Niharika Banerjea
Goettingen University, Sept 12-15, 2018
Keynote Presentation

Liveability as a Decolonial Option
through
Collaborative Research and Activisms

Introduction

In my presentation today, I discuss the question of liveability as a decolonial option, through collaborative research and activisms, both of which are central to my work and life. 'Liveability' I argue, offers a conceptual optic and a methodological direction to counter colonizing hierarchies and attendant material implications across sites of colonial difference and structural differentiations. Specifically, I have in mind the life-worlds of people who practice, express and identify with diverse sexualities and genders that are interpreted and consumed through either right-wing or liberal assimilationist terms, with often violent or reductionist consequences. In claiming liveability to have a decolonial potential, I join those voices that are actively involved in critiquing different forms of contemporary dispossessions and subjugations around sexualities and genders, despite being selectively appropriated by right-wing popular moralities and liberal majoritarian politics. I formulate my critique through a decolonial reading of liveability that in my work is emerging through an engagement with:

(a) the everyday and often ordinary[1] life worlds around queer lives and activisms that despite being juridically unintelligible, are folded into queerphobic and xenophobic renderings of nationalist discourses;

(b) forms of queer living that while juridically intelligible and normalized within liberal majoritarian politics, are struggling to be viable within complacent states;

(c) research practices that are potential connectors of lives across sites of differential precarities and places of colonial difference.

To this end, I draw from my work around *Making Liveable Lives: Rethinking Social Exclusion*,[2] a collaborative research work with Kath Browne, Maynooth University and Sappho for Equality (SFE), Kolkata. I am a member of and actively involved with SFE, an organization working with lesbian, bisexual women and transmen in eastern India.

---

[1] I use 'everyday' as a temporal marker and 'ordinary' as a state of being.

In the following parts of this presentation, I first provide a brief conceptual context around the question of liveability, coloniality the figure of the 'Indian Queer'. Following that, in the next two sections I elaborate on the specificities of collaborative research and activist collaborations, the two routes through which I am claiming liveability to be a decolonial option. Following that, I conclude the presentation with some key observations.

But before I move ahead, let me say that queer and queer-feminist colonial subjects such as myself are making their liveabilities w*ithin* and *through* much contested binaries of modernity/tradition, civilised/uncivilised, and forward/backward. I have lived my personal, professional and activist life across India and the United States. Having said that, my place of *dwelling* shaped me more than my place of actual residence.[3] Therefore, in the US, I dwelled as a 'queer woman of colour', with some privileges of class in the Weberian sense, and in India, I dwell as a 'queer woman', carrying privileges of caste and class. Across both contexts, I carried and still carry cis privileges, but not in an absolute way and with different histories. I self-identify as a 'queer academic-activist'. The classificatory terms that I use to introduce myself are not ontological categories but what Walter Mignolo would term as "enactment of classification" that while assumed to be based on ontological categories, are actually fictional classifications dependent on local histories (2016, ix).

Liveability, Coloniality and the 'Indian Queer'

Why liveability ? The limits of a juridico-political lens

Along with my research collaborators, I conceptualise liveability through Judith Butler's thinking around 'what makes a life livable'[4] (2004). Butler's articulation of livability is connected to her concerns about precariousness, questions of precarity, and vulnerability and grievability, all of which preoccupies much of her work around ethics, politics and resistance. I argue that thinking through liveability on the terrain of queer lives brings into view everyday and often ordinary life worlds, which are otherwise hidden or left unexamined within juridico-political renderings of queer lives and activisms. I use juridico-political to mean a form of rationalizing power circulating within systems of law, courts, and law

---

[3] For the difference between dwelling and residence see Mignolo 2011a, location 441. Kindle edition.

[4] Throughout the research project on which this paper is based, we have used the spelling liveable rather than Butler's livable. This 'e' whilst minor for us indicates a focus on lives, materialities and contexts, drawing on the crucial theoretical insights developed by Butler.

enforcement agencies, which marks the rights bearing subject. Deploying a liveability lens allows us to focus on those ways of life and living that "exceed normative conditions" of recognizability (Butler 2009, 4), including juridico-political ones.

