Home Happens Anyway: Belongings and Home in Vancouver's SRO Hotels

by

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Abstract

Single-room occupancy (SRO) hotel tenants in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside live in 100-square-foot units within aging buildings with shared facilities. The institutional abandonment of these buildings creates challenges that affect tenant's homes. Using intimate ethnographic methods, this thesis seeks to understand how SRO tenants use their belongings to make a place into home by exploring the role of belongings in creating and subverting precarity and examining the intersection of property, care, and relationships. It highlights how SRO tenants conceive of home outside the normative understanding of home as one's "castle", instead focusing on the relationships of care constructed within the SRO hotels. This thesis concludes by unpacking how the relational nature of home for SRO tenants can be expanded beyond precarity and beyond the SRO unit to consider how "home" can be a strategy of resistance in challenging power structures and fostering community control.

Keywords: Home; abolition; property; precarity; feminist geographies; care

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated in part to my family, friends, peers, and fellow organizers, who have supported me through much of the last five years, and also to the residents of the hotels in the Downtown Eastside, who have shown me what it means to learn, organize, and fight for housing justice.

Finally, this thesis is especially dedicated to my co-conspirator, Nicole, my mother, my grandmother, Rose Marie Freiburg, and all the women in Downtown Eastside and beyond who have built homes and lives out of even the most challenging situations. They have shown me the will to protect, care, hope, and imagine in a world that can feel so limiting.

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List of Acronyms

BC	British Columbia
DERA	Downtown Eastside Residents Association
DTES	Downtown Eastside neighborhood in Vancouver
PIC	Prison Industrial Complex
R2R	Right to Remain Research Collective
SFU	Simon Fraser University
SRO	Single Room Occupancy Unit
SRO-C	DTES SRO Collaborative Society

Chapter 1.

Introduction

Up the dank, dark steps of the Keefer Hotel and around the corner is an open door held by a bag, stool, and a small grocery cart. Inside is a treasure trove, a plethora of belongings, and two small chairs. While the room is vividly textured with bags, stacks of boxes, pans, and a small black cat trailing out the open window to the roof, the room does not exist as it once did. It is a memory from the start of this research project, a room of hard work, memories, and potential - tons of potential. Sitting in one of the two chairs in the three-square feet of available space, it is possible to imagine the room is much bigger than it appears in the mystery of all that surrounds me. This was Nicole's home, one of three of her homes since I met her in 2019. This research is about Nicole's home in all its forms and iterations. It is about how home is made amid the precarious conditions created by long-term institutional abandonment and the gentrifying of Canada's "poorest postal code."

Four years in the making, this research project was a collaborative process co-constructed with Single Room Occupancy (SRO) tenant co-researchers involved with the Right to Remain Research Collective and the Downtown Eastside SRO Collaborative Society. This intimate ethnographic research process focused primarily on one SRO tenant, Nicole Baxter, and the conversations we had together throughout six months of go-alongs, a hybrid between participant observation and interviewing (Kusanbach, 2016) and in-home interviews regarding Nicole's home, belongings, and relationships. The initial goal of this project was to answer the question: How do SRO tenants use their belongings to make a place into a home? Through the fieldwork, additional questions emerged that have guided this research forward:

- Research Question: How do SRO tenants use their belongings to make a place into home?
    - What roles do belongings play in homemaking?

- How do property and belongings facilitate home/hinder it?
- Does home extend beyond individualized notions of property?

These questions emerged through the time spent with Nicole and the discussions that allowed me to better understand SRO tenant life. It allowed me to explore the role that belongings play in re-making home every time it is threatened and in creating liberatory spaces for tenants. The three chapters that follow focus on two intertwined aspects of belongings in relation to SRO life and the ways we can envision a future.

The first chapter seeks to unsettle belongings and home by considering how belongings influence relationships to others and self. I argue that belongings are crucial to the development of home for SRO tenants like Nicole because they create kinship ties that allow tenants to meet emotional and tangible needs. Rather than seeking to understand the role of belongings in precarity, this chapter unsettles the meanings of home in the SROs and the role of belongings in shaping the relationships of home. The role of belongings in this chapter highlights how home is made through connections to other people and oneself through belongings.

The second chapter illustrates how belongings influence precarity. It focuses on the role of belongings in home-making processes, creating precarity for tenants like Nicole and the ways in which tenants use their belongings to resist the precarity they face. This chapter speaks to the ways in which belongings influence lives, often having an autonomy of their own. The role of belongings in this chapter highlights the fluidity and valuation of non-landed property in connection to the people who own them and their own land tenure.

Finally, the last chapter looks at belongings' role in imagining a better future for tenants like Nicole. Pulling from Gilmore's abolition geographies and other abolition scholars, this chapter asks what role home might have in creating abolition. By examining Nicole's experiences and her own analysis of the work her belongings do, this section explores the possibilities and potential of "home" as a useful tool that organizers and tenants building solidarity movements can use to expand upon existing relational

networks. Using home as a central analytic, this chapter expands on the potential of "home" to move beyond the confines of 100 square-foot units to encompass something more. However, before I attempt to answer how SRO tenants use their belongings to make a place into a home, it is important to consider how this research question emerged and its context. The following section explores the origins of this research question and the literature that informs it.

1.1.1. The DTES since 2020

I have read countless papers that referred to the Downtown Eastside (DTES) neighborhood of Vancouver, BC, as the poorest postal code in Canada. The DTES is a place that is constantly being constructed and redefined for political reasons. It is a Vancouver neighborhood with a long history of dispossession and displacement (Blomley, 2004). Throughout the last four years, the landscape of DTES, particularly its SROs, has been affected by fires, forced decampments, the pandemic, and the political fervor of revanchist policies to 'take back' the Downtown Eastside. In the wake of revanchist videos like "Vancouver is Dying" and calls to reopen mental institutions to solve homelessness, the potential of SRO hotels to be a stop-gap measure to prevent increasing homelessness has become vital.

There are approximately 95 privately owned single-room occupancy (SRO) hotels in Vancouver, primarily located in the Downtown Eastside. Hotels range in size from 10-100 units, making up a total of 2600 SRO units in the neighborhood. SRO hotels are a unique form because they originally were built as short-term lodging without self-contained washrooms and transitioned into primarily residential buildings following the closure of the Hastings Mill in 1928 and the displacement of Japanese Canadians in World War II, many of whom were owners, operators and residents of these hotels. With the decentralization of labor and the growing suburbanization of Vancouver, the DTES became known as a square mile of vice and began its infamous reputation (Wideman, 2017). Throughout the decades that followed, the SROs deteriorated rapidly and were considered a last stop for many people, especially those who were facing challenges to living outdoors, including disabled and elderly individuals, many of whom may have lived outdoors in the past (Rodriguez et al., 2013).

The SRO that Nicole lived in, Keefer Rooms, is midway along the spectrum of institutional abandonment and livability. This means that the numbers of weekly deaths, pests, evictions, and general chaos are a little lower than in some of the other buildings. Each building and block in the DTES has its own ecosystem and personality. It is by no means the homogenous environment that Vancouver politicians would like one to believe. When I first moved to Vancouver from the California Bay Area, I didn't think that Canada, with its pseudo-nationalized healthcare system, could possibly have an equivalent dystopian oppressive nightmare to the street sweeps common in San Francisco's Tenderloin. I was fresh from working with city data collected through the Freedom of Information Act, which highlighted just how intense and targeted sweeps were in San Francisco. In true U.S. fashion, I naively believed that the U.S. was exceptional in its treatment of unhoused folks, drug users, and those living in poverty. The first time I went into the DTES, I realized how wrong I was, for the scene before me was very familiar. It was a reminder that I did not know anything about Canada or the DTES, and yet I intended to write a master's thesis on it. It was through the mentorship of the tenants I worked with in the Right to Remain (R2R) and DTES SRO Collaborative Society (SRO-C) organizers that I was able to learn, watch, and try to understand Canada's history of settler-colonialism and deeply quiet racist and classist politics.

1.1.2. The Pandemic

After a year of learning about Vancouver, Canada as a whole, and the DTES, I thought I understood enough to think about a research question and begin to bring my master's thesis together. My original question is not far off from what I ended up writing, but it lacked the depth and context of what I now have. I owe that in many respects to the forced slowdown of research and expectations that occurred as a result of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Just days before the March 13, 2020 shutdown, one of many that would follow, I volunteered at the SRO-C's community dinner. This dinner was intended to share organizing tactics and hear from SRO tenants about their experiences, asking: what kind of programming and workshops would be useful to tenants? This event, with its thirty tenants in attendance, was the last major tenant-based event held until well into 2022. The landscape of the DTES changed dramatically with the pandemic, as did the

expectations for my research. My concerns around my thesis were that it would no longer be community engaged, thus I made the difficult decision to move to archival methods. I was concerned that the community that I was getting to know would die. The congregate living in the SROs and in encampment settings meant that no matter the lockdowns and anti-covid spread methods, folks would remain in close proximity.

Yet through extraordinary efforts by organizers, donors, and mutual aid networks, the SRO tenants were supported with meals, tenant-run building cleanings, and cell phones to prevent isolation. Eventually, these efforts expanded into a push for vaccinations in the SROs in 2021. The vaccination campaign, along with the other tenant-led programming, was successful, and a sense of normalcy, if one can call it that, returned to the DTES. The success of these campaigns and programs focused on relationships that were created in this congregate environment. SRO tenants surveyed their buildings, collected signatures for petitions, and handed out flyers for vaccination dates using the skills they had already developed from living in such close proximity to their neighbors in the building. Through the pandemic and the realization that tenants have always been involved in informal organizing, organizers changed the way they understood the issues in the SROs. The organizing strategy became about building capacity and leadership in the SROs, and the potential of self-governed housing.

1.1.3. Research Importance

With the changes in organizing and the launching of the SRO Hub project, which created tenant-led programming and leadership to manage buildings, my question shifted from what belongings mean for tenants to thinking about how home is constructed in the SROs through belongings. Home, of course, is both a process and a production. It is the verb and the noun of living. My goal was thus to move away from damage-centered narratives of SRO living (Tuck, 2009), which are so regularly available in news outlets, to instead think through how crucial belongings are to the creating and imagining of home in all the pain and joy it entails. This is an important point to consider because property theory does not often contend with personal property in considering how it affects precariously housed individuals. Here, I'm using 'precariously housed individuals' to mean individuals who lack stable access to private space, or the luxuries

afforded by land tenure, including the right to full possession or the right to exclude (Blomley, 2020). Precariously housed people do not control the spaces they call home. For the purposes of this paper, precariously housed individuals refer to SRO tenants and unhoused individuals, both of whom face some of the most precarious forms of housing. The importance of understanding homemaking for precariously housed individuals lies in how individuals who are surveilled the most with the least support get their needs met and to what extent they rely on outside systems of support and mutual aid to survive. By looking at belongings and SRO tenants, I want to expand further upon the work that these tenants do to sustain themselves, including how it can be used to build stronger networks of care and community control. My exploration of home through belongings, relationships, and power highlights how home may be constructed and performed as a liberatory space, reaching outside its normative potentials of "belonging and dominion" (Nethercote, 2022). The next section is focused on thinking through this importance by focusing on the academic literature that highlights the analytics and concepts I am thinking about in this research.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1. The SRO

Single-room occupancy (SRO) hotel tenants in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside live in 100-square-foot units consisting of a sink with shared bathrooms and kitchens scattered within the building. Their precarious lives are co-constructed with the very belongings that make up their small units. The precarity these tenants face in the form of eviction, gentrification, pests, and lack of privacy and space reflect a need for important research on the making and unmaking of homes in what is often referred to as the last bastion of private low-income housing. In trying to understand the nature of homemaking in the SROs, it is necessary to conceptualize the property processes that affect both the SRO hotels and the meaning of home. This section reviews property theory, conceptualizations of home, and the ways in which these topics interact with one another. It emphasizes the ways in which property relies on forms of valuation that place poor people and people of colour in marginalized positions. The result is a theoretical framework that underpins the analysis of this research of precariously housed tenants.

2.2. Property

The origins of whiteness as property lie in the parallel systems of domination of black and native American peoples, which created racially contingent forms of property and property rights. – Cheryl Harris

A spectrum of property rights is bestowed, challenged, and experienced every single day. Scholars have sought to understand how property is experienced and how it functions in real-time. Their work has highlighted the understanding of property as a possessive claim to land or objects that include a right to exclusion (Macpherson, 1978; Blomley, 2004; Blomley, 2016; Blomley, 2019). The work on property theory highlights how property is a compound of relationships that take into consideration who the owner is, what they own, and who else may benefit from ownership (Macpherson, 1978; Singer, 2000; Roy, 2017; Blomley, 2020). Ultimately, property is defined as a relationship between entities, both individuals and the state, through inanimate objects or animals

(Macpherson, 1978; Singer, 2000; Blomley, 2004; Blomley, 2016; Blomley, 2019). This relational view of property illustrates that not all bonds of ownership may be equal, let alone equitable. Research has highlighted the ways in which the establishment and perpetuation of exclusion from property has contributed to the dispossession of Black, Indigenous, and other individuals of color, limiting their ability to assert their own personhood and agency over their belongings (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013; Roy, 2017; Masuda et al., 2019; Bhandar, 2018).

The valuation of individuals, their belongings, and their lands are often tied to forms of differentiation that categorize and place people into a hierarchy based on their proximity to whiteness, gender conformity, and acceptance of settler epistemic dominance (Bhandar, 2018). This state-backed hierarchy places settler-owned land and property above others. This places SRO tenants near the bottom of the hierarchy, as SRO tenants are among the most precarious of rental tenants. Yet even the most secure of rental tenancies depends on a system of interdependence that places control with the landlord, even over the belongings of another (Blomley & Perez, 2018; Blomley et al., 2020). The result is a form of precarity or "precarious property" that is relational, stemming from the removal of agency from one individual into another that is systemic and institutionally backed. The importance of belongings in understanding precarity is under-researched and involves interrogating how belongings operate within property regimes.

2.2.1. Belongings and Precarity

Media reports and advocacy groups in Vancouver, Seattle, and San Francisco have cited the loss of belongings for precariously housed individuals as a major barrier to health, security, and stability (Burkhalter , 2014; Pivot Society, 2018; Street Sheet Stolen Belongings, 2019; Blomley et al, 2023) The mechanism for loss of belongings appears to be consistent with individuals' varying access to property which highlights a potential relationship between access to property, and personal belonging loss. Beginning with unhoused individuals, increased policing and targeted sweeps of public space have led to the loss of important belongings like tents, medication, and the ashes of loved ones (Stolen Belonging, 2020). These important and valued objects are often seized,

destroyed, or held in far-off facilities where access is tenuous (Herring et al., 2020; Herring, 2019; Blomley et al., 2020). The loss of crucial survival equipment and objects of memory further marginalizes and forces individuals into dangerous and precarious situations in order to cope or recuperate from the loss (Herring, 2019; Blomley, 2020). The continual loss of belongings for unhoused individuals produces a system referred to as pervasive penality, which includes the seizure of belongings as a mechanism for policing and removal of unhoused individuals that ultimately creates more homelessness and precarity (Herring et al., 2020). By focusing on "obstruction" and "debris," cities opt for a rationale that cleanses public spaces of unhoused individuals without arousing public outcry (Blomley, 2011; Herring et al., 2020; Goldfischer, 2019). The case of possession loss is often most extreme and devastating for unhoused individuals but continues to occur for individuals in other precarious housing situations, such as rental tenants. SRO hotels operate in an informality not unlike encampment environments, which highlights how little research has been done to understand the role of belongings in this environment and, in particular, in the intimate construction of home.

2.3. Home

'The home is rich territory indeed for understanding the social and the spatial. It's just that we've barely begun to open the door and look inside." – Mona Domosh.

The building of home depends on the many intersecting relationships between access to landed property, cultural and emotional dimensions of design, and placement of important objects. Feminist scholars have critically analyzed the domestic space of home as a place of gendered power dynamics and violence for women (Blunt, 2004; Massey, 2013). The feminist unpacking of home was crucial in supplying a counter to other studies, where home was understood as a place of comfort, autonomy, and safety. This positioning of home as both a place of violence and of comfort is important because it highlights the complexity of home as a never-ending process. Home acts both as a process and a fabrication. It is made through the material and less tangible processes that move between the internal feelings and physical space of "home." The act of homebuilding is a relational process that incorporates the spatial, temporal, personal, and

global processes that are rooted in the everyday. For example, Sandibel Borges uses the term “homing” to describe the homing tactics queer Latinx migrants use to stay connected to family support systems or create new modes of connection within their communities while facing deportation and violence (2018). This strategy of “homing” focuses on how individuals use past memories and re-remembering to tie them to feelings of home and belonging that map onto the present. The concept of homing illustrates how the relational process of home is temporal and present at different scales while also working as a strategy of resistance that queer Latinx migrants employ against the systems of oppression and valuation that perpetuate harm through displacement, marginalization, and deciding who is disposable (2017). These connections to autonomy, time, and belonging interrogate the complexities associated with homing for both an individual and communal sense of self, especially when considering one's belongings.

In a study of the domestic spaces of teenagers (Lincoln, 2014), researchers addressed the lack of full autonomy that teenagers had over their bedrooms, highlighting the role of belongings in the expression of “home” and autonomy. The study showed that personal space was permeable and subject to parents, siblings, and other factors that influenced the objects within the room. The teenagers often struggled for agency and control over the space to illustrate their growing autonomy and personal identity, often removing items or saving items that were incorporated into their self-narrative (Lincoln, 2014). This study reiterates the role of autonomy in the homing process while also incorporating the role of belongings. The belongings acted as a medium through which identity was established and exercised.

Continuing with the importance of belongings in the homing process, interviews with formerly unhoused individuals similarly highlighted how particular belongings made them feel comfortable, “at peace,” and as though they were at home (Chan, 2020). The research seemed to suggest that rather than individual items being representative and productive of a sense of home, home consisted of connections to “regular stuff.” The feelings of “home” were connected to secure, stable environments where individuals could spend their time and engage in day-to-day routines and community activities, doing things that “everyday people do.” (Chan, 2020) These studies highlight the need to

interrogate the "feelings of home" that differ from each study. As the formerly unhoused individuals and the queer Latinx migrants demonstrate, feelings of home differed as one focused on ideas of normalcy and the other on feelings of connection. Yet, these divergent feelings of home both illustrated how home is made up of both embodied feelings and spatial processes. These processes of homing were further examined in a series of interviews with refugees in their homes in London. The interviews noted that locations such as the kitchen or yard, as well as the objects of significance within these spaces, helped to create residents' cultural identity. The organization of these items and their significance highlighted the agency of non-human material belongings in the creation of home (Blunt et al., 2007).

In interviews with displaced Mexican, Hmong, and Somali families in Minnesota, the design and placement of belongings signified more than just functionality but also highlighted aesthetic ties to culture and place (Hadjiyanni, 2009). Each ethnic group accumulated items from their homeland in order to establish a connection to their identity and highlight a difference or distinction between themselves and their new home. Each possession held their own role within the home depending on their meanings, which created layers (Blunt et al., 2007; Cieraad, 2010). These layers could be historical as they were for the teenagers or tied to status and economic success. For Belgian miners in the 1950s, valuable, quality consumable goods served as the basis for the design and aesthetic of home (Januarius, 2009). The types of belongings and their meanings were rooted in cultural expression and were different for individuals facing a myriad of living situations.

