

Towards Transnational Feminist Queer Methodologies

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Abstract

This article introduces the possibilities of transnational feminist queer research as seeking to conceptualise the transnational as a methodology composed of a series of flows that can augment feminist and queer research. Transnational feminist queer methodologies can contest long-standing configurations of power between researcher and researched, subject and object, academics and activists across places, typically those which are embedded in the hierarchies of the Global North/Global South. Beginning with charting our roots in, and routes through, the diverse arenas of transnational, feminist, participatory and queer methodologies, the article uses a transcribed and edited conversation between members of the Liveable Lives research team in Kolkata and Brighton, to start an exploration of transnational feminist queer methodologies. Understanding the difficult, yet constructive moments of collaborative work and dialogue, we argue for engagements with the multiplicities of ‘many-many’ lives that recognise local specificities, and the complexities of lives within transnational research, avoiding creating a currency of comparison between places. We seek to work toward methodologies that take seriously the politics of place, namely by creating research that answers the same question in different places, using methods that are created in context and may not be ‘comparable’. Using a dialogue across the boundaries of activism/academia, as well as across geographical locations, the article contends that there are potentials, as well as challenges, in thinking ourselves through transnational research praxis. This seeks complexities and spatial nuances within as well as between places.

Keywords: Participatory Research; Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans Queer; Sexualities; Gender Identities; India; UK.

Introduction

There can be little doubt that there has been a proliferation of cross-national research studies and a drive towards ‘impact’, in part through participatory and collaborative research.

However methodological considerations of activists and academics coming together in feminist and queer frames to co-produce knowledge *transnationally* has been limited (see

however Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006; Nagar 2002; Swarr and Nagar 2010). Feminist epistemologies across disciplinary boundaries have long understood that there is a politics of location in research, arguing that a 'view from nowhere' does not exist (Longino, 1993: 137; WGSF, 1997). If all knowledge is created through the politics, history and location of where it is produced, then it matters where this knowledge is produced - as well as how, why, and by who (Haraway, 1991; Harding, 1997; Monk and Hanson, 1992; Rose, 1993; Stanley and Wise, 1983; Silva and Ornat, 2016). We begin with a feminist politics of location and use the perhaps awkward term 'Feminist Queer', rather than Queer Feminist, to indicate the ways in which feminist discussions can also be brought into conversation with queer thinking and emerge through the processes of a transnational, collaborative project.

This article begins work towards transnational feminist queer methodologies, drawing on a collaborative project on what makes lives liveable for LGBTQ people across UK and India. We are interested in the transnational creation of knowledges through collaborative research, in ways that embrace networks and flows of information, creativity and learning between places, through face-to-face as well as technological mediums. Grounded in feminist and queer methodologies, we contend that transnational feminist queer methodologies can contest long-standing configurations of power between researcher and researched, subject and object, academics and activists, and also across places, typically those which are embedded in the hierarchies of the Global North/Global South. Our methodological point seeks to generate collaborations between academics and activists eager to rework configurations of power between the constituencies of Global North/Global South, researcher/researched, academic/activist.

To articulate some possibilities of transnational feminist queer methodologies, this article initially explores dialogues from fragments of the vast bodies of research that form transnational, feminist, collaborative, participatory and queer areas of study. Following that,

we outline the methods used to construct this article and underscore the focus on methodologies. This is then followed by a series of themed dialogues between research team members, presented close to their original form, that reflect on the processes of our project, *Making Liveable Lives: Rethinking Social Exclusion*. These dialogues start with reflections on the multiplicities *within* locations that make the ‘many-many lives’ in each important, rather than framing locations as discrete units of analysis to be compared. The proceeding section develops transnational methodologies as distinct from such comparative methods. We then move to discuss race; indicating the complexities of intra-team positionalities that are multifarious as well as multi-sited. Our final section ends with notes on ‘what is working’ from the perspective of the researchers. Here we eschew celebrating collaborative and participatory research as unproblematic, but instead to note the elements of joy in collaborations that exist alongside and in tandem with frustrations and disconnections. Overall, then, the article introduces the possibilities of transnational feminist queer research as seeking to conceptualise a series of transnational flows that have the potential to develop and enhance feminist (and) queer research methodologies.

Transnational Feminist Queer Research: Roots in, and Routes through the Literature

Each concept - transnational, feminist, queer - has a significant body of literature associated with it. In bringing these together for the purposes of this article, we focus on tiny fragments of these literatures, recognising that this is a beginning and there is much more to be done to develop dialogues between these vast areas of study. As we root ourselves in this literature, we also take specific routes through it in order to create a momentum towards bringing these areas together, beyond the specifics of our project. In doing so we recognise that there have been various attempts to bring aspects of these different literatures together in productive ways, such as feminist queer work (see for example Kafar, 2013; Richardson et al., 2012).

These conversations are important, and bringing together transnational, feminist and queer research allows the development of potential routes, only a very small fraction of which this article is rooted in. Our potential routes start from feminist work that is both collaborative and participatory. The section begins with the transnational, and ends with queer engagements with Global South/Global North hierarchies. In between we outline key moments in feminist and participatory work, specifically exploring critical engagements with power relations in research and feminist discussions of positionalities (as we develop this in terms of intra-team positionalities).

