

Homing desires: Transnational queer migrants negotiating homes and homelands in Scotland

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journals.sagepub.com/home/sor**Francesca Stella**

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Abstract

A vast literature on the home across sociology, human geography and cognate disciplines has mapped out home as a messy conceptual terrain. Critical perspectives have theorised home as simultaneously imaginative and material, and argued for the importance to pay attention to both dimensions. Following in this tradition, empirical research has explored how 'home' is understood, imagined and experienced in everyday life, and how imagery and experiences of home are inflected by class, race/ethnicity, migrancy, gender, sexuality, age and able-bodiedness. In the literature on home, however, migrancy and sexuality are rarely brought together. This article advances existing debates on the home through an intersectional exploration of the home/migration/sexuality nexus, drawing on research with queer migrants from Central Eastern Europe (CEE) and the Former Soviet Union (FSU) living in Scotland. Methodologically, the article draws on photo diaries and photo elicitation interviews to explore queer migrants' sense of home: an approach that allows us to untangle the spatial, material, imaginary, affective and temporal dimensions of home. Empirically, we show how both migrancy and sexuality inform our participants' complex experiences and understandings of home. Conceptually, the article brings into conversation literatures on the migrant and the queer home, which have hitherto been largely separate, and proposes ways to advance the exploration of the home/migration/sexuality nexus.

Keywords

home, homemaking, migration, queer migration, sexuality

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Introduction

Where is home, and what makes a place feel like home? In what ways is home imbued with power, and how does it reflect broader patterns of stratification and inequality? A vast literature on the home across sociology, human geography and cognate disciplines has delved into these complex questions, and mapped out home as a messy conceptual terrain (e.g. Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Boccagni, 2017; Duyvendak, 2011). Critical geography perspectives have theorised home as simultaneously imaginative and material, and argued for the importance of paying attention to both dimensions (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). Following in this tradition, empirical research has explored how ‘home’ is understood, imagined and experienced in everyday life, and how imagery and experiences of home are inflected by class, race/ethnicity, migrancy, gender, sexuality, age and able-bodiedness (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). In the literature on home, however, migrancy and sexuality are rarely brought together.

This article advances existing debates on the home through an intersectional exploration of the home/migration/sexuality nexus, drawing on research with queer migrants from Central Eastern Europe (CEE) and the Former Soviet Union (FSU) living in Scotland. The backdrop to the research was the significant level of ‘East–West migration’ in Europe since the early 2000s, driven by the easing of restrictions on transnational migration after the demise of state socialism in the East, the process of EU enlargement, and high demand for cheap, dispensable labour in the West (Favell, 2008). The UK (and Scotland within it) was a top destination for East European migrants because, unlike other EU countries, it did not impose restrictions on access to its labour market. ‘East–West’ migration has predominantly been considered economic in nature; our project set out to explore the role played by sexuality in migration decisions and experiences of settlement. All our participants were from countries which had a lesser level of legal protection for queer citizens compared to Scotland, and the Intimate Migrations project explored whether this mattered in decisions around migration and settlement. Scotland is one of the four countries that make up the United Kingdom, and has a distinctive national identity and devolved parliament and government; in 2014, a referendum on Scottish independence from the rest of the UK returned a narrow majority against independence. In 2016, a referendum took place on whether the UK should remain a member of, or leave the European Union; although the UK as a whole voted to leave the EU, Scotland returned a majority Remain vote. Migration was a defining issue in the EU referendum campaign, and Brexit put an end to the freedom of movement of labour between the EU and the UK. The Scottish Government has promoted an inclusive form of civic nationalism and discursively positioned Scotland as more ‘European’ and more progressive than the rest of the UK – among other things on LGBTQ+ rights and migration. Narratives of Scottish exceptionalism, however, ‘can function to gloss over other inequalities, including shared legacies of and benefits from UK colonialism’ (Taylor, 2023, p. 77).

Methodologically, the article draws on photo diaries and photo elicitation interviews to explore queer migrants’ sense of home; this approach allows us to untangle the spatial, material, imaginary, affective and temporal dimensions of home. Empirically, we show how both migrancy and sexuality inform our participants’ complex experiences and understandings of home. Conceptually, the article brings into conversation literatures on

the migrant and the queer home, which have hitherto been largely separate, and proposes ways to advance the exploration of the home/migration/sexuality nexus. Work on the 'home/migration nexus' (Boccagni, 2017) has questioned the taken-for-granted notion of home as sedentary and fixed in space, and shown that transnational migration does not necessarily entail a loss of home and identity, but instead involves 'homing desires' that play out in simultaneous processes of displacement and emplacement (Brah, 1996; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). This literature has also shown that transnational migrants simultaneously locate home on different spatial scales, such as the body, the dwelling, the neighbourhood, the city and the nation (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Pérez Murcia & Boccagni, 2022). Meanwhile, queer scholarship on the 'home/sexuality nexus' has decentred 'the heterosexual, familial "home" as the emblematic model of comfort, care and belonging' (Fortier, 2003, p. 115), and explored alternative queer domesticities and practices of homemaking (Gorman-Murray, 2007). This work has mostly focused on sedentary notions of home as dwelling, or considered queers' search for home in relation to internal, rather than transnational migration (Fortier, 2003). Bringing into conversation work on the migrant and queer home, we draw in particular on Boccagni (2017) and Fortier's (2001, 2003) attempts to reconceptualise home as a process of homing, understood as an open-ended search for home which has cognitive, normative and emotional dimensions, and is shaped by access to material resources.