In the DTES, the SRO tenants' belongings may differ from unit to unit, given variations in ethnicity, gender, age, etc., yet they ultimately make up the atmosphere of the building. The level of precarity, access to property and culture are also different for each household but highlight the need for research on how belongings affect the home. The design, aesthetic, role, and meanings attributed to each belonging allow for a deeper sense of how homing happens and how personal property factors into the lives of precariously housed individuals. However, there is an important prerequisite to understanding homemaking in the SRO. Within the normative understanding of property

lies a moral evaluation of what kinds of homes are valid. The "feelings of home" that are often thought of when considering what feels like home are often set within colonial logics that rely on the use of property.

2.3.1. Home and Property

Home is often understood within property as a dichotomy of "home as belonging" and "home as dominion." The analytic of unhoming carefully considers this dichotomy of home in relation to property (Nethercote, 2022). These two understandings of home rely on normative understandings of "belonging" and individualized territoriality, both of which assess an individual's presumed deservingness of personhood based on settler logics that determines which home is considered a valid home, and in what ways it can be home. This concept of "home as belonging" highlights a long legacy of valuation that stems from the colonial logic that determines how to live a "rational and productive" life in line with settler nation-building. (Bhandar 2018). "Home as belonging" determines belonging based on proximity to middle class ideals of home created by colonial rhetorics that often decides in what ways property is used productively. Mariana Valverde's book, Everyday Law on the Street: City Governance in an Age of Diversity highlights how particular uses of space are codified into law based on racialized norms and ideas of "other" (2012). "Home as Belonging" often refers to the feelings of conformity and sameness that emerge through following these standards.

Those who do not conform often face the punitive process of "unhoming" (Nethercote, 2022). "Unhoming" is described as the process of how racial capitalism implicates property and "home as belonging" as a tool of dispossession and racial banishment (Nethercote, 2022). "Un-homing" refers specifically to the ways in which colonial understandings of home, belonging, and property act against the homemaking of queer, racialized communities. "Unhoming" suggests that for some individuals, there is no home but instead a process of revanchist unmaking of home that is perpetuated through racial capitalist processes like redlining, foreclosures, bailiffs, and mass evictions. Instead, precariously housed individuals can only aspire to "home as dominion" as it is rarely, if ever, the "castle" that one reigns over. Instead, the possessive individualism of property may not be as present for SRO tenants because of their position

within this hierarchy, all of which leads to an important question of how SRO tenants view home in addition to the ways in which they make it.

2.3.2. Conclusion

The issues that befall precariously housed individuals like SRO tenants need to be understood in relation to property. The need for this research on how belongings affect homemaking and unmaking is shown through examining literature on property, precarity, and its interaction with home. The gap that this thesis addresses focuses on precariously housed autonomy and self-determination in creating home within and outside of the constraints tenants face. These constraints build from a larger legacy of disinvestment that must be understood before moving to the bulk of this paper. In the following chapters I outline the history of the DTES and the SRO hotels to better contextualize the issues that tenants face in homemaking. I believe it is clear to see the ways in which property and the exclusion of SRO tenants from legal rental tenant protections have influenced the conditions of the SRO hotels within the larger context of the Downtown Eastside.

Chapter 3. Empirical Context

3.1. Single Room Occupancy Hotels

The Downtown Eastside's single-room occupancy (SRO) hotels are notorious for their failing infrastructure, predatory landlords, and the fires that regularly happen in these powder kegs. They are often considered the last form of housing before homelessness. While this is likely true, the SROs also have a long history and place within the DTES as a mechanism for storing wealth. The 100-year-old dilapidated hotels, often more expensive to rehabilitate than demolish, sit on parcels of land worth upwards of 3 million dollars (Vancouver City Council, Balmoral, and Regent Hotels: Downtown Eastside 2019). Landlords regularly purchase them, empty them of tenants through whatever means necessary, and renovate them just enough to charge $1000-$2000 per room (McElroy, 2023). The newly “remodeled” micro suites become housing for international students and workers seeking to be closer to the amenities of Downtown Vancouver. The gentrification of SRO Hotels and the Downtown Eastside is just a part of a larger history of displacement and colonization that decides how land should be used and by whom, echoing the discussion of property valuation above. This section follows the early colonization of Vancouver, highlighting how the SRO hotels began as “dollar-a-day” housing and became the residential hotels they are today (Blomley, 2004).

3.2. The Downtown Eastside

The migration in the 19th century of white settlers to Vancouver was facilitated by the parceling of land and the creation of the reserve system in the British Colony. The Coast Salish communities of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh nations lived throughout the Burrard Inlet and surrounding areas - moving seasonally between sites for ceremony, shelter, and gathering materials. The colonial government of British Columbia abandoned their initial policy of treaties or land purchase from Indigenous communities and settled on a policy of removal and displacement, allocating very little land to each Native family, thus attempting to sever the connection to their ancestral land (Bhandar, 2018). The reserve system focused on determining the best use of land and for whom it

should be allocated. Within this system, the colonial government considered Indigenous communities incapable of using land in a way in line with European "civilized practices"; thus, they were excluded as rightful property owners. (Bhandar 2018). These property logics in BC made it possible to forcibly remove communities, settlements, and "squatters." The forcible removal of communities opened the land for white settlers and for a new project of development based on the resource extraction that had already begun. This development demarcated the city into East and West, working class and racialized, and wealthy and white, respectively (Blomley, 2004).

Within the Eastside, seasonal and temporary work at the mills in the Lower Mainland contributed to the rise of boarding houses and hotels intended to house workers on an extended short-term basis. The working-class settlers who arrived to work in the mills, railyards, and warehouses stayed in the hotels, offering "dollar-a-day" stays and meeting all the basic needs of a worker coming into town temporarily. The majority of these hotels and other businesses in the neighborhood catered to temporary workers, many of whom were unmarried men. The buildings varied in luxury and size and, due to government and landlord mismanagement, would ultimately become the 100-year-old dilapidated SROs that make up the DTES in 2024.

Importantly, not all the buildings had the same clientele. The racial and ethnic makeup of resource workers changed as the industry grew, and more workers arrived from Japan and China, which shifted the demographics of the neighborhood as well. During this time, the sentiments of anti-Asian racist hate spread, culminating in the Chinatown and Japantown Riots of 1907 and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1923 (Tsang, 2023). Influential members of the Japanese Canadian community built and managed hotels along Powell St, establishing Pareau Gai as a Japanese Canadian enclave to house Japanese Canadian mill workers who faced this discrimination (Masuda, 2023). The intensifying racial tensions as Vancouver's key industries began to decline, culminating with the closing of Hastings Mill in 1928, relied upon a dogma of white supremacy and classist colonial urbanization that identified the east side of downtown Vancouver as a site of urban disorder, needing to be 'rehabilitated' (Scott, 2013). The racial tensions harkened back to the dispossession of Indigenous communities only decades prior. The definitions of whiteness and who had access to property and wealth began to shape

conversations around city planning as they did in the early settling of Vancouver. The city of Vancouver further spatially stratified into enclaves of ethnicities and class, leaving the Downtown Eastside, or the "Eastside" as it was referred to, as a microcosm of working class, poor, racialized people in an area that was deindustrializing (Blomley, 2004). The declining industries and loss of white, affluent businesses and residents who moved into suburban neighborhoods such as Kerrisdale and Kitsilano meant attention, resources, and capital moved elsewhere. The aging infrastructure and the closing of critical industries pushed the municipal narrative that the Downtown Eastside was a source of urban blight in need of intervention (Sommers, 2001).

These attitudes towards the Downtown Eastside and its inhabitants came to a head during the internment of Japanese Canadians in 1941, who at the time accounted for 50% of owner-operators of the historic SRO hotels of Pareau Gai (Masuda, 2023). Upon internment, many of the Japanese Canadian-owned SROs were sold off to predominately white settlers by the Canadian Office of the Custodian of Enemy Property (Blomley & Stanger-Ross, 2017). The closing of the Hastings Mill and the dispossession of Powell Street's Japanese Canadian inhabitants highlighted how the uneven distribution of capital ebbing and flowing out of the DTES deeply affected the neighborhood's trajectory and the SRO hotels, specifically. Along with the dispossession of Indigenous communities in Vancouver, Pareau Gai furthers the story of the DTES and its history of dispossession and displacement as it highlights the continual colonial project of removal and redistribution of resources toward the "best use" of the land - meaning in the lands of white settlers.

Following the dispossession of Japanese Canadians, loss of industry, and disinvestment from the social safety net emerged as a neoliberal urban governance model that moved from direct oversight to market-based solutions. In the mid-1960s, the Downtown Eastside and the surrounding area of Strathcona were home to immigrant families, old SRO hotels serving pensioners and veterans, Chinatown, and Hogan's Alley, Vancouver's only predominantly Black community. The story of Hogan's Alley, again, mirrors the fates of the Indigenous and Japanese Canadian communities in Vancouver. Hogan's Alley was bulldozed in 1970 to make way for an urban renewal project, the Georgia Viaduct. The destruction of Hogan's Alley was a way to alter the

area's fabric to better suit the needs of commuting workers in a failed attempt to create expressways into the inner city (Perl et al., 2015). The freeway system was a form of slum clearance that intended to remake Hogan's Alley, Chinatown, and the Downtown Eastside more broadly. Residents in the areas revolted against the freeway system, but not before the destruction of Hogan's Alley, which already faced displacement through other slum clearance acts as well as by the anti-Black racism that residents faced. The city and provincial policies of urban renewal were based on the same principles as "highest and best use." The aforementioned displaced communities did not use the property in ways that aligned with settler nation-building.

The acts of dispossession and displacement through the first half of the City of Vancouver's history highlight the context and political attitudes shaping the SROs through their 100-year history. Beginning as temporary housing for a growing workforce, to a community for Japanese Canadians, to then facing the dispossession, disinvestment, and neglect of the neighborhood, including the destruction of Hogan's Alley, the SRO hotel continued on undergoing its own set of changes from within the policies of the City and Provincial government as well as the effects of further neoliberal urban governance shaping the urban core through capitalist development. In the next section, I focus on the conditions in the SROs following the internment of Japanese Canadians by looking at the role of public health and code enforcement in setting up the future habitability of the SROs.

3.3. Public health

The city's enforcement of bylaws relating to public health through the decades has greatly affected the conditions of the SROs. Masuda (2021) refers to the restructuring of public health within Vancouver as indicative of a shift within colonial public health from focusing on the bylaws and legal technologies that surveilled and managed space within the DTES to focusing on the individual pathology of those residing in the neighborhood. The latter was influential in regulating the already dilapidated hotels to keep them from deteriorating further but also created racially specific bylaws that highlight the pathologizing of Indigenous and other people of color in place to justify dispossession, such as in the case of Chinatown and Pareau Gai. The burgeoning public health field

used legal technologies such as zoning, planning, and bylaws to cordon off blight and poverty, especially as population and industry disinvested from the DTES (Masuda, 2021.)

During the early settling of Vancouver, the public health department created the Lodging House Bylaw to address the livability and presumed chaotic nature of the hotels by focusing on the principle of conditions rather than construction. Dr. Frederick T Underhill, a critical author of this bylaw, said, "A building may be of first-class construction but not fit for a dwelling," highlighting the role of public health in housing (Masuda, 2021). The Lodging House Bylaw facilitated regular sanitary code enforcement within the buildings that addressed cleanliness and maintenance (Masuda, 2021). Although the Bylaw strictly dictated who could be considered a tenant in the SROs, it also meant that regular code inspections and place-specific enforcement held landlords, to some degree, accountable. This Bylaw remained the norm until the 1970s, when federal funds became available through the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP). The province modified this program to give forgivable loans to landlords to rehabilitate the aging SROs in exchange for low rents for an agreed-upon number of years. The RRAP program was used alongside the Lodging House Bylaw to manage the SROs in what Masuda referred to as a "carrot and stick" method. This program offered some improvements and low rents but ultimately had little oversight, and many SRO hotels received minimal repairs (Masuda, 2021)

By the 1980s, the city's neoliberal restructuring altered the bylaws and programs that affected the SRO hotels. The Lodging House bylaw was repealed, and a new Standards of Maintenance Bylaw was implemented, although much of the original Lodging House Bylaw remained within the new Standards of Maintenance Bylaw. However, the bylaw changed the implementation process to complaint-based inspections instead of city enforcement through regular sanitary inspections. The complaint-based system meant that unless extensive complaints were lodged, inspections did not occur (Masuda, 2021). As a result, low-rent SROs became further disinvested as both the benefits of rehabilitation ended, and no enforcement occurred. Instead, the public health department no longer concerned itself with habitability and housing concerns, which became apparent as SRO tenants fought for tenancy rights. At the same time, the ongoing

disinvestment from psychiatric facilities led to the closure of institutions across British Columbia (Masuda, 2021). With nowhere to turn, homelessness emerged as a major issue, and the SROs absorbed many of those with nowhere to go. The change in enforcement, end of RRAP, and closing of institutions highlight the neoliberal logics at play that removed the state as a source of support and landlord accountability for its most vulnerable citizens. The following section focuses on the struggle for tenancy status in the SROs and the role of property relations in exacerbating the already worsening conditions of the SROs.

3.4. SRO Hotels and the Inn-Keeper's Act

The putatively lawless and chaotic nature of the SROs is a direct response to policy initiatives that have painted the SROs as outside the 'normal' hierarchy of property regulation. The previous example of the Standard and Maintenance Bylaw is just a portion of the policies that devalued SRO tenants and contributed to their mismanagement.

Historically, single-room occupancy hotels in Vancouver have been subject to the BC Government's inconsistent interpretation of tenant protections (Blomley and Right to Remain Collective, 2021). Their earlier exclusion from the Tenancy Act and the government's willingness to abandon the tenants in the SROs highlights how these tenants have never clearly fit within the hierarchy of property relations that span from unhoused to landlord, Black to White, Indigenous to settler. Their ambiguity as DTES tenants set in motion the seeds of informality and exploitation that have allowed the poor conditions of the SROs to prevail. The perceived unmanageability of these tenants, over a third of whom are Indigenous, represents, solidifies, and reinforces their position within the state power relations and, subsequently, their (de)valuation. As previously mentioned, the colonial project of Vancouver focused on the highest and best use of land. By abandoning the SRO tenants as opposed to condemning or improving the building for the safety of tenants, the state both affirms a need for the SRO to exist but a refusal to acknowledge its problems and allocate the land to supportive housing. Instead forgetting

about the SROs and the tenants who live there, the city turns a blind eye to the work that the SROs are doing as housing for poor tenants.

During large swaths of their history, SROs were expected to function as if they were regular short-stay hotels despite the clear indication from city officials and residents that these hotels contained long-lasting occupants who paid a regular monthly rent for their habitation. Hotels were homes, in other words. By the 1970s, the SROs already had a reputation for poor conditions and social deviance. This reputation no doubt played an essential role in the decision to exclude these residents from legal tenancy protection, giving an early indication that the lifestyles and tenancies of these individuals were not considered a valid form of homing or a proper use of property.

Instead, these tenants were subject to the Inn-keepers Act, which prevented residents from obtaining rights associated with tenancy, including the right to full possession and exclusion, the right to visitors, and the right to fight eviction (Blomley and Right to Remain Collective 2021). The Innkeepers Act also empowered landlords to seize resident belongings to pay back rent, highlighting the important disciplinary role that belongings have long played in the SROs. Even when neighborhood activists like the Downtown Eastside Residents Association (DERA) pushed the city into a compromise to include SRO residents as tenants, the onus was placed on SRO residents to show proof of tenancy in court, which was often expensive, time-intensive, and not a viable option for residents on welfare. As Blomley and Right to Remain Collective (2021) suggests, this legal maneuvering created an informal space for SRO landlords to profit.

Rather than an oversight, the exclusion and subsequent burden of proof placed on the tenant made it easier for landlords to continue to treat SRO tenants as guests rather than as residents, highlighting the state's role as a protector of property rights. Even when the formal extension of tenancy status to SRO residents came in 1989, many landlords did not change course. Many Innkeepers Act provisions, such as banning guests and unlawful entry, continue in the SROs in the Downtown Eastside with little recourse for tenants (Blomley 2021). These changes in legal protections alongside a changing government regulation model led to the informal conditions of these buildings where tenants often lack the most basic of services like heat and mail. The lack of services calls

into question how a home can be built within an SRO when access and habitation for tenants are so precarious. The abandonment of the SROs and their inhabitants harkens back to the settling of Vancouver and the willingness to displace, dispossess, and also abandon as a means of urban governance. These policies affected the SROs directly on an institutional level, and the disinvestment of the buildings signaled that there was no desire to maintain this form of housing, which came further to a head with the mass evictions and demolition of SRO hotels during the 1986 Exposition.

3.5. Expo 86

Olaf Solheim was one of over 500 SRO tenants evicted from their homes leading up to and after the 1986 Vancouver World Exposition. The exposition was a thinly veiled attempt to redevelop and rebrand Vancouver by showcasing the city's innovation and technology. However, it contributed to much displacement, including the death of Olaf Solheim, who became despondent and died less than a week after being evicted from the Patricia Hotel, where he had lived for 62 years (Sommers, 2001). It is speculated that his death was a result of eviction (Expo 86 Evictions: Remembering the Fair's Dark Side, 2016).

Solheim's story highlights how the lack of tenant protections in the SRO hotels, still governed by the Innkeeper's Act at this time, contributed to mass evictions of poor, elderly, and disabled tenants. The number of SROs lost during this time is said to be over 2000 single-room occupancy units (Expo 86 Evictions: Remembering the Fair's Dark Side, 2016). The lack of tenancy protections meant that the SRO stock in the DTES drastically shrunk, and individuals were left dead and on the streets. Even with the mass efforts launched by community organizers such as the Downtown Eastside Residents Association (DERA), the evictions continued, and politicians remained adamant that these mass evictions were a "non-event" (Sommers, 2001). The 1980s marked a turning point in the government management of poverty and marked the peak of the war on drugs. These policies and government attitudes greatly affected the SROs, highlighting their abandonment and descent from the once necessary temporary housing for a growing population to unsightly dilapidated buildings that house poor populations out of sight.

Even later, as the Single Room Accommodation (SRA) Bylaw and the Rental Tenancy Act created space for the SRO hotels to be protected from conversion and included in tenant protection, the damage was done. The SRO hotels continued to operate using a patchwork of rules and rights from the Innkeepers Act, The Lodging House Bylaw, SRA, and the Rental Tenancy Act, although several of those acts had been repealed (Blomley, 2021). The lack of clear tenant protections and vacancy control, which ties rental increases to the unit rather than tenancy, incentivizes landlords to keep a steady turnover of tenants in order to increase rents. This loophole, among others, leaves tenants and their belongings vulnerable to further loss.

The conditions of the SROs upon their disinvestment, lack of bylaw enforcement, and clear tenant protections created what Blomley and the Right to Remain Collective (2021) refers to as an "outlaw zone" and what I often refer to as an "encampment in the sky." The informality of SRO living created by uneven investment and application of law means SRO tenants must do for themselves.