Transnational scholarship can be understood as being focused on transnational flows of migrants, labour, diaspora communities, commodities and cultural products (Crang et al. 2003; Massey 1994). Central to its emergence has been a set of imperatives to understand the differential effects of scattered colonialisms, neoliberalisms and homonationalisms, as evident in the works of scholars such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Inderpal Grewal, Karen Caplan, M. Jacqui Alexander, and Jasbir Puar, among others (Mohanty 1991; Grewal and Caplan 1994, Alexander and Mohanty 1997; Puar, 2007). This work is crucial to charting our own routes across academia and activism around our research project. In this paper, we conceptualize the transnational as methodology – that is a way of underpinning our research systems and methods that can move beyond the comparative formulation of research practices, towards the ‘dynamic networks that exchange ideas, values, cultural practices and information across national borders’ (Valentine et al. 2012:51; Olsen and Silvey 2006, see also Nash and Browne, 2015). Conceptualising the transnational as a methodology moves us from an understanding of transnational as research/ers located across geopolitical borders, towards examining the production of knowledges that are formed through the linkages and relationships amongst, and between, researchers that can include academics and/as activists in disparate places. This moves beyond the exchange of ideas and information across two or

more geographical borders towards conceptualising the difficult, yet constructive moments of transnational collaborative work and dialogue.

Starting with the transnational as methodology that is created through a series of flows links to contemporary understandings of 'positionality' and 'reflexivity' within feminist scholarship. Feminists have long sought to question the relationships of researcher/researched, not only to challenge the neutrality and presumed objectivity of the research process, but also to redress power relations within it. One aspect of the questioning of objective knowledge has been to reflect on the positioning of the researcher vis-a-vis those who are 'researched' (research subjects/participants) (Falconer Al-Hindi and Kawabuta, 2002; Cook and Fonow, 1990; Harding, 1987; Hirsh and Fox Keller, 1994; Maynard, 1994; McCormack, 1987; Morris *et al.*, 1998; Oakley, 1998; Price-Chalita, 1994). Underpinning discussions of these researcher positionalities are identities, that are understood as reiterated performativities, that are not fixed over the course of the project, but are also seen as relationally constituted, (re-)created through interactions between people, places and things (Browne, 2003; 2005; Butler, 1990; Rose, 1999; Gregson and Rose, 2001; Kobayashi, 1994; England 1994; Valentine, 2002; Crang, 2003), and requiring explicit and ongoing self-reflectivities (Kohl and McCutcheon, 2015). Of course, articulating these practices is not straightforward, and Nagar has argued that navigating languages of collaboration and translation, avoiding post facto reflexivity, and working across irreconcilables at the interface of scholarship and 'community-based' engagement are some issues that can figure into articulating transnational methodological processes (Nagar 2008; 2014). Moreover, the focus of discussions on positionalities and reflections in feminist methodological discussions has predominantly been on the singular researcher in relation to the participants. The relational creation of the researcher can be read as associated with relationships between a researcher and research participants, research fields and research objects. Transnational feminist

approaches can help us to get to grips with what Grewal and Kaplan (2001: 663) term the 'complex terrain of sexual politics' that could not be simply captured in terms of 'global identities', but rather had to get to the heart of the processes producing such identities as 'at once national, regional, local, even 'cross-cultural' and hybrid' (663). We read the development of cross-cultural and hybrid research identities as pushing for these to extend beyond the individual researcher. This enables a conceptualisation of researcher positionalities as not only fluid and multiple (see for example Crang, 2003; Valentine, 2002), but also as created through collaborations to reform collective positionalities that need complex, fluid and dialogical reflexive interrogation.

Developing within and (although only at times explicitly) from feminist questionings of objective knowledges and power relations in research processes, participatory research is inherently concerned with recognising and contesting hierarchies. This research praxis aims to work collaboratively, fostering approaches that seek to be inclusive and to re-position communities, activists and others as not simply subjects of research, but as 'central to the solution of social problems' (Taylor 1999: 372, see also for example, Cahill 2007, Cornwall and Jewkes 1995, Gatenby and Humphries 2000, Pain 2004, Mrs Kinpaiby 2008; 2011; Pain and Francis 2003, Ward 2007). Calling for participatory approaches has required radical re-thinking of research along the lines of praxis (see for example, Maxey 1999; Ruddick 2003). In particular, the learning and empowerment of participants through the very processes of doing research are considered to be key aspects of participation (Kendon, Pain & Kesby 2010, 13). Thus, acknowledging and addressing the variety of power relationships within participatory research projects is often at the heart of associated methodologies and writing (Pain 2004), particularly in feminist participatory research (Gatenby and Humphries 2000; Maguire 2011). Yet Pain has also noted the risk of essentialising or fetishising activist voices and knowledges (Pain, 2004). Participatory research is not a panacea for resisting hierarchies

and may itself be problematically institutionalized within North-South, academic-activist hierarchies (Swarr and Nagar 2010). It is clear that reworking power relationships between researchers and researched has been key for feminist and participatory research. What is particularly pertinent here is the creation of research teams across activists and academics, as well as noting the continuing relations of power that are manifest in and through these relationships.

