources, but also memory projects. They help to create a visible presence for the LGBT Latino/a community that in turn situates LGBT Latino/as in the social memory of Davie Village and the rest of Metro Vancouver. People remember these parties and social events; they imbue with them their own personal memories and form attachments to them. The Facebook group serves as a public record of past events. These mnemonic attachments and relationships also extend outside of the city and
incorporate memories and relationships that blend the local and the transnational (Rishbeth & Powell, 2013). In focusing on the new memories he is making in Vancouver, Mario is not giving up on his older memories of his country of origin. He incorporates them in his daily life and through his activism with the parties and the Facebook group.

3.2.3 “In order for you to love something, you need to have memories.”
Memory, Place, and Bringing Two Lives into One

Mario: So at the beginning it was hard. I was missing my life and my memories of home. I was missing my culture and everything. I gave up, and I said, okay—I am not going to suffer anymore. I am not going to keep reliving the memories of my country and not realize the memories that I am making in this country...

Now, my perception has changed because I have been travelling for some time inside of Canada. And now I love Canada. I love to go to small towns. I love to see ranches and all those small places that I never saw before. See the snow and be inside having coffee. I missed all that before. Even the cold weather right now, it makes me now excited. Before it used to make me depressed and I just wanted to go to somewhere warmer. But now, I love the cold weather.

Kat: What does the cold weather remind you of? What feelings does it bring up for you?

Mario: Well, it reminds of my memories that I made here. Reminds me about...being inside friends’ home and having something warm or going out and feeling the fresh air. So that reminds me of the memories that I now have here.

In order for you to love something, you need to have memories. If you don’t have any memories, then you don’t enjoy what you are doing. That’s why the first years are hard for many people here to fall in love with the city. You feel so alone. You don’t feel a part of the city. You can’t make memories. I am not speaking for everybody, but I am just speaking for people and myself who have had the same experience.

So for me, when I finally fell in love with Canada, it was when I finally had memories of Vancouver. I have memories now of the many streets in the city. Many places around the city, like Davie Street. I now have memories of those places and what those places were before. The city is always changing. I have memories of those changes. One day they tear something down and they make something new. It’s neat for me now to walk by somewhere and say, “Oh, that used to be a coffee shop; now it is a hotel. That used to be a gas station and now they are building a huge apartment storey there.” I can be there and witness it. I can say to people that I remember those places.
I can do that now. I can remember that. It really is wonderful. I don’t know it’s strange to recognize that attachment to the city...

The LGBT Latino/a pride stuff also helped with this. We have a history here. Being a part of the history of the city is important. We are now much more visible here. It makes you feel like you have a part in the city. My memories are filled with good times with friends. Those memories help me feel like I belong. (Mario, October 10, 2013)

Mario has lived in Davie Village for the past fifteen years. Davie Village is located in the West End of downtown Vancouver, one of the most expensive places to live in Vancouver. Although the cost of his apartment is a considerable burden for Mario at his salary level, Mario enjoys being at the center of Vancouver’s gay community. One of the activities he enjoys most is walking up and down Davie Street, greeting people as he walks by and seeing new developments in his neighborhood. Mario feels at home in Davie Village. It is a place where many people recognize him on the street because of his involvement with the gay Latin parties and his activism. He is a regular fixture at the local coffee houses, parks, and restaurants. It is a place where he feels safe as an openly gay man.

Mario’s thoughtful discussion on the importance of memory in his feelings of belonging suggests a deeper dynamic at work than just familiarity with his local environment. Memory has a significant role in working out how one might belong in a new place and transcend feelings of strangeness and longing for places left behind (Rishbeth & M. Powell, 2013; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). A strange space ends up being a place when it feels familiar to us through our physical, sensual, emotional, and mnemonic responses (Mowla, 2004; Casey, 1993). Qazi Azizul Mowla argues that our histories and identities are interwoven with space and places through our personal memory-tagging (2004): “We attribute to places a personal memory-tagging which marks them in our mind. In this way we might say that we need to remember in order to have an identity and sense of place” (Mowla, 2).

This memory-tagging happens through our everyday interactions
with the site and the relations we create, maintain, and transform with people and places left behind and the new people and places we encounter (Mowla, 2004; Waite & Cook, 2011; Christou, 2011; Hoelscher & Alderman, 2004).

Mario talks about making a decision to stop himself from dwelling on the memories of his homeland and start focusing on the new memories he was making in Vancouver. Mario’s discussion is similar to Devran’s experience related to giving up on the memories of his life back in his country of origin. Relationships are at the core of Mario’s discussion about memory and belonging. It is not only that he can now remember places and changes in the cityscape, but also that he creates relational attachments to those sites and to the larger history of the city. He feels belonging to certain places because of the social relationships he has made. It is the relationships he has made and the social interaction at these places that create mnemonic attachments and help situate Mario’s sense of belonging to Vancouver’s landscape.

**Mario:** My home is a place for relaxation. I have my garden, where I grow flowers and chilies. I try to keep it very neat and tidy because I usually live with a roommate. On my bedroom wall, I keep my pictures of my family and places back home. I look at these photographs every day. I miss them. I can’t see my family as much as I want because of expenses. It is expensive to travel. It is also dangerous for me to go there. There are a lot of kidnappings there. There is a lot of homophobia there. And hate crimes. Still that hasn’t changed. In the street, you can still be hurt if you are gay. I worry when I go home. That hasn’t changed.

But they are with me. I remember them when I see their pictures. And I can have them here with me, in my heart, but here with me. I can put both lives together. They are here in Vancouver with me, in my heart. I feel that having two lives in one life is really beautiful…. you take with you the culture that you were raised with and lived with. They live together inside you. It is like you have two cultures in one body. So having two cultures at once. So for me, it’s like having two lives in one life. (Mario, August 20, 2013).

Mario is very close to his mother, grandmother, and siblings. He sends money home to help to cover healthcare costs and maintenance of his family’s home. When Mario received his
citizenship in 2010, he flew back to visit his family. He has visited his family several times since then. These trips are always bittersweet for Mario, as he is happy to be with his family, but is fearful for his life as a gay man. His sexual identity, relative wealth, and Canadian citizenship make him and his family fearful of being the targets of extortion by local gangs. Mario has to keep a low profile when visiting his family, and this stress and fear cause him to feel alienated from his beloved homeland. Mario would like to relocate his entire family to Canada so that they could be safe together but this is not possible because of ineligibility for permanent residency, visa restrictions, and not being able to cover the sponsorship fees. Instead, Mario brings his memories and love of his family and culture into his daily life in Vancouver. The pictures in his home and the chilies in his garden are some of the homing practices that bring his family over “there” in his country of origin to his life “here” in Vancouver. The gay Latin parties and Facebook group can be seen as additional attempts by Mario to bring his loved ones and culture “here”: to Vancouver. It is another way for him to live his “two lives in one,” as he never wants to sacrifice one life for the other.

Memory is a form of creative process between the local and transnational. It is also a site of resistance. Through his activism and daily life, Mario seeks to interweave his identity and sense of place from the traditions, relationships, and places left behind with the traditions, relationships, and places of his current home. It is an ongoing process that changes as Mario expands and contracts his social worlds to create a sense of self, home, and place.
3.3 John

Field notes, June 25, 2015

John and I are sitting on the bus heading to downtown Vancouver. We just finished a three-hour interview at a local café, where John discussed his experiences of finding employment and housing in Vancouver.

We sit together in silence staring out the window. As the bus drives through the Downtown Eastside\(^50\), we pass by a series of homeless shelters, addiction treatment and health clinics, and food kitchens. The Downtown Eastside is an area known for its high incidences of poverty, crime, and homelessness. Years of gentrification, government cuts to social services, and economic and social inequality have oppressed many of the individuals living in this area. People crowd the Hastings Street sidewalk outside of the Salvation Army, socializing with one another and waiting for assistance.

John and I quietly watch the people on the sidewalks as the bus drives by. John leans over and whispers:

“You know, I envy them sometimes.”

I turn toward John and ask what he means by this.

John shrugs and says, “Well, they are Canadian. They always belong here. I will never have that.”

I ask, “Really, you don’t think so?”

John replies, “Yes. They are born here. They belong here. Canada takes care of Canadians. Even if I got my citizenship, I won’t be accepted. I will never belong. I will always struggle.”

I nod my head at John, not knowing exactly what to say.

John smiles and says, “It’s a lot like this bus. We sit inside looking outside. We pass through. We sit on the bus and watch. But, we never are...I don’t know, a part of it.

This is my journey. I am alone sitting in the bus. I look outside and watch people. But they don’t see me. I am just riding through. Riding and riding. Maybe this bus won’t stop. I will just be always riding.” (Fieldnotes, June 25, 2013).

\(^{50}\) The Downtown Eastside is a residential and commercial area in downtown Vancouver located next to the West End. The area houses the majority of Vancouver’s homeless shelters and public resources for low-income and homeless persons.
This section centers on narratives and photographs of John, a gay-identified cisgender man in his mid-forties from East Asia. When we sat together for our preliminary meeting, John told me that his interest in participating was to record his experience and share it with others. He explained to me that he felt very alone in Vancouver. He hoped that his experience would be helpful to other refugees who may also experience isolation and discrimination. He also wanted his story to be preserved and remembered.

John chose to photograph what would represent an account of his experiences of settling in Vancouver and his experiences of isolation and discrimination as an older gay Asian refugee. His critique and analysis of the racial, gender, sexual, and class structures and norms that surround him as an older gay East Asian refugee are astute and profound. In the following sections, I follow John’s story through photographs as he goes into detail about his encounters with racism, ageism, and sexism. The first section follows John’s journey to Vancouver and his refugee process. John talks about his initial desire to migrate to Vancouver and his hopes for the future. This hope quickly changes as John encounters social and structural barriers to finding housing and employment and making friends. John’s story then shifts to his experiences of living in Davie Village. I attempt to situate John’s experiences in Davie Village in the historical and ongoing discourses about race, class, and settlement in Vancouver. John experiences discrimination and objectification by the majority white middle-class gay community of Davie Village as an older gay East Asian refugee. John’s story disrupts the whiteness and homonormativity that underlies neoliberal gay politics and spaces in Canada. His story pushes me to understand and situate his experience in the context not only of whiteness and homonormativity, but also the history of white settler colonialism that shapes settlement in Vancouver. His story also provides me a new way of thinking about forced migration. It was not
that John was simply displaced because he was forced to leave his homeland. He experienced a
double-displacement because of the racial history in Vancouver. It was an emplaced
displacement in which racialized power hierarchies are work to construct to a specific space
(Metro Vancouver) and contribute to making people feel “out of place”. John’s experiences of
marginalization and discrimination made him feel objectified as an outsider. In the midst of the
oppression John experiences in his daily life, he also resists and continues to survive. In the last
section, I explore John’s feelings of isolation and hope. It is this hope for happiness that pushes
John to continue on his journey. His hope for happiness is both a false promise (Ahmed, 2010)
and a site of resistance for John. Despite the odds, John still hopes for a better life, “for his ship
to come” (Interview with John, June 25, 2013).
3.3.1 “I was hoping that Vancouver would be sunnier. But, there are gray skies here, too.”
Coming to Canada and the Refugee Process

Figure 3.15 Cloudy Sky

(Source: Photograph by John, April 2014)

**John:** *All right, so this is the first picture I took; you can see the gray sky, and obviously it’s raining. You can see it is raining. Very gloomy and very gray.*

*I wanted to capture this, and I thought that this would be the beginning of why I came to Canada. At the time, back where I came from, my situation was very gray, like really gloomy.*
I had issues with a lot of things. My whole life was upside down. I think I told you before in our first interview that the country that I come from is not very gay-tolerant, and I was always being harassed by the police. I told you before, but I went to the police to report a crime and then I became the victim of them.

My family is also not very supportive. I always had to fight with my dad. My dad eventually wanted me to leave. The whole picture, the whole scenario, is not a pleasant one. So, like I say, it’s a rainy day, rainy day, and gray sky. And it doesn’t seem like there’s any future.

So I felt very trapped. I’m soaking wet with all my problems. I don’t know where to go and all those things. It’s all kind of coming down on you like the rain. Yeah, no sunlight at all. All gray skies.

I was hoping that Vancouver would be sunnier. But there are gray skies here, too. You will see it later in the pictures. [laughs] Shame on me! I didn’t know. (John, April 20, 2014)

John described himself as a man who “struggled for most of his life because of being gay” (John, June 25, 2013). He knew that he was sexually and romantically attracted to men from a young age. By the time he was in his forties, John was a successful salesman selling men’s attire. He lived with his parents and helped to take care of them. John never told his family or his neighbors that he was gay. However, being a single man at his age and living with his parents made some people suspect that he was a homosexual.

John did not come to Vancouver intending to make a refugee claim. In 2011, John witnessed a crime committed against another person in his home country. The police interviewed John about what he had witnessed. The police’s attention quickly turned to John once they learned his neighbors suspected that he was a homosexual. The police interrogated John multiple times about his sexual partners. Police officers would randomly show up at his parents’ house and follow John on the streets. John was worried that they were building a case against him in order to send him to jail. He heard from his gay friends that the police would detain and extort gay men for money. John was afraid that he would be arrested any day.
John started to realize that he couldn’t live in his country forever, but he did not have a specific plan for where to go. Many of his close gay friends had already left the country and relocated to nearby countries in East and South Asia or to the United States and Europe. John frequently travelled outside of his country on extended vacations. He saved up money for another vacation, deciding that it would be a good idea for him to “get away from the police for a little while” (John, June 25, 2013). He hoped that the police would forget about him while he was away. John found a cheap flight package for Vancouver through a local travel agent. He had previously visited the United States and was curious about Canada. He checked out a gay travel website and learned about Davie Village. John thought that Vancouver would be a good place to relax and enjoy life as a gay man. John had an acquaintance in Canada who was willing to help him get a visitor’s visa to enter the country, and because he was a frequent traveler, financially secure, and had someone from Canada sponsoring his application, John received his visitor’s visa in a relatively short amount of time. Once he got the visa, John packed his bags, said goodbye to his parents, and headed to Vancouver.
Figure 3.16 Picture of Green Grass

(Source: Photograph by John, April 2014)

**John:** This is a picture of green grass. When I decided to visit Vancouver, I told myself it’s a place where I could just go and get some air. I want to go to a place where...Well, it’s very funny, this picture, you can see that we always think that the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.

So this picture is more about a very wide-open space. It’s about having an idea...a hope, thinking that maybe that the place I wanted to go will be more open minded, greener. You know? So you have all of the green, all the trees here are green, the landscape is so green. And it’s very, very, spacious here. Lots of open space. So when I looked at
Vancouver, I thought that this might be a place that I wanted to go. I mean, freedom, it is symbolized in open spaces. People have so much freedom in open spaces...

A place of refuge, you know? Give me a place. Give me a break. Because my situation was getting overwhelming that I couldn’t handle it anymore. So it was a kind of a break for me, sit down and rest a while, and then carry on with my journey. (John, April 20, 2014)

John learned about making a refugee claim during his first week in Vancouver. While staying at the local YMCA, he spent most of his time walking around Davie Village and Stanley Park. By chance, John met a volunteer for Rainbow Refugee at a crowded diner on Davie Street. He told the volunteer about what was happening to him back in his country and his fear of returning. The volunteer explained to John that he could make a refugee claim on the basis of the police persecution he experienced as a sexual minority. The volunteer connected John with a local lawyer. John met with the lawyer immediately and made his refugee claim the following week.

John waited a year for his refugee hearing. During this period, John struggled to find permanent employment and survived on his small savings. He experienced harassment and discrimination from employers because of his temporary work status. Eventually, John spent his savings and had to live on social assistance. He described this period as being very difficult, but he held a lot of hope that life would improve after his refugee hearing. John lived in Davie Village, but felt very ostracized and isolated from his gay neighbors. The volunteers and LGBT refugee members at Rainbow Refugee were his only source of community support. He attended the Rainbow Refugee drop-in meetings and would frequently meet outside of the meetings with other LGBT refugee claimants.

John’s refugee hearing was held in January 2012. He described the hearing as being “more of a relief than anything” (John, June 25, 2013). He knew that afterwards he could stay in
Canada and apply for permanent residency. John had high hopes that as a Convention Refugee he would be able to find secure employment and build a better life for himself in Vancouver.

**John:** This picture relates to what I thought or hoped my future would be. So the future is going to tell me that I will be okay, with abundant food. It means a place at the table for me. I took this picture to symbolize my hope for comfort. You know, finally my burden is really gone now.
Kat: Like you are going to come out with a better life? Being comfortable and happy?

John: Yes. But this picture also symbolizes poverty: It means I won’t have to be in poverty, because I have food to eat. So it’s nice. I won’t be struggling. I wouldn’t worry about starving.

It is funny, because this picture also represents my situation now. I cook this dish a lot. It’s very cheap. It is potatoes, some carrots, very oniony. I just bake them, and then pork, cream of mushroom soup. But it is good, and I can eat it for two or three days. So I am full…but not in the same way that I wanted. (John, April 20, 2014)

The hope for a full life kept John going through the wait for his refugee hearing. John’s hopes changed as he continued to struggle to find work, adequate housing, and a sense of community belonging. John applied for permanent residency immediately after the positive outcome of his refugee hearing, but waited almost three years to receive it. During this time, he was ineligible for the majority of newcomer job training services and assistance. John continued to experience discrimination in the housing and job markets as a refugee, an immigrant from East Asia, and an older gay man. John was also faced with ageism, classism, and racism within the local gay community in Davie Village. These experiences significantly shaped John’s sense of belonging in Vancouver.
3.3.2 “It’s not a perfect rainbow.”
Experiences of Racism, Ageism, and Classism in Davie Village

Figure 3.18 Picture of a WaterFall and a Picture of a Dumpster

(Source: Photographs by John, April 2014)

**John:** So these two pictures represents a contrast from what I thought my life would be. The first is a picture of a waterfall, like abundance and freedom. Flowing and able to move freely. Fresh and clean. Very beautiful.

[laughs] And then there’s the dumpster. These dumpsters are actually behind Davie Street. I wanted to take a picture of them. I say that when I look at Canada, especially Vancouver, there’s like the front face and in the back alley is the dumpster. The dumpster, the back alley dumpster, is my vision of Vancouver. That’s where I am forced to go.

**Kat:** The dumpster photo is very powerful. It reminds me of the double-sided experience you have had in Vancouver. I remember you told me that at first you thought Vancouver was this beautiful place. You had a lot of hope for yourself. But, then you experienced a lot of difficulties.
**John:** Yes, you know, you see! You got it there! You see, it’s all in a back alley, it’s all in the back alley. You don’t see what’s really going on until you get here. And then you find out that you are nothing. Just trash to be thrown in the dumpster. It’s all dumpsters, you know?

**Kat:** Why do you think you are being thrown in the dumpster?

**John:** So another thing, onto the challenges of living here...So, as a gay man, as a refugee, and, of course, as an Asian, as a single guy, I don’t have family here, you know...I have to work four times or even five times as hard to get to where I want to be as an ordinary Canadian. You know?

Because I am not entitled to all the rights I have. I am a visible minority and I am gay. I’m also older and not rich...which is, you know, terrible in the gay community. [laughs] A friend told me that it’s like a death sentence. You know? Being poor, Asian, old, and gay.

So I won’t have any place in this society. Especially because this society is a very unforgiving society. That’s why as a refugee here I can only say that my life is not any better from where I came from. It’s just that it is a different...I would say that it is a different experience, that’s all. And then plus my sexual orientation, not being young or rich, makes it even harder for me to excel. You know, to move on with my life.

I don’t really just face the straight people; I also face my own gay community. People in the gay community, they are also quite mean and nasty. (John, April 20, 2014)

John’s explanation of the meanings behind the waterfall and dumpster pictures speaks to the “double displacement” he experienced within Vancouver as a low-income older gay East Asian refugee (Kojima, 2014). John is very specific that the dumpster he photographed is located behind Davie Street, the main road that goes through Davie Village. There is a good reason why John is so specific about the dumpster’s location. Davie Village was the first place that John lived when he made his refugee claim. It was also an area where he experienced social rejection that affected his sense of home and belonging within Vancouver’s larger gay community. This section will focus specifically on John’s pictures and narrative surrounding his experiences of Davie Village and the surrounding gay community.
When John made a refugee claim, he decided to live in Davie Village because he wanted to be near the close-knit gay community living in the area. John did not have any family or friends in Vancouver. The cost of rent in Davie Village was considerable: more than twice the amount of an apartment in the periphery of Vancouver or in the surrounding suburbs. However, John felt that as a newly arrived gay immigrant, he would be best able to make friends in Davie Village. At first, John experienced difficulty obtaining an apartment in Davie Village. He answered “roommate wanted” advertisements posted online and at Little Sisters\textsuperscript{51} bookstore, only to find that the advertisers did not want to share an apartment with John because he was a refugee and unemployed. John described seeing several roommate ads saying “No Asians.” John was not able to rent an apartment on his own because he did not have credit and could not pass a mandatory credit check. He eventually learned from other gay Asian immigrants that some of the larger property managers in the West End take advance cash payments in lieu of credit. John was able to get a small studio apartment by paying three months of rent in advance. Even though the apartment was very expensive, John decided to move in because it was walking distance to the shops and bars in Davie Village.

John’s apartment was in a building managed by Hollyburn, a multi-million-dollar property investment and development company in British Columbia. As the area underwent rapid renovations in the aftermath of the 2010 Winter Olympics, Hollyburn and other development agencies experienced growing criticism from gay activists and locals for gentrifying\textsuperscript{52} the neighborhood and displacing inhabitants of the West End. Older and cheaper

\textsuperscript{51} Little Sisters is a popular and historic LGBT bookstore located in Davie Village.

\textsuperscript{52} Gentrification is the buying, selling, and remodelling of property in low-income neighbourhoods by individuals, state officials, and corporations for the purpose of revitalization and capital development. Critics of gentrification report that gentrifying poorer neighbourhoods
independently owned apartment buildings in the West End were being demolished and replaced by more expensive high-rise condos and apartments. Many of the older gay inhabitants were forced to relocate as they lost their housing and could not afford the higher rents. Coming in to replace these persons were a mixture of upper-middle-class professionals and affluent immigrants.

The changing landscape in the West End led to discussions in both gay-oriented and mainstream newspapers about the loss of housing and community. Although gay men remained a significant population in the West End, the influx of upper-middle-class, predominantly heterosexual professionals caused concern over the potential loss of Vancouver’s historic gay district. The growth of the younger, middle-class gay professional population and the “aging out” of the gay community as many moved to the suburbs to raise children or retire were also recognized as factors in the changing housing demographics of Davie Village. However, much of the media’s attention was directed toward investment and housing purchases by immigrants and foreign nationals coming from East Asia. Several papers ran cover stories with titles like “Saving Davie Village,” “Destroying West End,” and “There goes the gayborhood” (Miller, 2005; Ley & Dobson, 2008; Zomparelli, 2010; Shanks, 2008; Zacharias & Lindsay, 2014).

Incoming immigrants from Asia were visible targets for local anxiety about rising housing prices and the higher cost of living in downtown Vancouver (Miller, 2005).

John experienced racist comments and “dirty looks” from neighbors in his building. When he told other gay men where he lived, he received criticism for renting from Hollyburn, what they saw as an enemy to the local gay community in Davie Village. John was not only

creates larger income and housing inequalities as local inhabitants are displaced and/or actively removed from their homes. These individuals then have fewer options for safe and affordable housing (Ley & Dobson, 2008).
criticized for renting from Hollyburn, but also objectified as a threat to the gay history and culture of Davie Village.

**John:** When I moved here, I didn’t know anything. Nothing about the history...you know, about what’s going on here with Chinese, Taiwanese, Korean people buying up homes. I learned pretty fast. First time it happened when I got my apartment. One of my neighbors always gave me a mean look. I was always polite and smiled, but never did he smile back. Always a nasty look. I asked another neighbor about this and he said, “Well, he doesn’t like you because you are Asian.” And that’s all the reason he needed.

But, it wasn’t just the neighbors! I know that a lot of people hate Hollyburn. They always say bad things about them. When I first met people, I told them where I lived. They criticize me so much about Hollyburn. But then I told them I don’t have any other choice. I don’t know where else to stay. I don’t know where to find my resources. And I don’t know anyone here and I am all by myself. And they get angry with me for renting a Hollyburn property.

They say Hollyburn is letting people take away Davie Street...that Hollyburn is not doing a proper job in the gay community in the West End. They say they jack up the rent so much. That they are squishing out the gay people from the West End. They are a culprit...but then they also say that the government is also a culprit. The government allows them to do all these things.

And plus **YOU** people also. **YOU** people, which is me, but really they mean Asian. You are renting from them also. You also contribute to the disaster of the West End. You are hurting the gay community here. Then I say, look, how do you expect me to know all these things within two weeks of my arrival? (John, August 17, 2013)

Sara Ahmed writes that race and colonial historical legacies work together to render dispersed strangers and their irreducible differences into a singular figure that can be easily objectified (2000). John felt that the gay men he encountered had already “made their decision about him” based on his ethnicity, age, income, and immigration status. This assumed knowledge felt pervasive and inescapable. It rendered John not an individual, but an outsider (Gopinath, 2005; Kojima, 2015).

The reaction John received to living in a Hollyburn-owned building as an East Asian immigrant speaks to the history of white settler homonormativity underlying settlement and
sexual politics in Vancouver. Jaspir Puar writes that sexual exceptionalism in Western gay politics works on the framework of whiteness, which makes white bodies the norm for queerness (2006; 2002; 2004). Scott Morgensen expands on Puar’s argument and argues that sexual exceptionalism rests on white settler colonialism that denies Indigenous sovereignty and disregards racialized queers as outside of gay politics and spaces. White settler homonormativity reproduces white settler privilege and normalizes patriarchal and cisnormative heterosexual practices such as marriage, patriarchy, and the gender binary. The gay sexual citizen is a white settler who holds inherent privilege and entitlement to the settler state. Those outside of this confining white settler gay norm are seen as outsiders or threats, regardless of whether they are sexual minorities (2011).

Davie Village did not become the official “gay district” of Vancouver only because of the dismantling of anti-sodomy laws in Canada and the development of gay and lesbian political solidarity. Davie Village developed as a gay-designated commercial and community space as low-income persons, non-European immigrants, and sex workers were pushed out of the West End of Vancouver (Ross, 2010; Ross, 2012; Catungall & McCann, 2010; Ingram, 2010). By the 1960s, most of the Indigenous settlements in the West End had been forcibly removed by city officials (Catungall & McCann, 2010). The space left behind allowed the development of cheap housing and the creation of a large city park, Stanley Park. Becki Ross writes that during the 1960s, the availability of cheap single-occupant apartments and large outdoor spaces in the West End turned it into an area of sexual liberalism in which individuals engaging in public sex could meet discretely and sex workers worked independently up and down Davie Street (2010; 2012). The sexual liberalism allowed for more and more gay men to move into the area and build a community. These communities of gay men and women were mostly white and Canadian-born,
as First Nations communities had been forced out of the area, and immigration policies strictly limited migration on the basis of race, gender, and sexuality until the late 1970s.

Gay oriented and owned bars and shops appeared as more and more gay men moved into the area. Eventually, the West End became the most visible place for the gay community in Vancouver. In 1975, the Gay/Police Liaison Committee formed to work with the police to stop police violence against the West End’s gay inhabitants. Gay activists pressured city officials to remove sex workers from the area in an effort to “clean up” the West End and create a level of respectability. In turn, housing prices rose, forcing many inhabitants to leave the area. These persons included lesbian women, transpersons, and a long-established Chinese community. By the early 1980s, the predominantly white, middle-class gay men in the West End had achieved political gravity and economic stability (Borbridge, 2008; Ross & Sullivan, 2012). Sex workers were pushed out of the area through stricter police enforcement. Davie Village transformed from a sexually liberal and multicultural location to a mostly white and middle-classed (Ross, 2012) area defined by a particular sexual identity (homosexual) and gender (cisgender male).

The underlying racial, gendered, classed, and sexualized settler history of Davie Village contributed to John’s experience of double displacement. John’s experience of double displacement is similar to Mario’s experience as a racialized queer person. However, John’s experience of displacement differed from Mario’s based on the time periods in which the two men immigrated to Vancouver (Mario immigrated ten years earlier), as well as John’s age, ethnicity, education, and income status. John’s experience is also different from Mario’s because of the particular settler colonial history of Vancouver that structures social discourse around incoming immigration from Asia. Sharene Razack writes that the settler colonial history of Canada is built upon white settler hegemony, which depends on the ongoing objectification and
dispossession of non-white immigrants and Indigenous persons (2002). This history, however, is not monolithic and does not affect all racialized bodies in the same ways at the same time. Race in itself is a construct that is ever changing and contested. The meanings attached to racialized bodies will differ based on the particular histories and socioeconomic relations surrounding a place at a particular time. John and Mario both experienced objectification and discrimination within the predominantly white, middle-class gay community because of their ethnicities. At the same time, their experiences are also very much grounded in their unique social positions.

**Kat:** If someone asked you about Vancouver, what would you tell them about your experiences?

**John:** I would tell them that Vancouver is very unwelcoming. Because recently...these past few years...the media has been portraying that a lot of Chinese from Mainland China have been coming here and snapping up the housing. That they are the ones who are driving up the housing prices.

And in some ways that doesn’t look good on me. So when people look at me, as a long as you are Chinese-looking, we don’t care where you are from. You could be Chinese or Chinese-looking from Australia or America or Indonesia or Malaysia or Korea. They assume you are from Mainland China. They put all the problems on you. They strip you down to that and classify you as **ONLY** that.

So for people who don’t know the difference when they see you, they are like, “Oh! You Chinese! You are just coming here and buying everything.” I hear this all the time. People say that to me.

But only if they knew that there are Canadian businesses going over there to market to people in China and all around Asia. I don’t mind to tell you that I know that there are Canadian property developers that are actually going to China, to Taiwan, to Korea, all over to advertise. You would be surprised. And they have tour groups just specializing for buying properties. They tour around the city with the developers telling them that we are going to develop this piece here or that place there. So they say to them, “Okay, we are going to build a high-rise here. So start buying it.” It’s like a property marketing tour.

*And how am I to blame for that? Why put that on me? (John, August 17, 2013)*

bell hooks argues that those living or forced to live on the margin are the most astute critics of the center of society and the forces of power (2000). John is not silent about what he
sees as the injustice directed toward him and other Asian immigrants. As John explains, the media depiction of Asian immigrations being the root cause of Vancouver’s housing crisis is misleading and ahistorical. John was able to travel to Canada, make a refugee claim, and get an apartment in Davie Village because of the long history of communications, trade, and travel between Asia and Canada. John’s migration and settlement is not exceptional in the context of the larger history of immigration and globalization. Yet, he was marked as a stranger (Ahmed, 2010) and outsider because of ongoing colonial and Orientalist discourses around Asian immigration in Vancouver.

It is not enough to say that John encountered racism within the gay community in Davie Village. He did, but stopping there ignores the fact that Davie Village was a racialized place from the outset. John was cast into the category of outsider not necessarily because he was renting from Hollyburn, but because of the particular racial discourse surrounding Vancouver that draws upon the historic regulation of and ongoing panic over “hordes” of Asian immigrants infiltrating Vancouver. This rhetoric has been repeated time and again since before Canada was an independent state, with each “wave” of immigration being supposedly more terrible than the last (Teo, 2007; Anderson, 1991; Aujla, 2000).

The phrase “YOU people” stripped John of his individuality and placed him into a racial discourse that sets visible minorities, particularly those from Asia, as challengers to underlying white settler hegemony in Vancouver. Sharene Razack (2002), Sunera Thobani (2007), and Himani Bannerji (2000) write that political and social discourse in Canada and the United States works to define and naturalize the idea of a uniform cultural community and national border based on an “inherent” or “natural” white majority. This discourse ignores the ways in which constant migration back and forth from the Global South and North shaped the social, economic,
and political landscape of North America. This is especially true for migration between South/East Asia and the Canada’s West Coast (Teo, 2007; Kojima, 2015; Anderson, 1991). Migration to and from East and South Asia shaped the Vancouver landscape and created interlocking networks of social and economic exchanges across the Pacific. This relationship allowed Vancouver to grow into a large urban center as foreign money was invested in the region. Without this relationship, Vancouver’s industry and housing market would collapse. Blaming immigrants and investors from South and East Asia as the primary cause of Vancouver’s housing crisis ignores the immigration policies and neoliberal market practices put in place by the Canadian federal government, British Columbia’s provincial government, and Vancouver’s municipal office, all of which actively recruit and foster foreign investment and immigration. What is in fact a discussion about class and capitalism as they relate to housing and investment in Vancouver becomes a discussion about race in which Asian immigrants are visible targets for white settler social anxiety (Teo, 2007; Kelly & Cui, 2012; Madokoro, 2011).

**Kat:** Was there ever a moment where you felt attachment or belonging to Davie Village? Where you used to live?

**John:** No. No. I never felt welcomed. I felt like I didn’t belong...So, like, people might have good memories of Davie Village. But I don’t. I don’t feel anything. Even Pride...I don’t go to. Because it’s not accepting. I don’t like to go to Stanley Park. Because of the guys there. So, if the community constantly tells you are not welcomed, why would you want to go back? You don’t. (John, April 20, 2014)

John experienced an emplaced displacement because of the particular settler history of Davie Village. Sharene Razack argues that race is situated in place, but this relationship changes as people move through places (2002). John’s particular experience of being first displaced from his home country because of his sexual orientation and then later displaced in Vancouver because of his racial and class background speaks to how displacement is not a one directional
process. It is not necessarily the loss of homeland that leads to John’s displacement, but the marginalization and objectification he received in Vancouver and within the larger gay community in Davie Village.

Being “too old” for the gay community was another aspect John encountered in Davie Village. John experienced discrimination from employers because they felt he was too old for positions in retail, customer service, or food service. His sexual advances and offers for friendship were rebuffed by younger and older gay men he met online and at the popular gay bars. Research on queer aging shows a significant amount of ageism within the gay community, especially in the context of choosing sexual partners and significant others (Simpson, 2013; Heaphy, Yip, & Thompson, 2004; Heaphy, 2009; Cronin & King, 2010; Kaufma & Phuan, 2003). While age preference is not unique to the gay community, it is a community in which there is significant discrimination based on age. Gay bars and social spaces, as well as social gay dating apps, cater mostly to a younger clientele, leaving many older gay men feeling isolated and invisible. There is also a racial and gender component to age discrimination within gay communities in North America. White older gay men have more advantages in finding partners and accessing social services, as well as other benefits, than do older queers of color (Cronin & King, 2010). For John, age discrimination was also tied to ethnicity and gender.

**John:** The white guys love young Asian boys. The Asian boys like the white guys. They see you as competition for them. But nobody is interested in me. I’m not the right type. I’m not rich. I’m not young. Nobody is interested. I’m invisible. You know, what’s the point? I said forget it.

I don’t need this anymore. I used to go to Pumpjack, but I stopped going to gay bars. I got too many weird looks. I don’t go on Grindr anymore. The guys there are always posting “No Asians” as their preference.

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53 The Pumpjack is a popular gay and leather bar in Davie Village.
I don’t mind to tell you that when I was taking pictures downtown, I did bump into a gay guy, and he’s a white gay guy. I can tell you that he’s also very racist and he passed some remarks on me. He says that you Asians have small penises. He yelled at me and laughed.

Kat: When you were taking your photos?

John: Yeah, and I’ve seen him before. I know him. He’s in the gay community. So maybe he recognized me, but I can feel the hatred from him, you know, when he said that. This is what I meant by I don’t just feel discriminated by the society here, but even within my own community, the gay culture, it’s also quite discriminatory. (John, April 20, 2014)

John’s description of himself as not the “right type” reveals how race, class, gender, and age surround erotic desire. Within the narrowly defined parameters of sexual acceptability in neoliberal youth-driven gay communities in the West End, John cannot find a place for himself. John felt that gay white men judged him as too old to fit in to the stereotype of a desirable young and attractive boyish-looking gay Asian man. On the other side, John felt other Asian gay men discriminated against him because of his age, ethnicity, and low-income status.

John’s account of sexual harassment when he was taking pictures speaks to how power is sexually expressed in ways that maintain the privilege and significance of whiteness as the sexual norm while disempowering and objectifying queers of color (Robinson, 2012; Robinson & Vidal-Ortiz, 2013; Robinson, 2015; Puar, 2007; Caluya, 2008, Fung, 1996; Eng, 2001). A number of scholars have critiqued the ways in which Asian males are represented in Western gay media and culture (Caluya, 2008, Fung, 1996; Eng, 2001; Leong, 1996; Han, 2006, 2009; Jackson, 2000; Kojima, 2014). Richard Fung’s groundbreaking essay on the depiction of Asian men in Western gay erotica and media shows that the Asian male body is reproduced as subordinate, passive, and feminine in relation to white men (1996). What it means to be an Asian gay man is entirely constructed from and largely based on Western white expectations of what is normal and what is foreign. This is an Orientalist construction in which the discourse of
domination and colonization is based on the opposition of the “masculine” West to the “feminine” East (Caluya, 2006, 2008). Asian gay men are depicted as in contrast to white gay masculinity; they are seen as a sexless, homogenous group whose only concern is to obtain dominant white male partners (Caluya, 2006; Han, Proctor, & Choi, 2013; Han, 2009). Maurice Kwong-Lai Poon and Peter Trung-Thu Ho’s research on race in Toronto’s gay scene shows how the overt sexualization of Asian men in Toronto’s gay and queer culture continues to place white men in privileged positions and Asian men in positions of subordination (2008). Utterances like “No Asians” on gay social apps like Grindr and SCRUFF as well as the invisibility of Asian men in Toronto’s gay media and social spaces perpetuates common Orientalist stereotypes of Asian men while also disavowing them (Robinson, 2015). Through Orientalist stereotypes, such as the statement that all Asian men have small penises, power continues to be sexually expressed in a way that maintains the significance of whiteness as the sexual norm and desired social position. Asian gays are seen as inferior to white gays. This may create low self-esteem, internalized oppression, and pressure to fit in, and tension within gay Asian communities, as the men see themselves as competing with one another for white male partners.
Kat: So what is this picture about?

John: The picture of the rainbow flag represents my experience. Yeah, a lot of negativity from the gay community. The flag looks very nice, right, a very rainbow flag, you know, like, they tell you all this. But it is just a mere fantasy.

I remember coming to Davie Street and seeing all the rainbow flags. I thought it was so great. I don’t think like that anymore. My friend told me that this rainbow is imperfect because it lacks one color, so it has six colors only. It’s not a perfect rainbow. It doesn’t accept every color. I see that representing me. I’m the color left out. There is an unwelcomeness there. (John, April 20, 2014)
John stayed in Davie Village until a few months after his refugee hearing. The cost of rent as well as the “unwelcomeness” he felt from his neighbors and other gay men in the area made him want to leave. John felt discriminated against and unfairly judged by the close-knit gay community in Davie Village. He found it too difficult to make friends and find a job. John’s experience calls attention to the larger historical racial, sexual, gender, and class structures underlying settlement in Vancouver and sexually exceptional spaces like Davie Village. John’s arrival in Davie Village put him in the cross-hairs of historical and ongoing white settler colonialism, which objectifies and marks racialized immigrants as strangers and outsiders.

3.3.3 “Still waiting for my ship.”
Isolation, Relatedness, and Getting By

After leaving Davie Village, John moved to a shared apartment in a Vancouver suburb close to Richmond. He would move several times after that because of disagreements with roommates and inability to afford rent. By the time of our last interview, John was sharing a one-bedroom apartment with another person. He was still struggling to find permanent employment.
John: I took these pictures of the bus stop to show my experiences of Canadian culture. The culture, the society. I don’t think that I can fit in. I feel uncomfortable all the time.

The people have their backs to you. They’re not talking to one another. They’re all kind of off in their own space. It’s very individual here, you know? The city can be very cold. There’s no human touch. You can be in a large group of people and feel very alone. No organization here. Everybody is all spread out. You’re all on your own. Canada is looking after their people. I’m alone here. I don’t fit in. (John, April 20, 2014)

In the Western neoliberal cityscape, collective community structures are disassembled in favor of independent and anonymous individualism. In some ways, this anonymity and independence can be liberating (Noble, 2005; Ahmed, 2005). John D’Emilio and Estelle Freedman write that the anonymity and financial independence found in large urban cities allowed many same-sex-attracted men to meet and develop into various sexual social communities (1989). Cities provided a new way of living in which people were no longer dependent on biological kinship or communal structures: a person could be an anonymous free
agent. Yet, some feminists and critical race scholars critique the idea of anonymous and independent free agency in the urban landscape and for not considering the differences in social positions and power structures that limit people’s choices and make them feel “out of place” (Noble, 2005; Kokanovica & Bozix-Vrbancic, 2014). John’s feeling of being alone in a large crowd of people, and the discomfort he experiences, do not result from John being anonymous or independent. His discomfort is defined in relation to his sense of belonging and holding the subjective status of outsider or “stranger.”

In *Giving Account of Oneself*, Butler argues that one makes sense of one’s own experience based on the presence of others (2005). The subject submits him or herself to the power relations that exist in the social world, to specific subject positions that are socially produced. In order to “fit” in an environment, the subject requires recognition of belonging from other actors (Kokanovica & Bozix-Vrbancic, 2014). Our ability to be comfortable in a certain setting rests on our ability to be acknowledged as rightfully existing there. This recognition is unevenly distributed, with some individuals belonging more than others. As Sara Ahmed writes, “This uneven distribution reminds us that ‘who’ gets constructed as the host who welcomes the stranger is an effect of relations of power that cannot simply be willed away by the ‘good will’ of the nation, or the national subject. Indeed, the nation is an effect of the proximity of strangers, rather than the origin of their displacement or exclusion from civic life” (2005, 97). The nation depends on separating those who are inside the nation from those who are outside. Emotions are bound into this in the phenomenological sense that they are always intended for and directed at something or someone: “Such intensifications of feeling create the very effect of the distinction between inside and outside, or between the individual and the collective, which allows the ‘with’ to be felt in the first place” (2005, 97). In the context of white settler colonialism, the white body
is “the body at home,” the body already inside the nation (Razack, 2002). The stranger’s body, the body of the outsider, is a racialized body, a body recognized as “out of place.” In saying “I don’t fit in,” John reveals the emotional weight he carries as he is reminded in his everyday interactions, such as waiting for the bus, that he is “out of place” in the collective history and socio-political landscape of Vancouver.

It is important to recognize and understand John’s feelings of alienation and isolation. Yet, it is also critical for me as a listener and interpreter of John’s photographs and story not to place him in the singular narrative of being on the outside of mainstream Canadian society. John’s pictures are an act of resistance to his marginalization. In showing the contrast between what he thought Canada would be like (the Waterfall) and what he experienced (The Dumpster) he is directing the gaze back to the audience. This audience includes Canadian citizens as well as immigrants like myself who enjoy certain privileges of anonymity because of being white. He resists against his objectification and provides a counter-narrative to the underlying assumptions that determines who belongs and who does not in the Vancouver landscape.

