From travel to arrival: mapping intersectionality's landings in the Global South

Concepts do not enter an empty unmarked conceptual space. They have to affect the

operation of established practices and their implicit conceptual structures.

— *Sudipta Kaviraj, Filth and the Public Sphere, 1997*

We know that concepts travel, but where do they land? As the Subaltern Studies scholar, Sudipta Kaviraj reminds us, concepts do not enter "an empty unmarked conceptual space". In writing also on the arrival of modernity in the colony, Dipesh Charkrabarty shows that no concept can simply or universally be "applied" to another context, as "no human society is a tabula rasa", and "our historical differences actually make a difference" (2000). The travel of concepts is never about the simple transference of a cultural or political idea from one milieu to another, but always also "a process of translation of diverse life-worlds and conceptual horizons about being human" (ibid)

Such claims – as with wider ones around cultural transference, translation and travel– help me think about the density of the local into which concepts arrive; or of their landing upon conjunctures that are thick with existing political literacies, archives of thought and action, conceptual imaginaries and horizons, on which newer conceptual maps might draw and which, in turn, they inevitably inflect, even shift. What exists is hardly erased, just as what arrives

takes a specific shape, as it layers upon or even melds into specific conditions and cultural forms. Anxieties around intersectionality's origins and travel have produced limited and less nuanced accounts of where intersectionality lands.[i] When it comes to the Global South, in particular, a lack of nuance can reproduce dominant perceptions of these locales as being typically empty or passive, as amenable only to epistemic imposition from outside.

I use the occasion of this contribution to briefly reflect on intersectionality's travel to two distinct sites in the Global South, where it has been enthusiastically taken up by academics and activists (especially feminist and queer feminist). Queer feminist activists in India have turned to a more consciously intersectional language around gender, sexuality and rights in recent years, even as their political models and rhetoric articulated a proto-intersectional sensibility well before. However articulated, activist commitments to intersectionality folded into highly local attachments to the "subaltern", borne out of convergent leftist and feminist imaginations (which were especially intense and enduring in the formerly communist state of West Bengal). In South Africa, by contrast, "intersectionality" arrived at the high point of the student movement against university fees and was able to give voice and meaning to deeply felt experiences of gender-based violence, homophobia and toxic masculinity. Intersectionality worked to reorient activist energies towards the injury of gendered and queer subjects, taking away, for some, investments in questions of class and economic (in)justice.

I am less interested in mapping these sites for the conceptual or activist inadequacies that they might reveal; rather, for what they tell us about the particular political conjunctures into which concepts enter, and the work of translation that is undertaken "to make ideas work in different context" (Crenshaw 2011). The different take up of intersectionality with distinct effects suggests something about the conditions under which specific intersections take hold of public or at least activist imaginations (against others), revealing the multiple temporalities contained within a specific conjuncture. In both locales, "intersectionality" acted as a vehicle

to recraft inherited political grammars, as well as to craft new ones, offering "backward" forms of politics (Love 2007), and ones that led "back to the future" (Gillespie and Naidoo 2019).

Queer feminisms in India: proto-intersectional logics and practices

As queerness gained public visibility and social acceptance – even as it remained criminalised – questions around intersectionality grew prominent amongst queer rights activists in India. In the period in which the Indian courts removed and reinstated laws against sodomy – and new markets and media celebrating queer life emerged – activists worried whether these "new" queer futures could only be envisioned in normative, homonationalist and capitalist terms. But well before this period, a group of queer feminist activists in Kolkata turned to lobby a wider population in their struggle for decriminalization and de-stigmatization, and to move beyond identity-based politics to a proto-intersectional one.

With origins in a small support group for LBT women called Sappho, they formed an externally funded, rights-based organisation called Sappho For Equality or SFE. They described the journey from Sappho to SFE as one reflecting a shift from identity politics to issue-based activism, informed by a lesbian standpoint. In the words of founder members, Akanksha and Malobika (2007, 367): "we started to visualize our issues from the human rights perspective.…While registering as a trust/public body, we took on the new name Sappho for Equality indicating our mission to work on a boarder frame with marginalized women, starting with marginalization on sexual preference. Anyone who supports our cause can join this, irrespective of gender and sexual orientation."

The model of the activist platform – to which anyone, irrespective of sexual identification or choice, could belong – was not unknown to Indian queer activists, both as a way of critiquing single-issue, identity-centred Western LGBT politics, as well as embodying a more specifically intersectional one. One set of Indian queer feminist activists in Delhi

explained their shift from "an identity-based paradigm of sexual minorities to an intersectional framework, which sought to locate sexuality—in a dynamic and holistic way—in relation to other axes of social construction and control, such as gender, religion, and class'' (Sharma and Nath 2005, 87). They were referring to the Delhi-based activist platform, PRISM, whose everyday strategy Naisargi Dave (2012) describes as being concerned with "the intersectionality of oppressions, particularly those of sexuality and class".