Alongside feminist participatory questioning of power relations in research, queer methodologies offer further insights into questioning power relationships, with a specific focus on normativities. Queer methodologies develop non-normative ways of working, rather than necessarily specifically pertaining to Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans and Queer (LGBTQ) identities (see for example Browne and Nash, 2010; Giffney, 2004 Oswin, 2008). Browne and Nash (2010) have suggested a 'queer method' can be found only in a political positioning that constantly refuses the reification of normative structures and regimes. By querying what is normal, and what might be otherwise, queer thinking can interrogate methodological normativities. Developing transnational feminist dialogical approaches within a queer geographical framework facilitates the questioning of the often post-colonial positioning of the LGBTQ 'friendliness' of some nation states as either 'backward' or 'forward' (Puar 2007; Kulpa and Mizielinska 2011). Disrupting Global North/Global South divides through research that works transnationally has the potential to intervene into debates that hierarchize 'Western democracies' as spaces of inclusion, vilifying exotic 'others' as 'inherently homophobic' and synonymous with 'backwardness' (Puar, 2007; Kulpa and Mizielinska 2011). Kulpa and Silva (2016) have sought to identify the ways in which feminist, queer and geographical epistemologies can reiterate particular power relations in the production of knowledge. They, and others, question how 'objective standards' of peer reviewing and access to literature can create knowledges that uphold Global North privileges, including for

some gay men and lesbians (see also Silva and Ornat, 2016; Banerjea et al, 2016). This is important as we go on to consider the possibilities of transnational feminist queer methodologies as moving beyond comparative research, which requires particular understandings of ‘objectivity’.

Bringing these three concepts together then, transnational feminist queer methodologies can critically reflect on how methods and the knowledges that they create can be reconstituted away from gendered and normative power relations that seek objectivities and often serve specific Global North agendas. Throughout the article we take up issues of intra-team positionalities created through collaborations within the research, power relationships within research relationships, and querying objectivities. As should be clear, we are not presenting a ‘how to’ manual of transnational queer feminist methodologies. Instead, we echo Alexander and Mohanty (1997), in thinking ourselves out ‘through collective practice and particular kinds of theorizing’ (1997, xx). Our dialogue (following the note on methods) is composed of multiple forms of theorisation, including the conversation itself as means of theory creation.

A note on methods

This article draws on the research project ‘Making Lives Liveable: Rethinking Social Exclusion’. This is a transnational collaborative attempt to understand what makes life liveable/not liveable for LGBTQ people across India and the UK. We chose India and the UK because of their differing legislative contexts for LGBTQ people. In India, Article 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC 377) criminalizes ‘carnal intercourse against the order of nature’. IPC 377 has its origins in an 1860 British colonial law. It was read down by the Delhi High Court in the Naz Foundation vs Government of NCT of Delhi case on 2 July 2009, but was reinstated in December 2013, the same year that the same sex Marriage Act was passed in the

England and Wales. In the UK, in addition to the Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Act 2013, more than a decade of piecemeal legislation around sexuality and gender identity was unified under the Equality Act 2010. This Act upholds wide-ranging protections against discrimination for LGBTQ people under the Protected Characteristics of ‘Sexual Identity’ and ‘Gender Reassignment’.

Instead of focusing on UK and India as static units of analysis between which LGBTQ lives are compared in terms of the dualisms, such as ‘freedom’ and ‘unfreedom’, this project is trying to understand and create knowledges between LGBTQ people and researchers, which in this project include academics and activists. Whilst we use this project to develop considerations of transnational research praxis, we do not focus on the data collected in the research - the focus of this article, rather, is on moving towards transnational queer feminist methodologies.

This article began as an audio-visual Skype call in the summer of 2015. We are an interdisciplinary group, situated within and across various academic and activist contexts in India and the UK. We have been communicating via Skype throughout the project (we were about 8 months into the project at the time of the Skype call that makes up the main part of this article) and it reflects how we have chosen to operationalize this transnational research. Whilst two trips involving travel to Brighton by Niharika, Sumita and Ranjita have been undertaken, most of our communications have been internet-based. The project has an app-based platform, see <http://liveablelives.org>. This is indicative of the possibilities of transnational working, that does not seek to send researchers from the Global North to the Global South, but instead seeks to work collaboratively and participate across geopolitical borders. Following the first round of reviewers’ comments a further Skype call was used to discuss ‘race’ within the project (see below).

We pursued a joint editorial process that was led by academics in order to create an article for an academic publication. Kath, Niharika and Nick undertook specific tasks (setting this article into research/theory, referencing, introduction writing, revisions etc.) that academics specialise in, especially drawing out themes and ideas that connect to academic research/writing. The text is thus co-authored in a qualified way. The main body of the article has been edited and restructured from the original conversation – all of the authors added in further thoughts and ideas in response to the transcribed and edited original conversation.