In the first section of the article, we briefly map out the messy conceptual terrain of home, before in turn discussing literatures on the home/migration nexus and home/sexuality nexus, foregrounding key debates and points of contestation and departure. Secondly, we outline the rationale and methodology of the research project that provides the empirical basis for the article. Thirdly, we foreground some of the key findings emerging from the project, focusing in particular on: (a) queer migrants' attachments to their homelands and simultaneous unwillingness to return, which is linked to their sexuality; (b) queer migrants' simultaneous attachments to and sense of estrangement from Scotland as a nation, and to places they inhabit within Scotland; and how these are shaped by their queer and migrant identities; and (c) queer migrants' domesticities and homemaking practices, and how they are mediated by their material circumstances and unstable class positions. Finally, in the conclusions we outline the conceptual and methodological contribution that the article makes, and propose ways to advance existing debates on the home/migration/sexuality nexus.

Rethinking home and homing through migrancy and queerness

Home has been variously conceptualised in relation to place, space, social relations, affect ('being/feeling at home'), practices of homemaking and ontological security (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Mallett, 2004; McCarthy, 2018). In sketching a map to navigate the voluminous literature on home, Blunt & Dowling (2006, p. 6) set out two key tenets for a critical geography of home. First, they advocate a spatialised understanding of home: although home cannot be understood uniquely as a place, they argue that 'feelings, ideas and imaginaries around home are intrinsically spatial' (Blunt & Dowling,

2006, p. 2), and that therefore home is a 'spatial imagery that travels across space and is connected to particular sites' (p. 22). Secondly, they call for a politicised understanding of home, one that is alive to the 'processes of oppression and resistance embedded in ideas and processes of home' (p. 22). Ultimately, Blunt and Dowling call for attention to the material and imaginary dimensions of home; to the relationship between home, power and identity; and to the multiscalar dimensions of home.

The home/migration nexus

Work on the migrant home has questioned the equation between home and physical dwelling, common in housing studies (McCarthy, 2018), and disrupted the notion of home as singular, bounded and fixed in place. In exploring the complex and shifting relationships that transnational migrants have with places of origin and places of settlement, migration studies scholars have been especially attentive to the spatialities of home. Scholars of diaspora traditionally foregrounded homeland as a site of primary identification for diasporic subjects, as diaspora itself was understood as related to forced displacement from an original homeland (Safran, 1991). Later work within diaspora and migration studies, however, questioned the assumption that home is simply something left behind, and that an orientation towards a real or imagined homeland is the defining feature of the diasporic experience (Brah, 1996; Clifford, 1994). Brah (1996, p. 180) insightfully noted that 'not all diasporas sustain an ideology of "return"', pithily observing that 'a homing desire [. . .] is not the same thing as a desire for a homeland'. Fortier (2001, pp. 409–410) spells out Brah's 'homing desires' as 'the desire to feel at home achieved by physically or symbolically (re)constituting spaces which provide some kind of ontological security in the context of migration'.

'Home' remains an important concept within migration studies, although with the onset of a transnational turn (Levitt & Nyberg-Sørensen, 2004), the migrant home has increasingly been explored through a transnational, as well as a diasporic framework. Although transnationalism and diaspora are distinctive paradigms, there is considerable overlap between the two: diaspora originally referred to forcible dispersal and a shared ethnocultural identity sustained during prolonged exile, but it is widely seen as 'shar[ing] meaning with larger semantic domains' such as 'immigrant, expatriate, refugee, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community' (Tölölian, 1991, pp. 4–5; see also Clifford, 1994). While not disavowing the importance of the national scale, transnational perspectives relinquish 'methodological nationalism', or the assumption that social life is coterminous with the nation-state (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2003). They foreground 'the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement' (Basch et al., 1994, p. 6, cited in Levitt & Nyberg-Sørensen, 2004, p. 2). Literature informed by these perspectives has reframed home as a multiscalar experience for transnational migrants, on both a spatial and a temporal level. If home is defined as a special relation to place (Boccagni, 2017, p. 1), a migrant's sense of home may be confined to a specific place, or stretch across different locations, ranging from dwellings, neighbourhoods, cities, countries. Indeed, migrants' 'living conditions and social relationships in different locations shape their multiscalar understandings of home and their orientation to stay, return to the country of

origin or move elsewhere' (Pérez Murcia & Boccagni, 2022, p. 501). Spatial and temporal dimensions of home are difficult to disentangle, as migrants may locate 'home' in different timespaces, such as places where they used to live or would like to live, or a liminal non-space between 'here' and 'there' (Pérez Murcia & Boccagni, 2022). Homes are reconstructed over space *and* time (Boccagni, 2017, p. xxvi), and Ahmed et al. (2003, p. 9) note that practices of homemaking are about 'creating both pasts and futures through inhabiting the grounds of the present'. Literature on the 'home/migration' nexus recasts 'home' not only as something that migrants leave behind, but as something that they are in the process of (re)creating. In this sense, migration involves simultaneous processes of displacement (an unmaking, an estrangement or a detachment from what used to be home) and emplacement (a process through which migrants develop a 'sense of place' in their new surroundings and negotiate a sense of home) (Boccagni, 2017; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). There is a vast literature on migrants' homemaking practices; this work has uncovered how migrants recreate 'home' as a physical space and as an affective construct, for example through the display of material possessions and photographs (Tolia-Kelly, 2004) or through food preparation and consumption (Christou & Janta, 2019; Webber, 2023). Transnational homemaking practices evoke sensory memories of previous homes, affirm migrants' own cultural heritage and sustain diasporic identities; they also point to how migrants' sense of home is not merely reconstructed from scratch, but sustained across transnational borders.

