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Haunting Imposterism

Anjana Raghavan and Matthew Hurley

Introduction

If you believe in omens, this chapter should never have been attempted. Not one, but *two* of our planned timelines were thwarted by bereavements, one of which required cross continental journeying. Neither of us being particularly averse to the ontology of omens, we dedicate this chapter to these losses and ruptures, for they are part of the hauntings of imposterism. This paper is not solely about the vicissitudes of unbelonging and *being* haunted by imposterism. It is not this, precisely because that is the experience of a vast number of people, and communities who are oppressed by the violence of imposterism. We want to recognise, respect, hold space for those experiences of imposterism, without appropriating them. This chapter is the ongoing result of a conversation between us as academic interlopers, and friends. We occupy a matrix of privileged and marginal relations to the academy, and we bear *active witness*^j to the ways in which our many privileges ease our marginalisations. We are both weary, and wary of the binary amputations of the me and the not-me of our enfleshed-selves. So, we write instead as part-academics, part-poltergeists, haunting the (un)homes of Higher Education, that we both inhabit. The verb haunting is intended to animate both a sense our inextricable nearness to, and our deeply ambivalent, sometimes painful, and sometimes playful distance from the *feeling* of imposterism. This chapter attempts to examine some threads of imposterism in the academy. More specifically, it attends to the complex ways in which imposterism is experienced by (non-precarious) academics as fear and shame, whilst also serving as a discourse that obscures us from our own complicity in, and accountability to the privileges that we wield.

We locate imposterism as an 'omnicentric' (Holmes, 2005:110) feeling, crossing, and re-crossing several layers of intimate, and public spheres, altering and being altered by each movement. We experience imposterism in Ngai's (2005:11) sense of an 'ugly feeling'; a 'minor feeling' that is often associated with inaction and 'obstructed agency' (2005: 3). Ngai's nuanced analysis submits that these 'ugly feelings' are critical points of entry, and ways of unpacking the perceptions and realities of individual and structural powerlessness or feelings of inequality. Similarly, Sara Ahmed (2004: 118) refers to 'sticky' associations within

emotions and the complex ways in which we are entangled with multiple histories, silences and presences as we work with, and move through such feelings. Writing on envy, Ngai (2005: 128-9) notes that 'once it enters a public domain of signification, a person's envy will always seem unjustified [identifying the person as possessing] a deficient and possibly histrionic selfhood'. We find many important resonances between the characterisation and dismissal of imposterism, and Ngai's observations on envy. Imposterism as a damaging effect of the politics of authenticity, as a 'psychic landscape' (Gill, 2010) and as 'public feeling' (Breeze, 2018) reveal the ways in which imposterism diminishes those who experience it, and the importance of defying it as a structural relation of dominance. However, we also want to situate imposterism as 'ordinary affects that are public feelings that begin and end in broad circulation, but... are also the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of' (Stewart, 2007: 2). We want to resist reading imposterism within public/private binaries as well as within professional/intimate binaries.

While we are fully cognisant of imposterism being profoundly embedded both within the structure of neoliberal academia, we also want to honour the intimate and *ordinary* ways in which we experience imposterism in the day-to-day. Stewart's work on what she calls 'ordinary affects' (2007) inform our imaginary of the ordinary. Stewart writes that 'the ordinary is a shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges, a sense of both liveliness and exhaustion, a dream of escape or of the simple life' (2007:1). We find this sense of the ordinary particularly powerful when considering the ways in which imposterism haunts us, and we haunt it. In the socio-political every-day, we notice that complex combinations of marginalisation and privilege are assigned to things like comportment, or accent, the abnormal amount of time spent over choosing powerpoint slide designs; to sexuality, caste, race, class, and gender. The performance of authenticity and the fear of imposterism are, in this sense, marked by and felt through a dizzying variety of embodied acts and locations.