3.6. Present Day

The last 100 years of SRO hotel management by the landlords, province, and the City of Vancouver, alongside the continual dispossession of the Downtown Eastside, highlights how pervasive and long-lasting the policies and logics of the past are and how they remain within the present. The politics around property and the use of land continue to influence urban governance, moving from colonial management to neoliberal property development. The displacements from the Downtown Eastside, paired with the disinvestment in infrastructure (e.g., loss of the streetcars), prohibitive liquor licensing, and, importantly, the restructuring of bylaw enforcement, highlight how property is implicated in the uneven development of space leading to disinvested and abandoned spaces (Bailey, 2023; Masuda, 2021). For me, the story of the SRO hotels highlights how they are the enduring historians of Vancouver, exemplifying the changes in management and the populations most affected.

As previously mentioned, this research aimed to understand how SRO tenants use their belongings to improvise home. The informal conditions of the SROs outlined above require tenants to "improvise.". The re-discovery of the Downtown Eastside through real estate development and gentrification has made the SRO hotels a perfect target. Their

neglect upon high-value land makes it easier for landlords to flip or sell the buildings to one another and later to high-end land developers. Meanwhile, the residents of these buildings must deal with a lack of heat and crumbling infrastructure in hopes that the city will intervene while awaiting their always impending eviction.

The Balmoral Hotel is a perfect example of the waiting game that all SRO tenants play. In 2015, the City of Vancouver condemned the Balmoral and the Regent Hotels for their poor conditions. Over 300 tenants were evicted, and the buildings were shut down (Masuda, 2021). The owners of the building, the Sahotas, received little punishment for their neglect, which resulted in unstable and unsafe living conditions and eventually condemnation. Through the work of the DTES SRO Collaborative, City Counsellor Jean Swanson, and other community organizers, the city of Vancouver expropriated the Balmoral and Regent hotels for $1 in 2019 (McElroy, 2019).

Since this monumental act, there has been much discussion over the future of SRO hotels, especially as rising rents and gentrification pushed more tenants out onto the streets, often faster than the fires and poor conditions. The SROs continue to decline and lose housing stock while the conversations about preserving or demolishing them have continued. The SRO tenant that I engage with in this research may not represent the experience of all SRO tenants, but her story offers a means for understanding how this history echoes through the present.

3.7. Conclusion

The history of the SROs provides a through-line for understanding of the history of Vancouver and its housing. The SROs have witnessed the rise and fall of resource industries, white supremacism, and the constant changing of (dis)investment and ownership. Policymakers' and organizations' renewed interest in the SROs is vital to consider as homelessness increases. As I shall show, belongings, in particular, are valuable mechanisms to examine and explore these changing dynamics and how SRO tenants have overcome them.

Chapter 4. Methodology

I felt a deep heaviness welling up within me as Nicole coaxed me to flip through the pages of her photo album. As each page crinkled as it turned, I felt myself slipping deeper and deeper into the album like a trance, falling and tumbling into her memories. Her words were thick like honey, and my breath was bound by it.

"That's my 13th birthday" she said, beaming.

"It was the first year in the house."

As she spoke, a red-brown shag carpet filled my senses. Teens gathered at the table didn't bother to turn to face me as I entered the scene. Hidden inside the camera, my entire consciousness watched like a voyeur as Nicole blew the candles on a frosting ribboned cake.

Snap —the page turned to Nicole in a white dress, her hair braided around a crown of soft white flowers. Flowers that have certainly become dust now.

"This dress was made by Julia Livingston." She spoke as if those words meant something to me.

"She's made every single May queen's dress since 1940. She was 100 years old, and that's the last May Queen dress she ever made. I was 14 years old, and I was chosen to be the May Queen for all of New West. "

Nicole walked down the stands of the stadium, the white dress bouncing as she moved, her little hands in white gloves.

-Snap-

We continued talking and flipping through the book until the timer went, and our two hours of talking were over. My drink wasn't yet empty, and after glancing at it, I was brought back into her room. The room was crowded with memories, objects, and belongings that pushed us into the center to watch us like an audience. They listened as they were brought up, labeled, and named to someone other than her. "This is where my shoes go; I prefer these ones when I have to walk far," or "Back up there in those boxes, you can just make out the lid; those are my father's tools, I can't access them, but they're there." The room is 100 square feet, and we are just in two, maybe three feet of it. It's humid, and the hum of the fan helps to keep the air flowing in the cramped space. In a daze, I finish my drink and head to my car. We hug goodbye, and Nicole places a tiger eye pendant in my hand. "I thought of you when I saw it." My brain is swirling with her history, both past, present, and future. It feels neither sad nor happy, yet I cry in the car for 20 minutes. The big thundering sobs make me feel crazy, so I cry harder.

I fill my car with tears, rolling down the windows. They splash on the rainy ground. I laugh as I can barely tell the difference between my salty tears and the puddles of rain on the pavement.

Later that evening, in my 900-square-foot apartment, I lay across my couch on my stomach, feet dangling off the armrest, gazing at my computer. I can't stop thinking about this afternoon. Why did I cry? For whom did I cry? I type into the search bar, "May Queen - 19— ". After several clicks and a free one-month trial to access some newspapers, I found her. There she is, smiling, surrounded by friends, walking with her parents. Nicole's name was in bold print as the coronation marches on. Somehow, I didn't believe she was there, but there she was—a newspaper testament to her own archive of her life. I felt guilty looking this up, but I needed to see something unclouded by her: her story and her home. I can see it in front of me and the intimacy of it all scares me. The questions I asked about her belongings have opened a door I can't close. It's full of possibilities but other things too. The belongings in that small "closet with plumbing" are alive with history, closely mapped and guarded. A talisman of a deceased loved one, DVD movies that hold her past, and memories of her life.

They are alive and waiting for their stories to be told, running alongside hers. These pictures, jewelry, dirty clothes, and leather jackets whisper to each other in the night the legacies of her life along with the terrors and triumphs of her future. Clothes to be cleaned or discarded, jewelry to be sold or stolen, jackets waiting to be worn on cold winter's days still heavy with her dad's cologne. In Nicole's home archive, I bear witness to the vitality: to the world teeming with life. Her story opens the door to a world of stories, and I have come to listen.

Home is often viewed as a tangible, universal part of many people's experiences. It is a constructed part of our lives that may offer security and comfort but also immense pain. Home is not created equally and can be a myriad of things. For SRO residents, home is complicated when confined to 100 sq ft, governed by precarious property relations, and may require some careful calculation and quick action when things go awry. While this research speaks to home in many ways, its primary goal was to speak to the relationship and care between SRO tenants and their belongings,

A question I am often asked is, "Why belongings?" When there are a million issues that SRO tenants face in their communities and buildings – why belongings? In reflecting on my research trajectory, it became clear to me that this research was something I'd been thinking about for a long time. My life experiences, age, race, and gender affect my work in the Downtown Eastside. As part of my work with the SRO-Collaborative, I was asked to contribute a biography that tells the personal story of how I became interested in SROs

and the people who live in them. My positionality was immediately an important part of this work before I consciously considered it. It has only been through constant reflection that I understand why this work speaks to me.

I have never lived in an SRO. However, I was seven years old the first time I entered an SRO unit. I will never forget it. My grandmother was watching over my sister and me, during which her closest friend “Will " had just come out of the hospital. She wanted to check on him, so we went to visit him. The steep steps and the musty mildew smell were the first things I noticed. We climbed up the steps and entered a tiny room with a small sink. A long gray-haired man with a beard was stretched out across the bed. I had met Will before, but we had never visited his home. He would mumble, and my grandmother would understand him, and we’d sit there waiting in this room. I spent most of my time looking out the open window above the sink that faced another building. I had little concept of where we were. My grandmother visited him almost every day for months until he passed away. I later learned that in their younger years, he had wanted to marry her.

My mother and grandmother lived on welfare for the entirety of my mother’s childhood. They moved constantly because of the redevelopment of Downtown Sacramento, California, which meant living in buildings that were torn down or remodeled, including SRO hotels. My grandmother, a fiercely independent woman, refused to live in low-income social housing because of the rules that she’d be forced to follow -- she hated rules. She was also what we’d affectionately call a “pack rat.” The dilapidated mobile home that she lived in until her death was filled with stacked boxes, bookcases full of books, and many packed suitcases. She felt that everything had value and would save items that would make no sense to me. I recall a Christmas when she found a pair of shoes for me in a garbage can that still had “plenty of life” in them. This experience and that of my mother meant that “clutter” was always on my mind. The fear of it and its intrigue made it a specter of my childhood and an annoyance as my mother started her own junk collection. My grandmother was mentally unwell most of her life and suffered from hallucinations, among other things. She made friends on the street easily and would disappear for days at a time. This research, in many ways, highlights my feelings towards the unknown of my grandmother's life and also the lives of women living in precarity and the roles they take

on in care, relationship building, and community. SRO hotels are known as heavily male-dominated spaces, which speaks to the unique positions that the tough women who live here must take on to survive.

With that in mind, and before I address the specifics of the methodology of this study, I must introduce Nicole. Nicole and I became friends in 2019 before my research question was established. She introduced me to Vancouver and welcomed me into the research space. The first time we met, Nicole gifted me a pipe because I could not bring any marijuana paraphernalia into Canada from the U.S. During the next several months, Nicole and I went shopping, door-knocking, to lunch, and spent time discussing our very different lives. This research and my decision to work with her in a research capacity blossomed out of conversations I had with her around home and belongings that were deeply related to her experience of SRO living – I did not know that going in. During our time together in the field, she experienced the disruptions of SRO living – fires, evictions, etc. - and I struggled with my needs, academic and otherwise, and my deep desire to help not only Nicole but the tenants in her building. Nicole and the organizers I work with helped me to create the necessary boundaries to be able to balance the expectations of the research, of my collaborators and the academy. We had many frank conversations on friendship, respect, and limits, which led to friendship and witnessing that allowed this intimate, but hopefully not presumptuous, ethnography to take place. Nicole has been a co-conspirator of this research, often sending me pictures after our discussions or more ideas on how to move this work forward.

This research process was formed through a deep and intimate collaboration with Nicole, who is also part of the Right to Remain Research Collective (https://www.righttoremain.ca/). Her work on this project reflects the organizing and deeply thoughtful processes of engagement that she takes on in her everyday life. Nicole is a dear friend and a person whose subjectivity and alterity cannot be easily understood. Her ideas of home and her sense of duty in her work as a tenant organizer often contradict and are built within a deep well of experience and emotion. It is with her and the other members of the Right to Remain Research Collective that this question of “How do SRO tenants use their belongings to make their spaces into home?” came to be asked. It is also

within the meetings of the Right to Remain Research Collective and its partner, the DTES Single Room Occupancy Collaborative (SRO-C) (https://srocollaborative.org/) that the specifics of this research came to fruition.

4.1. Research as Organizing: The Right to Remain Research Collective

Methodologically speaking, I thought long and hard about the methods that speak both to answering the above question and, importantly, to the goals of Nicole, the other organizers, tenant researchers, and the Right to Remain Collective itself. I began this research as part of the Right to Remain research collective and drew heavily from their research methodology. As a budding community-engaged researcher, I sought to be reflexive and relational in this process, using what we came to refer to as "research as organizing." "Research as organizing" draws from a critique of participatory action (PAR) research, which positions the community research partner as the driver of the research and its benefactor. In critical PAR research, the researcher is often positioned as the role of "willing hostage" to the community to whom they are accountable (Kapoor, 2009). While "willing hostage" contextualizes the relationship between academics and organizers as adversarial, the relationship in research as organizing is more symbiotic, dependent on a shared negotiation of priorities, roles, and division of labor. Contrary to traditional forms of participatory action research, the researcher and the organization merge in many ways to pursue their combined goals and separate, only to come together again.

This is a long-term collaboration that takes improvisation, honest conversations, and carefully negotiated boundaries. Paul Roge (2018) refers to this process as an improvisational dance that rethinks Western concepts of failure and instead focuses on how dance moves us forward, backward, and up and down, often on unsteady ground. The connection between partners - built on memory, trust, and respect - push the work forward. I witnessed and participated in what could only be described as an improvisational dance of 4 years of research collaboration between the Right to Remain Research Collective and the DTES Single Room Occupancy Collaborative (SRO-C). I

worked within the Right to Remain Research collective, often abandoning my own research goals to pursue policymaking, assist during a public health crisis (COVID-19), and also for friendship, helping a friend move after a fire, and being a safe space to vent. Yet, this same energy has always found its way back to me in the form of respect and incorporation of my ideas and research into practical problem-solving, which speaks to the goals of all parties. As a volunteer and research assistant working in the field, I have immersed myself in the work of organizing and the theoretical and real-world implications of history, policy, and relationship building.

4.1.1. "Schlepping as praxis"

Half-jokingly, this work was often described in the midst of organizing as "shlepping as praxis," which can only be understood by looking at the day-to-day work that is important to any research project or advocacy group. My contributions in the form of "shlepping," such as moving chairs, ordering/picking up breakfast, taking notes, and meeting with tenant co-researchers, provided a connection to the work that can be all-consuming but importantly extend beyond research or organizing itself into the realm of being present and active. It's important to think through the term "shlep" in this context as it is a Yiddish word that is used frequently among North Americans. This somewhat self-deprecating word refers to a tedious, laborious journey of hauling or carrying. The grunt work associated with organizing meetings and research is an important part of the relationship-building process that is necessary for in-depth, engaged work. These meetings put me in a position to closely see the tensions of the research and its expectations of knowledge production, graduating students, funding updates, and grant writing alongside the quick-paced nature of organizing, with its own set of priorities and goals. The ebbs and flow of the work could give any person whiplash, but it is the relationships that tether the work to the ground.

The often-gendered work of "shlepping" also highlights a feminist ethics of care that creates the conditions for which the work of research can happen. The feminist ethics of care notes that gendered care work is a radical form of managing and maintaining social relationships that underpin the productivity and successes that are valued within society. While conventionally, care is marginalized, within "shlepping as

praxis," a feminist ethics moves the care work out of the private sphere and centers it in the research process as it becomes the work of the group to care and maintain relationships together. (Lawson 2007)

Nicole and the other tenant researchers of the Right to Remain are those who witness the shlepping the most and assist in the moving of chairs and picking up Tim Hortons coffee. I like to think the start of my methodology began in the form of conversations, eating breakfast before the start of meetings, or in-between door knocking while we got a beer at a pub nearby. These moments in between "work" built connections with tenant co-researchers that developed into friendships. These connections went beyond the research and organizing but were also bound by it in some ways.

4.1.2. Friendship as Methodology and the Pandemic

My research follows a particular combination of "research as organizing" and "friendship as method" that steers my research towards a reciprocal process of knowledge production and a deep relationality that centers the relationship with my collaborators above my own research goals. Friendship is more than a method; rather it is a way of centering the collaborative nature of research that seeks to undermine and challenge the hierarchical separation of participant and researcher (Tillman-Healy, 2003; Owton et al., 2014). It is built upon mutual respect and care for one another that is long-term but also carefully monitored and negotiated through boundaries. While "friendship as methodology" has some traction in theorizing ethnographies, others can likely recognize what this might entail in their own research (Owton et al., 2014). My understanding of friendship as method speaks to the fact that this research will end, and my master's will end. The fact that I have written this is hopefully a testament to that; however, what about friendship? My entanglements with this community? Do those things end? Whom or what do we prioritize when we work with community? These are questions I have engaged with that shape my methodology.

I want to be clear that this methodology does not entail throwing aside my own needs and desires but instead tempering them with those of my co-conspirators. Nicole often lectured me on ensuring I was taking care of myself and learning the importance of

turning off my phone at the end of the day. Nicole keeps a detailed calendar of what she needs to do, what is the most important, and what can be skipped. While I know these skills to be important, having your co-researcher ensure that you are recording or getting to all your interview questions can be quite humbling. It was an important reminder that you need to make space for yourself, especially in organizing, where burnout is so prevalent. Friendship as methodology speaks to the relationality and interconnected social web that can occur between participants and researchers. This methodology emphasizes the co-creation of knowledge and, importantly, maintaining the connection and relationship beyond the research itself. I wanted to be very careful in formulating this research in such a way that it honors the commitment and boundaries of each individual participating, myself included. Friendship as methodology is fraught with negotiation and continual failures of communication. This is a natural part of this process, as one may not always be able to keep a promise, or misunderstandings occur. As Owton et al. (2014) notes, friendship as methodology invites a deeper connection but also means hurt feelings and expectations that must be managed.

As a research participant, Nicole was also paid an honorarium for her help in this project. The challenge of friendship and payment meant I had to be very clear about when our time together was based in fieldwork or in socializing. As I finished fieldwork with Nicole and began writing my thesis, we had to negotiate and establish a new way of relating once again that did not involve pay. Yet, these different perspectives on friendship from various vantage points meant that the trust between us grew, which led to a better working and personal relationship. However, I found this method challenging at times, and I was beholden to the responsibility that came with working with someone I cared about. This was especially true when considering the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.2. Effects of the Pandemic

This research coincided with one of the most devastating pandemics of the last 100 years, the effects of which are still present among us. The pandemic changed everything about my Master's experience. I knew at the start of this master's program that I wanted to do community-engaged research. Yet, how can one do that when you are told by the university

to avoid face-to-face contact with ‘research participants? I made every attempt to transition my methods into archival methods and phone interviews. I was a worried graduate student who was unsure how my presence in a vulnerable community would accelerate the spread of COVID-19, but the work of organizing during the pandemic pulled me right back into the heart of the community. As many will recall, the lockdowns that occurred during 2020 and 2021 focused greatly on stopping the spread of COVID-19, and as a result, restrictions on gatherings and the implementation of “COVID bubbles” went into effect to keep individuals from congregating. This well-intentioned plan saved many people from acquiring COVID-19, especially at a time before the vaccines became available. However, in single-room occupancy hotels, tenants live in 100-square-foot rooms with shared bathrooms across the different floors of units, often 30-100 units per hotel. These tenants had no option but to live communally but also in isolation from their networks of support with little access to the digital means of communicating to which many of us have grown accustomed.

The meetings and organizing of the SRO-C and the Right to Remain became a much-needed lifeline not only for the tenants but for the other organizers, academics, and students who were also isolated. The in-between conversations and masked discussions that occurred during this time ignited an important spark for me that permitted me to set aside work that did not feel important at the time and focus on connections, as well as well-being. As restrictions later eased, these conversations shifted my research question greatly, which led to a reconfiguration of my research as something I knew it to be: involved, intimate, and paying close attention to the affective embodiment of belonging. I’m drawing from feminist theory here, particularly in thinking through intimacy in this research. “The personal is political” (Hanisch, 1970) is a canonic phrase that speaks in some ways to how my research thinks about intimacy. Pushing even further, as many feminist geographers have, the use of intimacy in this research and my friendships have focused on the ways connection reveals the nuanced and messy experience of the individualized self and its ability to relate to the collective experience.

This research has been difficult and uncomfortable because of how experiences connect and disconnect from one another and the deep intent to not just understand but accept what can’t be understood. I think that’s how intimacy has felt for me: it is a deep-

seated feeling that emerges and scares me at every chance it gets. It is a feeling of sinking into one another or maybe even being sucked into one another by a whirlpool that wants to merge you. It's both the fighting of that current, its questioning, and the haziness that blankets those feelings. I do not understand what it has been like for Nicole or any of the tenants I have worked with, but just being together and respecting one another's experience or way of being feels important. All of this is to say that intimacy is not just political in the personal but also in the ways global processes are multiscalar and feed into one another to create the spatial entanglements and possibilities for which we enact our everyday routines. The intimacies of the DTES between colonization, empire, and capital intersect with the personal to make the everyday and often painful experiences of tenants in the SRO hotels. All of these intimate interactions and discussions led to a change in my research that pays respect to the work and needs of my collaborators, particularly Nicole, and the relationships we have built over the course of the last four years.