John is not interacting with one hegemonic and universal society in Vancouver. Despite John’s experiences of marginalization, he is also an active agent who navigates several overlapping complex social worlds in his everyday life. For example, John worked to develop contacts and networks with ethnic and cultural communities from his country of origin and other Asian communities in order to find employment and needed resources. Similar to Devran’s experiences with the Middle Eastern community, these attempts were met with varying degrees of success because John had to keep his sexual orientation and refugee status secret out of fear of harassment or violence. As much as John may at times feel a sense of familiarity in shared
immigrant experiences and culture, he also feels out of place within the larger Asian community because of his sexuality.

Figure 3.21 Picture of Flowers

(Source: Photograph by John, April 2014)

Kat: So tell me about this picture.

John: This is a funny picture. You asked if there was a place in Vancouver that has special memories for me. I will say no. I don’t have a favorite place. I never felt that I could make something here my own. Nothing was special.

But I met two good friends here, and they will be my special memory for the rest of my life. If I have to leave Vancouver, I can always remember them. You know, when I want to think about nice things here, I think about them. When I am with them, I feel better here. These flowers represent them... (John, April 20, 2014)

Sara Ahmed writes that when talking about the dislocation or displacement of a migrant’s home, it is important not to frame home as a particular place that one inhabits (1999). Home should instead be seen as a concept of multiples, impossible to secure to just one place and time.
(Ahmed, 1999): “It is not simply that the subject does not belong anywhere. The journey between homes provides the subject with the contours of a space of belonging, but a space which expresses the very logic of an interval, the passing through of the subject between apparently fixed moments of departure and arrival” (Ahmed, 1999, 331). Throughout John’s story, I have explored how home is not necessarily situated in one place or one time. John’s pictures and narrative do not convey a fixed sense of home in either his country of origin or his current location in Vancouver. John has experienced violence and marginalization in both locations, making both locations unhomey places for John. John does not view his current living place as a home. Instead, John reveals how transitory relationships carry meanings of home and belonging. The flowers represent the two close friends John has made in Vancouver. This picture is the only picture John took that does not address the difficulties and marginalization he experienced in his country of origin and in Vancouver. John may not necessarily feel belonging or at home in the physical space of Vancouver. However, his attachment to his friends provides him the comfort of “being here” in an unhomey place. He will carry the memories and feelings associated with the “special memory” of his friendship with him through his journey.
John: This is just a Google image that I have on my computer. This picture represents two things. So you asked me if there were places I felt excluded. I wouldn’t say just Davie Street. I would say rather the whole Vancouver itself, you know. So this **WHOLE** picture.

But also, this image is really common on tourist sites. It was an image that I saw before I came here. So I guess this image is like two meanings, or a double meaning. Because I saw this image when I was planning my vacation. And I thought Vancouver would be so many things. But I see now that it is just a picture.

In some ways, Vancouver does give me refuge, but the hate part is there. It doesn’t have much true opportunity here. You know, when I say true opportunity, it means an opportunity that you can do things that are meaningful. You can live well. You can build a life. Yeah, I find that there’s not much opportunity here.

I just do whatever I can for now and then make my final decision. I might return to [country in East Asia]. Maybe I am just too tired. I can’t see much of my future here. I just see the next day. Maybe I might still go somewhere. Who knows? Maybe it might get better? Maybe not. I’m trying to figure out my direction.
You know, it’s like I told you the first time. I am still waiting for my ship to come. Still waiting for my ship. So I just keep looking for my ship (John, April 20, 2014).

When John first made his refugee claim, he believed that Canada would provide a new beginning for him. He had hopes for a full life, a life where he would feel a sense of belonging. This did not happen for him in the way he imagined it would. When we last spoke, the future was still very uncertain for John. He was growing more and more exhausted with his poor living conditions. He continued to feel isolated from the gay community. What was most upsetting for John was that he could not plan his future. He had no clear idea of what to do with his life. His limited funds made it difficult for him to decide on a plan of action. He was unsure about whether to keep trying to build a life for himself in Vancouver or to take what little money he had and go back to his country of origin. John felt that he was in between places, just waiting for his luck to change.

Sara Ahmed writes that we live in a time when “the promise of happiness” structures and regulates our lives (2010). Multiculturalism and immigration underlines this promise in the West. The image of the “happy citizen” is contrasted with the image of “the melancholy migrant” (Ahmed, 2010). Media portrayals of immigrants becoming happy citizens or “good immigrants” by adopting national customs and being productive members of society serve to perpetuate the idea that happiness can be achieved if one works hard for it. This covers up the ongoing inequality and hierarchical power structures that limit individuals from achieving such happiness on the basis of gender, race, sexuality, and class (Ahmed, 2007; 2010). In “waiting for [his] ship to come,” John must negotiate multiple dislocations. Although John has been a victim of racism and age discrimination, he refuses to be objectified and homogenized. John’s pictures and analysis of the discourses surrounding housing and settlement in the West End provide a counter-
narrative to historical whitewashing and racialized homonormativity. John’s experience speaks directly to the effects of whiteness and homonormativity on racialized queer immigrants. He feels that he was pushed to the alley, to the outside of Davie Village gay community—and in fact, he left the community to seek a sense of home elsewhere in Vancouver. The day-to-day negotiations of survival he must make show his ongoing resiliency in the face of displacement (Manalansan, 2003; 2010).

3.4 Conclusion: Relatedness & Placemaking

The stories and photographs of Devran, Mario, and John provide intimate snapshots of their lives as gay refugees living in Vancouver. Their stories are unique to their social positioning and backgrounds. Recording their stories and capturing their pictures allowed me to perform an in-depth exploration and analysis of their experiences. The three men’s lives are much more dynamic, complex, and changing than what I can show in this dissertation and what they have chosen to reveal to me. The stories presented reflect only as much of their lives as they shared within the relationships we had and the discussions we engaged in, filtered through my interpretative authority over their words and pictures. Yet, several key themes were shared between Devran, Mario, and John.

The material and structural challenges that Devran, Mario, and John faced as racialized gay refugees speaks to the larger structures of inequality surrounding refugee settlement in Canada. The particular political, economic, and social settler history of Vancouver has created a system in which gendered, sexualized, classed, and racial hierarchies constrict in-land refugees’
migration and settlement. LGBT refugees experience economic and social inequality in Metro Vancouver that limits their chances to build homes for themselves. The limited institutional support for in-land refugees places them in a disadvantaged position for obtaining employment, health care, and housing. Race, gender, class, and sexuality intersect within the limitations placed on in-land refugees by the provincial and federal governments. In-land refugees face significant discrimination in the job and housing markets. Being on social assistance leads many in-land refugees to be denied housing. Racism, anti-refugee sentiment, and xenophobia play significant roles in making refugees feel marginalized and isolated from Canadian citizens and permanent residents. LGBT refugees are further marginalized on account of their sexual orientation and gender identity. The intersection of race, gender, sexuality, class, and immigration status creates barriers for LGBT refugees attempting to build homes in Metro Vancouver. This situation creates a precarious social, political, and economic environment for LGBT refugees to navigate.

The challenges that Devran, Mario, and John experience extend beyond the material and structural constraints they face as low-income racialized gay refugees. Relatedness and feelings of being in/out of place were central throughout their narratives. The personal relationships they have to various places in and outside of Vancouver contribute to their senses of home and belonging. These relationships incorporate the material, structural, and social barriers they experience as racialized queer refugees, but also extend to the ways in which memory, senses, and social interactions work to both attach and displace Mario, Devran, and John in their current homes in Vancouver and the homes they have left behind.

Devran’s and Mario’s experiences of being physically present in one place but at the same time having a feeling of belonging somewhere else are shared by many who have been displaced and forced to migrate (Brun, 2001; Sampson, 2010; Said, 2000, 1999). Devran and
Mario have developed complex spatial strategies in order to navigate the places in which they are physically present, while also negotiating ongoing social, economic, and emotional relationships with places from which they are physically absent. Devran’s and Mario’s relationships to home(s) challenge the idea of a world divided into natural and intact nation-states whose existing inhabitants are inherently bonded to the land (Brun, 2001; Black, 1991; Bauer, 2000). They re-territorialize home by expanding and constantly reforming their networks of relations and sense of place. The “here” and “there” of Devran’s current home and the home left behind in the Middle East inform his sense of place. Devran’s discussion of home connects to Mimi Sheller and John Urry’s (2006) arguments about a new mobilities paradigm in social research in which all places are seen to be tied into at least thin networks of connections that stretch beyond a physical place or state border. This new paradigm insists on a “broader theoretical project aimed at going beyond the imagery of ‘terrains’ as spatially fixed geographical containers for social processes, and calling into question scalar logics such as local/global as descriptors of regional extent” (Sheller & Urry, 2006, 208). The distance between Devran’s “here” and “there” changes as he navigates the social landscape of Vancouver. At times the “here” and “there” collapse, as in his experience of riding the SeaBus, experienced through his previous memories of riding a similar type of boat in his country of origin. At other times, the distance between “here” and “there” carries much more weight, as Devran reflects on his inability to see his family and on the isolation he experiences in Vancouver. James Clifford (1994) writes that migrants mediate a “lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place” (307). Devran reconfigures his current home in Vancouver both figuratively and imaginatively in relation to his home in the Middle East (Sheller & Urry, 2006). His sense of place is informed by the relationships he maintains in his country of origin as
well as the relationships he must navigate in Vancouver. The distance between “here” and “there” is physical, but also emotional and mnemonic. Devran engages with his sense of “here” and “there” throughout his everyday life as his memories and the sensual residue of his home in his country of origin reconfigure the Vancouver landscape and the homing practices inside his apartment.

Mario experiences a similar sense of loss and longing for the relationships he had in his country of origin. Like Devran, Mario experienced dislocation and displacement in Vancouver based on his refugee status and his ethnicity. He describes his life as “two lives in one,” through which he maintains the cultural and social connection to his home country while also working to create a place for himself and other Latin LGBT persons in the social fabric of Vancouver. The gay Latin parties serve as an orientation device for Mario in which he can reconnect to his previous identity as an LGBT activist. Mario’s feelings of home and belonging are informed by the memories he has made with others and the ability to track the landscape of Davie Village. Mario’s “two lives” are not in competition with one another, but inform each other. This helps situate Mario’s sense of home to Vancouver and to his country of origin.

John’s experiences of objectification and not fitting into the social fabric of Davie Village and Vancouver speak to how dislocation and displacement figure differently depending on national spaces and historical periods (Sheller & Urry, 2006, 210). Sara Ahmed (2004) and Beverly Skeggs (2004) have noted that being able to belong, to move, and to control one’s ability to locate oneself in the landscape both “reflect and reinforce power” (Skeggs, 2004, 49). John’s pictures and story speak to the inequality of mobility in which “not everyone has an equal relationship” (Skeggs, 2004, 59). John’s experience of “unwelcomeness” on account of his social positioning as an older gay Asian refugee speaks to how displacement can be emplaced in
specific spaces through the collision of colonial histories that attaches racial histories to place. John navigates conflicting relationships as he continues to get by. His sense of home is in the lived tension he continues to experience through his marginalization and dislocation in Vancouver.

Relatedness expands beyond biological kinship to include relationships with other sexual and ethnic communities including, but not limited to, queer and cultural/ethnic communities in Vancouver. The experiences of Devran, Mario, and John challenge both heteronormative studies of refugees and kinship that exclude LGBT individuals and neoliberal homonormative queer studies of gay migrants and families that ignore cultural, racial, class, and gender differences. Devran, Mario, and John have experienced both acceptance and rejection within the various communities they interact with in their daily lives in Vancouver as well as in their countries of origin.

In trying to make a sense of home between (un)homey places, Devran, Mario, and John challenge refugee historiography, which until recently depicted home as a one-time accomplishment in a person’s country of origin and in the country of settlement (Fruend, 2015). Devran, Mario, and John reconfigure home as in-between, a journey or a wandering that is “neither placeless or place-bound, but place making” (Ingold, 2005, 206; Myers, 2008). In each of their stories, home is not lost or found, but an ongoing journey. There is a sense of plurality in regards to home as Devran, Mario, and John connect feelings of home to different locations, relationships, and senses that reside in their countries of origin and in Vancouver. Home is not binary, but instead rests in the in-between of different home places in which each of them experience belonging and not belonging. Because social relationships are dynamic and always changing, so too is home. Devran, Mario, and John are active agents who, despite their
dislocation, develop strategies to create a new sense of belonging between unhomey spaces (Rishbeth & Powell, 2013). They must negotiate often-conflicting social norms within Vancouver and their countries of origin in order to find what they need to survive. This negotiation is not always successful, and survival is not guaranteed, but they continue to move forward and find creative means to get by. These evolving relationships are never settled. Home is never settled.
4 The Body as a Site for Homecoming
Experiences of Home and Belonging for Trans Refugees.

Stories of Tiffany, Natalie, and June

In this section, I explore the narratives of Tiffany, Natalie, and June, and the participatory photography of Tiffany and June. Tiffany, Natalie, and June made refugee claims based on the persecution and fear of persecution they experienced as gender nonconforming persons. Their experiences reveal how gender nonconforming individuals and non-normative bodies are hyper-regulated by immigration and citizenship processes in Canada. Tiffany, Natalie, and June faced several barriers in accessing necessary health services, safe housing, and employment as trans⁵⁴ and racialized refugees. They experienced intersecting violence from state institutions, health services, and various social communities in Metro Vancouver that made them feel marginalized and vulnerable.

⁵⁴ I have chosen to use the word trans instead of transgender in order to be inclusive of the various ways individuals interpret and express gender identity that may reside outside of Western-based terminology and gender culture. Persons claiming in-state asylum based on gender identity may call themselves transgender or transsexual on their basis of claim form. They may associate with and adopt these terms for their personal use. However, some who claim asylum based on gender identity may not personally associate themselves with the terms transgender or transsexual, especially in the ways that these terms are used in North America. Gender is a cultural constructs and can vary greatly given the location. Those claiming asylum based on gender identity may more closely associate with the gender constructs of their countries of origin or cultural communities. They may use the term transgender in order to claim asylum, but they may not use it to describe themselves, or they may bring with it their own cultural framing outside Western constructs of gender.
The relationships Tiffany, Natalie, and June have to their bodies play a central role in their narratives of home and belonging. Their desire to have their gender identities accepted by state and society made them come to Canada and claim asylum. Being at home within their bodies and having the authority to do what they want with their bodies informs their sense of home. Although Canada provided them asylum as gender minorities, Tiffany, Natalie, and June continued to experience marginalization in Metro Vancouver as racialized and low-income trans refugees.

While Tiffany, Natalie, and June may not feel at home in their current locations, they carry a sense of home within themselves. As their bodies physically and emotionally change, their sense of home changes. Just as their bodies have no definitive endpoint in their transitioning, home is a continued journey of possibilities. The relationships they have to their bodies also affect the relationships they have with their families back in their countries of origin as well as with the larger LGBT community in Vancouver. Home is informed by the connections they make to the people around them. Each experience both rejection and acceptance in the larger gay, lesbian, and trans community in Vancouver. They must navigate through conflicting social networks that carry within them certain vulnerabilities. In their navigation, they resist against structural and social forces that seek to erase them.

While forced migration researchers have done much to resist and destabilize nationalistic and xenophobic representations of refugees, much of the research being produced overlooks the bodily experiences and embodied phenomena that generate particular meanings of home and belonging for forced migrants (Grønseth, 2011; Shum, 2014; Coker, 2004). Forced migration is an intrinsically embodied experience. Refugees’ bodies are regulated by state and society throughout their displacement, asylum process, and resettlement in a host country. Karma
Chavez writes that refugee bodies are caught in a web of relations once they cross state borders. Militarized state surveillance, border checks, containment in detention centers, and medical checks construct refugee bodies as “out of place,” calling into question a person’s legal right to be in the state and claim asylum (2010). These regulatory measures situate refugee bodies as threatening or dangerous to the nation’s wellbeing and encourage discourses about “bogus” refugee claims, illegality, and “queue jumpers” in an attempt to delegitimize refugee claims and displace refugees as threatening invaders (Gehi, 2009).

The body plays a central role in trans refugees’ claims for asylum, as they must prove to the IRB not only that they are gender nonconforming, but also that they experience or fear persecution based on their gender identity. Research on LGBT refugees in Canada has increased significantly in recent years, and although transpersons are included in the majority of research on queer refugees, they remain underrepresented and marginally included at best. There has been very little research to date on trans refugees’ experiences of settlement outside of the asylum process. A large portion of the literature on queer refugees makes only passing references to the particular experiences of trans refugees in Canada, often noting simply that trans refugees face additional hardships in the asylum process (Gehi, 2009; Berg & Millbank, 2013).

Catherine Nash writes that while attention to trans issues has begun to surface slowly in queer migration and queer geographical literature, there is not yet a sustained engagement with trans scholarship (2011). Emerging trans scholarship on migration shows promising explorations of lived trans migrant experiences that go beyond the nation-state and actively interrogate previous conceptions of gender, sexuality, and embodiment, as well as the intersections of race,

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55 By gender identity, I mean not only male or female gender identities, but also other forms of gender-variant or nonconforming expression and identities (such as they/them or ze) as well as culturally situated gender roles and identities.
class, and ability (Nash 2011; Bhanji, 2011; Cotton, 2012; Browne 2004; Doan 2007). Instead of dividing spaces along a hetero/homosexual or male/female divide, trans scholars argue against socially constructed binaries in order to dismantle heterosexist cultural norms (Stryker, 2006; Cotton, 2012; Bhanji, 2011). Trans scholars argue that the body and emotions as equal to concepts regarding representation, identity, and subjectivity in the context of queer migration (Nash, 2011; Aizura, 2012). Trans scholars interrogate borders not only in a figurative sense, addressing gendered, sexualized, classed, and racialized social norms, but also in a material and geopolitical sense by interrogating what happens to gender-variant bodies in their migration, crossing of state borders, and resettlement (Aizura, 2012, 135). Understanding the lived, material, and embodied everyday experiences of trans migrants can help scholars to further understand the interconnectedness and layering of gender, sexuality, race, class, and ability in migration and settlement (Nash, 2011).

Tiffany, Natalie, and June’s stories provide rich and complex understandings of the everyday obstacles many trans refugees face settling in Canada. As a cisgender queer scholar, I am faced with the tasks not only of interpreting their stories and photographs as an outsider, but also of resisting the legacy of objectification, tokenism, and erasure of transpersons in queer scholarship. In engaging with their stories, I draw upon the phenomenology of the body and embodiment to understand the stories and photographs of home and belonging that Tiffany, Natalie, and June shared (Csordas, 1994; Ahmed, 2006; Gorman-Murray, 2007). Phenomenology emphasizes the importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds (Ahmed, 2006). A phenomenology of the body places the body as the point from which to view the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Embodiment involves looking at the lived experiences of
social actors and how they corporeally experience and perceive the world around them (Csordas, 1994, 137). Embodiment is a way to look at power and meaning, and how individuals bodily experience power and meaning in their daily lives (Waskul & Vannini, 2006, 5). Persons experience themselves simultaneously in and as their bodies. The body serves as a point of reference in our narratives, and when we tell stories to other individuals, we experience the telling and listening through our bodies (Pons, 2003). A phenomenological and embodied perspective recognizes the historical and socio-political forces that impinge on the bodies of Tiffany, Natalie, and June, and the role their bodies play in expressing, producing, and contesting social norms. In listening to their stories, I sit in a location of indeterminacy and open-endedness (Rosaldo, 1980; Ramírez, 2005). Yet, as Renato Rosaldo has so poignantly argued, the value of storytelling lies in its messiness, in its ability to make us self-reflect, and the fact that in both breadth and depth, it can take us to places and meanings still undiscovered (1980). The stories and photographs provided are also shaped by my bodily presence as Tiffany, Natalie, and June act as a translator to my location as a cisgender, white, and non-refugee settler-researcher.
At the Mosaic LGBT Newcomers’ Workshop, in a room filled with settlement workers, community activists, and representatives from Citizenship and Immigration, Tiffany stood and presented her story of struggle and hope as a transwoman refugee. This was the first time that Tiffany had spoken publically about being a transwoman and a refugee. She gave me permission to share a transcript of her speech in this chapter.

Tiffany: Hello. My name is [Tiffany]. I am from [country in Asia]. I came to Canada last year to ask protection from my country.

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56 Pseudonym chosen by Tiffany
I think most of people here are curious about why I am here as a refugee in Canada. My home country, [country in Asia], is absolutely beautiful and one of the most advanced countries in the world. But I had to run away from my home, friends, and family because of compulsory military service.

Yes. I was born male. I am a transgender woman. I thought my life in Canada would be much easier and happier. That’s why I chose to move to Canada.

I am happy being here as a woman in Canada. But there are also pros and cons as a new immigrant.

Today, I would like to share some of my stories here.

First is employment. I am still looking for a job.

I’ve been to Canada almost a year, but without Canadian experience and education, it seems almost impossible to get a decent job. I graduated from a top university in [Country in East Asia] with an excellent grade, but now, I’m looking for jobs as a server in Canada. But still I don’t get calls from restaurants.

However, even if I’m about to get hired, I still face problems, because I’m still classified as male on my work permit. To change my gender on my work permit, I would need a proof of sex reassignment surgery.

I came to Canada because my country’s military office gave me only two options: Do the risky surgery to get exempted, or serve in the military with the men and be killed.

I wasn’t ready to go through a very high-risk surgery yet. And it’s my body and my life. I want to have the surgery when I am ready. As much I want to have the surgery, I am scared and I am afraid.

And now, Canada government asks me the same question: Do the surgery or be a jobless transgender woman.

I also have a travel document, which is our “passport” for refugee people. I sent my doctor’s letter to prove that I am a transgender woman. But I would still need medical documentation to confirm that I have undergone a change of sex and the surgery is complete.

I have heard that people in China have been strip-searched by customs officials at airports when their passport doesn’t match their gender. People at the American border have been questioned for hours.
I feel helpless again. When you become a citizen of Canada and apply your Canadian passport with your doctor’s letter, you do get desired gender passport only when you promise to have the surgery within 12 months. And it’s limited availability passport for only two years. It’s very tragic.

Secondly, housing is a big issue for me as well.

If your gender does not match with your ID, it’s very difficult to find a home. My transgender woman friend is still hiding from her landlord who lives on the same floor. He even told her that she will go to hell because of her sexuality and gender. Now she is always using the stairs and checks her entrance to make sure the landlord is not around. And it’s her apartment!

Finding housemates is also difficult. You have to come out about your sexuality and gender to every potential housemate. And you have no idea if they are transgender friendly or transphobic. It’s a very scary experience.

Even though you lie to them about being transgender, you will always feel fear that your housemates will find out. And because of housing being so expensive, we cannot afford our own place. We end up living in places very far from Vancouver.

But, it is the Vancouver area that has the most jobs. Vancouver is where our doctors are. It is where our support is. It is where we can get help as transgender people.

You do get support from the government if you don’t have a job and have no income. It is called income assistance. But it’s only $610 for a month. Living in the Vancouver area seems like a fairy tale with that money. I cannot afford a room in Vancouver with income assistance. I can’t even save up for the gender affirming surgery that might change my life for the better. Gender affirming surgery is covered by MSP, but you still have to pay private hospital fees for your recovery right after the surgery, which is more than two thousand dollars.

To all my lesbian and gay friends and people who work for refugees in Vancouver to make a better place in the world: We have to fight together. Gay and lesbian people were treated the same way I am right now. The generations before fought for gay and lesbian people to have the same rights and better life. And it seemed impossible, but now we are all here. Gay and lesbian people can get married. They are treated as equals in the law.

And now it’s transgender peoples’ turn. Please speak out to change. Let’s fight together for our next generations. Let’s be proud. Thank you.

(Tiffany, January 30, 2015, Mosaic LGBT Newcomers’ Workshop, Trout Lake Community Centre)
I first met Tiffany in the winter of 2014, when she came to Rainbow Refugee for assistance with her refugee claim. I worked with her to prepare for her upcoming hearing. I would later write a letter of support for her and be an observer to her refugee hearing. Tiffany and I volunteered for several Rainbow Refugee events. She knew about my research, and after her refugee hearing, Tiffany asked if she could participate. We waited over a year after her refugee hearing before sitting down for an introductory meeting. Tiffany was excited about participating in the project. She wanted her story to help other trans refugees who might feel alone.

Tiffany came to Canada and made a refugee claim based on the persecution she was experiencing as a transwoman in her country. From the moment Tiffany entered the country, her gender identity and sexuality became an area of contention and surveillance by the Canadian Border Service Agency (CBSA), the IRB, and Citizenship and Immigration. Tiffany also experienced policing of her gender in her everyday life from neighbors, landlords, and employers. Her refugee status made her ineligible for several social and health services offered to Canadian trans citizens. She was without a support network as she experienced housing and employment difficulties. These challenges affected Tiffany’s ability to build a life for herself in Vancouver.

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57 As a volunteer for Rainbow Refugee, I was invited by the members (LGBT refugee claimants) to attend and observe their refugee hearings. Observers must sign a confidentiality form signed by the refugee claimant to show their approval of the observer’s attending and observing the hearing. The refugee board staff give this approval waiver to the refugee board member at the start of the hearing. The refugee board member then tells the observers that they have signed a confidentiality form and cannot discuss the effects of the hearing unless given permission by the refugee claimant. I sat as an observer of Tiffany’s and June’s refugee hearings. June gave me oral permission to talk about his refugee hearing as a volunteer for Rainbow Refugee, especially with other trans refugee claimants who need advice.
Tiffany’s story reveals the hardships many trans refugees face when migrating and settling in Canada. Her story is also a story of relatedness. Tiffany was able to migrate to Canada and make a refugee claim because of financial support from her mother. In the last section, I focus on Tiffany’s relationship with her mother and her desire for a family to create a home with. These relationships are very much gendered and embodied. Tiffany’s relationship with her mother is a relationship of care, longing, silence, and distance in which Tiffany hides her gender identity from her mother out of fear of alienation and loss of support. While Tiffany longs for a relationship with her mother as a daughter, the distance between them provides Tiffany the freedom to live her life as a woman while still being a good son to her mother. Away from her family, Tiffany experiences both isolation and vulnerability in Vancouver that cause her to feel out of place. Tiffany’s desire for a family to build a home with gives her courage to keep surviving. It is this hope that allows Tiffany to feel a sense of home.

4.1.1 “I wouldn’t do all of this if I didn’t want to be a woman”
Trans Migration and the Refugee Process

Tiffany’s story of making a refugee claim in Vancouver is as much about crossing gendered borders as it is about crossing national borders. Her story begins in her country of origin, where as a young child she wanted to look like the girls in her class.

**Tiffany:** I was a happy little kid. I am still a pretty happy person. When I was little I would follow the girls around in my class. I was obsessed with them. But, I wasn’t attracted to them.

I realized that I liked one of my classmates. He was a boy. And I was like what is happening to me. What am I? What is this? Why do I like boys? I am supposed to like girls. I kept it quiet to myself. But, I kept thinking about it. I kept imagining him my boyfriend. But, I didn’t tell anyone because I was afraid that they would think I am a freak. And so I secretly thought I was gay.
But, then I remembered when I was seven that I was always playing with the girls. I wanted to be those girls. I wanted to be them. So there was something there already.

And things started to get worse in middle school. I was too girly already. I had no idea that I am transgender still. I got bullied at school. The boys got bigger. The boys got meaner. And I was targeted because I was small and feminine.

The bullying was bad. They would sometimes hit me after school. And my mom was afraid. One time a boy hit me and I came home with a red mark on my face. My mother was there and she asked me what happened. I told her that a boy hit me after school. She ran to the boy's apartment. She went there and screamed at the boy. She threatened him. She did my revenge for me. She was very protective of me.

Another time I got beat on the roof of my school. I came home with a red face. That time I was crying. My mother asked me. I told her. She went to the school the next day. During class and said to them, "Who hit my son? Come here!"

But it only got worse because my mom came. So everyone called me momma's boy and they kept on beating me up. I tried to hide it from her. But, my mom is really strong. So she decided that I couldn't go to school there. (Interview with Tiffany, February 24, 2015)

Tiffany’s mother decided that it would be best to send her abroad for education. She sent Tiffany to a country in the South Pacific where she lived with a homestay family from her country of origin. Tiffany came to terms with her sexuality while living abroad and accepted herself as a gay man. She was too shy to tell the other students about her sexual orientation. Tiffany finished high school and two-year college in. She did not want to go back to her home country because of the mandatory military service. Tiffany applied for university in a country in East Asia and was accepted.

Tiffany described her student years as very happy. She lived openly as a gay man. She had a part-time job and an apartment. She would eventually find a long-term American boyfriend. Tiffany was given a temporary reprieve from military service while she was a student. After she graduated from university, she was ineligible to apply for an extension of her military
service reprieve in order to attend graduate school. Tiffany was only able to get a one-year extension on her passport while she was living abroad.

Tiffany started her gender transitioning during her last year living abroad. She began intensive hormone replacement therapy that required her to receive injections every other day. Knowing her passport was about to expire, Tiffany researched how be exempted from military service as a transwoman. When her one-year passport extension was over, she was forced to return to her country of origin, where she immediately began trying to secure medical documentation in order to avoid military service.

_Tiffany:_ I couldn't get my passport renewed. My government did not give me a new passport. So I had to go back. But, before I left I researched how to get exempt from the military for being transgender. So when I first went to my country I knew that I had to go to the medical hospitals to get the documents for exemption. There are some hospitals and clinics that the military office selected. You can't go to random clinic or doctors. You have to go to military selected doctors and clinics. I looked through the list and there was one in my city so I went there.

I didn't have a job. I did have money saved. But I wanted to save it for the worst case. I used my mother's credit card to visit the doctor. I did not have insurance. I did not have anything to help me.

The first doctor refused me. She kicked me out of the office when I told her about my situation. I don't know why she kicked me out. She said that I don't do people like you. Meaning transgender people. She would not treat me. She kicked me out. But, the good thing is that she didn't charge me for the consultation.

I went to a second doctor in another town. The second doctor said that I would need to be in a mental hospital for three months to see if I actually have gender identity disorder. He said I had to go to a psychiatric hospital because they think of transgender as a mental disease or problem. Gender disorder.

_Kat:_ But, you already showed them your medical documents from [Country in East Asia]? You showed them proof that you were already taking hormones?

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58 Gender identity disorder is the psychiatric diagnosis for individuals who experience significant dysphoria with the sex and gender assigned to them at birth.
**Tiffany:** Yes. I showed him all of my documents from [Country in East Asia]. But, he didn’t buy it. I was crying and saying you don’t understand. You are my last hope. Because the first doctor refused to see me. But, this second doctor would not believe me. I said that if I go to military service I will be killed. I was begging and asking. I had no options. I did not want to go to a mental hospital.

I was devastated. I was by myself. My mom was not there. I could not tell her what I was doing. She saw the charges on her credit card, but I lied and said I was sick. I cried by myself. I didn’t want my mom to know.

Even if you have insurance if you go to a psychiatric or mental hospital you have to pay anyway. It is not covered. And that’s where I had to go. They would hospitalize me for three months. How am I going to explain to my mom that I am in a mental hospital for three months? And I would have to pay for my stay there? I couldn’t afford it.

And if you go to a mental hospital it is on your record. So that record will always follow you. You can’t get a job. It says that you were a mental patient. It was so difficult to have a job or anything. It is a stigma. It follows you until you die.

I left his office so heart broken. I had no hope. I was so scared. (Interview with Tiffany, February 24, 2015)

**Figure 4.2 Tiffany’s Dress**

(Source: Photograph Taken by Tiffany, April 2015).
The picture above is one of the first dresses that Tiffany bought for herself. She bought this in her country. She had to hide the fact that she was buying the dress for herself. She lied to the store clerk and said she was buying it for her sister.

**Tiffany:** I went to the military all dressed up. I had to meet with the officer there. I wore a wig and shoes. I put on makeup. Even in [Country in East Asia] I didn’t go out in a dress. But, for my life, to survive, I decided to go out in a dress with all makeup and wig.

My mother was away on a business trip. So I borrowed her clothes. I borrowed her clothes and stockings. I took a taxi there because I was too scared to take a train or bus.

The officer looked at me. I showed him my hormone medication. I showed him the doctor notes from [Country in East Asia where Tiffany previously lived]. I explained to him that I was transgender. But, he told me that I couldn’t be exempt. I didn’t have the documents from the mental hospital.

I asked the officer for an extension so that I could get the documents from the mental hospital. But, the officer said that in order to be exempt I needed to have surgery. I wouldn’t be exempt unless I removed my penis and get a vagina. I didn’t want to do that. I don’t know if I even want to do it now. But, I didn’t want to do that in my country. I was so devastated.

* I don't have too many memories because it was so sad. I went home and cried. So after that I decided to make a refugee claim.* (Interview with Tiffany, February 24, 2015)

After receiving the verdict from the military officer, Tiffany felt that her only option was to leave the country. She had a new one-year passport that she had secured when she first returned to her country, but this was the last time she could receive a one-year passport. Tiffany figured that meant she had one year to try to find asylum. After reading online about a transwoman in her country getting asylum in Canada, Tiffany chose to go to Canada because of the shorter refugee processing time than in the United States and Australia (1 to 2 years). She felt that if her asylum claim was rejected, she could try to claim asylum in Australia or Europe before her passport ran out.
Tiffany explained to her mother her plan to claim asylum in Canada in order to avoid military service. Tiffany’s mother knew how desperately Tiffany wanted to avoid military service, but she did not know that Tiffany was trans. Tiffany hid her hormones, wigs, dresses, and makeup from her mother. Tiffany showed her mother an article about a man from their country getting asylum in France because of the military service requirement. Through this article, Tiffany was able to convince her mother that she should try to claim asylum in Canada without revealing to her mother that she was trans. Tiffany’s mother agreed to pay for her ticket to Canada, but she did not have high hopes that Tiffany would succeed in getting asylum.

Tiffany contacted Rainbow Refugee before she came to Canada. Rainbow Refugee gave Tiffany the contact information of a local lawyer. This lawyer helped Tiffany prepare for her journey to Vancouver by giving her advice on what documents and evidence she needed to bring for her asylum case. The lawyer also gave Tiffany valuable advice about how to act when she arrived at Canadian customs at the Vancouver International Airport.

**Tiffany:** *One of the most important things he [Tiffany’s lawyer in Canada] told me was how to get through the border without being put into detention. Like not to pack too many bags because it would look like I was staying. I had a return ticket and I had a visitor’s visa. So I was only going to tell the border people that I was here on vacation. I did not want them to know that I was making a refugee claim. I was worried that the border guards would know that I’m transgender so I dressed very androgynous. I did not want them to suspect me.*

*My lawyer told me to be careful at the border because the customs people are putting refugees in detention. He told me that detention would not be safe for someone like me, you know, a transgender woman. That’s why I dressed more androgynous. To not draw attention to me. I was not confident to dress as a woman. And my passport is male anyways so they would know right away.*

*Because detention is prison. That’s the thing a lot of people don’t know. It is not like a hotel. You are put into a small room, like a prison cell. You have to be in a room with people. With people who have maybe killed or hurt other transgender people like me. You are in there with them. You have no contact with the outside world, only a phone.*
And if they want to, they can take you to prison in Richmond. It is worse there.  
(Interview with Tiffany, February 24, 2015)

Laurie Berg and Jenni Milbank write that travel is always risky for transpersons (2013). Acquiring travel documents can be challenging for transpersons. Those who are able to get travel documents often find that they do not reflect their gender identity. During migration, transpersons run the risks of harassment and sexual and physical violence by both fellow migrants and state officials. National borders become sites where reactive forms of governmental power regulate bodies in order to reinforce and reproduce heterosexist gender norms (Gillespie, 2015). Identity documents, border checks, and detention centers work together to create a structured insecurity in which gender nonconforming bodies are forced to perform certain gender identities (Gillespie, 2015). These administrative procedures work to create an unequal distribution of life chances across migrant populations in which their ability to migrate into a country and claim asylum are limited or denied (Aizura, 2012, 136).

Benjamin Gillespie writes that in charged heteronormative spaces like the U.S.–Canadian border, bodies are under intense surveillance for any signs of deviancy, especially in regards to gender and sexuality (2015). Under these conditions, gender nonconforming and queer bodies often have to assume heteronormative gender roles in order to escape detection and suspicion. Closetsing one’s gender identity at the border in order to match identity documents, as Tiffany did, may be a solution for some transpersons. Yet, it comes with a high amount of risk and is not an option available for all transpersons. Tiffany also had to hide her intention to claim asylum. Aren Aizura writes that Canadian and U.S. border guards can be suspicious of gender or sexually non-normative bodies, questioning their citizenship and limiting their access to the country (2012). The increasing attention paid to LGBT asylum applicants in the mainstream Canadian
news only adds to the suspicion of gender nonconforming and queer bodies infiltrating the country and claiming asylum. Queer and gender nonconforming migrants face regulatory state structures as non-normative bodies (such as increased interrogation, physical searches, and identity document checks by border officials (Murray, 2015; Gaucher & DeGagne, 2014). To put it more bluntly, in a 2014 workshop on refugee detention, one of the lawyers said, “If you are a gay or transgender person coming to Canada outside of Western Europe and the United States, be prepared for the border guards to assume you also want to make an asylum claim” (Fieldnotes, January 2014). This assumption of asylum-seeking for gender-variant/nonconforming and queer bodies creates much more risk for trans and queer migrants in their efforts to enter Canada safely without being interrogated by the CBSA and possibly detained.

Immigrants and refugees are detained if the CBSA and Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness consider them to pose an internal flight risk or potential danger to public safety, if they are without a visa, or if they do not have official identity documents and/or have false identity documents. Detention is used as a holding period while the CBSA and Ministry of Immigration assess the person’s flight and public safety risk and/or retrieve official identity documents. A person can file for asylum while in detention and will be allowed to contact Legal Aid and speak to a lawyer over the phone. If the person passes the review of refugee admissibility, which determines eligibility to make a refugee claim in Canada, the individual can meet with a lawyer while in detention. A member of the Immigration Division of the IRB reviews all detentions after 48 hours. If the Immigration Division decides that the person is not an internal flight risk or a threat to public safety, and/or is able to get official legal documentation, the claimant may be released from detention.
Detention of immigrants is nothing new in Canada. What is new is the greater discretionary power Citizenship and Immigration has given CBSA to detain individuals for an arbitrary amount of time. The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) laid the legislative grounds for immigration detention. The 2012 Bill C-31, now known as “Protecting Canada’s Immigration System Act,” provided more grounds for arbitrary detention; for example, if two or more foreign nationals arrive together at the Canadian border, they may be detained on suspicions of smuggling or being trafficked (Silverman, 2014). This means refugee claimants are under increased risk of detainment for an indefinite period of time. The CBSA claims that almost seventy-four per cent of detainees, including children, are released within forty-eight hours (Silverman, 2014, 30). However, any time spent in detention can have detrimental effects on refugees’ mental and physical health (Silverman, 2014). Shana Tabak and Rachel Levitan write that LGBT refugees are particularly vulnerable to heightened levels of physical and mental abuse while in detainment (2014, 2).

Trans refugees face added vulnerability based on their gender nonconformity. Like trans inmates in non-immigration prison settings in Canada, trans refugees are placed into either male or female detainment centers based primarily on their genitalia or identity documents rather than on their self-expressed gender identities (Sexton, Jenness, & Sumner, 2010; Jenness & Fenstermaker, 2014). When I visited the Vancouver immigration holding center with Rainbow Refugee in 2013, the CBSA officer told me that they would take into consideration the person’s preference for being placed in either a female or male detainee holding area. However, the decision is ultimately in the hands of the CBSA officer, private security officer, or prison official in charge of allocating spaces. I met with refugee claimants at Rainbow Refugee whose requests to be placed in a male or female room were denied because officials determined their room
allocation based on their genitalia or on the person’s identity documents that listed the gender assigned to them at birth. Tabak and Levitan report that trans refugees have been strip searched by officials, denied access to hormone medication, and subjected to physical and sexual abuse by fellow detainees (Tabak & Levitan, 2014).

The abuses LGBT persons face in detention have not gone unnoticed. In 2012, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) issued new detention guidelines for refugees (UNHCR, 2012; Tabak & Levitan, 2014), including guidelines to address the special concerns of LGBT refugees in detention. The guidelines state that special measures need to be taken to ensure the safety and wellbeing of LGBT detainees (Tabak & Levitan, 2014). These measures include access to adequate health care, gender and sexuality sensitivity and human rights training for prison or border officials, and the limited use of solitary confinement. These measures are a step in the right direction for LGBT persons currently in detention (UNHCR, 2012). However, as trans activist Dean Spade warns, these kinds of inclusionary measures in law and detention facilities further support hierarchical, colonial, and unjust systems of power that regulate bodies and limit life chances for gender-variant individuals (2011). The issue of LGBT refugees facing violence in detention centers goes beyond homophobia or transphobia. Kerry Carrington writes that the enclosure of borders and the increased use of disciplinary measures to segregate, detain, and deport undesirable migrants builds on the ongoing history of settler colonialism that depends on technologies of population control to narrowly define those eligible for citizenship and expel those who do not belong (2006). The increased use of detention is just another technology with which the Canadian state can control migrants’ bodies and chances for refugee protection. It is not surprising that a disproportionate number of people in Canadian detention centers are from the Global South (Silverman, 2015). While the grounds for
determining detention are not officially based on country of origin, income status, race, class, gender, or sexuality, migrants are detained for reasons that inevitably fall along social, political, and economic lines. Low-income people, racial and ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and sexual and gender minorities face greater limitations in obtaining legal travel documents and qualifying for visas to Canada because of their marginalized status in society. In escaping persecution, they may have no option but to obtain false documents to enter Canada and claim asylum. These circumstances, however, are not taken into account when the CBSA and Immigration Division officers question migrants at the border and later detain them. Instead, they are labeled as irregular migrants and their rights to enter the country and claim asylum are challenged by the CBSA and Immigration Division (Silverson, 2014). This significantly affects refugees’ chances of a successful hearing and, in fact, of survival (Tabak & Levitan, 2014).

When Tiffany landed at the Vancouver International Airport, she was not put into detention. However, she was taken in for questioning by the CBSA. Her bags and body were searched. Two CBSA officers questioned Tiffany about her travel plans for more than three hours. Tiffany described feeling very scared of the CBSA officers, but she stuck to her story about coming to Vancouver for a vacation. She showed the CBSA officers her return flight ticket and gave them the address of the place she was going to stay. Eventually, she managed to convince the CBSA officers that she was in Vancouver for vacation and they let her go.

Tiffany had a limited time to stay in Canada because of her travel visa and coming from a country listed as a Designated Country of Origin. Tiffany had thirty days to prepare for hearing once she submitted her basis of claim. She met with her refugee lawyer as soon as possible and
they went to work writing her basis of claim. She had fifteen days to submit her basis of claim. Writing the basis of claim was both cathartic and stressful for Tiffany as she tried to write her story in a way that would make sense to the deciding refugee board member. She was still very much at the beginning of her gender transitioning and was slowly discovering herself and who she was. As Tiffany explains, her feelings about her gender and her body were intermixed with her fear of military service and the difficulties she would face as a transperson.

