

Sympoiesis 'becoming with and through each other': Exploring collaborative writing as emergent academics

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Abstract

This paper explores our journey as three female academics as we collaboratively engage in the process of writing for scholarly publication. We read our experience through a Political Ethic of Care, Slow scholarship, and Sympoiesis. Informed by Barad's (2007) relational ontology of space~time~mattering we explore our process of collaborative writing. We trace our journey as emerging scholars in different environments and through different modalities and material entanglements. The paper contributes to an understanding of how emerging academics find and create opportunities to develop their scholarly practice through collaborative sympoietic relationships. We show how through an engaged and sustained Slow scholarship we were able to claim space and time to enliven our creativity and joy. This empowered us to meaningfully assert ourselves within the context of a neoliberal academic environment and to reimagine how socially just practices of scholarly writing could be realised in the 'belly of the beast'.

Keywords: academic scholarship, academic writing, collaboration, Political Ethic of Care, Slow scholarship, Sympoiesis

Connecting and context

'An ontological turn

to say something anew

to see something anew

intelligibility no longer human touch and feeling...

becoming through multiple connections...' (CHEC, 2018: 20)

In this paper, we explore our journey of collaboratively developing our capacity for scholarly publication within the challenges of a neoliberal university. We trace our turbulent path of writing collaboratively through the phases of connecting and context, *connecting and caring, losing our*



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joy, and reconnecting in new ways. We draw on Barad's (2007) relational ontology of space~time~mattering which refers to the material entanglements which emerge in and through relationships between space, time and matter. Furthermore, we engage with Haraway's notion of Symptoiesis (2016) of becoming with and through each other and Tronto's Political Ethic of Care (2013). These lenses informed the way in which we worked and opened up spaces and possibilities for reimagining socially just academic writing.

We have drawn much inspiration from papers by Black, et al. (2017a) and Mountz, et al. (2015) who are also female academics who have explored ways in which to survive and thrive within the constraints of the neoliberal university. We were encouraged by their example to explore how our collective agency could be enriched through a caring and Slow collaborative relationship. Their commitment to the attentive practices of Slow scholarship form a feminist ethics of care provided us with a flight path to navigate our journey as emergent scholars. It also gave us the courage to collectively assert ourselves and challenge the status quo.

Mountz, et al. argue that '[g]ood scholarship requires time: time to think, write, read, research, analyze, edit, and collaborate' (2015: 1237). They aver that within the demands of the neoliberal university Slow work is threatened, however, it also has the potential to defy the status quo. Carla Petrini (2007), the originator of the Slow Food Movement made explicit that Slow does not have to do with speed, but rather a thoughtful and attentive approach.

Black, et al. (2017a) and Mountz, et al. (2015) recognise the value of strengthening collective and collaborative efforts to support academic writing by sharing the load and supporting each other. These are behaviours we witness in flocks of migratory birds flying into



Source: Shutterstock

the face of tropical storms, much like the turbulence of the current HEI environment. Black, et al. argue that through a deliberate collaborative effort they 'have been emulating something of the cooperative reciprocity inherent in the energy-boosting-V-formations adopted by groups of flying birds' (2017a: 136). The image of birds flying in formation aptly captures our experience of collaborative writing to enliven our professional and personal lives and support each other.

In working collaboratively we also drew inspiration from new materialist scholars such as Haraway (2016) and Neimanis (2012) whose work helped to give meaning to our collaborative processes of reading-writing-becoming in and through each other and our environments. Collaborations are described by Neimanis as 'fruits of joint labours' arising from interactions of 'doing-in-common, more than a being-in-common' (2012: 216). Drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari, she argues that collaborations are not 'new'; however, she reminds us to

'pay attention and to cultivate our collaborations—human and more-than-human—with more care' (2012: 220).

This approach to collaboration stands in stark contrast to our work-live environment in the neoliberal university. We felt this most acutely with increasing job demands to publish and to innovate in our teaching and learning environments, as well as the need to access funding to support our research. Higher workload demands and decreasing resources for support added to our levels of stress as academics and working mothers. Like Barbara Godard (Sloniowski, 2013: 479) we 'juggled so much labour' (cited in Sloniowski, 2013: 479) as mothers and academics. Time to do the deep level work required of scholarship and meaningful collaboration became increasingly constrained. Bozalek argues that the 'corporatization of the academy has meant that market principles such as competitiveness, efficiency, excellence, consumerism, individualism and productivity now dominate all aspects of the university, including scholarship' (2017: 43).