Theorying/Queerying Imposterism

Having briefly outlined our affective treatment of imposterism, we now move on to locating and 'theorying' (Raghavan, 2019) imposterism. Distinct from the meta mode of *Theorising*, 'the work of theorying is rooted in decolonial and Black queer feminist practice as it speaks directly to the pseudo-binaries of theory-praxis' (Raghavan, 2019: 2). Theorying is also

located in a 'poetics of relation' (Glissant, 1997) which is unstable and uncertain but always seeking to *touch* everything. Glissant notes that 'theoretician thought, focussed on the basic and fundamental and allying these with what is true, shies away from these uncertain paths' (1997: 32). Theorizing is thus practiced as a walking of such 'uncertain paths'. Working through our embodied and intellectual experiences of, and responses to imposterism, we repeatedly – and not very uniquely perhaps – returned to the experience of a deep love for *some* of the work that we do. As people engaged in the work of constant learning-unlearning, teaching, deep care, compassion, and commitment, we both feel this to be an important part of our stories. The other part of our work, as Black, Dalit and Indigenous Feministsⁱⁱ, have long pointed out, is bound up with the fundamentally violent ways in which the academy bans, silences, and directly profits from the oppression and labour of Black women, Dalits, Adivasis, queer peoples, people of colours, working class, poor, and disabled peoples, among many others oppressed by systemic violence. As employees and academics both oppressed by, and complicit in, these forms of violence and exploitation, we think it essential to maintain a responsible, ethical, and nuanced relationship to the experience of imposterism. In keeping with this, we centre a Black feminist and queer theorizing of love as a radical practice of compassion, justice, and accountability in this chapterⁱⁱⁱ.

Academia in general, and the disciplines that employ us in particular (International Relations and Sociology, though we do not necessarily think of them as homes), are constitutively founded on the discursive and corporeal framing of otherness. Both IR and Sociology have violently imperial histories, and epistemologies^{iv}. In actively framing our scholarship and personal politics as resisting and challenging such violence, *and* as strong believers in transdisciplinarity, we are relegated outside any traditional or “authentic” performances of disciplinarity. In some ways, we might read this as a kind of “straightforward” imposterism, one which is taxing, exhausting, and deeply painful; but one which we have the vocabulary and wherewithal to challenge through the privileges we inhabit. It is a resistance we are fiercely committed to. There is, however, a second form of imposterism we want to articulate here, though a less straightforward one. This form of imposterism is tied to another manifestation of the academy’s constitutive dynamics of othering, and that is, the relentless commodification and fetishization of otherness. We are referring here, to what scholars including Brown (1995), Piepmeier (2010), and Nash (2019) have identified as a certain kind of affective investment in injury, besiegement, and defensiveness. While these affective investments in the particular disciplines of Women and Gender Studies (WGS) and Black

Feminism are historicised as valid and perfectly defensible by Brown, Piepmeier and Nash, they also elucidate the real dangers of being entrapped in what Piepmeier terms a 'besiegement narrative' (2010).

In Black Feminism, the story is further complicated by the ways in which dominant versions of white feminism have systematically erased and/or fetishized Black feminist scholarship and labour. We examine the ways in which this relation of besiegement cathects with an *imposterism of marginality*. Piepmeier notes that 'this narrative [besiegement] serves as a tool for heightening marginality, intellectual and generational claim staking, and absolution' (2010: 124). In other words, the claim to marginality itself becomes the prized location of authenticity. The virulently parasitic nature of the neoliberal academy ensures that the fetish of 'difference' produces new subjects of enquiry that then infinitely multiply exclusion in order to promote inclusion' (Puar, 2012: 55). The status of marginality thus becomes endlessly reproducible, emptied of its intended political purpose, which is to draw attention to the located, material experiences of multiply marginalised peoples and communities. On the one hand, as Nash (2019: 28) notes, this restricts the full potential, flourishing and reach of Black feminism, where she identifies the expression of defensiveness as a response to the relentless ways in which Black feminism and Black women are silenced, excluded and appropriated. On the other hand, what Piepmeier (2010) chronicles in mainstream WGS is a different, even more pernicious tendency. Observing that WGS has achieved an institutional status, and, is often a routine part of both academic institutional vocabulary and curricula (though by no means uncontested), in a way that Black feminism and two-thirds world feminisms are nowhere near, Piepmeier warns that the narrative of besiegement encourages a form of automatic righteousness. She writes that the narrative of being under attack simultaneously sidesteps the ways in which WGS are complicit in institutional oppressions *and* 'functions as a way for individual scholars... to absolve themselves of negative behaviours and ideologies without actually addressing or changing them' (2010: 130).