Kat: So in [Country in the South Pacific where Tiffany went to High School] you identified as a gay man? Not publicly, but privately, to yourself? Then in [Country in East Asia where she went to university] you also identified as a gay man before you started your gender transitioning?

Tiffany: Yes, that’s true. But I did have feelings about being a woman, too. The reason I started my transition when I did was I did not want to go to the military.

Who knows? I might have waited longer to transition. I was kind of preparing for it in my mind. I kept thinking about it. I would think, “Well, I like men. I don’t want to penetrate. Life would be so much easier if I was a woman.” That is how I started. But I wanted to be a woman, not a transgender woman.

If there wasn’t the threat of military, I might not have started my transitioning when I did. It is hard to say. It is kind of mixed. I don’t have a clear memory of it. There was so much fear. So much was going on. I can’t remember it clearly. I was so afraid of the military. I been wanting to be a woman. I was scared of the surgery. I was scared of coming out as a transgender woman. I was so chicken about it. I was so shy. I was not brave about this. But the fear of the military made me act. It pressured me to make a decision.

Because it is a big deal to change your gender. Because you may lose your family and your friends. I see on the news transgender people being killed. Or they can’t get a job.

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59 The process of writing and submitting your basis of claim and being approved can vary from two weeks to over a month depending on the circumstance. The basis of claim form serves as the primary evidence to a person’s refugee claim and it is the document that the IRB member will use to discern a person’s eligibility for asylum. Rushing through to finish the basis of claim can leave opportunity for mistakes or information being left out that may be vital to a person’s claim. The situation becomes more delicate when considering that refugee claimants working with lawyers through Legal Aide only have a few hours to spend with their lawyers to write their basis of claim. Much of the work is then left to the refugee claimant to write their detailed and complicated story. This takes considerable time and effort, especially when English is not the person’s first language.
And it is scary. They are working in bars or in prostitution. I don’t want to be like that. I want to have a successful life. So even though I wanted to be a woman, I think I couldn’t choose to be transgender so fast. But thanks to military service, it pushed me to transition. It pushed me to make a decision...

I don’t want you think that I transitioned only to get out of military service. I was dealing with this when I was writing about my story, you know, for refugee. It was so hard to explain. How can you put this all down in one story? That’s why it took me so long to do my basis of claim. It took me a month to write it down. It was so difficult.

I was dealing with all of these changes. My feelings about myself as a woman were growing. I knew that I had thoughts of wanting to become a woman. I was just scared. I was not confident. I was unsure. But the threat of military moved me to transition. I took a leap. I did not have the time to grow. I had to just go for it. I was happy as a gay man. I had a boyfriend back then. I am usually a happy person. But the military service was always there.

I was happy as a gay man, but sometimes I thought I wanted to be a woman. I remember when I was a kid I would play with dolls. I always had many friends as girls. But at that time, I thought, well, I am fine here as a boy. I have a job. I have a boyfriend. People accept me here. I have a lot of friends. I even told my boss that I was gay. She was so nice about it. I have nothing to worry about except the military service.

I think I was happy as a gay man. But after I started my transition, I was not as happy as I was before. There are so many things I needed to worry about. The future of my body. What will happen to me?

But once my body started changing, you know, because of the hormones, I felt shy. I felt more worried about how I look. I was worried about how I look as a woman. I never felt that before. I got all the girl problems of worrying about how I look and if I am pretty. Do I pass? You know, all those insecurities. I did not have those insecurities before. I worried if I made the right choice.

I did not talk about this in my refugee claim. I was worried that it would sound like I was just being transgender to get out of military. But, you know, if I just did the hormone therapy to avoid military service, I wouldn’t have kept it up after I got my refugee. I wouldn’t keep up with my hormones. I wouldn’t keep dressing up and wearing makeup. So, obviously, I want to be a woman. I wouldn’t do all of this if I didn’t want to be a woman. So, I guess I have to thank the military service for pushing me. (Interview with Tiffany, January 21, 2015)
Jena McGill and Kyle Kirkup write that “the process of asylum claims is built on an unrealistic ideal of a definitive and revelatory self” that may run counter to the necessary fluidity and ambiguity of sexuality, gender identification, and bodily expression (2013, 137). Trans refugees are faced with the difficult task of articulating difficult life experiences and understandings of themselves as gender nonconforming persons. Trans refugees are faced not only with the problem of trying to present a complete and coherent story of their lives as gender nonconforming persons, but also the challenge of trying to explain complex feelings and experiences to a potentially biased and ill-informed refugee board member (Jordan, 2010).

Laurie Berg and Jennie Millbank write that until very recently, the IRB’s understanding about gender nonconforming refugee claimants was minimal to non-existent (2013). Even today, trans-specific vulnerabilities and persecution remain alarmingly absent from or misleading in the majority of country of origin information documents IRB members use to help evaluate refugee claims (Berg & Millbank, 2013). Sensitivity trainings by outside organizations such as Rainbow Refugee, and greater awareness in the popular media about transpersons, bring better understanding about respectfully interacting with trans individuals. Yet, even with this progress, there remains a wide area of misunderstanding.

The diversity of trans lives, as well as differences in regards to culture, location, and social positioning are not taken into account within the refugee process. Trans refugees must navigate a tangled web of social norms around gender and sexuality in order to successfully convey to the IRB that they are not only gender nonconforming (and therefore members of a particular social group), but also that they warrant asylum based on a fear of persecution. This can pressure trans refugee claimants to reproduce normative and linear narratives around their gender and sexual identities in order to be recognized as trans by the IRB member (Jordan, 2009;
Berg & Millbank, 2009). Trans scholar Susan Stryker writes about the legal and discursive framing of gender nonconforming persons in North America that reinforces normative social values around sexuality and gender (2006). These normative social values further cement the gender binary as something that is natural and normal. The gender binary is the classification of sex and gender into two distinct and opposite forms of male and female, masculine and feminine (Irving, 2013). The gender binary is the predominant gender system in North America, where most legal and social discourses, as well as architecture, institutions, and policies, are built around a distinct and separate two-gender system. The gender binary erases trans subjectivity and bodies by refusing to recognize gender fluidity and oppressing gender-variant individuals.

Jena McGill and Kyle Kirkup write that the problem with the trans subject created in the media and in legal discourse is that it reflects only one version of trans lives and reifies trans subjects in a singular way that does not challenge the gender binary (2013). Transpersons are underrepresented in the media and in legal discourse. The few instances in which transpersons are represented often depict them one-dimensionally as someone “born the wrong gender” who wants to fully transition to the opposite gender (Gilden, 2013). This may be the experience for many transpersons; however, it is not the only experience. There are many gender nonconforming persons who refuse the gender binary altogether and do not wish to be associated with either gender category. This narrative also does not take into account cultural differences or the social, political, and economic factors that also play a part in a person’s experience of being gender nonconforming. The popular framing of transpersons conflates gender, biological sex, and genitalia as one and the same, inherently connected. For some transpersons, biological sex and genitalia may be irrelevant to gender identity and to being gender nonconforming. Yet, too often, these aspects become conflated in policy and legal framings so that gender nonconforming
individuals must undergo gender affirming surgeries like vaginoplasty\textsuperscript{60} or hysterectomy in order for their gender identities to be recognized by the state. The exclusionary effects of upholding a single model of trans experience, not taking into account social and cultural differences, and overly conflating sex, genitalia, and gender cast those seeking to challenge the binary understandings of sex and gender, as well as those with fluid or undefined gender identities, outside the legal domain of rights and recognition (McGrill & Kirkup, 137). Trans individuals who do not fit into this narrative of trans subjectivity are forced to adopt normative sex and gender values and undergo invasive and costly procedures in order to be legally recognized, or they are ignored entirely and suffer further human rights abuses.

Trans refugees like Tiffany must work with and against normative gender and sexuality narratives in order for the IRB to recognize them as gender minorities. Tiffany’s struggle to present a coherent story about her gender identity to the IRB member speaks to the underlying heteronormativity within immigration and asylum processes that further reinforce binaries around gender and sexuality. Tiffany decided not to talk about her complicated feelings about her gender identity when writing her basis of claim. She was concerned that if she talked about her experiences as a gay man and the uncertainties she was currently facing regarding her gender transitioning, then it would look like she was only claiming to be a transwoman in order to avoid military service. This meant that Tiffany had to be selective with the telling of her story so that the IRB member would recognize her as a person experiencing persecution on the basis of her gender nonconformity. Tiffany had the advantage of previously living in different countries and speaking English fluently. Her experiences and language capacity helped her to write her story and successfully present it to the IRB. However, many other gender nonconforming individuals

\textsuperscript{60}Vaginoplasty is a reconstructive plastic surgery for the creation of a vaginal canal and external labia.
face language and cultural barriers that prevent them from articulating and narrowing down their stories so easily. These individuals face the risk that IRB members will not recognize their gender nonconformity and need for asylum.

4.1.2 “I am faced with the same problems over again”
Hyper-Regulation and Erasure of Trans Refugees

Figure 4.3 Tiffany’s Feet on the SkyTrain

(Source: Photograph by Tiffany, April 2015).

**Tiffany:** This is SkyTrain. These are my feet. I wanted to take a picture of my feet. When you look at them, you just see feet. They could be a woman’s feet. There is no judgment. I can go about my day. I can pretend and imagine a life without the stress of being transgender, of being unemployed, of not having a family. I can just be two happy feet. No more discrimination. I can imagine these feet going to a happy life. You know, going home from work. Going home to a husband. Time can stop. Why do I need to hide? These are my happy feet. (Interview with Tiffany, April 20, 2015)
When Tiffany described this picture to me, it reminded me of similar comments made by June and Natalie (whom I interviewed before her) about their bodies and the desire to be free of the daily negotiations and stresses of being low-income trans refugees. When talking about her feet, Tiffany imagines a possible future in which she can just “be” without fearing discrimination. These happy feet serve as an orientating device in Tiffany’s sense of home as they walk or point in the direction where home rests for Tiffany: not a specific location, but within herself and the relationships she makes. This is both a corporeal and imagined sense of home. Her feet are moving; she imagines them going to a happy life, and in that moving is her sense of home and belonging.

Yet, within this picture there is absence. The picture of her feet speaks to her vulnerability as a low-income trans person and the loneliness she experiences. Tiffany’s picture and story direct me to be critical of the ways in which trans bodies are both hyper-regulated and erased in Canada. Tiffany must negotiate her gender identity every day because of underlying heteronormativity and the gender binary informing state structures and society. Dean Spade writes that within North America, trans individuals are facing both hyper-regulation and erasure (2009). Hyper-regulation takes the form of conflicting legislature, contradictory medical policies and practices, and various recordkeeping and identity verification/surveillance systems to establish gender reclassification and rights for gender nonconforming individuals. Trans individuals face many institutional and material barriers in reclassifying their gender in identity and citizenship documents (birth certificates, work permits, passports). This creates difficulties in being legally recognized by the state as a person warranting human rights protection (Spade, 2009). Transpersons have remained largely invisible in Canadian law, with most of the human
This regulatory matrix creates a precarious scenario for trans refugees, who do not enjoy the rights and protection of Canadian citizenship. When Tiffany made a refugee claim, the Ministry of Immigration took her passport into custody. She was assigned a temporary refugee identification card based on her passport, which listed her gender as male and used her birth name. The refugee identification card serves as the primary source of identification in Canada for refugee claimants, and Tiffany was unable to change the information on her card while she was a refugee claimant. When Tiffany was accepted as a Convention Refugee, she applied for a BC identity card (BCID) that would become her primary identification. Tiffany also applied for a work permit, permanent residency, and a travel document to visit her mother who was temporarily living in Japan. As part of the application process, she submitted the IRB’s written positive decision on her refugee claim, hoping that the claim’s basis on her being trans would allow her to use her female gender and name on the new documents. Tiffany learned, however, that although her claim listed her as a transwoman, she did not meet the eligibility requirements set by the Canadian federal government and the B.C. provincial government to use anything other than her birth gender on government-issued documents.

**Tiffany:** I left my country so I wouldn’t be forced to do the surgery. Because I would have to pay for it myself. I would be in a mental hospital. But here I am again with this surgery. Okay, Canada is not forcing me to do it. But if I want my ID to match myself I need to do it. Otherwise, I can’t travel or do anything. I would always be afraid someone would find out.

*But I can’t afford it. Because the MSP covers very little of the surgery. I would have to pay for the flight to Montreal and a nurse to take care of me. And then all the other stuff*

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61 Gender identity has not been recognized as protected from discrimination under the Canadian Human Rights Act, and efforts to see gender identity added as a protected class have met with resistance and harsh criticism (Tam, 2013).
that MSP don’t cover. I am faced with the same problems over again. Just this time I am not going to be thrown in jail by the military. (Interview with Tiffany, January 21, 2015)…

I was sad when I learned that I couldn’t change my ID and work permit. To be happy, to fit into this society, I need to do the surgery. To make my body fit into this society.

I actually don’t want to do it. I like myself right now with my body. I don’t need to have the surgery to know who I am. I am a woman. But in order to be happy, in the end, I have to do it. I have to fit in here. This society cannot accept someone like me, even though when you look at me you see a woman. I live my life as a woman. I am a woman. But society still cares about what is between my legs. I can’t change my documents until I change what’s between my legs. I will never be accepted. I will always be worried that someone would find out about me. I want a job. I want a successful life here in Canada. So I need to do the surgery. (Interview with Tiffany, February 2015).

When Tiffany was applying for her BCID, work permit, and permanent residency, gender affirming surgery was mandatory to legally change one’s gender on government-issued documents. For male to female (MtF) transpersons like Tiffany, this involved undergoing vaginoplasty. Female to male (FtM) transpersons did not have to undergo phalloplasty\(^{62}\) in order to be eligible, but they were required to have mastectomies. Queer and trans scholars have criticized the Canadian government for depending on a medical model for defining trans subjects and determining the grounds for gender reclassification (Lamble, 2009; Davis, 2014). The medical model pathologizes transpersons as having a mental and physical disorder without taking into account the fluidity of gender and its construction. Access to surgical or hormonal treatment is dependent on being diagnosed with gender identity disorder, a diagnosis that requires one to have experienced persistent discomfort with the sex and gender one was assigned at birth. The medical model reinforces the idea that gender is binary and fixed. This not only limits access to health services for gender nonconforming persons who refuse the gender binary,

\(^{62}\) Phalloplasty is the surgical construction of a penis.
but also presents trans identity as “a one-way trip from man to woman or woman to man” by conflating gender identity with sex and genitalia (Aizura, 2012). Instead of giving transpersons autonomy in deciding what they would like to do with their bodies, the medical model creates a restrictive and linear pathway in accessing hormones and gender affirming surgeries. The medical model also enforces the idea that one’s genitalia must match one’s gender presentation.

Michael Wun Ho writes that basing legislature on the medical model causes transpersons across Canada to experience further marginalization and victimization (2013). This is especially true for trans refugees, who do not have equal access to medical care. As Tiffany so succinctly put it, “Society still cares about what is between my legs.” Despite identifying as a woman and living publically as a woman, Tiffany is not recognized as a woman by the Canadian state because she has not undergone gender affirming surgery. The federal and provincial governments’ requirements for a transperson to undergo gender affirming surgery in order to reclassify their gender does not take into account the wide discrepancy in access to medical care and health coverage. It also does not take into account the barriers that racialized, low-income, Indigenous, and refugee transpersons face when trying to access quality health care in Canada.

Federal health care coverage does not cover gender affirming surgeries. Provincial coverage for gender affirming surgeries is limited and differs from province to province, with some provinces covering the majority of gender affirming surgeries and treatments (British Columbia) and others providing limited coverage for only two gender affirming surgeries (vaginoplasty and phalloplasty) and no coverage for treatment (Alberta). The process of achieving eligibility for gender affirming surgeries also varies from province to province. For example, in British Columbia, a person must be taking hormones and have lived publically in the gender role congruent with their gender identity for at least twelve months. They must then be assessed by
two qualified medical doctors/psychiatrists before they are eligible for gender affirming surgery. If the person is approved for surgery, the request is sent to the Brassard & Bélanger Gender Reassignment Clinic in Montreal, the only clinic in Canada performing genital reconstruction surgeries. The B.C. Medical Services Plan (MSP) covers the eligibility assessment appointments and the operation, but does not cover the flight to Montreal, residential pre-operation and post-operation costs, supportive equipment or garments (douching supplies, dilators, or protective garments for chest surgeries), or any other follow-up appointments (Vancouver Coastal Health, 2015). In Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Newfoundland, and Ontario, patients must travel to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto for assessment. They then must live two years in their chosen gender and then receive a recommendation for surgery from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. The individual must travel back and forth from their home to Toronto for routine assessments before they can receive the recommendation for surgery in Montreal (Fagan, 2009). The waitlist for individuals wanting to undergo gender affirming surgery can be up to five years (Rose, 2014). The long waiting period has caused several trans individuals in Canada to pay out of pocket to access private doctors or to travel abroad to countries like Thailand that offer cheaper and faster access to gender affirming surgeries. Those who cannot afford the cost of travel to various doctors and clinics to get the necessary assessments and surgeries as well as the additional medical costs not covered by provincial health plans are left with few options.

In April 2014, the Vital Statistics Information Regulation (Vital Statistics) on gender reclassification for government-issued IDs was modified for Canadian citizens living in British Columbia. Gender affirming surgery is no longer required for Canadian citizens wanting to reclassify their gender on their birth certificates, driver’s licenses, and passports. Individuals
wanting to change their gender on their identification need only one affidavit and a doctor’s letter. This change is an important step forward to removing the medical stigma against trans individuals and giving them greater autonomy in their lives. However, at the time of this writing, it is unclear if this will apply to refugee claimants, Convention Refugees, and permanent residents.

The failure to have government issued IDs reflect trans refugees gender identity is connected to other health and legal restrictions that trans refugees experience within Canada. As stated previously, changes to refugee health care mean that trans refugee claimants do not have access to the majority of health services covered under provincial medical services plans. Trans refugee claimants must pay out of pocket for hormone medication and specialized services. Tiffany could not afford hormone medication when she was a refugee claimant. She was able to get a limited supply of hormones from the Three Bridges community health center and the Ravensong free health clinic located in downtown Vancouver, but eventually she had to stop her hormone medication as she waited for her refugee hearing. This affected Tiffany’s health and wellbeing, as she suffered from the after-effects of suddenly stopping her hormone intake. When Tiffany was granted Convention Refugee Status, she was able to restart her hormone therapy and was finally given full access to trans specialists and care providers in British Columbia. Tiffany is now eligible to have her gender affirming surgeries covered by MSP. However, the cost of travel to see trans specialists in downtown Vancouver and the additional medical and travel costs not covered mean that Tiffany is not able to afford the surgeries required to change her government-issued IDs.
Tiffany: This is a picture of the bedroom of the second place I lived in Vancouver. Here is my makeup table. [laughs] There are my legs.

This place was okay. I chose it because it was really close to my lawyer’s office in New Westminster. The landlord thought I was a woman. Without my ID matching my gender, it has been difficult in getting a place. I always have to worry that the landlord or the neighbors might find out. I am not ashamed of being transgender. I just don’t want trouble.

I know a couple of transgender people here and some have been kicked out of their places or even broken into. The landlords are bad. They get dirty looks or get beat up. I don’t want that. I just want to live my life. Just be safe. Be happy. (Interview with Tiffany, April 20, 2015)
Tiffany describes her appearance when she first arrived in Vancouver as more androgynous. The first place she stayed was a temporary vacation rental owned by a Vancouver family. She stayed there for two weeks while she looked for more permanent housing. Tiffany would venture out at night wearing a wig and dress, exploring the city and meeting with friends she met online. Tiffany made sure that the owners of the vacation rental did not see her in female attire. When her short-term lease was up, the landlady gave Tiffany a positive review on a rental website and referred to Tiffany as “she.” Even though Tiffany never told the woman about being trans, the landlady listing her as female gave Tiffany encouragement that she could pass as a woman. The next place she rented was a room in a large house in New Westminster. She applied as a female applicant and gave the landlord her chosen name. She did not tell the landlord that she was a refugee out of fear that he would ask questions about her refugee claim. She told the landlord that she was in Vancouver on vacation. The rented room was expensive, as it was based on short-term month-to-month cash-only payments. She lived with several other male residents from East Asia. Tiffany kept to herself and stayed mostly in her room. She did not want to raise suspicions about her gender identity and refugee status. A week after Tiffany moved into her new room, the landlord requested a copy of Tiffany’s passport. Tiffany did not want to show her passport to the landlord, as it listed her gender as male. She was afraid that the landlord would harass her or force her out of the apartment. Tiffany hid in her room or stayed out during the day in order to avoid her landlord. She was afraid to look for other places because she would have to show her identity documents to potential landlords.

The difficulties Tiffany experienced in her housing are not unique to her. Transpersons are overrepresented in the homeless population of Canada (Grant & Mottet, 2011; Bauer, et.al, 2010). A significant percentage of transpersons experience homelessness at least once during
their lifetimes (Spicer, Schwartz, & Barber, 2010). A large majority of transpersons have reported various forms of direct and indirect housing discrimination. Landlords and tenants may refuse them homes or apartments, or they may be evicted when their gender nonconformity is revealed. Transpersons experience discrimination in obtaining legal action and social services to help them with their housing. The Human Rights Code of British Columbia did not until July 2016 explicitly list gender identity as prohibited grounds for discrimination. Transpersons can file charges under the BC Human Rights Code; however, it is up to the judge to determine whether their claims will be recognized (Lamble, 2009). Transpersons can also make complaints to the BC Residential Tenancy Branch. Many trans claimants do not pursue legal action against discrimination or violence out of fear of being exposed publically as trans, making them vulnerable to further attack. Shelters are usually divided along binary gender lines, so transpersons are denied access or face discrimination (Pyne, 2011; Mottet & Ohle, 2003). The lack of stable housing for transpersons is one of the leading causes/consequences of the high amount of violence directed at transpersons (TransPulse, 2008; Pyne, 2011; Sakamoto, Chin, Chapra, & Ricciardi, 2009; Mottet & Ohle, 2003; Spicer, Schwartz, & Barber, 2010).

Like Devran and John, Tiffany had difficulty finding a job because of her temporary work permit and not having Canadian experience. Her previous work experience did little to qualify for her jobs in Vancouver. Tiffany had the added challenge of having identity documents that did not match her gender presentation and name. Every time Tiffany applied for a job, she would worry about presenting her identity documents to the employer. On one occasion, after a successful interview, the employer asked Tiffany for a copy of her work permit and ID. After reviewing her identity documents, the employer told Tiffany that he did not think she would be the right fit for the job. This experience wounded Tiffany and made her more self-conscious
about applying for jobs. Tiffany stopped looking for work for two months because she felt self-conscious and was afraid of experiencing similar kinds of discrimination.

Tiffany was eventually able to secure a minimum wage sales job at a phone company. The employer reviewed Tiffany’s identity documents, but did not mention that her gender and name did not match. Tiffany did not initially tell her coworkers and customers that she was a transwoman. As she grew to trust her coworkers, she slowly revealed to them that she was trans. Tiffany’s coworkers have been very accepting. Although this experience has helped Tiffany rebuild her self-confidence, the fear and anxiety of being exposed because of her documents remains with Tiffany in her everyday life. It is a constant reminder of her marginalized status in Canada as a trans refugee, as she is without legal recourse to change her documents. She is still faced with impossible choices that make her feel vulnerable and alone. Fear of persecution, the core definition of who is a refugee, continues to be present during the process and settlement.
4.1.3 “You got to build the whole nest”
Relatedness, Embodiment, and Home

Figure 4.5 Tiffany’s foot at Library Square where the IRB is located

(Source: Photograph Taken by Tiffany, April 20, 2015).

Tiffany: These are a picture of my feet again. This is at the Vancouver Library, where I had my refugee hearing. I was just so happy when I got accepted. Then I realized I am too free now. I was feeling like a bird in a cage before. That was my feeling during my refugee hearing. I could not fly. I was scared.

Now I am out of the cage and I don’t know what to do. I don’t have my mom here. I don’t have my family here. I don’t have close friends here. My English is not perfect. And now I am an accepted refugee. But I have nothing holding me here. I have nothing grounding me here. I am on my own. All on my own. Alone.

And that was when it truly hit me. I made this crazy decision to come to Canada and make a refugee claim out of fear. And that was fueling me through all of this. And now that I am accepted, what will become of me now?

So after a few hours, I started to realize the real world. I was worried about my future. For the entire five months before, I had one goal. And then the goal was achieved. Now what? I felt like a bird without a cage. So I am free. But a bird needs a place to rest.
But Canada did give me the chance to fly. But that was it. So it is up to you to figure it out. They gave me like a stick to sit on, but you need to build the rest. You got to build the whole nest. (Interview with Tiffany, April 20, 2015)

Nael Bhanji writes that migration and homecoming is a common theme in trans literature (2011). Bhanji describes having to immigrate twice as a trans migrant. “You need to think of transitioning as immigrating to a new country. I’ve already had to do that once…when I came to Canada” (2011, 169). Transpersons move across theoretical, social, emotional, corporeal, and physical borders in order to find homes for themselves where they are comfortable and safe in their own bodies and in their environments. Crossing territorial and national borders and travelling long distances are experiences many transpersons face. As we saw in the last section, even within Canada, transpersons must be mobile in order to access the medical care and social support necessary to survive. Home is a precarious space for many transpersons, as they experience rejection, abuse, and persecution in their familial homes and countries of origin because of their gender nonconformity. Left without familial and social supports, the prospect of creating a new home in unfamiliar and dangerous new locations is a daunting and difficult task.

Despite all the thematic references to migration and homecoming in trans literature, surprisingly little research is being done on trans migrants and their experiences of home and belonging. Research on family and kinship for transpersons is also very marginal, with most of the work being done in family counselling and health care. Aren Aizura writes that the research being done on trans migration, family, and home reflects mostly the experiences of white, middle-class, and citizen transpersons (2012). The failure of trans research to take into account racial, class, sexual, and citizenship differences represents a significant oversight in understanding how transpersons experience home and belonging and the institutional, political, and social challenges they encounter in their migration and settlement.
In this last vignette, I focus on Tiffany’s feelings of home and belonging in Vancouver and how these relate to the relationship she has with her mother and her pursuit for a long-term romantic partner. Tiffany depends on her mother for financial and social support. However, she must hide her gender identity from her mother out of fear of rejection. This creates a tense and stressful situation for both Tiffany and her mother as they negotiate their relationship through long periods of silence and distance. The relationship she has with her mother affects her feelings about her new home in Vancouver. She feels free to live her life as a woman, but she experiences isolation and a lack of accountability to another person. Vancouver becomes both a home and an unhomey space for Tiffany as she experiences both dislocation and desire.

Figure 4.6 Photograph of Skyline Taken From Tiffany’s Apartment

(Source: Photograph by Tiffany, April 2015).
Tiffany: This is a view from my apartment. But you can see a church in the picture. I chose this picture because every time I see a church I grow a heavy heart. Because my mom is very religious. She is Christian. She is very religious. And it reminds me of the secret I am keeping from her. It makes me feel sad when I see a church. She goes to church a lot. I don’t know. Church is supposed to make you feel happy. To feel safe.

But it only reminds me of the stress I have with my mom. I can’t share this with her. I can’t share all of me with her. I cannot confess. In church you can confess yourself. You can reveal who you are. You know, tell God all your sins. But I cannot. I cannot do that to my mother. The church is something positive. But to me, because my mom is so religious, the church is not a safe place. But it is beautiful. I always think about my mom when I see a church. She always dragged me to church. (Interview with Tiffany, April 20, 2015)

So when I pass by in Vancouver, I see the churches. I see my mother. I see my struggle. I think, am I going to be okay? What if there really is an afterworld? Am I going to see my mother? It makes me feel guilty. My mother said that I would go to hell. I try not to think about this. I try to stay positive. I try to let it go. I release the pain. When my mother visited me, we went to church. (Interview with Tiffany, April 20, 2015)

Tiffany grew up as an only child, and her father passed away when she was young. Tiffany described her mother as a fierce and determined woman who often worked abroad, leaving Tiffany in the care of various relatives. Tiffany was very close to her mother despite living separately for most of Tiffany’s life, and her mother was very involved with Tiffany’s wellbeing as her only son. Tiffany’s mother would frequently visit while Tiffany was living abroad. When Tiffany moved to attend university, her mother would often spend the weekends with her.

Tiffany describes her relationship with her mother as being based on secrets, secrets that Tiffany keeps from her mother as well as secrets that her mother keeps from her. When Tiffany was living as a gay man, she kept her sexual orientation a secret from her mother. Tiffany’s mother is a devout Christian, and she worried that her mother would blame herself for Tiffany’s being gay. Tiffany suspects that her mother knew about her sexual orientation, but never told
Tiffany out of fear of confronting the truth or not wanting to drive them apart. When Tiffany decided to start her gender transitioning, she hid her female clothing and hormones from her mother when she came to visit. Tiffany felt that her mother would never accept her as a woman. Tiffany did not want to deny her mother her son, so she lived a double life when she returned to her country of origin: Tiffany would wear male clothing while her mother was at home, and return to female attire only when her mother was away.

Two months after Tiffany received her positive refugee decision, her mother came to visit her and help Tiffany find a new apartment.

Tiffany: Ever since I thought I discovered I was gay, I have been always hiding things from her. When I was back in my school days, I said to her that I had something to tell her, but I am not ready yet. I will tell you when I am all grown up. But mothers always know. Mothers know about their kids. She did not make it obvious. She never says anything about gay. Before she would ask about if I had a girlfriend. Or when she would have a grandchild. Something like that. But she doesn’t say that anymore. So I thought that at some point she accepted that I was gay.

I also thought she might accept me as a woman. Maybe. I don’t know. I had a lot of doubts. When she came to visit me in Canada, she found out that I was living as a woman. She saw my change. She was devastated. She was really upset. I never told her, but she figured it out.

She took me to the hair salon. I came out with a woman’s haircut. She was really upset. She started screaming at me. She started screaming at the hairdresser. Of course this was in [country of origin language], so the hairdresser did not understand. My mom then said in English, “Man’s haircut. Boy! Boy! Short! Short!” And the hairdresser said, “Oh! Is she a man?” I was so embarrassed.

I said to Mom, “Let’s go.” I said she was being rude to the hairdresser. We had to leave. I took her out of the door. Mom started screaming at me. She asked, “What are you? Are you some kind of faggot?!”

But she already saw the changes in me. She saw that my hips got bigger and my face got more feminine. She thinks that I came to Canada as a refugee just because I wanted to avoid the military. Not because I was gay or not because I am transgender. She thought that I came here just because I didn’t want to do military service. So I made up a lie to her. I said that my lawyer told me to say that I was transgender in order to avoid military
He wanted me to pretend that I wanted to be a woman. So that I could get my refugee status. I told her that I have to pretend that I am a woman until I get my PR. And she bought it. I don’t know if she really did. Maybe she just didn’t want to think about it. But after that, she kept asking me if I was sure that I didn’t want to be a woman. “You can tell me. You can tell me, I won’t get upset.” That’s the lie she tells me. She always says that to get me to confess. But, of course, every time I fall for that, she will get upset. I didn’t say anything. I just said I was pretending.

I told her that I wanted to live in Canada. I said, “Mom, do you know how many people die just to live in Canada? Especially from our country. All I have to do is pretend I am a girl. It’s such a good deal.” I did this just for her to calm down.

But since I have to keep this from her, our relationship is suffering. I want her as my mother. I want her to consider me as a daughter. We could go shopping together. I want her to ask me about how my boyfriend is or how my dating is. Like how you ask me. I want that from her. I want her to ask me that, but she can’t. It is sad. I want her to teach me how do my hair. I figured out how to do my makeup from friends and YouTube. But I always had men’s short hair. I don’t know how to do my hair like a woman. I don’t have any idea on what to do with my hair. I wish my mom would teach me how to do hair. How to tie my hair up. How to wear a bra. She helps me pick out underwear. But we will never be able to do that. I wish so much. But she is who she is. I have to accept that. But still I will get upset. I wish for something that won’t happen. I wish it to be different. (Interview with Tiffany, February 24, 2015)

The distance between Tiffany and her mother allows Tiffany to live her life as a woman without denying her mother a son. But with this distance comes pain and loneliness for both Tiffany and her mother. Tiffany depends on her mother’s financial assistance in order to pay for her apartment. Her mother is also her only close family. She does not want to cause her mother pain or guilt. Tiffany must negotiate her gender across two locations. She continues to keep male clothing in case her mother comes to visit. When Tiffany went to Japan to visit her mother, she stopped her hormone medication and wore only male clothes. During her time in Japan, Tiffany’s mother kept asking her about her bodily changes. Tiffany again avoided telling her mother.
Tiffany: This is a homeless market. I was surprised when I got here. There are many homeless people here. I learned that many transgender people here are homeless. I see how lucky I am that I get income assistance. But I also get help from my mom. But there is always the fear that I will be homeless. It is hard for transgender refugees. You don’t have family to help you, and you are alone. A lot of refugees experience this. But then you are transgender. So not only are you alone, but you face more difficulties. More challenges in finding a home that is safe. And then affording that home.

I would not have the apartment I have if my mom did not help me. She is helping me. I hope that I can support myself. I see similarities between the homeless and myself. I am sure that they don’t have family or friends here. But I have a house. The only difference is that I have a house where I can stay. I feel bad because I can understand how it feels like without family and friends. Every time I see them, I always appreciate what I have right now. (Interview with Tiffany, April 20, 2015)
Tiffany feels fortunate to have a home, but she does not necessarily feel at home in Vancouver. Canada offered Tiffany the opportunity to live her life without the fear of military service. Living in Canada has also allowed Tiffany to continue her gender transitioning without fear of persecution. As much as Canada provides a safe haven for Tiffany, it is also a space of vulnerability and violence. She sees how vulnerable she is as a trans refugee with few friends or family. Her fear of being abandoned and abused as a transwoman is reinforced by seeing and learning about how transpersons are victimized and marginalized in Canada. She has experienced both hyper-regulation and erasure by the Canadian government that limit her options for a safe and comfortable life. These experiences cause her to feel dislocated from her current home in Vancouver. Tiffany is unsure of her future in Canada as a transwoman. Without a clear vision of the future, she feels out of place (Bhanji, 2011).

**Tiffany:** It is hard to talk about home. I don’t really feel at home here because I cannot see what will happen to me. I am worried about what will happen. Will I have a happy life? I don’t know...

All I have is hope. I hope to one day find love. I want a family. You know, with a partner. A family that I can build a home with. I would be a wife. Maybe I would have children. That is my hope. It keeps me going. That makes me get out of bed. And maybe that is enough. Maybe if I survive all of this, that is enough. That is why I try to have as much fun as possible. I try to stay happy. It’s my way of showing people that they can’t bring me down. (Interview with Tiffany, April 20, 2015)

Home is a location of “dislocation and desire” for Tiffany (Bhanji, 2011). She struggles against the dislocation and vulnerability she experiences as a trans refugee with the desire to create a home for herself with a loving family. The hope of creating a family for herself speaks to her ongoing resistance. Getting up every day and holding on to hope in the face of despair is an act of resistance. Her resiliency informs her activism for social justice and encourages her to share her experiences with the public. Tiffany gave the speech provided at the start of this
chapter because she wanted to speak on behalf of trans refugees who are experiencing similar difficulties. She shares her desire for a better future as a hope for all trans refugees in Canada.

Tiffany may not know what the future will bring for her, but she holds on to hope. Her body is a site of resistance as she continues to move forward and live her life as a transwoman. It is in her body that Tiffany carries a sense of home in an environment where she remains precarious. Her body is an affirmation, a place to belong.

4.2 Natalie

Natalie: I try to take good care of myself. That’s true. My body is important to me. I always try to look good, you know? I don’t take it for granted. I worked really hard to get this body. I try to take very good care of it. It’s what brought me here to Canada.

(Interview with Natalie, June 16, 2013)

Natalie and I first met in June 2013, when she responded to my email advertisement for research participants. Natalie was interested in participating because she felt that her experience could help other refugees like herself. She was very much concerned about maintaining confidentiality and not wanting her identity to be revealed to the public. Natalie had not disclosed that she was a transgender to her employer and work acquaintances. It was therefore very important for her to make sure that everything she talked about was kept confidential.

63 In referring to herself, Natalie interchanged the words trans, transwoman, transsexual, and transgender. Transsexual persons are individuals who do not associate themselves with the gender and the body they were assigned at birth. Transsexual persons typically desire to establish a permanent gender role as a member of the gender with which they identify. They often associate themselves with one gender (male or female) over another and then want to transition fully into that gender. This is called gender transitioning, a process in which an individual transitions to living publically as the gender they identify with. Gender transitioning may involve medical intervention (hormones and gender affirming surgery) or may not. Individuals who identify as trans would also identify as trans, but not all transpersons identify as transsexual.
Natalie chose Qmunity as the location for our first interview because she felt that it was a neutral and safe space. We sat together for two hours while Natalie shared her story. I felt at the time of the interview that while we did touch on some emotionally difficult subjects, on the whole, the interview was mutually engaging and relaxed. Natalie and I were laughing together by the end of the interview. She expressed looking forward to reading the transcript and participating in the next set of interviews. I emailed Natalie later that night to thank her again for the interview and wrote that if she needed any counseling or support resources that I would happily connect her with them.  

Two weeks after our interview, I emailed Natalie the finished transcript and asked her when she would be available to meet again. After three weeks without a response, I called Natalie’s cell phone. Natalie was happy that I called her because she had been meaning to contact me. She read the transcript and said that it was fine as it was, but she could not continue with the project. Natalie’s work schedule was keeping her far too busy to participate, and she could not set aside another two hours to sit down and talk with me. Natalie also said that while she did enjoy talking to me, she found the interview emotionally difficult and did not want to go through it again. I told Natalie that it was perfectly okay for her not to continue and that she could withdraw from the project. I thanked her for the time she had given to me. Natalie gave me permission to use the transcript I collected for my research and thanked me for my understanding.

Transsexual and trans should not be equated as being the same thing. Transsexual is usually put under the umbrella of trans, but it is just one aspect of a wide spectrum of gender nonconforming identities and practices.

64 I sent a similar email to all of the interview and photography participants.
Although Natalie and I only conducted one interview, I kept returning to her oral history throughout my fieldwork and analysis because it was through her story that I could first establish the importance of the body in the settlement process. Natalie came to Canada to escape the persecution she experienced as a transwoman living in Central America. Upon arriving in Canada, she claimed asylum on the basis of gender identity. Soon after claiming asylum, she started hormone therapy and would eventually have gender affirming surgery in Canada. Her experiences of housing as well as education and employment were very much influenced by her being a transwoman. There are moments in Natalie’s story that are left open and indeterminate. At the same time, these stories are deeply situated within her body. It is this indeterminacy and the way that Natalie narrates her story through her body that kept enticing me to return to her words. In this section, I want to share Natalie’s story, knowing that it is incomplete and mediated by my brief interaction with her and my interpretation.

4.2.1 “You can only run so much, right?”
Coming to Canada and Becoming a Convention Refugee

Natalie came to Montreal from Central America in 2007. She had experienced harassment and violence from the police and local population in her country of origin because of her gender nonconformity, and was worried that one day she would be killed if she stayed. With help from her family, she was able to get a flight from Central America to Canada. At the time of her migration to Canada, the Canadian government did not require a visa for people coming from Natalie’s home country. Another reason for wanting to migrate to Canada was the opportunity to access proper medical care and attention for her gender transitioning. In her country of origin, few doctors specialized in the care of transpersons, and most were inaccessible to those without
the means to pay for their services. The cost and availability of hormone medication were considerable barriers, as medication was extremely expensive and often not readily available, out of stock, or expired. Natalie described the frustration she experienced in trying to access hormone medication from a private doctor. She worried that the doctor or medical staff might publically reveal her gender identity to members of the local community. Natalie feared that if she went to the local hospital seeking health care as a transwoman, she would be institutionalized for a mental disorder. Natalie knew that eventually she would like to have gender affirming surgery, specifically, breast implants and a vaginoplasty. The surgeries were too expensive for her, and she felt that the doctors in her country of origin were unqualified to do such risky surgeries.

Natalie researched the best countries for transpersons. She decided that Canada would be a good option for her, as hormone medication and gender affirming surgeries were covered under the provincial medical services plans. Natalie described her first experiences in Canada as a refugee claimant as very welcoming and well organized.

**Natalie:** When it comes to refugee stuff, it was very graceful. It was very good. I received pretty much a good orientation. Everything seemed to be so well constructed. Very well organized. Very well provided.

As soon as I got to the airport and I claimed for refugee, the officers seem to have had everything organized. They told me that I was going to spend the night at a shelter...

At that point I was very androgynous. I was dressing and portraying myself as female, but my legal identity was male. And they were kind of worried about me. Because they didn’t want me to spend the night there with the men. There were only rooms for four persons each staying in them. They were worried about my safety. To me it was okay to stay there, because at that point I was still a guy, right?

Once I was in the room, the people there were really helpful. The guys there were really there to help you. They were from Latin America and were really empathetic for people who just arrived the first day and they knew how stressed out we were. How we were missing our family and what we were experiencing.
One of the guys I met gave me a phone card so that I could make a call. So it was very exciting in terms of what I was feeling. I was feeling like, yeah, this is the right place that I should be at. That’s how it started. (Interview with Natalie, June 16, 2013)

Natalie’s experiences were positive in that the Montreal Border Security guards and staff at the YMCA and the YWCA were sensitive to Natalie’s desires and her vulnerability as a transwoman. She stayed at the YWCA until she found a room at a rental house. Since Natalie arrived in Canada before the refugee healthcare cuts in 2012, she had access to the medical services plan in Montreal and was able to see an endocrinologist who specialized in gender affirming procedures. She started her hormone therapy and slowly worked on her confidence to appear publically as a woman.

Although Natalie was very happy to finally be working with a qualified doctor for her gender transitioning, she faced discrimination because her identity documents did not match her gender presentation. When Natalie attended French immersion classes, the instructor was happy to refer to her in class using her chosen name and gender identity. However, the administration forced the instructor to use the gender and name on Natalie’s refugee identification card for her class assignments: her birth name and biological gender. When Natalie sought to challenge the school’s administration, they explained to her that because it was a provincially funded program, they were required to refer to government-issued documents. This experience made Natalie feel very unsafe. She felt that because she was a refugee claimant, the Canadian government and people did not see her as someone deserving recognition and respect. This situation created a vicious cycle of cross-border gender violence similar to what Tiffany experienced.

Natalie stayed in Montreal for approximately a year. She originally intended to have her refugee hearing in Montreal, until a neighbor who was a retired immigration lawyer advised her to leave Quebec for another province.
**Natalie:** The reason why I decided to leave was because I met one of my neighbors and he ended up being a lawyer. He ended up liking me and he gave me some advice. He said don’t stay in this province. Move out to another province because your chances for staying here are very small. Because of your history and everything, I want you to stay. You deserve to stay. So stick for another province and not Quebec.