This verse from a poem by one of our members captures the essence of how these constraints, hampered our being as academic and emerging scholars:

'Tied and tethered ... Row upon marched row... pressed, pushed and prodded to produce'
(CHEC, 2018: 20).

Feeling constrained and pressurised, we needed to find the spaces, places, and kin with which we could flourish and publish. This paper depicts the process of our *connecting and caring, losing our joy, and reconnecting in new ways* in our collaborative journey towards an academic scholarship.

Connecting and caring

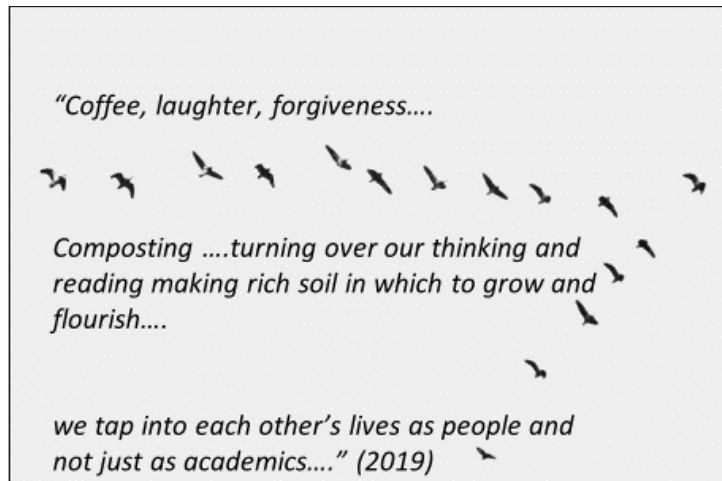
'Being touched by thought... touching the voice inside... being in touch with the meaning... I am me and I am we... careful to tread... careful to jump' (CHEC, 2018: 21).

We became a professional, caring community with a shared interest in doing and being differently in our academic contexts. We shared the need to develop the agency to claim the time and space for engagement to build our collective strength to flourish and thrive through each other, different modalities, and material entanglements (Haraway, 2016). The three of us drew mindfully on Fisher and Tronto (1990) and Tronto's (2013) Political Ethic of Care (EoC). This normative framework includes five interconnected phases of care and their associated moral dimensions, namely caring about (recognising caring needs), caring for (taking responsibility for caring), care-giving (work of caring), and care receiving (responding to care given). Each phase of care informs the next. These phases include the moral dimensions of attentiveness, responsibility, competence, responsiveness, and trust. Caring is defined as 'a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which

we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web' (Fisher and Tronto, 1990: 40; Tronto, 1993: 40).

Below we comment on the relational forces that nurtured our inspiration.

'For a moment my world is in suspension...Covered in a blanket of care... it's making itself known to me' (CHEC, 2018: 20).



Our reflective notes provide a sense of the environment for flourishing that we created. Through our engagement, we came to the realisation that 'we are not publishing for the sake of publishing, we are publishing to create a space for us to be able to engage with each other, to find spaces to flourish, in order to understand and develop our scholarly practice' (Reflective notes,

2019).

Through our writing, reading, connecting, and meaning-making, we were enlivening ourselves and finding the passion and energy to write and think anew about our work in playful solidarity. Similarly, Black, et al. found 'through our sharing, listening and connecting with each other we are establishing value in each other and ourselves; we recognize a different value to the metrics and measures that are being held to us as carrots and sticks' (2017a: 151). Like these female academics, we felt we were able to create spaces to 'interrupt and "rupture the bounds of what is permissible and possible" in academia' (Black, et al. 2017a: 151). Mountz, et al. correctly argue that '[c]are work is work. It is not self-indulgent' (2015: 1238). Through our collaborative engagement, we both supported each other and generated the energy to lift our inspiration for writing and understanding our academic challenges. Actively engaging with the dimensions of Tronto's (2013) Political Ethic of Care required a high level of care for both self and others. We took time to be attentive to both the personal and professional needs of group members and to ourselves. Tronto (2010) argues that for care work to be done properly, all phases of care and their moral dimensions need to be engaged in a holistic and integrated way. Over time, we developed a deepened level of trust and solidarity in caring for, with and through each other.