4.3. Methods

This research involved ten go-along and in-home interviews with just Nicole, followed by several insightful interviews with additional tenant researchers and organizers focused on the belongings in the SROs that occurred in June 2022-January 2023. As part of the knowledge mobilization and follow-up of this research, I also followed a process of artmaking that occurred over the course of 4 meetings in May of 2023. This process followed Nicole and a cohort of tenants involved in the Right to Remain as they mapped the social relations in the neighborhood by creating a game focused on the iconography of the Downtown Eastside. While this process was extremely important and insightful, it does not take away from the fact that the thesis primarily follows Nicole and centers her experience of SRO living.

I made the choice to invite Nicole to do this research with me because of our existing relationship, her unique perspective as a Queer woman in an SRO, and her enthusiasm for this research question. Nicole was prepared to embark on this exploration with me and was never afraid to question what I was asking or whether it was important. I found ethnography to be a useful methodology for this research because it spoke to what it felt like I had already been doing in the community, but also ethnography,

particularly intimate ethnography, tries to grasp the wholeness of reality, including its contradictions, its senses, and embodiment. Ethnography pays attention to the visceral and corporeal that is ever-changing in our lives. The intimacy of ethnography, or the ethnography I set out to do, focuses on exploring the lived experience of a particular group or community "without hesitation or detachment." The intimate ethnographic encounters speak to friendship as methodology and the solidarity of research as organizing both of which are present in this research. This research focuses almost solely on one person, which was not originally the intention, but as this project progressed, the depth possible in focusing on one person became apparent and spoke to the richness of this experience and its complexity.

During the go-along interviews with Nicole, we explored the DTES, vendors, and stores in the neighborhood and the network of relationships Nicole has in the community. Some of these excursions included Nicole purchasing things for her own home, picking up gifts for friends, and even finding things on the street that could be useful for herself and others. In the in-home interviews, Nicole showed me her home and how day-to-day living is affected by the constraints of the building and its management. While it may seem superfluous to interview Nicole multiple times in her home, her home has changed, and the various items in the rooms have stories. Nicole's autonomy in changing her room and the stories related to different belongings took time to unpack and discuss. It is a layered history of her life in many ways, an in-home archive. In addition to my work with Nicole, I also include some auto-ethnographic fieldnotes of my experience working alongside Nicole. These additional data points give context and texture to the overall narratives of this story. My auto-ethnographic accounts speak to some of the organizing work and how this research was shaped by outside forces.

These semi-structured and unstructured interviews were thematically coded into themes that highlight the role of belongings in SRO living and home-making processes. These themes were discussed with Nicole during the wind-down phase of fieldwork, during which we reflected on the data from the past year. While this research is about SRO tenants, it only provides vignettes and scenes of a much richer and more complex world of alterity that is shaped heavily by race, gender, sexuality, and the particularities of each SRO building. Nicole's specific positionality as a white queer woman shapes this

narrative in many ways. The SRO hotel is heavily male-dominated and can be a site of violence for women, particularly women of color. With that in mind, my own experiences as a Chicana queer woman in the building allow me to see some of the limitations to Nicole's vantage point and also the ways she uses care as a form of safety. As part of Nicole's positionality in the hotel, it is clear that as a non-SRO tenant, I will not always understand aspects of her life. In this thesis, I have included some contradictions and tension between scenes to highlight the unknowable ways that home can be understood. Nicole's experience is varied and contradictory at times, which speaks to the ways in which some experiences cannot be fully understood, nor need they be. My work with Nicole and other tenants still highlights the almost universal SRO tenant experience of institutional abandonment and the material conditions of the SRO hotel. I hope that through following along with these snippets of SRO life, we can see the nuance and constellation of solidarity that exists or can exist in this very particular form of housing. Along with the specific ethnographic methods, research as organizing and friendship as methodology is crucial to this research about home, belongings, and entanglements of power. These methods provide an intimate look into the ways belongings and home shape lives.

Chapter 5. Home as Belonging

In this chapter, I seek to unsettle how home is made in the SRO hotels through the role of belongings. Belongings refer to the tangible private property or possessions individuals use to survive and meet emotional needs. Belongings include functional and sentimental items that come together in home-making practices. I argue that belongings are relational and thus facilitate relationship-making that contributes to feelings of recognition between people that help to constitute home. This chapter investigates belongings as a mechanism through which such relationships unfold in SROs.

This chapter connects vignettes from my fieldwork that illustrate Nicole's relationships and the contradictory nature of home through her belongings. This data demonstrate how belongings, through the acts of gifting, purchasing, and trading, influence relationships with neighbors and home-making processes in SRO hotels. I argue that tenants make a space into home not only through tangible material possessions but also through the bonds built through these belongings that create relational networks amongst tenants. SRO tenants like Nicole use belongings to organize and build networks that provide for tenants when other means fail. I conclude that belongings' facilitation in relationship building helps tenants meet tangible and emotional needs in the challenging alternative homing processes that arise for precariously housed individuals.

5.1. Messiness of home: The changing nature of home and relationships

In order to understand the influence of belongings over relationships, it is first necessary to understand the challenges in classifying "home." Nicole's framing of home and how her belongings are implicated in her relationships play an essential role in determining home. Nicole is one SRO tenant, and her responses are her own. They cannot be extrapolated to the diverse array of tenants in an even more diverse array of buildings. Even more so, Nicole is a complicated person who has lived many lives of differing levels of precarity. Sometimes, I will not fully understand what Nicole means or why her answers change, but in this section, I want to think about home and relationships as unsettled. The

theme of “belongings influence over relationships” highlights the relational nature of home. Feelings of home can be dependent on many things. However, the ability to exercise autonomy, restore oneself, and build kinship ties are crucial elements that can make up the feelings of belonging that often constitute “home” (hooks, 1990). Borges’ (2018) work with Latinx migrants and the concept of homing are useful to consider here as the theme of belongings' influence over relationships highlights her framing of homemaking. Relationship building represents a form of home-making that does not rely on normative constructions of citizenship that place the state as the driver of relationships. Instead, it focuses on the building of relational networks amongst peers. The alternative feeling of belonging is critical because it allows tenants to circumvent the issues created by lacking stable access to landed property. Borges’ analysis of homing places the agency over “home” away from status or housing tenure and instead on the very political, everyday lives of marginalized individuals through relationships both to belongings and others (2018). The following vignettes highlight how experiences of home are tied to relationships in diverse and contradictory ways. I examine some of the contradictions of where home is for Nicole without necessarily delving into why these answers change. I want to keep in mind the nature of belongings' influence over relationships; I believe it is possible to see how relationships and belongings factor into a changing sense of home that becomes more visible throughout this chapter.

Vignette #1

“Nicole closed the photo album and set it on the shelf where she keeps items she needs to access quickly. She ponders the question I just asked her, her lips pursed as she thinks it through. For a moment, all I hear is the fan. “No, this is not home. This is my indoor closet. This is my closet with indoor plumbing. That's the basic way I see it. If you saw my home, you'd have to see Surrey. It's my dad's house. Yeah, that house was bought for me. My sister was in Winnipeg, and I was 12. At the time, I was turning 13. It was a month before I turned 13. Yeah, it was August, or no, it was July ‘86 when we moved into the house. And we went and looked at the house with my golden retriever. I'm like, this is the one, and I had my room picked out and my dog there. They were running around the backyard, and my mom and my dad were talking. And then my mom changed her mind. She didn't want to move in there. And I'm like, too late, Dad's buying the house for me. And he did, and he died in the house. (July 12, 2022, Nicole, Keefer Rooms)

This response comes from when I first asked Nicole if Keefer Rooms was her home. Her answer triggered a set of memories and connection to her dad and her childhood. At that moment, she was pulled back through time to the moment when she moved to Surrey. The photo album transported her through time into the relationships with her family, childhood, and experiences that she associated with home. However, this answer is not the only one she gave during our fieldwork. Two weeks later, in late July, we sat on a park bench, waiting to meet with a mutual friend. This time, I asked Nicole what home meant for her, and her answer surprised me.

"It's a feeling. It's not, it's not so much a roof over your head. It's a feeling. Like anywhere I've lived pretty much downtown so far, I haven't felt at home. I felt like I've lived in a closet with indoor plumbing. Right? Just it's home is when you feel comfortable. Just right. Like, safe. I have that feeling with my neighbors and stuff. So yeah, sometimes I do refer to this place now as home because I do feel safe there. And that's why I haven't moved. (July 26, 2022, Nicole, Keefer Rooms)

Her answer took me aback. Earlier, she seemed so sure that Keefer Rooms was not her home and could only be in Surrey, where she grew up. It was striking to see her thought process of where her home was at this moment. She paused to consider what it felt like for her to be at home and where, at that moment, she felt was most deserving of the term. Two weeks prior, when she had said Surrey was her home, we had just looked through her photo album. Her memories were fresh in her mind, and those bonds to that place were present in the room with us. Often, belongings such as photographs and clothing can become intermediaries between emotional states that occur when changing environments, such as when moving residences. These objects provide a sense of care and comfort, serving not only as sites of memory but also as a form of healing (Harrington-Watt, 2014; Svasek, 2012). The link between objects and their mobility helps Nicole determine what and where is worth remembering. This exercise in autonomy through Nicole's belongings' connection to herself and the past appeared to shift her understanding of where home was. I followed up with another question.

Marina: So, your home in Surrey, do you feel like it's gone back and forth between being your home and not being home?

Nicole: It was never home. It was just a homestead, an address, a secured address. And that's all it was. Like, none of my mail or ID or anything goes there anymore. All my mail

comes to my place now. I guess I could say that the Keefer Rooms is home. Yeah. Like it's not because of how I'm living. It's because of who I live around. Like when you [referring to Marina] think about home, where you're living now, It's not home. It's an apartment that you rent. When you think of home, it's back at the homestead with your family and in California. That's home to you.

Marina: Probably this year was the first year where I actually felt like this was my home.

Nicole: Because you've gotten closer and you built more bonds with people, it's not so weird, it's not weird at all. It makes sense. Because now you feel comfortable. You're feeling more secure. You can trust the people you work with. You can trust your friends. You can trust the relationships that you built. And that's why now, only now, is it starting to feel like home. (July 26, 2022, Nicole and Marina, Keefer Rooms)

When Nicole referenced my own feelings of home, and I was pulled into this research, the complexity of the concept of home became more evident to me. Nicole's relationships with her belongings and with those around her were unsettled and constantly changing. Nicole's connections through her belongings mold and shift relationships based on past experiences and connections to place, as seen through her placing of home at different times. Borges' (2018) work with Latinx migrants, in some ways, mirrors Nicole's changing of home in that recognizing home's ability to change offers a form of resistance and belonging that keeps individuals tethered to their lives. It highlights the temporalities in which home can exist and the ambiguity of placing home. The varying temporalities and relationships that make up home become imbued into the objects that perform the everyday.

The complexity of home is vital to note because it highlights its obscurity, and challenges the prevailing understanding that it is a fixed and bounded place, particularly as it is often understood within regimes of property as one's castle. The below thematic narrative of Nicole's belongings and experiences focuses on relationships and helps to untangle the feeling of belonging that often constitutes the ambiguities of home and how it may differ for precariously housed individuals.

5.2. Belongings influence relationships.

This section refers to how belongings influence trust in relationships, focusing on how belongings seem to facilitate the relationships of belonging that are often present in home-making processes. During my discussions with Nicole regarding her belongings, the role of her neighbors in home became very apparent. In one conversation sitting in her room, Nicole referred to what home meant for her:

"Everything [home] is about people, it's just the people. Honestly, it doesn't matter where you live. You can live in a townhome or condo. And you never know or meet any of your neighbors. You're always going to be feeling just a little off because if you see somebody poking their head out the door or you hear noise coming down the hall, you're never going to know exactly who's doing it and for what intention. You're always getting on eggshells. Like you're just never going to feel fully secure. Yeah, you know, it's just a roof over your head. You're never going to feel fully safe." (July 26, 2022, Nicole, Keefer Rooms)

Nicole's framing of home as being related to "people' was tied to feelings of safety, reciprocity, and personhood that are represented within this theme. Nicole referred to how she felt safe in her building as part of "trusting in the relationships" she built in the building. The vignettes and conversations with Nicole highlight how her belongings influence relationships and trust that contribute to her framing of "home." This section recognizes that home is a complicated and nuanced topic. Neither relationships nor home are consistent and static but constantly changing. As I explain, we can see this dynamism in relation to Nicole's belongings and associated relations with others.

5.2.1. Belonging(s): Under the influence of home and mutual aid.

To illustrate the role of belongings in relationships, it is necessary to understand how Nicole interacts with her belongings and neighbors in tandem. This can be seen in the importance of her bonds to her neighbors and the role of belongings in facilitating these bonds. The vignette below highlights the ways in which belongings build bonds between very different neighbors.

Vignette #2

It is a hot Tuesday afternoon; Nicole and I are sitting in two chairs in the three square feet of empty space in her room. She offers me a coke from one of her two mini-fridges, there are several different beers and drinks inside. "I always try to keep a beer or two in the fridge either for Jennifer when she stays over or when Brenda comes knocking at my door. Are you sure you don't want one?" I declined the soda. "Why does Brenda always come to your room?" "She's always needing a beer, so I give her one. She gets really aggressive when she drinks, so I'll drink one with her, not two. That one right there", Nicole points at the fridge to a Molson. "She gave that one to me to pay me back; she does that, and I just keep them in there for her." "The same one she gave you?" "Yeah, but I don't drink with her anymore. I just give her back the same beer she gave me". (July 26, 2022, Nicole, Keefer Rooms)

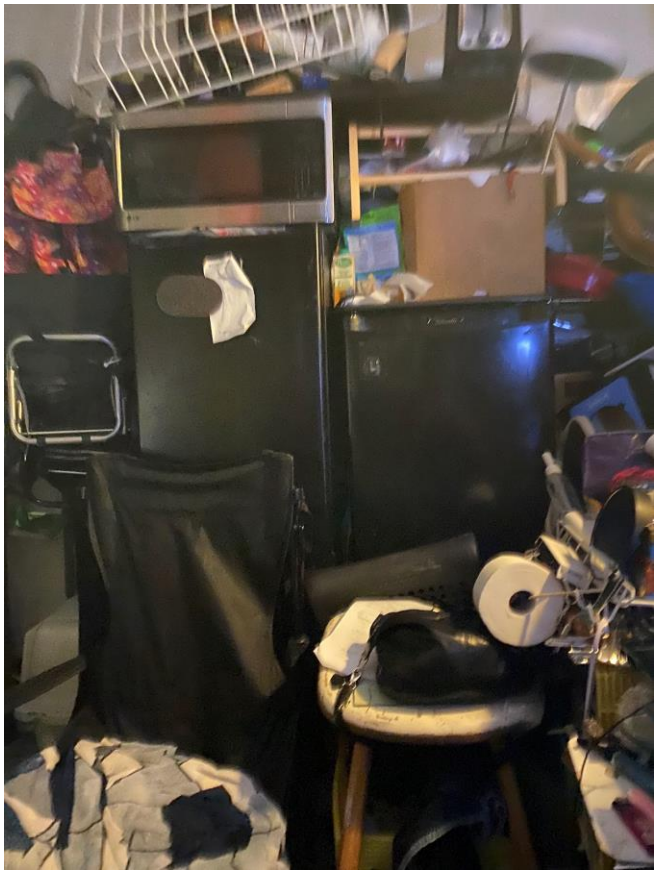

Figure 5.1 The two mini refrigerators within Nicole's room at the Keefer Rooms Hotel

During my time in the Keefer Rooms Hotel with Nicole, our discussions regarding her belongings and home continually referred to her neighbors. Nicole was very conscious of the people in her building, both from a position of trust and insecurity. As I have illustrated in the empirical context of the SROs section of this paper, SRO hotels often lack access to essential functions such as working doors and locks. Nicole argued that her "bonds" to her neighbors, especially those who were volatile, helped her to feel secure in the building. As the vignette above suggests, Nicole and her neighbor, Brenda, do not get along, and when I asked Nicole why she gave Brenda a beer, Nicole responded that she had something that Brenda needed. Nicole was explicit in asserting that she did not trust Brenda but that Brenda always paid her back. Eventually, it became easier to keep the same beer in the fridge to give to her without tapping into her own resources. While the individual beer continually passed hands, it was not the beer itself that was important. The beer represents helping her neighbor and acts in a relational way to build an interpersonal connection through a symbolic exchange.

Nicole did not lose or gain any material items from this exchange; instead, it was an exercise in care for two very different individuals who did not always get along. The SRO hotels have a diverse population of individuals with varying degrees of precarity and trauma. Most neighbors will not become lifelong friends. Brenda and Nicole share a bathroom, cooking facilities, and the precarity of living in an SRO, but not by choice. The sharing of the beer is an intentional choice that signifies their mutual autonomy. Nicole's consistent use of terms like "bond," "care," "trust," and "help" in our conversations around giving out harm reduction supplies or storage bags to others in the building highlighted her framing of these actions. Nicole's use of care here highlights how care is not only about the individual action but also a representation of the organizing work that Nicole does in her building, often using her belongings.

Beyond neighbourly relational work, Nicole's belongings played a significant role in her work as an organizer, where relationships are instrumental. Nicole's organizing tasks with SRO-C included canvassing her neighbors, training neighbors on overdose prevention, and helping to run committee meetings, for all of which she was given a stipend. Outside her official duties as an organizer, Nicole operated almost a commissary

out of her room at the Keefer. She had set informal hours where she kept an open-door policy, allowing individuals to come by to sell and trade items. She was known in the building as both a resource for food and other provisions. Nicole often met me in front of her building with a wagon of items from the neighborhood donation warehouse: clothing, storage bags, extra food, and things she found on her route. She kept these items for herself and the other tenants in her building. The importance of her work outside of formal organizing, where Nicole's role was as a neighbor and peer, illustrates how influential the sharing, exchange, and trading of belongings were in meeting both her own needs and those of her neighbors. The intentional exchange of belongings between neighbors was reciprocal and created a network of mutual aid where individuals could get items they needed often without leaving the building. Nicole's role in this network of mutual aid and care went beyond just being a neighbor. The relationships she made through these acts of care helped to shape the organizing relationships she'd have with these individuals in the future.

On another visit, I noticed that over six people stopped by Nicole's door to request harm reduction supplies or buy a cigarette and, in one instance, offer us some chocolate cake. Nicole referenced how these exchanges influenced her ability to meet her own needs. "I could get most things I need in 10 minutes if I ask someone; they all know me." (July 12, 2022, Nicole, DTES). Nicole's voice was confident when she spoke this. Nicole knew how to get resources in the building. She could place a call, knock on the door of a neighbor, and would get what she needed. This ability to meet her needs without leaving the building illustrated how the SRO tenant neighbors were able to create networks to meet each other's needs through their belongings, which created trust and mutual care. Beyond Nicole acting independently to provide opportunities to share, the culture of sharing and trading was pervasive. The role of Nicole's belongings in connecting her to her neighbors focused on reciprocity. Yet, it becomes clear that belongings do more than just provide materially. As exemplified previously by the sharing of the beer, belongings can also provide emotional comfort.