**Kat:** Really? Why would he say to go to another province?

**Natalie:** He said that the number of Latino claimants was pretty high in Quebec. So my chances were going to be less than compared to other provinces where the Latino claimants were shorter. (Interview with Natalie, June 16, 2013)

Acceptance rates of refugees from certain geographical locations do vary from province to province. This has been mostly attributed to the number of refugee claimants in the province and the capacity of the IRB to properly assess and make appropriate decisions. The distributions of refugee claims from particular countries/geographical locations also vary. There are no official reports from the Canadian government that state it is harder to make a refugee claim in some provinces versus others. Speaking with refugee social workers and activists, I learned that there is general consensus that it is more difficult to make a refugee claim in Ontario and Quebec than it is in British Columbia. One reason for this is that British Columbia has a relatively low number of in-state refugee claimants compared to the other provinces. The lower number of in-state refugee claimants allows refugee lawyers to have a smaller clientele base and therefore provide more personal care and contact with claimants (Conversation with Rainbow Refugee Volunteer, April 2014).

When Natalie first arrived in Vancouver, she contacted Settlement Orientation Services (SOS) to help her find temporary shelter. The person working at SOS arranged for Natalie to stay in a separate apartment run by the Salvation Army. Through SOS, Natalie was connected to Rainbow Refugee and the Trans-Health Clinic. At the Trans-Health Clinic, Natalie started the
next stage of hormone medication and planned to undergo a vaginoplasty. Natalie stayed at the Salvation Army apartment for three months until she met and started a relationship with a partner, Craig, and moved in with him.

Natalie’s relationship with Craig was the first open and public relationship she had as a transwoman. Her previous relationships with men in her country of origin were always risky endeavors because of fear of violence from the state and the public. Natalie not only had to be careful because of possible transphobic violence in her country of origin, but also because she could be targeted by the police and the public as a homosexual because she was legally classified a man in a homosexual relationship with another man. At first, the relationship with Craig was a very healthy and positive experience for Natalie; however, after a couple of months, it grew to be highly stressful. Natalie would leave Craig’s apartment every couple of weeks and find a new place to stay. The stress of the relationship and the constant moving, combined with Natalie’s fear of the impending refugee hearing, left her emotionally unstable and physically distraught. Natalie was left with few resources to help her with the situation with Craig. The majority of emergency shelters and resources for women facing domestic violence and homelessness were unreceptive or unavailable to Natalie because she was a transwoman. Natalie was left on her own to deal with her relationship and housing instability as she waited for her refugee hearing.

Kat: *What was happening to you before your refugee hearing?*

Natalie: *It was a really difficult... well, it wasn’t good...*

*I had a close contact with what I am pretty sure was a wolf. It was a wolf. It happened in the wintertime. It happened in Surrey.*

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65 Pseudonym.
So I was coming back from work. I saw it from the distance it was a wolf. It wasn’t a coyote. I noticed that coyotes come out earlier during the day. We were being driven home. Me and my friends, because we were sharing an apartment. It was during one of the times that I wasn’t living with my ex. I decided to make a go for it in Surrey. But then I got a ride in the early morning. I would get up for work at 6:30. And it was seven, and it was in the wintertime. It was totally dark.

And I saw the prints and I was like, “Oh my god, the coyotes!” But it’s okay. I am a tall woman. I kept reminding myself that I’m tall. I don’t easily get knocked over. It’s not going to attack me. So I kept on walking.

But I kept looking at the wolf. I noticed that the ears were more like rounded. The tip was more rounded. It was a BIG one. It was a really, really big one. I was afraid. I was like, that’s not a coyote! [laughs]

And I thought to myself...well, I thought, “Okay, are you going to run?” And I didn’t want to run. It wasn’t because I wasn’t scared. I was really scared... I never saw an animal this close up before in my life. I’m a city girl. We don’t have animals like this in [capital city in country of origin]. But I just felt that...I don’t know, I just didn’t want to run. I was tired and it was dark...You can only run so much, right? And my friend later told me that it was the right thing to do. When you run, that’s when the wolves attack.

It was really strange. The wolf looked at me and I looked back. It was incredible...to look at another animal and have it look back at you. It was a very close encounter. And I...I don’t know. But with everything that was going on...it was only a couple of seconds. I felt so tall...I felt so...so much taller. I don’t know if I am making sense. But it was something that I never forgot. (Interview with Natalie, June 16, 2013)

Natalie’s description of her encounter with the wolf haunts me. It was her first response when I asked about what was happening to her before her refugee hearing. Up until that point, our conversation was following a steady timeline and general narrative of her arrival to Canada, getting settled in Montreal, and then moving to Vancouver and meeting Craig. After Natalie shared the story of the wolf, she continued her story of her relationship with Craig, whom she went on to marry, and the difficulties she experienced as she waited for her refugee hearing. Reading the story of the wolf in the context of Natalie’s overall story of settlement, I see her memory of the incident as corresponding to the emotional, relational, and material difficulties
she was facing before her refugee hearing. Natalie’s options in finding a suitable place to live were limited because of transphobia and discrimination against refugees. Landlords and potential roommates would discriminate against Natalie because she was a refugee and on a temporary work permit. Potential roommates would also not want Natalie to room with them because she was a transwoman. Natalie would sometimes try not to disclose being trans to her roommates, but eventually the news would get out and Natalie would experience harassment or discrimination by her roommates, which would then force her to leave.

Natalie described being in constant fear of her refugee claim being rejected and having to go back to her country of origin. The discrimination she faced as a transwoman in Canada made her feel self-defeated and powerless. The situation with Craig made her feel stressed and vulnerable. Yet, in the story with the wolf, Natalie presents a moment of self-awareness and resistance in extreme circumstances. “You can only run so much, right?” speaks to the oppressive circumstances that Natalie faced in her country of origin as well as in Canada. These circumstances have socially, economically, and structurally marginalized Natalie, yet within this marginalization lie Natalie’s agency and her resistance. I see Natalie’s narrative of encountering the wolf and not running away as a way to configure her experiences within the larger contexts of survival. Faced with such a dangerous creature, Natalie reminds herself that she is a tall woman who will not be knocked down easily. She has already faced enough violence and difficulties in her life as a transsexual woman refugee, so what more can a wolf do to her? She survived far worse and is still standing. The memory of the encounter is also bodily situated. “I felt so tall” speaks to Natalie’s embodied meaning of resistance and strength in the face of circumstances out of her control. The narrative of the wolf contains within it a chain of complex meanings that are revelatory of disruptions in social systems and relationships that marginalized
Natalie (Yarris, 2011, 277). Feeling tall and looking directly into the wolf’s eyes serves as a metaphor for Natalie’s agency in a situation in which her agency had been curtailed by the Canadian state. She chose not to run, but to stand tall and firm. Out of this choice she talks about her body becoming taller, less able to be knocked down.

Natalie waited a year for her refugee hearing. During that year she worked with an endocrinologist at the Vancouver Trans-Health Clinic, and was scheduled to have a vaginoplasty in October 2009. Having the ability to undergo gender affirming surgery as a refugee claimant was a blessing for Natalie. Natalie described the surgery as essential for her mental and physical health and considered it a human right that should be provided to all refugee claimants.

Unfortunately, if Natalie were to come to Canada now, she would not have access to gender affirming procedures or treatments. The month after her surgery, Natalie had her refugee hearing. Natalie described the refugee hearing as traumatic and transphobic.

**Natalie:** It was very traumatic for me. [laughs] It was very traumatic. I mean, for me and my lawyer. After the hearing, we were seeing it as not a go thing. We were seeing like a rejection. A no. A total no...

But during the hearing, it was very chaotic to me. It was a lot of...I don’t know if it happened the way it was supposed to...but, yeah, I was like crying almost during the entire hearing. And some of the questions were very, very severe questions that I never expected to hear. At the beginning, the judge was very kind and very friendly. But along the hearing, he was showing a side of, you know, not politeness. Questions that was very offensive to me. And I was totally unhappy. And dealing with lots of bad memories by the way he was asking the questions. I was like, “Really!? Where’s the education here?”

**Kat:** Were some of the questions very transphobic?

**Natalie:** They were totally transphobic! Because there were points he was referring to me as “he” when it was obvious that the person in front of him was a she. And from the very beginning, there were questions he would ask, like, are you a he or a she? So it was very offensive. It was just another assault on me. I was shocked. I mean this is a government official in Canada. Where’s the education?
I went back home very devastated. And my...sadly to say now, my ex-husband was asking me if I was a Canadian now. Should we go out and celebrate? And I was like, no. And it was a very tough evening for us. (Interview with Natalie, June 16, 2013)

Natalie waited six months to receive her refugee decision. By that time she had separated from her husband and was preparing to be deported. Natalie was surprised to receive a positive decision. The decision reinvigorated Natalie. However, she continued to experience discrimination and harassment from educators, employers, and the Canadian state because of her gender nonconformity. She tried to find a place for herself in Vancouver’s queer community, but felt harassed and discriminated against in that sphere as well. Natalie finds familiarity and relatedness in the straight Latin bars but must navigate these spaces cautiously.

4.2.2 “You can never relax and just enjoy the night”
Navigating Vancouver’s Gay and Straight Worlds

After receiving her positive refugee decision, Natalie applied for permanent residency and enrolled in French school in Montreal, where she intended to live permanently. She and Craig were divorcing, and Natalie worried about being able to support herself. She decided that the best choice was to enroll in school and pursue higher education. However, as before, the school refused to allow Natalie to use her chosen gender identity and name. Natalie had undergone a vaginoplasty and qualified under Quebec’s regulations for gender reclassification. However, Natalie was not allowed to change her name or gender identity on her identification documents until after she became a citizen. Natalie would have to wait five years to qualify for citizenship in order to change her name.

Natalie went to the immigration office in Montreal and learned that in British Columbia she could change her name and gender on her identity card once she had permanent residency.
Natalie decided to move back to Vancouver and apply for a new permanent residency card with her name and gender on it. Having her identity documents match her chosen name and gender meant that Natalie never had to worry about being revealed as a transwoman to future employers or school administrators.

**Natalie:** So I got the name and gender I wanted on my permanent residency card, which is so great because I don’t have to deal with that and it makes my life much easier.

Because I identify, as I said from the beginning, as female. I wish that I could be cisgender. [laughs] But that’s not going to happen. But I feel very much like a cisgender woman. I pass as a woman. I see myself as a straight woman. So that’s the way I want my life to be. Just to make my life easier.

I acknowledge that I am a transwoman. I acknowledge that this is going to be with me for the rest of my life. So it’s always going to be a thing. You know, like my shadow. Right? But I am a woman. I am fully a woman. So this is something that I will always have to deal with. (Interview with Natalie, June 16, 2013)

While the acronym LGBT refers to inclusivity and community, trans-rights and recognition continue to be suppressed and marginalized in the larger gay and lesbian rights movement. Dean Spade (2007) writes that the trans experience is present in acronym only in the majority of LGBT scholarship as well in LGBT politics in North America. Spade refers to this as the “LGB fake (T),” in which the consequences of including or excluding transpersons are never adequately addressed (2011). Resources for transpersons and gender nonconforming persons are available at Qmunity and the Transgender Health Network. Through these places, transpersons can meet other trans or gender nonconforming persons. Yet, even within these places offering community space, the trans community remains very marginalized. Most institutional support for transpersons relates to health, particularly sexual health. There is very little institutional support for public awareness and community empowerment. There are no specific resources to help
transpersons find housing, employment, or education. Settlement services are often ill-informed and ill-equipped to service trans newcomers.

Natalie tried very hard to get involved with the LGBT community in Vancouver. As a straight Latina transwoman, Natalie found it difficult to fully relate to the mostly white and middle-class gay and lesbian community of Vancouver. Natalie did participate in some trans awareness and activism, but found the pressure to be out publically and politically as a transperson difficult. Natalie did not want her trans identity to be revealed outside of the queer community. When other trans and queer persons began to share Natalie’s trans identity with others within the queer community and then with outsiders, Natalie felt exposed and betrayed.

**Natalie:** Yeah, I would like to say that I felt belonging there...[sighs and laughs] but I identify myself as straight... so when I was hanging out a lot with people from the gay community...when I was becoming an activist, in this case, for the transgender rights. You know, when I was hanging out a lot in this area and being more transgender, then I started, you know, experiencing kind of...a kind of discrimination. I was getting pointed at, or, I would say, targeted. Because I was a...you know...in a group of people like me. And I was getting identified. People started to speak about me and point at me. And I didn’t feel it was healthy. So I decided to stay a little away from the gay and lesbian community.

Sadly, people from the gay community were disclosing about my identity outside of the community. Like in a restaurant or on the street. And I was able to notice that. That they were talking about me, and it wasn’t about me being a paranoid person. It was obvious. Or, some people that I got to know, they were, well...but they would say to me that I didn’t have to “come out” to them because they already knew I was trans. I was like, “How could you know?” And they were like, “Because...” Well, some would give me the names of people who told them or they would say that somebody told me about you. And I was like, why? (Interview with Natalie, June 16, 2013)

Natalie’s negative experience with the queer community in Vancouver made her avoid going to popular queer social spaces like dance parties and bars. Natalie has made some friends within the small queer Latin community in Vancouver. She often attends the gay Latin nights
Mario runs. Natalie also enjoys going to straight Latin clubs because of the music and the chance to meet Latin men, but these excursions also come with risk.

**Natalie:** When I am at the Latin nightclubs, and that happens more often, but I am at the nightclubs and sometimes I hang out with transwomen. We identify ourselves as passable so we can, you know, go to the straight men clubs. And we are hanging out there. And we get people...sometimes people are very obvious about disclosing to other people. You can just, you know, hear, and you feel the very negative vibe. And you can feel that somebody is talking about you. It is very marvellous to see when some of the people are like “So? She’s transgender, so what? What’s wrong with you? Move on! Just let her be!” Those moments are really fun to us. And we are like, “Yeah!” [shakes fist in the air]

But sometimes people are like, “Oh Really!? ” And sometimes they start bragging...or, sorry...I mean they start gossiping. And they bring this news to some other groups and some other groups and some other groups. And by the end of the night, well, everybody knows that we are transpeople.

And the guys who were at the beginning somewhat interested or they were walking towards us are encountered by these people and they disclose about us. And that’s very low. So we have to deal with very low-class people.

**Kat:** Yeah, and I am sure at that moment you don’t feel very safe or comfortable.

**Natalie:** Yes. So that happens a lot at the Latin nightclubs. So when I am going to hang out, I am going to the straight clubs. A straight club or meetings where you find a lot of straight people. I go there because it’s nice to be with other Latinos. There are so few Latinos here. It’s nice to speak Spanish. The music is always great. It is comforting. When I miss my home country, I like to go to these places. And...I don’t know. Sometimes I think Latinos here can be more accepting of transgender. Not all the times. You have to be careful. But there is an understanding there that is different from what happens here in Canada. We have like a macho male culture there. So if you are woman and you behave feminine...you know... you look like a woman, well it’s understood. It’s easier to flirt. Men are men with you. There’s a different energy. I can enjoy being a Latina. I don’t know. You just feel it in your bones. I dance and move my body. It’s great.

But we then have to be very discreet. We are limited to not be together. So if we are trans, we have to separate. When there’s a group of straight people and I know that you are trans and you know about me, well, we have to be discreet. Like not to talk to each other. That’s very limiting, and it’s something that should not be happening here. I mean, compared to where I am from originally it’s very minimal, but it’s still happening. I always have to deal with this. You can never relax and just enjoy the night. (Interview with Natalie, June 16, 2013)
Natalie is hyper-vigilant about her body and the bodies of others, especially her trans friends in these spaces. There are considerable risks in going to the straight Latin clubs. Natalie can never relax in these spaces because of the chance of being exposed as transgender and not being accepted. She must not only guard herself, but guard her other trans friends as well. At the same time, Natalie finds a sense of accomplishment in being able to enjoy her cultural community as a Latina. The risk of violence or rejection when going into the straight Latin clubs comes with the equal chance of being accepted in these places by others in the Latin community. Every venture into these spaces becomes an act of resistance as well as a place of possibility. Natalie’s description of the straight Latin community as being more accepting speaks to the importance of the culturally specific ways in which gender is constructed and engaged with. It also speaks to the importance of diversity and social positioning when talking about belonging and trans communities. There is transphobia and homophobia within the Latin immigrant community in Vancouver, but there is also a cultural understanding of femininity and masculinity. This cultural understanding and history creates a much-needed sense of familiarity and connectedness that Natalie does not receive from the predominantly white and middle-class straight and queer communities of Vancouver.

4.2.3 “When I see myself fully in the mirror…” Dwelling in the Body

In the four years following her refugee hearing, Natalie was constantly moving between various places in Metro Vancouver. She experienced several bad situations with roommates harassing her or treating her with disrespect because she was a transwoman. Even though Natalie worked two full-time jobs as a waitress at local restaurants, she could not afford a place of her
own. Natalie tried to find other employment, but was discriminated against because of her refugee background or strong accent, or for being a transwoman. The constant moving caused considerable emotional and physical hardship. Natalie’s health was deteriorating from the stress. While Natalie’s low income and vulnerability as a transwoman made her eligible for a low-income apartment through BC Housing, low-income housing is incredibly sparse in Metro Vancouver, and BC Housing has a waitlist of four to six years. Fortunately, Natalie was able to connect with a worker at WATARI, a counselling service for at-risk children and youth, their families, and the community. The WATARI worker managed to have Natalie moved up on the BC Housing waitlist, and Natalie was able to move into a one-bedroom apartment.

When I asked Natalie if she feels more at home now because she has her own apartment, Natalie replied that she carries the trauma of having to move around so much inside her. This trauma makes it difficult for Natalie to feel settled in her current apartment.

**Natalie:** Before I moved into this place, I was always moving. It affected me a lot. But, yeah, I was dealing with this...

At this point in my life, I still have all my clothing folded up in the suitcases, because I got to live that way. Yeah, my friends say or people who come to visit me, they are like, “Why do you have all of your clothes in suitcases? Why don't you just hanging it up in the closet? Why don’t get a drawer and you can just throw your clothes into?” And I am like, “I don’t know. I just have the trauma from moving from one place to another. I got used to it...”

It is funny. [laughs] It is funny just to have everything prepared like that. If I want to travel to Morocco, I can just go. [snaps her fingers and laughs] I don’t know. I can’t move on from that. That’s my situation, everything is ready and packaged. I’m never settled. (Interview with Natalie, June 16, 2013)

Home is connected to Natalie’s body’s mobility. Natalie came to Canada in order to escape the violence she was facing as a gender nonconforming person in her country of origin. Natalie then moved back and forth across Canada and around Metro Vancouver trying to find a
place where she could safely and comfortably live as a transwoman. At the time of the interview, Natalie did not feel that her current apartment was a home. Her apartment is a space for her body to rest and heal, but she still keeps everything in a suitcase in case she has to move again. The stress and violence she experienced from constantly moving impacted her in such a way that she does not feel fully settled in her own apartment. In this sense, home is an unstable and precarious place for Natalie. Natalie’s experiences of discrimination and violence because of being a transwoman have meant that she must be always prepared to move. Natalie’s unstable housing situation caused considerable sacrifice in terms of her emotional and physical health. She wants to study to become a professional makeup artist, but the constant moving and low-paying jobs make it extremely difficult for her to go back to school. She is hesitant to invest her time and energy in enrolling in school if she may need to move quickly again. Home as a physical space is unsecured and fleeting. It carries with it a sense of ongoing transit in which Natalie is constantly moving in her quest to find a livable space of familiarity and comfort (Bhanji, 2011; Aizura, 2006).

Natalie’s sense of home extends outside of a physical space and rests inside her body’s journey. Natalie came to Canada to begin her gender transitioning. Transforming her appearance and body to be more female was as much of a migration for Natalie as was crossing the Canadian border. Her body is both a journey and a homecoming in which she feels that one day she can safely dwell. For Natalie, her body is a home, a place where she can have the possibility of feeling comfortable in her own skin. Having the ability to express her gender identity makes Canada a home for Natalie even when she does not feel at home in her current apartment.
Natalie: Ever since I stepped into Canada, from the very first time that stepped my foot on Canadian land, I felt that I am from here. I don’t see myself anywhere else. So right now, things seem to work out. I am sending my thoughts to the heaven to always find a place for me here.

Every morning, I see myself completely changed, and that’s the most beautiful thing that I ever seen since I came here. I see me becoming who I was meant to be. [laughs] I can be fully myself. When I see myself fully in the mirror, that’s when I say that I am in the right spot to be. (Interview with Natalie, June 16, 2013)

Natalie searches for a physical and social place of belonging, she carries within her body a sense of perpetual homecoming and growth. Home for Natalie is a location of fluidity and desire (Bhanji, 2011; Caine, 2010; Brah, 1996). She can feel at home in her skin despite the ongoing marginalization and violence she faces as a transperson. I see Natalie’s description of home correlating to Heidegger’s (1971) concept of dwelling. Natalie’s body is a dwelling place where her sense of home resides. A person dwells in a place when they are at peace in that place, when they can exist there in freedom to be themselves. You can ‘be yourself’ where you dwell. You do not have to put on a role for a particular occasion (Heidegger, 1971). Whereas Heidegger rooted his conception of dwelling to a physical homeland, Natalie’s dwelling is not rooted to a particular location or bounded space (Pons, 2003), but instead shifts as her body moves through the world (Massey, 2005; de Certeau 1998). Natalie’s dwelling relates to a place of ‘becoming, a moving achievement between feeling at home or not’ (Schillmeier & Heinlein, 2009; Schillmeier & Domènech, 2009). Dwelling in this sense is not about closing places off, but opening them up to their possibility (Schillmeier & Domènech, 2009). To dwell in a place means to dwell in a place of possibility. Natalie may never feel that she is fully accepted for who she is by all branches of society. Her gender identity may always be challenged. She may continue to experience violence and harassment because of heteronormativity and cisnormativity. Yet, despite this, Natalie’s body is a space of possibility and growth. She can see herself changing and
becoming something different. It is in this space of possibility that she situates her sense of belonging. It is her changing body that gives her a sense of home. She can look at herself in the mirror and feel that she is in the right place. Natalie’s body is both her catalyst and her anchor in leading her migration and in grounding her in a sense of home.

4.3 June

Figure 4.8 June’s Hands

(Source: Photograph by June, January 2014)

Kat: So here is the camera. What places are you thinking about taking your pictures?

June: I want to go somewhere in nature to take the pictures. Like, we can go together to take them. We can go to a park. Somewhere really nice. You know... with not many people. We can go together.

Kat: Okay, sure. That’s no problem. Why do you want to go to nature to take the pictures?

June: I don’t know... Nature is healthy. It’s away from people. I don’t like people. [laughs] I want my home to be in the woods. Somewhere I can be healthy. Somewhere nice. Away from all the problems. I want to live in a small cabin in the woods. (Interview with June, November 16, 2013)
I met June\textsuperscript{66} in the winter of 2013. June was waiting for his refugee hearing at the time, and was regularly attending the Rainbow Refugee drop-ins. We spoke together very little at the Rainbow Refugee meetings, but June asked me and the other volunteers to be observers at his refugee hearing. June’s refugee hearing was the third I attended as a Rainbow Refugee volunteer. June knew that I was researching LGBTQ refugees and saw the advertisement I sent out through the Rainbow Refugee listserv and on the Qmunity message board. In the fall of 2013, June reached out to me and asked if he could participate in my project. It was eight months after his refugee hearing.

The picture above was taken during my photography fieldtrip with June in the winter of 2014. June and I met previously for two oral history interviews in the fall. June was the first person I asked to volunteer for the photography portion of the project. I wanted June to be the first participant in the photography portion because he was a photographer and had experience in art production. I felt that it would be a good learning experience for me to work with June and learn from him about how he approached photography.

June’s pictures are a mixture of the pictures we took together at Lynn Canyon Park and photographs he took on his own from a room in a shared rented house in Coquitlam that he lived in at the time. His pictures represent his desire for a clean and healthy home for his body as well as his journey as a gay transman. June’s story is that of a gender nonconforming body whose journey starts in the United States and continues in Canada. June travels across geographical borders as well as gender borders as he actively seeks to disrupt the gender binary and what it means to be an Asian gay transman. Through June’s story, I will explore how the body serves as a “claiming space”—a space in which June works to have control of his body and his

\textsuperscript{66} June requested this pseudonym.
environment. June dwells in this claiming space, although he does not feel at home in his current location.

4.3.1 “The strange thing is that I never felt home in the country where I was born”
Living in the United States and Coming to Canada

June grew up in a wealthy middle-class family in Asia. June never fully identified with the gender assigned to him at birth and always felt that he was somehow different from his sister and other girls. He hated the gendered expectations that were placed on him by his family and society. He was attracted to men, but did not “want to be a woman” with them (Interview with June, November 16, 2013). He did not know yet that he was trans, but June knew that he did not fit into his assigned gender role.

June attended art school in his country of origin and became very proficient at photography. He was interested in underground and sexual subculture art, especially gay erotic art coming from Europe and the United States. He believed that he would not be able to pursue these kinds of projects in his country of origin. June was able to go to a prestigious art school in the United States with the financial help of his parents. Out of the watchful control of his parents and his conservative culture, June was also able to explore more parts of his identity. It was at the art school that June first heard about transgender.
June bought this doll when he was in the United States and used it in several pieces of artwork he created while attending art school. When June moved to Canada, he had his mother mail the doll to him.

**June:** The first time I learned about transgender and made that connection to myself was at my art school in the United States. ‘Cause I make a lot of art about myself and I was making art as a gay guy. Yeah, and I talk about my art at the class, and people talking about transgender stuff, and that’s how I connected the dots together. But before that I know, like, it’s not like you wake up one day, “Oh, I’m transgender.” It’s not like that—it’s a gradual feeling, something’s not right, something’s strange, it’s awkward. And, you know, that feelings keep going on and on. (Interview with June, November 16, 2013)
The program June was enrolled in had several students from his home country and surrounding Asian countries. June was very afraid of telling his classmates about his feelings because he feared that they would harass him. June was also worried that news about being trans would get back to his father in his home country. June felt too insecure and shy to reach out to the American students, even to the LGBT students at his university. Instead, June sought the help of his guidance counsellor at the school, who helped June to find trans resources around the city.

**June:** I started transitioning in the United States. Was very expensive. The hormone treatment, it was really hard to find about information and also they had gatekeepers, so extended care time, you have to be, like, you have to talk to a therapist, counsellor, or someone in that field, and it’s really hard going through those time ‘cause you want to start right away, but they keep you down, sometimes like a year. Some lucky people get it in a few months, but usually like six months or a year you have to be wait. It’s very controlling.

And some doctor I went to, he just declined to give me prescription because I was seen as being too feminine, and he called me “sweetheart” or like “honey” or something, referred me as that. As if referring to female. He said something like, “Honey, come back a year later,” like something like that. He just kept referring to me as a woman. And I just went home and cried.

Some doctors are still very like in that way very transphobic or they think of transgender being only one way. They are very stuck in old days, the idea about trans men and trans women. They have like typical idea about what woman should be, what male should be. You have to be fit in those boxes, just to get assessed to get treatment. Just to start it. So if you don’t fit in that box, you face a lot of difficulties. They try to stop you at every turn.

**Kat:** How did you not fit in that box?

**June:** Because I am small and I am Asian. I don’t know. Maybe cause I was too feminine looking. They never took me seriously. It happens here, too. I constantly have to deal with this shit. People on the street look at me. They don’t know if I am a boy or a girl...And it is annoying. (Interview with June, November 16, 2013)

Transpersons face numerous barriers to hormone medication in North America. In the United States, most hormone medications are not covered by private insurance companies or by
Medicaid. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the National Center for Transgender Equality’s National Transgender Discrimination Survey (NTDS) report that transpersons in North America face unequal access to proper health care in comparison to cisgender persons (regardless of sexual orientation) (Grant et al., 2010; Hartofelis & Manchikanti, 2013). Transphobia and trans-discrimination by health care providers, lack of knowledge about transpersons and their specific needs, and refusal to treat transpersons are just some of the problems reported. The discrimination and insufficient attention to transpersons within health care has serious effects on the overall trans population’s health. Transpersons are at a higher risk of HIV/AIDS infection, late diagnosis of cancer (especially ovarian, breast, and testicular cancer), alcoholism, and suicide (Grant et al., 2010; Hartofelis & Manchikanti, 2013; Taylor, 2013; Bauer et al., 2009; Poteat, German, & Kerrigan, 2013; Brandes, 2014; Stroumsa, 2014).

June’s experience of discrimination in trying to access hormones speaks to the prevalent gender binary within North America’s health care systems and how it feeds into gender inequality. Feminist health researchers and theorists have shown how gender inequalities and discrimination in health care have limited women and transpersons from accessing proper medical care (Sen & Ostlin, 2007; Moss, 2012). Structural gendered inequalities in education and employment mean there is an inadequate consideration of female-bodied-specific health issues (Kent, Patel, & Varela, 2012). Patriarchal and sexist structures pathologize and undermine women and transpersons’ ability to make educated and responsible choices about their health. This has a significant affect for FtM transpersons, who face a considerably higher level of gender discrimination and financial barriers in accessing health care.67

67 This is not say that MtF transwomen do not face gender discrimination based on the very same structural forces of gender inequality and patriarchy that marginalize FtM transmen. However, as male-bodied persons who enter the medical establishment to start their transitioning, MtF
June’s explanation that he was turned down by the doctor because he is Asian is also telling. Annaliese Singh (2013), Kortney Zeigler (2011), and Katrina Roen (2001), show that racialized transpersons experience discrimination and denial of health care at a higher level than do white transpersons. A primary reason for this is the racial inequality within North America that marginalizes Indigenous persons and persons of color (Lamble, 2008), that disproportionately shapes their experiences of access to suitable health care. Racialized transpersons face disproportionately higher rates of violence, harassment, and discrimination in workplaces, schools, and social services (Bith-Melander et al., 2010). This inequality continues within the health care system, where there is a lack of understanding around culture and ethnicity in regards to gender identity and sexuality.

June went to several doctors after he was rejected the first time. Eventually, he managed to find a doctor in a private clinic to work with him and prescribe him hormones. June paid for his hormones without financial assistance and continued his hormone medication through his four years at art school.

June enjoyed the freedom he had in the United States to control what he wanted to do with his body, not only in terms of his gender transitioning, but also in terms food, music, and social activities. June would go every day to Whole Foods and eat an organic vegetarian diet. In his small apartment, he could control the environment in a way that he could never do while living in his parents’ house. He went to concerts around the city, attended poetry events, and went to gay nightclubs.

Transwomen may have more financial resources at their disposal as well as a relatively easier experience in accessing medical care. Nonetheless, ethnicity and class must be taken into account.

68 Whole Foods is an organic grocery store chain located in the United States and Canada.
June: These are tickets from concerts I went to when I lived in the States.

Kat: Why did you take a photograph of them?

June: I like going to concerts. Music is important to me. I went to that art school because a lot of my favorite musicians were from that city. I was already dreaming about that place before I went. And I was happy when I went to these concerts... I got Peter Murphy’s autograph. I saw Billy Corgan from the Smashing Pumpkins read poetry. I saved the tickets. When I moved here I had my mother mail them to me. I like having them with me here. I don’t know... Vancouver has no music here. No concerts. Everything is so expensive. (Interview with June, January 15, 2014)

While still living in the United States, June revealed to his mother and sister that he was trans. June’s mother was shocked by the news, but she eventually accepted June’s decision. June’s sister was supportive of him. June’s mother and sister promised to keep his trans identity a secret from June’s father out of concern that he would stop financially supporting June. During
June’s last year of university, his mother paid for him to undergo a mastectomy. June traveled to a private doctor in Florida for the surgery and went back to his university to recover.

As June’s final year of university was coming to a close, he was tried to find a way to stay permanently in the United States. However, June was unable to find a job that would sponsor him, and was unaware he could make a refugee claim in the United States based on his sexual orientation and gender identity. He stayed in the United States until the very last day of his student visa.

Returning to his country of origin was devastating for June. He was not able to stay on his hormone medication and had to hide his chest surgery from his father. June spent most of his days locked in his room, and when June went outside he felt that everyone was looking at him. June was harassed on the street by a group of young men one-night walking home. These men called June a derogatory word for lesbian and threw rocks at him. June avoided leaving the house after this incident.

June’s legal status in his country of origin was female, and all of his identity documents reflected this. In order to change his legal status, he would need to spend six months in a mental institution and undergo psychoanalysis for gender identity disorder. June would then need to have a hysterectomy and a phalloplasty. June did not want to be hospitalized and was fearful of the doctors in his country of origin performing a phalloplasty.

June’s country of origin did not legally criminalize gay and lesbian activity; however, the conservative cultural climate heavily marginalized gays, lesbians, and transpersons. June was a minority in the small trans community in his city because of his gender identity and sexual orientation. June explained that the majority of transpersons he met followed a heteronormative gender pattern in which (FtM) transmen dated only cisgender women and (MtF) transwomen
dated only cisgender men. Because June was a transgendered man who was attracted to gay men, he felt rejected by both the trans community and the gay cisgender male community.

These experiences made June feel suicidal and desperate. He tried to find job opportunities in the United States, but was unsuccessful. It was not until June saw a news report about a gay man from June’s country of origin getting refugee asylum in Canada that June learned he could make a refugee claim.

Figure 4.11 Tree Branches in Black and White

(Source: Photograph by June, January 2014). June digitally manipulated the photograph from colour to black and white.

June: *I remember when my plane landed in Vancouver. I cried. I was out of that terrible country. I was so relieved. I just cried in my seat.* (Interview with June, November 16, 2013)
June arrived on a visitor’s visa in the winter of 2012. He brought with him the remaining amount of his hormone medication, a few pairs of clothes and toiletries, and his pet cat. When June met with customs officials at the Vancouver International Airport, he showed them his country of origin passport and said that he wanted to make a refugee claim. June was taken into custody by the CBSA and held at the airport detention center for more than twenty-four hours.

**June:** The custom guys treated me like shit. I said to the guy, “I want to make a refugee claim.” And the guy at the counter said, “Oh no you aren’t.” He was like very mad at me for coming here and making a refugee claim. He then took me to a room. It was very small. No windows. He started like yelling at me, saying stuff like, “You can’t make a refugee claim,” and “You are going straight back onto the plane.”

He was trying to find any reason he could send me back. He went through my possessions. Take everything, my possessions, go through my possessions on the table. But he found my testosterone in the bag and I told him, he was asking me, like, why are you coming here to make a refugee claim and all kinds of stuff. And I didn’t know everyone out there. But I just talked in a really loud voice. I spoke to the translator that in order to change your gender in my country, you have to get surgery. I explain about this procedure and told them that it was dangerous. I told them that the surgery results are horrible. They could kill you. And that I was vulnerable to being raped or killed in my country because I am transgender. I had to shout at him. I was so scared. (Interview with June, November 16, 2013)

The CBSA eventually released June, and he was sent to a women’s refugee shelter. The shelter housed female refugee claimants and government-assisted refugees. June did not enjoy his stay at the women’s shelter. The devout Christian staff that ran the place would often discriminate against June because he was trans. June was stalked by one of the female refugee occupants. The woman would sit outside his door and wait for him to leave or enter his room. She would then throw insults at him. When June went to the administrators to complain about the woman harassing him and calling him derogatory names, they refused to do anything about the situation.
June was unemployed and could not afford another place while he waited for his refugee hearing. He waited over a year for his hearing. While waiting for the hearing, June volunteered at the local farmers’ market. June could not afford the produce, but it was a healing activity, and he enjoyed being around the fresh fruits and vegetables. One of the first things June did when he arrived in Vancouver was go to a local Whole Foods. It was a happy and sad moment for June.

Figure 4.12 Food Scraps

(Source: Photograph taken by June, January 2014)

**June:** *This picture is one I took at the farmers’ market. It’s leftover garbage. I was sorting the garbage for compost. Eating healthy is really important. I am very careful about what I eat. I try to eat healthy, but it is hard to do here. Fruits and vegetables are so expensive...*
When I was back there, [country of origin]… so I just sleep, and in my dream I go to Whole Foods. I wanted to get out of that place and eat what I wanted to eat. So when I arrive here, I think the next day I went to Whole Foods.

But I think that’s one of the happiest memories I have here, I guess. I finally had control again over what to eat. It’s important to me. It is expensive. I bought some fruits on that day. I can’t shop there, too expensive, but I still go there to look, touch, and smell. I sometimes buy one or two things. I buy food for my cat there.

I volunteered at the farmers’ market just to be close to the fruit and vegetables. I can’t afford the food there. At the shelter, the food was by donation, so it was a lot of canned stuff. There was never any fruit or vegetables. But I could pretend at the farmers’ market that I was eating those fruits and vegetables. It was nice just to touch and smell them. It helped me feel better. (Interview with June, January 15, 2014)

Having the ability to control what he eats and puts in his body is very important for June.

June’s story of migration is as much a story of having control over his body as it is about his discovering being trans in the United States and then seeking refuge in Canada. These aspects play equal parts and are connected in June’s migration story. June wanted to create a healthy environment that he could control. However, June’s difficulties finding a job and his increasing social anxiety created a barrier to his finding a more suitable place to live. Through this difficult period, the only thing that kept June going was knowing his refugee hearing was coming. June hoped that if he received a positive decision, he would be able to take more control over his life. He looked forward to moving out of the shelter and finding a place where he could feel safe.
4.3.2 “Hiding me from the world”
Refugee Hearing and Post Refugee Hearing

June’s hearing took place in the winter of 2013. He described his hearing as a surreal experience. He was surprised at how understanding the refugee board member was to his being a transman.

**June:** *I was really worried about my hearing. I thought it would be difficult. Like, the person wouldn’t know what transgender is and I would have to explain it to him. Or he would like call me a woman or something. I heard bad stories from other people from Rainbow Refugee. But he was very respectful. I was his first transgender case. He asked me at the beginning what gender I preferred to be called. He even asked like to correct him if he said something wrong about transgender. It was surprising, you know, I mean, I never heard of this before.* (Interview with June, November 16, 2013)

Soon after June received his positive decision in the mail, he went to Citizenship and Immigration Canada and changed his name and gender identity on his refugee identity card and temporary work permit. Because June had previously undergone a mastectomy and had taken hormones for over a year, he qualified for gender reclassification on his government-issued ID. Once he received his new refugee identity card and work permit, June started looking for a job. June applied for several jobs, but received no call-backs for an interview. He grew discouraged and stopped applying for jobs, believing that it was no use. He stayed in his room and rarely ventured outside.

Three months after June’s refugee hearing, the shelter June was staying at was permanently shut down. June did not have anywhere else to go. One of the workers at the shelter

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**69** The IRB member either gives a decision in person to the claimant during the refugee hearing or they defer their decision. After every refugee hearing, regardless of the decision outcome, the recipient receives an official written decision in the mail. This written decision is the document required to change identity documents and apply for permanent residency. The letter usually arrives approximately two to three weeks after the hearing, but it can take considerably longer depending on the refugee board member.
helped June find a room in a rented house in Coquitlam. A transwoman who had immigrated to Canada a few years prior owned the home. June paid five hundred and fifty a month in rent, almost all of his income from social assistance. He could not afford to travel to the Trans-Health Clinic in downtown Vancouver to get his testosterone shots. June was too anxious to administer the testosterone shots himself and started missing his treatments. The economic hardship June faced increased his anxiety and depression.

In addition to the economic hardship, living in a rented house with both women and men for roommates caused many problems for June. The landlord was rarely there to check on the conditions of the place. The house had a quick turnaround for renters, and new people were constantly moving in and moving out. June would stay in his room and only rarely go out to use the kitchen or go to the bathroom.

On three separate instances, June had to call the landlord about fellow tenants or their guests harassing and sexually threatening him. The first occurrence was in the spring of 2013, when one of the female roommates and her boyfriend got into a domestic dispute. June heard them screaming and opened his door to see what was going on. The boyfriend called June a faggot and tried to break down June’s door in an attempt to beat him up. The next occurrence was in the fall of 2013, when June experienced repeated sexual harassment and threats of sexual violence by a male visitor. A group of women staying in the house kept inviting men over. One of these men noticed June and started following him whenever June would leave his room to go to the bathroom or to the kitchen. The man would then make catcalls to June’s closed door and ask to be let in. June was scared and would keep his bed against the door in case the man tried to force his way in. The last occurrence was in the winter of 2014, when a male tenant started making death threats to June and accusing June of stealing his food.
June: I want to live in this picture. I want my home there.

Kat: Why do you want your home there?

June: It is clean. No chemicals. No dirty carpet. No mold. No one bothering me. I don’t have to worry. Feeling safe… (Interview with June, January 15, 2014)

June: I had a room in a place in Coquitlam. People were always moving in and out. The landlord knew I am trans. She didn’t do anything to make sure that the people she rented the rooms to would be okay with that. She didn’t care. She just cared about the rent.

One guy she rented a room to harassed me. He stood outside my door and make cat noises to me. You know, mewing noises. Like a cat. He would call out my name. He’d knock on my door and turn the handle.

When I tried to go to the bathroom he would wait for me and stare at me. I stopped cooking in the kitchen because he was there. One night he screamed that he was going to kill me. I told my landlord about the guy. But, she didn’t do anything about it. I was afraid the guy was going to kill me.
I talked with someone at Rainbow Refugee. They talked to the landlord and after two weeks she finally evicted him. She then treated me very bad after that. I had to leave because she thought that I was a troublemaker. (Interview with June, November 16, 2013)

June relocated several times after this incident. His options for housing were limited on account of having a cat and being on social assistance. June’s social anxiety worsened through the months. He tried to seek counseling and support through Ravensong, a free clinic that serves refugees and low-income persons. June attended their trans support group. However, June felt discriminated against because of his ethnicity.

Figure 4.14 June’s Hand in the River

(Source: Photograph by June, January 2014)

June contacted the BC Residential Tenancy Branch to file a complaint against the landlord. However, the Residential Tenancy Branch told June that besides sending a warning to the landlord, there was little they could do to help him in this situation.
June: The water is so clean there. I like this picture. Just my hand.

Kat: Why do you like this picture?

June: The water is clean. My hand is in the water. Air is clean. No chemicals. I can breathe. Just my hand. No one looking at me. No dirty looks. I can relax. Enjoy it. So beautiful... (Interview with June, January 15, 2014)

June: I went there, you know, to the trans group. And, like, they kept saying I should go to the queer Asian group. I don’t know. I did not feel very welcomed there. Like, they just saw me as Asian...and I don’t see myself as that. Like...I know that I am Asian. But I don’t see myself as part of that culture.

Yeah, people just see me as a certain, a certain race, a certain nationality and nothing else, just, and... they go from there, nothing else, and usually people like me because of where I’m from or they don’t like me because of where I’m from. It’s like too different... because it’s rare they are like me. There are not many gay people or trans people from my country. And if someone like me, they’re usually into the pop culture from my country. They want to speak the language. They want to eat the food.

And they just want to talk about it, and I have nothing to talk about it. I don’t know what they are talking about. They were seeing the way like my skin and my face, or color...

Like people always do that. They ask, like, “Oh, where you from, oh, I’m from here, oh, I know someone from there.” It’s just so boring. So boring, I just want to stop it. I’m so tired of this shit.