Embracing the Slow

'Discovery and expression... pauses and space... Silence... On emotions of thinking... words appear and fail... Shock to thought... on touch time' (CHEC, 2018: 21).

Our practice of engagement through our weekly meetings helped us to claim the space and time to engage in Slow scholarship in order to collaboratively read, think and write. This practice challenged the dominant ethos of individualism, competition and isolation often experienced by emergent academics within patriarchal organisational cultures (Black, et al., 2017b; Mountz, et al., 2015; Ulmer, 2017). Academics are incentivised to publish on their own to receive higher subsidies; however, there are also contradictory messages that promote collaborative, interdisciplinary research at a policy level. These collaborative practices still tend to perpetuate a competitive, performative ethos, with little space for different modes of thinking and being with others. Practising Slow scholarship requires collaboration underpinned by ethical connections which affirm space for curiosity rather than critique, and valuing difference rather than sameness (Verster, et al., 2019). Chen, et al., drawing on a feminist new materialist ontology, avers that '[c]ollaboration is about being a part of a community—a feminist community that supports our scholarly and activist efforts, a human community that we want our efforts to serve, and a more-than-human community that shores up and calls out our work in other important ways' (2013: 120). Our shared interest in intentional collaborative, co-production, informed our response and efforts to push-back the neoliberal demands of higher education. Like Black, et al. (2017b) and Muntz, et al. (2015), we were taking action to practice caring, Slow attentive action informed by Tronto's (2013) Political Ethic of Care.

In our practice towards Slow scholarship, we drew insight and guidance from Barad's (2007) work on relational ontology to inform how we understood the ways in which our movements, thoughts and writing were enacted through space~time~matter. Relationality is a key conduit for our ethico-onto-epistemological becomings-with encounters during which our affective energy is amplified. We experimented with different modes of thinking, reading, writing, and rewriting. We followed the suggestion of St Pierre: 'read, read, read and then 'do' the next thing that makes sense and keep doing the next thing and all that doing is a methodology' (2018: 619). These spaces of working collaboratively in different environments and with different media enabled us to deeply explore our thinking-feeling-reading-writing-being and to generate new energy and possibility.

We were aware of the need to engage in a Slow methodology as a conscious act to enhance spaces for social justice. Our relationality was enhanced through Slow reading (Mikics, 2013), Slow writing (Ulmer, 2017), Slow looking, (Tishman, 2018), and what we refer to as Slow engagement and emergence. The emergence with and through each other and our environment is informed by what Haraway describes as sympoiesis 'a worlding-with, in company' (2016: 58). Muntz, et al. (2015) argue that Slow offers a way of working and engaging that moves away from neoliberal higher education systems that valorise and prioritise measured outcomes and outputs. We made a conscious effort to disrupt the hegemony of market-driven academia and rather attune our bodyminds to the affective space~time~matter.

Becoming with and through each other and our environments

'becoming through multiple connections... letting go of the "I" the "me" the "we" ... beginning... beginning again' (CHEC, 2018: 20).

Through our weekly writing sessions through both face-to-face and online encounters, we experienced a deepening of our collaboration. Our writing and thinking seemed to grow rhizomatically (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). As layers of thinking, writing, and speaking became interwoven on the pages we experienced the 'I' become 'we' as our writing took form. We experience ourselves as a collectively-producing system with the sum becoming greater than the individuals or parts. Donna Haraway argues that '[n]othing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing' (2016: 58). Thus, sympoiesis encapsulates the process of being and becoming with and through others. Our reading-writing-becoming was enhanced through working in different modes and in different environments. Drawing out our ideas through walking-talking-swimming together, and working over each other's thinking and drawing we opened up spaces to see ideas differently and experience ourselves and each other in new ways. Sympoietically we experienced what Ulmer calls writing practice that is 'fed by playful techniques such as not writing, following creative impulses, and writing with concepts... involving shaping ideas or remixing materials into something I can think with' (2018: 729). The figures below provide a representation of the collective emergence of our feeling-thinking-being through different mediums and modes.