Drawing on previous uses of the term homing (i.e. Brah, 1996; Fortier, 2001), Boccagni (2017) theorises homing as a new lens to understand migrants' search for home as a *process*. This process involves appropriating place and attaching a sense of home to new settings; in Boccagni's words, homing 'refers to people's *evolving potential to attach a sense of home to their life circumstances, in light of their assets and of the external structures of opportunity*' (2017, p. 23, emphasis in the original). For Boccagni, homing points to the tension between migrants' realities and aspirations towards an 'ideal' home, which may never be achieved (2017, pp. 22–26). He also draws attention to 'the tension between the material basis of home and its immaterial facets – the emotional, relational and imaginative ones' (2017, p. 22). Boccagni also draws attention to the political and material aspects of the 'migration/home' nexus. Firstly, he notes that homeland, nation and citizenship are often conflated in political discourses on migration, and that metaphor of the home can be deployed to exclude migrants as non-citizens (Boccagni, 2017, p. 95). Walters (2004) theorised articulations of home, land and national security in public policy as *domopolitics* (from the Latin *domus*, home). Domopolitics is the governance of a nation-state as if it were a home which needs to be protected from outsiders. The logic of domopolitics implies a sharp division between the citizens who 'naturally' belong to the nation, and the migrant outsiders (although some citizens can also be cast as outsiders). Migrants, however, are not all treated the same: some may be welcomed as 'good migrants', some may be tolerated as guests who are allowed in when invited, but are not supposed to stay indefinitely, while others (such as irregular migrants and refused asylum seekers) are by definition uninvited and should be removed from the homeland and returned to 'their homes' (Walters, 2004, p. 241). Thus, migration governance and related questions around who is allowed to settle and on what terms inevitably shape transnational migrants' experiences and understandings of home, and orient their homing

desires (Boccagni & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2023). Secondly, against the postmodern tendency to celebrate the migrant home as inherently mobile and portable in an age of globalisation, and mobility itself as ‘a source of home feelings and attachments’ (see Rapport & Dawson, 1998), Boccagni (2017) argues for the continued importance for migrants, particularly less affluent ones, to attach their sense of home to geographical and material bases (see also Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). For Boccagni, an exploration of migrants’ dwelling places and housing conditions, therefore, remains central to understanding migrants’ home experiences and homing desires, even if home cannot be reduced to dwelling.

The home/sexuality nexus

Feminist and queer perspectives have explored the home as a key site of social reproduction and challenged the normative connotations of home as a site of security and safety. For instance, women subjected to domestic abuse experience home as an ‘unhomely’ site of estrangement, fear and violence; gender also shapes power relations across the public and the private sphere of the home and within the home, as women have been traditionally cast in the role of ‘homemakers’ responsible for social reproduction (Domosh, 1998). The parental home can be experienced as a site of surveillance and oppression for LGBTQ+ young people because of its heteronormative character (e.g. Stella, 2015; Valentine et al., 2003). Indeed, conflict or victimisation at home around sexuality or gender identity is often a significant factor leading to homelessness among LGBTQ+ youth, although family conflict interplays in complex ways with other factors such as poverty, precarious housing situations and poor mental health (McCarthy & Parr, 2022; Tunåker, 2015).

Queer scholarship on the home has examined practices of homemaking of LGBTQ+ people at different life stages (Cook, 2014), which often involves the renegotiation and contestation of heteronormative ideals of domesticity, and a queering of the home (Gorman-Murray, 2006, 2007, 2008; Pilkey, 2014; Scicluna, 2015). This work has foregrounded the importance of alternative notions of intimacy and kinship in queer homemaking: for example, home can be associated with communal living (as in Scicluna’s [2015] study of older lesbians in London, some of whom had lived in squats and feminist communes), or could extend beyond coupledness to become a space for socialising with other queers (Gorman-Murray, 2007). Examining domestic homemaking practices among older gay men in London, Pilkey (2014) notes the significance of material objects displayed in the home, such as homoerotic pictures, rainbow flags, couple photographs, as a way to affirm and sustain non-heteronormative identities. Gorman-Murray (2008) also shows that, for gay men and lesbians, domestic materialities and homemaking practices also serve the purpose of reconciling sexuality with other aspects of their identities, such as cultural heritage, spiritual beliefs and familial connections. Work on queer homemaking, however, has not always been attentive to the class dimension and broader economic contexts that shape the practices of queer homemaking, and often tends to privilege the perspectives of more affluent, middle-class queers. For example, Gorman-Murray, a scholar who pioneered research on queer homemaking, examined the role of material practices in queer identity work in a landmark essay (2008); however, he acknowledged

that his research focused on the homemaking practices of educated, middle-class and predominantly white gay men and lesbians, who have greater resources to choose where they live and control over their living space. More recent work, however, has explored how poverty and marginality impact on queers' housing situation and ability to create 'homely' homes (see e.g. Wimark's [2021a, 2021b] research on queer asylum seekers living in state-provided asylum accommodation in rural Sweden).

Thus far we have reviewed the extensive bodies of work on the home/migration nexus, and the home/sexuality nexus. However, there is comparatively little work that has sought to bring these two separate bodies of work together and explicitly examine the home/migration/sexuality nexus. There is a burgeoning literature on transnational queer migrations, but it rarely explicitly engages with the concepts of home and homing. One notable exception is Wimark's work on queer asylum seekers in Sweden, with a focus on liminal homemaking within the specific context of the asylum system and unhomely and precarious state-controlled housing (Wimark, 2021a, 2021b). Borges' (2018) research on practices of homing of LGBTQ Latinx migrants in Los Angeles and Mexico City frames queer migrant homemaking as a political process, describing homing as 'a strategy of resistance against displacement, isolation, marginalization, and exclusion as migrants in the United States and Mexico' (2018, p. 70).