We have sketched out the bases for this more insidious manifestation of imposterism at some length because we want to locate our experiences of imposterism as *moving between* narratives of defensiveness and besiegement. We are susceptible to internalising narratives of besiegement as individuals and academics who are highly privileged by structural positions of whiteness-cis genderedness-caste-class *and* by narratives of defensiveness as individuals and academics who are marked by some of our other positionalities. Lugones (2003) writes

that power maps us through relations of domination, and that we may not even fully comprehend the domination inherent in such mappings. But there is something in us that senses discrepancies or feels unease. Imposterism is, in many ways, such a kind of sensing. As Lugones goes on to elucidate, once we understand this map, we can begin to see the enormous variety in the ways that so many of us resist in the cracks: 'trespassing against the spatiality of oppressions is also a redrawing of the map' (2003: 11). We trace imposterism in straightforward and insidious ways, drawing from a multitude of disciplinary margins, and the complex points of convergence and divergence in our own experiences within and without the academy. We attempt, with the wilful havoc that is the provenance of poltergeists, to trespass 'against the spatiality of oppressions' both as they manifest within us and against us, in contradictory, yet simultaneous ways.

We decided on personal-political vignettes, as a mode of engaging more specifically with our individual dynamics and relationships with and as imposters, as we try to locate the complexities that we have thus far outlined in theorising imposterism. We use vignettes as we sense and make sense of imposterism through our own visceral inhabitations. The nuances we want to explore necessarily demand that we eschew any separation between intimacy and intellect; political and professional. We are fully aware of the dangers of narcissism, as well as certain forms of virtue signalling that can be inadvertent consequences of autobiographical modalities, and we try to be careful and as sensitive as we can to such consequences.

Imposturing in the UK Academy: Cast(e)ing Shadows of Privilege and Marginality

I arrive at this section as a bearer of enormous ambivalence, uncertainty, and discomfort regarding the politics of imposterism. My ostensible self in the UK academy is often coded as a non-diasporic Tamil-Indian migrant, a fat, brown, queer-identifying woman teaching postcoloniality, decoloniality, women of colours, Black and two-thirds world feminisms within Higher Education in the UK. As an amalgamation of these selves, I could tell you a lot about feeling infinitesimally small and grotesquely large in corporeal and intellectual terms. I could tell you about the sisyphian boulder of everyday racism, about being shunted around like a mobile exhibition to teach and speak about 'race, diversity and inequality'. I could also list institutional committees that are suddenly so keenly aware of, and interested in, the embarrassingly few people of colours within their orbits. I could recount all the exhausting hours I have spent on creating my modules, writing new content as I go along, with barely

any time to breathe. I could chronicle the ways in so many conversations I have with people of colours in or outside the academy in my every-day, is really a story of being othered or wounded by white privilege and white supremacy. I am telling you these things, both because they are true, *and* because they form an important vector of the ways in which I have tried to posture myself in the UK. An *imposture*, if you will, through 'strategies' (see Lugones, 2003 for an explanation of strategy as an institutional rather than a resistant manoeuvre) of intellectual complexity, academic sophistry, and a kind of hallowed *unbelonging*.

