

4 A Glory Hole to the Iron Curtain: Eastern European Male Identity and Gay Pornography

Eastern European identity is a bigger fetish in gay porn than one might assume. Following the Cold War the fall of the Iron Curtain and the NATO intervention in Yugoslavia in the 1990s made Eastern European sexualities more accessible to porn film audiences in Western Europe and the United States. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, sex tourism and pornographic film production emerged as industries in countries such as Russia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, and Bulgaria. The classic narrative of gay (and straight) sex tourism invests in the white upper-middle-class man from a First World country who travels to a Third World country to have sex. Eastern Europe became an exception to this colonial and Orientalist narrative. However, the colonization of much of Eastern Europe under the Austro-Hungarian Empire up until the First World War was accompanied by a cultural discourse that the scholar Ezequiel Adamovsky defines as Euro-Orientalism.¹

Through its focus on gay ethnic pornography, this chapter expands the notions of Orientalism and nineteenth-century colonialism to include the Eastern European context. Like the German-Turkish context, this specification will contribute to the discussions on how ethnicity could be orchestrated to exist outside the hegemonic understanding of whiteness. While this study consisted, until now, of case studies that focused on specific nations, this chapter is subsumed under the umbrella term of Eastern Europe in order to provide a more extensive discussion of the rich material collected. Another reason for this grouping is that (most of) these countries used to be part of the Soviet Union, which is, as we will see, negotiated in many of the movies discussed.

As Ezequiel Adamovsky argues, the concept of Euro-Orientalism emerged in the era of French Enlightenment and shaped especially by French literature that included examples in which many of the stereotypes and prejudices traditionally associated to the Orient were transferred onto the Slavic peoples.² Colonization is not always the result of belligerent invasions but occurred in new ways throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century. To be more specific, Austria expanded into the Balkans during 1878–1908 and the French engaged in practices that I would describe as neo-colonialist, specifically based on the extraction of labor and resources from this region. The colonization of Eastern Europe by France and Germany, and the Orientalization of

1 Adamovsky, Ezequiel. "Euro-Orientalism and the Making of the Concept of Eastern Europe in France, 1810–1880." *The Journal of Modern History* 77, no. 3, 2005, 591.

2 Adamovsky, 2005, 592.

Eastern Europeans, was a well-established phenomenon that goes back to the early 1800s as Ezequiel Adamovsky and Robert L. Nelson claim:

The German patterns of understanding and control over their Eastern neighbors, since at least the 1850s, fit neatly into the European global understanding of colonizer and colonized relationships.³

However, the Western European man's fascination with their Eastern European neighbors was not reflected in pornographic narratives until the late twentieth century. After events like the fall of the Iron Curtain and the Velvet Revolution, Eastern Europe became an attractive destination for both American and Western European male visitors and filmmakers for sex tourism and pornography.⁴ The bloom of Eastern European theme pornography in the early 90s doesn't come as a surprise, since the Velvet Revolution in Prague and the fall of the Berlin Wall both happened in 1989. European and U.S. gay porn production companies employed men from the post-communist Eastern countries to sexualize their post-war states and social challenges for their viewing pleasure.

This chapter focuses on the Eastern European examples of gay ethnic pornography; however, it is essential to describe what I mean by Eastern Europe. The films examined here are produced mainly in Russia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Latvia, and Hungary from 1992 on. The beginning of the 1990s is also essential for the advancement of LGBTI+ rights in the region. In 1993, Joseph Stalin's ban on sexual acts between men had been lifted in Russia. By removing the ban, the Eastern European gay male erotica became accessible as legal products to the U.S. and the Western European countries and also to their home markets. The early examples of this phenomenon were either produced by Western European and American filmmakers, or by the local production companies to meet the tastes of a porn market dominated by Western Europe and the U.S. I would like to first focus on the examples produced by Western countries, which tend to be more consistent in terms of conceptualization of Eastern European gay porn narrative. I will then go on to focus on regional examples of ethnic pornography in order to compare different discourses of ethnic male erotica of Eastern Europe.

³ Nelson, Robert L. *Germans, Poland, and Colonial Expansion to the East: 1850 through the Present*. Studies in European Culture and History. Transferred to digital printing ed. Basingstoke [u.a]:

Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 7. It is important to note that Robert L. Nelson stated that the history of colonialism in Eastern Europe is much older than 150 years. However, the specific colonialism referenced in this volume, that which appeared during the new imperialism of the latter half of the nineteenth century, is our focus.

⁴ Here I take increasing number of porn film companies and their sex work focused narratives as a resource. Companies or web pages such as Bel Ami, Czech Hunter, Czech Gay are explicitly centering the sex work related themes.

Before elaborating on the historical background of this chapter, I would like to unpack some of the terms that are going to be used. One of these terms is trauma. Elm, Kabalek, and Köhne suggested that:

...subsequently, the filmic ways to adopt, imitate, transform, process, or 'work through' experiences and symptoms of violence and 'trauma' will be discussed in sections referring to almost exclusively to the mentioned countries and societies while reflecting on the historical context of catastrophes and individual or governmental acts of violence connected to them.⁵

Trauma, within the context of Eastern European gay ethnic pornography, encompasses the lived experiences of individuals and communities grappling with the aftermath of historical catastrophes and systemic violence. These traumas are deeply rooted in the region's post-war financial crises and ethnic marginalization, leading to a complex interplay of socio-political and personal upheavals. In these films, trauma serves as a lens through which the social body is examined, offering insights into the multifaceted layers of pain, resilience, and identity formation within the Eastern European context. These films aim to capture the lived realities of individuals navigating a landscape marked by historical and contemporary challenges by depicting the consequences of such traumas, whether through narratives focusing on specific issues, such as unemployment or broader societal struggles. Here, I follow their approach to trauma as an analytical tool to investigate the means of social body inherited in gay pornography that thematize Eastern Europe through its history. The traumas that I will be referring to were caused by the different consequences fueled by the post-war financial crisis and ethnic marginalization. Each of these particular causes are reflected as part of the pornographic narrative, either by focusing on one single issue or several, thereby strengthening the reality effect of these films and making the storyline more understandable.

Eastern European examples of gay ethnic pornography built heavily on this region's past and its current financial catastrophes. Compared to the French and German productions, Eastern European gay ethnic pornography employs historical events such as war or its subsequent financial crisis to spin the wheels of pornographic power dynamics. This chapter argues reasons for straight males or bisexual males wanting to have gay sex in Eastern European films that are detached from their religious or heteronormative cultural aspects and instead serve as a survival strategy. Memory is essential in talking about trauma, a concept of trauma theorized by clinical psychology and sociology. The ways I approach traumas are mainly based on social and economic aftermaths and history, but also on the reflections of directors and cast members and how they perceive such traumatic states.

5 Elm, M., K. Kabalek, and J.B. Köhne. *The Horrors of Trauma in Cinema: Violence Void Visualization*. Cambridge Scholars, 2014, 4.

As Peter Leese mentions, “there is a distinction between trauma’s representational problems, which are connected to its inherent, intrapsychic tendency to disguise itself, and its striving for articulation.”⁶ The representational problems that Leese mentioned are highly apparent in the examples of Eastern European gay pornography, and the disguise of these traumas through sex between men contributes to the overall analysis of these productions, considering their proximity to class and ethnicity. Sublimating traumatized memory of the body into pleasurable experiences carries analytical and historical notions. On the one hand, most of these film scenarios are made up and do not reflect the actual situation of the cast members involved in filming. On the other hand, history and financial catastrophes are based on these countries’ factual realities, making them realistic and documentary-like. Given that traumatic experiences had a foundational role on men in the countries of the former Soviet bloc, I am interested in the ways these individual experiences were utilized in pornography and how they were translated onto the screen.

Some of the first examples of gay ethnic pornography that showed Eastern Europe from a Western perspective were produced by companies in France, Germany and Sweden: Jean-Noël René Clair – JNRC Films from France, Ben Tamam, Murat Bal, and BUM Film from Germany, and Peter aka Potro, Potro Video from Sweden. Meanwhile, in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, local film companies produced examples of ethnic pornography in mostly one of two ways: either as the incorporation of sex tourism and the gay-for-pay narrative into the country’s national identity, or as a more redemptive Eastern European narrative and aesthetic where young white males celebrate their sexuality.

First, let’s delineate the history of these companies and their productions to allow the reader a rare insight into this archival field. Potro Video from Sweden produced the first examples of gay ethnic pornography among other local and foreign gay porn filmmakers in Russia: *Young Innocent Russians I & II* (1994), *Young Soldiers Disclosed* (1994), and *Russian Suburban Youth* (1997). Following Potro Video, Jean-Noël René Clair also produced films with an Eastern European focus. Among these films were *USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics* (1996), *СССР – Союз Советских Социалистических Республик* (1996), *Balkans Connection/Men of Balkans* (1997), *Gypsy Sex* (2002), and *JNRC Films Casting Call Bulgaria* (2009). BUM Videos from Germany produced only one movie that is titled *Yugo Power* (2004).

In Russia, local production companies joined the trend of using Eastern European male sexuality after the West European productions. Dan Healey claims that the *Kazaki* (*Cossacks*) (2004) might be the first example of Russian gay pornography with an ethnic focus that is produced locally.⁷ *Kazaki* is produced in 2004, eleven years

6 Leese, P., J.B. Köhne, and J. Crouthamel. *Languages of Trauma: History, Memory, and Media*. University of Toronto Press, 2021, 3.

7 Healey, 2010, 223.

after the first example of the genre produced by Potro Video. *Kazaki* was created by St. Petersburg-based porn film studios Kaline.⁸ Following *Kazaki*, few more examples were produced locally in Russia until Putin's 'gay propaganda' law in 2013. Of course, underground productions have appeared since 2013, but since the focus of this study is officially studio-made porn (rather than amateur or underground porn), this analysis of the Russian context will be limited to the years between 1993 and 2013.