Fortier's influential essays (2001, 2003) remain a rare attempt to conceptually bridge the home/sexuality and home/migration nexus. Fortier seeks to question 'narratives of queer migration as homecoming' (2001, p. 407), and the related idea of queer home/homeland as a destination rather than an origin for queers. In this narrative, the home of origin is equated with 'the heterosexual family [. . .] posited as the originary site of trauma' and experienced as homophobic (p. 408). For queers, it is necessary to leave the family home of origin in order to come out and forge a queer self; the movement away from the family home leads queer towards queer-friendly cities, which host community and scene spaces. These cities are 'queer cultural homelands' where queers can find a sense of home and belonging. Fortier challenges pre-existing understandings of movement within queer scholarship that frames migration as an emancipatory identity quest for queers away from the parental home and towards queer cultural homelands; her point is that queer belonging is shaped through both movement and attachment. Fortier frames homing not simply as a vector or node of movements, but also as a 'site of attachment: a site where one attaches herself, even momentarily, by way of grounding who she is, or was, in her process of becoming' (p. 413). Fortier (2001, p. 420) also foregrounds the central importance of materiality in the construction of queer homes: 'home is not simply a sense of place, but that it is also a material space, a lived space, inhabited by people who work to keep the roof over their heads, or to keep their family warm, safe and sane'. Like Boccagni, Fortier recognises the importance of materiality in terms of the labour that sustains and the resources that underpin the home. Woensdregt (2023) draws on Fortier in her work on young queer male sex workers from rural Kenya who have migrated to Nairobi. While creating a queer home in the city, they maintain ties with families in rural areas and are involved in back-and-forth migration, and aspire to acquire land in their villages and eventually return to them when older. Woensdregt (2023, p. 539) argues for the importance of recognising the 'multi-directional' character of processes of queer homing, noting that 'it can include subjects' reclaiming and reprocessing

of histories that might have been uprooted in migration and can be part of returning home to remember the past differently and reimagine the future'. Fortier's and Woensdregt's work, however, is concerned with *internal* queer migration within national borders, and does not explicitly attend to the spatialities, materialities and politics of *transnational* queer migration. These are significant in light of the domopolitical framings of home discussed earlier.

Methodology

This article draws mainly on photo diaries and visual elicitation interviews collected for the Intimate Migrations project. The project explored the role played by sexuality and gender identity in experiences of migration and settlement among LGBT-identified migrants from Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union living in Scotland. The first stage of data collection involved biographical interviews with 50 self-identified LGBT migrants to explore reasons for migrating and experiences of migration and settlement. A sub-set of stage 1 participants (18) also produced a photo diary focused on the topic of home, and took part in a follow-up interview based on visual elicitation. The brief for the photo diary was:

The theme of the photo diary is HOME. You can interpret 'home' any way you like. We would like you to take pictures of places, objects and people that you associate with 'home', or remind you of 'home', or make you feel 'at home'.

Participants were given the option of producing new photographs, utilising old pictures, or using a mixture of the two, and were given the choice of borrowing a Polaroid camera and submitting the photo diary in hard copy (via post); or taking pictures on their own electronic devices and submitting electronically. They were also provided with a template that asked them to add a title and a brief explanation for each picture included. The photo diary brief and related documents were available in Polish, Russian or English, and participants were interviewed in one of these three languages (for more details see Stella & Gawlewicz, 2021).

We did not pre-determine 'home', leaving our participants to explore the material, symbolic and affective meanings they attach to 'home' and allowing for an exploration of their sense of place and belonging. The photo diary exercise in itself was a 'search for home' (Boccagni, 2017): some participants said that the process of putting together the photo diary had made them pause and think, and helped them articulate their complex geographies and feelings around home. Roman (Ukrainian/Polish, gay, 35–39, 4 years in Scotland, interviewed in Polish) challenged the brief ('your instructions were useless to me') and the normative notion of 'home' it implied ('But when you come across a person who does not have a home, what then? [. . .] You need to change your understanding of home.') He decided to continue with the photo diary exercise to understand what home meant to him. Thus, the photo elicitation method allowed for discrepancies between culturally constructed ideas and experiences of home to be unpacked during the interview.

A preliminary analysis of the images and captions was conducted at the stage of receiving the photo diary: we did not conduct an in-depth semiotic analysis of the images, although we made notes of visual and symbolic elements of each photo. Images were also related to themes emerging from the biographical interview (for example plans for settlement or onward/return migration). Based on this preliminary analysis, the follow-up interview was tailored to each individual participant.

During the follow-up interview we asked participants about each individual image, and how these related to their sense of home as queer migrants. Although abstract notions of home were hard to articulate, the photos prompted discussion about the everyday and affective dimensions of home and homing, and interviewees often offered stories that moved beyond the pictures and delved deeper into important life events and relationships with places and people.

Photo elicitation interviews are widely used in social sciences research (Rose, 2012), but the use of visual methods in research on the migrant home remains relatively rare (Bocagni, 2017, p. 45); yet photo diaries have great potential to explore home in its affective, temporal and visual dimensions, given the filmic qualities of lived experience and the photographic quality of memory (Fortier, 2001, p. 413). Visual elicitation interviews based on photo diaries, therefore, can make a significant methodological and empirical contribution to research on the home/migration nexus through their ability to capture the sensual, everyday and affective dimensions of home that are missed out by words-based methods (Harper, 2002).

Images from the photo diaries are reproduced with the consent of participants; to preserve anonymity, photos depicting people have been turned into drawings by a research assistant. Interviews were transcribed in full, and data analysis was conducted in two stages: first, each interview transcript was analysed alongside the photo diary, and a set of notes was created for each participant, centring participants' interpretations of the pictures, noting emerging themes and relating them to participants' narratives of migration and resettlement from stage 1 interviews. The second stage of analysis involved teasing out recurring themes *across* all participants' photo diaries and follow-up interviews, and relating them to concepts and theoretical frameworks identified in the literature.