I have already told you that I love learning and teaching. I bear enormous respect, gratitude and love for my students-teachers, and collaborator-colleagues. It is why I am still here. But I am also here primarily because of the story of myself that I never have to tell. I am a 'highly skilled' Indian migrant, on a work visa. I was raised in the systematised hierarchy of caste, class and educational privileges, in a Tamil brahmin^v household and community, and until I came to the UK to do a Masters' degree in 2005, I would never have identified myself as a "brown" woman. I knew something of colourism and anti-Tamil discrimination because part of my childhood was spent in Northern India, but in my own environment, I was spectacularly privilege-blank to most things around me. The reason I teach postcoloniality, decoloniality and WoC feminisms with "authority" is precisely *because* I am immensely supported by a powerful matrix of caste and class privileges that can be rendered wholly illegible in the UK context; but it is what brought me here and keeps me here. In a complex set of manoeuvres that enable a personal stake in an unwillingness to recognise and dismantle my own structural privileges, combined with the institutional fetishization of otherness, I execute and perform an imposterism of myself. It is difficult to articulate the complex matrices of privilege and marginalisation that I am iterating without appearing to provide a confessional, '*curriculum vitae*' of my identity locations. That is not my intention. What I want to show through this brief *autohistoria-teoria*^{vi} (Anzaldúa, 2009) is the ways in which the stories told, and stories *untold* function to maintain, on the one hand, what Piepmier (2010) identifies as an avoidance to confront our own oppressive faces, and on the other, fuels the relentless and fetishized demand for "authentic outsidersness" by the institution. Both as a brown-woman body in the white academy, and as an elite, dominant caste woman body in *the* academy, I simultaneously *imposture* in the public/private and am *imposter* in the private/public. What these combined sleights of hand prevent, then, is the crucial and productive opportunity to engage these interstitial, and 'frictional' (Puar, 2012) narratives with each other to produce an ethical account of self in and of the world. In other words,

these varieties of imposterisms are all produced in and through embodied, relational dynamics within and between self-other-world. In this sense, we might say that *every* feeling is a public feeling, if we account for the ways in which the public and private are always conjoined and co-constitutive. Even in the most violently binarised context, public and private remain connected by haunting one another.

Tracing an intimate-structural *autohistoria-teoria* to explore the dynamics of imposterism is not an attempt at performing transparency, which, as Edouard Glissant (1997) notes, does not really exist. It is rather to demonstrate the *opacity* of these multiplicitous narratives to each other and to identify an 'aesthetic of turbulence whose corresponding ethics is not provided in advance' (Glissant, 1997: 155). Glissant's formulation of opacity resists any form of reductive solidarity or unitary notion of selfhood. The untranslatable elements, that which cannot be rendered as articulation for consumption, is an invaluable quality in the navigation of imposterism and relationality. To fashion an ethics of turbulence for self-other-world therefore requires 'listening with raw openness' (Keating, 2013: n.p.), and assuming a positionality of 'mutual vulnerability' where 'my survival and thriving depend on yours' (Nash, 2019: 115). There can be little meaningful engagement with the *feeling* of imposterism if we do not pay attention to its performance both as a public and personal act. Awakening fully to ourselves-as-worlded (that is to say, self as inextricably connected to world and vice versa) is not something that simply happens with a reasonable level of reflexion, or introspection. It requires coming into what Gloria Anzaldúa describes as *conocimiento* (2015: 119), a metamorphosis much more than an awakening; and one that does not see body-spirit-mind as in any way separated. The stages of coming to *conocimiento* are brutally disruptive, painful, and require us to crumble the edifice of the learnt, the known, and the deeply held; again, and again, and again. What is worth dwelling upon here is that, the response to imposterism whether as a marginal-response to domination, or as a privilege-response to guilt-denial, cannot only involve counter narratives. Imposterism as a marginalised-response must eschew being co-opted by Master tongues and Master strategies at every turn. Resisting domination requires collective praxis and a commitment to collective liberation that is deeply relational; a mutual constitution of 'I' and 'we' (Nash 2019: 121). As Jacqui Alexander (2005: 17) eloquently reminds us, 'while dispossession and betrayal provide powerful grounds from which to stage political mobilization, they are not sufficiently expansive to the task of becoming more fully human', where "human" is rearticulated in resistance to a European Enlightenment definition of 'the Human'. What Black Feminists like

Alexander, Lorde, and Nash are signalling here is for oppressed and marginalised peoples and communities to make a radical break from *all* Master tropes – even if they claim to address values of freedom, rights, or protection – and re-energise these values with their true power.