In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the production of gay ethnic pornography had a close relationship to gay sex tourism. Since a strong sex industry was maintained in the Czech Republic despite a highly restrictive political context, the Czech examples cannot be compared with the post-Soviet ones. One of the first efforts at utilizing sex tourism in the Czech Republic is the company CzechBoys, which was launched in Prague in 1999 with a seven-film series called *Twink Party* (1999). Following CzechBoys, the porn site Locker Room produced *Prague Orgy* in 2004. Another local porn production company, Czech Hunter, made over 500 films, which were numbered rather than titled. Bigstr network (Czech Hunter, Dirty Scout, and Debt Dandy) and BelAmi Videos (BelAmi Online) are among the few gay porn production companies that are still active and based in various Eastern European, such as Prague, Budapest, and Bratislava.⁹

Czech Hunter is one of the first porn production companies to have established 'gay-for-pay' as a popular narrative in Eastern European ethnic pornography. The gay-for-pay concept was exported from the U.S. when the HIV epidemic was on the rise during the early 90s. Kevin John Bozelka confirms: "AIDS influenced the creation of a gay-for-pay superstar persona in the mid-1980s-alooof, never to be anally penetrated, usually avoiding intimacy".¹⁰ The Eastern European version of the gay-for-pay narrative, such as those produced by Czech Hunter, differ significantly from the AIDS-influenced U.S. version. Here, gay-for-pay evolves into a narrative where the porn actor would do anything for the money, including being penetrated or even verbally and physically humiliated. Czech Hunter challenges the impenetrable porn star persona tradition of the U.S. by using Czech Koruna to play with the straight male fantasy. However, while the U.S. version is 'problematic' in so far as it further stigmatizes AIDS, one might say that Czech Hunter sends a message that it is not necessary to worry about STIs when it comes to having sex with Czech men. In examples from the U.S. the audience is often introduced to a safe-sex scene in a similar narrative. For instance, in the Bait Bus films, spectators encounter how a single man is picked up

⁸ Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any information on Kaline studios.

⁹ BelAmi Videos changed their name to BelAmiOnline since the production company carried their productions exclusively online in 1999.

¹⁰ Bozelka, Kevin John, "The gay-for-pay gaze in gay male pornography." *Jump Cut*, No. 55, fall 2013. See: <https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc55.2013/BozelkaGayForPay/text.html>. (Last Access Date: 17.03.2024).

from the street and offered cash to have sex with a woman in front of the camera. But his eyes need to be blindfolded so that afterward the actress, who was present during the offer, is replaced by men. Once the protagonist realizes he is part of a prank, he bursts out in anger to then actually enjoying having sex with a man. This gay-for-pay scenario of Bait Bus uses a condom during the anal sex scenes that, according to Bozelka, are part of the stigmatization of AIDS by heterosexuals. However, in the videos of Czech Hunter, most scenes depict bareback sex. In the gay-for-pay concept, eliminating condoms also becomes part of the story, which could imply risking sexual health for money. The local men from Prague are portrayed as desperate for cash, carrying a vague position of being sex-positive while risking their sexual health.

Following Czech Hunter, Bigstr network launched two other websites, Debt Dandy and Dirty Scout, which adapted the gay-for-pay narrative for a more contemporary audience where post-Soviet financial trauma meets with Eastern European males' recent agenda such as social challenges of unemployment and economic anxieties of millennial neoliberal Europe. The promo video on Debt Dandy's website states: "In Eastern Europe, over 40% of the guys aged 18–25 already have serious debts." Debt Dandy offers a helping hand to the financially troubled guys by offering them money to star in porn films. The website also claims that it is "100% unscripted, real amateurs, and shocking."¹¹ Within the realm of porn, none of these has to be accurate. In fact, most sites build their marketing strategies on contriving authenticity.

Bigstr based the narrative of Dirty Dandy on a more corporate style of gay-for-pay in which a job interview evolves into a sexual fantasy of mobbing. Dirty Scout puts a bilingual ad (in Slovakian and English) in a newspaper offering cash to young men. This ad's whole purpose was to entice young men. In return, the cameraman asks for a sexual service. Dirty Scout is another Czech gay porn site that reinterprets the gay-for-pay narrative in the Eastern European context. Dirty Scout has a straightforward slogan: "They want a job; we want their holes."¹²

Joseph Brennan argues that these three companies "construct a nostalgic fantasy that encourages viewers to long for a historical social reality (the early years of post-communist Czech Republic) that does not necessarily exist today, and yet that continues to function as a key national myth, particularly among viewers of all-male pornography."¹³ These three companies might lean on a form of nostalgia, but they also represent the recent development of the social and financial conditions experienced by Eastern European youth. Especially the corporate narrative and aesthetic style of Debt Dandy and Dirty Scout is significantly informed by the anxieties of Eastern Europeans who have only recently been adopted into the capitalist community of the EU. Considering these social and financial anxieties, these companies con-

11 See: <https://www.debtdandy.com/> (Last Access Date: 17.03.2024).

12 See: <https://www.dirtyscout.com/> (Last Access Date: 17.03.2024).

13 Brennan, 2019, 20.

tribute to the discussion of Eastern European gay pornography by providing an analysis of Soviet nostalgia as well as the current economic state of Eastern Europe, which itself is linked to post-Soviet traumas.

In the same years when the Western companies are exploiting Russia (during the late 1990s and early 2000s) and its peripheries, a Slovakian gay porn company BelAmi launched offices in Bratislava, Prague, and Budapest, championing an aesthetic alternative to Western mainstream porn companies' representation of Eastern Europe. BelAmi Videos was founded in 1993 in Slovakia, and soon grew to become one of the most significant gay porn companies, even creating its own genre. As Michael Hone stated, "Bel Ami ranks consistently high in having the biggest orgies, unprotected sex, beautiful lads and bodies, the biggest dicks in the industry, and even incestuous between brothers, notably the Peters twins."¹⁴ Although Hone offers no definition of beauty, what qualifies as 'beautiful lads' in BelAmi's videos is: smooth skin, (primarily) white, blond, muscular, and not overly feminine (nor excessively masculine).

Noticing the Eastern European and Russian potential in gay pornography, the prominent U.S.-based porn company Lucas Entertainment decided to collaborate with local companies and producers. Born in Soviet Russia, Michael Lucas worked as an escort in Germany, before migrating to New York to work in the porn film industry as an actor and producer. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Lucas visited Russia to make two films with the same name called *To Moscow with Love 1* and *2* (2001, 2002). In 2004, Lucas Entertainment went to the Czech Republic to co-produce *Prague Sex Express* with Best Czech Boys. After this collaboration, Lucas Entertainment produced another movie set in the context of Eastern Europe titled *Cruising Budapest* in 2007.

Following the lead of Lucas Entertainment, another U.S.-based porn film company, Collin O'Neal, found success with the *World of Men* series that included visits to Turkey, Lebanon, Colombia, Argentina, Australia, Israel, East Berlin, and more. Like Collin O'Neal, Lucas Entertainment focused on the ethnic pornography genre and produced *Men of Israel* in 2009 with a cast of all Israeli men. Lucas Entertainment produced their own merchandise, such as the Lucas Men International calendar showing porn models from outside the United States. Lucas Entertainment's *To Moscow with Love 1* and *2* (2001, 2002) and *Cruising Prague* (2007) followed the mainstream approach of representing Czech and Russian men, similar to the method of Collin O'Neal's *World of Men* series. Such an approach re-constructs the power dynamics from a perspective that eliminates the financial crisis and traumas mentioned earlier; however, in this context, the U.S. perspective allows us to analyze later examples from Eastern Europe and helps to translate the changing perspectives both from in and outside Eastern Europe.

14 Hone, M. *All-Male Pornography: From Antonio Rocco's Alcibiades to George Duroy's BelAmi*. Independently Published, 2018, 128.

4.1 *Young Russian Innocents*: Swedish Potro Videos

I watched most of the movies on online streaming platforms. Most of these companies are no longer active, and their pornographic material is no longer around ever since the market for DVDs and VHS has vanished in the meantime. No one can assure that these videos will remain accessible on streaming platforms that only profit from pop-up advertising and clickbait banners. In addition to the films themselves, I have explored the blurbs on the back of DVD covers, and the film descriptions from websites to support my reading of the visuals. For this chapter, I took the artist William E. Jones' video work *The Fall of Communism as Seen in Gay Pornography* (1998) as a source, since it includes footage from a number of ethnic porn films with a particular Russian focus that no longer exist.¹⁵ The film *Young Russian Innocents 1&2* (1994), *Young Soldiers Disclosed Part I* (1994) and *Russian Suburban Youth* (1997), for instance, are the only accessible via a few amateur gay porn streaming platforms.¹⁶ Besides those platforms, Jones' is the only archive that one can refer to. In addition to the video work itself, this chapter will refer to interviews in which Jones discussed his work, as it contains crucial information about *Young Russian Innocents* (1994) and Potro Video.

With the *Young Russian Innocents* series released in 1994, the Swedish porn production company Potro Videos produced one of the first examples that features Eastern European gay ethnic pornography.¹⁷ Most of the movies either have a military narrative that suggests the Cold War was still ongoing or depict the social traumas of the post-Soviet Eastern Bloc. *Young Innocent Russians* was produced as a two-part series, both of which are a compilation of the solo and duo scenes. Each of these mini episodes opens up with an interview between Potro and the film's subject. This conversation was mediated by a translator who appears as an agent of Potro later in the series.

The founder of Potro Videos is an anonymous Jean Genet fan from Sweden who went by the name Peter. According to the information that Jones shared with me, he picked the name because it was easy to pronounce for a global audience. Peter worked as a school teacher but resented teaching the children of middle-class people, so he

15 THE FALL OF COMMUNISM AS SEEN IN GAY PORNOGRAPHY (video, color, sound, 19 minutes, 1998) – Every image in *The Fall of Communism as Seen in Gay Pornography* comes from gay adult videos produced in Eastern Europe since the introduction of capitalism. The video provides a glimpse of young men responding to the pressures of an unfamiliar world, one in which money, power and sex are now connected. See: <https://www.willamejones.com/portfolio/the-fall-of-communism> (Last Access Date: 17.03.2024).

16 Although it seems like Potro Video took the video the same year that they recorded *Young Russian Innocents 1&2* (1994), *Russian Suburban Youth* was published later in 1997.

17 At the beginning of *Young Soldiers Disclosed*, a showreel introduces Potro's early and upcoming works. It shows that he originally wanted to publish *Young Russian Innocents* as *Innocent Boy Debutants* in Russia 1&2.

decided to become a porn producer and director instead. In the interview I conducted with Jones, he said:

When Potro shot *Young Russian Innocents*, he told the boys that these were tests, not to be released as final products, and whoever did well would be cast in a more extensive production. For most of the boys, this didn't happen. He paid them all \$50 – in those early post-communist days, about one month's rent in Moscow – and never saw them again. The exception was Christian, who starred in a later Potro video that was more like a conventional gay porn movie.¹⁸

In light of the narrative involving Potro's exploitation of young Russian performers, it's pertinent to revisit Elm, Kabalek, and Köhne's conception of trauma as a lens for understanding the social dynamics embedded within gay pornography. Potro's actions, depicted in the anecdote, reflect a form of exploitation that can inflict lasting psychological and emotional scars on the individuals involved. The promise of future opportunities juxtaposed with the reality of exploitation underscores the complexities of trauma within this context. The experiences of these performers promised opportunities yet ultimately left abandoned after being exploited for Potro's gain, highlight the enduring effects of post-communist socio-economic struggles and power differences. This narrative serves as a poignant example of how trauma permeates the fabric of Eastern European gay ethnic pornography, shaping both the narratives portrayed on screen and the lived realities of those involved.