The demographic details of our participants are detailed elsewhere (Stella & Flynn, 2019), but for the purpose of this article it is important to briefly discuss participants' sexuality and gender identities, unstable class position and migrant status. The focus of our analysis is sexuality, rather than gender identity, because most of our participants (17) identified as cisgender. All participants had moved to Scotland as economic migrants, and all were in work, with the exception of a full-time university student. Most were educated to undergraduate degree level or above, however high educational attainment was not always reflected in their occupation or income, as most worked in low-paid jobs in the service, hospitality and care sectors. Indeed, East European labour migration was driven by a demand for cheap and precarious labour in the UK (Anderson, 2010), resulting in many East European migrants becoming proletarianised (Dickey et al., 2018). Transnational migrants may inhabit different class positions in their countries of origin and destination (Rye, 2019), and experience 'contradictory class mobility', as migration may simultaneously result in improved economic position and a decline in

social status (Cederberg, 2017). Our participants' precarious class position was reflected in their housing arrangements: the vast majority lived in rented accommodation (social housing or private sector), with some living in flatshares. Most of our participants (17) came from EU member states, and benefited from a racialised preference for white European workers, a long-standing feature of UK immigration policies (Favell, 2008). Unlike most non-EU migrants, under the principle of EU free movement of labour, they were largely exempt from immigration control and were entitled to settle in the UK for the long term. The legal entitlement to settle in the UK no doubt allowed them to imagine a future in Scotland; indeed, most of them had lived in Scotland or the UK for several years. Brexit and the end of the EU freedom of movement, however, created new uncertainties and anxieties around their ability to remain in the UK, although this theme emerges only tangentially from interviews, as fieldwork was completed a few weeks before the 2016 EU referendum.

Queer dis/engagements with the homeland

In this section, we explore our participants' engagements and disengagements with their national homeland. Most of our participants visited regularly to see friends and family, and maintained transnational connections with their homeland, which was still thought of as a place linked to roots and memories, and therefore a fundamental part of their identity. When asked where home is for him, Piotr replied:

The UK – no. Scotland – yes. Poland – to a certain degree, yes. . . because of – . . . You know, where you grew up. . . how you were raised. . . this influences how you view things. (Piotr, Polish, gay, 40–44, 9 years in Scotland, interviewed in Polish)

Similarly, Wera was adamant that home for her was in the 'here and now' with her Polish partner in Scotland, and did not identify it with Poland; although she did not rule out going back temporarily to support her elderly parents should the need arise. Nonetheless, some pictures included in her photo diary are, as she put it, 'rooted in Polishness', and they refer to the making and consumption of 'traditional' food, such as home-made pickled cucumbers (Image 1):

You can't just weed it [Polishness] out from the mind. It is in us. However, it fades away with time. Sometimes it's just in memories that are nice. It's nice to have memories, but unfortunately it is as it is. (Wera, Polish, lesbian, 35–39, 9 years in Scotland, interviewed in Polish)

Livia also associated Romania with a place of roots and memory. Many images from her photo diary represented places and people from her hometown and the surrounding countryside (Image 2); she explained that she used to associate home with these places, but since moving to Scotland she doesn't 'really have a home anymore, a stable kind of home feeling':

Because I don't really associate home with anything anymore, but I used to associate home. . . I'm not sure where home is now, that's why I go back, rather than forward. (Livia, Romanian, lesbian, 19–24, 1.5 years in Scotland, interviewed in English)



Image 1. Wera's photo diary: "Jars with food preserves, 2015 - TRADITION".

Her sense of displacement and of 'not having a home' is linked to her own history of emigration (she grew up in Italy, before moving back to Romania and eventually to Scotland) and the fact that the two people that made her hometown feel like home no longer live there: her mum had lived in Italy for years and her best friend had recently moved to England.

The original homeland was a place of longing, roots and identity, but also 'a place of no return' (Brah, 1996, p. 92). Some, like Livia, attached a sense of home to particular places that were fixed in time, and populated by people who were no longer there. More literally, the national homeland emerged as a 'place of no return' because hardly any of our participants contemplated moving back, either temporarily or permanently. This is significant in light of high rates of circular and return migration among East European migrants living in the UK, facilitated by freedom of movement and relatively low travel costs within the EU (Parutis, 2013; White, 2022). Parutis (2013) shows that, while economic considerations were an important context for return migration decisions, these were to a large degree guided by social and personal circumstances; and that a sense of not fitting in with the dominant social norms of the 'homeland' was strongly correlated with a low motivation to return, particularly for non-heterosexual migrants and women negotiating gendered expectations around sex, relationships, marriage and motherhood (Parutis, 2013). This is borne out by our findings: for many, 'feeling out of place' in their country of origin was linked to their sexuality, and this engendered a lack of desire to



Image 2. Livia's photo diary: "Countryside near [village name], Romania."

return and mixed feelings towards their homeland. Livia talks about the difference between visiting Romania on a short holiday and staying for a longer period of time:

Well, it's kind of nice, because it's a holiday, you do loads of things. [. . .] You don't get fussed about the politics, you don't get fussed about the mentalities, nobody messes with you, they don't really have time to mess with you, because you're gonna leave. [. . .] But if you stay for a longer period of time, yes, Romania is really homophobic, there's loads of – religion has really had an influence on public opinion. Politics is freaking bad, everybody steals from everyone. [. . .] I don't feel at home if I stay for a long period of time. I just go there to experience the good things, and just come back. Here, I just feel kind of good all the time.