Juridico-political norms of recognizability are typically based on a meter of inclusion and exclusion. This has its limits, as such norms fail to understand the precarities of those recognised as humans residing in nations that do have rights, in addition to foreclosing an understanding of the nuanced and active agentic lives of queer bodies in nations without rights. An optic of liveability includes figuring out ways to endure, persist and how to "become possible" (Butler 2004, 31), in both places where the 'good life' is denied as well as granted. Please note that I am not drawing a false equivalence around the struggle for liveability across populations that inhabit gaping geopolitical divides; differential precarities mean deeply differing forms of violence, lack of access to infrastructure, injuries, destructions, with many rooted in continuing colonial divides. What I am arguing instead is, *precisely because* life across geopolitical contexts are not equally precarious, despite a similar condition of precariousness affecting all, asking critical questions through an optic of liveability forces us to re-think uninterrogated socio-political contexts within which lives either become complacent or struggle to be viable. Liveability also works as a connector of lives across sites of differential precarities and places of colonial difference. Consequently, as I will explain later in this presentation, with a lens of liveability, we can avoid placing nations and by implication, lives, in neat narratives of progress and backwardness, that a juridico-political lens serves to further. There is a problem with an overdependence on legal reforms as being able to encompass and solve all forms of inequalities in society. A lens of liveability allows us to challenge this "symbolic overload" (Garcia 2016, 234). We cannot take the promise of legal reforms for granted, not because only some are privileged enough to have access to it, but because legal reforms, as I will elaborate later, are also consequential to dominant narratives of colonial difference.

Coloniality and the figure of the 'Indian queer'
Decolonial writings remind us that the power characterizing the logic of modernity is coloniality or the colonial matrix of power. The colonial matrix of power is an assemblage of various relations of power, including gender, sexuality, race, capitalism (Lugones 2010; Bacchetta 2016) and caste; these relations while characterizing colonialism, is extended into current discourses and practices (Bacchetta 2016). The term coloniality when juxtaposed with

modernity, works to name "a narrative that builds Western civilisation by celebrating its achievements while hiding at the same time its darker side…" in other words, "there is no modernity without coloniality." (Mignolo 2011a, 2). Coloniality does not stop with political independence from colonisers, but crucially remains as a "socio-epistemic formation" that organizes knowledge and experience (Posocco 2016, 250). For the colonial subject, accounting for oneself is therefore "an impossibility" but also "imperative" (Posocco 2016, 250), as categorisations are inadequate but also necessary. A decolonial stance then requires a different account of oneself; that while still attached to colonising epistemes, makes a critical attempt to de-link itself from that episteme and present alternatives, if not entirely new lenses of accounting for oneself. When deployed to critique hegemonic discourses around genders and sexualities, decolonial work goes beyond the "simple inclusion of those on the 'academic peripheries'" and "rebuilding of epistemological foundations" of contemporary research practices (Kulpa and Silva 2016, 140-141). To this end, a decolonial take allows us to re-signify a field that is "already marked by the coloniality of power." (Bakshi, Jivraj and Posocco 2016, 6-7).

When used this lens to understand the figure of the 'Indian queer'[5], we see that the diverse forms of gender-sexual practices, expressions and identities in India inhabit a spatio-temporal bind, in 'the in-betweens' (Ekine 2016) of the British empires' 'epistemic weapons' (Mignolo 2016) and contextual heteropatriarchies that are both outside and inside of the colonial, rational time of nation, family and community. Within the Indian cultural context, the 'homosexual', the 'single woman', the 'unmarried woman', the 'Muslim man', the 'tribal woman', the 'Scheduled Caste'[6] are figures that hold within them colonial and post-colonial histories, often violent, that are constitutive of the univocal ordering of capital and time in our cultures. These figures, differentially abject, are constitutive of the construction of the ideal Hindu, heterosexual, homosocial, upper-caste, middle-class citizen-subject. Therefore, the homosexual figure, while not legally recognized until 6th September 2018[7], but even after that, is intrinsic to the linear ordering of the Hindu imagination, discourses of nationalism and the ideal citizen-subject. In discussing the significance of queer genders and sexualities to

---

[5] I use the term 'Indian queer' as a heuristic figure to refer to diverse forms of non-heterosexual practices, expressions and identities. In no way, do I claim the term to be exhaustive.

[6] Scheduled caste is an official term to refer to broad categories of social groups marginalized by caste, who are the targets of administrative and welfare reforms.