While early SFE members did not use the language of intersectionality, their drive to move beyond identitarian articulations of sexuality to question, on behalf of everyone (queer and non-queer), "the assumptions of 'mainstream' sexual practices and norms" (Ghosh 2016) reflected a proto-intersectional logic. In explicit terms, though, the organisation employed the language of universal human rights that provided impetus and direction to early Indian queer feminist organising (see Dave 2012). Activist slogans moved from additive models - "Prothome ami manush, tarpor ami meyemanush, shob sheshe ami shomokami meyemanush" (I am first a human, and then a woman, and only last am I a lesbian woman) – to the insertion of lesbian needs to existing rights discourses – "lesbian rights are human rights". Needless to say, these rhetorical shifts were fundamentally transnational in nature, with concrete material consequences. Unlike comparable platforms like PRISM that eschewed external funds, SFE was funded by international donors. Funding support from international organisations working on "lesbian rights as human rights" were critical to the sustainability of lesbian activism, which was not only criminalised by the Indian state but also fell outside of the new regimes of risk, visibility and support that the HIV/AIDS crisis had generated in the Global South. As a NGO, SFE worked on three fronts: it sought to "empower" community members, engage in robust advocacy work (which included building its own set of publications and a queer archive), and sensitise state representatives and organisations. Sappho continued as a "safe space" where LBT persons (mostly cisgendered women) could meet for the purposes of accessing

community and "emotional support". These were mostly individuals "of means" (Dave 2012); not elite but solidly middle-class and metropolitan.

Looking back on the early years of an organisation that emerged as the face of the queer movement in eastern India, core members reflected on a proto-intersectional politics:

"Issues like livelihood, class, caste, disability, regionality and political/racial/religious marginalisations did come into discussions and in solidarity-building efforts with other movements, but not so much directly in our political consciousness. Intersectionality, not then a buzzword as today, came in the form of matching footsteps with other movements, raising voices in each other's support and reacting in solidarity to crises" (Biswas, Beethi and Ghosh 2019)

This was one of the ways in which intersectionality resonated with this group of queer feminists, as a way of building alliances and solidarity with other movements. The intersectionalities of struggle was rooted in an understanding of the intersectional nature of identity itself, as founder member, Akanksha wrote: "we are trying to connect the gender-sexuality rights movement with other movements against marginalisation on the basis of markers like caste, class, religion, occupation, geographical location, education – to understand our own identities through the lends of intersectionalities between multiple marginalisations" (Ghosh 2016). For Akanksha, individual lives were comprised of some mainstream (or, privileged) and some marginal positions, best captured by "intersectionality", from which movement organising could emanate. Finally, intersectionality enabled a firmer articulation of what was always known, namely, that sexuality could not be understood outside of its intersections with class, caste, religion and location. Individual activists often reached for the example of the "Muslim hijra" or the "Marwari lesbian", as ways of explaining the specific intersections of gender-variant and sexual minority experiences with religion and community

in the Indian context. This recourse to religion and community suggests a specifically postcolonial understanding of queerness and queer struggles.[ii]

One way of mapping changes in conceptual and political horizons is available in the bilingual newsletter that SFE published. A 2016 issue was devoted to the concept of intersectionality, with a lead article by a Delhi-based activist identifying the newsletter – published in English and Bangla – as itself an intersectional act. Acknowledging how urban-based and even elite the mainstream queer movement in India was, the author saw SFE's efforts to publish in the vernacular (and not the newsletter alone) as extending the otherwise metropolitan scale of queer activism, to non-English speaking and non-urban publics.

SFE was deeply reflective of its own metropolitan limits and biases, and the specific intersections of gender and sexuality with class came to most occupy and direct activist imaginations and agendas. Above all, they directed metropolitan queer activism towards the needs and desires of the subaltern lesbian of rural Bengal – or, the *gramer meye*, a figure with great symbolic meaning in postcolonial feminist and leftist imaginaries. Such a figure tended to be invoked more as metaphor – of hope and failure – than as fleshy material being (as Jen Nash remarks of Asian and black women in US "transnational" and "intersectional" women's studies; Nash 2015). The gramer meye shaped activist investments in particular intersections, over others, and produced a politics that "felt backward" (Love 2007). In order to assuage their class and metrocentric limits and establish a more intersectional praxis, queer feminists turned to a pure subaltern subject, as made available by political projects, both past and enduring.