Young Russian Innocents (1994) was presumably Potro Videos' first movie. Following *Young Russian Innocents*, Peter released *Young Soldiers Disclosed Screen Test*, *Russian Suburban Youth*, *Spanish Boys in Intimate Screen Test*, and *Out of the Sea*.¹⁹ Again, according to the information that William E. Jones shared, the *Spanish Boys in the Intimate Screen Test* series was shot in the Canary Islands with a slightly different aesthetic where there were no interview scenes or an additional hand. Both Russian and Spanish videos included shots of the boys urinating in jars, but these scenes had to be cut out for U.S. distribution. Since none of these scenes are online today, let's assume that what has been transferred to the digital platforms was from the U.S. distribution. Jones mentioned that "in Los Angeles County, pissing in porn was forbidden, something the director Bad Brad (Braverman) found out when the Sheriff's Department raided his studio and confiscated material." Even without 'pissing' scenes, the Potro Videos productions are thought-provoking.

Scripted interviews are a regular feature of porn. Their point is to introduce the performer and flesh out their story to fuel the imagination of the audience. In most

¹⁸ William E. Jones, writer, historian, and artist shared what he knows about the Potro Videos with his full consent. I received his letter of confirmation that states I am allowed to use this information for my research.

¹⁹ There is no concrete information on the exact publication dates of some of these films; however, considering the release dates of *Young Russian Innocents* and *Russian Suburban Youth*, these movies might have been released between 1994–1999.

cases, what the audience sees is an already hired performer being interviewed as a cringeworthy icebreaker before the sexual performance starts. Potro Video's interview scenes are always introduced as casting videos, shot before they go on with the actual movie, in which Potro asks the performer a series of questions, such as why do they want to be in a porn movie, have they ever been in a porn movie before, if they feel relaxed or anxious, or what do their parents or partners think about it. Following these questions, he explains what will happen next. Answers to the question of "why do you want to participate in a porn film?" are mostly the same: money and a good time. To explicitly vocalize sex work is a characteristic of European gay ethnic pornography, which seems to be not so popular outside of Europe. This can be considered in relation to the cultural myth of prostitution in Russia. As Eliot Borenstein argues "the post-Soviet prostitute was burdened with the symbolism that might seem wildly disproportionate to her status, she became a sign of Russian national humiliation – of the desperation of a country forced to sell off its natural and spiritual resources to unscrupulous clients from other lands."²⁰ Borenstein further argues that "the Russian prostitute represented the anxieties of post-Soviet masculinity in crisis, where the loss of the empire, the onslaught of the market, and the competition with a triumphant West were presented as kind of male sexual humiliation."²¹ Let's read Potro Video's *Young Russian Innocents* series with this crisis of masculinity in mind. Dam Healey suggests that Russian gay pornography of the 1990s has two key elements: "the all-male military utopia and the idyllic gay sexuality in the countryside."²² However, *Young Russian Innocents* challenges these two key elements through a simple interview scene, adding a new feature that will be a dominant sub-genre in Eastern European gay ethnic pornography: the gay-for-pay.

The post-Soviet crisis of masculinity and male sex work in the context of gay pornography expand Said's notion of Orientalism and the East-West binary by including Russian male bodies. The inclusion of Russia and Eastern Europe challenges the conventional Western narrative of the antagonized foreign male bodies by their whiteness. Considering the previous examples of gay ethnic pornography in Europe, notably those of Cadinot or Jean-Noël René Clair featuring Arab men in France, *Young Russian Innocents* shows a more complex power relation since the imagery is not shaped by a binary colonizer versus colonized dynamic. Fetishizing the post-war traumas of Russian men through gay-for-pay narratives adds a new element to the meaning of the sexual Other in European gay politics and aesthetics.

Besides the interview scenes, the Potro Videos introduce another narrative agent in these films that has never been featured in the earlier examples of the genre: the

²⁰ Borenstein, E. *Overkill: Sex and Violence in Contemporary Russian Popular Culture*. Cornell University Press, 2008, 79.

²¹ Borenstein, 2008, 80.

²² Healey, 2010, 223.

translator. This person trims the cast members' pubic hair, talks to them, undresses them, gives them hand-jobs, fingers them, and even checks their mouth and teeth, which echoes familiar erotic tropes of the masseur, the gym instructor, the school-teacher, etc. The presence of a second person in the frame during what is supposed to be a solo video is a challenge both to the genre and its meaning. His involvement is not that of a sexual partner, but rather a mediator of the viewer's relationship to the foreigner. This person could be the translator (assuming that he is the translator, because of the voice-over, and that he has a translator-like role in making the performer legible to the audience as a sexual subject), but since his face is barely visible, it does not matter who he is. What matters here is how this control mechanism functions and what it adds to the sexual appeal of the film. These hands are in a way disembodied: they operate both as sexual body parts (without a body) and as erotic instruments used for multiple purposes such as controlling, helping, and arranging. The international audience of pornography today could read *Young Russian Innocents* in different ways. One potential reading is that there is a '(helping) hand-built' hierarchy between the cast and the hand, and between the actor and the audience's 'helping hand.' These hands have specific codes: they look clean and healthy and seem to belong to a middle-aged white male – probably anticipating the video's main target, i.e. Western audiences, since these films were not distributed in the East.

This second person also serves as an interlocutor for the audience not familiar with Soviet aesthetics, culture, and customs. During the Soviet Union, the circulation of Soviet erotica was limited, especially in the West. Thus, *Young Russian Innocents* (1994) enabled the global audience to see what male sexuality could be in Russia. As much as a tutor who introduces these bodies in the film, the role of this 'mediating hand' is also to set the boundaries and moderate how we should perceive the subject of the film. Although similar in its narrative structure and the employed dynamics of otherness, no such interlocutor appears in *Spanish Boys in Intimate Screen Test*, the third series from Potro Videos. This suggests that the audience needs no introduction to desirable Spaniards. In *Overkill: Sex and Violence in Contemporary Russian Culture*, Eliot Borenstein writes:

...in 1990s Russia, pornography enjoyed a peculiar status in that it was doubly ubiquitous: not only was the first post-Soviet decade marked by a proliferation of pornographic texts and images on newsstands, televisions, and even shopping bags, but pornography seemed all the more pervasive in that it is featured prominently in the standard litany of woes afflicting post-socialist society.²³

The rise of pornography during the first decade of the post-Soviet era might have seemed arguably liberal. However, alongside the HIV epidemic, porn contributed to the negative perception of homosexuality and prostitution as invasive elements from the West that came to spoil whatever moral was left over from the communist past.

²³ Borenstein, 2008, 53.

Simultaneously, in Western Europe and the U.S., post-Soviet citizens, their culture, and sexualities were understood as oppressed and alien. Therefore, otherness was constructed in multiple and ambivalent ways on both sides. However, Bornstein's remark also applies to other media besides film. His understanding of pornography includes printed publications such as magazines, newspapers, and graphic novels. Based on this definition, gay pornography has not benefited from the supposed libertarian wave that followed the fall of the Iron Curtain, because gay porn was not printed but only circulated underground.

Following the *Young Russian Innocents* series, we could say that Potro Videos' two other series have a specific Russian theme. The first one is called *Young Soldiers Disclosed* (1994). In this film, Potro follows the same strategy of undressing and interviewing young men who supposedly served in the army. Potro shows various army men, including marines, aviators, and soldiers. Before interviewing the army men, Potro states that this is an audition, and if they succeed, these men can take part in the actual productions. He relies on the translator's help as he did during the shooting of *Young Russian Innocents*. Although the narrative seems repetitive, Potro includes an Estonian soldier, Tõmi, who defends the Estonian border to the 'new border of Russia.' Unlike Tõmi, most of the cast members represented the former Soviet army. Tõmi's inclusion changes the narrative and shows Russia as an enemy to Estonia, which hints at the new position of Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

However, in his interview, Tõmi shares that the only reason he wanted to act in porn was girls and to make money, which resulted in the cut of this scene. In the movie's last scene, Potro depicts a Spanish soldier completing his screen test out of the blue. Potro shares a disclaimer, as flowing text over the screen, while a Spanish soldier is being interviewed. The text states: "Jose is a 19-year-old Canarian serving in the Spanish elite troops 'La Legión' on the desert island of Fuerteventura in the Atlantic outside of the Sahara and the African coast." The two-part series has a soundtrack of military orchestra music and a variety of army uniforms that supports the narrative. Although Potro appeared to carry a political message in his movies by including Estonian and Spanish army men, he did not clarify his message and it remained a vague caricature of the military.

The other movie of Potro Video that continues with the Russian theme, *Russian Suburban Youths* (1997), portrays a group of young men playing basketball in the 'suburbs' of a Russian city. These young men dressed in what can be described as American street style, we see colorful jumper jackets, jean pants, and jean shorts that slightly expose the butt cheeks. In addition to their interest in basketball, the street style of these young men signifies the inevitable cultural change in Russian daily life. While this group of young men is playing basketball, the camera rotates to a couple that is entering a building of a housing estate next to the basketball court. In the following scene, the audience is introduced to the heterosexual porn performance of this couple. Young men who decided to stop playing basketball go up and join the couple that had just finished having sex. From that point on, the movie continues with collec-

tive jerk-off and (bisexual) group sex scenes. There is an ambiguous plot twist between the sets where the young men decide to go into the building and the couple ends up having sex.

The woman and the man from the first sex scene seemed to be apart while another woman appeared in stockings and prepared breakfast for this man. Later on, the woman from the first scene shows up in the other room to have group sex with the young men. This particular twist in the setting creates the illusion of portraying suburbs as brothels, supporting the message of sexual freedom that Potro wanted to share. In the history of gay pornography, suburbs are often described as sites of sexual liberation. For example, in the movies of Citébeur or Eric Videos, two French companies constantly use the suburban aesthetics of French banlieues as a site of sexual attraction. In the French examples, suburbs carry the cultural codes of migration and working-class, whereas, in Potro Videos, this might not be the issue yet.

Although Potro Video produced mainly gay porn films up until *Russian Suburban Youths* (1997), Peter, as producer and the director of the company, was targeting a broader range of audiences while keeping the homosexual tension in his movies. Looking at the chronology of his movie's portrayal of the two different sides of Russian men, in the first example, young men gave interviews and explained why they had no choice but to do porn. In the second one, Russian men seem to enjoy their free time with their stylish clothes and celebrate their sexual freedom and youth. This 81-minute-long film represents the bisexual portrayal of Russian men compared to Potro Videos' filmography.