When it happens, I feel offended. I left that country for a reason. A good reason. I don’t feel a connection to it. I didn’t feel connections even when I was a kid. I always felt like I was in a foreign country for some reason. I wanted to go to another country to live. I don’t want to bring that country with me here.

But then people kept bringing it up, kept bringing up. It’s very tiring. I don’t want to remember that place. But they see my face... and I just wish I could stop people then. And sometimes a stranger comes up and starts talking about their story and I don’t want to talk to them. It’s all very tiring. So tiring.

Yeah...so when I went to that group, I just saw that they only saw the color. So I never went back. (Interview with June, November 16, 2013)
Jay Prosser writes, “Skin is the body’s memory of our lives” (Prosser, 2004, 52). Skin constitutes a visual biographical record. The scars and blemishes of our skin tell our personal history (Ahmed & Stacey, 2004; Ahmed, 2006; Chavez, 2010b): “The look of our skin—both to others and to ourselves—brings to its surface a remembered past” (Prosser, 2004, 53). This remembered past might be unwillingly and unwantedly placed on our skin. Skin color and race are intimately tied together. The history and significance of race in Canada are placed on racialized immigrants, whether they associate themselves with that history or not. The inheritance of race in skin color shows that our skin’s memory is as much a fabrication of what did not happen as a record of what did (Prosser, 2004). Racialized persons are reduced to their surface (skin). This is what Frantz Fanon calls the “epidermal schema,” in which the body is “re-membered by the racist white subject as only skin” (Fanon, 1967,112). Racialized transpersons in North America face a higher rate of violence and marginalization than do white transpersons (Lamble, 2008). Racism within the larger middle-class and white LGBT community leaves many racialized transpersons feeling unwelcomed or marginalized when seeking social support and community. June felt that the trans support group unnecessarily racialized him and only saw him for his ethnicity. As June explained, he does not want to associate with the culture of his country of origin. He does not share a sense of belonging based on a shared ethnicity and culture with other persons from his country of origin. The experience of the trans support group left him feeling that he does not belong in the predominantly white and middle-class trans community in Vancouver.

At the same time, the large Asian populations in the Metro Vancouver area also made June feel uncomfortable and nervous. June lived in an area that had large East Asian and South Asian populations.
June: One of the first things I noticed here was the huge Asian population. And I was really scared. Because these are the people I was trying to get away from.

I am still not comfortable. Like on the SkyTrain, I always get dirty looks from Asians. They stare at me. They give me nasty looks. I hate it. I hate going outside and getting those looks.

Because Asian people are usually closed-minded. It also reminds me of where I came from. It makes me nervous. I get scared that someone will do something to me.

Kat: Is it always Asian people?

June: Yes, always Asian. I hate it. I want to get away from Asian people. But then people here do not like me because I am Asian. Like, I get it from both ways. I hate it.

Kat: By people, do you mean white people?

June: Yes, white people. They just see me as Asian. Just the color. I feel them looking at me. (Interview with June, November 16, 2013)

June’s description and fears of Asian people are based on his personal experiences and the difficulties he experienced in both his country of origin and in Canada. His description of Asians as closed-minded and transphobic is not indicative of the entire Asian-Canadian population of Vancouver. Metro Vancouver’s Asian-Canadian population is very culturally and geographically diverse and has within it a very strong and vocal LGBT contingent. However, June is caught in between the racial discourses of white and Asian settlement in Vancouver that make him feel vulnerable and hyper-visual.
4.3.3 “I feel at home when I look at the trees”
Unhomey Places and Dwelling

Figure 4.15 Picture of Snow-covered Trees

(Source: Photograph by June, January 2014)

**June:** This is another picture from my room. I spent the whole winter inside, mostly. I don’t like going out. You feel so much...I don’t know...it makes me feel anxious...This place is not good, too. I just have my room. My cat is here. That’s important...but I don’t want to live here. (Interview with June, January 15, 2014)
Despite the structural, economic, and social barriers he faces, June believes that in the future he will make a home for himself. June’s immigration to Canada was a journey to allow him to have control over his body. He wanted not only to be the gender he identified with, but also to control what he did with his body. June’s body is a place that he can claim and of which he can take ownership. This act of claiming gives June a sense of agency in an environment where much is out of his control. Home for June is a place where he will be away from the social pressures that trigger his anxiety. It is a place where June can control the environment and take ownership of his life. Home is a place where June can be at home with himself.

Figure 4.16 Picture of Forest Floor

( Source: Photograph by June, January 2014).
Kat: What would a home be for you?

June: A safe place... A place like where I can control the environment. Like where I can grow vegetables and eat from my garden. In nature with animals. A place that is clean and not polluted. I would live alone.

I want to build my home, a healthy house, somewhere really healthy. I will have a personal business, like a few businesses, so I'll have some income then. But this home would be mine, only mine. I want to do gardening just in my backyard or something. So it's just living with nature and peace... and less people. Less worry about people. I won't have to worry about roommates. No more worry about something happening to me.

Kat: Do you feel at home where you are living?

June: No. It is not safe there. But I don’t know where I would feel safe. Vancouver is not like a home. It is better than what I had before. I felt more at home in the United States. I had more freedom to live the way I wanted to. It’s very difficult here. I don’t have that same lifestyle. I am alone supporting myself and I can’t work...

Figure 4.17 Close-up of June’s Cat

(Source: Photograph by June, January 2014)
Kat: Are there times that you feel at home?

June: I feel at home when I look at the trees. The tall trees and birds singing in the morning, the sounds of waves, and my cat’s voice. That’s when I kiss my cat. That’s when I feel connected to myself. I know that I have these things. I have myself. I have my cat. I have the trees and the birds, you know, like the nature...It calms me. It makes me feel connected to myself.

Home would be a place where I can just be me. Left alone. No one to tell me what to do. A place in nature. (Interview with June, November 16, 2013)

Schillmeier and Heinlein argue that home is not so much a fixed and bounded spatial entity, but a moving achievement between feeling at home and not. In this sense, home is always “becoming” and is constantly renegotiated and reimagined (Schillmeier & Domènech, 2009; Schillmeier & Heinlein, 2009; Bhanji, 2011). June’s conceptualization of home is located in an imagined environment as well as within his self. In this sense, home is migratory as well as situated. Home is something to be travelled towards. Home is also something that travels with June. “I have myself” speaks to June’s sense of home that is situated within his body. He has his self regardless of where he is and what forces are limiting his ability to live a life that he wants. He has ownership over his body and can make decisions about what he wants to do with his body. These decisions are limited by structural, social, and economic inequalities and norms. But within these limitations, June claims agency over his body. June’s body is a dwelling place in which he can be in control (Bhanji, 2011; Mohanty 1993, 352). It is in this act of dwelling within his self that June can feel a sense of home wherever he goes.
4.4 Conclusion: The Body and Homing

Throughout this chapter, I have tried to both expand and collapse home from outside the physical landscape and structure to inside the feeling and physical body. Focusing on embodied experiences shows how individuals create a sense of home and belonging in unhomey places through the connections they have to their bodies. The stories of home Tiffany, Natalie, and June stories shared are bodily physical and sensual stories as well as symbolic and affectual. How Tiffany, Natalie, and June relate to their bodies also shows their sense of affinity and relatedness to the social worlds around them.

As much as possible, I grounded these stories in the physical, structural, material, emotional, and symbolic worlds that Tiffany, Natalie, and June inhabit; however, I also know that my interpretation of their stories is incomplete and uncertain. As Tiffany, Natalie, and June move along in their journeys to find homes for themselves, their experiences continue to unfold. Their stories about asylum and settlement in Canada are intimately intertwined with their relationships to their bodies and sense of self. As Natalie said, “Without my body, where would I be?” Tiffany, Natalie, and June all came to Canada to escape persecution in their countries of origin because of their gender identities. This persecution was inherently tied to social gender norms that caused them to be objectified and experience violence. Canada offered them relief from the state and social persecution they were experiencing. Yet, they also experienced hyper-regulation and silencing by the state that caused them to experience difficulties in accessing health services, education, and housing.

The stories Tiffany, Natalie, and June shared reveal the underlying heteronormativity within Canadian immigration that regulates and marginalizes queer and gender non-normative
bodies, preventing them from accessing state resources and citizenship. Their stories create an alternative archive of trans experiences of forced migration and settlement. This alternative archive highlights the experiences of displaced gender nonconforming persons and resists the dominant heteronormative narratives that uphold the gender binary, thereby creating a new narrative space in which to challenge the institutional structures that threaten trans refugees’ security and chances for survival. The hyper-regulation by and invisibility within the Canadian state that Tiffany, Natalie, and June experience is gender violence that ultimately goes back to the structuring of immigration and citizenship around white heterosexual and cisgender bodies. Those who do not fit within these narrow confines of citizenship run the risk of being detained, deported, and refused asylum. This violence continues long after the refugee process is over, as trans refugees’ ability to change their documentation is restricted by the state’s dependence on a gender binary medical model that enforces medical intervention in order to change one’s gender.

In addition to violence from the Canadian government because of their gender nonconformity, Tiffany, Natalie, and June also experience discrimination in the job and housing markets and in the larger LGBT community in Vancouver because they are racialized trans refugees. Their stories point to the ways in which race, gender, sexuality, and citizenship intersect in feelings of belonging and community participation. The predominantly white, cisgender, and middle-class queer community in Vancouver can be a place of both acceptance and abjection for gender nonconforming and racialized refugees. June experienced marginalization and objectification based on his race and gender identity in both the queer community and the larger Asian community. Experiences of belonging and acceptance, however, do differ and depend on the individual. Natalie experienced unwanted exposure and harassment within the gay and lesbian community, but found belonging in the larger Latino community. Just
as the Latino community is not necessarily transphobic, the gay and lesbian community is not always a safe place for Natalie as a straight transwoman. Natalie experiences certain vulnerability and fear of exposure in both circumstances. She navigates between these communities, always having to decide how and when to hide or reveal her gender identity.

All three of the participants experienced housing difficulties as gender nonconforming refugees. June has relocated to eight different apartments since our interviews took place about a year ago. At every new location, he experienced various degrees of harassment and violence from roommates and neighbors because of his gender identity and health concerns. The memory of the sexual violence he encountered in his first apartment continues to reinforce his vulnerability to attacks because of his gender identity. He is currently living alone in a modified camper in Vancouver. Tiffany is in the process of finding a cheaper place to stay, as her mother can no longer afford to help her. She is again faced with the stress of having to reveal her gender identity to potential landlords and roommates because her identity documents do not match her gender presentation. There are few resources available to help June and Tiffany find safe and affordable housing. The lack of housing support and availability causes Tiffany and June to feel vulnerable and uncertain about their futures. Yet, despite these difficulties, Tiffany, Natalie, and June continue to endure. This speaks to their bravery and tenacity, and their determination to survive.

Relatedness is embedded in the stories of home and belonging that Tiffany, Natalie, and June shared. Their relationships to their bodies not only inform their sense of home, but also provide a dwelling space for their hope for the future. A strong part of their sense of future rests in the relationships that they can make and maintain with the people around them. As her body changes and she struggles to live her daily life as a transwoman, Tiffany is unsure about her
future. She worries about whether there will be a place where she can find the acceptance and love she desires. Part of this acceptance and love rests in her connections to her mother and the desire to create a family for herself. The relationship between Tiffany and her mother is one of silences. As of writing this chapter, Tiffany has not told her mother about her gender nonconformity. How much Tiffany’s gender nonconformity is actually a secret from her mother remains to be discovered. Tiffany suspects her mother knows, but is avoiding confrontation. Both act out of love and concern for each other. Yet, the silences and fear of losing their close relationship have taken a toll on both of them. June’s desire to have control over his body and to resist the gender expectations placed upon him in his country of origin ultimately led him to Canada. Yet, upon entering Canada, he was confronted with another form of gendered and racial norms. June’s experience of racialization within the trans support group hearkens back to John’s experience of emplaced displacement on Davie Street. June disidentifies with the racial and gender norms placed upon his body by the people he encounters on the streets in Vancouver and within the larger white LGBT community. He looks to nature, the food that he can eat, and his cat’s eyes as references for a home that he has not yet been able to achieve. It is this hope to have control over his body and his environment that creates a sense of home for June.

Tiffany, Natalie, and June’s relationships to their bodies are connected to their feelings of home and belonging. Their stories point to the nonbinary and fluidness of home. Home is an embodied sense of place. Home travels with them as they move forward in life and their transitioning. As Natalie said, “When I see myself fully in the mirror, that’s when I say that I am in the right spot to be.” Her body is a dwelling place where she experiences and interacts with the world around her. Tiffany’s and June’s bodies are also dwelling places that are constantly changing and transforming as they continue on their journey. It is in this changing that Tiffany,
Natalie, and June hold their hope for the future, for homes where they can be themselves. Their sense of home dwells in a place of possibility (Pons, 2003, 49).
5 “Home Is Where We Are Together”

Domesticity and Homing for Queer Refugee Couples

Tavo, Juliet, Sara, and Samuel

I never thought I would live here. Like, I never ever thought about Canada as a place for me to live. I love my home country. I thought I would live there forever. I came here to be with the man I loved. I guess I followed my heart to Canada... And now I am here. And I need to see if I will fall in love with here. I have two hearts in one chest... I don’t know if it will ever be again just one heart. (Interview with Tavo, August 2013)

In the previous sections, I explored participants’ relationships to places, communities, and their bodies. Most of the interpersonal relationships I focused on have involved the participants’ relationships with their families, their cultural and ethnic communities, and the larger queer communities in Vancouver and abroad. In this section, I focus on the narratives of four individuals who came to Canada to be able to live safely with their significant partners or openly pursue relationships with persons of the same gender. The relationships they have or had with their significant partners not only shaped their migratory journeys, but also play a predominant role in their stories of home and belonging. I follow the stories and photographs of Tavo, Juliet, Sara, and Samuel. The quotation above is from Tavo, a gay-identified cisgender man from Central America. Tavo came to Canada in 2009 with his ex-partner, Luis, to escape the violence they were facing as a gay couple in their country of origin. Juliet and Sara are a

71 I use the term significant partners to refer to individuals who have a sexual and/or romantic relationship together.
lesbian cisgender couple from Central Asia who came to Canada in the winter of 2014 and made a successful refugee claim as a couple. Samuel is a gay cisgender refugee from Central America. He made a successful refugee claim in 2004. What comes out of their stories is a sense of the significance that domesticity and romantic relationships play in their experiences of home and belonging. Home is situated in the relationships they have with their partners and how these relationships help locate the participants’ sense of home in unhomey places.

This section is a contribution to the “emotional turn” in forced migration studies that calls for a recognition of individuals as more than mobile bodies within the global neoliberal capitalist world, going beyond the “victimhood fate” of refugees fleeing persecution to see refugees as sexual and emotional beings expressing, wanting to express, or denied the means to express their sexual identities and desires (Mai & King, 2009, 296). In the following sections, I explore how intimacy and citizenship are interplayed together in the refugee process for queer couples making a joint refugee claim. Love is an expected/unexpected topic to explore in forced migration research. Most people would generally agree that feelings and social constructions relating to love are important when talking about refugees’ sense of home and belonging (Morrison, Johnston, & Longhurst, 2012). Yet, discussions about love and its varied role in refugees’ settlement remain marginal. In All About Love, bell hooks writes that love is “a combination of care, commitment, trust, knowledge, responsibility and respect” (2000, 7-8). Love is a personal experience that is affective, reactive, and relative. Love is always attached to something, someone, someplace, and somewhere. Sara Ahmed writes that love should be seen as multisensory, lived, embodied, felt, and contradictory (2004). Love is also socially situated. Meanings behind love, practices of love, performances of love, and the social significances of
love change from place to place (Morrison, Johnston, & Longhurst, 2012). Love is therefore not static or ontologically given.

Intimate feelings like love are deeply intertwined with national and transnational technologies of power (Ahmed, 2004; Stoler, 2006; White, 2014). Love is politically, legally, and socially regulated by state and society: Who is allowed to express love? What kinds of love are recognized by the state—and how does this then shape who is granted certain rights, like the ability to seek citizenship for a partner? What cultural and social norms are embedded within the discourse of love? Love is a relevant topic when talking about LGBT refugees. How, where, and whom one loves is a motivating factor and a structuring force in regulating their migration and their ability to settle. Tavo, Juliet, and Sara experienced several institutional barriers in their dealings with the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) as well as material and emotional challenges in creating homes for themselves in Canada as members of queer couples. The heteronormative and patriarchal norms that underlie the IRB’s determination of legitimate and recognizable relationships cause many LGBT refugee couples’ claims to be dismissed or seen as not credible. LGBT refugees must not only prove that they are in a committed relationship with each other, but that this relationship makes them vulnerable to persecution.

Nicholas Hersh writes that there is reason to be concerned about how IRB members consider sexual minority refugees’ relationships and how this can reproduce heteronormative norms around identity and intimacy (2015). Hersh argues that IRB members often make insufficient consideration of the psychosocial barriers and cultural differences that may impinge on sexual and gender minority refugees’ ability to testify about their past relationships (2015, 527). In addition, norms around sexuality and gender may inhibit IRB members’ ability to fully understand the social world the claimant comes from and why their life may not align perfectly
with Western queer lifestyles. Very little research to date has looked at the institutional, material, and social challenges sexual and gender minority couples making a refugee claim together experience in the refugee process and afterwards. This is a serious oversight in the research on LGBT refugees. What are LGBT refugee couples’ experiences of settlement and the refugee process? How do the refugee and settlement processes affect their relationships with each other? What barriers do they face in accessing housing and resources as queer refugee couples? How do they create a sense of home and belonging together in their newly adopted country?

In addition to exploring intimacy in the refugee and settlement process, I explore how feelings of home are informed by the emotional and physical relationships LGBT refugees have with their romantic partners. My exploration of these four individuals’ stories of love and loss pull home into the intimate and personal experiences. Tavo, Sara, Juliet, and Samuel may not necessarily feel at home in their current locations in Vancouver as racialized gay and lesbian refugees, but the intimate experiences and domestic rituals they share with their romantic partners create a sense of home in times of uncertainty and precariousness. Andrew Gorman-Murray (2008) and Rebecka Sheffield (2014) write that the majority of queer research has preoccupied itself with lesbian, gay, and trans lives outside of the domestic sphere in the social world of predominantly gay/lesbian bars and parties. Less research has been done on the intimate and domestic spheres of queer lives (Gorman-Murray 2008; Sheffield, 2014; Manalansan, 2014). 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 (2006). 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 (Sheffield, 2014). Exploring
homemaking and domesticity for LGBT refugees expands on current research on queer domesticity; queer refugees not only must work against heteronormative norms to create a home for themselves, but also face challenges in creating and maintaining a domestic space as racialized, classed, and gendered refugees. Creating private and loving domestic spaces with their partners helps Juliet, Sara, and Samuel feel at home and in place in Canada. Domesticity becomes a site of validation of themselves as partners in gay and lesbian couples, as well as resistance against heteronormative regulation and surveillance by the state and the public. Home expands outside the material or physical structure to rest in the intersections of memory, affect, and the intimate relations Tavo, Juliet, Sara, and Samuel have with their significant partners. Yet, finding and maintaining housing is an ongoing challenge for them as racialized, classed, gendered, and sexualized refugees.
5.1 Tavo

Figure 5.1 Picture of Tavo from his apartment window

Tavo reached out to me by email in the spring of 2013 after seeing the advertisement looking for interview participants I posted on the Qmunity bulletin board. He was one of the first people I interviewed. Tavo and I met three times to conduct extended oral history interviews. We met again in the spring of 2014, when he agreed to participate in the photography portion of the project. Tavo’s photographs are a mixture of photographs he took using the camera I gave to him and personal photographs that he had previously taken and shared with me. Through an exploration of Tavo’s story and photographs, I want to study the intricacies of emotional desire and romantic partnerships that situates Tavo’s experiences of home and belonging. Love is a
central thread in Tavo’s story and photographs as both a motivation for his migration to Canada and an orienting/grounding device for his current home in Vancouver and his country of origin. Instead of thinking of love as just an emotion, I want to explore through Tavo what love does and how LGBT refugee migration and settlement can be seen as much as an *intimate* migration as a forced migration to escape persecution (Kojima, 2015). By doing this, I argue for the necessity of emotion, especially love and desire, in understanding LGBT refugee settlement.
5.1.1 “Being gay is bad enough. It is foolish to want more”
Queer Violence as Gender Violence

Figure 5.2 Gay Pride Parade in Tavo’s Country of Origin

(Source: Photograph donated by Tavo, April 2014).

Tavo: That’s the Gay Pride in [city in Central America]. It’s just funny how we celebrate Pride very differently. Everyone in [Central America] is included. The ones who are, like, watching on the side are the people who are not gay. Like, all the gay people are in the Pride. If you are gay, you are in the Pride. All the people on the side street are straight. It’s nice because we are all together. That’s my Pride.
But...also, this picture is a very emotional day.... This is when I met my boyfriend, Luis. So it’s kind of important ‘cause it’s at this point that I promise to myself that I would never leave [Central America] again. I would never live in the States or anything. And then I meet Luis and then like in an instant we were like, “Oh, we’re going to Canada!” I remember this picture because that day we went out and I got really, really drunk and I told my friends, “I’m never leaving [Central America]!” I will live, love, and die here! (Interview with Tavo, April 11, 2014)

Tavo and Luis met in the spring of 2004 through mutual gay friends at the yearly LGBT Pride event. They lived in a large metropolitan city in a Central American country with an active and vibrant LGBT gay community. When they first met, they were living in their mothers’ homes. Their mothers both knew about their sexual orientation and were accepting of their relationship. They decided to move in together after a year. Tavo described their living together as a risky move, as it would make their relationship more noticeable to their neighbors and local police. Tavo and Luis had already experienced police harassment the previous summer when they went on their first vacation together.

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72 Luis is a pseudonym.
Tavo: This is a funny story. Well, not funny, but it shows the kind of stuff Luis and I were dealing with before we came to Canada. We went on a trip outside of [Central America]. This trip is special because it was our first trip as a couple...

And we were resting on the side of the road. Luis had his head on my chest. But cops are, like, everywhere, and they stopped by our car. We were inside the car. So they asked, “What are you doing?” We are going to take you to—it’s not jail, it was like to the police station. We are going to take you to the police station, cause you’re doing stuff that is not allowed, is not—in that state, it’s forbidden.

So, we’re like, well, we’re doing nothing. And they were like, well, you’re homosexual. That’s enough. This picture I took when they left, ‘cause they asked us for money, and if you don’t want to go to jail, you give it to them. I think it was like fifty dollars in Canadian money. (Interview with Tavo, April 11, 2014)
Being harassed and extorted for such an innocent action (placing one’s head on another person’s chest) made Tavo nervous about public exposure. In Tavo’s country of origin, same-sex sexual activity was legal. However, individuals could be arrested and abused if they were caught being “publically indecent.” It was common for police to raid public parks, back alleys, public rest areas, and known gay bars for individuals engaging in sexual activity. The public indecency clause included a wide range of non-sexual activities, and it was left mostly to the discretion of the police officer to decide whether an action was indecent. The public indecency clause was so arbitrary that just about anything from holding hands to two men sitting together on a park bench alone at night could be justification for arrest. The experience solidified for Tavo that he needed to be extra-careful whenever Luis and he were out in public.

Tavo described his living situation with Luis as safe but stressful. They kept a low profile around their neighbors. Tavo and Luis were always worried that the neighbors would find out about them. They would spend most of their weekends visiting family members in order to avoid suspicion. Tavo and Luis loved being together and sharing a home. They wanted to build a family together and adopted two dogs. This happy period would soon end when Tavo and Luis started working together.
Tavo: This was a picture of our two little dogs. We had to leave them in [Central America] with Luis’s mother. Yeah...it was really sad... (Interview with Tavo, April 11, 2014)....

Tavo: I was living in [a city in Central America], I had a partner, and we were together for three years before that...We had our little home. We had our dogs and we were really happy together. We kept to ourselves. People expect you to be married and have kids. Being gay is bad enough. It is foolish to want more.
**Kat:** And you were messing with the system?

**Tavo:** Absolutely! Two men living together was like a total “no” there. Like, people do it, but you need to be careful. But the problems started when my ex-partner started working with me. I worked in downtown [city in Central America]…

And there’s all these gangs and gang leaders. And one of the gang leaders had a sister. And the sister wanted to…well, I think she kinda fell in love with Luis. When she noticed that we were gays and that we were a couple, the beatings started coming. We started getting beaten like once or twice a week…and…then we stopped working because the last beating was really, really bad. And they [the gang members] said that if we ever see you guys ever again, we are just gonna kill you. But we couldn’t just stop, like, working…that was our only way of life…our only way of living.

So we came back, like, probably two weeks later, and the scene was late at night, at the end of the day. When we closed the place, we were walking towards my car…I guess to go home. And probably ten or more guys were coming after us. We started running, but there was a bunch. So they beat us up until we passed out. Blood everywhere.

And I think they actually thought that they killed us, and that’s when they stopped. Because even when I couldn’t move anymore, I kept feeling the kicks and the punches in the face and stuff. They pissed and pooped on us.

So…that night, we went to the hospital and we stayed there for a week. I went into a coma for, like, two days. And then I woke up. My ex-partner was fine, like, his health was fine. My mother was there, and she was crying. She was so worried about us.

Then my mom said, “We’ll need to do something. You guys need to do something. You need to go somewhere, because they are gonna kill you if you stay here.”

So then, at that point, we were like, “Okay, what are we going to do?” It’s not a huge gang, but the problem is what they do. They go all over the country. The gang bosses, kidnapping, and all of that. It is easy for them to find us if we moved to another big city.
Kat: They would follow you?

Tavo: They would follow you. Yeah, they would be able to track us. Being two gay guys...well, it wouldn’t be so hard to find us. And we wanted to stay together. You know? We loved each other and wanted to stay together. So wherever we would go would be together. So people would know us. So...we decided to come to Canada because we thought it was gay-friendly and far enough from our country. It was really easy at that time to come to Canada because we didn’t have a visa. Within a day we got our passports and our tickets. Three days later, we were flying. (Interview with Tavo, August 16, 2013)

Tavo’s experience of persecution speaks to the complexities of violence that is overlooked in research and media attention on anti-queer violence in Canada and abroad. The focus is primarily on violence directed toward an individual because of their sexual orientation. It is important to be mindful of how gender, race, and class intersect in the way violence is directed towards queer bodies. Tavo explained that in his country, it is relatively common for unmarried adult children, especially male children, to live with their families. Tavo and Luis lived in a large metropolitan city in which it was more and more common for adult children to live by themselves, but this was mostly restricted to upper or middle-class individuals who had the financial and social means to live independently. As a single man living with his mother, Tavo’s sexual orientation was slightly less visible. When Tavo and Luis moved in and started working together, they become more visible and were targeted by local gang members.

It is important to be clear that being forced to live discretely because of the fear of violence is persecution. Tavo was already living with the everyday persecution of having to hide his sexual orientation from outsiders as a single gay man. Tavo and Luis experienced violence not only because they were sexual minorities, but also because they were male-bodied and working class. James Wilets (2008) 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. Wilets argues that violence against sexual minorities is “predicated
upon assumptions of a polar construction of gender, in which nonconformity with gender role
expectations is enforced through violent and nonviolent means” (Wilets, 2008, 989). Violence
against women and sexual minorities is rooted in a system of gender hierarchy and patriarchy.
Sexual minorities are “gender outlaws” in which persecution based on sexual orientation
involves intolerance not only of homosexual relations, but also the defying of traditional gender
roles (Wilets, 2008). Gender is at the root of oppression. Focusing only on sexual orientation as
the reason for persecution may overlook the overarching gendered system of oppression that
causes violence against sexual and gender minorities to occur in the first place.

Looking only at attitudes and laws against homosexuality may also have the negative
effect of framing persecution in a limited way that overlooks the social position of the claimant
and how gender plays in their basis of claim. The violence that Tavo and Luis experienced in
their country of origin also speaks to the difficulty in labeling a country safe for LGBT persons.
Tavo came from a country that did not criminalize homosexuality. The city where he lived had
an active gay nightlife. A large Gay Pride event was held every summer. Tavo’s country of
origin was also a very popular place for gays and lesbians from Canada and the United States to
vacation. On the surface, one could argue that Tavo’s country of origin should be a safe country
for LGBT persons. Yet, as we can see in Tavo’s story, his country of origin was only safe for
those who had the economic and social means to be able to protect and isolate themselves from
police harassment and street violence. Because Tavo and Luis wanted to stay together as a
couple, internal flight would not be an option for them. They were afraid that they would be
either be identified by gang members in their new location or they would be too visible as a gay
couple and therefore vulnerable to harassment by and violence from the police and the local
population. Tavo and Luis were therefore left with no options in seeking safety for themselves in their country of origin.

**Figure 5.5 Picture of Bar and Tavo’s Back**

(Source: Photograph donated by Tavo, April 2014).

**Tavo:** This picture was the night before we came to Canada. My best friend, he rented a tiny spot. It’s a tiny, tiny, tiny bar. He rented that bar for us to have a goodbye party. This is my best friend making decorations. It was one of the best moments before I left [Central America], I guess. After all that, that was like, “Oh, wow.”
I see this like a before-and-after picture. Before this picture, I thought that my life and my entire soul was in [Central America] and this is the moment when I realized I am leaving [Central America] behind. I’m leaving where I belong, and in that moment, I realized I was coming to Canada. I was going to try to stay there for good. So...yeah that, that was really hard. It was really, really, really tough. (Interview with Tavo, April 11, 2014)

Going to Canada was not an easy decision for Tavo and Luis. They would be leaving their social support network of family and friends. This social support network provided love, comfort, and protection, as well as a needed network for housing and employment. Going to Canada meant the loss of this important social system and vital means of survival. Tavo’s words and the picture above hearken back to a previous discussion on the importance of recognizing and acknowledging the complexity that relatedness plays in LGBT migrants’ lives. Tavo and Luis’s migration to Canada was not a solo endeavor. Their migration would not have been possible without the support of their family and friends. His story challenges Western and neoliberal narratives of queer migration that see queer persons as being mobile and independent individuals without families (Kojima, 2015). As stated previously, these narratives do not take into account sociocultural differences and their effects on queer migrants’ familial and social relationships (Eng, 2010; Lewis, 2013; Manalansan, 2003; Rodriguez, 2011; Peterson, 2014; Hudson & Mehrota, 2015; Wimarka, 2015; Tongson, 2010; Yue, 2008; Kojima, 2015). The idea that gay persons are easily mobile because they have no family attachments or commitments flattens the complexity and dynamics of LGBT refugee migration that rely on complex kin networks and social supports (Triger, 2011). Tavo hoped that he and Luis would be able to live safely in Canada, and believed that they could work together to create a new home for themselves. These hopes were quickly challenged during their first two years living as undocumented persons in Vancouver.
5.1.2 “Vancouver is like a golden cage”
Living in Canada Undocumented and the Refugee Process

Figure 5.6 Pictures of Tavo’s Dolls and Luis’s Hand

(Source: Photographs taken and donated by Tavo, April 2014).
Tavo: That baby doll in the middle. This is the first thing that Luis bought with his first money; first pay cheque that he got was this one. So, it’s a baby. It was our little baby here. Yeah, and then my current boyfriend gave me this one and this one.

That’s my little babies. I love them. It was awful our first two years here. And now we are no longer together. But even if we are not together, I will always keep my baby. It is very special to me.

This is a picture of Luis’s hand. We weren’t going home. I think I was crying because I wanted to go back to [Central America] and Luis, he kept telling me, no, let’s stay, let’s try to do something, let’s try to do it. So he drew, like, a face in his hands to make me laugh. (Interview with Tavo, April 11, 2014)

Tavo and Luis arrived in Vancouver in 2008. They spoke very little English and did not know anyone in the city. They stayed at the downtown YMCA and went to the library to look online for local gay social spaces. Tavo and Luis went to Davie Street in hopes of finding information on places to live. They met a Spanish-speaking gay man by chance, and with his help, they used Craigslist to find a shared apartment with other undocumented persons.

Tavo and Luis did not know they could make a refugee claim based on the persecution they experienced in their country of origin. The situation they fled left them little time to prepare and plan for a way to stay in Canada legally. Tavo had previous experience living and working in the United States as an undocumented person. He knew the difficulties and challenges of living undocumented, but was prepared to do so until he could find a way to stay permanently in Canada with Luis. He knew that if they were sent back to their home country, they would be killed, and felt that he had no choice but to stay in Canada undocumented.\(^\text{73}\)

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\(^{73}\) I deliberately use the term “undocumented” rather than “illegal” in this research because it allows me to problematize the way that the Canadian state places migratory individuals into categories of legitimacy and non-legitimacy. “Undocumented” also allows me to show the heterogeneity of migration and break apart the essentialized and racist depiction of the “illegal migrant.” By taking a political stance in using the term “undocumented,” I am saying that
Melissa Autumn White writes that experiences of social abjection and social difference increase for those crossing territorialized borders (2010, 2014). Territorialized borders emerge as sites of heightened surveillance in which individuals may be exposed to other unexpected vulnerabilities. People crossing borders undocumented become highly surveyed bodies in which 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 (White, 2014). Living undocumented created a significant amount of stress for Tavo and Luis. First and foremost, it meant living in constant fear of being discovered by city officials and police. Everyday activities like taking the SkyTrain and walking down the street brought the threat of being discovered. Work was always unstable, as they could only find jobs that were willing to hire them without work permits. There was always a fear that the police would raid the worksite. Access to healthcare was a challenge, as they did not have medical cards. Even going to the free clinic came with the risk of being reported. Being gay men only increased their feelings of vulnerability, as it made them fearful of homophobic violence or discrimination by employers, landlords, roommates, and other undocumented persons. There was also the risk of being more noticeable or easily remembered by others because they were a gay couple. Being remembered was dangerous, as it could lead to someone reporting them to the police, and then to their deportation.

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migration in itself is not illegal. It is the Canadian state that determines and regulates who can settle legally. This regulation is based on a hierarchy of racial, class, and gender norms as well as the global apartheid of migration that allows for the mobility of some and the immobility of others (De Genova, 2002).
Housing was also something Tavo described as being very stressful during the time Luis and he were living undocumented. Tavo and Luis could only rent from landlords who did not ask for or require work permits. Often these were basement apartments in people’s homes. The cost of rent was so high that they would often live with two or three other persons. Their vulnerability as undocumented persons made it easy for landlords to abuse them.

**Figure 5.7 Picture of Cherry Trees and Street**

![Image of cherry trees and street](source: Photograph by Tavo, April 2014).

**Tavo:** This picture is a street of one of the places we lived in. We moved many times. This place was really bad. It was in the basement of these East Indian people and we were living there. They obviously knew that we didn’t have like a work permit and nothing like that and so they took advantage of the situation.
They raised the rent almost every month. We didn’t know that we were paying, like, three times more than we should. They would charge us, like, 700 dollars a month for utilities and we were never shown the bill. Even when we asked, we were not shown the bill. And we weren’t allowed to cook in the place because the guy said that our food was too smelly and dirty. It was just awful.

Kat: It’s such a contrast, too, because this picture is of a really pretty street with the pink flowers, but I see this as, like, such a representation of all of the bad experiences of when you were living undocumented because it was on this street that people were taking advantage of your vulnerable situation.

Tavo: And it represents the anguish of living without any help. You can’t go to the police to help you. I don’t really like this picture because of the anguish that you feel when you’re not sure of where you’re going to stay or go back, and you can’t go back to your country. Going back meant that we would be dead. We were, like, what are we going to do? We, like, either pay what he’s asking for, or if next month asks for more, and what if he calls the police? What are we going to do, right? He could call the police anytime he wants. It was a really an awful time even though the place was really beautiful. It’s Easter in this picture. The street is beautiful, but what we were experiencing and living in our place was just awful.
(Interview with Tavo, April 11, 2014)

Tavo’s experiences with abusive landlords were not isolated to this one incident. The fear of being discovered meant that Tavo and Luis were constantly moving. They would not stay too long in one location out of concern that the landlord would call the police. Landlords, sensing their vulnerability, would substantially overcharge them for rent and utilities. Luis grew increasingly anxious and depressed. The trauma Luis experienced in his country of origin was compounded by the violence and fear he experienced living undocumented in Vancouver. Luis had recurring nightmares of being attacked, and it was hard for him to sleep. He was unable to go outside because of increased paranoia that people were following him and would attack him. He could no longer work and spent most of his days lying awake in bed. Tavo was left alone to try to support the two of them. The pain of what they were experiencing, as well as the exhaustion from working various jobs, left Tavo feeling depressed and alone.
Figure 5.8 Golden Sunset on the Beach

(Source: Photograph Taken by Tavo, April 2014).

**Tavo:** This picture I like a lot, and I think it represents the loneliness of what I felt when I was first living Vancouver. I think it was my first or second year or something when I took this. The beach is so huge, and in [Central America], you don’t see beach like this, like, not the colour, ‘cause it has no features, not the colour, and that water is really, really, really cold, and so no one is in the beach, like, inside the water, I mean. I thought it was sad. It was really lonely. I would come to the beach by myself a lot. I felt like I was trapped. I did not know what I could do. I was so alone here.

I don’t know if there’s a saying about like being in a golden cage. In [Central America], there’s a saying about being in a really, really nice, gorgeous cage, but it’s still a cage. And Vancouver is like a golden cage. It is beautiful. But it is still a metal cage.
Yeah, so, here I was in this gorgeous city, but in my perspective, this was not where I wanted to be. I wanted to be in [Central America]. Like, that was home, and that was what it actually represents this picture for me. It is beautiful, like, it’s golden, but it’s not where I want to be. (Interview with Tavo, April 11, 2014)

Tavo did not talk about what happened to him in his country of origin with his employers, work colleagues, or other people he met. He was afraid that if too many people knew about his past experiences with gang members, word would eventually reach his country of origin, alerting the gang that Luis and he were still alive. Even though they were living far away from their country of origin, Tavo and Luis were still very afraid that the gang members could find and kill them. Tavo and Luis deleted all their social media profiles. They spoke little to their families out of fear that people in their country of origin would find out they were still alive and then blackmail or abuse their families.

Luis was so anxious and having so much trouble sleeping that Tavo and he visited a free clinic to get some sleeping pills. They had a good rapport with the clinic’s physician and felt he was someone they could trust. When they later ran into him by chance at a local gay bar, he was friendly towards them, and the social setting and his kindness gave them the confidence to finally tell the story of what happened to them in their country of origin. After hearing their story, the physician told them that they could be eligible to make a refugee claim on the basis of sexual orientation. The physician then connected Tavo and Luis to volunteers from Rainbow Refugee.

Tavo and Luis were fearful of making a refugee claim. They felt it would be rejected because of their delay in claiming and because the Canadian state saw their country as a relatively safe country for gay persons. Their concern over the delay in claiming asylum was legitimate. Tavo had previously lived in the United States, and they had been living in Canada for two years. Failure to claim in the United States and delaying their claim in Canada could be
enough grounds for their claim to be denied because of the safe third country agreement between the US and Canada, but the Canadian IRB does consider the circumstances of why a claimant did not make a claim in a safe third country or why they delayed claiming in Canada. Tavo did not make a refugee claim in the United States because at the time he was not experiencing direct violence and he wanted to return to live in his country of origin. It is only when Tavo began his relationship with Luis that they started to experience violence and had to escape, fearing for their lives. They had not made a refugee claim in Canada because they did not know that they could do so based on sexual orientation.

**Tavo:** *We were really scared about our hearing. We hear stories of gay people denied because they didn’t have enough proof. And our country is seen as sort of safe, but of course it isn’t. And we had to prove that we are a couple. So we had to figure out what that meant.*

*We were lucky. We had vacation photos. We even had a police report from when we were first attacked by the gang members. The police didn’t do anything, but they did file it. My mother mailed it to us.*

*When we were beaten up we would make fun of ourselves to cheer ourselves up. We would take pictures and say things like “Did you see this cut and did you see this other cut?” So we took pictures of everything.*

*But, at the time, you know, the time we took those pictures, we never never never thought of putting it as proof here to be a refugee. We never thought of it. We didn’t even know that the refugee thing existed. We never could imagine that such a thing could exist for gay couples.*

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74 By not claiming asylum in the United States, Tavo would have been in violation of “The Safe Third Country Agreement between Canada and the United States”. The Safe Third Country is part of the U.S.-Canada Smart Border Action Plan in which refugee claimants are required to request refugee protection in the first safe country they arrive in. Claimants must show how they qualify for an exception to the Agreement. Failure to claim asylum in a Safe Third Country also applies to countries in Western Europe. If an individual enters France, for example, before flying to Canada and making a refugee claim, their claim may be rejected on the grounds that they failed to make a refugee claim in a Safe Third country (CIC, 2015).
And we were so afraid of the hearing. We wanted to be together, but we heard that it was up to the refugee decision maker. So we were really scared.

At the hearing, we got to be together. But, I just remember crying. I was so scared and so tired. I just cried and cried. (Interview with Tavo, August 16, 2013)

In order to prove that they would experience persecution in their country as a gay couple, Tavo and Luis had to not only provide substantive evidence of their sexual orientation, but also make the case that it was their relationship that caused them to be vulnerable to persecution. The evidence Tavo and Luis presented to the IRB was enough to support their claim that they would be vulnerable to persecution despite the claims that their country was safe. In many ways, Tavo and Luis were lucky. Without the support of their families to help them get additional evidence and supporting letters, or the photographs of their injuries, it is very possible that their claim would have been denied. Many queer couples do not have access to such support during the asylum claim process, which can create challenges in being granted refugee protection.

Tavo and Luis had a joint refugee hearing. The refugee board member listened to them together. At the end of the board member’s initial questioning of Tavo and Luis, he told them that he was finished and was ready to make a positive decision. Tavo described feeling a sense of both shock and relief at the positive decision. Receiving a positive decision meant that Luis and Tavo could finally live safely in Canada without the threat of deportation. Tavo left his hearing feeling hopeful for his future and looking forward to building his life with Luis.

The stress of the refugee process kept Tavo and Luis together. However, once the hearing was over, Tavo and Luis’s relationship rapidly deteriorated. They ended their relationship three weeks after their refugee hearing, and Luis moved out of the apartment. Losing Luis meant that Tavo lost his reason for being in a country that he had never wanted to live in. Without his partner, Tavo had to find a new way to anchor himself to his newly adopted country. In addition
to this devastating turn of events, Tavo knew he faced a wait of up to two years to receive permanent residency, and until then, he could not enroll in advanced English classes or travel abroad to see his family.

**Tavo:** I know like there is this travel document...so I could use that to go to like the US or something. But, then how do I get my family there. And even if I did manage to get us all there for a vacation or something, what if they [Canada] don’t let me back in.

Because I don’t have permanent residency. So I don’t have anything here. Like I can stay but that’s it. I need to wait to get permanent residency. And it’s very hard. Because I can’t do anything but wait.

Like, for example, I took all the English courses that are free. But, I can’t enroll in school or take any higher English classes until I get my permanent residency because it is only for permanent residents. I can’t take classes because I have no way to pay for them and I can’t take loans because they are not available to me until I get my permanent residency. Everything is waiting on that. So I’m just waiting and waiting. (Interview with Tavo, August 16, 2013).