The ghosts of the past and the paradoxes of the present

"Intersectionality" did not stop queer feminist activists from prioritising class dynamics, implicitly reproducing their primacy over other structures and relations of power. These logics had specific – and highly local – histories and lineages, which one could easily locate in

Kolkata's leftist political "field", as shaping the directions of a regional women's movement but also informing the self-understanding of a more national one (Ray 1999). Even as queer feminisms had troubled origins in the women's movement – which activists experienced as homophobic and as offering them only conditional acceptance– they also embodied many of its political vocabularies and affective terms, several derived from the left. For organisations like SFE, for who global neoliberal circuits of funding and capital had transformed the imaginative and material scope of their activism, a recourse to available conceptual maps and political models helped negotiate the risks and tensions – and opportunities – of the neoliberal conjuncture. This was the terrain upon which individual activists embraced proto-intersectional perspectives. They also constituted the conditions under which the "margin of the margins" (Ghosh 2016, 50) came to stand in, above all, for the non-urban poor, and folded into existing tropes of saving subaltern others.

From the start and in ways that intensified with organizational expansion, SFE had clear aspirations and anxieties around the reach of their activism. "Is our activism city-centric? Does it have no sway in rural areas?" they asked in their newsletter, *Swakanthey*, and went onto illustrate in a January 2012 editorial how their movement moved from cities to villages:

"On 4th December, on the occasion of [the] anti-violence fortnight for women, we headed out with our leaflets to local trains running towards villages, where we directly talked to the daily passengers who come to the city to earn and go back every day. Our purpose, through these passengers, sending our messages…that we, your urban friends, are by you! Perhaps as a result of it, a village girl from close to the Sunderbans stands at our door, with her same-sex lover" (Ghosh 2016, 33).

Campaigns such as distributing leaflets on local commuter trains that connected the city of Kolkata to its peri-urban and rural fringes were geared towards advocacy and consciousness-raising efforts in non-metropolitan areas, amongst those queers who were less privileged in

class, caste and locational terms. Such initiatives were undertaken in the name of women's rights, violence against women, and reaching the grassroots. They suggested how international funds and donor-speak had extended activist (out)reach, beyond the metropole, while the constructs of the rural and the grassroots as key sites of need, risk, and vulnerability were handy in attracting such funds.

If the train campaign extended the literal reach of activists, other initiatives ensured that those outside of the metropolitan had a safe space to arrive at. For many members, the support group was vital for outreach, for those who lived beyond the urban and the cosmopolitan. Researcher and SFE member Niharika Banerjea (2014, 8) quotes Neena, a fellow member, expressing such sentiments:

> Suppose a girl who comes to know about Sappho for the first time or comes to Sappho for the first time, think of her world!! A girl from an interior village or suburb, she does not get to see two girls roaming around! She does not know about *this life*! Maybe, she heard about Sappho and came here. Think of her fears and palpitations! So many thoughts are there embedded in her mind! That she is something different, that she is guilty, that she is giving pain to her parents, she just does not know what to do with life! So much of societal pressure! When these girls come here, what do you do? You just want to give her some warmth! Like a person freezing in cold!…Just as a person freezing in cold gets back the warmth within, when comes under a wrap! It is the same here. After a point of time, girls start feeling warm, stand up and face life in a different way (emphasis added)

Queer progress relied on a literal and symbolic journey from the rural, a space not conducive to same-sex livability, to the urban, the site of queer liberation and life itself. These kinds metrocentric imaginaries, that were widely in circulation, posited specific kinds of

relationships within the community, with the empowered metropolitan "queer" being posited as savior of the vulnerable and victimized rural "lesbian."[iiii]

In the *Swakanthey* issue, previously cited, the editor wrote: "In rural areas, where there have not reached the touch of anything western, women who have willingly exited life send us their cryptic messages through their suicides" (Ghosh 2016, 34). SFE members even went to investigate one such suicide of two young women, who belonged to poor, Scheduled Caste families, and lived in a rural region of West Bengal that had become infamous as a site of popular resistance to forced industrialization and dispossession. The double suicide formed the basis of a documentary film that the organization supported. Critics accused the film of a classic Spivakean error: of speaking on behalf of the subaltern only to further silence her, while fortifying the subjectivity and agency of those who cast themselves as her savior (Chatterjee 2018; Bhattacharya 2020). Apparently, hostile villagers also "stalled the shoot and the documentary corroborates this by showing villagers asking the director to stop filming" (Bhattacharya 2020, 158). Some SFE members later expressed regret at entering a space "alien" to them, to place its inhabitants under "investigation" (Chatterjee 2018).