Even though the previous examples of Potro Video depict the social crisis of post-Soviet Russia, one late example hints to the mainstream Eastern European-themed gay porn productions. The film is called *Out of the Sea* and, unfortunately, due to lack of information, the film's production year is missing; however, looking at the style and actors who appeared in *Russian Suburban Youths*, the film seems to be shot in the same decade. Despite the previous examples that reflect the financial hardships and traumas, *Out of the Sea* starts with a romantic storyline of two men coming out of the sea and cruising in nature until they end up in Moscow as two flamboyant tourists. After checking the landmarks, wandering around the Kremlin Palace wearing hot pants, they meet with a woman in a café. Following a short conversation, the three of them leave to have sex in an apartment. During the gay sex scene, two actors start wrestling and, as one of them seems to have passed out, and the other one carries him as the main porn event of the film fades out. The film is only available on a pirate porn streaming platform with a Russian title; therefore, the knowledge regarding this production remains very limited, while still providing a variety of Potro's Russian narrative, which is similar to the examples from the U.S. as well as Bel Ami Online from Prague and Bratislava. What sets Potro apart from the other examples is how he portrayed the same theme with two utterly different forms of objectification in the same era. The diversity in the fetishization of Russianness results in multiple additional readings of his films.

The movies of Potro Videos have particular importance considering that other gay porn film companies, such as *Kalinka Films*, are not available anymore in either online or physical archives nowadays. Despite the later Russian or Estonian productions of gay pornography, Potro somehow helps document gay sex in post-Soviet Russia while breaking the fourth wall with his unmannerly interactions and interpretations. Besides implementing long term economic reforms, Perestroika promised some sort of social liberation, which, after the 1980s, became manifest in erotic art, although this appears to be a very late occurrence. On a local level, this delay suggests that such promises of sexual liberation mostly worked for the outsiders of post-Perestroika Russia.²⁴

4.2 JNRC Films and the French Productions of Eastern European Gay Pornography

Following the success of Potro Videos, the French director Jean-Noël René Clair of JNRC Films realized the market potential of post-Soviet male sexuality and produced seven movies with an Eastern European narrative. Here the main themes included military men and gay-for-pay as well. In chronological order, JNRC's catalog of Eastern European ethnic porn includes *USSR* (1996), *CCCP* (1996), *Miles Para-Militaires*, (also known as *Mercenaries*, 1996), *Outrage* (1997), *Balkans Connection* (also known as *Men of Balkans*) (1997), and *Gypsy Sex* (2002).²⁵

Jean-Noël René Clair's first movie, titled *Légionnaires I* (1995), can be considered as one of the first European gay porn movies that has specific focus on Soviet army. He is accepted as a pioneer in terms of utilizing Eastern European masculinity, the identity of post-communist men, and the financial struggles that followed the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The protagonist, a soldier in the French army of Eastern European origins, introduces the set-up of the film:

I'm called Thief and I'm a paratrooper in the south of France. Originally, I'm from Eastern Europe. Being in the army is the best way for me to keep fit. I wanted to give porn a try because I know that other guys get a boner when they look at me. That's what happens with my superiors anyway, I can see their hard-on pushing against their uniforms as they check me out... The same is going to happen to you!²⁶

The film works by mixing the stereotype of the masculine heterosexual soldier with the Western cliché of post-communist Eastern European identity. The protagonist does not say that he is gay, but he enjoys arousing other men.

²⁴ Borenstein, 2008, 55.

²⁵ See: <https://www.jnrc.fr/en/> (Last Access Date: 17.03.2024).

²⁶ See: <https://www.jnrc.fr/de/dvd/detail/21765-legionnaires> (Last Access Date: 17.03.2024).

Contrarily to how military intervention is referred to through the use of German and French flags in the first chapter of this book, the gay male army utopia is constructed of different narrative elements in *USSR* (1996): while the scenario involves the usual military barracks and sexualization of war culture, one scene also shows a Soviet spaceship captain masturbating. The text reads:

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is your Big-Dicked Captain speaking. My space sausage is about to take-off while you stare at your screens with disbelief and desire. Yes, Ladies and Gents, my rocket is huge, thick and loaded with hot creamy fuel! Watch it point towards the sky as it prepares to penetrate the atmosphere!²⁷

The presumed right to invade space is the hallmark of colonial thought, as well as it is about the Cold War space ‘race’. Space discovery (or invasion) is a long-lasting competition in the world. Mainly between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, especially Russia. Metaphorically invading space is also being considered as a patriarchal action embedded in war culture. Therefore, as it has been narrated in the movie of Jean-Noël René Clair, the spaceship captain occupies a strategic militarist position that has not often been part of the narrative of gay ethnic pornography. However, since the Soviet Union is no longer an existing threat to Western countries, Cold War nostalgia found its way into porn in the 2000s. War and military themes often propose a utopian environment for homosexual desire, and political triumphs and insecurities, as seen in ethnic pornography, become more of an effective tool to portray such environments. That is similar to the prison theme that was significant in Arab-themed porn films from the U.S. As John Mercer describes “[...] these scenarios as performing an important function within gay porn by offering idealized spaces for the acts of pornography: voyeurism, narcissistic display and active/passive role-play.”²⁸

Jean-Noël René Clair’s next movie, *СССР* (Союз Советских Социалистических Республик, the Russian abbreviation for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) (1996), takes a man from the former Soviet Union as a case study. The back cover of the DVD and the text from the webpage states:

JNRC has dispatched a team to Russia to study the behavior of men from the East. This video features two young Russian Army dudes, boned-up and ready for action. It’s a real pleasure watching these two hard, muscular bodies and rock-hard cocks!²⁹

The idea of ‘a team sent to study the behavior of Russian men suggests a kind of anthropological study of cultural and ethnic others. A similar rhetoric has been used to commodify North Africans in Maghreb or Turkish men in Germany. The ethnogra-

27 See: <https://www.jnrc.fr/de/dvd/detail/5> (Last Access Date: 17.03.2024).

28 Mercer, John. “In the Slammer: The Myth of the Prison in American Gay Pornographic Video.” *Journal of Homosexuality* 47, no. 3–4, 2004, 151.

29 See: <https://www.jnrc.fr/de/dvd/detail/5259-cccp> (Last Access Date: 17.03.2024).

phic study is mobilized as part of the pornographic fiction. In most ethnic porn, either the names of places, local slang, or even the local language is used to support the credibility of the storyline. In *USSR* (1996), a Soviet Union flag is used as a backdrop, and Potro Videos used Soviet Army music as the film's soundtrack. Jean-Noël René Clair used additional elements to make sure that what the audience is watching is authentic.

The alleged educational and documentary value of pornographic cinema was often used as a legal defense strategy in favor of pornography: producers of pornography generally tried to bypass censorship by explicitly presenting sexual images as factual and artistic documentation.³⁰ Besides the fictional story it claims to tell, a pornographic film documents actual human bodies, non-scripted pleasure, and orgasms. In addition to this straightforward meaning of documentation, the sub-genre 'reality porn' further promises that what is presented is footage from real life.³¹ It is important to explain the distinction between reality porn that is quite similar to the format of reality TV and actual, authentic amateur porn which is often overlapped with reality porn, since both of them are marketing the concept of reality: incest, role-play, and gay-for-pay were popular themes of the reality porn sub-genre and are often related to 'amateur porn.' In most reality porn, such as that produced by Reality King, Czech Hunter, and Reality Dudes, the cameraman engages with the cast and participates in the movie. Gay ethnic pornography incorporated some of the critical elements of reality porn, such as mock interviews, cameraman involvement, including footage from the city that the movie was filmed in, and so on. This documentary style strengthens the authenticity, so the viewer may relate more to it. *USSR* (1996) is one of the first movies in which Jean-Noël René Clair reinforces authenticity by using a flag, real military gear, language, and music. In addition to these elements, gay ethnic pornography promoted post-communist Eastern European nationalities as novel to pornography – many of these movies are marketed with a 'first-time' tagline.

4.3 *Men of Balkans*: The Balkan Men Trend in Gay Pornography

Where the first of Jean-Noël René Clair's Eastern European-themed films thematized the gay male military fantasy of the Soviet Union, the later ones rather focus on the post-communist identity crisis of Eastern European men. The first significant example of his later filmmaking is *Balkans Connections*, sold in the U.S. as *Men of the Balkans* (1997). The VHS video front cover says, "the roughest, toughest, hairy, tattooed men

30 Sconce, Jeffrey. *Sleaze Artists: Cinema at the Margins of Taste, Style, and Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007, 97.

31 Longstaff, Gareth. "From Reality to Fantasy: Celebrity, Reality TV and Pornography." *Celebrity studies* 4, no. 1, 2013, 71.

from Bulgaria let it ALL hang out!”³² Gay ethnic pornography of Eastern Europe changed its direction to country-specific examples: Bulgaria, Albania, Hungary, and the Czech Republic became the top destinations for Western European and U.S. porn filmmakers. Jean-Noël Réne Clair pioneered this ethnic division that goes way back to the Nazi invasion of Eastern Europe and even before. For the gay porn audience, this has been introduced as a sort of premiere. However, the ethnic segregation and degradation of ethnicities were openly instrumentalized by Nazism during World War II. To ‘trace’ Germany’s colonization of Eastern Europe, we need to go back to Poland’s reinvention in the nineteenth century and the Prussian colonial settlements in Europe. Robert L. Nelson states that:

[...] for as long as colonialism has existed, it has existed in Europe. All the hallmarks of the new imperialism of the nineteenth century, as well as both its murderous and more informal manifestations in the nineteenth century, exist in the history of Germany and Eastern Europe.³³

Taken from literature, this example demonstrates, again, how deeply rooted discussions about the East vs. West division were in Europe and how the resulting political tension and power dynamics manifested in other branches of artistic production as well. *Balkans Connection* (1997) is a 90-minute-long compilation of solo and duo scenes featuring Bulgarian men. Most of the duo scenes start with a conversation in Bulgarian that happens outdoors in nature. The scene continues as the pair ends up in a room and start having sex. Unlike *Young Russian Innocents*, there is no interviewer, or any other mysterious person who moderates between the cast and the director. This time, Jean-Noël Réne Clair built his narrative purely around the environment and the actors. In his later works, he brings the scripted narrative elements back to the idyllic countryside of Eastern Europe.