[7] Navtej Singh Johar and Others vs. Union of India

postcolonial right-wing Hindu nationalisms, Paola Bacchetta argues that both 'queerphobia' and 'queerphilia' are "integral to the formation, maintenance, and deployment of Hindu nationalism" (2013, 122). Within discourses of Hindu nationalism, queerphobia does not necessarily present itself in isolation but reworks colonial sexual and gender normativities and presents itself with xenophobia. This occurs in two ways. As Bacchetta explains, 'xenophobic queerphobia' operates by "constructing the self-identified Indian queer as originating outside the nation", and 'queerphobic xenophobia' works by assigning queer genders and sexualities "to all the designated Others of the nation regardless of their sexual conduct or identity" (Bacchetta 2013, 123). Now, the Hindu imagination do not only contain queerphobia but queerphilia as well. When Hindu religious symbolisms are drawn upon to present a hyper-valorized queer, what we have is 'queerphilic idealization' (Bacchetta 2013, 122). We can often see this in discourses that attempt to represent queer genders and sexualities as authentic subjects of the Indian nation by excavating them from Hindu epics and religious texts. This is the context within which queers in India reside, with several of them being involved in a variety of activisms, some of which are intricately aligned with feminist collectives and movements.

Collaborative Research

Making Liveable Lives: Rethinking Social Exclusion, from where this presentation is drawn, is a research project that asks, "what makes liveable for LGBTQ persons across India and the UK?" This is not a comparative study of LGBTQ lives between the UK and India, but a collaborative research study between Kath, me and Sappho for Equality. Comparative methodologies have been part of colonial systems where "the observer" remains "uncontaminated" and privileges "Western epistemology" over others (Mignolo 2011a, 208). Juridico-political frames around queer lives typically compare the social health of populations and nations with a meter of the presence or absence of legal rights. This, we have argued (Browne and Banerjea et.al 2015) is likely to further progress/backwardness and modern/traditional binaries by classifying nation-states and populations along hierarchical lines. Deploying liveability outside a comparative frame allows us to move beyond familiar "workings of neo-colonial epistemic categories, systems of classification and taxonomies that classify people" (Bakshi, Jivraj and Posocco 2016, 1). We actualized this by doing work *collaboratively from a transnational methodological position* across our sites of geopolitical divides and colonial difference (Browne, Banerjea et.al. 2017) Let me elaborate.

Theorising across the north and south together through a liveability optic

We are reconfiguring epistemological foundations of how we do research on sexualities, by not simply adding those from the global south but *theorising* across the north and south *together* through an optic of liveability. Our collaborative theoretical claim is the following. Liveability's decolonial potential lies in its possibility to focus on the *lives* of those who are otherwise juridically unintelligible and folded into queerphobic and xenophobic renderings of nationalist discourses. At the same time, in places where juridical recognition is guaranteed, liveability facilitates a discussion about the forms of living that are also constitutive of such recognition, and hence inside-outside the realms of legal rationality. In our research, we attempt to understand how LGBTQ persons across places of colonial difference create and introduce liveabilities in the cracks and fissures of hegemonic gender-sexual practices and normative regimes.

India, a former colony of the British empire, until September 6th, 2018 was legally burdened with Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (henceforth referred to as S 377). Under the theme, "Unnatural offences", S 377 states:

> Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with 1[imprisonment for life], or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine. Explanation.—Penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offence described in this section. https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1836974/

S 377 has its origins in an 1860 British colonial law, an imperial epistemic configuration that prioritises a singular understanding and posits itself as the only valid universal to understand sexual desire and behavior. By rationally ordering and regulating the multiplicities of sexual behavior, it has been part of racial classifications that underlie conceptions of the natural and unnatural. S 377 is not just a relic of colonial difference, but has been a living epistemic reality that marks sexual behaviour outside of peno-vaginal acts as unnatural, and therefore to be contained. It was read down by the Delhi High Court in the Naz Foundation vs. Government of NCT of Delhi case on 2 July 2009, thereby decriminalizing consensual sexual acts outside of peno-vaginal ones.[8] On December 11th, 2013, in the Suresh Kumar Kaushal vs. Naz Foundation, the Supreme Court overturned the HC's decision, after finding it "legally