But the ease with which urban individuals and groups could enter — and exit — the rural is unsurprising and not unique to such types of activism or even to this particular NGO. It speaks to long histories of urban educated Indian activists, whether Gandhian or Maoist, "returning" to the village for social justice and development work. In West Bengal, radical left identity was historically constituted through specific imaginings of rural Bengal, as a site of the primitive and premodern, full of purity, innocence, passivity, but also revolutionary promise that could be unleashed with external (urban/middle class) intervention. Postcolonial Indian feminists too were deeply invested in "the moral virtue of poverty" (Dave 2012), and established their early authenticity and relevance by speaking on behalf of poor, rural others (John 1996). These affective and representational economies had a direct bearing on how

poverty came to be prioritized over the politics of sexuality, to the exclusion and even negation of lesbian identity and (injurious) experience. As queer feminisms grew and entered the mainstream, they were similarly haunted by the gramer meye for failing to interrogate their own metrocentric limits and class-caste biases. Activist and organizational strategies that fall short of building robust analyses of differences and inequalities, even when they demonstrate commitments to intersectionality or "diversity," have been attributed to global funder-driven obligations (Ghosh 2015). But in this feminist field, compulsions to reach, even "save" the gramer meye and to achieve intersectionality had other lineages, showing important continuities across time and place.

The trajectory of this one queer feminist organization shows that there were still other ways to claim and *do* intersectionality, including through a "letting go" of the defensiveness with which activists approached their own class and locational limits (Nash 2019). On the eve of Sappho's 20th year, in 2020, a statement issued on Facebook included the following:

"Our location in an urban middle-class setting has brought with it certain advantages and resources. We remain aware that such privileges often tend to create a divide with other geographical and social cultural settings that might not be equipped with the resources that we have been able to access. While we have taken this critique seriously keeping the lens of reflexivity focused on ourselves, we are also careful not to self-flagellate ourselves to the extent where we end up producing locational binaries between an 'authentic non-urban' and an 'inauthentic urban'. After all, the urban, middle-class is not a homogenous reality, and numerous individuals, who despite being located in urban middle-class settings, are the target of different forms of violence within domestic and familial spaces. Therefore, we stand to work across this locational difference. We are reflective of the fact that there is a need to unpack and understand such labels that tend to reduce the complexity of lives lived at intersections of diverse marginalizations and privileges in different geographical scales".

Rather than employ intersectionality to defensively negotiate one's privileged class location – and reproduce, however inadvertently, essentialist assumptions around non-metropolitan and subaltern identities – activists embarked on letting go of defensiveness, to mark new ways of relating to others and to the self. The travels of intersectionality in the life of this one organization could lead to easy conclusions of the inadequacy or even the failure of the concept, attributable to its "facilitated" arrival via funding networks and transnational imperatives (Menon 2015). Yet, the density of the local and the multiple spatiotemporalities into which intersectionality arrived offered activists specific ways of negotiating the paradoxical possibilities of the present, besides encountering the ghosts of the past, differently.

South African student movements: intersectional, decolonial

In comparison to queer feminist activists in Kolkata, feminist and queer student activists in South African cities like Cape Town and Johannesburg developed a far more explicit attachment to and articulation of an intersectional politics. Black women, trans and queer students used intersectionality not only to centre issues of gender and sexuality in struggles to decolonise the university and South African society at large, but also to name patriarchy and rape culture in movement spaces, at the hands of their own male comrades. These students, who were at the forefront of "Fallist" movements, fought simultaneously on two fronts: as part of an intersectional, decolonial struggle *and* as what one activist called a "quiet revolution", which tried to keep the movement accountable to its commitments to intersectionality (White 2016).

The Fallist movements exploded on South African university campuses in 2015 and 2016, with the most well-known of these circulating, globally, as #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall. While initially over the raising of university tuition fees, they quickly morphed into a struggle for a number of issues, insisting on a project of decolonising the university and

challenging neoliberal imperatives in higher education. Alongside the demand to stop fee increases – and eventually, to remove fees entirely – they aligned with precarious service workers in their longstanding demand to be "insourced". They also addressed the university as a site of gender-based and sexual violence, in continuum with and not as a departure from the endemic forms of "GBV" that South Africa faces. Moving quickly beyond claims on the university alone, they sought to hold to account the failures of the ANC government itself, rejecting what it had offered since 1994 – nationalism, transformation, nonracialism, embodied in the idea of the rainbow nation. As a first generation of "born free" black South Africans, the students "ruptured the legitimacy of postapartheid democracy and demanded a reopening of the history of South African politics and its associated visions of the future" (Gillespie and Naidoo 2019).