Livia can only feel good in Romania during short-term visits, but longer stays engender a sense of alienation, triggered, among other things, by homophobic and socially conservative attitudes. This sense of alienation towards the homeland was echoed by other participants, particularly Polish ones, who often talked very emotionally about the homophobic sentiments peddled by prominent public figures and the rise of the right-wing party Law and Justice, which went on to win the 2015 elections on a socially conservative and homophobic agenda. This broader political climate was often reflected in painful everyday interactions with friends and relatives 'back home'. For Tomek, dormant tensions with his parents over his sexuality had re-surfaced during a recent visit to

Poland. Tomek had met his partner, Piotr, in their hometown in Poland, and they had lived together for many years, first in their Polish hometown and later in Scotland. When they first moved in together, he hadn't spelled out the nature of their relationship to his parents, although he believed that they tacitly understood and accepted Piotr as his partner. Several years after moving to Scotland, Tomek and Piotr decided to enter a civil partnership; when he invited his parents to the ceremony, making the sexual nature of their relationship impossible to ignore, his parents had emotionally refused the invitation, and a family feud had ensued. Although they had eventually smoothed things over, his recent visit to Poland had brought home to him the fact that his parents were still struggling to accept Piotr as his partner, foreclosing the impossibility of return:

I asked them [parents] whether they could imagine a situation that we're married, or even not married, that we come back to Poland now as a couple. And there are many more occasions to meet people, aunts and uncles, and neighbours. And my mum said no. (Tomek, Polish, gay, 35–39, 9 years in Scotland, interviewed in Polish)

For Tomek, the public recognition of his relationship with Piotr was an important reason for staying in Scotland and 'one of the reasons for me to think five times before returning [to Poland]'. While continuing to feel an emotional connection with the homeland and to sustain relations with people 'back home', our participants rarely displayed a homing desire oriented towards the homeland, where they felt out of place because of their sexuality and struggled to envision a queer future for themselves.

Homing, emplacement and displacement in Scotland

In this section, we discuss participants' efforts to recreate a sense of home in Scotland, and the simultaneous processes of emplacement and displacement involved in settlement. The photo diaries generally focused heavily on participants' present lives in Scotland, and most of them also envisioned their future in Scotland, at least in the short and medium term. The focus on Scotland, rather than the UK as a whole, reflects the fact that most of our participants had moved to Scotland directly and had not lived in other parts of the UK, as well as their acute awareness of Scotland as a nation with a distinct identity, against the backdrop of the then recent referendum on Scottish independence. Participants often talked about the city, town or neighbourhood where they lived as home, rather than Scotland as a country, pointing to the multiscale nature of home as a spatial imagery (Blunt & Downing, 2006). Roxana (Romanian, lesbian, 25–29, 1.5 years in Scotland, interviewed in English) included a picture of Edinburgh Castle in her photo diary (Image 3). She explained that it evoked a sense of home both as one of the first things she saw when she first visited the city for a job interview, and because of the similarities between Edinburgh's Old Town and the historic centre of her Romanian hometown. Developing a sense of place and emotional attachments to places such as dwellings, cities and neighbourhoods was an important part of 'domesticating Scotland' and recreating a sense of home. Many participants talked about creating a sense of home in Scotland by becoming familiar with their environment and surroundings, a process that involved domesticating and appropriating space. Piotr talked about his inner-city



Image 3. Roxana's photo diary: "Edinburgh Castle."

neighbourhood as home, and mentioned buying local maps and books about local history as a way to become familiar with it.

The process of building a home and creating a sense of home in Scotland was explicitly connected by some of our participants to sexuality. Nadya, who was born in Soviet Ukraine but grew up in Poland, had moved with her Polish partner, Marta, and their shared desire to enter a civil partnership and have a child together was central to their decision to leave Poland. Nadya and Marta's homing desires found fulfilment in Scotland (Image 4): migration had enabled them to have a child together and create a safe queer home. This had felt impossible in Poland, not only because of the lack of state recognition for same-sex couples and legal routes to parenthood, but also because of the homophobia they had encountered from their families and the discrimination they feared in the workplace as teachers, should their sexuality be made public. Leaving the teaching profession behind and taking up 'migrant jobs' in manufacturing and hospitality was seen as a worthy trade-off for a queer home:

Scotland's our home. But I feel good in Scotland because Scotland opened up its arms and took me in. Scotland doesn't judge me, it lets me be who I am. I don't need to hide here. (Nadya, Ukrainian/Polish, lesbian, 30–34, 10 years in Scotland, interviewed in Polish)

Nadya identifies home as Scotland, here represented as the personification of the Scottish nation who embraces her with open arms, an adoptive queer homeland.

For many of our participants, greater legal protection of LGBTQ+ rights compared to their countries of origin rendered queerness 'normal' and unremarkable, and made Scotland a place where they felt safer and more comfortable as queers (Stella et al., 2018), and where queer homes and futures could be imagined. Sexuality played a key part in orienting queer migrants' homing desires towards the 'here and how' in Scotland;



Image 4. Image based on Nadya's photo diary entry: "Child and cat".

this orientation, however, didn't necessarily mean that Scotland felt like home: instead, it translated into different degrees of identification with Scotland or their homes in Scotland. Nadya strongly identified Scotland as her welcoming adoptive homeland, and felt she belonged. However, others had more ambivalent feelings towards their homes in Scotland, perceived as temporal, and by extension towards Scotland as a home(land). Przemek, a cook in a café, had moved from Poland to the UK for greater economic security. He had lived in the UK for eight years, six of which in the city in the north of Scotland where he still resided. He compared this city to a hotel that would never feel like home:

I tend to joke that I'm homeless. I live in [city in the North of Scotland]. . . For me it's a bit like living in a hotel. It may be the best hotel in the world, but you're aware that you'll need to check out some day. You may have everything there, same things you normally have at home, but it's temporary. . . And that's how I live here, that's how I feel. Because I feel great here, I know I can stay here. . . but on the other hand, this isn't my home. . . (Przemek, Polish, gay, 35–39, 8 years in Scotland, interviewed in Polish)

Przemek's sense of being transient and not fully belonging is linked to his experience as an economic migrant in low-paid hospitality work and to his housing situation. He had lived for years in a flatshare where the only space that felt his own was his room; although he was earning better money than in Poland, he was vaguely considering moving to another country for higher wages and mentioned Dubai as a possible destination, despite homosexuality being illegal there.