---

[8] A Bench comprising then Chief Justice A P Shah and Justice S Murlidhar in its 105 page judgement had said that criminalisation of homosexuality among consenting adults, is a violation of Article 14 (guarantees equality before the law), Article 15 (prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth) and Article 21 (guarantees protection of life and personal liberty) of the Constitution of India. They said, "As it stands, Section 377 denies a gay person a right to full personhood which is implicit in notion of life under Article 21 of the Constitution."

unsustainable."[9] This is the same year that the same sex Marriage Act was passed in the England and Wales.[10] On September 6th, 2018, in the Navtej Singh Johar and Others vs. Union of India case, the Supreme Court stated "S 377 is arbitrary…" and "majoritarian views and popular morality cannot dictate constitutional rights."[11]. While moving between this turmoil, S 377 all through is an obstinate colonial wound that is part of contemporary "imperial classifications" (Mignolo 2011a, location 612) and deployed to rank order and classify people and nation states. While regulating and persecuting sexual behaviour that falls outside of peno-vaginal acts, S 377 is has been consistently used to generate knowledge about queer lives and mark entire nations as homophobic, thus completely disqualifying forms of thinking and doing that is part of the 'body-politics'[12] of that place.[13] Let me elaborate.

As perceived champions of progress, social actors in the global north, juxtaposing laws such as S 377 and the English and Welsh Marriage Act, use a comparative frame to address issues around homophobia and social acceptance. Legislation emerges a key form of evidence in metrics and comparisons (Browne, Banerjea et al 2015). So, for instance, while the UK is generally seen as inclusive in terms of LGBTQ equalities and legislation, India is rated poorly in metrics of LGBTQ equalities and the decriminalisation and subsequent recriminalisation has been used to describe it as one of the 'most homophobic countries' ahead of countries in which homosexuality remains punishable by death (Batchelor, 2017; Nunez, 2017; Strasser, 2014). We sought to challenge some of the conclusions that we might draw from a focus on inclusive/exclusive legislation, that places sexual and gender politics 'over there' (in India and often by extension the Global South) where we are 'losing'; and frames 'us here' (in the UK, and often the Global North) as 'sorted' and 'winning'.

---

[9] A two-judge bench, comprising Justice G S Singhvi and Justice S J Mukhopadhaya observed that the HC had overlooked the fact that a "miniscule fraction of the country's population constitute LGBT," and that in over 150 years less than 200 people were prosecuted for committing offence under the section. https://indianexpress.com/article/india/section-377-to-be-revisited-timeline-of-the-case-5016095/

[10] 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'.

[11] Five-judge Constitutional bench, led by Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra and comprising Justices R F Nariman, A M Khanwilkar, D Y Chandrachud and Indu Malhotra, stated S 377 to be unconstitutional.

[12] Mignolo (2011a) elaborates body-politics of knowledge or bio-graphics to connote the "responses, thinking and action, of the population who do not want to be managed by the state and want to delink from the technologies of power to which they are being summated." (Mignolo 2011a, location 625). Opposed to body-politics is bio-politics or biopower that connotes strategies of the state to govern populations.

[13] Mignolo (2011a) reminds us that the "translation of geography into chronology was the work of colonization" and "has served as the justification of the ideology of progress and, in the twentieth century of development and underdevelopment." (151).

I along with my research collaborators are therefore making a call to move beyond the inclusive/exclusive legislative frame, as it is part of a larger colonial sexual rhetoric and its reworked forms. This sexual rhetoric, as Sabsay argues, operates as "a marker" to distinguish "the so-called advanced western democracies in opposition to their 'undeveloped others'", thereby justifying "the current re-articulation of orientalist and colonial politics" (2012, 606). The inclusive/exclusive legislative binary has the effect of racializing "regions and areas of the world" (Mignolo 2016, xi), and has geographical manifestations and imaginaries, most prominently in the differentiation of the Global North as 'progressive' and the Global South as 'backwards' (Kupla and Mizielińska, 2011; Kulpa and Silva, 2016; Rao, 2014; Silva and Ornat, 2016). The binary may (1) legally address forms of queerphobic xenophobia and xenophobic queerphobia and (2) influence nation states to correct exclusionary legislations. But it does not go far enough in fracturing universalized and nationalist temporalities that are part of colonial power and being, and conceals "the irreducible cultural, political, and economic dependencies in the inter-state system and, therefore, between nation and nationalities" (Mignolo 2016, xv).