The following vignette diverges from the role of belongings in meeting material needs such as food, clothing, and harm reduction. Instead, it highlights how living

"belongings" can influence relationships often through care and companionship. As animals are technically the legal belongings of their owners, these belongings in the SRO often connect tenants to one another through entertainment (playing, visiting) and also through care.

> *Vignette #3: "I'm just going to run to the washroom real quick." Nicole left the room, and I sat in the chair facing the door. The fan blew air through the room out of the tiny space where the door was cracked open. There was an explosion of rattling behind me, and a little cat jumped through the window and over the fan. Without realizing it, she moved towards me and sat next to me. I reached my hand out to pet her when suddenly she let out an alarmed "MEOOOW." Nicole appeared at the door. "Lindsey! She called. "She thought you were me. I always sleep in that chair at night, and she cuddles up next to me." (July 19, 2022, Nicole, Keefer Rooms)*

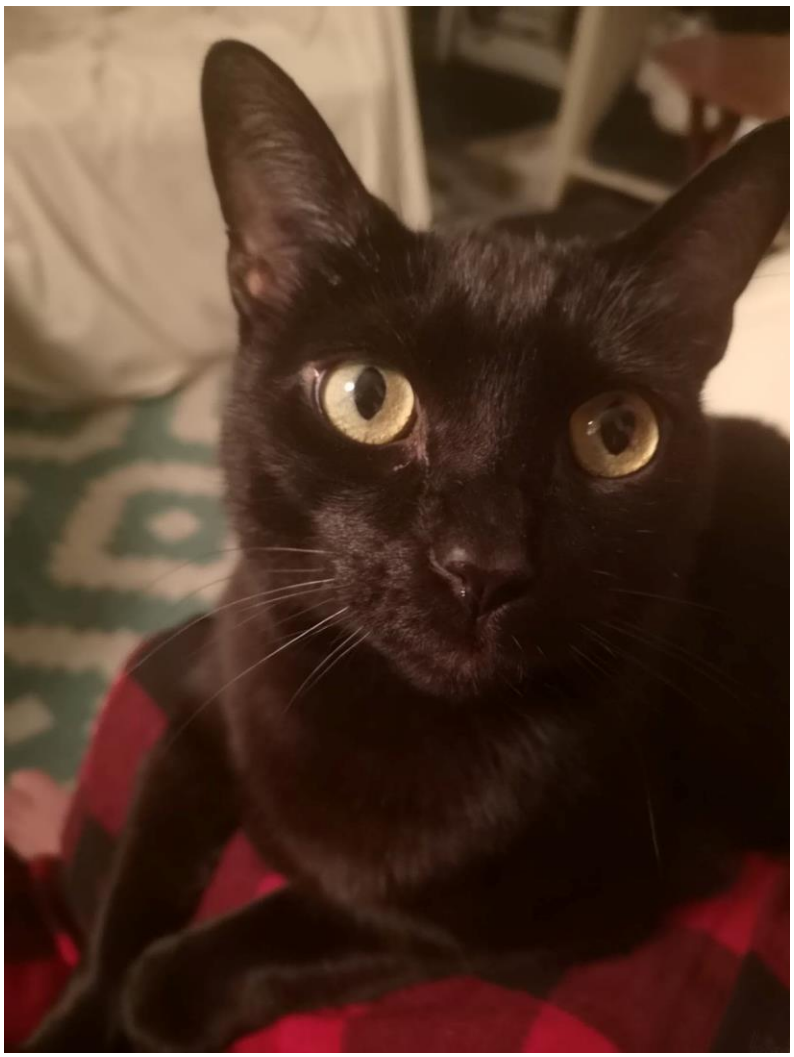

Fig. 2: Lindsay LowPaw immediately after being taken in by Nicole in the Lion Hotel.

Nicole inherited Lindsay Lowpaw, a black cat, after her friend and neighbor, Ron, passed away. Through their time together and relationship with Lindsay and Ron, Nicole built a deep friendship that led Ron (a member of R2R) to introduce Nicole to organizing in the SROs. As illustrated above, Nicole quickly started organizing in the SROs, beginning with community dinners and then with committee meetings, petitions, and donations. Nicole noted that often, she and Ron thought of themselves as Lindsay's human servants. *"It was her [Lindsay's] world, and we were just living in it." (July 19th 2022, Nicole, Keefer Rooms).* Nicole took in Ron's cat after he unexpectedly passed away, saving the cat from living on the streets, although Nicole was not allowed to have animals in her room at the Keefer Rooms. Initially, she hid Lindsay from the management and even neighbors. Eventually, Nicole was able to convince the manager to let her keep the cat largely because of Nicole's relationship with the manager and work in the building. The sway with management again highlighted how her relationships within the network of tenants influenced her ability to meet her needs, this time through Lindsay. Still, Nicole took Lindsay in without knowing how it would affect her tenancy but felt the urge to care for her friend's cat regardless of whether it would cause her eviction. Lindsay forged a bond between Ron and Nicole that went beyond Nicole's fear of eviction and even beyond death. Through Lindsay, Nicole remembered Ron and built connections with other tenants in the building.

While most of our conversations around Lindsay were about her memories of Ron, Lindsay lived outside Nicole's room, where she interacted with other tenants. Lindsay often roamed the halls of the Keefer Hotel, moving through other tenants' rooms and lounging on the roof of the building. She would catch mice and play with other tenants and their cats. She was a mostly welcome addition to the building, but importantly, she provided Nicole with a mechanism to exercise her relationship with Ron, who was no longer with her. The precarity of SRO living necessitates these deep relationships with even the most casual of neighbors, mainly when social isolation, overdoses, and infrastructure failures are a continual issue for tenants. Lindsay's role in helping to provide an avenue for tenants to feel care and trust in one another is essential. Her role was so

influential that Nicole risked her housing to ensure that Lindsay was with "family."

As evictions increase in the SROs and the stock of housing shrinks, finding new rentals is challenging. Nicole's willingness to risk her housing highlights her understanding of home through belongings and relationships. It is not about the housing unit that makes up Nicole's home. Instead, Ron and Nicole's bond through Lindsey provided care to Nicole and kept her connected throughout time to a dear friend, which helped build feelings of belonging and recognition. Additionally, Lindsay's visibility in the building also made her an ambassador for Nicole in building relationships with her neighbors. While I would not like to refer to Lindsay as just a belonging, she joins a more extensive process of relationship-making that comes out of the interactions between individuals and their things. These kinds of relationships that transcend time and death highlight how belongings influence relationships of care that can be useful in building the capacity to organize for housing justice.

5.2.2. The Future of Belongings and Relationships

In the aforementioned sections, I have focused on Nicole's relationships with her neighbors through the exchange of items and the care a beloved pet provides. This section takes these individuals' connections further to consider how belongings influence the processes of organizing more directly through the creation of a new organizing tactic.

As my fieldwork was ending and my discussions regarding belongings among the SRO tenants and staff organizers became more regular, a new initiative was created to address introducing new tenants in the SRO hotels to the SRO Collaborative. The work of Nicole as an organizer in her building through formal means (food deliveries, petitions) and informal (gifting, listening) demonstrates how belongings affected relationships. The work of belongings and their influence over relationships called forth a conversation around how these relationships and the work of SRO tenants such as Nicole can be expanded upon to create relational networks that better fight the institutional abandonment of the SROs. The SRO-C received a grant of $100,000 to create "SRO welcome kits for tenants facing the jarring experience of moving into a new SRO." These kits include

necessities and items that make living in an SRO easier, such as shower shoes, toiletries, shower caddy, bedding, and more items tenants could use or sell. These items introduced these tenants to the advocates and organizers in their buildings. The welcome kits had the potential to create relationships between organizers and tenants that are vital in mobilizing tenants. The kits gave legitimacy to the organization and gave tenants a sense that they could work on improving building conditions without the landlord's help. The belongings helped to connect these individuals and ground them in the reality of SRO living. The following vignette illustrates how these welcome kits function but also reinforces the importance of belongings in organizing.

Figure 5.2 SRO Welcome Kit example prepared by SPARC BC.

Vignette #4

Bryan [an SRO-C organizer] walked over to me after the meeting was over. "We just got the mock-up of a welcome kit. Do you want to see it?" I nodded enthusiastically. Bryan laid out the items in the plastic container before me. "This is everything they [SPARC BC, the funders] think we should have in the kit, but after talking with some tenants, ours will be different." I scan the items: toothbrushes, surge protectors, pillows, and an alarm clock. Bryan continued, "We'll have our tenant organizers look out for people moving into the building and then have them make the kits for folks who will need them. It will also include a gift card and information about the SRO-C."

Establishing a program such as this highlights the work belongings are already doing in the buildings, both in fostering relationships and continuing a legacy of care that tenants themselves were doing long before the SRO-C began to organize in buildings. This care is important because it reflects the necessity of care in social movements and organizing more broadly. Care is a survival strategy that is necessary in the SROs. The welcome kits exemplify this. They were tailor-made to reflect the needs of an SRO tenant, recognizing that some items will be sold, stolen, or given away. The goal was to offer support and solidarity to SRO tenants. This form of relational organizing is built upon the influence of belongings on relationships in home-making and radical care (Hobart & Kneese, 2020). The data throughout the last several sections highlighted that belongings are critical in creating networks of care between tenants that even extend into the realm of organizing. Nicole's hand in creating this program and her work with Bryan at the SRO-C highlights how the belongings have operated and who is now listening to them and perhaps taking their lead.

As illustrated through the work of animals, beers, and welcome kits, tenants' emotional and material needs and relationships are influenced by belongings. However, as prefaced at the beginning of this paper, the ambiguity of home and belongings directs us to another form of relationship without which the work of organizing could not exist. The last section focused on how belongings inform connections to others, but belongings not only influence relations to others, but they also shape the relationship to oneself. Much like the messiness of home, identity changes and relies on anchors that bind us to our senses of self. The memories and associations that belongings provide can often act as anchors and help to reaffirm and create subjectivities that connect individuals to each other. Belongings' role in the relationship to oneself offers a way of understanding how identity and self-determination play a role in homemaking. In other words, the relationship to oneself through belongings is essential to the ultimate goal of understanding how this theme influences home.

5.2.3. Belonging to Myself: The relationship to Personhood, Identity, and Home through belongings.

Returning to the relational nature of home and belongings, this section ties the theme of belongings' influence over relationships back to the personal nature of "home" and its complexity by focusing on how belongings influence relationships with oneself. This relationship with oneself is crucial in considering how belongings influence autonomy and identity. The following vignettes focus on Nicole and her personal connections to her belongings.

Vignette #5

Sitting together on a sweltering summer day in Nicole's room at Keefer Rooms, Nicole pulls out a big bag of clothing. It had been months since the laundry machine in the building broke, and Nicole had recently come into some money. The clothing in the bag all had tags on it and came from a couple of shops in Chinatown that Nicole would often frequent. "Look at this stuff I got; I think some of it won't fit me so you can have it if you want." Nicole smiled and started to pull clothing out of the bag. This dress here will work with my headscarf; they match pretty well." Nicole pulled each colorful item out of the bag one by one so that we could admire and sort through them together. "This one is a jumpsuit, but I don't really like the top part, so I think I'll probably cut it off and just wear the pants. "Nicole admitted she spent too much money on these clothes, some of which she knew wouldn't fit her when she bought them, but it's her "me time." (July 12, 2022, Nicole, Keefer Rooms)"

Many people can relate to the experience of a shopping trip, of purchasing things that make one feel good. These items that one purchases play a role in one's well-being both negatively and positively. The lack of laundry facilities in Keefer Rooms and bodily changes made clothing a critical purchase for Nicole. The clothing was an assertion of her feminine identity and pride in the functionality and beauty of her fashion choices. The "me time" that Nicole refers to is when she restores and reaffirms who she is without the weight of precarity and struggle in the DTES. Often, research and media place tenants like Nicole into neatly categorized boxes marked only by oppression (Tuck, 2009). But Nicole did not see herself in this way. Her belongings allowed her to break this mold and reconnect with her sense of personhood outside of the precarity she experiences, even when the belongings also cause it (as discussed below). In addition to the role of her clothing in asserting herself

and her sense of well-being, Nicole's nails and other personal belongings also affected her relationship with herself, bridging the gap between her relationships with others and, ultimately, her ability to build home.

Vignette #4

Nicole and I walk through the aisles of a Rexall Drug store, moving to the press-on nails section. Nicole points out several different sets with rhinestones and glitter." I think these are on sale; I'm going to get them. I like these ones the best because they're easier to wear every day. The other ones are a bit too long". I agreed with her and asked about a pair of earrings on the rack nearby. "I used to wear earrings and stuff, but it's really hard with my skin. This is the only feminine thing that I do .... the only consistent girly thing I can do. I like my nails to sparkle across the room." (Aug 2, 2022, Nicole, Rexall Drugs)

Nicole's nails are a big deal. It is rare to see her without a bedazzled hand. She usually wears nails or is in the process of transitioning from one set to another. In the men-dominated and precarious space of the SRO hotel, expressions of gender can provide an avenue for reaffirming a sense of self, especially when facing constraints that hinder gender affirmation. Nicole is tough, she can fight, and she has worked in construction, but the importance of her feminine identity often lies in her belongings, clothing, jewelry, and nails. Although this is not the only role, the belongings offer a form of expression related to Nicole's deep-seated sense of self or self-care. In addition to the self-care provided by items, there is a role of the past and the items associated with them that bridge the connection between oneself and the connections to other people. Nicole's nails help to connect her to various parts of her life and her memories as a child, a dancer, and a mother, all of which are deeply rooted in her sense of self. The nails offer a medium through which Nicole can express femininity in a way that is accessible, especially when health issues and lack of resources make other forms of expression difficult.

The connection to the past was also apparent in our conversations around other items like jewelry or her late father's leather jacket, which helped to connect Nicole to her life before living in an SRO and, at the same time, helped to bridge the gap between places. The coat was worn by her father every winter until his passing. She associated the jacket with him and their relationship. Nicole was reminded of her childhood home and role as a daughter when she wore this jacket and smelled her father's cologne. The coat had an

additive effect as it represented her identity and sense of home in a new place she identifies as home. The bridging of time and place connects to the role of belongings in tethering individuals to particular places or people. The jacket and Nicole's nails act almost as a throughline in Nicole's past and current iterations of home and self. Nicole's framing of home as related to "people" highlights that her sense of self, connections to others, and place are tied in many ways in her belongings.

5.3. Belongings and connection to home

"Home is where the heart is, and it is who you share that space with that makes it home. It's not about the place you're in. Any space can be home, if you build it, and it comes with the environment, the people. Yeah. And honestly, like, if my friends are more like family, yeah, it's easier to build a home." (Feb. 2023, Nicole, Empress Hotel)

This chapter aims to understand how SRO tenants use belongings to improvise a space that becomes a home. I believe these vignettes and excerpts of Nicole's life and our time together highlight the unique work that belongings do to encourage processes of homemaking. Often, literature around property and belongings highlights belongings' role in tangibly making home or connecting individuals to their sense of personhood. This section theorizes that precariously housed individuals may move away from possessive individualized notions of property to instead focus on the relational nature of both home and property. In the previous sections, I considered how Nicole's belongings can build networks of care between neighbors and within oneself in an SRO. The importance of Nicole and Brenda bonding over a beer, Nicole selling or buying things from her neighbor, and the overall relationships that form through belongings help to create a sense of home for Nicole. These moments I shared with Nicole and her neighbors highlight the different framings of home at work. The nature of home in the SRO for Nicole does not focus on her individual room but rather on the connections to people in the building.

Unpacking this a bit further, concepts of home are often entangled with notions of nation-building, possession, and rational ways of living (Nethercote, 2022; Bhandar, 2018; Roy, 2017). There is a legacy of settler-colonialism, displacement, and racial

banishment to reflect upon when considering the subjecthood of SRO tenants and who can lay claim to home and property (Roy, 2017). This legacy lives within the confines of the SRO hotels and within the DTES more generally. The history of institutional abandonment and hyper-surveillance that befalls the DTES speaks to the location of SRO tenants within a hierarchy of property and subjecthood. The political subjectivities of SRO tenants such as Nicole are as marginalized as their access to property. It is a reminder that the middle-class white suburban dream of no shared walls and everything within the confines of one's own property is not something accessible to the SRO tenants of the DTES. The communal living of SRO hotels (shared bathrooms, kitchens, facilities) promotes enmeshed experiences of property relations at multiple scales. For Nicole, and perhaps other SRO tenants in the DTES, using belongings to create relationships is its own form of "self-authored subjectivity" from which another framing of home emerges (Roy, 2017).

I argue that exchange, gifting, and the use of belongings illustrate that unlike the normative understandings of home and possessive individualism, the forms of belonging and recognition in the SRO are not based on individualistic ways of living but instead on relationships to one another. The use of home within the dominant property logic often ties land property to ideas of home. The concept of home coincides with determining the domain of private life from public, the appropriate conditions needed to be productive within society, and who has full access to these "homes". This suggests that SRO tenants do not have "homes." The inability to appropriately use property and home to forward the colonial agenda of nation-building means that SRO tenants do not "belong." Yet, the work of Nicole suggests otherwise.

5.3.1. Alternative Belonging

The work of Nicole and other tenants in the building illustrates an alternative form of belonging that focuses on care. Unlike individualized notions of home and conformity, the use of belongings shown within these vignettes highlights a radical ethics of care that is instrumental in organizing and remaining housed. Radical care is characterized as a shift from an increasingly individualized form of care to instead an understanding of care as a critical strategy of survival that marginal individuals use to

survive and cope within capitalist societies (Hobart & Kneese, 2020). This shift in care is useful in understanding Nicole's work because it highlights how relating communal efforts of care, belonging, and property can provide an avenue for organizing even beyond welcome kits. My research with Nicole shows that belongings can act as primers to these organizing relationships that help tenants meet tangible needs in ways that respect their agency and establish their sense of personhood and feeling of home. Ananya Roy's research with the Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign addressed alternative homing processes by following the organizing efforts of precariously housed residents of Chicago to meet needs and remain housed by reclaiming vacant homes in ways similar to Nicole and her neighbors. These residents reclaimed boarded-up homes by moving into them and breathing life into "peopleless houses." The collective efforts of homesteading highlighted a shift away from individualized possessive claims to property and, thus, home. Instead, the residents worked together to create possibilities out of poor conditions. Roy refers to these tactics of homemaking as "emplacement," a defensive home-making and re-making that struggles against the denial of subjecthood (2017). Roy highlights the menagerie of mismatched chairs, dining tables, community dinners, and items that illustrate the work that belongings do in building this reclamation of home.

While homemaking in this example focused on the political implications of reclaiming home, it is still similar to the way Nicole uses belongings as a method of survival and organizing. The belongings and care that go into them provide a place of belonging and home that can circumvent the cat-and-mouse game that the state plays. The key difference here is how I frame belongings in opposition to land-based property. The work of SRO tenants like Nicole in taking up care and home in defiance of the poor conditions and continual disruption of home highlights a similar alternative subjecthood or belonging that does not center landed property. When faced with unmet needs and poor conditions, Nicole was able to use her belongings to flesh out relationships that helped her to meet her needs without waiting on state interventions.