In this part of the article, we deliberately maintain individual voices, and prior to the peer-review process we did not have a collective commentary following each dialogue. This seeks to augment discussions of reflexivities and positionalities, by refusing the softening of differences and the ways in which dialogues develop new ideas. It illustrates how teams challenging each other, reframing debates and processes, reworks how research is produced. These tensions can be hidden in polished journal articles – detrimentally, given their potential for reconceptualising non-hierarchical methodologies. We present the text as a dialogue between collaborators that develops specific areas of thinking. In each section, we offer our interpretations of the conversation, exploring some theoretical possibilities in this rich conversation. We invite the reader to read more into and even against these efforts. We use conversations to create theoretical engagements by reflecting on the methodological and affective contexts of our ongoing journeys. Thus, we do not see the conversations as ‘data’ to be analysed by ‘the authors’. Instead, the dialogue *is* analysis and knowledge creation in itself – conceptualisations of transnational feminist queer methodologies that are created between academics and activists. We therefore start with the voices from the recorded conversations, and then offer some points that seek to further this discussion, offering some detail about the research, but mainly developing transnational feminist queer methodologies from the starting points in the literature above.

No comparison: thinking transnationally across time and space

Sumita: I cognitively know that this is a transnational project, but frankly speaking, I'm still struggling with what is happening in Kolkata. So I'm totally immersed in liveabilities in Kolkata at this moment. I do know that you are there in Brighton and I know that I'm talking to you who at this moment is living a different life, living within a different set of liveabilities perhaps, in a different time zone, but that is only a cognitive response. I really do not know what is happening there. I am really not connecting. I'm so much connected here in Kolkata. Perhaps when I go to Brighton, when I see you, when I start working with you, perhaps the connection will begin from there if that makes any sense.

Leela: I'm hearing connected in Kolkata, and Brighton is alien. And difference across the two locations can be hard to understand when the other location is 'foreign'.

Nick: I think I'd quite like to echo some of Sumita's comments in that I feel very immersed in it over here, and despite the fact that we're a transnational project, it is often difficult to get my head around what's happening elsewhere in the project. Something that I've noticed, when I do the workshops and when I'm explaining the research to people, that I've been thinking about recently, is that often people find it quite hard to wrap their heads around the idea that we're not doing a comparison between India and the UK.

Kath: And I'm having this guilt or this feeling that we should be closer as research teams here. We should be closer, but actually when I think about it, and Sumita you're completely right. We've never met, we have only been working together realistically for a few months, and when I think about the other research projects and it's taken four or five years to really develop relationships. We're rushing because we've got the funding and we need to rush, but the kind of depth of relationships that we would hope to develop aren't really possible in the time-scales that we've had so far and also in the interactions that have been mainly computer-based.

Niharika: I'm really looking forward to the meeting in Brighton. I think that sharing that physical space for a few days will also be very important.

Sumita: I have to see, feel, touch people in front of me.

Our project began with the express purpose of moving beyond progress narratives of better/worse nations, addressing key geographical critiques of the representations of sexualities between the Global North and the Global South (Brown et al 2010; McClintock 1995; Thoreson 2014). This was reflected in the methods and how the project was undertaken, but as relationships are developed, connections move beyond the practicalities - or for instance creating project workshop protocols or dealing with ethics review processes that favour a UK context, to something that is felt. The connections we created are investments in a joint endeavour, so crucial to participatory research. These emotions, as has often been noted, are neglected parts of intellectual research and yet the touching of each other's lives, grappling with how to create positive change through research (and various bureaucracies) have a physicality 'in front of me'. There is also an expectation, articulated by Kath, of closeness – closeness that needs to be developed and cannot simply be assumed.

Yet, as we reflect and create intra-team research and positionalities, the physical distance was important to acknowledge, as was the emotional element of investing in each other and the agendas we came to the table with. As Nick and Sumita suggest, these connections and investments are limited, connecting to that which is 'foreign' in seeking to develop conceptualisations of 'living a different set of liveabilities'.

In considering transnational feminist queer research praxis, emotions, investments and local ties are crucial, crossing the national, as well as re-rooting us in the local. Transnational, feminist queer methodologies can work between the local and the transnational. As we now explore, traversing the local and the transnational acts in ways that are attentive to both questions comparative research. Specifically, it questions comparative research that aims to compare across different places, seeking similarities and differences by using or creating data sets that are 'comparable', i.e. produced through the same research tools applied in the same way in different places.

Comparing versus working transnationally: Parallels, divergences, linkages and learning

Leela: Are we closer at an intellectual level although physically separated? We are challenging the assumption that to work together, you have to be 'close' physically and in mindset. I think what we are saying is that it is working - that we have a common endeavour that brings us together.