As we have argued in a recent publication, this also has material implications for a politics of development (Banerjea and Browne 2018). The superiority of the Global North in relation to sexual rights can and has been invoked as a rationale for moral superiority and at times military intervention (see, for example, Currah 2013; Hubbard and Wilkinson 2015; Morgensen 2010; Oswin 2007; Puar 2007, 2013). Coupled with this, allocation of monetary funding has begun to be linked (uneasily) to LGBTQ rights. For example, when Uganda's Anti- Homosexuality Bill was signed by the President Yoweri Museveni, Norway and Denmark cut their aid support (Plaut 2014). The US put their position under review, and the decision reiterated the UK's position of channelling support away from the government through alternative routes for the Ugandan people. The World Bank while debating how to mainstream LGBTQ rights in its development agendas (Tyson 2014) has drafted an economic assessment report for homophobia in India (Badgett 2014). In a similar vein, the European Parliament had voted to include LGBTQ rights in its development policies (European Parliament Intergroup on LGBT Rights 2014). Hence, the place of LGBTQ rights in a nation's agenda and its link to economic growth and development aid is not an innocent progressive indicator of change that addresses global homophobia; instead it creates and reiterates, not simply reflecting, a colonial matrix of power.

Further, when considered against the background of the Indian nationalist articulations of queerphobia and xenophobia and queerphilia, the binary also functions to mark oppositions between the 'traditional here' and the 'modern there', that can never be subsumed within the imaginaries of the national body and/or our nationalist aspirations. This is colonial politics with both its assimilationist liberal and right-wing versions that is part of larger processes of marginalizations, dispossessions and structural differentiations that emerge out of interconnected processes of militarization and incarceration within ever increasing fundamentalist and hypernatioanalist regimes. The power differentials which are otherwise hidden between comparisons of legal reforms for the queer can be made visible through interrogating and ultimately moving beyond the inclusion/exclusion binary.

Lastly, the inclusion/exclusion binary cannot capture lives and forms of living that resides within and outside of juridico-political frames of intelligibility. While such binaries are based on an attempted process of rational enumeration of the pre/absence of legal rights, lives and forms of living that escape and/or exceed such enumeration become silenced or obscured. Moving towards an exploration of what makes life liveable for LGBTQ people enables us to grapple theoretically with this key colonial temporal-geographical logic as present within queerphobia and xenophobia and sexual and gendered progress/backwardness narratives. We thus set out to empirically situate/locate/develop liveabilities of LGBTQ persons across the UK and India, with the goal of understanding our contextual vulnerabilities, our interdependencies, and our material realities of individual and collective belongings.

Transnational as methodology

We used a transnational methodological entry point to operationalize this research. I use transnational to mean dialoguing and creating knowledge from our places of colonial difference, without seeking sameness. Our entire methodological endeavour has been to jointly develop our research design with shared questions, but differently implemented. We used a mix of project workshops, in-depth unstructured interviews, online questionnaires, and street theatre that took shape through context. We thus rerouted ourselves through the local even as we were working within the transnational. This allowed us to move away from 'methodological normativities' that typically considers places as static units of analysis, from which comparisons are made in terms of dualisms, such as degrees of 'freedom' and 'unfreedom'. (Browne and Banerjea, et.al. 2017).

A research practice based on a transnational methodology with liveability as an epistemic category is allowing us to bring into focus the social patterning of experiences that reside outside and yet within colonial and nationalist logics. Hinging on distinctions between modern and traditional, modern and non-modern, backward and forward, such logic attempts to regulate by either denying or challenging the existence of worlds with different ontological premises. Such denial and challenge are the working of colonial power, which is constitutive of modernity. A focus on liveability may open the way to a more transformative discourse, by putting into circulation a conceptual took to decolonize "general historical schema or schemas that establish domains of the knowable." (Butler 2009, 6-7). Liveability, methodologically operationalized through our transnational entry point, is offering us opportunities to empirically explore the unease felt by many in the UK regarding the supposed completion of LGBTQ equalities agendas with the passing of same sex marriage and other legislation, and also the problematic assumptions of backwardness associated with India following the reinstatement of S 377 of the Indian Penal Code.