Imposterism as a privilege-response, on the other hand, must be exceedingly wary of adopting a confessional-superficial model of addressing and dismantling privilege. Reframing and rearticulating our narratives, and naming our privileges can be useful first steps, but 'challenging the old self's orthodoxy is never enough; you must submit a sketch of an alternative self' (Anzaldúa, 2015: 139). More often than not, this takes time and generous periods of slowness, and silence. The considered, critically-reflective, generative silence of privilege is very different from the annihilating silence practiced by privilege, or the violent silence perpetrated by privilege upon those it oppresses. Radically reflective silence is in and of itself a *practice* of accountability, and deep listening. So, when we 'submit a sketch of an alternative self', let us ask if it bears the features of radical relatedness, an acknowledgement of mutually-held fragility (Mani, 2019), risks that we are willing to take, and attachments to domination that we *must* relinquish.

As I move through the sticky, spiky, joyful, and frightening orbits of this unlearning, and unravelling, what I have offered in this section are field-notes in process. Perhaps the unsustainable exhaustion of imposterism, the *striving* towards some imagined, superior 'other' might be transformed, in small part at least, by honouring both our own, and others' right to untranslatability. This untranslatability allows us much needed space to access both ourselves, and our relationships to others-worlds in ways that do not demand that we *know* or *be known* within Master frames. We might then reimagine the imposter as metamorphosing from a figure who is always-in-fear-of-exposure to a figure who might appear as unknowable, but is always relational. A figure who might fluster us, discomfit us, laugh with us, challenge us, and ultimately, demand better of us.

Playing It Straight? The Awkwardness of a Queer (Un)Belonging in the Academy

I live, I suppose, what some might call a homonormative life. I use this term not unproblematically and for want of a better one; as a momentary space/place-holder, to which I will return. I am a cisgender, white, middle-class, British, gay man, who, whilst not married,

is in a long-term, loving relationship. And whilst this 'shopping list' - or what Anjana so wonderfully describes as a *curriculum vitae* - of identity locations are rarely entirely meaningful, what it does signify is that, in many ways I am the embodiment of societal conventions deemed, by and large, acceptable in the context/s within which I live my life. More significantly, I have been afforded many of the societal privileges that these markers of my identity produce and reproduce. I am, what Weber (2016), in her book *Queer International Relations*, might describe as a 'normal homosexual', a 'gay rights holder' in a state that understands itself to be significantly 'progressive' enough to afford these rights to some members of once excluded and brutalised communities; and in doing so, positions itself *vis-à-vis* 'Other' states, that refuse to recognise 'gay rights as human rights', as it, of course, once did. In addition - perhaps (or perhaps not...) because of growing up within an all-boys secondary school where learning to 'fit in' with hegemonic masculine norms, or at least to develop strategies to mitigate their effects, was an essential survival tactic - my overwhelming experience as an adult has been that others, in their encounters with me, begin with an assumption that I am heterosexual. Or, as I was once told, my gayness 'is not obvious', whatever that might mean. In many ways then - to my sometimes horror and shame - I *conform* to an understanding of queerness, or perhaps more appropriately gayness, that is deemed, whilst not universally acceptable, at least somewhat palatable to the Britain of 2020.