For Krzysztof, a precarious claim to Scotland as home was linked to the political uncertainties around the EU referendum. Krzysztof had observed the hardening political rhetoric about migration in the UK, and was concerned that, should the leave vote prevail in the EU referendum, Britain's exit from the EU might impact on his right to remain in the UK:

[Applying for UK citizenship] is about safety. It's about the uncertainty related to the government here. . . Nobody knows who'll rule this country in the future and how the immigration law will change. . . If I had to return to Poland, I'd probably end up at whatever train station [homeless]. I have no home in Poland, I have no acquaintances to be honest. And I'm not close to my family. So. . . that's why I want to stay here, because I want to have a home here. (Krzysztof, Polish, gay, 45–49, 10 years in Scotland, interviewed in Polish)

Krzysztof had successfully applied for UK citizenship as a way to secure his right to stay, and the home he had built in Scotland, because he could not envision reconstructing a home in Poland. Krzysztof's quote powerfully brings home how even migrants with privileged mobility rights may not feel secure in their rights of residency and claims to a home in Scotland, as migration policies change and borders move over people.

Exploring the materialities of the queer migrant home

In this section, we foreground the importance of our participants' living arrangements and material circumstances in creating a home in Scotland. Images of physical dwellings and domesticity featured prominently in photo diaries: having a place to call 'home' was associated with comfort, personal freedom and control over personal space, and this often translated into a feeling of being relatively settled and secure in Scotland. Practices of homemaking are a useful lens through which to explore migrants' dwellings and domesticities, because they bound together material and imaginative geographies of home (Webber, 2023, p. 5). For queer migrants, social relations and homemaking practices that made a physical dwelling feel like home were strongly informed by their sexuality and their migrant identity.

Having a home, or feeling at home, was often associated with queer intimacies and kinship. Blagoy (Bulgarian, gay, 30–34, 4 years in Scotland, interviewed in English) included in his photo diary an image of himself and his Polish partner, Grzegorz, decorating the flat they had bought together (Image 5). What made this flat home was not just the physical work that had gone into it, but also the fact that it was a space and a project shared with his partner. For Mags (Polish, lesbian, 30–34, 11 years in Scotland, interviewed in Polish), home was 'my woman, our child and our dog'; her diary included many pictures taken at home, although she wished they could afford to move out of the rented house where her Polish partner, Grażyna, had previously lived with her child and ex-husband (the child's father, also from Poland, who had directed homophobic abuse at them and tried to turn the child against Mags). For Krzysztof, a single gay man living alone, his flat was a place where he could be himself and freely express his sexuality: for example, he could bring men home for sex, and openly discuss with gay friends topics they would not feel comfortable discussing in public. Thus, home was a safe haven and

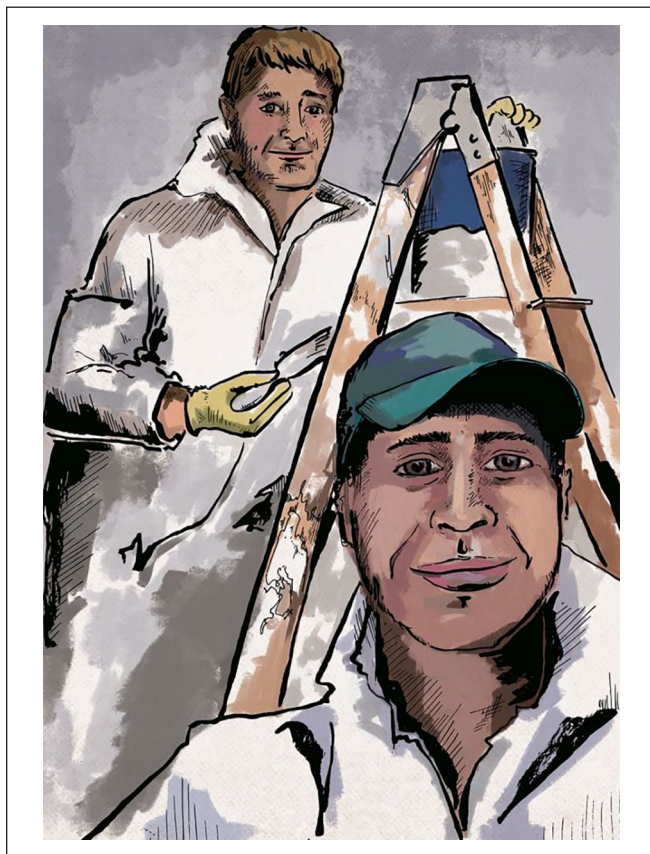


Image 5. Image based on Blagoy's photo diary entry: "Me and my partner. Building our home."

a place used to resist heteronormativity and nourish queer identities and relationships. Diaries also included pictures of material possessions displayed in the home that marked it as queer: these included homoerotic pictures, pictures of partners and/or children, queer-themed books, films and music or Pride flags. Material objects embodying participants' migrant identities also consistently featured in the photo diaries; these ranged from pictures of people and places from 'back home', to souvenirs, books and traditional food, such as Wera's pickled cucumbers (Image 1).

Queer and transnational homemaking practices were an important part of (re)creating homes in Scotland. However, participants' material circumstances and housing situation impacted on their ability to 'make a house a home'. Not all our participants lived in a 'homely' home, or were able to cultivate a 'home-like' relationship with their dwelling, one based on 'an attribution of security, familiarity and control to a given housing arrangement' (Bocchagni, 2017, p. 57). Those who had a greater degree of control over space were home-owners, tenants who had secured a permanent tenancy in social housing, or tenants who have lived in privately rented flats for some time. Control over one's



Image 6. Krzysztof's photo diary: "The flat. I take care of how my home looks the same way I take care of myself."

living space also translated into physical and financial investment into it to make it 'homely'. Blagoy and his partner had decorated the flat they had bought together as soon as they moved in; Krzysztof had repainted the walls in his housing association flat because he hated the original magnolia, a colour he associated with the impermanence of 'transitional apartments' (Image 6).