Tavo felt trapped in Canada and was frustrated that he could not move forward in his life. He was left with conflicting feelings of love, longing, and loss. It took time for Tavo to slowly rebuild his life and create new attachments to his current home. Eventually, Tavo fell in love with another person. As Tavo fell in love with his current boyfriend, he also found himself falling in love with Vancouver. As we see in the next section, Tavo’s conflicted feelings of love, longing, and loss have not subsided or settled. Instead, he navigates all three emotions as a person with “two hearts in one chest.”
5.1.3 “Will I fall back in love with there?”
Forced Migration as Intimate Migration

Figure 5.9 Picture of Sunset at the Beach

(Source: Photograph by Tavo, April 2014).

**Tavo:** This picture reminds me of that terrible time. When Luis and I broke up, I felt like I had died. I had given so much...and the loss of us...well, I couldn’t imagine living anymore. What life was there for me here? I was here because of him. This place felt even more like a golden cage. I didn’t know what I could do. (Interview with Tavo, April 2014)
Although he was now able to reside safely in Canada as a convention refugee, his reason for coming to Canada and making a commitment to build a life here was taken away. He adopted the name “Victor”\textsuperscript{75} to create a new start for himself. Victor became a new persona for Tavo to inhabit as a way to escape the pain and isolation he was experiencing after his breakup. Tavo hoped that he would be able to find a network of friends and support within the gay community that could distract him and help him through his grief. He became popular within the gay nightlife scene as a “new face,” but the friendships he made were fleeting and superficial. Tavo did not find the sense of belonging he so desperately wanted within the mostly white and middle-class queer community in Davie Village. It made him miss the close friendships and sense of belonging he had with his gay friends and family living back in his country of origin.

**Tavo:** After I got accepted as a refugee, the waiting time took so long to get my permanent residency. This was really difficult for me. Even though you are not trapped, you feel trapped because you can’t do anything. You can’t go to school. You can’t take high-school courses. You can’t learn the proper way to speak because they don’t let you because you can’t go to school. And you can’t leave the country or can’t see your family. So I am like, yeah, okay, I am here. I am safe, but I am safe in, like, a floating bubble. Floating in the wind. Where nothing can happen. Nothing will hurt me, but nothing will benefit me. There are no benefits there. You can’t build a life. You are in limbo. You can’t go to school. You can’t see your family. You can’t learn the proper way to write or speak. So it’s a bubble.

We are here, but we are not. We are here, but we cannot go to school. We are here, but we cannot access the same rights and stuffs as other Canadians. We can’t do things to actually build our life and be a Canadian. Because that’s what we want. That’s what every refugee wants, is to settle down and start growing up as a human being, professionally, emotionally, economically. And we are not capable of that because of the permanent residency card. I haven’t seen my family in over six years because of how long I had to wait for my permanent residency. (Interview with Tavo, February 2014)

\textsuperscript{75} This is a pseudonym that I have chosen to represent Tavo’s pseudonym.
When Tavo and I had our first interview, he was still waiting for his permanent residency. He received it between our second and third interviews. With his permanent residency, Tavo could apply for a travel document and visit his family in the United States or a country neighboring his country of origin. However, the travel document requires the payment of a considerable fee and a guarantor who is a Canadian citizen. The cost and inability to find a guarantor are barriers for many refugees wanting to travel abroad. Because of these barriers and the fear of being denied re-entry to Canada, Tavo planned to wait until he had Canadian citizenship before returning to his home country for a visit. He would be eligible to apply for citizenship within two years.

When Tavo received his permanent residency, his original passport was returned to him. His passport was an important symbol of Tavo’s ongoing connection to his country of origin. The thought of returning to his country of origin left Tavo feeling excited, curious, and nervous.
**Tavo:** I took this picture of my passport. I was really happy to get it back. It just means something to me—like I am still a part of my country, even if I don’t live there anymore. I was thinking the other day, I was talking to these Latino friends also, we were talking about that what if when I go back to [Central America], I fall in love with [Central America] again and I just want to stay there? And I knew someone, well, he wasn’t a refugee, he got sponsored, but he went back to [Central America] and he fell back in love. So he went back there. He said, “Well, I love my city, I love my family, I love my country. I just want to go back home.” So it makes me curious. Like, I’m not really sure how I’m going to feel whenever I go back to [Central America].

I’m not really sure how I’m going to feel about [Central America]. I still miss it; I still think about my friends, and I still want to see them and my family, and there are still things that are going on in my family, like births, deaths, the everyday life. The everyday rhythm. There’s, like, a different heartbeat there. I can’t describe it. [Laughs] My heart beats different when I think about [Central America].
There is so much I am missing there. My brother is learning to drive now, and my mother is getting older. They have their everyday lives. And do I grow with them? Or is my life now separate? Where does that all fit now? They have their own lives, and my life is now here. I sometimes feel like I have two hearts in one chest. I’m not really sure how I’m going to feel if I go back, though. Will I fall back in love with there? What if I love it more than here? (Interview with Tavo, April 11, 2014)

Robyn Longhurst writes that bodies cannot be detached from the spaces and places in which they are constituted (2005). It is through our bodies that we connect with and experience spaces. Our bodies are constituted and reconstituted as we travel through spaces. We take the emotional and mnemonic experiences of spaces with us as we move (Longhurst, 2005). Tavo carries with him the love, longing, and loss of his cultural and familial home. Tavo’s relationship to his country of origin is also attached to the love and longing he has for the rhythm of everyday life. This rhythm is reflected in his description of his changing heartbeat whenever he thinks about his country. It is a heartbeat based in cultural, familial, and ontological familiarity and affinity. This heartbeat has not diminished since moving to Canada. Living so far away from the everyday life of his family and friends, Tavo does not know where and how to attach his everyday life to his family’s everyday life. Without the relational attachment to Luis that tied him to Canada, Tavo finds himself in an ambivalent situation in which he does not know where to place his story (Riaño Alcalá, Colorado, Díaz, 2008).

Tavo’s story gives voice to the multiple displacements migration invokes and the homing desire for a place of belonging and security (White, 2014; Fortier, 2003; Brah, 1996). This place of belonging and security for LGBT refugees might be “desired from a distance and not so easily attained once you arrive to its figurative shores” (Weston, 1995, 275). Home and belonging for LGBT refugees comprise multiple intimate connections and disconnections between country of origin and adopted country (Quayson & Daswani, 2013). Tavo felt and continues to feel
belonging to his country of origin because of his emotional and relational attachments, as well as a shared cultural affinity. Tavo’s country of origin became an unhomey place when it denied him the ability to live safely with Luis. Canada offered the promise that Luis and Tavo could live safely together without the fear of being targeted. But the years spent living undocumented and the time waiting for their refugee hearing made Tavo’s current home an unhomey place. The fear, discrimination, and isolation he experienced made it hard for him to feel connected to his current location.

Tavo’s experiences speak to how homing desires may not necessarily rest on just one aspect of one’s life, but on multiple and complex relational and emotional attachments and desires. By exploring and understanding these relational and emotional attachments and desires, we can see how space becomes reterritorialized and reshaped (Boehm, 2012). Tavo’s “here” (Vancouver) and “there” (country of origin) become intertwined with his feelings of love, longing, and loss. The push and pull of separation from loved ones and everyday life in his country of origin create a sense of misplacement and disorientation for Tavo. At the same time, this push and pull provide a creative site in which Tavo can create new rituals, attachments, and a sense of belonging in his current location.
Tavo: Okay, the pictures that I took with the camera you gave me. They are basically pictures of my place. Because I took pictures of this, because it’s kind of, like... you know what a mantra is?

Kat: Yeah, I know what a mantra is.

Tavo: Like, several times when I wake up, I keep repeating these words in Spanish as a way to, like, to assure of my happiness, like, this is what I want, this is what I want to do, this is where I want to go. And so I do that all the time, repeat those words in Spanish a lot. And it’s really, really important because it represents, like, a change, being, like, living by myself and stuff. I accepted that I was never going back home to [Central America]. And I will still be sad, but I must make a go for it here. I must find a way to have love in my life. I must create a new life. (Interview with Tavo, April 11, 2014)
Deborah Thien argues that love is more than a personal feeling; it is an ontology. Love creates intimate knowledge of places through the attachments we make to specific spaces and persons, whether in affection, desire, loss, or longing (2004). Falling in love with someone is similar to falling in love with a place (Thien, 2004). At first, you have a sense of excitability and wonder over this new relationship. As you spend more time together and get to know each other better, you start building memories together and a knowingness of each other. The memories and knowledge you gain of each other expand to a deeper sense of comfort, familiarity, and belonging to one another. Creating a sense of home in the place you dwell is a labor of love. Individuals must constantly work at constructing a sense of home through their physical actions, social relationships, and emotional attachments. Love and home are not innate and unattached. Instead, love and home rest in the everyday actions of individuals as they interact with others, create or recreate social rituals, and attach memories to the places they inhabit (Quayson & Daswani, 2013).

Home continues to be a labor of love for Tavo. When I first interviewed Tavo, his relationship with Luis had been over for almost two years, he was waiting for his permanent residency status, and he was still using the name “Victor” to people he met at the gay bars. During our first two interviews, Tavo felt that he did not belong in Canada and was badly missing his country of origin. By the time of our last interview over the photographs, Tavo was in a serious relationship with another man and was feeling more and more like Vancouver was home. When I asked what had changed for him, Tavo said that he had finally fallen in love with Vancouver. It was not only that Tavo had fallen in love with another person, but also that he felt he finally had an intimate connection to Vancouver because of all the memories and experiences he has made there.
Tavo: Yeah, it’s crazy. All these times we talked, I talked and talked about missing my home country. And now it is different. I still miss my country and my family. But it’s a weird feeling now that I feel like it’s [Vancouver] actually my home.

Kat: So what changed?

Tavo: [laughs] It could be that I am dating a new guy. He’s a candy—yeah, he’s really sweet. He’s really, really sweet. So I’m really happy.

So that’s why I’m probably so much more happy here. It changed my mind, right? Cause I went to Kelowna with friends for a short vacation, but he stayed here. I went and I felt lonely and I thought I want to go home because I want to see him. Home is Vancouver; he lives here. So that could be the switch in my brain, right?

But I don’t think it’s like just that. Like, I feel more connected to Vancouver—just more connected generally. Yeah. At that point in Kelowna, I realized, “Oh, maybe, like, my life turned in a good way.” I mean, I love my city, I know my way around it. I know the best places to go. I have a very small group of friends that I can go to these places with and I had such a great time all these days, so sunny and gorgeous days and so much to do. And so alive at this time!

When I walk down the streets now, I have more happy memories than sad. I don’t get scared so much. I can actually enjoy the feeling of walking to work or wherever. I went to the fireworks the first time this year and the crowds don’t make me anxious. I see the beautiful things of the city for the first time. It makes me feel good. I fell in love with here. (Interview with Tavo, May 16, 2014)

When I asked Tavo how he would describe his life now, he said that he still feels like he has “two hearts in one chest.” He has one heart in his country of origin and another one in Vancouver. The second heart came as a surprise to Tavo, as he thought for a long while that he lost his reason for coming to Canada when he broke up with Luis. This new heart is still growing as he slowly builds more connections to the cityscape through the emotional, relational, and mnemonic attachments he makes with other people and places. The heart attached to his country of origin is growing and changing as well. When he does get a chance to visit his country of origin, Tavo may fall back in love with the everyday life there and not want to return to Canada.
Tavo may also fall back in love with his country of origin, but retain his love for his current home in Vancouver. Tavo’s decision will depend on the relationships he makes and continues to foster between his family, friends, and lovers from his country of origin and his adopted country. His two hearts may never be one, but that does not mean that Tavo cannot experience and feel love, longing, and loss equally in both.

Tavo’s journey was as much an intimate migration as it was a forced migration. It was only when he could make intimate connections to the people, places, and things in the city that he started to feel a sense of belonging. Falling in love with his new boyfriend coalesced with falling in love with Vancouver. Removing intimacy from Tavo’s forced migration story would remove Tavo’s agency in deciding to come to Vancouver, his efforts in surviving undocumented in the city, his decision to claim refugee asylum, and his struggle to find a new sense of belonging in Canada. By focusing on love, we see in how Tavo talks about his feelings of home and belonging that love can be a catalyst as well as an orientating device. Love is also a grounding device for Tavo. Falling in love with Vancouver has meant that he has “two hearts in one chest.” These two hearts may beat differently, but they nevertheless make up Tavo’s sense of belonging. He is in love with both places. When he is away, he feels longing for both. Tavo has experienced significant loss in both places. Through his two hearts, Tavo is both “here” and “there.”
5.2 Sara and Juliet

Figure 5.12 Picture of Sunset and Coast at Canada Place

(Source: Photograph by Juliet, April 2015).

**Juliet:** This is a picture from Canada Place. We like to watch the water. We go to Canada Place and watch the water. It is so beautiful. So peaceful.

**Sara:** Yeah, it is peaceful. We couldn’t do that before. That’s why it is so special.

(Interview with Juliet & Sara, April 13, 2015)
I met Juliet and Sara at their first Rainbow Refugee drop-in meeting the winter of 2013. They had lived in Vancouver for a little over a month and had just started their joint refugee claim. Juliet and Sara learned about my research when I was helping them at Rainbow Refugee, and they wanted to participate. We waited over a year after their hearing before we sat down for our first interview. Juliet and Sara later participated in the photography portion of the project. Their photographs are a collection of pictures that they had previously taken in Canada. Their pictures are a mixture of times spent together as well as symbolic representations of their feelings of being at home in Canada.

Juliet and Sara experienced public and state surveillance in their country of origin in Central Asia that not only denied them a right to privacy, but also exposed them to extreme acts of violence. They escaped to Canada in order to remain together without persecution. Through their story, I explore the gendered nature of border-crossing and asylum in Canada that places lesbian refugee claimants in precarious positions of deportability and erasure. Juliet and Sara had to prove not only their sexual orientation, but also the validity of their relationship in order to get asylum. The stress of the refugee process was compounded by the difficulties Juliet and Sara experienced in attaining and maintaining stable housing. They experienced several periods of homelessness as well as discrimination by landlords on account of their temporary residency status and being on social assistance. The constant uncertainty of their housing situation and the lack of stability has made Juliet and Sara feel that their current dwelling is not a “true home.” Juliet and Sara do feel at home, however, when they are together in their apartment, where they can enjoy moments of privacy and intimacy. It is in these experiences of intimacy and privacy that Juliet and Sara feel at home and in place in Canada. I argue that home extends beyond the physical or material semblance to rest in the relationships we foster and maintain. Home lies in
moments of intimacy. It is a radical space of intimacy that challenges the fixed notions of home and extends beyond the confines of heteronormativity and the nation.

5.2.1 “We just knew that we were in love”
Experiences in Country of Origin, Coming to Vancouver, and the Refugee Process

Kat: I won’t be using your real names in this research. Are there names that you would prefer I use?

Sara: I like the name Sara.

Juliet: I don’t know what name I want. [laughing]

Sara: Juliet. Your name will be Juliet.

Juliet: [laughing] Juliet?

Sara: I’m her Romeo, and she’s my Juliet.

Juliet: [laughing] Okay, I will be Juliet. I’m your Juliet. (Interview with Juliet & Sara, February 21, 2015)

I worked with Sara and Juliet throughout their refugee process. We spent many hours discussing their history of persecution in order for me to write their supporting letter. I also heard more about their experiences when I sat as an observer to their refugee hearing. Sara and Juliet wanted some of the details of the persecution they experienced to be documented in this research, but they did not want to relive these moments by having to go into detail about them in our interviews. We decided that we could do a joint narrative in which they could address what they felt comfortable talking about. They gave me permission to fill in the larger details about
the persecution they experienced and their need for asylum based on the knowledge I gained from working with them at Rainbow Refugee.

**Kat:** So tell me how you two met.

**Juliet:** We met in a train. I was going to the capital city. I had to take a train. We just kept talking. We spent the entire night on the train. We just talked. We were laughing. But we liked each other, so we exchanged phone numbers.

**Sara:** [laughing] I was just looking for a place to sit. There was a space next to her. I started talking to her. I learned that we had a lot of things in common. I liked talking to her. She has a great smile. It made me happy. We had a long conversation.

**Juliet:** So we exchanged numbers, and after that, we could not stop texting each other. We hung out for two days. She was living in the capital city. And she invited me to her house.

**Sara:** And we just hung out. We would watch movies and stuff. I just know that I was happy when I was with her. That’s how it started.

**Juliet:** Probably after seeing a movie at [Sara’s] house, we realized that we were attracted to each other. I knew that I liked girls, but it was really hard to say this, even to yourself. And then to say it to her. It was hard. It was hard to have girls in my life, because it was really dangerous. I had to hide. I did not want to come out. I was afraid to come out that I am lesbian. I always had to hide myself. So then I saw her. When we started to have feelings for each other, it was hard for it to come out.

**Sara:** Because we both were hiding. We started as friends. And then the more we hung out, the more we wanted to be closer. We did not tell each other because we were both scared. I was afraid of losing her. Will she accept me? What if she is straight, and what if she just runs away if I just express myself to her? I want to tell her how I feel, but I am afraid. And the funny thing is that we didn’t say anything, actually. We just knew that we were in love. We just did not want to be apart. Like some kind of feelings. We got the sense [laughing], if you know what I mean...

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. And we did not have boyfriends. So people got suspicious. People found out that we were in a relationship. That’s when the violence started.

(Interview with Juliet & Sara, February 21, 2015)
Their families eventually discovered Juliet and Sara’s relationship and disowned them. Rumors began to spread about Juliet and Sara’s relationship among their circle of friends and former schoolmates. Sara’s former boyfriend found out she was a lesbian and violently attacked her, putting her in hospital. A police officer visited her while in the hospital and filed a report against her attacker. The police later called her to the police station, where her case was dismissed because she was a lesbian. Two officers then took Sara to the back of the station and raped her. After the incident was over, Sara was forced out of the police station and told never to show her face again.

**Kat:** You experienced a lot of violence from different people. How did you two manage to stay together through that? How did you support each other?

**Juliet:** Yes, sometimes it was really hard. Because we had to rely only on each other. And there were times that I wanted to die because we had no hope. I thought that there was no use to living.

Sometimes I was thinking, "Okay, if I die maybe it would be better for her". I could not say this to her. I could not share all this pain. Because it was too much. Because it would hurt her. I did not want her to worry about me. I was worried that it would hurt her more.

So even though we were sharing all this pain together, we also shared a lot of pain alone because we did not want to cause more pain. But, it was her that kept me going. I wanted her to be happy.

So that meant I had to keep going. Whatever happens, I had to make sure that I was there for her. But, there were times that it got so bad that we could not look at each other. I could not hide the pain in my face. Even though I wanted to die, I cannot because I needed to stay with her.

It was really hard times to manage everything. Because everybody can find out about us. We tried to hide really hard. We could not walk to the bus holding hands. We would walk on the opposite sides of the street or not really close. Because people would find out.

So we had to be strong for each other. There was nowhere we could go.

**Sara:** We just kept running. We kept moving all around the country. We moved to different cities. We even moved to the countryside. Every move we just hope that it would be better. People would just leave us alone. But, we never found that.
Juliet: *Everywhere you go, people know you. Because it is a close country. So they learn about you very fast.* (Interview with Juliet & Sara, February 21, 2015)

Juliet and Sara relocated several times in an effort to escape the violence they were experiencing as a lesbian couple. Rumors about their relationship followed them wherever they went. Juliet and Sara never felt safe in their own home. Neighbors would become suspicious of their relationship and harass them by writing derogatory slurs on their door and yelling at them on the street. They tried to keep their relationship a secret from their coworkers, only to be discovered and ostracized at work. Coworkers harassed and refused to work with them. They broke into Juliet and Sara’s apartment and defecated on their bed and clothes. Two male coworkers broke into their apartment and sexually attacked Sara and Juliet. Juliet and Sara tried to seek police protection, only to be rejected once the officers found out about their sexual orientation. They tried to seek assistance from the Red Cross but were dismissed.

Juliet and Sara applied for a travel visa to the United States and went there with the hope of staying permanently. They did not know that they could claim asylum based on the persecution they experienced as a lesbian couple. Sara and Juliet were in the United States for less than a month when Juliet got word that her mother was sick and in the hospital. Although Juliet was very afraid of returning to her country, she did not want to abandon her mother. Juliet and Sara returned to their country, where Juliet helped her mother recover and return home. They could not stay in Juliet’s home as a couple, so they decided to move to the capital in hopes that they could live together discreetly. During the first week they arrived, they were kidnapped and held hostage by the husband of a former friend who knew that they were lesbians. This man kept Juliet and Sara tied to chairs and raped them repeatedly over the course of several days. Other men came to rape Juliet and Sara. Juliet managed to convince one of the men to let her go. She
helped Sara out of her ropes, and they escaped through the window. They lived in hiding, never staying in one location for more than two weeks out of fear of being kidnapped again. Juliet and Sara never reported this incident to the police.

**Juliet:** After that happened to us, we had to move out of our country. It was dangerous to live there together, so we had to leave. Both of us would be dead.

*We didn’t know which place would be good for us to be together. We saw on an online video of a couple, they were lesbians and they came from our country. They got married in Vancouver, and so we thought that Vancouver would be a good place to live. And we thought, well, it must be safe for us there because they got married there. And they were from our same country.* (Interview with Juliet & Sara, February 21, 2015)

After seeing the news article about the lesbian couple, Juliet reached out to a former co-worker who was living in Canada. This person wrote an invitation letter that Sara and Juliet used to apply for a visitor’s visa. Using the rest of the money they had saved, Juliet and Sara booked a flight to Vancouver.

**Kat:** So when you arrived at the Vancouver Airport what happened?

**Juliet:** When we arrived in Canada, we did not make a refugee claim. Because we had to come out of that country. We needed to leave as fast as possible. We did not know about the refugee claim very well. So we knew that this was a safe place. So we just came here to escape. We just needed to leave right away.

**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 to fly to. So we had no reservations for hotels and no one is coming to pick us up. So the customs asked us so many questions. And 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:** And then they took our cellphones and laptops and everything. They checked everything. And the customs lady even checked my text messages. She wrote them down. She scrolled down and looked at them. So she said you have no reservations. She asked us where you are going to stay? Where is your friend [The Person who wrote the invitation letter]? He's not here. Who bought your ticket?
Juliet: We were really scared. We were at the gate for almost three hours. We arrived at nine and we came out around probably after one am. It is hard to think about. I just got so upset.

Sara: I couldn’t breathe. I don’t know. I was crying. I couldn’t breathe. So 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.

They were checking everything. And they were thinking that we might stay here. You know, hide somewhere or something. The problem was that we didn’t book a hotel in Vancouver. Oh it was also Thanksgiving and all the hotels were booked. And Vancouver has lots of tourists coming. That's why we can't find a hotel. It was really expensive. They wanted to know how much money we had. They checked our bags. (Interview with Juliet & Sara, February 21, 2015)

Eventually, the CBSA officers managed to talk over the phone with Juliet’s colleague who wrote the invitation letter that they had used for the travel visa. He was living in Toronto, but he told the CBSA officer that they were in Canada to visit only and would not stay permanently. The CBSA officers finally let Juliet and Sara go.

Juliet and Sara’s experience with the CBSA officers at the Vancouver airport speaks to how national security borders cause both violence against and erasure of queer bodies. The CBSA officers have the authority to detain and question incoming migrants they think are suspicious. As two women with little knowledge of Vancouver, little amount of money, and no hotel reservation, Sara and Juliet were suspicious. They did not fit the CBSA officers’ definition of a legitimate visitor to Canada, which is heavily dependent on class and gender. As noted in previous chapters, Canada has a long history of regulating immigration based on gender and class. Migration is built upon a male model of privilege in which women are at a disadvantage in being unable to accrue enough financial and social support to qualify for a visa to enter the
United States or Canada, and experience policing of their gender on entering the country (Mahler & Pessar, 2006; Kahn, 2015; Andrijasevic, 2009; Nielson, 2005; Keenan, 2011; Lewis, 2010; Tremblay, 2014). Assumptions and norms surrounding gender determine who is allowed entry into a state’s territory and given the right to stay (Keenan, 2011). Women applying for a visitor’s visa must prove attachment to their country through financial and relational ties. Independent female migrants coming 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 being able to come into Canada, but also led to reinforcing heteronormative norms about gender and sexuality for incoming migrants. National borders work to reinforce heteronormative norms in which bodies coming through borders are deemed heterosexual and cisgender by default. Queer bodies are either erased or made hyper-visual when crossing state borders (Nielson, 2005; Keenan, 2011; Lewis, 2010; Tremblay, 2014). The CBSA officers did not recognize Juliet and Sara’s same-sex relationship. The officers never questioned them about their relationship to each other and why they were travelling together. They were kept in separate rooms and not allowed to touch or comfort each other. This experience traumatized Juliet and Sara and made it difficult for them to seek help from the CBSA officers to deal with their situation. Juliet and Sara left the detainment center at the Vancouver airport not knowing that they could make a refugee claim in Canada. The experience made them afraid to tell people about their situation and seek assistance.

Juliet and Sara stayed at a youth hostel in downtown Vancouver during their first two weeks. They told the manager of the youth hostel that they were sisters and were looking for a short-term room to rent during their stay in Vancouver. They later found a room in a large rented house on the east side of Vancouver. They were afraid to tell the landlord and their fellow
roommates about their situation and instead retold the story of two travelling sisters. They became more and more stressed about finding a way to stay in Canada before their visas expired. Sara and Juliet grew to trust a roommate 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. Sara and Juliet met with the lawyer and told him their story. The lawyer got them in contact with Legal Aide, and they started their refugee claim.

Figure 5.13 Picture of Sunset at English Bay

(Source: Photograph taken by Juliet, April 2015).
**Juliet:** This picture is English Bay.

**Sara:** I remember the first time we went to English Bay. It was before we made our refugee claim. It was rainy and cold.

I remember thinking that I wish I could walk into the water and disappear. Then no one would find me. I would never come back. But I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t do it. I did not want to leave her.

**Juliet:** I would be alone on the shore. Yeah, we were so sad. It was hard.

**Sara:** The ocean is always changing. Some days it is good and some days it is bad. Like, it could be flat, and then there are a lot of waves. My experiences in Vancouver are mixed up with my feelings of being alone and afraid. A lot of things happened here. Because ever since we came here, we have had happy days and we have had bad days. So everything is mixed up. But we have each other. (Interview with Juliet & Sara, April 13, 2015)

Sara and Juliet had less than sixty days to prepare for their refugee hearing once they submitted their application. The short time before their hearing presented a considerable challenge for them in gathering enough evidence to support their claim. Victoria Neilson writes that lesbian asylum seekers face more obstacles in articulating and supporting their claims for asylum than their gay male counterparts (2005): “Historically, definitions of persecution in asylum law have been based on a male model of political activity. Men, including gay men, are more likely to suffer harm in the public arena; thus, the facts in their cases often fit within established precedent for asylum claims” (Neilson, 2005, 4). Lesbian women more often experience violence in the private sphere (their own or familial homes) than in the public sphere. Violence in the private sphere is much harder to document. There is little evidence besides testimony. This is one of the reasons that it is so difficult for lesbian women to show evidence supporting their stories of persecution. Lesbian women also face gender inequalities that may limit their access to the public sphere. Social norms and rules governing women’s behavior and access to education and employment may make it difficult for them to have the financial
resources and independence to patronize gay social nightclubs and socialize with other women or participate in queer activism. The gendered nature of violence against queer bodies should be taken into account when addressing lesbian asylum claims. However, more often than not, gender is not given adequate consideration, and lesbian claimants are denied at a higher rate than their male counterparts because the asylum decision maker does not believe that their story is credible (i.e., that the claimant is a lesbian) or that the persecution they experienced warrants refugee protection (Keenan, 2011; Tremblay, 2014; Lewis, 2010).

Having to live their life in constant fear meant that Juliet and Sara had very little evidence of their sexual orientation and relationship. They had a few photographs of each other, but none depicting what would be considered overtly romantic displays of affection by Western standards. Most of the photographs depicted Juliet and Sara sitting next to each other or standing side by side. These were significant photographs for Juliet and Sara that represented their romantic relationship. Standing next to each other in the photographs was for them a defiant and subversive effort to document their relationship in the face of constant erasure. The years spent hiding their relationship meant that they had no close friends who would be willing to write them a letter of support corroborating their story. Juliet and Sara did not have a vast amount of knowledge or experience in the LGBT community in their country of origin. They did not attend gay social spaces or participate in queer activism out of fear of being outed. The years of fear and constant vigilance stayed with them and made it difficult for them to participate in or frequent gay social spaces in Vancouver. Sara and Juliet also did not have the financial means to get to and pay the entry fees at the popular gay bars on Davie Street, and they had little knowledge of the queer social scene in Vancouver. The only contact they had with the queer community was Rainbow Refugee.
Sara and Juliet also faced the possibility of bias from the IRB board member because their appearance did not match up with stereotypical Western images of lesbian women (Bennett & Thomas, 2013). Rachel Lewis writes that lesbian refugee claimants often face pressure to make their appearance match with stereotypical images of masculine and/or butch-looking lesbian Western stereotypes in order to convince the refugee board that they are lesbians (2014). There remains considerable gender bias within sexual-orientation asylum jurisprudence in which gay men must display overtly feminine or flamboyant attributes and lesbian women must display a masculine, non-feminine, and butch appearance in order to be recognized as a sexual minority. This not only reproduces binary and essentialized stereotypes of what it means to be gay or lesbian, but also works to erase cultural differences relating to sexuality and in turn causes lesbian and gay refugees’ asylum claims to be rejected.

Sara and Juliet not only had to prove that they were a lesbian couple, but also show supporting evidence of their story of persecution. The police reports and hospitalization records were vital to supporting their story. However, getting government, police, or hospital documents from overseas takes a considerable amount of time, even in the best scenario. LGBT persons face added difficulty when trying to get government or other institutional documents because of homophobia or criminalization of same-sex sexuality. It may simply be too dangerous to call or have someone get these documents in person. In refugee cases where the person has broad evidence to support the claim, such as their image or name being in news reports, or supporting letters from close friends and family, not being able to get police reports, hospital records, or other institutional documents can be overlooked if the person can show that they made an effort to get these documents. However, in cases like that of Juliet and Sara, where there is little
evidence besides their testimony to support their claim to be a lesbian couple, the asylum claim could be dismissed on the grounds of credibility without police reports and hospital documents.

Juliet and Sara had few resources to get the hospital records and police reports needed to support their story. They called the hospitals and police stations to ask for the documents to be mailed to them, but were unsuccessful. Juliet talked with her elderly mother over the phone. She told her mother about what happened to her and that she was making a refugee claim in Canada. Although her mother still disapproved of Juliet and Sara’s relationship, Juliet’s mother knew that her daughter could not safely live in their country. Juliet’s mother agreed to help Juliet get her hospital documents and police reports. She needed to take several trains to the various cities in which Juliet and Sara had lived in order to get the documents directly from the police stations. When Juliet’s mother tried to get the police report that Juliet and Sara filed together, she was turned away, but she managed to get the hospital records that confirmed Juliet’s hospitalization for her injuries from being attacked. She mailed these documents to Juliet’s lawyer. The lawyer managed to submit the documents a day before the submission deadline.

Sara and Juliet both worked hard to prepare for their hearing. In some ways they were lucky. They were able to learn about making an asylum claim before their visa expired. This prevented them from being put into detention or being deported. Sara and Juliet’s lawyer helped them get in contact with support organizations like Rainbow Refugee, Vancouver Survivors of Torture, Settlement Orientation Services, and Inland Refugee Society that provided them with necessary resources like food and housing. Volunteers with Rainbow Refugee and Vancouver Survivors of Torture spent many hours preparing Sara and Juliet for their hearing and writing them supporting letters. The shortened refugee process because of PCISA (three to four months) has meant that refugee claimants face a tight deadline to gather enough evidence and be
sufficiently prepared for their hearings. This often leaves refugee claimants ill prepared and lacking the support necessary to successfully argue their cases to the IRB. For vulnerable and marginalized refugee claimants like Sara and Juliet, the support of organizations like Rainbow Refugee and Vancouver Survivors of Torture, as well as the time to obtain vital evidence, can mean life or death. That Juliet and Sara were able to work within the tight time constrictions speaks to their perseverance and their continued fight for survival. Even for claimants like Tiffany, who knew that she was going to make a refugee claim and had already been in contact with a lawyer before coming to Canada, there is a steep learning curve to understand the refugee process and how to successfully prepare for a refugee hearing. Far too often, the refugee process involves close calls where refugee claimants manage to get the support and/or evidence needed right before the deadline. For every case like Juliet and Sara’s, there are many more who do not manage to get enough elements together to have a successful refugee hearing.
5.2.2 “We could not find a place to rest”
Challenges in Finding Housing and Employment

Figure 5.14 Picture of Geese in the Park

(Source: Photograph by Juliet, April 2015).

Juliet: *This was our first spring in Vancouver. And it is a picture of homes and it’s a sunny day. It represents our hope for a new life in Canada. We came here to live safely and to enjoy life. We had gotten our refugee and we did not know what our future would be, but we could enjoy the spring together. That was really special.*

Kat: *So what were your hopes after getting your positive decision?*
Sara: Nothing. I would say nothing. I just thought that we would be safe. That’s the thing that I wanted. That was what I thought first. We had really no plans after this, like, “Oh we are going to do this after and blah blah.” Talking about school or money or something. No. We didn’t think that. The first thing that came to our mind was that we could finally be safe here. So that’s it for us. That was all our worries.

Juliet: There are so many things now to worry about. The refugee was just one. I am happy to be here. But there are so many things. You have to work so hard. There are so many challenges. When we were doing our refugee process, we thought that everything is going to be great after that. But it is so hard to get a job and a place. We just have each other. (Interview with Juliet & Sara, April 13, 2015)

Juliet and Sara relocated several times during their first year in Vancouver. What savings they had went to the first place they stayed, the rented room in East Vancouver. They stayed there a little over a month while they worked with their lawyer on their basis of claim form, which they needed to submit to begin the refugee process. Once they submitted their basis of claim form and the IRB approved them to make a refugee claim, they would be eligible for social assistance, but they ran out of money before that happened. When they could no longer afford their rented room, they had to spend the night on the street. They were afraid to visit the shelters in the downtown area as a lesbian couple. Juliet and Sara went to Inland Refugee Society for housing assistance. Inland Refugee Society paid for Juliet and Sara to stay at the Immigration Settlement Services (ISS) Welcome House for government-assisted refugees76 for three weeks. After the three weeks were over, Juliet and Sara did not have a place to go and went back to Inland Refugee Society for help. Inland Refugee Society managed to put them in a hotel for three days. By this time, they had filed their refugee claim and applied for social assistance. However, they could not find a landlord willing to rent to them because they were on social assistance.

76 ISS Welcome House offers free temporary residency to government-assisted refugees in the Vancouver area. Welcome house offers some temporary beds for in-land refugees. However, the options are limited and not for an extended period of time.
They went again to Inland Refugee Society for help, but Inland Refugee Society could only afford to pay for one additional week at the Welcome House.

**Figure 5.15 Picture of Flowers at the Welcome House**

(Source: Picture donated by Juliet, April 2015).

**Juliet:** *This is the welcome house that we stayed at. We stayed there just for a short time. So, what was funny was when we went into the house, I saw the flowers. And I was like, “Oh my god, this is just like home.” I was laughing. I could not believe that I would see a bottle with flowers in it. We saw so many sad things in Vancouver. I never thought I would see a bottle with flowers. Just the small things like that. It reminds you that home is out there.*
**Sara:** *It was so nice there, but we could only stay there for three weeks. We kept moving. It was so hard. I remember wanting to cry. I was so tired. We could not find a place to rest.* (Interview with Juliet & Sara, April 13, 2015)

Juliet and Sara’s experience of housing is not unique. While short-term housing is available for government-assisted refugees, there is very little housing available for in-land refugees in Metro Vancouver. Only two places, Kimbrace and the Salvation Army’s Belkin House, have a small number of short-stay rooms available for in-land refugee claimants. The ISS-run Welcome Houses for government-assisted refugees cannot provide extended accommodation to in-land refugees. Most of the shelters offer only one night stays, and individuals must leave the premises during the day. The changes to the refugee process have made the housing situation for in-land refugees much more precarious, as refugees usually do not have enough time or resources to apply for a work permit before their refugee hearings. This creates a situation in which in-land refugees are vulnerable to repeated periods of homelessness because they are unable to afford housing.

Constant moving caused considerable stress for Juliet and Sara. In each new environment, they had to worry about hiding their relationship out of fear of being harassed. It also made filing their refugee claim difficult, as they did not have a stable address at which to receive notifications from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) and the IRB. Sara and Juliet needed to find a place that they could stay for the duration of their refugee hearing. They used Craigslist to find a woman renting a room in her two-bedroom apartment. Juliet and Sara managed to convince to the woman that they would pay her once they got their social assistance. She agreed to let them rent the bedroom. While Sara and Juliet were happy to finally have a place, the living situation became very unsafe for them. The landlady rented the apartment to other inhabitants who would sleep in the living room and the second bedroom. Juliet and Sara
felt that the landlady was taking advantage of vulnerable newcomers like Sara and Juliet who had very little knowledge or support to fight for their rights as tenants. The apartment became a squat for migrant workers and international students and as many as ten people could be staying there at any given time. They would have loud parties and would often bang on Juliet and Sara’s bedroom door.

Juliet and Sara stayed at the apartment for three months while they waited for their refugee hearing. About a month after they received their positive decision, they went looking for a new place. The limited amount of affordable and safe housing for Sara and Juliet made finding a suitable place difficult for them. Many of the landlords did not want to rent to them because they were on social assistance with temporary residence status. They would manage to secure a place to stay only to find out that the place was another illegal squat or the landlord they were dealing with was not the actual landlord but another renter. Juliet and Sara would then be forced to leave and try to find another place. Their housing situation made it difficult for them to provide a constant record of their residency to the government. They not only missed important letters of notice from the CIC regarding their permanent residency, but also missed key notifications from MSP and social assistance that later caused them to go into debt collection for unpaid bills.

When writing a draft for an upcoming housing report on LGBTQ newcomers, I asked Sara and Juliet if they would mind providing a quote. Juliet responded:

*My girlfriend and I came to Canada to escape the violence we faced as a lesbian couple back in our country. We are safe in Canada, but we still face difficulties. Housing is very expensive and hard to find. We don’t make much money. We have to stay in places that are not always safe for us. We are afraid to tell our neighbors we are lesbian. Sometimes we have had guy neighbors hit on us. They think we are two single girls.*

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77 This draft would become the *Access to Housing for LGBTQ Newcomers in Metro Vancouver* that will be released in the spring of 2016.
We always have to make sure to lock our doors and watch out for them whenever we leave the apartment. (Juliet, March 22, 2015)

The incidents Juliet refers to happened at their current apartment in a large house in East Vancouver that has been converted into several small single- or double-room apartments. Most of the people living in the building are male students and immigrant workers. Two of the men living in one of the other apartments found out that Juliet and Sara were living together and wanted to go on a date with them. Juliet and Sara were too scared to tell these men that they were a couple and instead lied and said that they were sisters. These men would often wait for Juliet and Sara to leave their apartment to go to work or outside to smoke a cigarette. They would knock on their door and try to pressure Juliet and Sara to drink with them. Juliet and Sara were fearful of being accosted by these men every time they left their apartment.

Juliet and Sara faced similar difficulties as many other refugee women in Vancouver. There has been little research on the housing experiences for immigrant and refugee women in Metro Vancouver (Ives et al., 2014). What work that has been done across Canada has shown that migrant women report higher rates of personal and housing discrimination than their male counterparts. Immigration and refugee women comprise a significant percentage of the homeless, but this is often hidden or made invisible to the public eye. Gender bias and discrimination in the housing market have meant that refugee women experience several barriers to finding and maintaining safe and stable housing. Refugee women have also reported a significantly higher amount of abuse by their landlords and neighbors than non-immigrant/non-Indigenous women (Ives et al., 2014). Sara and Juliet not only experienced discrimination and abuse by landlords and tenants because of their gender, but were also put in precarious situations because of their sexual orientation. The inability to find stable housing coupled with insecurity
about being open about their relationship caused significant stress and trauma. They felt that while they were safe from the violence they experienced in their country, they were not completely safe in Vancouver.

Their stressful housing experiences were in tandem with the challenges they were facing in the job market. Like many of the other participants in this research, Juliet and Sara were discriminated against in the job market because of their temporary status and lack of prior work experience in Canada. Juliet and Sara both had graduate degrees from their country and had previously worked in managerial positions in large companies. Juliet and Sara did not have access to job retraining services or career counselling because they did not have their permanent residency. Eventually, they found minimum-wage part-time waitressing and dishwashing jobs. Juliet and Sara had to change jobs several times because of harassment from employers, lack of hours, and low wages. They experienced discrimination in the job market as young immigrant women. They were passed over for managerial jobs and were always given fewer hours than their male counterparts. Their experiences in the job market speak to the gender discrimination many immigrant and refugee women face in Canada. Gillian Creese and Brandy Wiebe write that refugee and immigrant women experience underemployment and deskilling at a higher rate than do immigrant men (2009). The labor market is both racialized and gendered in that white immigrant and Canadian-born women fair better than non-white, immigrant/refugee, and First Nations women with equivalent educational backgrounds and skill levels (Creese & Wiebe, 2009, 59). The economic restructuring of labor in Canada with the increased use of temporary and part-time low-skill and low-wage work has created a polarization of the Canadian labor market that disadvantages immigrant and refugee women of color (Creese & Wiebe, 2009; Guo, 2015). Underemployed and deskilled, Juliet and Sara could no longer qualify for income
assistance, yet could not make enough money to pay their bills. Juliet and Sara ended up working three separate jobs each to make ends meet through survival employment (Creese & Wiebe, 2009). The time spent working their various jobs meant that they could not attend English classes or other job training programs.

When I met with Juliet and Sara for our last interview in the spring of 2015, they were not sure about what their future would be. They were exhausted by the amount of work they need to do just to get by. Juliet was working two minimum-wage jobs and cleaning houses on the weekend. Sara was a dishwasher at a catering company and trying to study English. The added worries over finding and maintaining stable housing made it difficult for them to feel safe and settled. Even though they may not necessarily feel that they have a “true home” for themselves in their current apartment, they felt more at home than they had before because they were able to live together without the fear of persecution. In the next section, I explore love and homemaking for Juliet and Sara. Home rests between the two of them and the intimacy they continue to protect and cherish.
5.2.3 “If you have love, you have some feelings of home”
Home Dwelling in the Spaces of Intimacy

Figure 5.16 Picture of Roof

(Source: Photograph by Juliet, April 2015).

**Sara:** This is a picture of the sunset. It is in our backyard. So there is some darkness there. But even if you have a hard time, there is the sun. It is important to hold on to hope. You can see that it is so dark here, but there is some light.