The use of belongings intentionally and otherwise to build mutual aid networks highlights how their usage differs from land-based property. The reclaimed boarded-up houses in Chicago can come and go, but the feeling of hope and possibility remains

within the belongings themselves and their stories. The homing process is tied to the relationships imbued within the land and non-land property, but more so for Nicole in her belongings. Her cat, the sharing of belongings, and the relationships within her treasured possessions are more telling of home than the land could be, likely due to her struggles to access landed property, including the SRO unit in which she resides. The belongings link her to her neighbors in a web of exchange and gifting that highlights their mutual precarity but also their capacity to organize and care for one another despite differences and challenges. Nicole's specific framings and experiences of relationships with her neighbors come from an intentional need to interact and organize. Nicole's interaction with her neighbors often happens in the form of recognizing one another's capacity to meet each other's needs through belongings. The struggle to keep home when it is constantly under threat by gentrification, unlawful eviction, and otherwise highlights a different way of understanding home and property as relational. The belongings worked to create home for Nicole in that they created the relationships that plugged her into networks of care that influenced her ability to meet her needs – emotional, social, physical, etc. By examining belongings, the fluid nature of home and ways of relating to one another in the building became clearer to me. The chaotic and congregate living environment of the SRO makes it impossible for tenants to use property in ways that exclude and enforce individualized ownership; instead, in order to feel secure and safe in their units, they must build relationships with those who can help or hinder their ability to make home. By recognizing their mutual precarity and ability to help one another, tenants like Nicole move away from a property logic enforced by the state to instead see property as relational. Ultimately, Nicole's building of bonds in the building influenced her ability to get what she needed, which ultimately is the most critical part of living precariously.

5.3.2. Conclusion

Through trying to understand the relationship between belongings and home, the relational nature of property became a cornerstone of this research. By moving away from what Singer referred to as the "ownership model," SRO tenants such as Nicole may have a unique perspective of home and, as a result, on property (Singer, 2000; Blomley, 2004). The work of the SRO-C and their tenant organizers on capitalizing on the networks of

mutual aid in the SROs highlight how these findings may refer not only to Nicole but also to how other tenants come to understand home and relationships through their belongings. Gifting, trading, and sharing offer a way to build relationships that perhaps can be expanded upon through efforts such as welcome kits. This is important to consider when SRO tenants and other precariously housed individuals constantly lose belongings through eviction, fires, and theft. The loss of belongings from regulators like fire inspectors, landlords, and police officers means that precariously housed individuals are constantly in the process of losing relationships that ground them to place and to themselves. The unmaking of home and the ability to continually remake it is a crucial component to living precariously. However, before delving into how home is continually remade and the vantage points that exist for SRO tenants, it is necessary to consider the role of belongings in unmaking home. The following chapter examines vignettes of Nicole's experience of belongings and home as seen through precarity and fire.

Chapter 6. Home in the (un)Making

In this chapter, I seek to answer how SRO tenants use their belongings to make space into home by considering how tenant belongings increase precarity but also can be used to defy it. The ways in which belongings unmake home was not originally a part of this research. However, due to the extenuating circumstances of the Keefer fire, my research questions shifted to consider not only how SRO tenants make spaces into home through their belongings but also how belongings can serve to unmake home. This chapter connects data from interviews and participatory observation from the weeks before and after the Keefer Fire to consider how belongings create and subvert precarity for SRO tenants.

I show first that belongings are used by landlords and other regulators to delegitimize SRO tenant homes as a means of control and displacement and then, secondly, demonstrate how SRO tenants can use their belongings to undercut the effects of precarity by continuing to make home anyway, not in spite of the challenges but parallel and intersecting to them.

The first theme, exploring belonging's influence on precarity, is broken down into two distinct sub-themes that emerge from within the fieldwork through the circumstances of the Keefer Fire and the unique conditions of the SROs and Nicole's response to them. The first sub-theme is defined by circumstances where belongings were threatened, stolen, sequestered, or access was denied, as shown through semi-structured interviews and autoethnographic vignettes. The second sub-theme explores the ways in which SRO tenant belongings are weaponized by landlords through claims of 'hoarding'. Conversely, the second theme considers the relation between belongings and precarity by considering how belongings can subvert precarity. It pays close attention to how the circumstances of the belongings influence homemaking. .

6.1. Belongings increase precarity.

To begin to understand the influence belongings have over precarity, it is necessary to understand the context in which this theme emerges. In the year this research

was conducted, Nicole lived in three different buildings, and moved a total of four times within the last three years. Each move that Nicole undertook was deeply connected to her belongings. Two moves resulted from conflicts following the alleged theft of her belongings, and one resulted from a fire that destroyed her belongings. The Keefer Fire started less than three months into my fieldwork and was catalyzed by the poor material conditions and management of SRO hotels that launched Nicole and her belongings into further precarity - unmaking her home and disrupting the relationships embedded in those belongings. The following narrative foregrounds the destabilizing of Nicole's belongings by showing how deeply intertwined their belongings were with the response to the fire. The narrative focuses on the damaging conditions of the hotel after the fire, the lack of support, and the disregard for tenant belongings shown by the landlord and the city through their absence and control.

6.1.1. The Keefer Fire

I found out about the Keefer Fire in September 2022 through a grainy video of smoke coming from a far-off tower posted to Facebook. It quickly became apparent that it was the Keefer Rooms Hotel, and my heart sank. I frantically messaged the Right to Remain Group chat to check on Nicole. Bryan, the SRO-C organizer, responded quickly, "We spoke this morning, she's okay." I followed up quickly, "What about Lindsey?" Bryan responded with a photo of Nicole hugging her cat. I felt relieved but also panicked. Where would these tenants and their belongings go? Bryan and the SRO organizers immediately devised a plan to organize volunteer drivers to help the Keefer tenants move. I was the first to arrive.

I spent three days with my car and a U-Haul helping Keefer tenants move. Some moved to a street corner carrying whatever they could take or lay out on the sidewalk. The landlord gave tenants three days to sort, clean, and take what was salvageable from their rooms. Standing on the street corner waiting for the next tenant to be ready to load the car, I could hear the frustration and bickering of tenants in the worst of situations. Nicole's already crowded and disorganized room had been ransacked by the second day, making it even more challenging to sort and organize. Many of her belongings were stolen, including the soldering gun that belonged to her late father.

The hotel manager sat in front of the hotel against the boarded-up Chinese food restaurant, Gain Wah, a prominent establishment in the DTES. A little table was given to her by a tenant who was unable to take it with them. The table had tiny slivers of paper and pens laid out across it. These papers were liability slips for anyone entering the watery, mildew building. The legal language amounted to a little more than "enter at your own risk." I entered the building several times to check on Nicole and other tenants. The smell was unforgettable. The drywall had begun to crumble in the century-old building. The paint was peeling, and the mildew, slush of drywall, bugs, and other slime spilled out into the hallway. The only lighting came from flood lights strung down the hall like Victorian streetlights. The smell was intense but not as bad as the cacophony of sorrow and curse words echoing in the halls.

Even before the fire, the Keefer Rooms Hotel was a neglected, crumbling century-old building that, for lack of a better term, was a powder keg. The conditions of the Keefer Rooms Hotel and the subsequent response to the fire highlight the condition of the SROs and their effects on residents. The three days of access to the building and, for some, placement in a new building was the extent of the support offered by the owner and management of the Keefer Rooms Hotel. The building was shuttered for the foreseeable future, pending renovations. Over fifty tenants were displaced, with many moving to friends' places or the streets. On moving day, the tenants brought only the belongings they could carry or fit into my car. This meant they were forced to make hard decisions and leave many belongings behind. One tenant took only their drum set out of the building, leaving behind all other belongings.

Nicole was able to move to the Silver Avalon, a hotel four blocks away owned by the same landlord as the Keefer Rooms Hotel. Nicole's belongings contributed significantly to her ability to re-make her home in the new building, first, with the amount of belongings and, second, their mobility. Nicole's unit contained layers of items packed away in sections of her room that spoke to different parts of her life. The room was filled with family heirlooms, DVDs, laundry, food, toiletries, and items buried so deep Nicole may not have realized they were there. All these items had to move with her into the new building - her security and sense of home depended on it. Nicole was in the process of renovating her room when the fire happened, which meant items she planned

to give away, items she wanted to store, and the important items of her every day life were being reorganized. She had figured out a system for her toiletries to prevent her from accidentally grabbing a towel used for cleaning instead of a face towel. Her photo albums and jewelry were stored near the chair she slept in for easy access. All of these belongings act as both an extension of Nicole and a victim and agent of the processes that lead to precarity. The following section highlights how fire and belongings were implicated in the precarity that came after.

6.1.2. Aftermath of the Keefer Fire

Although the Keefer fire had not been an SRO tenant's fault, the tenants were subjected to the brunt of the fallout. In a community crowd-funded fundraiser, $35,000 was raised for the restaurant downstairs, while only $5,000 was raised for the fifty displaced tenants. The landlord said renovating the building would take over a year, at which point tenants who remained in the area could move back. During this year, there was no support, and many tenants moved to buildings with higher rents.

Figure 6.1: The 2x5 storage unit procured by the Right to Remain.

With all her belongings, Nicole had to decide how to prioritize getting as many items as possible in less than three days. The new unit did not have room for her belongings, some of which were damaged by the crumbling drywall and sprinkler system. The already impossible task of organizing her belongings became more challenging. The fire and its mismanagement by the landlord sent Nicole and her belongings into the world with few means to tether them together. The options for Nicole's belongings were a storage unit paid for by the Right to Remain for three months, the abandoned, dilapidated restaurant space under the Silver Avalon Hotel, or a drive to a relative's house 40 km from the Downtown Eastside. Ultimately, some items went into storage, most into the restaurant space and the rest into the garage of a house too far away to be accessed daily. Nicole had limited access to her belongings, due to the surveillance of the hotel's management and that of the storage unit. As a result, Nicole had to enter into a relationship with other individuals in order to access her belongings.

At the storage facility site, Nicole was unable to rent a storage unit without a credit card nor access her belongings without written approval. Together, we toured four different storage facilities before we were accepted under the condition that I join the lease with her. The facilities we visited were not direct in their language, but the meaning was clear, “Is the storage for you…or her?” “Does she have a credit card”? “What kinds of things will you be storing? If they are too dirty, we cannot accept them.” They directed these questions to me despite Nicole standing beside me. Nicole knew what they meant by the sheer amount of discrimination she faced as a resident of the DTES. The constraints of finding a storage unit and the stipulations were a reminder that storage facilities are owned by people who have direct control over one’s belongings. As with Nicole herself, the safety of her belongings relies on the discretion of landlords.

Figure 6.2: The restaurant storage space under the Silver Avalon Hotel.

Like the storage facility manager, the manager of the Silver Avalon had the only direct access to the restaurant space under the building. It was held open with only a water cooler jug as we moved items in. It was a damp room with a compromised ceiling and mold on the walls. It had no cubbies or totes. It was loosely sectioned off by each fire victim's items with no safeguards against theft. Tenants had one month to use this space before the belongings would be discarded. Nicole was not informed of this policy until her items were nestled into the corner of the room. This limited time meant that Nicole had only one month to sort, wash, clean, and dispose of any items in the space before they were thrown away. These barriers made it difficult for Nicole to make her new unit into a home as she was worried that her collection of stored DVDs, clothing, and tools could be stolen or destroyed. The scattering of Nicole's belongings into the care of landlords, storage facility managers, and relatives meant that Nicole's autonomy and access to everyday functional items were hindered. This hindrance led to the apparent theft of Nicole's belongings in the restaurant space by a close friend who was helping her sort and move her belongings. This theft of belongings set into motion a series of events that would lead to her eviction from this new hotel, the Silver Avalon,

Nicole reflected on these events, highlighting that when items began to go missing, she suspected theft. However, as it escalated, it became clear to Nicole that this individual was no longer helping her. The fallout of this relationship led to her eviction from the building. The Silver Avalon was known within the community as a men-only SRO, and Nicole's inclusion in the building came only as a courtesy because of the fire. Her interpersonal conflicts and the "drama" she caused contributed heavily to this eviction. The building manager gave her an extra month to move out of the building, but this eviction coincided with the end of Nicole's storage unit. Nicole paid several hundred dollars a month to renew the storage unit, which had a significant financial impact as Nicole, like many tenants, paid over 90% of her income on rent. Again, Nicole had to think through how to move, store, organize her belongings, and make new connections within another hotel– The Empress.

Nicole's belongings directly affected her ability to remake her home following the Keefer Fire. The mental toll of accounting for the items, the functional need to access

them, and the loss of these items illustrate how Nicole's autonomy was linked to her belongings. The control over her belongings by landlords, building managers, neighbors, and storage facility managers highlights how Nicole's ability to make home and remain grounded and connected to her community are often in the hands of others. This is just one way in which belongings increase the precarious circumstances of SRO tenants, such as in Nicole's life. While fires have effects on all people and their belongings, they are exacerbated in spaces of heightened precarity, like SROs.

Moving on past the effects of the Keefer Fire, the circumstances of the fire were made more difficult by the barriers often created by belongings. Regardless of the hotel Nicole lived in, barriers such as having too many belongings or clutter were commonplace in the SRO hotels, especially in units of less than 125 square feet. The following section underscores the role of belongings in the precarious situation of hoarding. The vignettes signal the role of belongings in creating precarious situations and reveal the distance between SRO's ways of living and normative understandings of home.

6.1.3. Hoarding and Precarity

Vignette #1

Sitting together in her room, Nicole signaled to the wall of garbage bags behind her. Each bag was stacked upon furniture that was no longer visible. The bags pushed us towards the door and against the wall. Nicole explained, "The Manager's given me looks. She hasn't made any comments yet. But I know if she comes and does another inspection, with the room the way it is … Yeah, that'll be it. I'd have a notice to clean it up right now. And I got only so much time to get rid of some of it because this is starting to become a fire hazard. She understands the dirty laundry pile because of the machines. And I have been looking at ordering a portable washing machine." (July 19, 2022, Nicole, Keefer Rooms Hotel)

Most SRO tenants face a lack of space in their unit, especially when all cooking supplies and toiletries must be stored in the same 100 sq. ft. where one keeps one's bed, clothing, and tools. The lack of storage and adequate space for tenants highlights the expected number of belongings a tenant should have. However, this expectation conflicts with tenants' understanding of the items necessary for living comfortably. There is often

a lack of cooking facilities and working laundry in the SROs, which influences the amount of belongings one may have. The stack of garbage bags that towered over us in our talks at the Keefer was full of clothing that Nicole could not wash. The building's machines were broken for a little over three months. All of her clothes were piled in garbage bags behind her, waiting for access to a functioning machine, as the DTES has no clean, reliable laundry facility. Her inability to wash the clothes in the neighborhood and the unit's minimal space made this a concern for the landlord. The garbage bags were labelled a violation of fire safety and deemed to be an example of "hoarding." Nicole had already received several notices regarding the condition of her room. The management of this hotel could have evicted Nicole at any point due to the conditions, even though it was due to the neglect of their own facilities. Belongings, therefore, become weaponized by landlords. Nicole regularly purchased new clothing to make up for the soiled clothing, most of which could not be saved.

The purchase of clothing increased her precarious situation as the room filled further. As mentioned previously, SRO tenants like Nicole pay 90% of their income on rent, which makes purchasing new clothing difficult. Even if the management had fixed the laundry machine, Nicole would have spent days washing and sorting, which disrupted her ability to work, attend to her everyday tasks, and organize her room. The lack of space in SRO units also distorts what is considered hoarding, as tenants often do not have built-in storage or a closet. The criterion for defining what constitutes hoarding is based on the standards of suburban homeowners living in multi-roomed houses (Lauster, 2016). Inside the SROs, the same Hoarding Rating Scale developed by clinicians is posted in hotel lobbies by managers to assess hoarding in 100 sq ft (Lauster, 2016). The threat of eviction due to her belongings imposed by poor facilities and small space highlighted how belongings can be a means of control.

After considering how hoarding is misapplied to SRO tenants due to their impossible circumstances, the next vignette furthers the case for how SRO tenants are unable to manage the belongings in their space due to the constraints of SRO living.

Vignette #2

"Yeah, I don't care. I let him call me it [Hoarder]. Like in the condition it is, I would, I would call me a hoarder. Yeah, I know I'm not because I have no problem with letting shit go. It's that I have too much shit that I can't go through and sort every time I open up a box, just one box, and when I start going through it, I get people knocking on my door. So, what happens? Everything gets just thrown back into the box. Put back up on the shelf, right back into the pile or whatever, or into another pile, or into boxes. So, then those two boxes get stuck because every time I start, something interrupts me. Because I have very little space, I have to throw it all back in the box. I have done nothing but waste time." (July 19, 2022, Keefer Rooms)

An important narrative emerged from analyzing this data regarding Nicole's belongings related to how hoarding is solved. The concept of hoarding repeatedly surfaced in our conversations. As mentioned previously, the lack of laundry facilities in the building increased the number of belongings and thus decreased the space Nicole had in her room. Yet, this is not the only way the hoarding affects precarity in the SROs. The lack of space in the SROs is not a problem that can be solved, for there is a finite amount of space within those units. The inadequate space to store and sort belongings constrains the SRO tenant despite them paying upwards of $600 for their room and thus becomes their problem to solve while landlords and inspectors threaten eviction. For comparison, a renter of a room in a home will typically have access to the kitchen space to store food and cookware, the bathroom to use the shower, and the living room space. An SRO tenant must keep all of the cookware, toiletries, and living necessities within the 100 sq ft space, which highlights how hoarding becomes a form of policing that assumes what is capable of being a functioning home and who is responsible for assessing it. Belongings, this time in the form of hoarding, create more precarity while potentially being able to solve it. The next section looks at instances where Nicole makes home happen anyway, not in spite of these challenges but parallel and intersecting to them.

6.2. Belongings Subvert Precarity

As the aforementioned sections have illustrated in detail, belongings can become a significant challenge that can lead to theft, eviction, and loss of autonomy. Yet, despite these circumstances, an interesting counter-perspective emerged from my conversations

with Nicole. The following section refers to how the unmaking of home through hoarding and other precarious circumstances is undercut through her use of belongings. The unmaking of home through the process of continual displacement and devaluation of tenants and their belongings cannot deter them from making a place into a home. The space of mobility and uncertainty that the individuals and their belongings face during a displacing event becomes the status quo that changes their understanding of home even further beyond the limits of normative society. In a study of communities experiencing forced migration or "protracted displacement," migrants continued to dream of their futures and organize their daily lives. The sense of needing to be "put back in place" in order to create home was resisted, and instead, home was imagined as a constellation of contradictory feelings and temporalities (Brun & Fabos, 2015). The next section highlights both the resistance to these mechanisms of unmaking and the ways in which the processes of harm and displacement are presupposed, and home happens anyway. Belongings subvert precarity and perhaps remake what precarity is through hoarding and home-making practices.

6.2.1. Precarity Becomes Her: How Home Happens Anyway

In continuing with the theme of precarity, this section diverges from the work of the previous section that focuses on the ways in which belongings influence precarity to focus on understanding how precarity and belongings factor into the ways that home continues to be made and re-made within the oppressive systems that threaten it. This section is complex in that both precarity and stability intertwine and separate in varying contexts. The messiness of SRO living means that normative understandings of precarity often don't quite fit. In circumstances such as hoarding, hoarding is both precarity-inducing and a means to homemaking. Even further, I suggest that regulation in the context of hoarding in the SROs is often a tool of control rather than of health and safety.