Figure 3: Emergence through multimodality (Verster, et al., 2019)

Wood and van Nieuwenhuijze (2006) define sympoiesis in collaborative writing as an act of co-creation in which an insightful meaning emerges spontaneously or unexpectedly from the collaborative process. According to Csikszentmihályi (1990), true sympoiesis may be characterised by a 'eureka' moment, or by what Wood, et al. call a sense of 'flow that seems to eclipse other, more mundane experiences' (2006: 94). This became a generative space where

ideas wove into each other and new insights arose. Our work emerged out of the processes of inter-relationality with ourselves and our evolving environments. Our notion of collaboration increasingly included our recognition of the context both living and non-living in shaping and affecting our thinking-being-writing. We reflect on these shifts below:

To tell a story of emergence in a two-dimensional text is not capturing the story, a multimodal form will capture it. Multimodality is a way that you can bring in post-humanist principles. It is no longer science or art, more art through science and here you find the new. (Reflective notes, 2019)

Through collaborative writing, we were able to pay attention to our needs to nurture and support ourselves and each other, without feeling as if we were neglecting our families. Current practices in our HEI's encourage staff to write by facilitating attendance to writing retreats and writing over weekends and evenings. Bozalek argues that a writing retreat within the context of the neoliberal HEI has 'become part of the endeavour to get academics to churn out as many publications in as little time as possible' (2017: 41). In addition, due to the undue pressure that writing retreats place on new academics, we would argue that the format does not suit all academics and particularly those academics with child-caring responsibilities. The prescriptive emphasis on outputs was a recipe for greater anxiety and exhaustion for us. These retreats took us away from the contact time with our families and required us to take what should be leisure time over weekends or vacations to work instead of recharging our energy. Furthermore, they placed extra pressures and costs on us to source alternative carers for our children. Tronto argues that 'the best forms of institutional care will be those which are highly deliberate and explicit about how to best meet the needs of the people who they serve. This requirement, in turn, requires that such institutions must build in adequate and well-conceived spaces within which to resolve such conflicts' (2010: 169).

By working more systematically and consistently in work time, and through online connections after hours, we were able to pay better attention to our own needs as people and professionals and the needs of our families. According to Tronto's (2010) definition of institutional care, we would argue that our practice of collaboratively retreating to writing during the working day provided an adequate and well-conceived space within which to write about what mattered to us, in a way in which it mattered to us, as well as under circumstances that served us.

The purposiveness of our care within our group was focused on both rekindling joy and meaning in our work, as well as supporting each other to publish in a way which nurtured our flourishing.

Leading and following

As colleagues and friends, we drew on each other's strengths and took on different leadership roles at different times. In our reflection note the following:

We each take a leading role and so we are like birds flying in formation (borrowing from Black, et al.'s (2017a) idea of the V-formation). We work together to take the lead. We come from different departments and Faculties and institutions and disciplines but have a similar passion for our teaching and learning that binds us. (Reflective notes, 2019)

Working in this collaborative way and sharing leadership built our confidence and cohesion as a group. What we were able to achieve came through a collective effort that acknowledged the unique contribution of all. Black, et al. acknowledge that working it this way 'allows room for others and otherness. Flying in this kind of formation is an ethical choice. It isn't a common choice' (2017a: 146).

This arrangement required all of us to take on and rotate the roles of leader, mentor, supporter, editor, reader etc. It also helped us to work more consciously with power dynamics within the team related to writing and publication. In our group we had these reflections on power dynamics in the group:

Power is a maker or a breaker in a collaborative group. It may be different in different stages but it is always there. Rotating the lead, for example, helps to break the power dynamics. The trust shifts at different times, but being in and working with an EoC framework helps to make you mindful when you are not paying attention. (Reflective notes, 2019)

Collapsed space - Losing the joy

'Covered over... covered up... Streams channelled... captured – damned' (CHEC, 2018: 20).

As a writing community, although we held the time and space for a weekly meeting, we found ourselves falling victims to the time pressures and performativity of our neoliberal context. The lack of attention to deep reading and the time needed for writing began to affect our own levels of writing and motivation. We began to focus more on rushing to meet submission deadlines and less on the quality of our thinking, reading and engagement. Our care and attentiveness to caring collaboration (Neimanis, 2012) were lost in the turbulence. These internal dynamics coupled with the constant pull of deadlines and time pressures further drained our sense of joy and energy to write. We gradually lost our joy and meaning. Increasingly we felt the need to justify time spent together in relation to articles published. As one of us expressed 'you are having to show what you have produced with your time' (Reflective notes, 2019). While we criticised the forces of marketisation in the HEI, we had to acknowledge that our own behaviours and attitudes were part of the problem. The following quote captures our realization:

We had stopped asking ourselves what we really needed and what we individually needed to flourish. We felt we needed to provide a product. (Reflective notes, 2019)

This drained our space of joy and creativity. Collectively we were out of touch. There was a feeling of loss and frustration. The following sentiments capture our feelings during this period:

Our space became empty... we started compartmentalising things... it means that we are not engaging with one another and reading together. As soon as this started, we could feel that things were slipping... We experienced the disconnect and discomfort...