Jean-Noël Réne Clair applies the two main elements of Eastern European gay ethnic pornography in his cinema as well, one being the army and the other being a post-communist pastoral fantasy. As part of the latter, he uses the word ‘Gypsy’ to glamorize and humiliate Eastern European men. With *Gypsy Sex* (2002), Jean-Noël Réne Clair changed his focus from Bulgaria to Kosovar and Roma people. In this film, he pairs an ethnic stereotype with the familiar “heterosexual male who enjoys participating in gay adult movies”. Roma people, or the Romani community, is a nomadic community mainly located in Southeast Europe. Roma people have been stigmatized throughout history and are often called by the derogatory term ‘gypsies’. Jean-Noël Réne Clair instrumentalized these cultural stigmatizations against the social identity of Roma people and commodified male sexuality by incorporating these men into his narratives of heterosexuality/bisexuality and gay-for-pay. In *Gypsy Sex*, Jean-Noël

32 See: <https://www.davidkordanskygallery.com/viewing-room/firsthand-william-e-jones> (Last Access Date: 17.03.2024).

33 Nelson, 2012, 6.

Réne Clair invites ‘straight Gypsy dude’ Halit from Kosovo to have anal sex in front of the camera for money. The introduction text on Jean-Noël Réne Clair’s web page states:

Halit is a straight dude from Kosovo who has a thing for submissive boys. Nothing excites him more than a young male avidly working on his big schlong. He loves to fuck their mouth before taking their ass. A young ass with a tight hole feels so good!³⁴

Here, the link between the characterization of ‘Gypsy’ men and the pastoral or rural fantasy are supported by the nomadic customs of Roma people. For example, the film introduces ‘Gypsy’ culture to the audience through their moving way of living. Such a nomadic way of living is not based on the tradition that has its roots in the 14th century: it is deeply affected by wars and xenophobic attacks. Angus M. Fraser also points out that “modern stereotypes still characterize Gypsies as a wandering people, even though settled Gypsies are in the majority.”³⁵ Instead, the standard narrative in gay pornography portrays ‘Gypsy’ men as wanderers, and if not wanderers, they are shown as part of a ghetto culture. Additionally, the migration of Roma people does not happen individually but in the form of nuclear families. However, the description of ‘Gypsy’ men is based on the textual information printed on the DVD jacket and the internet page of the film. The actual film is no different from a typical gay porn movie that films men having sex in front of the camera without a developed scenario.

In *Gypsy Sex*, the way JNRC includes characters who are presented to be Turkish and Kosovan, he perhaps generalizes and mixes the ethnic and cultural diversity of his films to make them more eccentric for his audience. In *Gypsy Sex*, the audience is, besides the typical JNRC narrative, also introduced to the houses they supposedly live in, including a compilation of short films that contains solo and duo sex scenes. For both scenarios, the camera follows the actors from the outside to the inside of their homes. These houses are either squats or small rooms that lack basic facilities such as heating to represent the nomadic lifestyle of Roma men. Compared to the other set-up scenarios of JNRC, such as in *CCCP* (1996) or *Outrage* (1997), the audience is introduced to more of an authentic setting that contradicts methods used in the JNRC films.

Additionally, *Gypsy Sex* includes some narrative elements that aim to strengthen both the fantasy of straight men in gay porn and the authenticity of the nomadic lifestyle of the Roma people. For example, in one of the solo scenes, the actor introduces himself on a horse and then goes to his house. However, such a move is not shown, and the scene zooms out from the actor’s face and fades to a drawing of the Virgin Mary holding Jesus. During this solo scene, the camera often focuses on the poster of naked women that are glued on the top of the actor’s bed. However, *Gypsy Sex* could be considered an obscure example compared to the previous JNRC movies with an

³⁴ See: <https://www.jnrc.fr/en/dvd/detail/5264-gipsy-sex> (Last Access Date: 17.03.2024).

³⁵ Fraser, Angus M. *The Gypsies*. Peoples of Europe. Oxford, UK; Cambridge, Mass. U.S.A.: Blackwell, 1992, 2.

Eastern European focus, based on the ways in which he handles the issue of social and political traumas through ethnicization. This particular film contributes to the overall analysis of his movies by providing the default for the future representations regarding Roma men that later on will receive more visibility in the European gay porn scene, as in the case of EastBoys (www.eastboys.com), a platform dedicated to a series that followed JNRC Films' footsteps and produced films under Caravan Boys – Hot Gypsy Boys. The other gay porn examples that invested in narrating 'Gypsy' male-to-male sex are mainly categorized as gay-for-pay or bait porn genres. There was also a U.S.-based Mexican-Romanian gay porn star named Ari Gypsy from the early 2000s who appeared in bait-bus movies, such as the ones produced for *Manover30* and *Ungloryhole* gay porn film companies. Like the bisexual or top-only non-white men of JNRC, Ari Gypsy is portrayed as straight or bisexual in most films that follow the tropes of European gay ethnic pornography. The U.S. example also shows that the usage of the fantasy of straight or bisexual 'gypsy' men was not a particular theme only within Europe.

One of the primary triggers for this interest could be the Roma people's mobility after the establishment of the European Union and the launch of free movement between member countries. The migration crisis within the European Union countries triggered both fear of and fascination with the Roma people. *Gypsy Sex* does not share much of the Eastern European side of the story, though it does give voice to a silent phenomenon – that is to say, the sexuality of the Romani male. In the post-communist Eastern European context, *Gypsy Sex* offers an alternative pleasure that expands the knowledge of male sexuality of an ignored community in Europe.

4.4 BUM Videos: *Yugo Power* and the Comeback of Zip Production

Jean-Noël Réne Clair is not the only director who produced gay porn films in Bulgaria. In 2005, the German producers Ben Tamam and Murat Bal, who founded the prominent Zip Production, under the name BUM Film, made a short series called *Yugo Power* (2005). In *Yugo Power* – *Yugo* being short for Yugoslavian – a German tourist is fucked by ten different cast members, including Eastern Europeans and Africans. However, this gang bang was not like the mainstream kind in which, most of the time, the cast members are brought into a scene where all parties are 'willingly' involved in sexual interaction. Rather, *Yugo Power* starts with a group of Eastern European men waiting for someone to walk by whom they can 'kidnap.' When the German tourist walks by, he gets kidnapped by them and taken into the film's set, an industrial space. Once inside, they handcuff and chain him before leaving the room. After a while, two of them come back and release him. They start to strip off his clothes, and the three of them have sex. The Eastern European men we saw at the beginning of the film then take turns to have sex with the German tourist, and, towards the end of the film, out of nowhere, a black guy joins the scene. Aside from this group scene, *Yugo Power*

includes two solo scenes. The inclusion of a German character kidnapped and gang-raped by Eastern Europeans is a commentary on the social transformation of Europe and its pornosphere.³⁶

In the narratives of BUM Film, the Oriental sex tourism fantasy familiar from Jean-Daniel Cadinot's cinema is transformed into a triumphant post-communist sexual tension between Eastern Europe and the West. Whereas Cadinot's erotics brought together the colonizer and the colonized, the BUM Film productions utilize a form of neocolonial tension. It is worth noting that this movie's production year, 2005, was also when sex tourism, as a sub-genre of gay male erotica, was already a hot topic in other Eastern European countries such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary.³⁷ BUM Film inadvertently illustrated the socio-political tension between the post-communist East and Western Europe by showing a German man being fucked by ten Bulgarians.

4.5 BigStr Network and the Czech Porn Bloom

The Eastern European-produced porn films often include sex work in their storylines, but not as part of an exploitation-narrative, as it is characteristic for BUM Film or Jean-Noël Réne Clair. Productions from the Czech Republic mainly used sex work as a way of thematizing the country's financial obstacles. Before the bloom of the gay-for-pay genre in the Czech Republic, one of the first Czech gay porn companies, CzechBoys (founded by Pavel Rada), adapted the American twink genre for the Czech context. With the *Twink Party 1–7* series (1999), CzechBoys produced the first Czech gay porn films. A twink is understood to be 18–23 years of age, have smooth or clean-shaven skin, be skinny rather than muscular, not overly masculine, and predominantly white. As well as a sexual type, twink is also a norm-making term that defines beauty standards in gay subculture. The orgy scenes from CzechBoys' *Twink Party* series would later inspire similar content from the Slovakian BelAmi Boys company. CzechBoys widened the scope of what Eastern European porn could be, previously defined by the sort of narrative promoted by *Young Russian Innocents I & II* (1994). CzechBoys continued to produce gay porn content until 2006. CzechBoys and Bel Ami tell us about the changing relations between Eastern and Western Europe by removing war culture and its after-effects from their narrative. This 'bland', white twink porn neatly corresponds with the non-pornographic representations and recreates an image of Eastern Europe from a 'politically' less risky perspective.

³⁶ Here I use the term pornosphere, a concept introduced by Brian McNair, to describe the exchange and circulation of sexually explicit materials. McNair, B. *Porno? Chic!: How Pornography Changed the World and Made It a Better Place*. Routledge, 2013.

³⁷ The narrative of the following films that appeared in the mid-2000s.

Following CzechBoys, the Czech Hunter film company adapted the gay-for-pay genre to thematize the Czech Republic's social challenges. A typical Czech Hunter movie starts in a public space, where a man holding a camera hunts down young Czech guys and ask them what they would do for 7,000 Czech Koruna. The young men act innocent, giving the impression that they are surprised by the offer, and do not anticipate taking part in a porn film minutes later. The man behind the camera does not immediately let on that this will be a porn film, but offers hints when saying that it will be a quick job that does not require talking. It is only when they are in private that he asks for a blowjob. Interestingly, we see the camera man paying his prey before he commences with the blowjob. After that, he offers more money to complete their recording with anal sex. Here the young men often react surprised, rejecting the request immediately; however, thinking of the cash they are going to make, they tend to quickly change their minds.

The desire for straight men is a well-known phenomenon in gay culture, and it was frequently used as a narrative of homo-erotica, including pornographic film. Gay-for-pay first emerged in the U.S. mainstream gay pornography, and then European filmmakers adapted the genre to suit their contexts. Kevin Bozelka states that "the history of gay-for-pay pornography is nearly, if not necessarily, coextensive with that of gay pornography."³⁸ Besides the attraction of watching straight men having gay sex, part of this genre's appeal is to see it happening for the first time in an unprotected sex setting. To take part in gay porn is a socially transgressive act, in some cultures even more than in others. Incorporating such dynamics is another way in which gay-for-pay can be made ethnic. In addition to this, John Mercer argues, the financial alibi in gay-for-pay absolves the distinctive tension between straight and gay men.³⁹ Considering the relationship between the audience who subscribe to these productions and the performer, gay-for-pay could be a transgressive genre where money functions as a catalyst of multiple dynamics simultaneously. Especially in the post-communist context, it exposes the performer's new social status, whether it is accurate or not. In the U.S. version, gay-for-pay performance was mainly moved between straight and gay sexual fantasies without being directly linked to the social and economic class.

In Potro Videos' *Young Russian Innocents* (1994), the gay-for-pay elements were very apparent. Most of the cast members highlighted that one of the main reasons why they agree to participate in a porn film was money. Taking notice from *Young Russian Innocents* (1994), Czech Hunter elevated the gay-for-pay narrative by making

38 Bozelka, Kevin John, "The gay-for-pay gaze in gay male pornography." *Jump Cut*, no. 55, fall 2013. See: <https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc55.2013/BozelkaGayForPay/text.html>. (Last Access Date: 17.03.2024).