I begin first with the ways in which what appears to be hoarding happens in the SRO and how this form of precarity influences homemaking. In my many discussions with Nicole regarding hoarding, she did not realize that the conditions of her room would be considered hoarding based on the standards set by clinicians (Lauster, 2016). The

conversation started with “I look like a hoarder, but I’m not one.” and changed into a conversation about the specific items in her home and the constraints she faces in maintaining her room in the order that is demanded of her by management. The policing of her home through inspections by landlords, managers, and fire inspectors fails to acknowledge how hoarding standards could be harmful. Nicole does not follow this standard anyway, although I suspect she tries. Like many SRO tenants, the mechanisms to meet needs do not align with homemaking in this form. Instead, Nicole’s accumulation of possessions and the apparent messiness of living are often useful to her so long as it is kept under the radar. Nicole is resourceful and imagines the potential of any item she comes across. Her home is a testament to that. The belongings that she brings home or gives away are always in flux, and the mobility of what might appear to be a static mess highlights Nicole’s ability to get the things she needs. The following vignette highlights Nicole’s ability to see the potential around her.

Vignette #3: Nicole and I walked on yet another hot day to the corner store. We picked out some drinks and then walked over to a bench in the park. On the walk, we moved past a pair of crutches lying beside a bus stop. Nicole stopped and started inspecting the crutches. Carefully, I saw that she was taking the screws off the crutch. Soon after, I watched her slowly peel the cushion off the top of the crutch. I asked her what this was for. She responded that screws are often anywhere from 10-90 cents, so they are useful to have in her toolbox. “What about the cushion? ““I know a lot of people on crutches, and the cushion on them wears out, and you can’t find a new one, so every time I see one in good condition, I take it.” (August 2, 2022, Nicole, Downtown Eastside)

Nicole sees utility where many people would not. Along with the crutches, Nicole finds items that would be useful to herself and others. Part of living in SROs is the ability to improvise and imagine possibilities, even within the confines of the SRO. As SRO tenants are constantly facing challenges associated with habitability, Nicole can use the extra screws to modify her home or put up shelving. The cushion can be used to trade with a neighbor or help a friend. Yet, these items still take up space, even the small screws. Nicole even purchased a mini-powered laundering device in hopes of using it to clear her bags of laundry. Belongings in an SRO can be about function, preparing for future needs, and security. In relation to security, “hoarding” can often prevent individuals from knowing what kinds of possessions one has in their room. If it looks like

a mess, the location of drugs, money, and heirlooms can be obscured, deterring intruders or even friends and neighbors who are desperate for money and easy items to sell.

As previously illustrated, however, hoarding can also create precarity, as it can lead to fire, eviction, and pests, but the circumstances of the SROs in their state of disarray mean that most hotels already contain all of those elements. The usage of hoarding to meet needs and also for security highlights how a "precarious" circumstance can be subverted into a useful practice. This is but one way SRO tenants can build homes within the circumstances of precarity, often without directly resisting it. In this case, belongings' influence over precarity underscores belongings' ability to create and act within precarity to build home.

This following vignette illustrates the ways in which the precarity of impending eviction is disregarded in the name of homemaking, particularly highlighting the different roles belongings play in relation to precarity.

Vignette #4

A Facebook messenger notification appeared on my phone, and I looked to see a message from Nicole. "Look at the photo I just sent you." I opened the message, and before me was a picture of a beautifully tiled sink. "Did you do that? It looks amazing." I responded. Before Nicole knew she would be evicted, we took a trip to the dollar store, where Nicole purchased a roll of peel-and-stick tiles she planned to use on her sink to make a kitchen area. She had completed it after knowing she would be evicted. A few days later, I went to her home and asked her why she decided to tile it even after knowing she couldn't stay. She responded, "I just looked at it, and I thought no man is gonna sit there and go, 'Oh, I don't like that ugly wall.' Like, I'm gonna fix that. I couldn't stand looking at it the way it was. It made me crazy. So, I made it

look attractive and I could actually go up to my sink and enjoy myself, brush my teeth, wash my hands, wash my dishes, whatever. But it looked nice and attractive. When I go up and start up and make tea or whatever, it was attractive and enjoyable." (January 2023, Nicole, Silver Avalon Hotel)

Figure 6.3: Tiled sink and DIY fruit basket completed by Nicole at the Silver Avalon Hotel

As indicated earlier, Nicole was evicted from the Silver Avalon Hotel. Her tenure there was very brief. She lived there only a few months before the management evicted her following the alleged theft of her belongings. Nicole worked hard to complete the tiling on the wall despite the news that she would be evicted because it would be hers as long as she was in this space. She brainstormed shelving options and created her vanity and fruit basket using items from the dollar store to make this space her own, although she would have to leave it. The tile and baskets worked to create an enjoyable, attractive space. The items and improvisation of this space allowed Nicole to exercise her autonomy over her space and ground herself in place, even if only temporarily.

The role of these belongings is in direct contrast to the items in storage that were stolen, damaged, and evicted. The belongings' role in influencing precarity was often related to being utilized by others, particularly landlords, to cause harm and delegitimize SRO tenant homes. However, in the circumstances highlighted in this section, belongings influenced precarity by subverting it and using it to build home and meet needs. Nicole used the belongings to make home, despite endemic practices of unhoming, asserting the legitimacy of her relationship to home through her belongings.

6.2.2. Discussion

Through the narratives of the Keefer fire, hoarding, and homemaking, I have illustrated belongings' influence over precarity in creating and subverting it. A focus on belongings is crucial to understanding the role of property and valuation in assessing the validity of homes and who is deserving of them. Beginning with the narrative of the Keefer fire and the subsequent consequences, the lack of access and control over Nicole's belongings highlights how deeply influential belongings are on housing precarity. By examining how SRO tenant homes are unmade through their belongings, the data illustrate that belongings are valued as extensions of their owners. The control over Nicole's belongings by regulators and her inability to access them highlight an

understanding of the value of her belongings based on her own access to property. As mentioned in Chapter 3, SRO tenants did not use the hotels as the short-term housing it was intended to be, and through generations of tenants, it transformed into long-term housing. The illegitimate form of housing faced neglect for so many years because the disinvestment from the area meant the hotels could remain in the shadows where there were no eyes on the inner workings of the hotels and their conditions. Yet, as seen with Expo 86, when the goals of the neoliberal government shifted, places like the Downtown Eastside returned to focus. The improper use of property becomes the pretext for evictions and displacement that free up high-value land in the Downtown Eastside to be developed in the pursuit of capital. This is a reminder that the colonization of British Columbia is ongoing.

These larger-scale economic and colonial processes directly affect not only the habitability of the SRO hotels but permeate into the everyday interactions and routines that tenants have. For Nicole, her belongings were used as fodder for an always impending eviction and as a means of controlling her mobility. Her position within a property hierarchy as an impoverished SRO tenant not only hinders her access to her belongings every day but also defines her political subjectivity and right to make home completely. It places her at or near the bottom of a hierarchy that determines whose lives are grieve-able and whose existence is worth protecting (Blomley, 2020). In this case, the landlord is worth protecting, meaning that they do not have to take accountability for their negligence.

The broken laundry facilities and lax approach to the fire highlight how landlords can cleanse themselves of responsibility by placing this burden on the tenants. The habitability of the building is not taken into question. Instead, it is the tenant's responsibility to conform to a normative understanding of property use – clean, organized, and just the right amount of belongings - while also battling neglect. The result, very often, is the loss of home, always already framed as the fault of precariously housed individuals. Through both formal mechanisms of eviction and inspections and informal, rundown buildings with small units, landlords are able to project the responsibility for the loss of home onto SRO tenants, in this case, through hoarding. Herring terms "pervasive penality" as the additional punitive measures, short of arrest,

placed upon precariously housed individuals to manage them in place while further limiting their ability to make a space into home (2020). Barriers to accessing or storing belongings are one of the ways in which pervasive penality can be applied to the unmaking of home for SRO tenants.

Likewise, lack of support is another way of skirting responsibility to the tenants in the building. Fires in single-family homes are often met with support from neighbors, insurance companies, and often from the city. SRO tenants suffered the loss of their housing through the Keefer Fire, yet neither the landlord nor the city intervened to help tenants recover their belongings or access housing. Instead, the constraints placed on tenants to store their belongings and find adequate housing reinforce the evaluative statements regarding tenants' abilities. The lack of support for tenants who were victims in this fire further highlights a refusal to acknowledge their homes as legitimate, often due to pretexts of hoarding, pests, or lifestyles considered illegitimate, like drug use. Jessie Speer's research on homeless encampments similarly highlights the role of regulation in the creation of home and particularly the modes of home that are acceptable. Residents of the encampments in Fresno that Speer worked with described the destruction of homes designed for their own needs and the frustration with other housing models. In supportive housing or other nonprofit housing models, housing is not based on tenants' needs but on surveillance and conformity. (Speer 2016). While Nicole is technically housed, the quality of the housing is so poor that tenants must also cobble together salvageable items to make the space functional. Both unhoused communities and SRO tenants are treated as burdens on high-value land. Due to their failure to make home in line with white suburban dogma, both face the destruction of home that highlights their banishment in the name of capitalism and the churning of wealth within property.

The lack of support and adequate housing paired with the always impending eviction means that SRO tenants cannot safeguard against their loss of home. For Nicole, this continual practice of unmaking becomes a regular part of her experience, highlighting how belongings make home through subverting precarity.

6.2.3. Connection to homemaking

The burden upon SRO tenants to maintain adequate housing while facing the neglect of these decrepit buildings illustrates how their belongings play a role in the unmaking of home. However, importantly, it also tells us that neither tenants' homes nor their ontological perspectives on home are recognized as valid forms of homemaking. As illustrated in an earlier chapter, Nicole makes home happen anyway through her belongings and relationships. The view of home for SRO tenants moves away from normative viewpoints of home-based in the "ownership model" form of property and instead focuses on the relationality imbued in the property they have more secure access to their belongings (Blomley, 2004; Blomley et al., 2020).

Although SRO tenants experience the destruction of their homes through mass evictions, building condemnations, and fire, SRO tenants such as Nicole still consider their SRO home, even while under constant attack. Borrowing from Borges' (2018) use of homing, making home can be seen as a grounding exercise for tenants in creating the conditions for which they can resist and move beyond precarity. Through her ability to use hoarding and discarded items to her advantage, Nicole is able to conceive of a home through her belongings that is concurrent with her precarity. As a result of these findings, it is clear that belongings play a distinct and unique role as conduits of power, layered over landed property. Belongings can both plug the holes created by the imbalance of power dynamics but also act as conduits of damage because they are highly responsive form of fluid property – unlike land in this way. Nicole can assert her autonomy and create her subjectivity using her belongings and subsequent relationships, yet as illustrated in this chapter, the belongings can be manipulated by landlords and other regulators to destabilize and control SRO tenants.

Overall, the role of belongings profoundly affects home-making processes and how precariously housed individuals understand home. As I have argued previously, SRO tenants such as Nicole view home not as personal dominion or belonging but as a fabrication and as a process of contradictory feelings, temporalities, and relationships that expand beyond the four walls of their units. In the following chapter, I look forward to what these findings and their implications may mean for home and housing in the SRO hotels and in the DTES more broadly.

Chapter 7. What is Home's role in Abolition?

7.1.1. Introduction

This chapter takes a turn from the last two chapters by expanding upon the implications of the experiences of SRO tenants in what I refer to as "making home anyway," or the processes of homing that occur as a result of relationships that circumvent the precarity faced by SRO tenants. I started this thesis by highlighting the role of belongings in creating a home through relationships and the role of belongings in disrupting "home." This chapter diverges from this by considering how "making home anyway" can be expanded upon to consider the potential futures of housing justice organizing. The entanglements of place and home in the Downtown Eastside are critical to understanding how this neighborhood operates. Here, home and place collapse and diverge into a network of relationships that make up the Downtown Eastside. However, these relationships do not exist in a vacuum. Instead, the relationships in the Downtown Eastside are influenced by the often difficult conditions that create the need to build a new understanding of home. The place of the Downtown Eastside may not feel like "home" for the residents of this neighborhood, but the networks of care and relationship building flesh out a new process of home-making that alters preconceived limiting notions of home and place that build out what this place means for residents.

The last chapters focused on the power of belongings to create and disrupt the bonds and feelings of belonging that form home. In this chapter, I want to take a step back from the inner workings of belongings and relationships in the SRO hotels. Instead, I'd like to think through the importance of belongings and place in expanding feelings of home and liberation. In envisioning a future of the Downtown Eastside and of SRO hotels, I ask how we might reconfigure what home is and what role it has in theorizing abolition. The goal of this is to conceive of a new model of living that expands upon existing efforts of Indigenous, Queer, and otherwise marginalized yet deeply interconnected SRO tenants. I take the lead from Nicole's and other tenants' experiences regarding their homemaking to consider what futures the DTES holds. Reflecting on the previous chapters and drawing from a collaborative art project, I consider how the

relational nature of home can be expanded beyond precarity and beyond the four walls of an SRO unit to think about what role home and belongings have in abolition. I first unpack abolition and its connection to space before examining the specifics of home-making and cultural mapping of relationships through belongings and art.

7.1.2. Theorizing Abolition.

Through precarious housing and the confines of racial capitalism, both houselessness and incarceration become the solution to a racialized surplus population, illustrating how the prison-industrial complex expands into the amalgamation of laws, facilities, and surveillance that affects not only the prison system but all aspects of the law (Gilmore, 2007). Unhoused folks live within a feedback loop that puts them in constant contact with the criminal justice system through restricted mobility, anti-vagrancy laws, and red zones (Mitchell et al., 2009; Herring, 2014; Amster, 2003; Blomley, 2013; Blomley, 2016; Blomley, 2019; Sylvestre et al., 2020). The SRO hotels are among the most accessible places to rent for formerly incarcerated individuals, over 30% of whom do not have housing upon leaving prison in Canada (Palepu et al. 2017). The conditions of the SROs illustrated through fire, theft, and eviction show that the abandonment of the hotels and their policing creates unequal circumstances that put tenants into increased contact with regulators.

However, Nicole's work envisioning her home through her neighbors and the networks of care and resistance through her belongings invokes the work of Mariame Kaba and other scholars in theorizing abolition. Both Kaba and Ruth Wilson Gilmore theorize what abolition is, with abolition praxis at the core of their vision. As Kaba (2021, page?) states, “Every vision is also a map.” I am curious about this map and how the prison industrial complex (PIC) and carceral spaces permeate the housing sector. In theorizing home and property, there may be some potential in connecting home to abolition.

Abolition refers to the dismantling of the PIC and all of the racial capitalist and colonial hierarchies that subjugate and incarcerate, such as prisons and detention facilities. However, it extends beyond the direct workings of the criminal justice system

into schools, and also into housing. (Kaba, 2021, Gilmore, 2022). Abolition is more than the dismantling of these systems. It is a process of imagining what comes next, a restructured society that focuses not only on what we currently have but what we can imagine for ourselves (Kaba, 2021). In this sense, abolition is also a mechanism for thinking through what is missing and how we might build forms of freedom that do not rely on carceral societal structures (Gilmore, 2022). Gilmore discusses freedom as something everyone wants but that is rarely defined. I spent most of my fieldwork thinking about what Gilmore (2022) meant when she said, "Freedom is a place.", especially when contemplating how this phrase interacts with concepts of home and belonging. Both Gilmore and Kaba emphasize that abolition is not a world without harm, but instead, a world where folks can take accountability for their actions and individuals are not disposable and sent to rot away in prisons or on the streets.

As I am seeking to understand abolition in connection to housing justice, it is important to unpack how not just housing but how "home" is emmeshed in carceral structures and how they can be untangled. It is important to understand that concepts of home are entangled with colonial rhetoric and property logics that decide access to land, belongings, and to home itself. In Chapter 6, Nicole's access to her belongings and her ability to access her unit following a fire was tied to her place within this system that utilizes mobility as a means of control. As a precariously housed person who uses drugs living in the DTES, Nicole's home and her belongings are always in some way illegal and subject to the forces of landlords, police officers, and storage facility managers. Nicole's transit between units, storage facilities, and the streets to secure access to belongings that influence her relationships kept her bound to a survival mode that largely controlled her ability to make any one place her home. The use of her mobility as a means of control meant not just controlling where she could go but also preventing her from remaining still. Nicole was forced to constantly move her belongings and re-make home within a carceral housing system that considered her home-making invalid. Additionally, tenancy laws and their application have been shown to be different for precariously housed individuals such as Nicole (Blomley and Right to Remain Collective 2021). The limited access to property and application of law means that SRO tenants often operate in highly carceral environments where the access to their belongings and,

thus, relationships are controlled by regulators (landlords, bylaws, etc.). Their "homes" are not homes in the sense of a detached single-family home or a mansion in the eyes of the law. Instead, SRO tenants realize home in a highly surveilled but also hidden environment. Homing for SRO tenants appears to be different and relationally focused, so how might this radical view of homing contribute to abolitionist struggles?

Building home is an act of resistance and survival that appears to incorporate so much of what abolition praxis describes at a very intimate, everyday level. It is the daily processes of belonging and grounding that occur by maintaining and creating ties to place throughout time. These ties make it easier to build trust and hold space for accountability and care. Similarly, bell hooks (1990) understood homeplace as a site of resistance for many Black women at a time when domesticity and labor in one's own home were denied. It is a site where Black women could build community and subjecthood on their terms. This creation of a separate place of citizenship and personhood built on ties of kinship and community pushes my understanding of home further to conceptualize if home can be seen as a place of freedom and, in return, how home can extend far beyond the confines of an SRO unit or apartment.

As I stated earlier in this thesis, the possessive individualistic notion of everything you need existing within the confines of your own property is not something shared by the SRO residents of the DTES. In the SRO especially, the bonds created in the buildings can make or break one's experience and ability to make a place into home. These bonds are easily expanded upon, as illustrated through the organization of the SRO-C welcome kits in Chapter 5. This framing of abolition as focused on care and accountability connects back to Nicole's work in Chapter 5. Nicole used her belongings to diffuse situations and build trust before any form of escalation that led to police involvement, as shown through her sharing a beer with a neighbor who has been difficult in the past. Abolition praxis takes the role of accountability very seriously in alternatives to the PIC, which is useful for individuals in precarious housing because individuals often seek out justice outside of the PIC through relationships. These relationships can be of care and mutual respect that allow individuals to bring up issues and harms and address them directly, holding neighbors and friends accountable for their actions in ways that may

further strengthen bonds. However, a lot of precarious housing environments are places where many people struggle and have faced many injustices in their lives, often at the hands of law enforcement and the PIC more broadly. The interpersonal relationships between these individuals are complex and nuanced -- holding space for harm, love, care, and hatred. The influence of punitive measures that the PIC employs does not hold individuals accountable or resolve feelings of hurt, and for SRO tenants who rarely receive even this warped form of "justice," they may seek their own in ways that are violent and cause further harm. Part of exploring the role of home and housing in abolition is considering how to make space to grow these relationships and hold neighbors accountable within these nuanced relationships and networks that face so much harm. Exploring concepts of home and relational practices may provide a better sense of how to grow beyond the PIC.

Gilmore's (2022) work with Mothers Reclaiming Our Children (ROC) in Los Angeles highlights how domesticity and existing everyday social practices can be utilized and "arranged" to fight the PIC. ROC is a group of mothers collectively organizing to support their incarcerated children and each other and fight the criminal justice system more broadly. Their tactics emerged from the care and help they provided individually to their children and the need for support from others with shared lived experiences. The tactics used by ROC and the Black tradition of social mothering, seen through hooks' reflection on homeplace as resistance, can be applied to the housing justice movement. The concept of "home" or homemaking is often relegated to hollow Hallmark imagery of peacefulness and the nuclear family, but it is also messy, painful, and responsive to changing relationships, locations, and dispossession, as shown through the discussions with Nicole regarding her sense of home as related to the people around her (Blunt 2004, hooks 1990, Borges 2018).