What I want to convey in these short paragraphs is a sense of some of the manoeuvres that occur as I navigate the privilege that my whiteness, cisgenderedness and a presumed heterosexuality confer with the feeling always being out of place and ill-at-ease as queer in the heteronormative Academy. Moving through and within these spaces as an imposter, yet one with the ability to 'pass', has become a quite queer (un)belonging. Again, it is worth stressing the point made above, we need to be wary of understanding imposterism simply as privilege-response; I do not see this as a confessional, neither is it a reflection intended to garner sympathy. Imposterism for some can be a location of extreme suffering and violence. My privilege/s allow for a form of empowered imposterism to manifest, yet one that is haunted by the ever-present spectre of a sudden and abrupt disempowerment, a disempowerment that is all-too-often the daily lived experience of others. As Weber (2016) points out, even those that society deems 'normal homosexuals' are only selectively included and protected and there is nothing inevitable or permanent about this inclusion. Yet, this *is* an account of my privilege *and* of my queer (un)belonging, and the feelings of imposterism provoked in that tension that transcend public/private, professional/intimate binaries but that

are characterised by an ever-present awkwardness of self. It is an account of the conflicts, contestations and exhaustions this awkwardness brings to the extraordinary and mundane everyday of my life within the Academy.

I attempt this in two ways: firstly, by discussing the uncomfortable distinction between 'passing as' and 'playing it' straight when conducting fieldwork interviews with NATO military personnel and the ugly feelings this invokes (Ngai, 2005); secondly, and relatedly, in discussing the anticipation and constant necessity of 'micro coming-outs' in my relationships with colleagues and students.

Beginning with my PhD, my research has become centred around issues of gender, war and militarism with a particular focus on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). My research has therefore taken me to institutions within which men and men's bodies dominate, where militarised, hegemonic masculine norms patterned through a pervasive heteronormativity are so ubiquitous as to become invisible, unremarkable and 'built into the walls' of those institutions (Kronsell, 2005). To describe the feelings generated by moving into, through and researching within those spaces as an imposterism is simply insufficient. And yet, I *was* able to; I did move within those spaces, awkwardly, uncomfortably, but I moved. And that moving was facilitated by what one of my PhD supervisors beautifully described as my 'non-exoticism'. My outward presentation of self was unthreatening and aligned so very well with expected norms of the institution and the types of bodies expected there. In many ways then, those identity locations so dutifully listed above helped facilitate access to those spaces. They also allowed me to develop a rapport with the military personnel I interviewed.

The military men I interviewed engaged in a series of a series of 'bonding ploys'. Conway (2008: 348-9) has highlighted how bonding ploys, invoked when men interview other men, are informed by the 'unspoken norms of masculinity' whereby interviewer and interviewee performatively generate tropes of identity (Conway, 2008: 350; See also, Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001) and whereby the interviewer can 'emphasise' aspects of their self in order to continue the rapport and facilitate particular types of bonding. Those deployed by the military men centred on particular jokes and discussions of wives, girlfriends and children; most were banal, none were crude or offensive, yet they were premised upon an assumption that I could share in them or relate to the reflections upon their lives and experiences as a heterosexual

man. They were also, as I have discussed elsewhere (Hurley, 2018), intended to dispel any misconceptions that I might have about their sexualities as men 'doing gender work' within the military. Within those interview encounters, within those hegemonic masculine spaces, I was awkwardly positioned as the same as and yet different to those men.

If I was asked about my sexuality directly, I would have answered truthfully, and yet, that is precisely the point, I wasn't asked. However, I also did not contest their perceptions and assumptions, and that non-contestation and conformity facilitated my research. Walby (2010: 646) argues that queer sexualities matter when men are interviewing other men, as hegemonic masculinity is not the only or primary script at work in these scenarios. Further, who is doing the interview matters for how the self is constructed through talk and gestures, that our bodies and tenor are involved in meaning making and identity construction during these encounters (2010: 653). I have reflected deeply on whether or not I 'de-emphasised' my homosexuality within those encounters, or de-emphasised aspects upon which an inference of homosexuality could have been made, as a way to facilitate access and rapport. Did I 'police my own gestures' (Walby, 2010: 651), alter my tenor; hold my body in a particular way? More importantly, did I 'play it straight' or simply 'take the pass'? I am uncertain and unsettled. What is most problematic is that 'de-emphasising' comes uncomfortably close to the offensiveness and queerphobia laced through phrases such as 'straight-acting'; of what Bergling, (2001) calls a 'sissyphobia' apparent in a continued (re)marginalisation and subordination of some members of the LGBTQI community by others. To return, as promised, to the concept of homonormativity, Lisa Duggan (2003: 50) suggests that it is 'a new neoliberal sexual politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds them and sustains them'. Within those encounters, I upheld and sustained, I did not contest. Skirting these boundaries invokes an imposterism from community and self that is unsettling in the extreme. Yet, this uncomfortableness is imperative. It goes some way in providing an accountability of self, that Enloe (2016: 258) argues keeps us researchers mindful of our own limitations and failings. It is also imperative to try to be comfortable with the uncomfortableness invoked by posing these questions of self; to resist the urge or rush to 'answer' them. The *practice* of accountability and listening (to ourselves and to others) necessitates letting the silence hang in the air and within us; as a spectre in and with its own right/s. What *is* clear is that within those moments, within those spaces the patriarchal privilege, the dividend (Connell, 1995) that my cisgenderness, my whiteness and a presumption of heterosexuality afforded me was real and it was seductive.