Niharika: Personally for me it has been really trying to navigate challenges. Even though we decide to have some kind of commonality and some kind of common direction about where we want to go, yet the different methodologies that we have to adopt where some seem to work and some doesn't seem to work for others, this is I would say was challenging initially. Now I'm not sure if I would term that as a challenge anymore. I think it's just working through these different priorities of methodological choices that I've had to navigate and work through.

Kath: Realistically we have two research teams who operate in two different countries and what might it mean to do it transnationally in a way that is achievable, that isn't about us kind of flying to one country or another and taking over and being colonialist about it. So it's a real kind of struggle I think that transnational component to it in a way that I hadn't emotionally expected.

They aren't really comparable, not just in terms of our research but also in terms of the research team and the operation of the research itself.

Leela: We don't assume commonality of experience within two locations and contrast between these two locations- perhaps it is complex in that lay persons thinking is that different places have homogeny within place and heterogeny between places.

Niharika: I think we need to think about transnational here in terms of I don't know if there is a term parallelities [laughter]. I mean that's what I'm thinking, it's thinking of transnational in terms of parallelities and how, but also thinking, if I think of two parallel lines but also little bridges, which are not exactly symmetrical but kind of crooked, you know, so it is parallel. It's not comparable but then also there are these imperfect bridges that are across these two parallel lines and I think that that is the vision that I get when I think of this and what are, you know, what are these two parallel realities and what are

those bridges that we see over these two parallel lines which are again not perfect bridges but asymmetrical ones.

Sumita: I have a problem with two parallel realities. I have a problem with these words. It is not two parallel realities. It is many-many realities because it is many-many lives and many lives are not comparable to each other. They are lives. They all run together in different directions maybe sometimes, not even parallel. These run together in different directions. I rather see it's like strands of light going in different directions.

Niharika: Divergent.

Sumita: Maybe divergent. Maybe the core is the question that what is liveabilities or understanding liveabilities is the core from where we all are trying to emerge out and go to different directions, our own directions, our own lives. Living our own lives. I myself am struggling with the idea of liveabilities and we've already taken a few ideas in the interviews. At least one of them is mind-boggling at this moment for me.

Niharika: Mind-boggling in what way?

Sumita: Because a person, she talked about liveabilities, it was like poetry. That's exactly what I told [name] after the interview, that it's so surreal and so subjective like poetry and she didn't know that she was writing poetry. She was talking to me.

Kath: And that's part of the problem isn't it in the sense that we're trying to do is so specific to an individual life that this joining it together, is causing an issue and maybe because we're trying to join them together in specific ways, not just transnationally but even within Kolkata or within the UK.

Ranjita: This transaction across time and across space where language has been a complex negotiation [laughs], where also understanding, you know, where some certain things have been very obvious to me, certain concepts, certain methods, whereas certain other methods and concepts, I've learnt during this project. So like using apps and all that. I was completely in the dark about these things. So that's been a learning process for me.

Niharika: I think that we started out with the project workshops, then the website and app and then the in-depth interviews and so on. What we are seeing here is that we are

getting perhaps the best response in terms of the in-depth interviews. And the websites, people have signed up and BB [nickname for Rukmini] mentioned as well some kind of apathy that people are feeling around the website whether it's due to technology or something else whatever. Then the workshops. Yes we have started the workshops. We'll have one again, but we are really not sure whether that's going to bring in as many people as we thought it initially would, and you know, at one point it started worrying me because obviously I see you guys with this flurry of workshops, it's happening and so things seem to be happening at one end and nothing seems to be happening on the other end. Then I asked myself that if I think like that, then the whole thing will completely panic and fall apart and I was thinking that perhaps maybe something would have less relevance here and something would have more relevance here, and we would have to go with that that has more relevance and brings more people in.

Nick: My impression is that there's a lot happening over in Kolkata.

Niharika: Is that so? [Laughter]

Nick: Yes, I keep thinking that the kind of data that you're getting and the stuff that you're doing, I have this constant impression that what's happening over there and the work that's going on over there is so much richer than the work that's happening here. And particularly when you think about the write-up of the workshop that BB said, and I felt very jealous of her really [laughter] because it sounded so amazing and there was like great pictures that looked like it was a really interesting and like an intimate kind of event. And I thought, 'Oh god. I wish we could have stuff like that from our workshops.'

Niharika: So we are both having crises on each side.

Sumita: Which is good [laughter].

Leela: There are feelings of inadequacy in this situation. What is assumed to be 'meant' to happen can't/doesn't happen in this project work and that is unsettling. We compare and judge ourselves to be inadequate - I have a sense that this is jumping on, trying to share or own the other's experience. Perhaps, it would be freeing to acknowledge that experience is different in each place and accept that, rather than feeling driven to replicate across both locations in a way that feels almost competitive?

Kath: Definitely, I think it's something we need to reflect on and also celebrate what's happening in India and Kolkata.