We lost the connection and caring because we started to be driven by the output and not the process...we lost our vision and intention for what we needed in this space... We all knew immediately something was wrong, the joy of Friday mornings was gone. How can we regain our balance? (Reflective notes, 2019)

Over a period of time, we felt our reading-writing-becoming space being lost as we focused on pushing ourselves to write more articles in less time. We had to take a step back and review what we valued in scholarship. We had to ask ourselves what type of relationship to ourselves, each, other and our disciplines we wanted to build and nurture.

The moment we fell into the trap of allowing other demands to dictate measures on our behalf, we lost the joy. The external pressures and expectations permeated our space and fragmented our attentiveness and care. We were not paying attention to a deepened engagement with all of Tronto's (2013) phases of care. Thus, our collaborative spaces began to feel unsafe. Instead, we all started to feel alone, insecure, and guilty for not meeting deadlines.

Reading the articles by Black, et al. (2017a, 2017b) gave us the inspiration to go back to focusing on our processes of relating and meaning-making as we re-asked ourselves - what is needed to give meaning and pleasure to our work? And how do we make this possible? Their insights challenge us as academics to listen with a different ear to what is needed: Not the ear of the academic assembly line, not the ear of the impending doom and helplessness, We listen to our enduring questions of what it means to be human, to our questions of who we are to each other' (Black, et al. 2017a: 141).

We started compartmentalising things and moving back to do individual work and it means that we are not engaging with one another and reading together. As soon as this started, we could feel that things were slipping and we were pressuring ourselves and starting to resist this way of doing. We could experience the disconnect and discomfort. (Reflective notes, 2019)

These insights and our own feelings of collective and individual mourning forced us to begin to pay attention to the need to hold the space for Slow scholarship.

Holding the space - Re-connecting in new ways

'I cannot shut it out; not dim the light ... it is all present'

'beginning ... beginning again ... flounder-ing... refusing order... words thinking the thought...'
(CHEC, 2018: 20).

So, what are the key practices, values and processes we need to expand on, in order to open spaces for a flourishing sympoietic Slow scholarship? These include asking the right questions, keeping the focus on the process of readingwritingbecoming, mindfulness and attentiveness to the personal and professional, actively practicing Slow scholarship, working in creative ways and through different spaces, standing in solidarity and working collectively, and finding joy and pleasure through scholarship.

Asking the right questions

In 2019 we reflected that a key practice in holding the space for Slow scholarship was to ask the right questions about what this meant for us. It also required that we took time to trouble ourselves and others to find the answers to these questions. Similarly, Black, et al. experienced that '[a]sking the right questions has directed us toward agency, purpose, pleasure, fulfilment and self-care/caring relationships' (2017a: 142). Working with each other to explore these questions and hold the tensions was part of our growth. Haraway argues that sympoiesis requires 'staying with the trouble' and to engage with each other and the 'world in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles' (2016: 4). Our experience showed us how easily our relationships can become fragmented and unproductive if we fail to pay careful attention to what we are needing as emergent scholars. And how we would like to meet these needs. Staying with these tensions between ourselves and in our writing supported us to search for new possibilities. We had these insights:

While you are busy reading and writing you are busy transforming... Not to fall into the trap of speed and lose the things that keep us together ...

What pulled us through is that we believe in what we do and the value-adding, friendship and care that we share. It confirms the deepening relationship... Understanding and making meaning. (Reflective notes, 2018)

Through this process of attentive engagement with each other, like Black and colleagues, '[w]e listen to our shared longings to lead a good life, a connected life, a life of meaning and relationship' (2017a: 144). By questioning our practice and troubling ourselves, we explored ways to find joy and flourishing in our collaborative writing.

