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DESIRING THE WEST AND THE HOMO(NATIONALIST) AVATARS OF (QUEER) PRIDE

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In 2014 Prague Pride choose an overarching theme 'East meets West' and professed 'the support of gay and lesbians from the East'. The media and the press releases of the Pride festival noted that 'East from us, people cannot have such festivals as Prague Pride. Moscow bans the gay and lesbian marches till 2112, the neighbouring states, participants [of the marches] risk being attacked by police or the skinheads' thus 'this year's program is supposed to draw attention to unfreedom of homosexuals (sic!) of the countries of the East.' As one way of showing their support to queers living in 'unfreedom', Prague Pride joined up with a private advertising company to develop a mobile app for smart phones enabling queer people from abroad to participate in the Prague Pride events virtually via their 'live avatars' who were in Prague and visited Prague Pride. Thus, as the then director of the Prague Pride Czeslaw Walek noted, these avatars (with the app in their phones) 'grant[ed] freedom to people from countries where they cannot live freely' through 'mak[ing] it possible for them to take part on the Pride (March)'.

Using concepts of homonationalism and homoexceptionalism as proposed by Jasbir Puar, I ask what do the assemblages of disability, race and sexuality that are called up in this technology developed especially for Pride indicate about the fantasies of liberatory narratives (of proud gay identity, liberal tolerance, pink economy and queer mobility) steeped in the ideologies of development and rehabilitation (away from the corrupt communist past). Questioning the figure of the avatar and its ideological appropriations, I want to draw attention to the ways in which the avatar app appropriates disability/cripness in this simulation of an access technology (without actually providing and thinking of disability access), as well as relies on racialised notions of the East as a signification of backwardness, retrogradeness and political oppression. Further, I am arguing that these figurations of the avatar create a disembodied fantasy of political alliance and emancipation, while they simultaneously foster a troublesome vision of queer (only virtual and disembodied) mobility that bears implications over the current contexts of refuge crisis, racialised discourses of Islamophobia and terrorism.