Activist collaborations

Collaboration with activists is central to my work and how I imagine liveability to be part of my academic-activist critique. It is a way to re-link with ways of *doing and thinking*, with patterns of 're-existence' (Mignolo 2011a. location 677)[14] that is otherwise hidden or objectified within the troubled separation of academia from activism. Collaboration with activists therefore is part of my 'epistemic disobedience' (Mignolo 2011b, 3)[15] that refuses to produce knowledge within exclusive walls of the academy. We need not always tell activists what to do but can contribute to decolonizing knowledge production by working against the separation.

Feminist, queer-feminist, and decolonial writers, scholars and activists remind us of the usefulness and political implications of collaboration with activists in research. Locations, politics and histories often get hidden within the process of academic knowledge production; thus it is important to note where, how, why and by who knowledge is produced. (Stanley

---

[14] Mignolo (2011a) notes that this term was introduced by Adolfo Alban Achinte to talk about how Afro-Colombian communities in Columbia from the 18th to 20th centuries creates forms of re-existences rather than resistances.
[15] Epistemic disobedience means changing the terms of the conversation underlining the colonial matrix of power. For more on this, see Mignolo 2011a.

and Wise 1983; Haraway 1991; Monk and Hanson 1992; Rose 1993; Harding, 1997; Silva and Ornat 2016). This sensibility runs through our work on *Liveable Lives*; our work is a transnational co-production with activists across the UK and India.[16] In the UK, Leela Bakshi, Independent Activist Researcher based in Brighton, and in Kolkata, India, those members of Sappho for Equality who were interested in the question of liveabilities and had time, collaborated with us. Our research teams therefore constituted members across activist and academic sites, but at the same time we noted "the continuing relations of power that are manifest in and through these relationships." (Browne and Banerjea, et.al. 2017, 5). During the writing phase, which is still ongoing, we saw that even though the activists were meaningfully involved, yet they also understandably declined to get extensively involved in the academic writing, due to limited time. From within our places of colonial difference, we are literally thinking ourselves out "through collective practice and particular kinds of theorizing." (Alexander and Mohanty 1997, xx). The activists who collaborated with us did so because they are interested in and working toward the creation and consolidation of collective social systems that will enable and facilitate queer loves and ways of living; but also, not in an isolated way, but critically connected to other forms of dispossessions.

The term liveability, with its Bengali versions, are now becoming part of SFE's advocacy and awareness efforts, along with terms such as discrimination and rights that the organization uses. Research work, a part of SFE's endeavors, is crucial for its vision of socially transformative politics; the organization has been researching and documenting different aspects of LBT* lives to understand structures of normative violence and discrimination across social institutions. These efforts at social transformation bear all the more significance in the light of the fact that S 377 never directly affected lesbian lives. The letter of the law addressed only carnal intercourse against the order of nature where penile penetration is a necessary condition to constitute the offence and for all practical purposes indicates sodomy. On the one hand, this judicial invisibility, up until a few days ago, offered some level of protection to lesbian and bisexual women; on the other hand, lesbian expressions remains a blind spot in the heteropatriarchal state machinery, which refuses to acknowledge the fact that 'women' *do* love 'women' and cohabit with them. Given this context, SFE's advocacy and activism has been geared towards breaking socio-cultural and

---

[16] For more on how we theorise transnational feminist queer methodologies, see, Browne, Kath, Niharika Banerjea, Nick McGlynn, Sumita B., Leela Bakshi, Rukmini Banerjee & Ranjita Biswas. 2017. "Towards Transnational Feminist Queer Methodologies." Gender, Place and Culture. DOI: 10.1080/0966369X.2017.1372374.

emotional-intellectual barriers and building spaces for difference and celebration. While legal reform has been an important pillar of the struggle for equality and non-discrimination, SFE has taken its struggle beyond the juridical and statist discourse to engage the larger society of thinking-feeling compatriots in its endeavor to bring social transformation. Given that the scope of law as an agent of emancipation is limited and given that LBT* lives are lived through multifarious forms of violation, there is a need to have different terms to 'break the silence'. "Breaking the silence" involves the process of identification and articulation of marginalization and invisibilization, albeit in terms that can be communicated. While admitting that there are some silences, some sufferings that cannot be articulated in language, and can only be grasped at the perceptual level, it is nevertheless important to be able to find a language of resistance that can then become a possible path to address such hitherto unacknowledged pain and seek justice thereof. SFE's queer feminist politics is situated in this space of heterogeneity and multiple possibilities, in which the concept of liveability and its Bengali versions acquires significance.