These struggles were as consequential in material terms – scrapping fee increments, insourcing workers, and moving from loans to scholarships in higher education (Veriava 2019) – as they were in shifting ways of knowing and knowledge-production, acting as "epistemological ruptures" (Lewis and Hendricks 2017). The students brought back into the political fray traditions like Black consciousness (BC) and Pan-Africanism (PA), which had nurtured the liberation struggle (Gillespie and Naidoo 2019). But they also drew centrally on a "newer" concept – intersectionality – in ways that catapulted an otherwise academic feminist term into mainstream visibility. They attempted to "sculpt" "a distinctly South African intersectionality" (Khan 2017), given the concept's African American roots but also the specificity of the conjuncture into which it had arrived.[iv] Apartheid's success in imposing and entrenching cultures of "division and differences" (Gqola 2001) had not only impeded the scope for black solidarity – a central tenant of BC – but also for recognising multiple, overlapping and co-existent systems of power and oppression. A decolonial intersectional praxis meant that struggles against racism or white supremacy or patriarchy could not take

precedence over one another, in a conjuncture in which "struggles against injustice cannot but embrace intersectionality" (Ratele 2016).

BC, PA and intersectionality created "both epistemological and material possibilities for expanding liberation" (Khan 2017, 110). As the student movement's three intellectual pillars, they were not however easily reconciled with one another. The movement deployed intersectionality precisely as a way to go beyond the limits of historic BC ideologies and movements, in which race was considered "the primary oppressive force" (Gqola 2001). "Younger" womxn and trans activists saw in intersectionality the promise of countering historic trends that did not recognise the specificity of the category Pumla Gqola names, "Blackwoman". But on the ground, activists experienced the fragility and indeed, the backlash of trying to secure and sustain a genuinely intersectional struggle. Activist-scholar, Leigh-Ann Naidoo (2016a) provides a close mapping of the conflictual terrain in which intersectionality felt incommensurate with other ideological leanings of the movement:

"The balancing act of BC, Pan-Africanism and intersectionality meant that there were more women and queer students voicing their concerns and participating more fully in the early stages of the movements. But as the student movements continued to struggle to decolonise their universities through an intersectional understanding of privilege and oppression, there was more and more resistance from a number of men in the movements who tried to argue that the issue of racism should trump all other issues. There was a shift from the October 2015 #FeesMustFall protests that placed class squarely on the struggle agenda, which resulted in movements centering race and class as the primary oppressive systems to fight against. Many students made the argument that the struggle needed to focus on one or two things and could not take on everything at once. Black queer feminists in the movement resisted this approach and continued to draw attention to the oppressive systems of patriarchy and homophobia, compelling their heterosexual male comrades to recognise that while they are oppressed as

black men in a university system and world that continues to privilege whiteness, they are simultaneously privileged as men by patriarchy and by heteronormativity as heterosexual. The key issue has proved to be a challenge internet to most student movements and highlights the continued ideological and power struggles taking place" (183).

Intersectionality, at the hands of black, queer feminist students, had more labour to perform, though, than to simply remind male comrades of the intersecting logics and manifestations of patriarchy, heteronormativity, capitalism, coloniality and racism. It served the urgent and difficult task of critiquing the movement, from within, by those most minoritized by it, even as the struggle swelled and surged forward. Sharp cleavages emerged around experiences of patriarchy, sexism, homophobia, transphobia and hetero and cis-normativity, especially amongst those most visible and vulnerable to such violence and those most protected from or even complicit in it (see Dlakavu 2017). While trends of silencing and normalising sexism were familiar from historic BC movements (see Gqola 2001), what was unique to this moment was the emergence of an unapologetic feminist challenge to "the oppression and discipline of patriarchy within the movement itself" (Mabaso 2017; see also Ndelu, Dlakavu & Boswell 2017).

It fell to those who comprised the "margin within the margins", to wage an internal revolt – a quiet revolution – "within a hetero-sexist patriarchal #FeesmustFall" (White 2016). During FMF, intersectionality became the site of actual conflicts amongst activists, with one set blaming the other of "using the rhetoric [as] an ideological stance attempting to derail the broader movement" (Jacobs 2017). Self-identified queer, trans and feminist students – encompassed in the category of "womxn" – were at the receiving end of such backlash; they persisted in the labour of making intersectionality speak to their comrades. But, across different university campuses, Fallist movement spaces were experienced as ones in which the promise of intersectionality had, in fact, failed: "Black cis and trans women and non-binary people

worked hard to ensure that the decolonial agenda was truly intersectional. In theory it was a success, in practice patriarchy and cis-heteronormativity prevailed' (Kim in Matandela 2017, 27).