Niharika: Celebrating both places, no? [Laughter]

Being very clear from the outset that the research was not about comparability, but instead about working and developing concepts and ideas as well as methods transnationally, meant that the research teams could adapt methods to suit the context (in this case the use of interviews in India), yet still focus on the key question, 'What makes life liveable in the UK and India?' This meant different ethics processes (where, for example, no one in West Bengal was asked to sign a consent form), but also a transnational feminist queer approach affected the methods themselves. Whilst we shared the methods of workshops/street theatre, the way these were done was sensitive to the place they were in. For example, project workshops were extensively and publically advertised in England and run as a 'drop in' for individuals or groups. In West Bengal they were shared through closed social networks and run as a group where activities were all undertaken collectively. In India, individual interviews were used to supplement data for those who could not or did not want to attend workshops; individual interviews in the UK were held as part of the workshops. Thus we worked with the contextual specificities of India (West Bengal) and the UK (England), as well as the possibilities of transnational collaborations. This meant a research design that was created jointly with shared questions jointly designed, but differently implemented.

From this, it could be argued that the research existed in 'parallel'. The work is parallel because we work from two teams that are physically separated so we miss being able to 'see, feel and touch' people (Sumita). The 'many-many' lives are connected by the bridges between the two parallel working groups and at being together in Brighton did lessen the sense of being separate, providing emotional and physical, as well as intellectual and planning connections. When seeing each other on Skype it was easier to 'place' the person

physically having once shared these locations. These crossings both grounded us in the 'here and now', and also how we connected/may connect across geopolitical borders. We are however nervous of this as well. As Sumita indicated, the idea of parallel research teams/data sets/realities was not a useful conceptualization of the multiplicities that emerged in the data. While they may be bridged parallel lines themselves do not cross, overlap, mess or converge; there are in Sumita's words 'many-many lives' involved in the research, both as researchers and participants (and indeed others). This is not to ignore embodied spatial positioning but to recognise the lived complexity of the research 'within' locations.

The 'many-many' lives and liveabilities have methodological implications - in refusing comparability, we also refuse to categorise India in this way and the UK in another way and then to compare these. Putting academics and activists across India and the UK into dialogue, we have sought to contest the ways in which some nations are seen as simplistically moving 'backwards' in terms of sexual and gender equalities based on ideals of LGBTQ human rights, and therefore need to learn from others who are moving 'forward'. Instead working transnationally can ask us to consider multiplicity in both contexts, to avoid neglecting contextual specificities for overarching national and globally hegemonic narratives. As outlined in the discussion between Niharika, Nick and Sumita above, discussing particularities enabled the creation of productive dialogues and solidarities across borders.

Despite our desire to be 'good' transnational researchers, comparability arose in our working relationships, leading to the 'fear' of being 'not good enough' as we compared ourselves with each other, finding richness, expertise and depth in the data from the context in which we were not located, and perhaps drawing on characterisations of 'Western' efficiency / 'Eastern' exoticism. The dangers of fetishising North-South collaborations and tapping into characterizations of the West as 'efficient', and hence what is happening 'out

there' seems more colourful and active than what is happening 'here', as both Nick and Niharika allude to – albeit differently - in the context of Kolkata and Brighton. The competition within the team was both unexpected and unwelcome, and focusing again on difference rather than comparability allowed for both places to move on with exploring the same questions in different ways.

Taking seriously a transnational feminist queer approach that questions the 'rigour' of comparative research rethinks the process of creating research across different places. Querying comparative methodologies draws on politics of place that understands that many-many lives can create connections, as well as divergences. These connections and divergences questioned and queered normative modes of engagement pointing to the possibilities of spatially sensitive methodologies that enable explorations of multiplicities.

Race, sexuality and transnational research

Swarr and Nagar (2010) have offered crucial reminders of the potential complicity of participatory research in reproducing hierarchical practices and the complexities of racial subjectivities in transcultural research where researchers move between places of employment and transcultural 'fields' has come under scrutiny (see Faria and Mollett, 2016; Fisher, 2015) . In this writing this article, discussions of race brought into sharp relief the operationalization of intra-team critique and what could/should be spoken of, or not. The politics of location and the co-construction of research are inflected with uncomfortable compromises and necessary oversights, in order to make things happen in spite as well as because of interpersonal relationships. The project sought to address some of the issues of Global North/Global South hierarchies identified in the literature by directly exploring the question of what makes lives liveable (Kulpa and Mizlenski, 2011; Puar 2007), without presuming forward/backward trajectories of India and the UK. As with all research there are

limits to what can be spoken about, and what can be known (Rose, 1995). But more than this, as is clear from the critiques of participatory research, power relations can only ever be negotiated and power is inevitably recuperated in various guises, including through racial privileges (Kindon et al., 2008; Browne, 2005; Ahmed, 2016). This project was no exception. In the praxis of the research there were unequal relations of intersecting privileges and marginalizations. Responding to reviewers' comments for this article, we decided to discuss race in a new Skype conversation in May 2016.

Niharika: So, how did our race and sexuality intersect between us?

Sumita: We connect with each other from our own locations, and how our own locations (affect our lives) with our own races and I, as a brown person, relate to you, a white person. So therefore you are white and I am brown. That is there. So the location that we are coming from is tinted, coloured. But other than that I don't find race to be... it wasn't on the plate <laughter>. Mine was a brown plate and yours was a white plate, that's all!