Relatedly then, the necessity – and given the discussion above, the imperative – of what can be described as 'micro-coming outs' can be a constant haunting. They are micro in the sense that I am 'out' – 17 years and counting since the 'macro' coming-out, if you will – yet I am also always 'in' to those that don't know me. For some, the focus of my research has been a 'tell'. As a male PhD student interested in gender and the military, I was told by one newly appointed lecturer that I must of course, be gay. Or, when giving a work-in-progress seminar on reflexivity, being told by a professor that in order to illicit different data, next time I should go 'mincing into NATO HQ' with a 'limp-wrist'; a comment shocking for its homophobia and one that provoked outrage by my assembled supervisors and colleagues. Some, though very few, ask outright and directly; they are in a minority, as are, thankfully, the overt expressions of homophobia.

These coming-outs are not micro in their frequency, in their scope or impact; it is a constant and ever-present navigation, a spectre in any new situation I find myself in. They are also manoeuvres compounded and facilitated by that ability to 'pass'. Again, in that moment, the option to not do it, if the question is never explicitly asked, can still, after all these years, be appealing. It speaks to the empowered nature of this manifestation of imposterism I referred to above, there is a choice. And yet there is not. The multiplicities of micro coming-outs are sites of a *personal resistance* of the heteronormativity that pervades the Academy *and* a resistance of the comfortability that my whiteness, cisgenderness and a presumed heterosexuality can afford. One module that I teach, a third-year optional, offers a somewhat welcoming environment within which to 'out myself'. The module deals with issues of gender and sexualities in a global context, aligning the personal, political and international in a way that facilitates drawing upon my personal experiences in ways that do not feel jarring or forced. But again, this is both an empowering and marginalising manoeuvre, imbued with the dread, joy and awkwardness inherent in the resistance and subversion nonconformity within the classroom can bring. Pedagogic strategies that deploy the vulnerabilities of opening up, of speaking candidly about my life to students, offer sometimes profound teaching and teachable moments. They are moments wherein I retain the ability to choose how and in what ways to deploy my marginalisation, to make those moves. However, it is never entirely clear, how or in what ways this vulnerability will be received or understood by colleagues, by students or even by myself; nor is it clear how far perceptions of my masculinity manage or mitigate their effects; it is a simultaneous movement of immense power and powerlessness

within which privilege and imposterism are both troubled and reinforced. Yet it is a move whereby I can begin to contest and resist the seductions of both hetero *and* homonormativity.