The failures – even farce – of intersectionality were experienced in particularly intense ways when the movement emerged as a site of sexual violence, of the violation of comrades by other comrades. Instances of rape and sexual assault that occurred within movement spaces – during occupations and protest actions on campuses –travelled to mainstream media as multiple hashtags (#UWCRapeAlert, #RapeatAzania, #PatriarchyMustFall #EndRapeCulture, #RUReferenceList, #IAmOneInThree). These hashtags showed the leaky nature of rape cultures –from society at large to university campuses to progressive movements from which "progressive" men were certainly not exempt (see Breakey 2022).

If BC arrived in South Africa in a conjuncture where women – and gender – did not seem to matter (Gqola 2001), then intersectionality arrived at a time when feminists struggled to make sexual violence matter, greatly. They called sustained attention to a pandemic of femicide, corrective rape, and direct violence on women and queers – to a South African nightmare, as Gqola named it (2015). Womxn students placed sexual violence at the centre of their intersectional decolonial struggle on university campuses, tracing its stubborn endurance to entangled colonial and apartheid legacies (see Gouws 2017). Through their naked marches, brandishing of sjamboks, online naming and shaming, and careful consciousness-raising, they made clear that they would no longer tolerate societal tolerance of such injury and injustice. They received little support from (cis-het) male comrades. One critical event in the early life of RMF – when a female comrade accused a fellow comrade of raping her in occupied "Azania House" at UCT – shows how much students poured their hopes for a different feminist future into "intersectionality", which also came to contain their feelings of desperation and disappointment. As I show in a last and final section, "Azania" embodied intersectionality's

fragile, even incommensurate life in this movement, but it also signalled what could be and was yet to come.

Back to the future?

In their essay titled, "Cold Future", Kelly Gillespie and Leigh-Ann Naidoo (2019) draw out the specific temporal logics and claims towards futurity in the student movements. In their recovery of past political ideologies and histories – such as BC, PA and in the evocation of "Azania" – the students reopened the past for a future that they ought to have been delivered but were effectively cheated out of. Instead, in the impasses of the present, the future had effectively gone cold and needed to be remembered and recast. The students were reopening the question of political time, asking anew: "what time is it?" (Naidoo 2016b).

Womxn in Fallist movements were also "time-travellers" (ibid); their quiet revolution emerged a terrain for imagining and building "worlds to come" (Nuttall 2019). Notwithstanding their own feelings and declarations of intersectionality's failure, the concept was, in fact, critical to their investments in feminist futurity. If queer feminist activists in India turned backward in their struggles against queer normalisation – especially in a wider context of global neoliberalism – then feminist Fallists conjured up and made room for what could be but did not yet exist. Their "hallucinations" (Naidoo 2016b) both converged with but also disrupted a wider activist claim to the future, through an insistence on and demand for intersectionality. After all, intersectionality functioned less as a coherent conceptual map in these movement spaces, than as "sites of intensity that articulate a coming to political consciousness" (Mupotsa 2019).

Naidoo (2016b) points to generational fault lines that emerged in the wake of these movements, with anti-apartheid activists declaring the call to revolution as being out of step with post-apartheid democratic time. If "older" activists accused Fallists of being out of touch and time, then self-identified older feminists accused younger activists of forgetting past

struggles and their continued relevance (Miller 2015). Much of their disquiet centred around the deployment of intersectionality, more as slogan than as concrete epistemic intervention, which easily devolved into single axis thinking – either privileging race or gender – and essentialised identity (Miller 2015; Gouws 2017; Lewis and Hendricks 2017). But beyond these typical criticisms of intersectionality – which feminist Fallists identified in their own critiques of the movement – generational logics produced a new radical African intersectional feminist as refusing to inherit the class and anti-capitalist analyses of the past, turning instead to transnational, especially American political vocabularies that fell prey to neoliberal logics (Lewis and Hendricks 2017). Such linear, generational accounts – undergirded by attachments to loss and recovery – typically flatten the multiple times through which the present is seamed (as Nuttall 2009 observed of the immediate post-apartheid years). Fallist movements held the possibility of recovering *and* reinventing the past, but they also offered temporalities other than those normatively linear or progressive. Intersectionality enabled rather than foreclosed the possibilities for a future-oriented, even utopian politics (see Mupotsa 2019).