Niharika: This is definitely an attempt to create some kind of a solidarity, both research solidarity as well as a political solidarity, across the differences that we have. The felt experience of our differences could really be anything. I think we are working with our limitations and our privileges that are attached to both our racial and spatial positions. This is something that we are negotiating. I mean race, the felt experience of racial position in addition to a geographical position may not necessarily be in terms of that we are expecting, that you will do a top-down work I think we have moved beyond that. The point is how we are in an everyday level negotiating our different axes of privileges and marginalisations in a much more structural way which perhaps intersects with race, but not overly that. And it is not to erase these differences because we know that they cannot be erased, but to work through them and to try to create that sense of connection and solidarity across these differences.

Kath: And that was the whole point of the project as well, when we created the website and everything that was about trying to work together, recognising the different places that we were coming from as well as understanding our different privileges, prejudices and engagements.

The conversation played down the significance of the question of race. Tackling racism through bringing it into discussion may initially seem like a good idea, but anti-racist activism and discussion requires careful organisation and facilitation to be safe and productive, to not de-rail the process/group doing it, and to avoid masking or reproducing racist relations (DiAngelo 2011; Srivastava 1994). Here our commonality around our queerness and shared sexualities brought us together, but precariously, as our earlier discussion suggested regarding our local ties.

Transnational research is a context that sets up multiracial interactions where racism is likely to operate across unequals, where some are privileged in ways that others are not. This is undoubtedly an important question to ask of transnational research, but it is beyond the scope of this project to engage with this question. We, in our conversation, were in danger of tending towards reproducing 'race' as an innate objective characteristic, rather than as socially constructed. This is not of course what we intended, but the discussion was stilted and awkward, perhaps emphasising the underpinning concerns that the team have about race as well as caste. The fact that we did not discuss this in our earlier conversations perhaps highlights the silences that can often surround these issues. We had this conversation because in the academy, it is often the case that sexualities (Global North based? White?) reviewers 'require' a discussion of race. This returns us to Kulpa and Silva's (2016) point regarding how knowledges are created and framed through particular Global North understandings of how articles should be written and cited. For some of us based in India, as Niharika and Sumita noted, the question of caste is more important. Leela watched the recorded conversation because she was unable to attend the meeting, and drew attention to the way issues around race were dealt with within the research project. Her analysis and conceptualisation completes this section because it clearly articulates the issues of race and its complexity, alongside the pragmatics of transnational working. Her theorisations seek to

challenge celebratory readings of this project (in part to mitigate against the noting of ‘what works’ in the final section), or other transnational feminist queer research, which is always messy, power laden and compromising. At the same time, however, she challenges the imperative to discuss race within the context of this project’s processes and academic outputs:

Leela: I don't want to talk about my experience of race in the project or why I don't want to talk about it in the contexts we have created here. We haven't set out to create a safe and appropriate space to talk about race, we didn't set out to do that, and the project needs to keep moving forward with its workplan. Managing issues relating to race is energy consuming, talking about it would I think give us more baggage to handle and potentially disrupt the working relationships the team has forged with the issue of race operating, but not spoken about. I think it would be unhelpful to assume we have a common understanding of what is meant by 'race' in the question. Discussion might start with 'what are we talking about?' Then I think there is work to be done beyond 'I am brown and you are white' as Sumita said. The question requires a more robust approach than we can execute in this context.

The position of asking us to reflect on race feels to me potentially destabilising to the project because it potentially names and raises issues that we have quietly worked around, and discussion saps effort away from our *raison d'etre*. It would be naïve to assume there are no tricky or uncomfortable issues relating to race in this project. It also seems to me naïve to assume that asking us to examine such issues is healing or helpful. Examining race is not a panacea for resisting privilege around race’

Later having read the article, Leela pointed out how in the way we represented her comments, as mitigating celebration, was also a form of racialized engagement as she is juxtaposed against the celebratory narrative, the ‘killjoy’ (Ahmed, 2010). Her insights point to the ongoing interactions of transnational research and reiterate the importance of racial constructs even where these are ‘quietly worked around’:

Leela: Responding to the question I become the tricky customer who states I refuse to talk about this, and there are issues there. My comments get juxtaposed against

celebratory narratives, which is entirely correct in terms of where they sit, but then also reproduces the figure of the angry/tricky/critical person of colour killjoy here.

The robustness of our relationships makes me feel ok about doing this, I don't feel like a killjoy, I feel like I'm being honest and cautiously open in a safe space that is our team. But in the article, I'm a killjoy- that's ok for me, but I want to note that's what the process of asking 'what about race?' creates.

I note that our team is minority White rather than minority people of colour, and I think this facilitates me to feel ok about saying what I have said. But the transnational working side means that I lack a feeling for how the other people of colour perceive race and I think they may not share the story and understanding of race issues and antiracism initiatives that I have lived in the UK. My perception is that there are stronger established ways of communicating, common understandings between academic researchers working in the academic paradigm which communicates transnationally, and the weakest store of this resource for working together would be between me and the other researchers of colour. I think in this way our project reproduces some kind of white privilege just through it's natural evolution.