39 Mercer, John. "Gay for Pay." In *The Handbook of Gender, Sex, and Media*, edited by Karen Ross. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, 547.

it more of an apparent phenomenon.⁴⁰ The banner of Czech Hunter web page states: “Czech boys do it for money! It is true: the difficult social situation in the Czech Republic supports our hobby.”⁴¹ The Czech Republic took a more liberal stance towards pornography during its transition from communism to democracy. During the first years of this transition, porn production and sex work were not considered criminal offenses.⁴²

Perhaps the social situation that they mentioned was also the reality of that time, however, as a company that is still active today, this social reality is more of a nostalgic fantasy that supports the myth of a particular Czech identity. Using the same narrative for more than a decade, Czech Hunter has produced over 500 gay porn films, achieving a kind of cult status in the gay porn industry. Post-communist socio-economic trauma and nostalgia has proven a sustainable source of income for the Czech sex industry. Before Czech Hunter, it was mainly production companies from Western Europe and the U.S. that showed specific interest in capitalizing on post-Soviet male sexuality and the erotic narratives that might be related to the fall of the communist regime. It is also worth noting that, since a straight character in the film can, de facto, be paid only once to have gay sex for the first time, each actor can only appear once in this genre. This means that more than 500 Czech amateur porn actors, supposedly heterosexual, contributed to this genre. It is also important to highlight that the movies do not have a name; instead, they are numbered: the number of Czech guys they hunted represents a kind of score.

Following Czech Hunter, the Debt Dandy and Dirty Scout companies produced alternative narratives to Czech Hunter, but relying on similar patterns and concepts. Debt Dandy gets their cast members from newspaper ads offering money to young guys who live in the Czech Republic and are in debt. Once in touch with Debt Dandy via phone, they are asked for sexual intercourse for quick cash. Where in Czech Hunter, there is a flirty tension between the cameraman and his subject, in Debt Dandy, this flirty atmosphere has been exchanged for real desperation, as the indebted young man is abused by the Dandy holding the camera. At the beginning of every movie, the Dandy asks why the actor needs the money. Most of the time, they share the same reasons, basic needs such as rent or groceries that speak to the real financial difficulties the young men go through. In some scenes, the power relationship in Debt Dandy goes even further, erring on sadomasochism.

⁴⁰ Chronologically, between Potro Video and Czech Hunter’s production time, Eastern European’s focus did not focus on the gay-for-pay narrative. However, BUM Film hinted the sex tourism in their history.

⁴¹ See: <https://www.czechhunter.com/> (Last Access Date: 17.03.2024).

⁴² Diamond, Milton, Eva Jozifkova, and Petr Weiss. “Pornography and Sex Crimes in the Czech Republic.” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 40, no. 5, 2011, 1038.

As Joseph Brennan states, “the greater the debt, the more humiliating the act.”⁴³ Similar humiliation scenes have existed in U.S. gay pornography for more than a decade. If we take HazeHim.com as an example, the web page banner states, “straight college fraternity guys getting hazed into gay sex.”⁴⁴ In the Eastern European context, the idea of getting hazed into gay sex – that is, sex as a form of humiliation and abuse – sits in the complicated intersection of class struggle and a historically founded crisis of masculinity. However, we should also acknowledge that there might be a crucial distinction to be made between this concept and the SM sex. Hazing does not seem to be about pain as pleasure, or submission as power, but just ‘abuse as abuse’; which is quite different from the erotics of SM, which are based on the principles of safeness, consent, and saneness. Even so, for a viewer, the pleasure in watching someone being ‘abused’ usually does not take into consideration the framework under which the particular movie was produced.

Dirty Scout sexualizes similar social and financial anxieties in narratives constructed around a job interview. Young Eastern European men (according to answers that they gave during the interview, mostly Czech and Slovakian) are invited to an office where they will be asked to do a recorded interview. The interview starts with typical questions such as educational background, salary expectations, work hours, etc. At the end of the interview, the job agency representative usually makes an offer: the candidate may either pay a fee for his consultation service in cash, or, if they do not have money, perform a sexual favor instead. From the moment that candidate gets naked, more questions start to come up, with additional cash offered by the job agency representative in return for answers. At the end of the narrative, the candidate leaves with a cash tip, a new job contract, and a porn film to prove it.

All the sites of the Bigstr network – Czech Hunter, Debt Dandy, and Dirty Scout – use the financial difficulties of post-communist Eastern Europe as the narrative framework of their productions. Since these three websites belong to the same distributor, by subscribing to one, users gain access to all three. Besides those of the Bigstr network, another Czech site, Czech Gay Authentic Videos (known by the abbreviation CzechGav), offers access to seven different gay porn sites (CzechGayFantasy, CzechGayCasting, CzechGayMassage, CzechGayCouples, CzechGayAmateurs, CzechGaySolarium, and CzechGayToilets) each with a different profile such as gay-for-pay, darkroom, sexwork, anonymous sex, massage, hidden camera, casting call, and more. While some of these sites offer refined versions of the narratives familiar from the Bigstr network (CzechGayCouples and CzechGayCasting, for instance, are very typical, supposedly authentic gay-for-pay scenarios), others are more fresh, using a hidden-camera conceit to allow viewers the ‘illicit’ experience of observing a man in a solarium, a toilet, or even in a sexual massage session.

⁴³ Brennan, 2019, 24.

⁴⁴ See: <http://hazehim.com/> (Last Access Date: 17.03.2024).

Toilets, massage studios, and saunas are typical both of pornography and real-life cruising playgrounds. The CzechGav network mixes aspects of national and regional culture to sexualize these public spaces along ethnic lines. These sexual spaces could often remind the viewer of the financial obstacles encountered by Eastern European men. However, the niche network of CzechGav offers a vibrant urban narrative while hoping for a financial benefit out of these niche tastes. Joseph Brennan defines networks like CzechGav as “specialized networks, that offer variations on a single theme or genre niche.”⁴⁵ The specialized network of CzechGav brings a new narrative into their genre, where they combine cruising and sex tourism in an authentic way.

Some sub-genres on CzechGav, such as setting the gay-for-pay narrative in a public toilet, are also used in U.S. and Western European pornography. Yet, CzechGav maintains its local specificities while being part of a more global trend in gay porn. The videos on CzechGayFantasy.com are set within a sex club for which one has to buy a ticket at the door to have sex, not with other visitors to the club, but with the Czech men that work there. It is important to mention that it is not just cruising but a kind of prostitution joint where some people are clients and others work there. Architecturally, the venue is not a typical darkroom or sex club. Rather, wooden walls that resemble the traditional Czech forest cabins with differently sized and placed glory holes functioning as space dividers. Some of the glory holes are large enough to fit a person, and some are placed high enough, with chains for holding up people’s legs, so that they can function for anonymous fisting sessions. Other glory holes are paired with biometric pictures of the person behind them. This allows the clients of this space to see who they are interacting with, while the person on the other side of the panel still has no idea. Moreover, darkrooms and classic toilet cubicle-style glory holes allow clients more ways to have anonymous sex. There are two camera views in the movies of CzechGayFantasy.com. One that shows the inside of the club from the perspective of the clients, and one placed on the other side of the wall showing the people who work there.

The Czechness of this fantasy is built around the particular place that sex work occupies in relation to the Czech national identity as conceived in porn. Czech gay pornography created an ethnic-national aesthetic that functions in tandem with sex tourism. CzechGayFantasy emphasizes the elements of sex work by providing video footage of the ticket counter, and the interior architecture of the space, which separates the clients from sex workers. These wooden dividers function as a mechanism for enforcing both sexual and social hierarchies. Sex workers either have their legs cuffed or are bent over a massage bench. But the club’s clients are anonymous only to the sex workers, not to the viewers of this website. Through its association with sex work, anonymous sex becomes another key element of the Czech sexual fantasy. The

45 Brennan, 2019, 145.

anonymity of the clients functions almost like the sort of control element you would find in a BDSM narrative, thus reaching out to that audience as well.

In addition to the portraits, the audiences of CzechGayFantasy can see the reaction of the sex workers. The voyeuristic audiences are satisfied because they can see what both the clients and sex workers cannot. Two sets of footage are visible to the viewer simultaneously: one that shows the actual sex between clients and sex workers, and another showing mostly the upper bodies of the sex workers, transmitting pleasure through gestures, postures, verbal dialogue and vocal expressions such as moaning. In the part where the audience can observe the sex, they also follow the dynamic between the clients, hear the discussions, and observe multiple interactions at once. Besides sheer voyeuristic pleasure, this set-up also satisfies the viewer by allowing them a similar position of power as the cameraman in Czech Hunter, Debt Dandy, and Dirty Scout: controlling and penetrating, at the same time. Yet, another form of identification that is available to the audience is one with the sex worker. This particular example continues the sex worker fantasy while allowing the audience to be involved not only by observing the sex worker but also the customer and the whole architectural setting. Such a setting allows the audience more access, although the different camera angles limit their perspective. What separates this example from the previous ones, such as CzechHunter or Debt Dandy, is the expansion in the access to the depicted customer in the sex club who is not holding a camera but can be observed by the camera and the limitations of camera angles that impair the observation. The audience can also identify with the actors who enjoy anonymous sex in such a setting while being informed that this is a Czech gay fantasy that sets the ethnic desire in addition to the active/passive dichotomy in semi-anonymous sex.

4.6 Big Swing: BelAmi Online

The CzechGay and Bigstr. Network alternated post-communist nostalgia with an amateur porn aesthetic, while Bel Ami Videos and CzechBoys were dedicated to promoting a more mainstream, or normative, international aesthetic within the Czech Republic and its neighbors. Bel Ami Videos was founded in 1993 by the Slovak native Georges Duroy, who chose both his *nom de plume* and the name of his company as a reference to Guy de Maupassant's novel *Bel Ami* (1903).⁴⁶ George Duroy took the pictures of amateur Slovakian male models and sold them U.S.-based gay porn magazine *Freshmen*.⁴⁷ Today, Bel Ami is operated from three countries, namely Budapest (Hungary), Prague

⁴⁶ Morrison, Todd G. *Eclectic Views on Gay Male Pornography: Pornucopia*. Binghamton, NY: Harrington Park Press, 2004, 161.

⁴⁷ Kroll, Gerry. *Nature in the Raw: Gay Erotic Fiction from Freshmen Magazine*. 1st ed. Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1996.