This might sound surprising to some. Indeed, Nash (2011) argues (after Jasbir Puar), that intersectionality is not amenable to futurity, being "present-oriented". Insofar as it seeks to make visible identities and injustices in the here and now, intersectionality disavows futurity. Nash contrasts this dominant strand in black feminist theorising with an "older" political tradition, which she calls "black feminist love-politics"; one that eschews attachments to the present and to fixed selves to "dream of a yet unwritten future". Like queer recastings of time and temporality, black feminist love-politics is invested, unlike identity-driven intersectionality, not in what *is* but what *could be*, or the future as a locus of possibility.

For sure, the student movements lend to wider critiques of intersectionality as essentialising identities, or visibalising what is there for the purposes of inclusion, at the cost of more radical, transformative and future-oriented agendas. That is, if we read Fallists as quite

closely tied to intersectionality's origins: to Kimberley Crenshaw's original emphasis on the intersectional nature of social identities and the interlocking dynamics of relations of power, in ways that some have read (Gouws 2017, 1). But if we treat intersectionality as a site of intensity, as a coming-to political consciousness, even of affective excess, then the conjuncture into which it landed offers scope for a different reading. Womxn Fallists harnessed the concept to do more than name identity – gender or race – as fixed essences, around which their claims for visibility and inclusion cohered. They used it more so as a tool to diagnose the limits and frictions in black solidarity, especially along the fault lines of gender and sexuality.

If the student movement was, as Gillespie and Naidoo (2019) claim, an extended experimentation with a politics of blackness – to affirm a new black subjectivity and a future into which "black students felt willing to step" – then intersectionality, in proving incommensurate with some articulations of political blackness (BC), voiced "the difficulties of Black solidarity" (Mupotsa 2019). These "difficulties" exceeded the kinds of gender-specific violence, injury and exclusion that this new political grammar made visible and nameable within and beyond the space of the movement; it also came to contain womxn students' sharp sense of disappointment and betrayal at sources of violence and injury within the movement. When they recast the movement as a site of failed intersectional possibilities, they named the tensions, connections, and contradictions – the frictions (Tsing 2005) – intrinsic to projects and promises of black solidarity. Failure and friction both presumed and prefigured "that which does not yet exist; that which only exists in an incipient state; or that which, it is hoped, is still to come" (Nuttall 2019).

At the time of #RapeAtAzania, student activist, Wandile Dlamini (2015) wrote:

A hashtag like #RapeAtAzania should be contradictory because Azania as a space is supposed to be a one of refuge… a space that we come to after experiencing teargas, rubber bullets and police brutality; a space that we go to in order to flee the institutional and social violence. We are not supposed to have violations of safety, psyche and bodies at Azania.

Azania was the name used by nationalist formations, including BC and PA movements during the liberation struggle, to refer to South Africa. RMF activists evoked this (lost) past as the site of a black future. Contestations within the movement around gender and sexuality led naturally to Azania, disrupting and expanding this locus of black political futurity (in ways that black feminist imaginations inevitably do; see Pinto 2018). In her disappointment with what Azania had failed to be, Dlamini also imagined what it could be:

'If Azania practiced intersectionality, there wouldn't be an extraordinary need for people to prove why someone's presence or actions is violent.

It wouldn't be an uphill battle to get Azania to talk about patriarchy and hypermasculinity

It wouldn't be an uphill battle to get Azania to swiftly deal with violent people in the space

There wouldn't be a need for us to prove why dealing with patriarchy is of importance

All of these things would happen naturally in an intersectional space.

But Azania is not an intersectional space… At least, not yet'

Throughout the life (and afterlife) of the student movement, feminist, queer and trans activists materialised a different Azania. At Wits University, for instance, #MbokodoLead started trending a few days after the students occupied key parts of the university to mark and to shift patriarchal power dynamics within the movement. Through their aesthetics, political rhetoric and affect, womxn students sought "to create safer spaces where Black women's ideas, political agency and being would be valued" (Dlakavu, 2017; see also Veriava 2019 and Mabaso 2017).

At UCT, the Trans Collective disrupted a photographic exhibition of #RMF by stripping and painting over images, to protest not just their erasure from these commemorative events, but also the erasure of the "quiet revolution" that they had led. In a statement explaining their intervention, the trans collective (formed in the early days of RMF and responsible for an intersectionality audit committee), had this to say:

"Our intervention is an act of black love. It is a commitment towards making RMF the fallist space of our dreams. It forms part of the journey towards the 'logical conclusion' of the decolonisation project. There will be no Azania if black men simply fall into the throne of the white man without any comprehensive reorganisation of power along all axis of the white supremacist, imperialist, abliest, capitalist cisheteropatriarchy" (UCT Trans Collective 2016).