**Juliet:** That means that there is always hope. In the picture, there is roof, and that is also special. Because we are under the same roof. That is important. We can live together. Even though it is difficult to find a home here. It is expensive. There are so many difficulties. But we can keep a home together. You need love to have a home. If you have love, you have some feelings of home.
Kat: 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. (Interview with Juliet & Sara, April 13, 2015)

Home is a complicated set of feelings and dispositions for Juliet and Sara. On one hand, they feel much more at home in Canada than in their country of origin because of the safety and anonymity they are provided. Home is a place where Sara and Juliet can acknowledge their relationship away from the prying eyes of the public (Valentine, 1993). Home is a place of refuge and sheltering invisibility (Elwood, 2000, 12). They were denied this right to privacy in their country of origin. Societal and state surveillance made them hyper-visual and vulnerably exposed in both the public and private arenas.

On the other hand, Juliet and Sara do not necessarily think that the apartment they are currently living in is a “true home” for them. They continue to experience exposure and vulnerability as a racialized and low-income lesbian refugee couple. They encountered discrimination from and exploitation by landlords that made finding and maintaining safe and stable housing difficult. The constant moving and fear of homelessness caused considerable stress and anxiety for them. This anxiety followed them to their current dwelling; they still do not feel confident that they will stay at this place for too long. The number of hours they must work to afford their apartment means that they have had little time, energy, or money to invest in making their place more home-like by purchasing more furniture, cooking meals, or inviting friends over.
Kat: How do you feel when you two are alone together in your apartment?

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. (Interview with Juliet & Sara, February 21, 2015)

While the physical place that Juliet and Sara are staying does not necessarily feel like a “true home,” they feel at home when they are together. This feeling of being at home together is reminiscent of bell hooks’ idea of “homeplace” (2009). hooks writes that homeplace is a place in which African American women are empowered to create and maintain a space where they, their families, and their community can be liberated from the oppression and everyday domination of racist society. This homeplace is not just a physical place, but also an affective and relational space that resists the objectification and erasure of black bodies. It is an affirming space of care and love (hooks, 2009). 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” (2000, 17). The intimacy and love that Juliet and Sara continue to hold for one another gives them a homeplace they are otherwise denied. As Juliet said, “If you have love, you have some feelings of home.” The affective meaning of home is not reduced to the physical dwelling, but instead is imbued by the feelings and experiences of Sara and Juliet’s intimacy and commitment to one another (Gorman-Murray, 2008, 229). It is behind the closed doors of their apartment that Sara and Juliet can express their feelings for one another.
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.* (Interview with Juliet & Sara, April 13, 2015)

Love is a central thread throughout Julie and Sara’s narrative of home and belonging. Juliet and Sara’s love was a motivating factor for them to claim asylum and serves as an orientating device in how they experience home and belonging. Juliet and Sara also had to navigate through various social and structural systems of love in order to cross into Canada and for their relationship to be recognized by the IRB. They are still navigating an environment where they are vulnerable to harassment or discrimination by landlords and locals as a lesbian couple. Yet, despite this, love is place of possibility for them. It is through loving each other that they can create a radical space of intimacy that challenges static notions of home outside of heteronormative and national boundaries (Gorman-Murray, 2008). The moments Juliet and Sara can spend together in their home and outside give them a new sense of place and belonging. Hiking together on Grouse Mountain rewrites this site as a site of affirmation of their relationship and commitment to survival. Juliet and Sara cherish these moments, especially because life for them is uncertain and everyday living is challenging. Andrew Gorman-Murray writes that home is not only a physical location, but also a matrix of affect, shifting cultural associations, and ideal meanings for LGBT couples (2008, 229). Juliet and Sara’s description of what a home is and what it means to be “at home” are connected to the emotional support, affirmation, and physical intimacy they share when they are alone together. Having a space where they can be together without the fear of exposure, intrusion, and violence is key to feeling at home in Canada. Home rests for them in those moments of intimacy where they can confirm to each other their commitment and care. By constantly working to maintain this homeplace, this
space of intimacy, Juliet and Sara resist against gendered power structures that would see their relationship and existence erased.

5.3 Samuel

Figure 5.18 Picture of Cherry Tree Branches and Building

(Source: Photograph by Samuel, May 2014)

Samuel: Okay, so these are the first set of pictures I have for you. These are the pictures from our walk. My partner, Allen, and I love to go on this walk on the weekends with our dog. So I wanted to take photographs of our walk because it is something really special to me. It’s what makes me feel at home here.
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 kinda like past and present meets when I walk with Allen. I always remember these places for their memories. It’s a good visit. Kinda like a visit with family. There’s good times and bad times, but most importantly you are experiencing them with the person you love. (Interview with Samuel, May 17, 2014)

Samuel and I met in the spring of 2014. He responded to my email message through the Rainbow Refugee listserv asking for participants to interview and take photographs. Samuel was interested in participating because he was an amateur photographer and he wanted to share his story as a gay-identified cisgender refugee from Central America. Samuel came to Canada in 2004 and made his claim on the basis of sexual orientation. Samuel’s pictures are a mixture of photographs he took from the camera I gave him and personal photographs he shared with me. It was Samuel’s photographs and story that made me start to think about how forced migration is
also an intimate migration and the importance of love, longing, and loss in LGBT refugee settlement. The pictures above are from a walk that Samuel took with his partner of more than ten years. This is a walk that Samuel and his partner, Allen78, take regularly on the weekends. It is one of the many rituals that they enjoy together as a couple. Samuel wanted to take pictures of this walk to share with me his sense of home and belonging. Samuel’s photographs include the pictures he took while on a walk with Allen, personal pictures of his past life in Central America, and past pictures of his life with Allen. As we follow Samuel’s story, I analyze how he frames home through his desire for an open romantic relationship with another man and his relationship with his long-time partner. Both Allen and Samuel were immigrants to Canada, and together they created their own sense of home. Home is not grounded in one particular location, but in the everyday actions of domesticity (Gorman-Murray, 2008). Home lies in the rituals that Samuel and Allen perform as a couple as well as objects they take with them from place to place. It is through their relationship that Samuel creates a sense of belonging and home. By following Samuel’s story, we will explore how home is situated and formed through emotional, relational, material, and mnemonic expressions and experiences of love.

78 Pseudonym
5.3.1 “I just wanted to live a normal life”
Coming to Canada and Making a Refugee Claim

Figure 5.20 Picture of Sunset in Samuel’s Country of Origin

(Source: Picture donated by Samuel, May 2014).

Samuel: This is what a sunset at 49 degrees Celsius looks like. It feels even hotter. I grew up with that view. This is my “hometown.” As much as I know this is not home anymore, I feel nostalgic every time I see this, because that’s where a big part of who I am today was formed.

I mean that in the sense that this is where I came out of the closet, where I participated in the first ever Pride March, where we had to cover our faces, where I fell in love for the first time, and where I was also attacked by several homophobes, not only physically but psychologically as well. I know that those attacks did not in fact make me want to hide; on the contrary, they made me want to fight for my rights. There isn’t a single day in which I don’t miss my family and friends. (Interview with Samuel, May 17, 2014)
Samuel grew up in a middle-class family in a large metropolitan city in Central America. Samuel told his parents that he was gay at the age of thirteen. His parents accepted Samuel’s decision but were fearful for his safety. When Samuel grew older and went to college, he became involved with the local LGBT activist community within his city. He researched LGBT activism in places like San Francisco and New York. He attended a liberal church at which a large part of the congregation was gay, lesbian, and trans persons, and the pastor performed non-legally recognized commitment ceremonies. Samuel participated in the very first Pride Parade in the city, in which the participants had to wear masks in order to protect their identities.

Samuel never considered himself an “official activist” for LGBT rights. Instead, he described himself as someone who just wanted to live a normal life. A normal life for Samuel meant being able to be publically affectionate with another man and not having to hide his sexual orientation. Samuel said that he was very rebellious back then because he was not ashamed of his sexuality and felt no hesitation in telling others he was gay or being openly affectionate with another man. Samuel’s behavior led him at times to be in dangerous situations. The church he attended was raided by a local television show called “What a Shame.” The television crew stood outside the church’s entry and filmed people leaving the building. Many of the people stayed inside the church out of fear that their identities would be revealed and they would lose their jobs and their families, or later be targeted by the police or neighbors. Samuel was angry with the news crew for what they did to his friends and fellow church members, but it was not until Samuel fell in love with his first boyfriend, Leo, that he thought about leaving his country of origin. His relationship with Leo made him see that it was just not possible for him to live the life he wanted in his country of origin as an openly gay man.
Samuel described falling in love with Leo rather quickly. They soon decided to move in together. They lived together in an apartment in a middle-class area close to downtown. Leo was closeted to his family, work colleagues, and acquaintances. He did not want to come out to his family or tell them that he was in a relationship with Samuel. Samuel had to keep all of his clothes and possessions in suitcases that he would take away whenever Leo’s family came to visit. Despite the struggle of having to hide from Leo’s family, Samuel was happy to be able to share a home with Leo. Leo and Samuel adopted a dog, and they would often go out on long walks together. Samuel described feeling like a normal couple during these walks with their dog.

Figure 5.21 Picture of Samuel's Dog

(Source: Photograph by Samuel, May 2014).
**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. 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. (Interview with Samuel, May 17, 2014)

Like Tavo and Luis, Samuel and Leo became more visible to outsiders because of their relationship. The police stopped them one night when they were walking home together. A police officer had seen Samuel take Leo’s arm, and they accused Samuel of being a prostitute. The police officer threatened to arrest Samuel and Leo, but they managed to pay him off. When they were sitting on a bus together one day, Samuel leaned his head on Leo’s shoulder. A fellow passenger called the police, saying they were acting immorally. The police detained Samuel and Leo, and they had to pay a fine.

In addition to violence from the police, Samuel and Leo faced significant harassment and violence from their neighbors. Samuel would find graffiti outside his apartment door, with homophobic slurs and messages telling them to leave. A neighbor started a petition to have the police arrest Samuel and Leo for indecency. One of the neighbors called a priest to exorcise their building from the sin that Samuel and Leo were committing. While these acts of violence were upsetting, Samuel felt determined not to be bullied by his neighbors. It was not until Samuel and Leo’s beloved dog was poisoned that Samuel became fearful for their lives. He was afraid that the neighbors might do something worse. The constant hiding from Leo’s family also took its toll on Samuel. Samuel was tired of having to live out of a suitcase. He did not want to live a double life anymore. Eventually, Samuel ended the relationship and moved out of the apartment.
Breaking up with Leo was very difficult for Samuel. He was upset not only about losing Leo, but also because he had experienced so much pain and hardship trying to have a “normal life” with the man he loved. Samuel researched gay lifestyles outside of his country. He looked at countries where gay marriage was legal. He spoke online with gay persons living in the United States and Canada about what their lives were like.

Samuel: I remember it was close to my birthday in 2004. I was having dinner with a friend...and, you know, I had several problems before. So, everything was just piling up, and I was just discouraged—just really depressed. I felt hopeless about my life and what future I would have there. It was close to my birthday, and my friend asked me what I wanted to do for my birthday. I joked and I said, “What about two male strippers?”

And then all of a sudden, a guy next to us got up and started to attack me. He was sitting next to us in the restaurant. He started to punch me and call me names, just over this joke that I was having in a private conversation with my friend. I think that was the day that I decided to leave.

It was time to leave. I mean, I couldn’t even joke with friends. 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.

Kat: 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. (Interview with Samuel, April 23, 2014)

While researching online, Samuel found out that he could make a refugee claim on the basis of sexual orientation. He decided to make a refugee claim in Canada because the country had legalized gay marriage. Samuel got in contact with a gay man living in Vancouver through
an online queer message board. For a small fee, the man agreed to pick Samuel up at the airport and let him stay at his downtown Vancouver apartment for a couple of days.

It is important to emphasize that if Samuel tried to come to Canada now, he would have a much a harder time because of increased border restrictions for persons traveling from his country of origin. The violence Samuel experienced and his migratory journey to Canada reflect his class status and gender. Gender norms and conservative religious beliefs are contributing factors to the violence Samuel experienced from his neighbors and the police. However, it is important to recognize the difference in social positioning between Samuel and Tavo, who came from the same geographical region. Samuel and Tavo faced the same kind of violence in the form of police harassment. However, the violence that Samuel experienced from his neighbors is notably different from the violence Tavo experienced from local gang members. Samuel’s class background offered him opportunities through education and employment to live in a safer area in the city. Samuel also had the opportunity to learn fluent English and travel abroad to several places. He had the ability to carefully plan his migration to Canada. He had enough income to afford his plane ticket and immediate stay in Canada. He also had the language skills to look for resources and make a refugee claim right away. Bringing attention to Samuel’s social positioning is in no way dismissing the significant fear he had for his life or the hardship and violence he experienced in his country of origin and while he was a refugee claimant. However, it is important to recognize the difference that class, gender, race, sexuality, and ability make in a person’s mobility and access to resources.

During the first week after Samuel’s arrival in Canada, he researched queer organizations and found Rainbow Refugee’s website. He went to the monthly drop-in meeting and learned

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79 On November 19, 2015, Canada lifted the visa requirement for Mexican citizens. Visa requirements still remain in effect for the majority of countries in South and Central America.
about making a refugee claim. Samuel then went to Inland Refugee Society for support and
applied for Legal Aide, and made a refugee claim soon after that. Samuel got involved in local
LGBT organizations as a volunteer.

Samuel’s arrangement for accommodations upon arriving in Canada was only for a
couple of days, and Samuel knew that he needed to find a place to live. When the person Samuel
was staying with asked him to leave, Samuel did not have much money left, so he spent several
nights sleeping on the beach. Samuel then stayed at the YMCA, but he could not stay there
indefinitely. On the very last night of his stay at the YMCA, he met Allen at a local party thrown
by a mutual gay acquaintance. They hit it off at the party and were very attracted to each other.
Samuel was nervous about telling Allen about his situation and decided against telling him that
he was about to be homeless again. By chance, Allen and Samuel ran into each other the next
day at the Vancouver Central Library. Allen invited Samuel to lunch. Over lunch, Samuel told
Allen about his housing situation, and Allen offered his couch for Samuel to sleep on. Samuel
moved into Allen’s apartment the same day.

**Samuel:** *And I never left. Ten years later, here I am. I thought it was pretty
amazing...I walked from Burrard, the YMCA Burrard, with my two suitcases, my
backpack, and a briefcase all the way from there to our old place in Kitsilano
[neighborhood in Vancouver].* (Interview with Samuel, April 23, 2014)

Samuel and Allen’s romantic relationship started off very slowly. Allen was thirty years
older than Samuel and had moved to Vancouver several years earlier from Europe. They were
attracted to one another, but Samuel’s refugee status made them both hesitant to start a serious
relationship. Once Samuel arrived in Canada, he realized how dangerous his life had been back
in his country of origin. Being removed from the everyday life of survival in his country of
origin allowed him to see how repressed he truly was. It made him more frightened of being sent
back. Samuel frequently attended the Rainbow Refugee drop-ins, where he met several people from his country of origin who were making refugee claims. One person, a lesbian, told Samuel that she was denied because the board member was not convinced that she was actually a lesbian. Samuel worried about being rejected and described this period as being in his own private nightmare.

**Samuel:** *It was hell. I kept myself up at night asking myself, what have I done? Did I do the right thing? Was I better off? I basically didn’t have anybody here, right, other than this guy that I met online and then my partner after that, but even then I didn’t know very much about Canada. For all of that time, you know, he [Allen] could have just said, you know what, is it worth it for me to put any effort into this relationship knowing that you could probably be deported in two or three months down the road? That was pretty scary, too. I mean, I was thinking, did I make the right decision coming here, leaving everything behind, or should I just, what do I do?* (Interview with Samuel, April 23, 2014)

Allen’s encouragement and support were critical in allowing Samuel to get through the year-long wait for his refugee hearing. Allen would take Samuel on long walks through Stanley Park, and they bonded during these outings. Allen and Samuel were in a committed relationship by the fall of 2004. Allen was a legal resident of Canada and went to a lawyer about sponsoring Samuel as his same-sex partner. The lawyer explained that Samuel could not have a refugee claim and a sponsorship claim at the same time. If Samuel decided to drop his refugee claim and go with sponsorship, he would run the risk of being sent back to his country of origin for several months while his sponsorship claim was approved. The lawyer advised Allen and Samuel that sponsorship should be a back-up option for them in case Samuel’s refugee claim was denied.

Samuel had his hearing the following spring. Samuel presented photographic evidence of his relationship with Allen and his volunteerism with local LGBT organizations as proof of his sexual orientation. Allen attended the refugee hearing as a witness. The IRB member asked Samuel to retell his personal story, describing what happened to him as a gay man. Samuel
explained that the IRB member was not interested in what news reports or country documents said about the conditions of sexual and gender minorities. Instead, he wanted to know what it was like to live as a gay man in Samuel’s country of origin. Samuel told his story for forty-five minutes with little interruption from the IRB member. When Samuel told the board member about his dog being poisoned, he started to cry and could not speak any more. The IRB member then asked Samuel why he would be so public about his sexual orientation if he lived in a place where it was so dangerous to be gay. Samuel grew angry and said to the IRB member, “Why not! I have the right to a normal life, just like anyone else.” The IRB member quickly apologized to Samuel for making him upset and told him that he was ready to make a positive decision.
5.3.2 “Home is where I can be with him and our puppy”
Carrying Home with You

Figure 5.22 Picture of Teacups in Samuel’s Home

(Source: Photograph taken by Samuel, May 2014).

Sam: *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.* (Interview with Samuel, May 17, 2014)

The positive decision was a relief for Samuel and Allen. With Samuel safely in the country, they could start planning their life together. They bought a small cabin in northern British Columbia and would spend their weekends there away from the city. Allen and Samuel got married the following spring, and Samuel took pictures of the blossoming cherry trees as part
of their wedding photos. By then, Allen had retired and wanted to live somewhere in the countryside, away from the city. He found a farm in Nova Scotia and bought the place sight unseen. They sold their cabin, packed their belongings, and drove to Nova Scotia.

Figure 5.23 Pictures from E. Lodge

(Source: Pictures donated by Samuel, May 2015).

Samuel: E. Lodge, as we named our cabin in the middle of nowhere, Nova Scotia. My partner had always wanted to own a farm. I am more of a city boy, but to me, home is where I can be with him and our puppy. This cabin was located in a “ghost town” in the Maritimes. Our closest neighbors were ten minutes down the road, and we were the last house on this road for miles.
To my partner, this was bliss; to me it was bliss for the most part, until I needed to have my fix of city life. People in the area were incredibly welcoming and they did in fact not have an issue with us being a gay couple. I remember the first day there, we fell asleep on the porch, and one of the neighbors woke us up. He introduced himself, and talked a bit about the previous owners, who were also a gay couple.

What we also liked about the house was that it was built from Douglas Fir, which was brought all the way from British Columbia to Nova Scotia. It was a nice metaphor for us. (Interview with Samuel, May 17, 2014)

Samuel agreed to move to the countryside because of his desire to build a life with Allen. They stayed at their farm in Nova Scotia for two years, but decided to move to Ontario because of the high costs of maintaining the farm and Samuel’s desire for more social interaction. Living in Ottawa was not as pleasant as Samuel had hoped it would be. Samuel had a hard time making friends and felt even more isolated. He described feeling really depressed during their time in Ottawa, and so Allen and Samuel decided to move back to Vancouver. Samuel received his citizenship, and he and Allen stayed in Vancouver for a year before deciding to move back to Nova Scotia for a second try at running a farm.
Figure 5.24 Pictures from E Lodge and Samuel’s Current Apartment

(Source: Pictures taken by Samuel, May 2014).
**Samuel:** *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. We even moved our books, cups, and furniture to [Central America] with us even when we stayed there for just a couple of months. They travelled with us.* (Interview with Samuel, May 17, 2014)

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” (1994, 88). Home is a material space of desire in which queer persons work against the power of normative domestic heterosexuality by creating a domestic space that affirms their gay/lesbian identities and lifestyles (Gorman-Murray, 2008, 285). A particularly important feature for homemaking lies in its material dimensions and the actions that individuals put forth to create domesticity (Gorman-Murray, 2008; Blunt & Dowling, 2006). The possessions Samuel and Allen bring with them are an everyday affirmation of the work they have put into creating a home together. Having the ability to control and maintain a private and safe domestic space with Allen allows Samuel to affirm and celebrate his life as a gay man, and works to resist the heteronormative powers and structures that marginalize his family (Gorman-Murray, 2008). Samuel and Allen’s maintenance of domestic materiality is important for affirming their family. The material objects that they collect and maintain create a sense of home for them wherever they are (Young, 2005, 153; Gorman-Murray, 2006). Home is not necessarily the location, but the domesticity that Allen and Samuel create together.

While in Nova Scotia for the second time, Samuel received a phone call from his mother, who told him that his twenty-year-old nephew had been kidnapped. Samuel’s father was also very ill and did not have much longer to live. Samuel and Allen decided to pack their belongings and drive down to Samuel’s country of origin in order to support Samuel’s family.
Kat: How did you feel about going back?

Samuel: I think when I first left there were two feelings, actually; there was kind of relief and anger of having to leave everything behind. I became more philosophical about it as time went on and I thought, well, you know, my family was still there and that connection will always be there. I don’t feel that anger anymore, as I did back in the day, but I don’t feel a connection either. My connection is with the life I have made with my partner. The only connection that keeps me, or the only connection that I keep with my country, was my family and friends. That’s about it. So when my nephew was kidnapped, I just felt that I needed to go back and support my family.

Kat: Was it a hard decision to go back to your country?

Samuel: It was really difficult. It was hard. We had to keep things in the balance. Do we go or do we not go? What do we do? It was going to be dangerous. It was dangerous before being with a person who’s a local. It was hard enough now with somebody else from another country. I think because I was worried about my partner. I didn’t want to jeopardize anything. We’re going to drive through one of the most dangerous parts of the world at the moment and not only are you white, but we’re also a gay couple. I said to my partner, “As much as you are also my family, they’re my family too.”

And I think on some level I wanted him to share in this with me. I wanted us both be there to help my family. I wanted to prove to my country on some level that I wasn’t going to be stopped. Allen was my partner and I wanted him to be with me through this difficult time. (Interview with Samuel, April 23, 2014)

It was a dangerous and emotional time for Allen and Samuel while staying in Samuel’s family home. Samuel’s family was not able to retrieve his nephew from the kidnappers. Samuel’s father’s health deteriorated. Samuel was also worried about Allen being targeted or kidnapped because he was a white foreigner who did not speak Spanish. Samuel and Allen tried to keep a low profile as much as possible. A police officer stopped Samuel and Allen when they were walking hand in hand one night, but once they showed their Canadian passports, the police officer let them off with a warning. Locals would sometimes harass Allen on the street for being a foreigner. These experiences made it hard for Samuel to stay, as they brought up painful memories of the past as well as new fears for his partner. One surprising and welcoming aspect
that came out of this experience was the acceptance Samuel’s siblings and extended family offered of his sexual orientation and his relationship with Allen.

**Figure 5.25 Picture of Oranges from Samuel’s Family’s Home**

(Source: Picture donated by Samuel, May 2014).

This is an orange from Samuel’s family’s orchard in his country of origin.

**Samuel:** You know, one of the things that was interesting was the acceptance I received from my family. My mother was always accepting. But I think most of my relatives, including all of my sisters and my brother, as well as my uncles and aunts, were more open about me and my partner, which is more than they were before. It’s sad that I had to leave the country for them to realize this, but it was nice to see this from them. They were much more welcoming and open with us. It was really amazing to see.

**Kat:** Do you think it was your family being more open to you as a gay couple or maybe something with you as well?

**Sam:** Well, now that you mention it. It probably had to also do with me having more confidence in myself. It wasn’t that I was ashamed before, but there was a lot of fear in me. I had a lot of reasons to be afraid before. But now I wasn’t afraid about my life, even though it was a scary situation we were in at the time.
I was really proud to show them my husband. I was really happy to show them my life and everything that Allen and I made for each other, because we were both immigrants. We didn’t have family in Canada. We made a family together. So there’s that. And to show that as two gay men, we could live happy and successful lives. And it sounds corny, but I cannot imagine my life without my partner. (Interview with Samuel, April 23, 2014)

The picture above is from Samuel’s aunt’s small orange orchard. As much as the experience of living in Central America was difficult and at times very scary for Samuel and Allen, Samuel was happy that he could share his memories and experiences of his homeland and upbringing with Allen. Having Allen experience the orange season was very special for Samuel. The smells and tastes of the oranges were a happy part of Samuel’s childhood. Sharing this experience with Allen made Samuel feel more connected to both his country of origin and his current life with Allen.

Samuel and Allen stay in Samuel’s country of origin for six months before deciding to return to Vancouver. Samuel got a job at a telecommunications company and they rented a small apartment in the Kitsilano area. When I met with Samuel for the interviews, he and Allen were talking about moving back to Nova Scotia for the third time to make another go at running a farm. Allen wanted to retire in the countryside, and Samuel wanted to be with Allen. When I asked Samuel how he would describe his story with one word, he said love.
Sam: If I could choose one word, it would be love. Yeah, love. I would describe my life as scary in the beginning and then adventurous. I wanted a partner that I could be adventurous with, and this is what I got. I wanted someone where I could build a future with. I think that has made my settlement much more easier here in Canada because we could work together to build a future for us instead of doing it all on my own.

I wanted to be able to hold hands with a partner without being beaten up. I didn’t expect coming to Canada that I would find a relationship right away. That was a happy surprise. But I did want to come here to be myself and be in a normal relationship with someone, where I don’t have to hide being in love with someone and were we can go out as a couple.

Getting your refugee...well, it’s like getting a brand new shiny thing and not knowing what to do with it and especially who to share it with. That’s where my partnership fits in. I was given this opportunity to stay in Canada and build my life. Together we could build dreams. Together we could grow and mature. I could be adventurous, take chances, like moving to Nova Scotia and starting a farm. That’s special.
Home is my family here, meaning my partner. Wherever he is, is where my home is. Together we build a life. That’s why I have a special connection to Vancouver and Nova Scotia. Both places were special to our relationship and our journey. Home is with him. Well, to be more precise, home is where I can be with him and our puppy [laughs].

(Interview with Samuel, April 23, 2014)

Love is not just a personal feeling for Samuel, but an emotional, material, mnemonic, and relational force in Samuel’s migration and settlement. It was his desire for a public romantic relationship with another man that encouraged Samuel to make a refugee claim in Canada. Allen’s love and support helped Samuel through his refugee process. It is through his relationship with Allen that Samuel has built a home for himself and a sense of belonging. By examining love in Samuel’s narrative, home is revealed not to be a static state, but an emotional and relational process. Love creates a space for a sense of home to dwell where no permanent home may be available. Home is a “living process or construction” that changes as Samuel moves forward in his life with Allen (Tognoli & Horwitz, 1982, 339; Kellet & Moore, 2003, 127). As his relationship with Allen changes and as they travel together to new places, Samuel’s sense of home continues to evolve.

Samuel’s sense of home and his home-making practices can be viewed as a route to belonging (Kellet & Moore, 2003). His stories and photographs reveal how homemaking practices are deeply connected to people’s sense of self. The material constitution of home, the objects that Samuel and Allen bring with them, affirms and supports their relationship as a gay couple (Morrison, 2013). Through the everyday rituals of drinking tea, cooking dinners together, and taking walks with Allen, Samuel creates a sense of home wherever he goes. Home is also created through the material objects that Samuel and Allen have packed and repacked with them through their various moves. The books, the furniture, and the teacups used in their everyday rituals are a reflection of their commitment to one another and their sense of home. Samuel’s
experiences with Allen also provide a sense of mnemonic and emotional attachment to his current location in Vancouver and his previous homes in Nova Scotia, Ottawa, and his country of origin. Taking a walk with Allen is as much about homemaking for Samuel as is the physical dwelling in which they reside. Through these walks, Samuel attaches and reattaches past and present experiences. As Samuel describes, these walks with Allen are like visiting family. Good and bad experiences collide and inform Samuel’s sense of place and his personal connection to the landscape. Samuel’s pictures help to show how he frames his story within the relationship he has with Allen. Home is wherever they are together. In almost every picture, Allen is attached in one way or another.

5.4 Conclusion: Home Rests Between You and Me

Throughout these sections, love has come forth in multiple emotional, material, social, and institutional ways. Love is both a catalyst for migration and an orientating force for creating a sense of home between unhomey spaces. Love is also a site for regulation, disenfranchisement, and hyper-visibility through state regulation of same-sex refugee couples. The stories and photographs Tavo, Juliet, Sara, and Samuel shared show the complexities of love on various scales, from the nation-state to the tiny objects in their homes that hold significant meanings for them as sexual minorities.

The persecution Tavo, Juliet, Sara, and Samuel experienced speaks to the need for IRB members, asylum officers, immigration policymakers, and forced migration researchers to better
incorporate and contextualize how gender norms and socio-economic status cause queer bodies to be more visible and vulnerable to violence. Tavo, Juliet, Sara, and Samuel experienced persecution as sexual minorities within their countries of origin. Each of them became more visible and therefore more vulnerable when they decided to live in a same-sex relationship and share a home with a same-sex partner. This act of creating a home with a partner caused them to be targeted. Focusing only on homophobia and persecution based on sexual orientation may cause IRB members and forced migration researchers to overlook the important particularities of LGBT couples’ claims for asylum that rest not only on sexuality, but also on gender and class norms. Incorporating a greater gender analysis into LGBT refugee claims may bring much-needed understanding of how violence against sexual and gender minorities is related to greater gender persecution and socio-economic inequality within a country.

Tavo’s story and that of Juliet and Sara reveal some of the challenges and precariousness LGBT couples face in the asylum process. They not only had to prove their sexual orientation, but also had to provide enough credible evidence to support their claims as couples. As stated previously, Tavo, Juliet, and Sara were lucky in many ways. They were each able to bring forward evidence that not only supported their history of persecution, but also supported that they were part of a “legitimate” couple and not one of convenience. Tavo, Juliet, and Sara also had the advantage of being in monogamous relationships. Queer refugee couples who are not monogamous or who are married to/in a relationship with an opposite sex-partner may face much more scrutiny, with their relationships potentially seen as not legitimate because they do not fit into Western homonormative scripts of same-sex relationships. LGBT refugees may have to force their stories to conform to linear and normative narratives of identity and experience in order for the IRB to recognize them as sexual and gender minorities, and to convince an IRB
member that they need asylum as a queer couple. More work needs to be done to understand how LGBT refugee couples navigate the asylum process.

It was the desire for protection that led Tavo, Juliet, Sara, and Samuel to make refugee claims in Canada. Tavo, Juliet, Sara, and Samuel experienced heightened visibility and violence in their countries of origin because they were in committed relationships and living together with their same-sex partners. Violence and surveillance were present in both the public spaces they frequented and the private spaces in which they sought refuge. Home was not a safe space for them, not necessarily because of the people living in their homes, but because their neighbours and the police denied them the right to privacy and safety. The private sphere was just as precarious as the public sphere, as the state and society continuously violated their privacy. This narrative is different from other cases in this research, in which some of the participants did not feel safe at home because of persons living inside the home. Here, it was the act of living together with queer partners that made Tavo, Sara, Juliet, and Samuel more visible and vulnerable to violence. Their desire to create safe homes for themselves and their partners ultimately led them to make refugee claims in Canada. However, the vulnerability and violence they experienced in both the public and private spheres continued in Canada as Tavo, Sara, Juliet, and Samuel faced homelessness, discrimination, and insecurity as racialized, gendered, and classed refugees.

Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling write that home is comprised of material and imaginative elements that are related to feelings of belonging:

geographies of home are relational: the material form of home is dependent on what home is imagined to be, and imaginaries of home are influenced by the physical forms of dwelling...Home is neither the dwelling nor the feeling, but the relation between the two (2006, 22).
Tavo, Juliet, Sara, and Samuel’s articulation and representation of home rests on the idea of home being formed by the intimacies that they are allowed to maintain and express with their significant partners and close companions. Home is not settled in one particular place or location. Instead, it rests in emotional and physical work within the home relation, “evoking the sense that one can feel ‘at home’ in any number of spaces, relationships, and conditions” (Bryant, 2015, 263). It 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” (Bryant, 2015, 263). Tavo, Sara, Juliet, and Samuel’s pursuit of spaces of affirmation, freedom, privacy, and love—all the elements they described as creating a home—gives them a sense of purpose and pushes them forward despite repeated obstacles. Home is a site of resistance against the dehumanization they experienced within their countries of origin as well as in Canada. Creating a domestic space of privacy, safety, and love is important for them as part of the reconciliatory process and a key means by which they can affirm their lives as gay and lesbian persons. The stories shared by Tavo, Sara, Juliet, and Samuel are intimate stories of migration and settlement. Home rests in the intimate moments that they share with their significant others. These moments may be fleeting or tenuous, but they serve as a dwelling place for home and belonging. Regaining this intimacy and creating a space of affirmation and home-making allows for a sense of belonging.
Figure 6.1 View of Burrard Bridge, Downtown Vancouver

(Source: Photograph taken by Devran, February 2014).

Devran: I took this photo with you. Do you remember? We walked along the bridge. [laugh] You were so scared of the traffic.

Kat: I was! [laugh] I hate walking over the Granville Bridge. The traffic is going so fast, and you are so high up. But this is a beautiful picture.

Devran: Yes, Vancouver is a beautiful city... It sometimes amazes me how beautiful it is. I hope that one day I can really enjoy it.

Kat: What do you mean by enjoy it?

Devran: Well, I mean that I hope one day I can live here without all the stress. You know, not having to worry about money. I would have a house with a big group of friends. I would invite them over all the time. I would be making enough to support myself. I could even go on vacation. I would be free to live my life. You know? Maybe it is stupid, but I still hope for something like this. (Devran, February 15, 2014)
I received a phone call from Devran during the time that I was writing his chapter. He was happy to inform me that he had received a full-time sales position with a large company in Vancouver. Devran was so excited and happy about his new job. He was already planning on using the first paycheque to pay off some debts and to start saving for a better apartment. He promised me that after a couple of months of working, he would invite me over and cook a large meal to celebrate his new job.

It has been over a year since Devran got that job. He has been able to pay off some of his debts and is now saving money to send back to his family. He has received his permanent residency and is applying for a travel visa to visit the United States. While he has not moved to a larger space, I have been fortunate enough to enjoy several delicious dishes he prepared at his apartment. Devran continues to be an active volunteer for Rainbow Refugee and assists many LGBT refugees not only through the asylum process, but also in finding housing, employment, and health care. He does this work under increasing restrictions on health and social services for in-land refugees. Many of his days are spent “negotiating” with various government offices, settlement services, and landlords. I am often amazed at how successful Devran is in getting resistant government clerks at the BC Employment and Assistance office, doctors and hospital staff, and overfull shelters and temporary housing places to make special concessions and favours in order to help our Rainbow Refugee members. This speaks to the persistence and ingenuity that Devran brings to his activism for LGBT refugees.

This dissertation has brought together LGBT refugees’ intricate stories of home and belonging in Metro Vancouver. The material the participants provided to me was dense and complex. Each story and photograph brought a new understanding and layer to LGBT refugees’ experiences of migration, housing, home, and belonging. In exploring their stories, I wanted to
make sure to keep as much of the detail and complexity intact as possible, but still provide important insights into the structural and material challenges LGBT refugees face when settling in Metro Vancouver. The participants’ photography and oral histories provided another realm of inquiry around home and belonging that encouraged me to explore what it means to be in place or out of place, to feel at home or not at home, to belong and not belong all at the same time.

The issues examined in this thesis lie at the intersection of and contribute to two ongoing areas of discussion in forced migration scholarship and queer migration theory: sexual orientation and gender identity in refugee settlement in North America, and home and belonging for queer migrants. While significant work on LGBT asylum continues to be produced, much remains to be learned about the everyday structural, material, and social worlds that LGBT refugees must navigate in order to survive. This dissertation contributes a postcolonial queer perspective to refugee settlement that disrupts homonational narratives of Canada as a progressive safe haven and the Western discourses surrounding “saving” LGBT refugees. The research findings challenge the stereotypes that depict LGBT refugees as queer migrants without familial/communal support. They document LGBT refugees’ agency and put their experiences at the forefront of refugee research and policy. The findings presented here are part of a growing body of research by queer migration scholars on the importance of interrogating home and belonging through the lenses of race, colonialism, and globalization. Questions framing this research focused on the material and emotional aspects of LGBT refugees’ experiences of home and belonging. Focusing on home provides a window through which to explore larger systems of power that regulate queer refugees’ settlement in Canada and their ability to survive. What comes out of this work is a better understanding of the shifting terrains of belonging/not belonging and homey/unhomey that are dictated by the geopolitical and social environments
through which LGBT refugees must navigate both within their countries of origin and in Vancouver, B.C. This terrain between belonging and not belonging becomes a site for invention and resistance as LGBT refugees experience both in different contexts and across different landscapes.

In addition to providing greater insight into LGBT refugees’ experiences of home and belonging, this work is a reflective and critical engagement with activist research and participatory methodology. Discussion around the potentials and pitfalls of activist research with vulnerable communities continues to grow, especially in feminist and queer research. The research presented here contributes to this ongoing discussion by producing a blended narrative that does not erase differences or inequalities between the participants and the researcher, but interrogates them. The result is an open-ended dialogue between the participants, the researcher, and the reader that is open to multiple interpretations.

In this conclusion, I want to touch on the six main contributions this dissertation brings forward. The first involves greater insight into the material and structural challenges in-land LGBT refugees face in securing employment and housing in Metro Vancouver. This leads to the second contribution, regarding migration and asylum for in-land refugees. The stories and photographs presented reveal the underlying heteronormativity and racial hierarchies structuring LGBT refugees’ mobility and asylum in Canada. From there, I switch gears to focus on the emotional, embodied, and relational insights the participants brought forward around home and belonging. The third contribution focuses on the participants’ conceptions of home as multiple and fluid—not bounded by geography, but based on the attachments LGBT refugees make with various places, persons, and their bodies. The fourth contribution involves talking about displacement as something other than a binary or linear experience. This leads to me to reflect on
dwelling in-between two unhomey homes and how LGBT refugees construct and imagine a sense of home so that they can be “at home” with themselves, even if they do not feel at home in their current living situations. The fifth contribution is highlighting the importance of relationships in LGBT refugees’ experiences of home and belonging. Throughout this dissertation, my use of relatedness is purposely broad in order to encapsulate the various attachments LGBT refugees make and maintain between various persons, places, and their bodies. In this last contribution, I focus specifically on the relationships LGBT refugees make with persons in their countries of origin and in Metro Vancouver. These relationships serve as a vital means for LGBT refugees to survive and serve as an orientating device in their experiences of home and belonging. I talk about the importance of emphasizing social belonging in refugee settlement and the need for better community support for LGBT refugees. My final contribution focuses on activist scholarship and the lessons I learned in engaging with participatory methodologies.

6.1 Challenges in Finding and Securing Employment and Housing for In-Land LGBT Refugees

It is important to acknowledge that the difficulties many of the participants experienced in the job and housing markets are not restricted to in-land LGBT refugees, but to the majority of in-land refugees as well as to other marginalized communities, such as First Nations (Francis & Hiebert, 2014; Miraftab, 2000, 2010; Wayland, 2010; Kissoon, 2010a, 2010b; Murdie, 2010; Francis, 2010). In-land LGBT refugees have limited amount of social support and services to assist them in Metro Vancouver’s competitive housing and job markets (Miraftab, 2010). The
instability of employment and housing causes significant distress, affecting LGBT refugees’ mental health and social wellbeing (Francis & Hiebert, 2014; McGrath & McGrath, 2013).

In-land LGBT refugees face an uphill battle to find secure living-wage employment in the highly competitive job market of Metro Vancouver. Employers’ reluctance to hire them because of their limited Canadian work experience and temporary status leads to high levels of unemployment. All of the participants navigate conflicting and sometimes precarious social situations in order to find adequate resources and build needed social networks. This has meant having to strategically hide their sexual orientation and refugee status from various cultural and ethnic communities in order to network for potential jobs. John and June both experienced racial profiling and discrimination within the larger white and middle-class gay, lesbian, and trans communities in Vancouver that made them feel unwelcomed and therefore not able to explore potential avenues for employment and social support. The economic and institutional barriers Tiffany must overcome for her government-issued identity documents to match her gender presentation not only cause her the undue stress of having to reveal her gender nonconformity to employers and coworkers, but are violations of the human rights to self-determination and protection granted to Convention refugees.

Affordable and safe housing remains one of the biggest obstacles the participants face in building homes for themselves in Metro Vancouver. The lack of temporary housing and housing services specifically addressing the particular challenges that LGBT refugees face contributes to physical and mental distress, homelessness, and isolation. The effects of not being able to support themselves and feel safe in their own homes has lasting impacts on LGBT refugees’ ability to build their lives in Canada. The soon-to-be-published housing report Access to Housing
in Metro Vancouver for LGBTQ Newcomers,\textsuperscript{80} on which I collaborated with other activists and service workers, makes a series of emergency requests of officials in Metro Vancouver and the British Columbia provincial government regarding the barriers to safe and affordable housing for LGBT newcomers. Our first request is that shelters and temporary housing servicing refugees and immigrants dedicate a percentage of housing/beds to LGBT newcomers. We also request that housing subsidies be provided for vulnerable LGBT newcomers, particularly lesbian and trans individuals, and that funding be provided for outreach and housing assistance to LGBT newcomers in the form of settlement programs, informational housing guides in several languages, and funding for mandatory sensitivity training for shelters, housing agencies, and landlords regarding sexuality and gender identity. Providing temporary housing for LGBT refugees, better social services, and greater access to renters’ rights information are just a few steps to addressing the critical needs of LGBT refugees in Metro Vancouver. Inviting LGBT refugees to contribute to city planning and housing councils in Metro Vancouver and supporting them in doing so are also important steps. LGBT refugees, along with other marginalized immigrant and Indigenous communities, bring with them critical knowledge and experience that challenge the ongoing structures of inequality that create a hierarchy of housing access and financial security. LGBT refugee activists like Devran, Mario, June, and Tiffany are already speaking out against the injustices and difficulties many marginalized LGBT refugees face in Vancouver. More institutional and community support needs to be given to assist other

\textsuperscript{80} This report is a collaboration between MOSAIC, Immigration Settlement Services, Battered Women’s Support Services, Qmunity, PRISM, Vancouver Survivors of Torture, SALAAM, and Rainbow Refugee. Volunteers from these organizations worked together to create this report. I donated research findings and quotes from the participants to form the bulk of the findings. We plan to finalize and publish this report in the spring of 2016.
marginalized queer migrants in sharing their stories and providing input on the distribution of municipal, provincial, and federal resources in housing development and services.