The relational nature of home and its potential for envisioning abolition was also apparent in considering the work of Moms 4 Housing in Oakland, CA. Five Black mothers targeted a neglected investment property in West Oakland owned by a national investment firm and chose to reclaim it and build a home for their children and themselves (Ramirez, 2020). As Ramirez argues, the selection of this property was an intentional choice as it represented the worst of speculative real estate in Oakland. These

Black housing activists brought attention to a speculative process that is occurring in Oakland while also addressing an immediate need for themselves. The reclamation of this house was an act of abolition as these women sought to fill an unmet need of their own volition, creating their sense of personhood and attachment to place in response to property logics while also directly addressing them. The opportunity they saw within the housing system coincided with an act of self-determination that demonstrated what Kaba (2021) referred to as the abolitionist imagination. The relationships and collective between people in the community facilitated the success of their organizing. As these studies demonstrate, the traditional domestic space is not separate from organizing and the struggle for justice. Instead, it is a sphere of abolitionist political activation and capacity-building (Gilmore, 2022). The "taking back" of home is interesting because it illustrates a denial of the PIC and its tendrils. The tiling of Nicole's sink is another example of a taking back of home. It is a denial of her eviction and an assertion of her will and imagination of something better. The defiance in beautifying something for your own enjoyment or reclaiming "peopleless houses" (Roy, 2017) highlights how the intimate and domestic acts of homing can serve as both an act of protest and also one of simply meeting a need.

The work to improve conditions in the SROs functions similarly, perhaps as an expression of abolitionist politics. The previous chapters are a testament to that, particularly in the use of belongings and private property. I foreground the work of homemaking and its connection to abolition in larger scale organizing and community in the following section, which explores the process of creating the DTES Loteria for the 2023 SRO Tenant Convention.

7.2. The Right to Remain Tenant Convention

The work within this larger paper did not arise within a silo. As Chapter 4 attests, my research questions on how SRO tenants make a space into home using their belongings emerged from the discussion with tenants and the ongoing research of the Right to Remain Research Collective. My participation in the Right to Remain over the last four years and in their concluding tenant convention in early 2023 was an opportunity to look forward beyond my thesis. The convention was planned as a knowledge

mobilization project aimed at showcasing the work of the Collective, especially the peer researchers whose work contributed significantly to the advancement of many SRO hotel initiatives, such as the SRO-C hub, a series of tenant-led programming to address habitability in the SROs and the creation of a DTES community land trust. The Loteria game emerged by melding my research questions around home and belongings with the goals of reflection and futurity.

7.2.1. Situating the Loteria

Similar to the game of Bingo, Lotería is a traditional Mexican game that is recognizable and popular within the Mexican/Mexican American community. I have many memories of playing Loteria with my immediate family, aunts, uncles, and cousins as a child. The game uses a deck of cards with corresponding images on an individualized game board.

Figure 7.1: The Mexican Loteria Game tabla (left) and the DTES Loteria Game gamecard (right)

The caller or "el griton/a" flips through the cards in the deck, singing the phrase associated with each card, and the players mark the card on their board with a pinto bean until an individual wins that round by completing a row and calling out "Loteria!" In parallel, bingo is a game accessible and enjoyed by many groups and ethnicities and has a similar premise. The bingo caller pulls a ball from a raffle drum that contains a letter and number associated with a position on an individual gameboard. The first to complete a row calls out "Bingo!" and wins that round. Both Loteria and Bingo are played for money or prizes, often raising money for charity or mutual aid. The reason I chose to transform Loteria into a DTES bingo game came through the conversations in my fieldwork and with tenants regarding the items, iconography, and symbols associated with the DTES and the popularity of Bingo among the aunties in the community. The process of creating Loteria focused on artmaking and the ways art facilitated community conversations. The

symbols that emerged for the Loteria cards can be read as cultural assets that bridge the relationships between SRO tenants and the wider DTES community (Duxbury et al., 2018). The goal was to play Loteria at the SRO Tenant convention, leaving a legacy of fun and connection while also mapping the web of relationships between people, places, and things in the DTES. At the convention, I was the caller. With a stack of assorted prizes, tenants were excited to play, and throughout six iterations of the loteria, tenants laughed and joked with one another. A group of Chinese Canadian seniors played the game with the assistance of a translator, connecting with the cards and reflecting on their own experiences in the neighborhood. As the caller at the convention, I called improvised phrases associated with the cards and bantered with the players, listening as they chortled and giggled with their fellow game players, hoping to win.

7.2.2. Mapping relations in the DTES

The SRO Tenant Convention Organizing Committee was excited at the prospect of the game and how it would represent the DTES and community member's experiences. Rather than relying on traditional Loteria iconography, I decided to work with community members to create DTES-specific Loteria cards. The process started by brainstorming ideas of items, symbols, and things we saw regularly in the DTES. The list generated by the participants of this project came from conversations about the neighborhood and the SRO-C tenant-led programming. The brainstorming resulted in a list of objects and symbols that collaborators could draw from and check off to ensure no overlaps. Collaborators could also make cards from points of inspiration in their lives that had not been brainstormed beforehand. During four meetings, collaborators sat together, drawing 54 unique cards to create 16 different *tablas or* game cards.

The questions that were used to create these cards focused on the following:

1. What objects and scenes do you see in your everyday life?
    a. What images or sentiments do you think represent the DTES?
    b. What would resonate with the people in the community who would play this game?

The resulting cards focused on several themes that illustrated the landscape of the DTES and the important items, scenes, and characters that I argue make up the boundaries of "home." The important items that were created focused primarily on the everyday items that collaborators use or see in their lives, including drugs, mobility items, and references to our regular meetings. These belongings relate directly to the previous chapters on how belongings connected individuals and to a sense of home, as apparent in my conversations with Nicole. However, these items moved far beyond the SRO unit and instead situated home within the larger community. The items that stood out in reference to the bonds of the community included Naloxone and cultural medicinal items like braided sweetgrass, which are items used to save the lives of others and in cultural reconnection. The importance of life-saving overdose reversal and cultural healing highlights the interdependent ways that DTES residents help each other stay alive and connected through the use of these powerful items.

Figure 7.2: #18 The Medicine and #39 the Naloxone Loteria Cards.

In addition to the connections built through the items representative of the DTES, there are the characters regularly seen that represent relationships between community members, non-humans, and authoritative figures negotiated daily. Some make life more

difficult in the SROs and the neighborhood more broadly. These characters included police officers, bedbugs, rats, and other creatures that frequent the neighborhood. The relationships between these characters, especially the animals, highlight the relationships and connections to the shared experiences of the collaborators. Like Lindsay, Nicole's cat, mentioned in the previous chapters, the negotiated relationships with mice and rats in the building illustrated a shared space and a lack of control over home life. The animals in the building and their uncontrollability reflected their autonomy in the community. Meanwhile, the police officers and gentrifiers depicted in the game represented a threat to 'home,' the community, and the relationships that tenants have built.

During the SRO convention, the feedback from the players highlighted how relevant these cards were to the experiences of the wider SRO tenant community. Players laughed at depictions of a police officer as a pig, a "gentrifier" depicted as a devil, or the "super plunger" needed to unclog the ancient toilets in the SRO hotels. The resonance of these cards highlighted the shared experiences and bonds that help tenants navigate challenging situations with the community's support. The cards were a place to safely explore the tensions of the community, including those with police officers and mice. The experiences with the characters and items representing the relationships are layered over the scenes, and more abstract concepts that emerged from the artmaking.

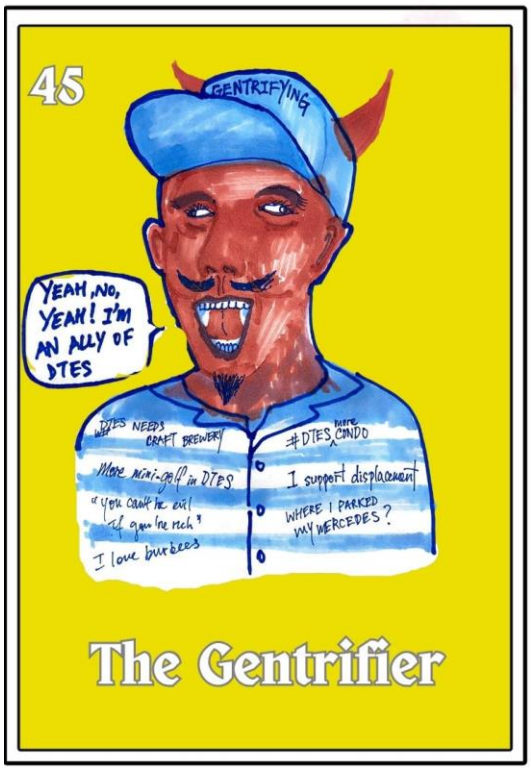

Figure 7.3: #45 The Gentrifer and #35 The Rat Loteria Cards

The landscapes in which these items and characters interact further highlight how interconnected the DTES is and the experiences that characterize what stands out to members of the community. These images were represented by scenes both within the SRO and in the neighborhood. More than the objects and characters, the landscape illustrated the bonds and networks of care and harm that make up home in the neighborhood or threaten it. These cards included food delivery programs, safe supply, SRO fires, and even the spilled chow main regularly seen in the alleys of Chinatown. These scenes represented the connections that the creators felt to be important to the people in the community while also giving space to discuss the major issues, such as fires and the overdose crisis caused by the drug prohibition that continues to incarcerate and kill individuals who use drugs. These difficult scenes, alongside the more lighthearted ones, highlighted how residents continue to build home within painful circumstances. Yet, alongside these landscapes that express deep sentiments are the abstract thoughts and feelings that emerged from this practice that went beyond items, characters, and scenes.

Figure 7.4: #13 The SRO Hotel Fire and #17 The Spilled Chow Mein.

Many sentiments expressed by the cards were political, as in with a “safe drug supply” or a “pitchfork” that presented the homeless encampment sweeps. The baseball bat card written by an SRO tenant included the sentence, “Unfortunately, I will protect myself ♀” highlighting the violence women in the community experience and the lengths they will go to protect themselves. In contrast, a peace sign or a sun with sunglasses illustrated the gentler or even joyous parts of relationships with the community, both of which coexist within the experiences of the SRO and the DTES but are often not directly explored.

In total, the creation of the DTES Loteria illustrated the items, scenes, characters, and sentiments that exist within at least one part of the community. However, the question may remain as to how the creation of the DTES Loteria connects to home, future, and abolition. The following section speaks to the work of Loteria, belongings, and relationships in envisioning freedom.

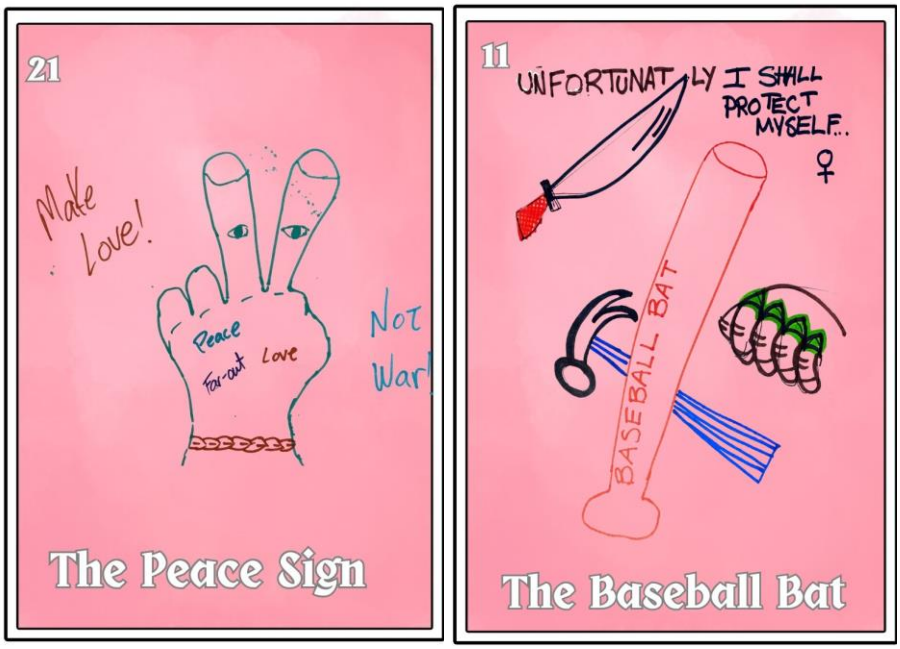

Figure 7.5: #11 The Baseball Bat and #21 The Peace Sign

7.2.3. Connection Belongings and relationships to Abolition

*Abolition Geography starts from the **homely** [notion] that freedom is a place."*

- Ruth Wilson Gilmore, my emphasis (?)

In reviewing the implications of the work with Nicole and the DTES Loteria in understanding relationships to belongings and others and how belongings influence home, it becomes clear that SRO tenants use belongings in ways that expand a relational sense of home beyond their units into kinship and community networks built amongst their neighbors and colleagues in ways that may connect to the fight for abolition. The site of "home," both in its physicality and its relationality, moves through the unit and spills out into the neighborhood. In Chapter 5, the focus was on Nicole's building, but between the time spent with Nicole in the building are the invisibilized spaces: the food line-ups, parks, peer meetings, donation spaces, stores, community gardens, and restaurants that Nicole draws resources from and helps distribute in her building. The DTES Loteria brought to light some of these spaces in the neighborhood and their contributions to feelings of home. The networks of care and commerce exist in a particular way in the Downtown Eastside through the shared experience of its inhabitants

who rely on services and establishments to meet physical and emotional needs. Yet, these individuals are different in regard to socio-economic, ethnic, and racial identities, over 1/3 of SRO tenants and 9.8 % of DTES residents identify as Indigenous, and 22.1% of DTES residents identify as Chinese (PHSA, Downtown Eastside Community Health Service Area Profile, Friesinger, 2023). Not all residents can agree upon the goals and ideas of the future of the DTES or the SRO. However, as Gilmore theorized, everyday relational practices may help circumvent the challenge of recognition in organizing (2022). Domestic and social practices build alliances between various groups through cultural exchanges, meals, activities, and resource sharing. Kaba's (2021) work on abolition attests to the importance of solidarity and "co-struggleship," and the process of artmaking for the DTES Loteria was an example of getting residents to see their connections. These activities can help residents to discuss issues they face, highlighting how topics such as gentrification and food insecurity bridge cultural and linguistic barriers. The alternative view of home by SRO tenants as built on relationships rather than on bounded property or citizenship can be further illustrated by highlighting the political process of place-making and extending relationships beyond the unit and into Downtown Eastside's streets, neighborhood, and landscape as shown in the DTES Loteria. Engaging with a collaborative art project that focused on visualizing and connecting with the places and scenes around the DTES, the work of relationships in creating home within the community becomes clearer.

By exploring the intimacies of place and home in the Downtown Eastside while considering how it fits into the fight for abolition through art, it appears clear that home is much more than one person's dwelling; it is the networks of relationships built in an environment that exists in constant conflict with colonial hierarchies. Illustrating the relationships and shared experiences in the DTES through an interactive art form, SRO tenants and the wider community could see how these relationships map onto their environment. A sense of placelessness often forms in precarious housing, but this is circumvented by laying bare the deep ties to the neighborhood and place. The uncovering of the items, scenes, characters, and shared sentiments in the neighborhood through the Loteria project provides an opportunity to organize around the experiences of different community members and to honor the relationships and support needed in the

community without the dogmatic political ideology or identity politics that can emerge within organizing that often derails the process. Instead, this process was a joyful processes of feeling connected to place through reflection and fun that is sometimes not possible.

The DTES Loteria is just a step in a much more significant process of imagining and connecting that, while still confronting the deeply engrained prejudices and power dynamics in settler-colonial society, can bridge the processes of differentiation that decides who deserves what kind of life and who is at most risk of premature death. The universality of "home" as a concept provides an opportunity to rally around the relationships and domestic practices that make up the feelings of trust and security that come from understanding the place where one lives. Gilmore (2022) referred to abolition as the unfinished feelings of liberation attached to place, starting from the '*homely [notion] that freedom is a place.'* I argue that home itself may also represent those feelings. To paraphrase what Nicole once said, "Home is a work in progress; it can constantly be improved and worked on." Home and freedom may work together in a never-ending process incorporating the nuance and mobility of relationships and feelings attached to place.

Moving forward, this research provides opportunities to expand my research questions to further contextualize how concepts of home, abolition in practice, and place-making interact within organizing. The use of belongings in facilitating relationships (Chapter 5), moving beyond harm (Chapter 6) and mapping the relationships (Chapter 7) can be vital to understanding what role home can have in abolitionist movements.

Chapter 8. Conclusion

Throughout the last chapters, I have made a case for the ways in which SRO tenants may understand home through a relational lens focused on their relationships to themselves, others, and their belongings, which connect them to an even wider process of homemaking. Through Nicole's work illustrated in Chapter 5 with her neighbors and the establishment of the SRO welcome kits, belongings facilitated relationship building that helped individuals feel grounded within the SROs. In Chapter 6, belongings increased precarity but were also tools that tenants could use to move through the precarity and alongside it to create places of meaning and use. Finally, in Chapter 7, the process of creating the DTES Loteria spoke to how the relations of home can strengthen community and kinship bonds into a coalition of place built on networks of care and shared experience that is in direct opposition to the carceral systems that value individuals on their ability to conform and aspire to white land ownership.

Through examining property's role in home-making both as a relational material object and as a tool of colonial power, it is clear that property is a conduit that is used to control and navigate relationships in the Downtown Eastside. Although this research looked specifically at belongings, the undercurrent of landed property remains at the center of many of these issues. The access to land and its legal application and designation set in motion the circumstances of SRO tenants like Nicole. However, the narratives of these tenants move beyond their precarity to improvising and creating full lives out of the relationships to the people and things around them. In exploring these relationships and building relationships of my own, the possibility of something better became apparent to me, even if it is still somewhat hard to discern.

The exploration of abolition and abolition geographies, as well as the attempt to situate freedom as a place, helps me to think through how places can be vessels of liberation and how we can access them. In housing justice, it appears that by starting with the most basic domestic everyday tasks and needs, capacity may be built for solidarity,

and bonds can spread through a landscape. The work of the SRO-C and the Right to Remain is built on the existing relationships and care in this community, often on the backs of women like Nicole, who autonomously organize because of their desire to fill the need for connection and home. Relationship building is crucial to the goals of organizing, and Nicole exemplifies that role with the SRO Welcome kit making and the move to conceptualizing property through community care. The final questions that emerge from this research ask what it means to decenter individualized notions of private property in homemaking and center relationships in a move toward abolition.

The possibility for "home" and all its complexity to be a rallying point for organizing and coalition building needs to be considered in future organizing especially in terms of understanding the everyday in relation to sustainable change. As Nicole talks about building sanctuaries for herself and for others, I wondered how many other Nicoles are out there feeding others in their building, offering trades, and running errands. Plainly and clearly, Nicole affirms that she can make home anywhere and often must remake it — like many other SRO tenants in the DTES, she's used to it.

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