The housing arrangements of other participants, however, were much more transient and precarious. Wera and her partner had moved home 14 times in their nine years in Scotland, not least to decrease their living costs, and Wera didn't think they'd ever be in a position to buy their own place. Several participants, irrespective of age, lived in flatshares. Przemek, a man in his thirties quoted earlier, had lived in the same flatshare for several years, with a friend and other more transient flatmates. The flat has a mould problem he put up with because the landlord did not address it and he did not want to spend his own money to fix it. Safety and comfort were confined to his own room, where, behind closed doors and surrounded by his possessions, he could relax. Roman experienced his room in a flatshare as unhomely, impersonal and devoid of intimacy:

The majority of people do have a place where they live. . . where they keep their stuff, where their close ones live too. When I get back from work, I get back to my room – four naked walls. . . an empty room. And I'll never feel good in such a place. This isn't home – it's a place where you live. But, not home. So, I've never had a home. . .

While other participants felt they could freely express their sexuality in the privacy of their home, Roman had experienced homophobia from both Scottish and Polish flatmates, and had to move out from two flatshares. His low-paid job as a hospital cleaner, however, meant he could not afford to live on his own, or to move to a bigger, more anonymous and gay-friendly city in Scotland. Elsewhere in the interview, Roman talks about an unattainable ideal of home involving a husband, children and a large house,

and of home as a lifelong quest for a place where he can ‘feel good’. Like Przemek and Wera, Roman talks about precarious attachments to dwellings and places in Scotland, and a profound sense of impermanence, linked to his class position as a precarious migrant worker.

Conclusions

The article contributes a number of methodological, empirical and conceptual insights to existing literature. Methodologically, we have shown how photo diaries and photo elicitation interviews can be an effective way to explore the intertwined geographical, material, imaginative and affective dimensions of home. While the use of visual methods in research on the home/migration nexus remains relatively rare (Boccagni, 2017), there is scope to use them more widely because of their ability to capture different dimensions and complex understandings of home. Conceptually and empirically, our point of departure was the gap between literatures on the migration/home nexus and on sexuality/home nexus, and the main contribution of the article lies in bringing them together. We offer some reflections towards the development of a theoretical framework to explore the home/migration/sexuality nexus.

Our findings show that queer migrants’ sense of home remains rooted in their original homeland as a site of memory and identity, and that they retain an attachment to people and places ‘back home’ even as they cannot imagine returning there for good. Indeed, many felt ‘out of place’ in their homeland because of their sexuality, and struggled to imagine a queer future there. Our participants’ decision to settle in Scotland, at least for the short and medium term, reflects their ability to imagine a future in the country and is often explicitly linked to their sexuality. Scotland, however, was not necessarily perceived as an adoptive queer homeland enabling a more authentic queer life, because as migrants they experienced “‘restructured” inequalities and opportunities through migration’ (Luibhéid, 2008, p. 170). Settlement involved simultaneous processes of emplacement and displacement, and many queer migrants had ambivalent feelings towards their places and country of residence, reflecting their status as migrant outsiders. Even as migrants with privileged mobility rights, our participants from EU member states, interviewed in the politically charged run-up to the EU referendum, did not always feel secure in their rights of residency and claims to a home. Brexit entailed a rebordering of the UK and Scotland vis-a-vis the EU, creating uncertainties around EU migrants’ residency rights, feeding into everyday xenophobia and bringing in a ‘complex process of boundary making and conditionality that have serious implications for how migrants negotiate their identity and everyday sense of belonging’ (Pietka-Nykaza et al., 2020, pp. 296–297). This points to the importance of the domopolitical in explorations of the home/migration/sexuality nexus.

Our findings chime with Fortier’s argument that queer belonging is shaped through both movement and attachment: migration is not merely a means to affirm one’s sexuality, and home is not merely a destination in a queer cultural homeland. However, we argue for the need to pay greater attention to *transnational* migration, because current work (including Fortier’s) is mainly concerned with queer migrations occurring within national borders, and conceptual work on the home/migration/sexuality nexus tends to generalise from the experience of internally mobile queer migrants.

We have shown how the experience of transnational migration affects our participants' sense of home and homemaking practices in two ways. Firstly, their sense of living transnationally across two or more countries crucially shaped their sense of home. Spatial dimensions of home were bound up with temporal ones, as they located 'home' on different spatial scales and in different timespaces; however, the national scale remained central to their home attachments and sense of home, shaping orientations 'to stay, return to the country of origin or move elsewhere' (Pérez Murcia & Boccagni, 2022, p. 501). Thus, the transnational experience adds a layer of complexity to current theorisations of queer migration as a movement (linear or otherwise) between the home of origin (typically identified with the parental home or smalltown/rural locations) and home as a destination (typically identified with the home of choice and with gay-friendly cities as 'queer cultural homelands'). Secondly, the materialities of border regimes and the economic underpinnings of transnational labour migration also shaped homing orientations and homemaking practices. After Boccagni (2017), we argue for the importance of paying attention to the material basis of home, which has been neglected in much work on queer domesticities and homemaking, more concerned with the affective and sensual aspects of the queer home and more likely to generalise on the basis of the experiences of more affluent and financially secure queers. Indeed, the article illustrates the importance of considering queer migrants' housing situation in light of their material circumstances, and how this shapes their sense of home and ability to 'make a house a home'. Queer migrants who had a greater degree of control over their domestic spaces were better able to make financial and emotional investment in their homes, and had a more secure sense of home; more transient housing arrangements, linked to participants' class position as precarious migrant workers, constrained their investment in homemaking practices and engendered a sense of impermanence and displacement.

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Data availability

The data supporting the findings reported in this article were archived with the UK Data Service, DOI: 10.5255/UKDA-SN-853389. Given the sensitive nature of the research, an embargo dissemination period has been granted until January 2025, and access will be subject to restrictions thereafter.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval was granted by the College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee, University of Glasgow (reference 400140134).

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