I argue that a collaboration with activists bring about a more critical imagination of liveability, because of the following. First, as I alluded to earlier, the concept of liveability allows us to think beyond legal reform and diminish our over-dependence on the symbolic excess that such reforms bring. Second, imagining a 'better future' from within our locations and yet beyond them, is what animates much of our decolonial politics. Collaboration with activists can illuminate how everyday activisms that go into the making of collective histories generate diverse imaginations of liveabilities that while actively supporting legal reforms are not limited to reformist agendas. For instance, at this moment, queer-feminists in India are working to strategically broaden the discussion around the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) to include alternative arrangements of kinship. The UCC is a proposed universal law that seeks to replace plural personal laws governing matters such as property, inheritance and succession. Further, activists who live with and through un-recognized or stigmatized desires have an unique vantage to theorise the actualities of power relations that circumscribe the making of a liveable life. This theorisation often includes an imagination of liveable futures that are also ethical; while drawing from existing norms and institutional structures, such imaginations also strives to give a different account of one's relations with these institutions. Thus, activist collaborations, especially in contexts that are still waiting for legal reforms or do not entirely depend on them, can show possibilities to reconfigure colonial relations of power. The progress/backward binary that undergirds the hierarchization of nation-states, has

had the effect of erasing such everyday activist efforts and collective histories that generate these imaginations. If we read sexualities only through the juridico-political lens, then legal reforms, and by default the west, become the primary placeholders for the production of queer liveabilities, in comparison to a 'cultural imaginary' of places in the global south as lacking such liveabilities or waiting for only legal reforms as the sole enabler of a liveable life. Surely, sexualities can offer better ways of analysing presents and imagining futures!

Having argued for activist collaborations, I am in no way indicating that activist sites are clear of hierarchies or have been able to adequately interrogate marginalizations around caste, location, (dis)ability and religion in relation to sexualities and genders. When trying to argue for activist collaborations for a better imagination of liveable lives, I am only saying that our theorisations of liveabilities needs to be situated within activist histories that are struggling to *make lives liveable* beyond legal reforms. As we saw through our work, 'making' not only includes advocacy and awareness, but also research. In other words, activism happens through research collaborations as well that in turn feed into advocacy and awareness efforts.

In Conclusion

In conclusion, I once again emphasize that juridico-political forms of power are not the only epistemic sites that organises our experiences, and can promise liberation from our colonial pasts and reworked colonial presents. Liveability as a decolonial option has the potential to address the limits of uninterrogated equality-based agendas which seek to recognize, codify and act for and upon marginalized subjects, even when some of these subjects are incorporated into the liberal assimilationist imaginary. These two images that I have here are part of the celebrations surrounding the decriminalization a few days back. My friends and activists in these images are carrying posters that are not only celebrating legal recognition but at the same time critiquing violent Hindu imaginations and practices that in addition to persons of queer genders and sexualities continue to dispossess several others who are at the receiving end of caste and religious hierarchies.

Standing today in front of you from a place of colonial difference, I want to remind all of us here today that the 'here' and 'there' are products of elaborate colonial schemas (modern/traditional, civilised/barbarian, progressive/backward) along which regions and populations are placed, always indicating a chronological motion of arrival to modernity, civilisation, progress. The solidarities that I was able to forge through our sharing of

knowledge and experiences around liveabilities across academia and activism and through places of colonial difference, gives me hope and reasons for optimism.

Lastly, methodologically speaking, we need to read and interpret our 'data' in ways so that our writing can contribute to a different kind of knowledge. By suggesting that we focus on liveability through a different analysis of space and time, I am not saying that this is the only counter-hegemonic lens that should be now universally deployed; there can be others as well. The point is, whatever lens we decide to use and from within our own intellectual and material contexts, it is important to question if that will keep on reproducing colonial relations of power or help to create forms of knowledge that are otherwise subsumed within such relations. So, we have to ask how, say, the unacceptable gets lived out, how the unintelligible and the intelligible gets lived out, and how what is not lived out, what is unliveable, also leaves its mark as a mode of unintelligibility. If one lives according to a rationality, what forms of 'life' come to haunt that mode of rationality as its outside, and how do those unliveable modes vacillate between what is 'here' and what is 'there'.