(Czech Republic) and Bratislava (Slovakia), from where the company continues to produce gay porn. In addition to film content, they also publish calendars and photo books with the German publishing house Bruno Gmünder, which publishes books for the French porn company Citébeur. Bel Ami adopted the aesthetic of the U.S.-based straight porn producer Vivid Entertainment, established in 1984. Their videos feature young, skinny women with plenty of plastic surgery, often glistening with oil. Similarly, the typical Bel Ami boy is a pretty twink who enjoys bareback sex. As opposed to the post-communist trauma many other Eastern European gay porn films tap into to arouse their audience, Bel Ami's videos offer a positive view on male sexuality. According to Michael Hone, who provided a detailed analysis on BelAmi Online, this joyful attitude was the idea of Marty Stevens, one of the first models of Bel Ami videos in 1991 (the year that the Soviet Union has collapsed), who since joined the production team as a chief photographer.⁴⁸

The physical similarity of Bel Ami's models was prominent enough to become the subject of a movie called *Taboo: The Peter Twins* (2010).⁴⁹ This body type is dubbed 'Bel Ami discipline' and can only be the result of "working out, a non-fat diet, and abstinence, which allows them to ejaculate abundantly."⁵⁰ This diet is a metaphor to describe lookalike Bel Ami models that almost remind the viewer of a familiar resemblance. According to their interview on the Gay Twins WordPress page, Elijah and Milo Peters – two of Bel Ami's popular models – are not actually related, although they share enough similarities that Bel Ami could cast them as part of incest narratives.⁵¹ In their movie *An American in Prague* (1997), Bel Ami presents an idealized version of Prague through their models' glossy bodies. *An American in Prague* tells the story of George Duroy's assistant, who hosts a porn actor cast for their next production while George is away. The film opens with George's assistant having sex with a friend before going to pick up the actor who is travelling to Prague. The film includes very few pictures of the historical landmarks of Prague. The rest of the film features scenes from a nightclub, a villa with a huge garden that has palm trees. In contrast to the political unrest in Eastern Europe after 1990, Bel Ami's world looks clean and slick and is all about pleasure and leisure. The UK's mainstream gay lifestyle magazine *Gay Times* emphasized Bel Ami's glossy aesthetic and reads their narrative as a healing one: "When porno naysayers bang on about filthy moral corruption, Ian Jackson sug-

⁴⁸ Hone, 2018, 121.

⁴⁹ Lukas Ridgeston directed this film for his porn film company in 2010; however, later on, Bel Ami adapted the narrative to their concept and continued casting the same actors as twins for their films.

⁵⁰ Hone, 2018, 120.

⁵¹ See: <https://gaytwins.wordpress.com/about/> (Last Access Date: 17.03.2024).

gests a peek at the clean-living Bel Ami boys' for sexual healing."⁵² A question to be asked is how far this 'White-otherness' of Eastern Europeans should extend to be racially marked within whiteness, and whether Bel Ami counts as ethnic pornography when the identity that it fetishizes is the hegemonic one.

Bel Ami's remaking of the Eastern European man's image is not only about aesthetics, but about realigning their representation according to social and economic shifts. With their series *Out in Africa* (2006), Bel Ami attempts to produce a subversive version of ethnic pornography. The back cover states:

[...] In Cape Town, South Africa, there are both natural landmarks and popular tourist attractions to visit. For example, a monkey park, an ostrich farm where one can feed the birds, buy products made from ostrich leather and even eat ostrich meat [...]. The *Out in Africa* series doesn't just show the models sightseeing. The three *Out in Africa* videos feature the models in their private lives, getting together for sexual encounters on their own while director George Duroy is busy filming elsewhere.⁵³

As the text states, the Bel Ami boys only go sightseeing and have sex with one another. They do not engage with South African society. There is only one black and one mixed-'race' model in *Out in Africa* (2006), which would be a disappointment to the dedicated consumer of Africa-themed gay porn. Although the DVD covers include elements of African art and design, it is hard to find African features besides the found footage of Cape Town that appears sporadically in the series. There is no research on Bel Ami's audience demographics; however, given that its models are typically the white 'boy next door'-types typical of mainstream U.S. pornography, we might assume that the audience is a white majority too. While *Out in Africa* (2006) was loyal to Bel Ami stereotypes, *Out in Africa 2* (2006) includes a 'special guest,' Adam Dexter, a black man. *Out in Africa* functions as part of Bel Ami's re-creation of the Eastern European man as someone who visits Africa as a sex tourist, just like any Western middle-class white gay man would do. The interracial performance in an Eastern European gay porn film challenges the context of Bel Ami, while still strengthening its Westernized image by bringing colonial sex tourism stories back into porn. Also, the term ethnic porn here is something we should question. What sort of ethnic porn is the *Out in Africa* series, Eastern European or African? Has the real issue become not the cultural/sexual otherness of Eastern Europeans, but the political and economic conditions that make Czech, Hungary, and Slovakia disproportionately large contributors to the sex industry? Perhaps, this can be seen as another version of 'interracial porn,' given that it is a significant category in hard-core porn, both straight and gay. The purpose of Adam

⁵² Jackson, Ian. "When Porno Nay-sayers Bang on about 'Filthy Moral Corruption', Ian Jackson Suggests a Peek at the Clean-living Bel Ami Boys' for Sexual Healing." *Gay Times*, London, England, no. 336, 2006, 241.

⁵³ See: <https://www.gaydvdempire.com/1069355/out-in-africa-1-gay-porn-movies.html> (Last Access Date: 17.03.2024).

Dexter's performance seems there to justify that the Bel Ami boys are even in Africa. In 2014, the Gay sex blog Sword claimed that Bel Ami whitewashed their 'mixed-race' models, by erasing their multi-ethnic backgrounds in their promotions and called Bel Ami a 'white-only' gay porn site.⁵⁴ George Duroy responded to the claim in this way:

I was repeatedly accused of 'racism' by some because I don't use different ethnicities... We live and create our programming in an ethnically homogenous region of Central Europe. Walking the streets of Bratislava, I have the opportunity to see an African American (or only African or Latino) about twice a year. It doesn't mean we are racist. We simply work with the material we have.⁵⁵

The footage from South Africa that features in the *Out in Africa* series is mostly sourced from wildlife documentaries showing animals having sex, or picturesque natural landscapes. This is also true of another vacation-themed Bel Ami series, *Greek Holiday* (2004). Like *Out in Africa*, Bel Ami models visiting Greek islands, mainly the footages from Mykonos, have been used to support Grecian sexual fantasy as a background for the Bel Ami production. As George Duroy explained, Bel Ami productions' holiday themes add up aesthetic elements because they could only work with what they have, ending up using "exotic" travel themes for marketing purposes, for branding and to promote their DVDs.

Besides consolidating Bel Ami Videos' Westernized image, the *Out in Africa* series treats the labor of sex work in a humorous way. Bel Ami released these films as 'reality series', suggesting to the audience that there is some element of authenticity. While previous examples of Eastern European gay pornography presented sex work as a choice people were pressed to make given the economic circumstances of the post-communist era, *Out in Africa* bore the tagline "All play and no work!" on the DVD's front cover. The approach of Bel Ami here is both redemptive and satirical. George Duroy's Bel Ami broke out of the gay-for-pay narrative so prevalent in post-communist Eastern European gay porn by creating narratives in which the characters were happy, loaded and carefree. George Duroy's challenge to the Western conception of Eastern European pornography mirrors the plot in Maupassant's *Bel Ami*, as Susan M. Barrow argues:

Protagonist Georges Duroy retains the brute code of survival internalized during military service in Algeria. In order to thrive as a civilian in treacherous Parisian milieus, he deploys predatory tactics cloaked by a veneer of civility. Starting as a fledgling journalist, he will infiltrate and ultimately conquer the hierarchies of power. It is in settings evoking aspects of the Orient that Duroy will form liaisons with the influential consorts who aid in his ascension. Duroy emerges as a

⁵⁴ See: <https://www.thesword.com/bel-ami-tries-to-appease-racist-bel-ami-members-who-hate-black-people-by-reminding-them-that-austin-merrick-isnt-actually-a-full-black-person.html> (Last Access Date: 17.03.2024).

⁵⁵ See: <https://bananaguide.com/article/88414/bel-ami-responds-to-the-sword-s-racism-charge> (Last Access Date: 17.03.2024).

pagan idol through appropriation of guises of the Orient, a triumph marking the erosion of the core values of French civilization.⁵⁶

Bel Ami, the porn company, presented a new and redemptive image of Eastern Europe compared to the others with little difference from films produced in the U.S. Although Bel Ami created an alternative to the dominant gay-for-pay narrative, George Duroy's films do share features with the films of that genre, such as that most of his characters claim to be straight.⁵⁷ The three leading gay porn producers of Eastern Europe, Bel Ami, Bigstr, and CzechGav provide three different takes on how to sexualize Eastern European identity after the collapse of communism. While Bel Ami portrays a Western reality that speaks to the assimilation of the region into the EU, and the economic growth of the new millennium, Bigstr and CzechGav focused on the sexual commodification of Eastern European political struggle aimed at Western audiences.

While the prominent porn production in Czech Rep., Slovakia and Hungary allowed some degree of pornographic self-representation in that region, Russia and other post-Soviet countries became the primary subject for Western production companies. U.S. filmmakers paid specific attention to the post-Soviet erotica. While gay pornography provided access to the Eastern male sexualities, it also reflects the power dynamic by operating within the East's post-communist traumas. The relationship between colonizer and colonized is supported by the different formulations of masculinity that helped to illustrate and sexualize the power dynamic of East and West. The primacy of purportedly heterosexual men in gay porn from this region speaks volumes of the workings of this power dynamic.

In addition to these European examples of gay, ethnic pornography, we should also mention some of the movies made by Michael Lucas of Lucas Entertainment. Although Lucas Entertainment is a New York-based gay porn film company, Michael Lucas is a Soviet Union-born, Russian-Israeli filmmaker and porn actor. Lucas migrated first to Germany and worked as a sex worker and then moved to the U.S. where he continued to produce films both as producer and performer. Lucas Entertainment made several movies focusing on Russia and the Czech Republic. Their first Czech film was a collaboration with Best Czech Boys, who also produced the *Twink Party* series. Their collaboration is called *Prague Sex Express* (2004), and the film presents Prague as a sexual utopia, much like in Bel Ami's movies. The back cover of *Prague Sex Express* reads:

There's a lot of porn coming out of the Czech Republic. I've heard it's because that particular country has very liberal views about gay sex. Straight boys don't mind doing it on camera for

⁵⁶ Barrow, Susan M. "East/West: Appropriation of Aspects of the Orient in Maupassant's 'Bel-Ami.'" *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 30, no. 3/4, 2002, 315.

