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*Real Queer? Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Refugees
in the Canadian Refugee Apparatus* by David A.B. Murray
(review)

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REVIEWS/RECENSIONS

David A.B. Murray. *Real Queer? Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Refugees in the Canadian Refugee Apparatus.* London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016. 183 pp. Bibliography. Index. \$51.95 sc.

The author, David A. B. Murray, begins this book with a story of his personal encounter in late 2006 with a fellow volunteer (a sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) refugee from Uganda named Edward), while volunteering at a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) helpline. This experience frames the content of this book, which further explores how this group of asylum seekers endeavors to prove both their identity as LGBT refugees and the persecution that they have faced as a result of their membership in this group in their countries of origin. Murray refers to this as the “daunting double challenge” and as a process that is unique to SOGI refugee claimants (13). This book details how SOGI refugee claimants in Toronto, Ontario “learn about, prepare for and perform ‘SOGI refugeeeness’” (153).

Murray is a professor in the Department of Anthropology and Sexuality Studies at York University. This book incorporates his ethnographic research which includes individual interviews with SOGI refugees in Toronto from 2011 to 2013 (with some additional interviews conducted in 2013) and fieldwork at LGBT support groups, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) hearings, and other sites, such as the participants’ homes and sites of leisure. The role of documents, SOGI group support workers, lawyers, and IRB employees in the refugee determination process are also examined.

This book includes seven chapters. It begins with the narratives of four of the participants in Murray’s study (Joe, Janine, Odu, and Latoya). Through their stories, Murray works to illuminate the diverse realities of SOGI refugee claimants in his study, which includes participants deriving their countries of origin mainly from Africa and the Caribbean. He challenges the linear migration narratives associated with SOGI refugees that depict their journey to Canada as “...closeted; repressed and/or persecuted in their country of origin to ‘out’ and ‘free’ in Canada” (21). Through the stories of his participants, Murray provides evidence of their diverse reasons for migration. In particular, he uncovers their “multiple, circuitous paths to becoming a SOGI refugee” (22). Murray also challenges normative portrayals of SOGI refugees to display how they are used to “‘fit’ the homonationalist narrative” (53). These narratives portray the country of origin of SOGI refugees as backwards

and homophobic and Canada as being free and accepting of all LGBT refugees. According to Murray, LGBT support group workers, settlement staff, lawyers, and others directly involved in the refugee determination process, often persuade, train, and/or teach SOGI refugee claimants to abide and align their personal experiences in accordance with these socially constructed narratives. This book brings to light the homogenizing influence of the refugee determination process as SOGI refugee claimants are encouraged to reproduce and perform credible storylines of migration, sexual identity and orientation.

This book is well written and easy to follow. It integrates both refugee and queer literature in its analysis of the challenges faced by this group of refugee claimants. A strength of this book is that it uncovers the silenced voices of SOGI refugees/claimants during and after the refugee determination process. By doing so, it gives voice to this marginalized group of refugees providing an alternative storyline that is congruent with the participants' actual lived experiences. However, Murray fails to fully locate himself within this book. As a reader, one is left wondering about the author's background, specifically with regards to how it may have personally impacted his interactions with the SOGI refugee participants. Given his location as an insider in some ways (as a member of the LGBT community) and outsider (as a white male researcher), more information would have been beneficial for the reader in this regard, due to the author's personal connection to the topic and experience as a researcher studying this topic.

Murray provides a detailed analysis of the processes by which SOGI refugee claimants navigate and exit the refugee determination process. He reveals the unsettling dominant discourse surrounding this topic, which continues to suppress and ignore the realities of SOGI refugees/claimants in general, such as the racialized SOGI refugee claimants in his study. Murray also challenges social constructions of SOGI refugees to reveal myths relating to their migration experiences and identities. In particular, he conveys how hegemonic narratives associated with citizenship further perpetuate stereotypes associated with LGBT individuals and the assumption of a universal SOGI refugee identity. This book is a great resource for university students or anyone interested in learning more about the SOGI refugee determination process, law, human rights, and issues faced by LGBT refugees in general.

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