6.2 Border Insecurities and Underlying Heteronormativity and Racism in the Asylum Process

The difficulties that many of the participants experienced in housing and employment are indicative of wider global inequalities regarding migration, asylum, and settlement. Although I designed this project to focus primarily on what happens to LGBT refugees once they arrive in Canada, it does not escape me that many queer migrants face migratory barriers and violence while attempting to enter the country on account of their global positioning, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class and wealth accumulation, and gender identity. Sexual and gender minorities coming from the Global South are particularly vulnerable to this global apartheid of migration because of the marginalization and violence they experience in their countries of origin, which may limit their ability to get the resources needed to travel safely. Economic and political insecurity, social unrest, and global inequality between the Global North and South are also contributing factors to the marginalization and persecution of minority populations. Governments and the public often use sexual and gender minorities as scapegoats, suggesting they release societal unrest because of poverty, political corruption, and conflict within their countries. Even those LGBT migrants who do manage to get the resources needed to pay for their travel and qualify for a passport and visa to enter Canada may experience hyper-regulation and visibility at a Canadian port of entry because of their sexuality, race, and/or gender identity. June, Tiffany, Juliet, and Sara were each detained at the border because of their gender, race, and country of origin. This speaks to the underlying heteronormative and racial norms affixed to Canada’s regulation of immigration. Migrants who do not fit into the limited confines of the
accepted race, class, gender, and sexuality become suspect upon arrival in Canada. They experience hyper-regulation of their bodies; they may not only be detained and interrogated, but also refused access to necessary health, legal, and social services.

These heteronormative and racial norms continue throughout the asylum process, in which sexual and gender minority refugees must prove their sexual orientation and gender identity and their need for asylum. LGBT refugees must negotiate Western-based norms and biases regarding sexuality and gender identity in order to successfully make the case for asylum. LGBT refugees must worry about being rejected because they do not appear to be gay or trans enough (Fobear, 2014; Lewis, 2014, 2013, 2010; Murray, 2014b; Shuman & Hesford, 2014; Gaucher & DeGagne, 2014). The diversity of experience, as well as the larger socio-cultural, political, and economic factors contributing to refugees’ persecution, may be silenced, as refugees are forced to adhere to a certain script that demonizes their home countries and cultures as backward or inherently homophobic. Moreover, they must tell their stories in a hostile political and social environment in mainstream Canada that frames a large majority of incoming refugee claimants as “queue jumpers,” “bogus,” and “a threat to Canadian society” (Hari, 2014; Diop, 2014; Jantzi, 2014). There is an ever-present fear of being misheard or seen as not being consistent and/or credible, often owing to cultural differences in storytelling and in IRB members’ own biases or misunderstandings (Fobear, 2014; Murray, 2014; Jordan, 2010; LaViolette, 2014).

The fast-forwarding of the asylum process has meant that many refugees do not have the time and resources needed to successfully prepare for their refugee hearings. The limited amount of funding for social services directed at in-land refugees only exacerbates the problem and causes more in-land refugees’ claims to be denied. The asylum process was reduced from one or
two years to three or four months at the start of fieldwork. What impact do changes to the asylum process have for refugees’ success rates and their experiences of settlement? More work needs to be done to survey the long-term effects of the shortened refugee process on LGBT refugees in terms of both their chances for asylum and their ability to successfully build homes for themselves in Canada.

6.3 Home as Multiple and Fluid

During the time I spent reading and analyzing the stories and photographs of fifteen LGBT refugees, I felt that I was constantly swimming. At times I felt that I was treading water or drowning in the different and complex narrative currents that the participants put forward in response to my questions about home and belonging, only to resurface with another insight on what home and belonging mean. I am still swimming with their stories, and I carry with me the memories I made with all of the participants as a listener and interpreter. As much as there are shared experiences in housing, the asylum process, and interacting with various communities in Vancouver, there are also narratives that further complicate these commonalities. My structuring of the dissertation reflects my desire to follow different narrative currents, even if it seems like these currents took me in the opposite direction or to unresolved conclusions, because I see them connected to one another in my understanding of home and belonging. In my quest to display participants’ experiences of home and belonging, I felt that it was necessary to structure the stories around overarching narrative themes: place, body, and partners. Yet, as has become apparent after reading the participants’ stories, these themes weave throughout the chapters. The stories and photographs in this research show that how we view, construct, and experience home helps to shape us and informs who we were, who we are, and who we will be (Kinefuchi, 2010,
231). It will be interesting to see how the participants’ sense of home and belonging will change through the coming years. The relationships that they maintain, as well as the new ones they create in both their countries of origin and their current homes, will shape how they orient themselves to place and create a sense of belonging. The “here” and “there” of what home means are not mutually exclusive and do not reside solely in bounded geographical locations. These attachments are both rooted and unrooted, as the participants must negotiate the gender, sexual, and cultural norms from their countries of origin and their current locations. When the participants talk about a sense of home, they simultaneously invoke their past homes as well as what they want their future homes to be. Home shifts between the past, the present, and the future, but these temporal shifts are always tied to some kind of relationship with their bodies, places, and people.

Home also rests inside the self, in the relationships that participants make with their bodies, and in their hopes for the future. Through the stories of Tiffany, Natalie, and June, I explore relationships to and with the body that inform how each of them experience home and belonging. Their stories and photographs show that the body can be a dwelling place for home and belonging when living in (un)homey places. Being at home in oneself, feeling safe and secure in one’s body, is an important aspect of home for Tiffany, Natalie, and June. They must navigate a world in which their gender nonconformity is constantly regulated by state and society. They are caught in the crosshairs of citizenship, sexuality, and gender, a situation in which they face marginalization and violence. Having control of their bodies gives Tiffany, June, and Natalie a sense of home in situations where they cannot control the environment. In seeing their changing bodies, they can experience a feeling of home and belonging. Their bodies are dwelling places where possibilities and hope for the future are moored.
Home is also informed by the emotional resonance the participants created and connected to spaces and objects, as well as the people in their intimate lives. Creating a space of intimacy with their significant partners allowed Tavo, Sara, Juliet, and Samuel to feel a sense of belonging and home in the face of the dislocations they experienced in their countries of origin and their current location. Their attachment to their partners informs their attachment to Vancouver, which in turn transforms the landscape around them. For Juliet and Sara, Grouse Mountain is more than a popular tourist destination; it blends with the landscape of their country of origin as an act of resistance against forces that sought to erase them. Home rests in these moments of convergence between past and present, here and there, homey and unhomey. Intimacy, love, and care contribute to the ephemeral construction of home that rests not in one specific space or geographical location, but in the touches, tastes, and feelings between others.

6.4 Emplaced Displacement and Dwelling In-Between Unhomey Homes

All of the participants described feeling multiple and intersecting dislocations in Metro Vancouver. Their stories show that as much as the Canadian state legally protects sexual and gender minorities, what happens on the ground is always different. Racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, and classism intersect in the participants’ daily lives as they experience belonging and unbelonging in Canada. This affects them on a material level in terms of access to employment and housing, and in their attachment to different social communities in Metro Vancouver. LGBT refugees’ relationships with various cultural and LGBT communities in Metro Vancouver are conflicting and ever-changing. While some of the participants have had affirming and positive experiences in their relationships with individuals within the larger queer community of Metro
Vancouver, other participants have experienced abjection and further marginalization based on race, sexuality, class, and age.

The participants’ stories and photographs challenged what it means to be displaced. Instead of focusing on the displacement they experienced in leaving their homelands, the participants talked about displacement in the multiple terrains in which they experienced emplaced displacement on account of their race, citizenship, gender identity, and sexuality in Metro Vancouver. Their stories speak to how race, class, gender, sexuality, and citizenship inform a sense of place and individual attachment to it. The participants challenge what it means to belong in Metro Vancouver, where whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism inform citizenship. At times, their sense of displacement was fluid and not restricted to one location, but to a general sense of feeling not at home or out of place because of the isolation and vulnerability they experienced in their day-to-day negotiations. While many of the participants continue to experience marginalization as racialized queer refugees, they also do not feel completely displaced or without a sense of home. A sense of home may be fleeting in the precarious situations in which they are living, but it is nonetheless present and acts as a rudder directing them in their stories of home and belonging. Whether it is dancing to Latin music, looking in the mirror, or having a private moment with a partner, home exists in the crosscurrents of emplacement and displacement.

Home rests in-between two unhomey spaces (country of origin and Metro Vancouver), and despite the multiple displacements that many of the participants experienced in both locations, they could still feel or imagine a sense of home for themselves. I see the participants’ efforts in creating home in-between “unhomey” spaces as an act of dwelling in which home rests in the ability and desire to be oneself. Home dwells in the “ephemeral space that speaks to an
absolute acceptance of the self” (Silva, 2009). The ability to be oneself and to be at home with oneself is informed by the relationships that the participants make with various people and places. It is carefully constructed through performances like Devran’s cooking, self-care and affirmative rituals like Tavo’s mantra, or Samuel’s maintenance of shared household objects. Their stories challenge the neoliberal gay and lesbian liberation rhetoric of being able to be public and open about sexuality and gender identity as the final destination point for all queer persons.

Many of the participants needed to strategically negotiate their identities in conflicting and sometimes dangerous environments in order to get needed resources to survive in Metro Vancouver. This means at times hiding their sexual or gender identities to escape discrimination. This also means feeling at times hyper-visualized and marked by others, as John did in Davie Village. Some of the participants did not see openness about their sexuality/gender identities with outsiders as necessary or even desirable. Canada offered protection, but it did not necessarily offer the participants freedom to be themselves without fear of violence or discrimination. Being open or public about their sexuality or gender identities did not automatically lead to feeling at home in Canada. It was one part of it, but did not encapsulate everything. What was more important was being able to create a home for themselves with the elements that mattered to them the most. This ranged from sharing and creating memories with friends/loved ones, to having control over their bodies, to sharing intimate and domestic moments with their partners.
6.5 Relatedness and Relationships with People as an Orientating Device in Home and Belonging

Relatedness serves as an orientating device in the participants’ narratives of home and belonging. Throughout this dissertation, I explored notions of relatedness through the emotional and social attachments the participants made to place(s), to their bodies, and to their significant others. Relatedness was also connected to the personal relationships the participants’ maintained or created with the people around them and in their countries of origin. These relationships bear an emotional weight that contributes to the participants’ sense of home and belonging. These relationships also hold material significance. Many of the participants would not have been able to claim asylum or survive in Canada without the financial and emotional support of their families back in their home countries. The material and emotional relationships the participants maintain with their families and communities abroad provide them necessary resources they are often denied in Canada. The participants’ stories and photographs stand in contrast to the all-too-common depiction of LGBT refugees as independent migrants without families or without support from their biological families or cultural communities. Their stories complicate the narratives of forced migration and queer migration, both of which ignore differences in geopolitical positioning, culture, ethnicity, and class. This is not to say that many LGBT refugees coming into Canada have not experienced rejection, abuse, or violence from their cultural communities and biological families. It does, however, speak to the necessity of difference and the need for a greater intersectional awareness when talking about queer migration and forced migration. The research findings contribute to previous work on forced migration and transnational relationships (Hyndman & McLean, 2006). This work shows how immigrants create transnational relationships of care and belonging between dispersed populations.
Immigrants and refugees are not only active participants in supporting their communities, but also can be strong and highly vocal actors fighting for human rights and social justice in their countries (Landolt, 2008). Much more research needs to be done, not only on the transnational relationships LGBT immigrants and refugees maintain between their current homes and their countries of origin, but also on how they are important actors in fighting against persecution and for sexual and gender rights and social justice abroad.

Doreen Massey (1994; 2005) writes that space is constructed through individuals’ interactions with one another. It is through these interactions that relationships are formed and place is given meaning; in turn, these interactions affect individuals’ attachments to certain spaces, like parks, or larger spatial/ideological constructs, like states. All of the participants’ relationships to the places and people within Canada and abroad inform a sense of home and belonging that fluctuates between the physical borders of a dwelling (building, apartment, room) and the act of passing through national borders, feeding into emotional, mnemonic, and embodied resonances. Memory is a part of this relationship and allows individuals to create attachments to certain places. Memories and feelings around home act like an accordion, stretching and squeezing between the past and present and between two unhomey spaces (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). Often, when participants told stories of their lives in Canada, they drew on previous experiences from their home countries. These experiences served as framing devices to compare and contrast life in Canada to life in their countries of origin. The participants also used memories of their home countries as tools to adapt or adjust to new situations in Canada. Memory serves as a necessary emotional and relational link that connects country of origin and Canada. Participants described themselves as “having two lives in one body” (Mario) or “two hearts in one chest” (Tavo): the memories of their home countries were connected to the
memories they were now creating in Canada with friends and loved ones. For others, the pain of leaving their countries made them not want to revisit old memories of friends and family and instead focus on creating new memories in Canada. In both instances, memory was a way for individuals to situate themselves within the relationships they were creating in Canada and simultaneously maintaining/recreating in their home countries.

6.6 Social Inclusion and the Possibilities for Decolonization and Coalition

In exploring the complexity of relatedness in LGBT refugees’ experiences of home and belonging, I am left with a much greater appreciation of the power of social connection and the need for refugee servicers and policymakers to emphasize social belonging and support as core components of refugee settlement. As this dissertation has shown, the relationships LGBT refugees make with various people and communities in Vancouver have a significant impact on their wellbeing and their ability to survive. The findings presented here corroborate ongoing and recent research on the importance of social networks and support for incoming refugees in Canada (Hynie, Valorie, & Barragan, 2011). Isolation is not just a problem for in-land LGBT refugees. In the past five years, news reports have shown that social isolation is one of the biggest challenges that newcomers to Metro Vancouver face (Fletcher & Jackson, Feb 25, 2015). One reason for this isolation lies in the transitory nature of immigration in Metro Vancouver. Metro Vancouver is a hub for migrating workers and students, who stay for a couple of years and then move elsewhere. The various established sociocultural communities within Metro Vancouver remain enclosed and segregated from one another by ethnicity and class (Hiebert & Ley, 2003). This creates a significant challenge for newcomers as they try to find places of
belonging and learn from one another. Laura Simich et al. (2005) write that social support plays an important role in refugee health and wellbeing in Canada. However, systemic issues resulting from limited resources, the lack of integration of refugee policies and programs, and narrow service mandates limit service providers’ ability to meet newcomers’ needs. Local ethnic/cultural communities play a vital role in helping to support newly arrived immigrants and refugees, but they may not always be able to accommodate the increasing demand for social support (Simich et al., 2005). Through the years, immigrant service organizations like ISS, MOSAIC, and SOS have created several initiatives to help newly arrived immigrants and refugees better adjust to their new home and become more socially connected. Social meet-ups, workshops with service providers, and matching newly arrived refugees to local volunteers are just some of the programs ISS, SOS, and MOSAIC offer to combat refugees’ isolation. These initiatives are mostly volunteer-based, receiving little funding and institutional support. It is difficult to keep these programs running without a steady stream of volunteers and funding (Interview with ISS, May 2013). The meet-ups for refugees and immigrants may also be unwelcoming or even precarious spaces for LGBT persons because of possible homophobia and transphobia.

Last year, MOSAIC hosted a series of workshops specifically focused on LGBT newcomers. These workshops came from an exploratory project called I Belong, which focused on improving the settlement experiences of LGBT newcomers in Metro Vancouver. The intention of these workshops was to catalogue LGBT newcomers’ core needs and formulate a series of action plans to better assist them. The speech Tiffany gave at the start of her chapter came from an I Belong meeting in which refugee activists, immigration service providers, immigrant community groups, LGBT organizations, and members of the surrounding Coast

81 For more information about I Belong, please visit the MOSAIC website: http://mosaicbc.com/settlement-services/general-support/i-belong
Salish First Nations communities participated. What came out of this meeting was a call for immigration and city services to offer more sponsored and financially supported initiatives to better help LGBT newcomers engage with different communities and build their social networks. Recommendations included improved service coordination and a more holistic approach to LGBT refugee settlement that emphasized social belonging. Participants called for more funding for social programs that involve various community groups and LGBT newcomers coming together to socialize and collaborate. Further research on the significance of social belonging for incoming LGBT refugees is still very much needed, particularly focusing on institutional gaps and recommendations for better services. Work remains to be done to provide opportunities for LGBT refugees to have greater community engagement and exchange with other immigrant and Indigenous communities in Metro Vancouver.

Many of the LGBT refugee participants asked for opportunities to learn from and engage with local First Nations communities. For several of the attendees this was the first opportunity they had to talk face-to-face with First Nations community members about inequality and social justice. Many of the LGBT refugee participants expressed interest in learning more about the history of colonialism in Canada. This same sentiment was repeated earlier at the 2013 Canadian Council for Refugees Spring Consultation in Burnaby, British Columbia. During a workshop focused on building social bridges between First Nations and refugee newcomers, members of the Penelakut First Nation spoke about past and present violence experienced by Indigenous communities in Canada and the need to recognize land rights. The audience was comprised of mostly in-land and government-sponsored refugees. After listening attentively to the members of the Penelakut First Nations, many of the audience members expressed concern that within Canada’s mainstream media and newcomer guides there is little to no mention of the history of
Indigenous peoples in Canada. Many spoke about how the information they received in the media abroad presented Canada as a benevolent and caring nation, not as a settler colonial state. Canada was depicted to them as a land of opportunity and freedom. But, as one person said at the end of the workshop,

Canada offered me a home when my home was taken away. But, as much as Canada has done for me, I must pay attention to what Canada has done to others. It is my duty as a refugee and as a Canadian. I now see myself as a guest to this land. I must work hard to learn and not support violence. (Field notes, June 2013).

Harsha Walia writes that decolonization can only be possible when the immigrant and refugee rights movement is rearticulated as a struggle against settler colonialism (2013). One step to this is to not address refugee immigration as a separate issue from Indigenous sovereignty and land ownership. Andrea Smith writes that “immigration is an Indigenous issue because settler colonialism ultimately depends on an exclusivist concept of nation based on control and ownership of land and territory that is demarcated by borders” (2013, xii). Anti-immigration xenophobia, white privilege, and histories of settler colonialism reinforce hierarchies that disenfranchise and marginalize refugees, persons of color, and Indigenous people.

One interesting aspect from this research has been the only in passing references to and notable absences of First Nations peoples from participants’ stories of home and belonging in Canada. Take for example, Devran’s earlier comments on his pictures of Smokey

… Mostly, uh…well, people are not as accepting here as it is promoted for sure. This country, even though there aren’t any natives of Canada, other than a small bunch of people, they extend judgments about immigrants, not thinking that actually all immigrants came here from Europe, a number of centuries ago.

Devran’s reference to First Nations peoples was one of the few times that the participants directly mentioned or discussed Indigenous peoples of Canada. One reason as to why First Nations peoples were absent from the participants’ stories may be due to my framing of the
questions around their personal experiences of home as well as my position as a white settler. When the participants brought up First Nations peoples, I would engage and talk with them about their experiences and insights. Many of the comments were similar to Devran’s in that they were aware of Indigenous peoples of Canada and have interacted with many First Nation’s peoples in their everyday lives, but felt that they were a minority in Canada and largely absent from their everyday concerns. There was a general sense of not knowing what the issues were for First Nations’ communities and not really understanding why they were being marginalized. Several of the participants, like Tavo and Miguel, wanted to learn more about the history of First Nations peoples. Miguel especially wanted to find ways to work with First Nations LGBT and Two-Spirit persons around social justice for sexual and gender minorities. The opportunity to engage with and learn from one another would not only help LGBT refugees feel more connected to First Nations communities in Metro Vancouver, but might also lead to greater opportunities for social change. Supporting community-based immigrant and refugee initiatives that encourage greater dialogue with First Nations communities on issues such as gentrification, police brutality, and social inequality will not only help build coalitions, but may lead to unsettling institutions of power and violence at the local and state level.

These coalitions, however, are messy and disruptive. Sandrina de Finney writes that we must be aware that no mythical solidarities exist that might unite racialized settlers and Indigenous peoples or engender neutral spaces of encounter (2010). As discussed previously, Indigenous sovereignty is not about recognizing minority rights, but the right to nationhood and land. LGBT refugees are settlers on First Nations lands and with that comes the responsibility and understanding that coalition may not be easy or entirely possible. Supporting opportunities for LGBT refugees and newcomers to respectfully engage and learn from First Nations
communities is a vital step in discovering what is possible and what decolonization can look like. It is not a simple solution to decolonization. However, it is a potential pathway to decolonization that I firmly believe is worthwhile in pursuing and supporting.

6.7 Activist-Research with LGBT Refugees

Oral history and participatory photography was critical in generating the stories and images collected in this dissertation. The multiple extensive oral history interviews allowed for more in-depth discussions on the ephemeral and emotional nature of home. The participatory photography brought in a creative element that allowed the participants to express their feelings around home beyond the text. What came out of this was a complex and multi-layered representation of home and belonging.

In engaging with participatory photography and oral history, I learned the value of time and persistence. The stories collected here would not have been possible without the hours spent together. This investment involved not only the time officially spent recording the participants’ oral histories or taking photographs, but also the countless hours sharing coffee, volunteering together at special events, and keeping lines of communication open in order to keep the dialogue going. Through this time spent together, I learned that as much as I was questioning the participants, they were also questioning me. I spent many hours talking about my experiences as a student, an immigrant, and a refugee support worker. I shared my understanding of the participants’ experiences and was often encouraged to complicate this understanding significantly. I learned the value of returning to questions over time and the importance of asking questions differently. I also learned the value of silence and the beauty of avoiding tightly bound conclusions. This dissertation is another manifestation of relatedness. If I had to do this project
over again, one aspect I would change would be to provide an avenue for greater interaction between the participants. I met with each of the participants separately, and their involvement was kept confidential. Several of the participants were volunteers for the Painted Stories Project and the Busting Borders workshop. Although these projects were an extension of my research and activism, they did not allow for greater reflection or engagement between the participants and their work on the research for the thesis. Having the opportunity to do a community forum or workshop where all the participants could come together to reflect on their experiences doing the research and discuss key issues around housing, home, and belonging could possibly open up new areas for conversation and insight. It would be interesting to explore how the participants would respond to each other and what new lessons I might have gained as an observer rather than a mediator of their stories and photographs. It might even allow for some greater community connection between the participants.

What came out of this was not just a collection of stories and images, but an exploration of what it means to feel dwelling in-between homes. In engaging with the participants I also felt unsettled in my authority as the interpreter of their stories and in representing their experiences. I still feel unsettled as I finish this dissertation, knowing that the archive I have created in this text is incomplete. I struggled throughout the thesis in how to represent the participants’ experiences that would allow their stories be told in full, but would also allow me to interpret them and explore larger questions around home and belonging. My decision to separate stories into chapters focused around central themes (Place, Body, Relationships) comes with it several drawbacks. First and foremost, a constructed segmenting of the stories that makes it difficult for the stories to talk with one another in the text. As I said in the beginning of this thesis, the placement of the participant’s stories could have easily been switched between the chapters.
John’s experience of place is also a story about his relationship to his body as gay middle-age East Asian refugee. Tiffany’s story around the isolation she feels in Vancouver is also connected to her romantic partnerships and the difficulty she faces in maintaining lasting relationships. There is inevitably a loss of complexity in my placement of the stories. I feel that the ability to sit with each story and explore them provides interesting insights that can lead to further inquiry. This is just one iteration of the participants’ experiences and should not be seen as concrete. The photographs and stories collected are not a transparent record of reality, but reflect the constantly evolving relationships the participants and I had with each other. Participants let me into their homes, shared personal and intimate stories, and gave their time and energy to create visual messages and commentary. The stories and photographs they provided must always be viewed in the context of the relationship of a non-refugee white queer settler conducting research with racialized LGBT refugees. They must also be viewed in the context of the assemblages of power, especially national discourses, that the participants were keenly addressing and that were circulating around us.

This dissertation is an intimate archive in which the participants shared their stories and photographs in a deliberate manner and I constructed the framing of their insights and experiences under my own interpretative authority. In doing so, I hope to have provided a lens through which migration, home, and belonging can be understood as part of the complex relationships through which LGBT refugees build and interpret their lives. As much as I want this to be a living archive, a contested and changing place of representation and dialogue, the static nature of text has captured these stories and photographs as moments in time. Ultimately, I hope that these stories live beyond the text, beyond my interpretation, and evolve into a greater discourse around home and belonging, citizenship and settlement, and forced and queer
migration. One way that I plan to do this is through posting the photographs and oral history excerpts online on the Rainbow Refugee website. Visitors wanting to know about the asylum process will be able to learn more about LGBT refugee experiences in Metro Vancouver. It is my hope that by sharing these experiences to a larger audience the participants’ stories will continue to inspire and inform others about the challenges as well as the creativity and tenacity LGBT refugees possess in building a home for themselves.

6.8 Final Commentary

If someone asked me, “What is home for LGBT refugees?” the easier answer would be to say it depends on the person. However, as this research has shown, home holds much more resonance than just personal opinion. The idea of home is a strongly motivating force in LGBT refugees’ migration and settlement. What that home may be and what it entails differ depending on the person, but the pursuit of home, finding a place to belong, is shared by all of the participants. In talking about home, the participants not only addressed the structural, political, and social forces that marginalize them, but also pushed back at my own position of power and interpretation of their stories. As much as this research has interrogated home, home still remains elusive. I have spent many hours and shared many cups of coffee and tea with LGBT refugees exploring questions around home and belonging. What I am left with are amazing stories of survival, resistance, and creativity. These stories comprise a sense of belonging in-between spaces of dislocation and inform a sense of home where no physical home may be fully realized yet. It is in this fluidity and multiplicity of home that the participants’ sense of belonging
stretches across space and time. Home rests within their bodies, in what they taste, what they 
hear, and what they feel. Home reappears in an intimate touch or a memory with friends. Home 
is a desire. It is in this dynamic and living nature of home that the participants hold onto 
possibility and hope for the future.
Bibliography


Caine, V. (2010). Narrative Beginnings: Traveling to and within Unfamiliar Landscapes. *Qualitative Health Care, 20*(9), 1304-1311.


Appendices

Appendix A: Introductory Information Sheet for Informational Interviews with Settlement Workers
INTRODUCTION FOR INFORMATION INTERVIEWS
RESEARCH PROJECT:
Exploring Memories of Place, Identity, and Belonging through the Oral Histories and
Memory Works of Sexual and Gender Minority Refugees Living in Metro Vancouver

**Principle Investigator:** Dr. Leslie Robertson, Associate Professor Anthropology,
University of British Columbia, (UBC).
Email: [redacted]

**Co-Investigator:** Katherine Fobear, PhD Student at the Institute for Gender, Race,
Sexuality and Social Justice, Liu Institute for Global Issues, UBC.
Phone: [redacted]
Email: [redacted]

**The Project:** This research explores the experiences of persons in the Metro
Vancouver (Burnaby, Vancouver, and Surrey) who received refugee status on the basis
of sexual orientation and gender identity. This project will focus on the period after
these individuals have received their refugee status. This project seeks to collect
stories and artistic memory works of sexual and gender minorities to learn about the
experiences these individuals have had in building their lives in Canada. The project
seeks to document and dignify the voices that have been excluded and marginalized in
discussions on immigration and refugee settlement in Canada.

**Information Interviews:** The co-investigator, Katherine Fobear, will conduct a series
of information interviews with refugee and immigration settlement service providers,
social workers and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex service
and community workers, in order to gain empirical and practical knowledge on the
settlement process for refugees in the Vancouver area. The focus will be on the legal
and structural processes that sexual and gender minority refugees must undergo, such
as obtaining housing, employment, education, and health care. These information
interviews are designed to assist and support Katherine's knowledge of the field and
assist her in the analysis of the data. If possible, Katherine would like to have a follow-
up meeting with refugee and immigration settlement service providers, social workers
and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex service and community
workers to discuss the research's initial findings.

**Confidentiality:** These information interviews will be voice recorded and transcribed.
No personal details will be recorded or preserved, only the organization or departments's name (for example, MOSIAC or Citizenship Immigration Canada). The
principle investigator and the co-investigator will be the only persons who have access
to the audio recordings and transcriptions.

**End Product:** The information interviews recorded in this project will be used in
Katherine Fobear's upcoming doctoral dissertation on the oral histories and memory
works of sexual and gender minority refugees living in Metro Vancouver and
subsequent policy, academic, and advocacy papers published by Katherine on sexual
and gender minority refugees' experiences of settlement in Canada after receiving
their refugee status.
INTRODUCTION FOR INFORMATION INTERVIEWS
RESEARCH PROJECT:
Exploring Memories of Place, Identity, and Belonging through the Oral Histories and Memory Works of Sexual and Gender Minority Refugees Living in Metro Vancouver

Partners: Supportive Partner to this project are Rainbow Refugee and Settlement Orientation Services. Whether you participate or not in this research will not affect your access to or involvement with Rainbow Refugee or Settlement Orientation Services. No personal information, audio recordings, or transcripts will be shared with Rainbow Refugee or Settlement Orientation Services.

Please feel free to contact the co-investigator, Katherine, if you have any concerns about this project. If Katherine is not available, please contact the principle investigator, Leslie Robertson (contact information above) or the Research Subject Information Line at UBC (contact information below).

Research Subject Information Line
UBC Office of Research Services
Telephone: 604-822-8598
Appendix B: Consent Form for Informational Interviews
CONSENT FORM INFORMATION INTERVIEWS
RESEARCH PROJECT:
Exploring Memories of Place, Identity, and Belonging through the Oral Histories and Memory Works of Sexual and Gender Minority Refugees Living in Metro Vancouver

Principle Investigator: Dr. Leslie Robertson, Associate Professor Anthropology, University of British Columbia, UBC.
Email: [REDACTED]

Co-Investigator: Katherine Fobear, PhD Student at the Institute for Gender, Race, Sexuality and Social Justice, LiU Institute for Global Issues, UBC.
Phone: [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]

The Project: This research explores the experiences of persons in the Metro Vancouver (Burnaby, Vancouver, and Surrey) who received refugee status on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. This project will focus on the period after these individuals have received their refugee status. This project seeks to collect stories and artistic memory works of sexual and gender minorities to learn about the experiences these individuals have had in building their lives in Canada. The project seeks to document and dignify the voices that have been excluded and marginalized in discussions on immigration and refugee settlement in Canada.

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Potential Risks: There are no anticipated physical or psychological risks related to participating in this study. You may choose not to answer any questions asked by the co-investigator. You may leave the study at any time and the audio recording produced in the interview will not be used in the research. Rainbow Refugee has agreed to be a supporting partner to this research. Whether you decide to participate in this research or not will NOT affect your relationship with Rainbow Refugee and access to their services. Rainbow Refugee will NOT have access to anything that is recorded or transcribed from the interviews. If you decide to leave the study at any time, your relationship and access to Rainbow Refugee’s services will NOT be affected.

Confidentiality will be secured in a variety of ways:

- Your name and contact information will only exist on the signed informed consent materials and stored in a locked cabinet at the University separate from other materials.

- Your name will not be recorded in the transcriptions of the voice recording. Only the organization or department’s name that you are attached to will be recorded.

- Any identifying information will be removed from transcriptions.

- Data will be kept in the principal investigator’s office in a secure file cabinet.

- Only the principal investigator and co-investigator will access the audio-data.

- Data is destroyed within five years of completion of this project (July 2020)
CONSENT FORM INFORMATION INTERVIEWS
RESEARCH PROJECT:
Exploring Memories of Place, Identity, and Belonging through the Oral Histories and Memory Works of Sexual and Gender Minority Refugees Living in Metro Vancouver

In case of concerns: If you have any concerns about this research project or your role in the project, you can contact the co-investigator at any time (see above for contact). If you have any concerns about the way this research is conducted you can contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or email rsil@ors.ubc.ca.

We are asking you to sign or mark this form to indicate that you understand the following:

✓ Sessions will be audio-recorded.
✓ Sessions will be transcribed into typewritten form.
✓ You may stop an interview at any time for any reason.
✓ You may withdraw from the research project at any time.
✓ That research materials like audiotapes and transcripts will be identified only by code number, held in a secure location and will not be publicly accessible.
✓ If you have any concerns about the way this research is conducted you can contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or email rsil@ors.ubc.ca.
✓ If you have questions or desire further information about this study you can contact:

CONSENT: PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY.

You are free to decline to participate in this research study, or to withdraw your participation at any point, without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate in this research study will have no consequences to you.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study,

Participant Signature (or Mark)                      Date

Printed Name of the Participant
Appendix C: Information Sheet for Oral History Interviews
INTRODUCTION
RESEARCH PROJECT:
Exploring Memories of Place, Identity, and Belonging through the Oral Histories and Memory Works of Sexual and Gender Minority Refugees Living in Metro Vancouver

Principle Investigator: Dr. Leslie Robertson, Associate Professor Anthropology, University of British Columbia, (UBC).
Email:有限公司

Co-Investigator: Katherine Fobear, PhD Student at the Institute for Gender, Race, Sexuality and Social Justice, Liu Institute for Global Issues, UBC.
Phone:有限公司
Email:有限公司

The Project: This research explores the experiences of persons in the Metro Vancouver (Burnaby, Vancouver, and Surrey) who received refugee status on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. This project will focus on the period after these individuals have received their refugee status. This project seeks to collect the oral histories of sexual and gender minority refugees to learn about the experiences these individuals have had in building their lives in Canada. The project seeks to document and dignify the voices that have been excluded and marginalized in discussions on immigration and refugee settlement in Canada.

The project has three goals:

1. Make the voices and experiences of sexual and gender minority refugees central to the national, regional, and local history of Canada.

2. Document and preserve the memories, voices, and lives of sexual and gender minority refugees for future generations.

3. Create a political and advocacy platform in which these oral histories will be used to campaign for greater political recognition, protection and social services for sexual and gender minority refugees.

Oral History Interviews: This project seeks to document and preserve the unique histories and experiences of sexual and gender minority refugees in Canada. We aim to make sexual and gender minority voices central to this project. In order to do this, we are doing a series of oral history interviews with 7-10 sexual and gender minority refugees. Oral history involves participants telling their life histories and experiences to another person. An oral history interview is different from a typical or standard one-hour interview as it allows the narrator to have more control on what they want to tell and how they want to narrate their story. What is more important is what the narrator (the participant) wants to tell the listener (the researcher). Oral history is also more in-depth as it involves a series of interviews instead of just one single interview. The co-investigator, Katherine, is a trained queer oral historian and will be in charge of interviewing. The total amount of hours for each oral history interview will be approximately 1-2 hours. We would like to have 1 to 2 separate oral history interviews with each participant. The interviews will be audio recorded. After the interviews are over, Katherine will provide you a transcript of the oral history interviews. You will have the opportunity to review, edit, and revise with Katherine the transcript.

Reimbursement: Travel and childcare costs for the interviews will be reimbursed. At the end of the interviews, you will receive a 25 dollar grocery store card as an appreciation for your time.
INTRODUCTION
RESEARCH PROJECT:

Exploring Memories of Place, Identity, and Belonging through the Oral Histories and Memory Works of Sexual and Gender Minority Refugees Living in Metro Vancouver

Partners: Supportive Partner to this project are Rainbow Refugee and Settlement Orientation Services. Whether you participate or not in this research will not affect your access to or involvement with Rainbow Refugee or Settlement Orientation Services. No personal information, audio recordings, or transcripts will be shared with Rainbow Refugee or Settlement Orientation Services.

Please feel free to contact the co-investigator, Katherine, if you have any concerns about this project. If Katherine is not available, please contact the principle investigator, Leslie Robertson (contact information above) or the Research Subject Information Line at UBC (contact information below).

Research Subject Information Line
UBC Office of Research Services
Telephone: 604-822-8598
Appendix D: Consent Form for Oral History Interviews
CONSENT FORM ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS RESEARCH PROJECT:
Exploring Memories of Place, Identity, and Belonging through the Oral Histories and Memory Works of Sexual and Gender Minority Refugees Living in Metro Vancouver

In case of concern: If you have any concerns about this research project or your role in the project, you can contact Katherine at any time (see above for contact). If you have any concerns about the way this research is conducted you can contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or email rsl@ors.ubc.ca.

We are asking you to sign or mark this form to indicate that you understand the following:

- Sessions will be audio-recorded.
- Sessions will be transcribed into typewritten form.
- You may stop an interview session at any time for any reason.
- You may withdraw from the research project at any time.
- You will receive compensation for transportation and childcare expenses.
- You will receive a 25 dollar grocery store card.
- If participation in the session becomes emotionally distressing for you, you have the right to stop the session or withdraw from participation. The researcher will be willing to provide you with a list of appropriate support for you if you are in distress and request such support.
- That research materials like audiotapes and transcripts will be identified only by code number, held in a secure location and will not be publicly accessible.
- If you have any concerns about the way this research is conducted you can contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or email rsl@ors.ubc.ca.
- If you have questions or desire further information about this study you can contact: [Contact Information]

CONSENT: PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY.
You are free to decline to participate in this research study, or to withdraw your participation at any point, without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate in this research study will have no consequences to you.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study,

---

Participant Signature (or Mark) ___________________________ Date __________

Printed Name of the Participant ___________________________
CONSENT FORM ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS
RESEARCH PROJECT:
Exploring Memories of Place, Identity, and Belonging through the Oral Histories and Memory Works of Sexual and Gender Minority Refugees Living in Metro Vancouver

Principle Investigator: Dr. Leslie Robertson, Associate Professor Anthropology, University of British Columbia, (UBC).
Email: [redacted]

Co-Investigator: Katherine Fobear, PhD Student at the Institute for Gender, Race, Sexuality and Social Justice, Liu Institute for Global Issues, UBC.
Phone: [redacted]
Email: [redacted]

The Project: This research explores the experiences of persons in the Metro Vancouver (Burnaby, Vancouver, and Surrey) who received refugee status on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. This project will focus on the period after these individuals have received their refugee status. This project seeks to collect the stories of sexual and gender minorities to learn about the experiences these individuals have had in building their lives in Canada. The project seeks to document and dignify the voices that have been excluded and marginalized in discussions on immigration and refugee settlement in Canada.

Procedures: You will be asked to participate in one to two interviews that will last approximately sixty minutes to two hours each. The purpose is to learn more about your experiences in settling in Canada after receiving your refugee status. The interviews will be conducted by the Katherine Fobear. You have an option to speak through a translator. The interviews will be voice recorded. With regards to the location of the interview, you may determine a place that is safe and easy for you to access. Transportation and childcare will be compensated. You will receive a copy of the transcript of the interviews and will have an opportunity to review and edit the finished transcript with Katherine. After all of the interviews are completed, you will receive a 25 dollar grocery gift card for your time.

Potential Risks: There are no anticipated physical or psychological risks related to participating in this study. If participation in the interviews becomes emotionally distressing for you, you have the right to withdraw from participation. Katherine will be willing to provide you with a list of appropriate support for you if you are in distress and request such support. You may choose not to answer any questions asked by Katherine. You may leave the study at any time and the interviews will not be used in the research. Rainbow Refugee and Settlement Orientation Services have agreed to be a supporting partner to this research. Whether you decide to participate in this research or not will NOT affect your relationship with Rainbow Refugee or Settlement Orientation Services. Rainbow Refugee and Settlement Orientation Services will NOT have access to anything that is recorded or transcribed from the interviews. If you decide to leave the study at any time, your relationship and access to Rainbow Refugee and Settlement Orientation Services will NOT be affected.

Confidentiality will be secured in a variety of ways:

A Your name and contact information will only exist on the signed informed consent materials and stored in a locked cabinet at the University separate from other materials.

A Your name, birth date, place of origin will not be recorded in the transcriptions of the voice recording.

A Any identifying information will be removed from transcriptions.

A Data will be kept in the principal investigator’s office in a secure file cabinet.

A Only the principal investigator and co-investigator will access the audio-data.

A Data is destroyed within five years of completion of this project (July 2020)
Appendix E: Consent Form Participatory Photography
CONSENT FORM PHOTOGRAPHY
RESEARCH PROJECT:
Exploring Memories of Place, Identity, and Belonging through the Oral Histories and Memory Works of Sexual and Gender Minority Refugees Living in Metro Vancouver

Katherine Foebear, PhD Student at the Institute for Gender, Race, Sexuality and Social Justice, Liu Institute for Global Issues, UBC.
Phone: [Redacted]
Email: [Redacted]

The Project: This research explores the experiences of persons in the Metro Vancouver (Burnaby, Vancouver, and Surrey) who received refugee status on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. This project will focus on the period after these individuals have received their refugee status. This project seeks to collect stories and photographs of sexual and gender minorities to learn about the experiences these individuals have had in building their lives in Canada. The project seeks to document and dignify the voices that have been excluded and marginalized in discussions on immigration and refugee settlement in Canada.

Procedures: You will be asked to take a series of photographs that represent what home means to you. These photographs can be of your choosing and you will decide what to take photographs of. All the photographs taken will be used in Katherine Foebear's dissertation. After you are finished taking the photographs, Katherine will sit down with you and talk about each photo. This interview will be voice recorded. The recorded interview will be used in the dissertation. After this, you will choose which photographs you would like to submit to public photo-book that will be displayed online through the Rainbow Refugee website.

All participation in the project are voluntary. You will be able to keep a copy of all the photographs produced.

Confidentiality: In the research and photo-book, you will be assigned a pseudonym. Your name, place of origin, and birthdate will not be recorded in the research and the photo-book.

Potential Risks: There are no anticipated physical or psychological risks related to participating in this study. If participation in the project becomes emotionally distressing for you, you have the right to withdraw from participation. Katherine will be willing to provide you with a list of appropriate support for you if you are in distress and request such support.

You may choose not to answer any questions asked by Katherine. You may leave the project at any time and the photographs produced will not be used in the research or the photo-book.

Rainbow Refugee has agreed to be a supporting partner to this research. Whether you decide to participate in this research or not will NOT affect your relationship with Rainbow Refugee and access to their services. Rainbow Refugee will NOT have access to anything that is recorded or transcribed from the interviews. If you decide to leave the study at any time, your relationship and access to Rainbow Refugee's services will NOT be affected.

Confidentiality will be secured in a variety of ways:

- Your name and contact information will only exist on the signed informed consent materials and stored in a locked cabinet at the University separate from other materials.
- Your name, birth date, place of origin will not be recorded in the transcriptions of the voice recording of the workshops.
- Any identifying information will be removed from transcriptions.
- Data will be kept in the principal investigator's office in a secure file cabinet.
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CONSENT FORM ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS
RESEARCH PROJECT:
Exploring Memories of Place, Identity, and Belonging through the Oral Histories and Memory Works of Sexual and Gender Minority Refugees Living in Metro Vancouver

In case of concern: If you have any concerns about this research project or your role in the project, you can contact Katherine at any time (see above for contact). If you have any concerns about the way this research is conducted you can contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or email rai@ors.ubc.ca.

We are asking you to sign or mark this form to indicate that you understand the following:

- Sessions will be audio-recorded.
- Sessions will be transcribed into typewritten form.
- You may stop an interview session at any time for any reason.
- You may withdraw from the research project at any time.
- You will receive compensation for transportation and childcare expenses.
- You will receive a $25 dollar grocery store card.
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- That research materials like audiocassettes and transcripts will be identified only by code number, held in a secure location and will not be publicly accessible.
- If you have any concerns about the way this research is conducted you can contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or email rai@ors.ubc.ca
- If you have questions or desire further information about this study you can contact: ____________________________

CONSENT: PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY.

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Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Participant Signature (or Mark) ____________________________ Date ____________________________

Printed Name of the Participant ____________________________

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
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