⁵⁷ Hone, 2018, 129.

money, and there is a high degree of sexy young strippers, especially in Prague. But what kind of video do you get when some, or many, of the boys aren't really gay? You certainly can thrill to their bodies, but the action between them cannot equal what happens in the porn that is made by genuine homosexuals.⁵⁸

The Eastern European gay ethnic pornography of Lucas Entertainment blends the gay-for-pay narrative of Bigstr network with Bel Ami's aesthetics to create its own Americanized version. According to Lucas, the reason why the Czech Republic is producing porn films is related to the liberal politics over gay sex. Similar rhetoric continued in the following film of Lucas Entertainment also set in Prague. In *Straight to Prague* (2005), not only gay and straight men were penetrated by Lucas, even the landscape was. The DVD-back cover states:

Follow Michael Lucas as he penetrates the landscape, hearts, and butts of Prague! At the most popular hotel in town, hot 3-ways, steamy seduction, and irresistible Czech men abound. Want to know how Czech men stay warm on cold Prague nights? Take a vacation STRAIGHT TO PRAGUE!⁵⁹

The 'landscapes' Michael Lucas is exposed to are limited to the saunas, hotels, gay bars that function as spaces for sex work. Although Lucas Entertainment represented Prague and Czech male sexualities from a utopian and apolitical perspective, Michael Lucas believes that porn filmmakers should take 'significant responsibility' for gay politics in their movies.⁶⁰ However, this responsibility seems to be limited to sober and protected sex and the stigmatization of AIDS. Michael Lucas directed a documentary focusing on homophobia in Russia, *Campaign of Hate: Russia and Gay Propaganda* (2013), and he took part as an actor in several documentaries about gay visibility and gay rights movement such as *Sex Positive* (2008) and *Jonathan Agassi Saved My Life* (2018). Michael Lucas also produced examples of Israeli gay ethnic pornography from a similar perspective as in Collin O'Neal's *World of Men*. His multicultural background provided him with pornographic content that he could market to the U.S. audience with a neoliberal slant on sex work, sex tourism, and gay-for-pay fantasies.

4.7 Markku Heikkinen and *All Boys of the Czech Republic*

In 2009, Finnish film director Markku Heikkinen released a documentary film titled *All Boys* that focuses on the thriving gay porn scene in the Czech Republic. The synopsis of the movie states: "In the wake of cultural events like the Velvet Revolution and the fall of the Berlin Wall came the rise of a newfound adult film industry in

⁵⁸ See: www.lucasentertainment.com (Last Access Date: 17.03.2024).

⁵⁹ See: https://www.lucasstore.com/shop/feature-films/straight_to_prague/re-films/straight_to_prague/ (Last Access Date: 17.03.2024).

⁶⁰ Lucas, Michael. "On Gay Porn." *Yale Journal of Law & Feminism* 18, 2006, 300.

Eastern Europe. Since then, Czech actors in gay erotica and sites like Bel Ami have risen to iconic status.”⁶¹ The documentary portrays directors, protagonists, and even audiences, who have a particular interest in Czech gay porn. Dan Komar and Alan Pelikan, described as two noticeable directors behind the Czech gay porn bloom, provide helpful insight considering the work conditions, their relationship with porn filmmaking, and the nuclear families they built through the porn film industry.

Dan Komar is originally from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He moved to Prague after the Velvet Revolution and described Prague as becoming one of the most vibrant cities for young men. However, looking at the filmography of Dan Komar, his very first porn production is called *Postcards from Riga* (2002), in which 18-year-old Raivo Lexus was recruited to become a new exclusive actor for Triumvirate Productions. Raivo travels from his small town to Riga to be trained by Ray Renfro. After some hot sex with the train conductor, Ludvig Lyons, Raivo joins Ray and gets to work. Ray feels rejected when Raivo is invited to a bareback sex party but feels seen again when a chance encounter with a handsome waiter, Danny DeNiro, revitalizes his sex drive. The film’s cast comprises thirteen actors from both Latvia and Russia.

Like the Potro Videos and Jean-Noël René Clair, Dan Komar found Russia and its peripheries interesting, especially after the fall of communism and the following events like the Velvet Revolution or the fall of the Berlin Wall. However, this interest has two sides. As explained in the previous section on BelAmi, George Duroy was working for U. S.-based gay porn magazines. And in order to be able to take part in this mainstream gay scene, George Duroy marketed Eastern European male sexuality by selling his models’ sex life as innocent, as a body of ‘male virginity.’ Dan Komar also followed the thematization of male virginity and directed two films in Prague, *Virgin Tales* (2004) and *Virgin Tales 2: Revenge of the Virgins* (2005). The *Virgin Tales* series can be described as a version of Potro Video’s *Young Russian Innocents* with a script. However, *Virgin Tales* does not engage with the social realm of post-Soviet financial catastrophe as *Young Russian Innocents* did. However, Dan Komar pictures Czech men as socially and sexually inexperienced; he avoids exploiting their socio-economic backgrounds or their emotional states resulting from the radical political changes that they recently experienced. *Virgin Tales* was filmed almost ten years after the films of Potro and JNRC, but it shows that the portrayal of Eastern European men and their alleged lack of sexual experiences and youth were solid assets for the mainstream porn industry.

The *Virgin Tales* series is also an example of Dan Komar’s production after moving to Prague. Unlike JNRC and Potro, Dan Komar refers to Prague as Central Europe, which insinuates that he took a more updated terminology since the Czech Republic joined the European Union in 2004. His rebranded vocabulary perhaps describes Prague more accurately; however, the content of his films did not follow the update that he put on his DVD jackets. Content-wise, most of his movies were similar

61 See: <https://mubi.com/tr/films/all-boys> (Last Access Date: 17.03.2024).

to the narrative and aesthetics of BelAmi Online. Unlike Dan Komar, the director of *All Boys* documentary film introduces a Czech gay porn film producer, Alan Pelikan, who creates similar films like Dan Komar or BelAmi. However, Alan Pelikan produced some of his movies for specific European target audiences, such as French or German-speaking customers. For example, *Les Garçons de Prague* (The Boys of Prague) was shot explicitly for a French-speaking audience interested in young men from Prague. Like BelAmi, Alan Pelikan also targeted the mainstream porn audience by exploiting Czech men's sexuality; however, different from BelAmi's naturalist clean-cut aesthetic, Alan Pelikan spoke more to the working-class. Examples like *Les Garçons de Prague* are limited: even so, these movies act as resources to understand how re-Orientalization or self-exoticization of poverty functions in the post-colonial context.

Alan Pelikan also shares how much he usually pays his actors. He states in the documentary *All Boys* that he likes to shoot during Christmas because "most actors are out of town, and the ones who stay need money the most because they don't have a family". He stated that during Christmastime, he pays between 7,000 to 9,000 Czech Koruna, which ranges at other times around 13,000 to 15,000 Korunas. This information is important because up until this point, no record shows how much the average pay is in the Czech porn industry. Another aspect that the documentary points out is that some of the actors are bisexual. In their private life, they participate in heterosexual monogamous relationships in which their partners know what is happening. There is also a scene where one of these couples is having a conversation about the gay porn business and how it helps to maintain their family's finances.

Overall, Markku Heikkinen's documentary is essential to fill the historical gap that resulted from the fact that most of these production houses have vanished from the gay porn archives or internet channels. It also provides additional information that a viewer does not learn from watching pornography, such as the salary range or the actor's relationship with women outside the film. Although it is insufficient to generalize the Czech gay porn industry based on the history of two specific companies, it is still helpful to connect its chronology. The documentary ends with a prediction from Dan Komar, who thinks the popularity of Central European gay pornography will go down because of the future developments in internet technologies. By the time plane travel became affordable compared to the past decades, the directions of sex tourism had changed to other destinations. Although it is not as popular as it used to be, ethnic pornography is still produced by self-employed actors and amateur porn companies in and outside Europe.

4.8 Russian Tourists in Prague

Compared to the French and German examples of gay ethnic pornography, where Maghrebi or Turkish men were never represented as tourists, an example from the Czech Republic dared to reverse this stereotypical, representational structure by presenting Russians as tourists who visit Europe. In 2005, the Czech production house

Gladirex released *Russians in Prague* (2004), a film in which two young Russian men spent their summer holiday in Prague. During the movie, the audience is introduced to the sightseeing activities of this couple and their sexual encounters with both the hotel staff and each other. This film was co-produced and edited by the Best Czech Boys film company, which could also be a parent company of Gladirex, considering the lack of its online presence. Unlike the earlier examples of Russian-themed gay porn films, this film presents young Russian men as individuals who can afford to travel to Europe during their summer holidays. Even though this was the only production under the name Gladirex, this film challenges the ways Russian were typically represented in gay pornography. Although the overall narrative kept repeating similar stereotypes as other Russian-themed porn movies, this example reflects the spirit of the time by changing the storyline of their films, portraying the protagonists as tourists in a Czech gay porn from 2005, showing the changing economic status of Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The Eastern European context brings a new perspective on the sexual Other within Europe, allowing us to locate white bodies in relation to a post-colonial frame of analysis. In his research, Larry Wolff argues this as an emerging style of colonialism and the Orientalization of the Eastern European as a concept of post-Enlightenment by the French-inspired West.⁶² Eastern Europe's colonization by the Western powers constructed an Oriental East. In the narrative of pornography, such a re-Orientalization of Eastern Europe was orchestrated by including the recent political history and the following socio-economical aftermaths that positioned Western Europe as superior, similar to the power dynamics and the articulation of legacies of Orientalism portrayed in the S.W.A.N.A. regions. However, the focus of Orientalism usually contains the East of Eastern Europe. Andrei Terian argues:

Orientalization is a process which was applied not only by Western Europe to Eastern Europe, but it can equally well be said to characterize the relations between countries situated only in the West or only in the East of Europe.⁶³

The collapse of the Iron Curtain and the gradual expansion of the European Union redefined the power dynamic in Europe. In the new millennium, anti-migration policies were high on the agendas of right-wing and centrist (and even some left-wing) Western politicians, a xenophobic ideology that was not only directed against nations outside the EU, but also against Eastern European countries that have recently joined the Union. One of the main reasons the UK left the European Union is the fear of migration from the Eastern European countries, as has been openly declared by con-

⁶² Wolff, Larry. *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994, 11.

⁶³ Terian, Andrei. "Is There an East-Central European Postcolonialism? Towards a Unified Theory of (Inter)Literary Dependency." *World Literature Studies* IV, no. 3, 2012, 21.

servative politicians in the country.⁶⁴ The knowledge embedded in the porn films discussed here becomes more apparent in the light of current political tension in Europe, despite the downgraded aesthetic and cultural status of pornographic filmmaking.

⁶⁴ Guma, Taulant, and Dafydd Jones, Rhys. “‘Where Are We Going to Go Now?’ European Union Migrants’ Experiences of Hostility, Anxiety, and (non-)belonging during Brexit.” *Population Space and Place* 25, no. 1, 2019, 2.