Azania was not simply a locus of failed (intersectional) potentialities and scripts of disappointment, betrayal and loss. It was also about what could be possible, a claim towards not-as-yet scripted but possible alternative worlds. Intersectionality gave these students the political grammar to imagine and conjure these utopian desires, rooted not in the identitarian politics of gender or race (or past political struggles), but in the kind of black feminist love-politics that Nash (2011) describes. The trans statement powerfully concludes with, "We are the trans people who have loved RMF even when it did not love us. Aluta Continua".

Conclusion

Intersectionality has been marked by excessive travel; travel that has taken it beyond its intellectual, discursive and spatial origins, stretching but also diluting, many have argued, the analytical bite and political imperative of the concept. But anxieties over travel – and origins – tend to ignore where concepts land, and how their arrival might be marked not so much by "co-option" by other forces but by a "foldedness" into what exists (Nuttall 2009). The language of travel also produces a forgetting of the fundamental amenability of concepts to change; ideas do different work in different contexts not because of loss or mutation through travel but because of their incomplete, impure, leaky, and fungible nature.

In placing, alongside, two distinct accounts of intersectionality's arrival into the Global South, I have been less interested in these sites as marking the concept's possibilities or limits, than in how they produced the need for and attachments to specific kinds of affective, epistemic

and political aspirations. Intersectionality's arrival gives us important clues as to which intersections come to matter and why, and how these constitute the grounds for specific kinds of activist imaginations and interventions. In neoliberal India, proto-intersectional stances and sensibilities served "backward" forms of queer activism, which even reproduced metropolitan queer feminist activists as saviours of subalterns, partly to manage the effects of global neoliberal capitalism on activist futures. In the mythic figure of the gramer meye, we find some of the historical and regional entanglements in which millennial queer feminist activism found itself. This mythic subject shaped specific intersectional possibilities, in a moment of unprecedented queer visibility and progress.

While queer feminist activists in India rearticulated the concept through existing political grammars and relations (around class and subalternity), queer feminist Fallists deployed intersectionality to name the limits, tensions and potentialities in historic projects around black solidarity. Intersectionality's visibility made a lot visible; a new kind of radical feminist energy and internal contests and divides that were not unique to this movement or moment, but were far more nameable as "intersectionality". The conjuncture into which intersectionality arrived – the high tide of the student movements and hyper intolerance towards patriarchy and rape culture – offered a way to reorient both historical movements and present(ist) identity politics towards future-oriented feminist world-making possibilities.

Fallism has, of course, emerged as a traveling concept in its own right. Against usual presumptions of "global unidirectionality" (John 2015), fallism travelled from the South to the North, most prominently as #RMFOxford. But it also travelled within the Global South in ways that are less recognised. Indian students took up the hashtag to reveal the Indian state itself as a colonising power, and to materialise more intersectional protest cultures (see Sumati 2016).

Even the short travels of this relatively new political idea forces a shift from predictable stories of origin and travel – from the northern epicentre to the global periphery– to complex

mappings of arrival onto Southern shores. That concepts might look, sound and feel different – even appear unrecognisable – in different political and historical contexts is surely evidence that they can never be universal or pure or simply applicable anywhere. Intersectionality's arrival in the Global South offers, then, an opportunity for thinking about the impurity in which concepts always reside.

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[i] I am thinking for instance for Sara Salem's (2016) worries that intersectionality has travelled so far from its radical origins that it has effectively mutated into something else, easily co-opted by neoliberalism. In contrast, Nivedita Menon (2015) uses intersectionality's take up in India to unpack the deficiencies in the concept itself, rooted in its imperial origins and "facilitated travel", by transnational donors and Western knowledge-producers, including feminists. In such accounts, intersectionality's travel becomes a way of marking its co-option or inherent inadequacy.

[ii] These claims echo with Menon's (2015) arguments around how gender has always been intersectional in India. In her rejection of western-derived intersectionality analysis, Menon says that single-axis logics around "woman" never existed in "our" feminisms, as woman was always undercut by class, caste, religion and community.

[iii] Dave (2012) shows how, in the political expansion of early lesbian activism, the support group became the locus for meeting the needs of those lesbians who were construed as desiring but fundamentally apolitical, in need of safety and support alone.

[iv] Activists also acknowledged proto-intersectional leanings in black women's experiences and activism before this moment (Khan 2017 and Matandela 2017).