

6 Heterosexual Here, Homosexual There¹

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“More and more young refugees in Berlin are earning money by having sex with older men. According to human rights organizations, Tiergarten² has become a regular scene for this – including with minors”.

So begins an article published in April 2017 on the website of the radio broadcaster *Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg*. According to this article, there is now a large number of young adult, or even minor, refugees from Afghanistan and Pakistan offering sexual services for payment – to older, white German gay men. The report attracted a great deal of attention in media, the political realm, and wider society, presumably due to its alarmist and moralistic tone. The author quotes an employee of *Moabit hilft*, an action group that provides aid to refugees: “Many of them seem helpless, like small children. When you take them in your arms, they often break into tears”.

The fact that any of this is news is astounding, since Germany has a long history of male sex work. What is in fact new, however, is that at least since the New Year’s Eve events in Cologne³, a great deal of attention has been paid to the sexuality of male refugees. Stories about refugees are dominated by one of two ideas: that of the hypersexualized refugee, who harasses *white* women, and that

1 Translated from the German by Daniel Hendrickson.

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2 Editor’s note (CS): Tiergarten here refers not to the central city district but instead to the huge park at the center of the city. Homosexual cruising in this park is a tradition going back to the late 19th century.

3 Editor’s note (CS): See my introduction to this volume for a brief explanation of the New Year’s Eve events in Cologne which the authors are here referring to.

of the “forced prostitute” or “hustler of necessity,” who is exploited by older gay men. What these seemingly so divergent narratives have in common is that they are both based on sexualized fantasies. They show a willingness by the German public to speculate endlessly about *the sex of “Others.”*

Our concern here is not so much the lack of facts, vague sources, nor the numerous obvious contradictions in the media reports. These have already been extensively pointed out and critiqued by a large number of online comments. We are much more interested in the larger narrative that not only makes these fictions believable, but also contributes to their easy dissemination.

Here in Germany there is a generally prevalent idea that only gay men practice gay sex. If one of the sex partners turns out to be non-homosexual, his sexual identity is called into question. In the current debate, the young hustler is then often represented as non-homosexual, following the assumption that there are not very many homosexuals in the “Orient.” His sexual act with a *real* homosexual is thus reduced to a purely economic transaction. The hustler and his sex work are thus presented in a moralistic manner, as he does not represent a *real* homosexual in the western sense. He seems too “Muslim,” too young, too uneducated, and too poor and must therefore have been compelled to go into sex work as a survival strategy.

Despite the heterogeneity of refugees and male sex workers, these hustlers are usually abstracted as “Arab” or “Muslim”. This marking of actual or constructed belonging to a religion means to Orientalize or racialize them as “other,” denying them *real* homosexuality. While on the one hand the hustler is thus heterosexualized, on the other hand, parts of the media cite the sanctions and proscription of homosexuality in their presumed countries of origin as a reason for their leaving. Consequently, the refugee hustler is contradictorily imagined as heterosexual “here” and as homosexual “there”. Reasons for fleeing, such as war, political persecution, the search for new opportunities and a better life, are all ignored in his case.

Over the course of these debates the question has arisen: Are young/minor refugees allowed to even have sex(uality), that is, are these refugees meant to remain sexless? This question is accompanied by further anti-homosexual attitudes. While the hustler is generalized as young (minor), Muslim (thus, not gay), poor, and a refugee, the john only ever appears as old, white, German, gay, settled, obese, and able to pay. Latent accusations of pedophilia can be read between the lines.

Sex work by refugees is thus only depicted as *forced* sex work, sometimes even amplified by unsubstantiated reference to underage activity. The ordinary econ-

omy of sex work is no longer the primary issue. The hustler's body is not viewed here as a resource in the sex industry, but is fantasized as "under threat" by old, white German homosexuals. It is also further "othered" by turning it into a potential "AIDS body" due to unprotected sex with johns.

And so old racist and homophobic moral panics return to take on a new life. Politics and civil society are mobilized, while racially-charged integration policies regarding refugees are definitively declared a failure. While the hustler is de-individualized with regard to his sexual self-determination, the old, white, gay mam – who the media otherwise often feature as the gay victim of young Muslim men – is demonized as a "sex monster". Stigma and discrimination face the marginalized bodies of the refugee hustler and the old homosexual, each in its own contradictory way.

Authors and Translator

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