Conclusions

Writing this piece in the long nights of term-time has been a far more visceral experience than writing it in the abandoned eeriness of the university on summer break would have been. It has required us to en flesh our words, and word our bodies with no time to make room between the two processes. Barbara Holmes (2005) raises the important need to constitute a 'pedagogy for oppressors' following Friere's (1972) call for a 'pedagogy of the oppressed'. The conversations, and kinship that we both share, in many ways, are at the crossings and thresholds of these two pedagogies. The imposterisms that we haunt, and are sometimes haunted by, are inherently 'frictional' (Puar, 2012) in their privileges and marginalities, with the latter mitigated by the former. While our desire to co-write this piece was founded on a shared queerness-in-the-academy, as we began 'diving into the wreck' (Rich, 1973), we also saw in it the possibilities of a shared practice of accountability, and of speaking to our privileges, both shared and frictional *between* us, and of the ways in which we are able to occupy the positions of hegemonic power that we do, precisely through our privileged-marginalities. Our experiences of imposterism and *imposturing* within the embodied discourses of race and caste, as well as resisting the seductions of homonormativity and heteronormativity thus complicate binarised notions of resistance and conformity with reference to imposterism in the academy. In this particular instance, our decision to be our own "subjects" is rooted in the complex positionality of academics as producers of "the academy", while also being produced and dominated by its structural and neoliberal hierarchies. Dismantling – a word whose etymology literally means to deprive of dress, or strip – particularly, dismantling logics of domination, requires this kind of intimate canvas. The use of personal vignettes, as observed earlier, always entails the risk of narcissism, but it is also worth remembering that, particularly within academia, narcissism can often posture as structural, institutional, intellectual or other kinds of meta-narratives. Thus, acknowledging the self in an honest, actively accountable way allows us to address these wounds, and oppressions both experienced and perpetrated by academics within the spaces of Higher Education and in the production of scholarship. Doing this work is, for both of us, an important way to both understand, and practically destabilise and confront the ways in which imposterism affects academics, in a variety of ways, some far more brutal than others. A

loving, ethical, accountability, and the ongoing journey of *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa, 2009) must be an honest practice. It is neither a form of virtue-signalling, nor confessional. In bringing together our experiences and practices of imposterism in the academy, we have also tried to explore the ways in which structural privileges are deeply connected, and how they enable and uphold each other. These forms of ethical collaboration can also open up paths for those of us who are bearers of both privileged entitlements and marginalities, to do the work of recognising and taking responsibility for our privileges without burdening those whose oppression is perpetrated by our privilege. Particularly within the space of Higher Education, where structural privilege sits so close to precarious bodies, and oppressive hierarchies, this accountability is more necessary than ever. Anzaldúa writes that 'using wounds as openings to become vulnerable and available to others means staying in your own body' (2015: 153). In trying to hold space for the ways in which we experience different forms of wounding, and othering, we have tried to use our own wounds as openings, without allowing the experience of the pain to eclipse our positionalities, as well as ways to connect to our privileges, and to practice ethical, reciprocal forms of resistances and coalitions. We have tried to imagine ourselves as imposters, and our imposters as interlocutors. We have tried to resist the tendency to tell a linear story, and instead simply show our rough- workings. We have tried to reveal:

'the wreck and not the story of the wreck
the thing itself and not the myth
the drowned face always staring
toward the sun
the evidence of damage
worn by salt and sway into this threadbare beauty the ribs of the disaster
curving their assertion
among the tentative haunters' (Rich, 1973).

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ⁱ See Leela Fernandes (2003) for an account of Active Witnessing which she sees as a practice of accountability, resistance and *action* rather than a rote process of observation and documentation.

ⁱⁱ See Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, Thenmozhi Soundarajan, Jennifer Nash, Audre Lorde, Patricia Hill-Collins among others

ⁱⁱⁱ See Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Jennifer Nash, Gloria Anzaldúa, Anjana Raghavan and Lata Mani for more in-depth work on Black and WoC theorisations of love

^{iv} See: Syed Farid Alatas 2000, Gurinder Bhambra 2013, 2014 and 2016, Julian Go 2016 for work on the coloniality of Sociology as a discipline. For examples of similar work in International Relations see: Geeta & Nair, 2013; Biswas & Nair, 2009, Biswas, 2014

^v Caste position of enormous structural privilege as well as symbolic-ritual power in the Indian caste system. It occupies the “top” tier of the Indian caste hierarchy, where each caste tier considers itself “superior” to the one “below” it.

^{vi} An embodied, personal-political imagining of theory that Anzaldúa uses in her own work.