What is working?: The Doing of Research

Niharika: I would like to end with something positive and concrete about what is working or what we are taking also home from here. I would say that for me this whole exercise of exploring what is liveability for me as well as for others is the positive things, however methodologically, incomparable that might be.

Sumita: I absolutely and totally agree with you.

Ranjita: Yeah. For me I think the whole learning processes are very positive. It's not just about the notion of liveability and the practice of liveability but also the methods that we are trying out, experimentally or otherwise and what kind of insights that gives us. It's absolutely positive for me.

BB: I think especially when we are talking about timing. I think of course there is a difficulty in timing but I think the last Advisory Board meeting that we had, it spanned across I think like three continents and [laughs] some several countries and the fact that we could actually have that is absolutely positive. I mean we could coordinate and we

did actually manage to do that. So that is also something that I have learned, that it's not easy to do this but it's definitely possible. I think so. Yeah.

Nick: Yeah. I would agree. I guess at least we're able to get this far. At least we can start having these kind of conversations and hopefully to set up personal embodied meetings....

Sumita: Bye from all of us.

As we move towards transnational feminist queer methodologies, we need to be aware that critical engagements with power within and outside the research teams can be draining and potentially end working relationships. In the previous section, Leela pointed to how we 'move forward' in the midst of tensions and also an awareness of the compromises that 'moving forward' with the workplan entails. Harnessing positive emotions and celebrating successes of projects within teams can make the difficult work of transnational feminist queer research bearable. This is not to negate power relations and struggles that authors have elucidated elsewhere (see for example, Kesby 2010; Kindon et al., 2008); rather it is to point to the importance of noting 'what works', if only to know that this work is vital if difficult, incomplete and imperfect. The specifics are less important than the practice of noting, moments of coming together and recognising as BB does that 'it's not easy to do this but it's definitely possible'. It is in these 'possibilities' that the potentials of transnational feminist queer methodologies lie.

Conclusions

In this article, we sought to begin a conceptualisation of transnational feminist queer research methodologies that can create knowledges that work against creating sameness, globalizing or imposing Global North ideals/values. Rooting the article in transnational flows, feminist critiques of positionalities and power relations, and queer engagements with non-

normativities and Global North/Global South hierarchies, the article discussed the challenges and possibilities of thinking and doing work that cross places, in ways that seek complexities and spatial nuances within as well as between places. Transnational feminist queer methodologies seek to force conversations that partially rework power relations, recognising that at times they may reiterate them (Swarr and Nagar, 2010). Transnational feminist queer methodologies are constantly being co-created. They are never complete. Tentatively suturing fragmented thoughts and anxieties as we have done here can form questions, research designs, analytical concepts and relevance across differences of geopolitical landscapes that structure privileges and marginalizations.

The conversational/dialogic approach used in this article enabled explorations of the ways in which multi-positionality is created through transnational, multi-sited teamwork can move beyond self-reflexivity to intra-team reflection and critique. This is a constant process of not only doing but also undoing. The 'our' in this text (and outside of this text) is fragile, somewhat tentative as our discussion of race attests, held together by a desire to 'do something together'. When we began this project, even though our research proposal outlined certain goals (as funding agencies demand the outlining of goals), we did not have a definitive 'to do list' of how we would actualize our methodology. We knew that we wanted to understand liveability together; yet the ingredients of that methodology grew from the needs and contexts of our own work and lives. Thus, our dialogic encounters relating to our reflections on our project on liveabilities talk about how fragile transnational feminist queer methodologies are, never arriving into a fully articulated or defined mode. Whilst such experimentation can be seen as a weakness, we see it as a strength and necessary in creating methodologies that flow and contest. The 'many-many' lives that Sumita calls upon, perhaps do not converge or cross, but they can be joined (temporally and imperfectly) by asymmetrical bridges, connecting across difference and distance. This enables an exploration

the movement, fluidity and dialogic as central to the creation of transnational feminist queer participatory research. There is far more to be done to develop methodologies at the interstices of transnational, queer and feminist praxes. We must interrogate these possibilities, without negating the ways that these, and all, methodologies fall short of the ideals of emancipatory research practice.

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Sumita is a queer feminist activist, a grass-root gender-sexuality worker, a member of Sappho for Equality, an activist forum for rights of lesbians, bisexual and queer women and transmasculine persons in Kolkata, India. Sumita is part of the transnational research project 'Making liveable lives: rethinking social exclusion' in India. She describes herself as a gender non-conforming woman whose sexuality is in continuum. Sumita is a student of Comparative Literature, she is a lone hiker, a theatre enthusiast, who loves to read science fiction and also tries out writing queer creative pieces in Bangla.

Leela Bakshi lives in Brighton and has worked on the project teams of two LGBT research projects with Kath Browne and others, exploring the potentials of activism and social change in work with the academy. Leela co-authored 'Ordinary in Brighton? LGBT, activism and the City' with Kath Browne.

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