Keeping the focus on the process of reading-writing-becoming

Rather than getting caught up in a frenzied focus on producing academic articles, we made a shift in our values and practices toward attentive reading, writing, and becoming through each other. This reading-writing-becoming brought back the joy to our work. Gergen avers that

'writing is fundamentally an action within a relationship; it is within relationships that writing gains its meaning and significance' (2008: 1). Creating the conditions for this sympoietic relationship to thrive are reflected below:

The focus for us is on thriving and not the publication... and to be able to read about what other scholars in HEIs are doing. We create the agenda and we close ourselves into a cocoon. We redefine our own agenda. This is a powerful free space. There are not a lot of spaces to be and to think. We are in charge here and nobody is going to bully us. (Reflective notes, 2019)

We realised that it was critical to take the time to pay attention to nurturing our relationships and to deepening attentive processes as co-reader-writer-creators. In our engagement, we became more mindful about our feedback and engagement with each other online and face-to-face spaces. Drawing on Tronto's (2013) care ethic our feedback sought to open up the spaces for creativity, curiosity and caring critique. Our use of technology enabled increased opportunities for feedback, and feedback to be given at a pace and time where responses could be attentively considered (Collett, et al., 2018).

Mindfulness and attentiveness to the personal and professional

We realised that we needed to stop and take time to notice what was happening in ourselves and with each other. Time and space needed to be created to unpack the loss we were experiencing. We had to be reminded not to feel guilty as Muntz, et al. (2015) affirm that caring for ourselves and others is work, which is not indulgent. As we commented:

We are often in roles of listening and giving to others ... students, family, friends... At times it is very difficult to acknowledge what we are needing. The collective helped with paying attention to what is needed... Looking inward, we needed to have time to acknowledge the person in the professional.

Not just the focus on "What is our output" ... and being driven by output... As the heart became cut off from the head...We disconnected... I really felt the loss. This safe space where I felt I could be my authentic self... the loss of mindfulness. (Reflective notes, 2019)

We would begin our weekly reading-writing-becoming sessions with a personal check-in over a cup of coffee. These check-ins resulted in some serious and comical moments. We never tried to shy away from the realities of our personal lives and invited them in. The quote below captures and share these experiences:

a child that has not gone to school today because he is sick, ...a son that is amputating a foot as medical student, ...two sons that had got dressed for school but their mother forgot

it was civvies day so had to get undressed and redressed. (Reflective notes, 2019)

When reading the article by Black and her colleagues (2017a) the quote below resonated with us. It mirrored and affirmed our experience of engaging holistically with our needs and finding spaces to engage differently in academia. They, like us:

recognise the joy and pleasure of responding to our longings to connect, to 'care for self and others', and to 'be' differently in academia. Our resistance and pleasure have been found in opportunities to listen and to converse in meaningful ways that give time to reflection and relationship; ways that enable us to work cooperatively and speak our lives into the academy. (Black, et al., 2017a: 136)

Making space to engage at a personal and collective level helped us to relate and connect in multiple ways. This became a platform where our ideas and emotions could take flight. These processes helped to build our caring and trust in each other and gave us space and permission to be both bold and vulnerable in the co-reading-writing-becoming process.

Actively practising Slow scholarship

Our experience of losing Slow and joy in our reading, writing and connecting affirmed the need to 'actively stand back and open up our senses and reconnect with our sense of space and time and mattering' (Reflective notes, 2019). We needed to strongly hold on to the values that underpin Slow in the process of developing our scholarship.

Slow reading helped to enhance attentiveness to our thinking and the thinking of others. We noted that '[o]ne exercise that helped us reconnect was to read together and aloud to each other. To Slow down, to feel, to hear and just be with no expectation for that session' (Reflective notes, 2019). Bozalek argues for Slow scholarship to enable publishing in higher education, a practice which encourages 'hesitation, thoughtfulness and new ways of relating, for readers and writers...' (2017: 41). She relates these practices to broader historical and political movements of Slowness or Slow scholarship (Bozalek, 2017; Mountz, et al., 2015; Ulmer, 2017).

Providing each other with sensitive and mindful feedback on our writing helped us to explore ideas in more depth and test out different ways of expressing ourselves and exploring what Slow scholarship meant. Drawing on the work of Barad (2007) and Dolphijn and Van der Tuin (2012), Bozalek (2017) recommends engagement with diffractive methodologies to inform Slow scholarly practices. In many ways our engagement with our readingwritingbeing and with each other embraced a diffractive methodology, although we felt new to the philosophical and epistemological debates and practices informing it. Bozalek describes a diffractive methodology as a practice:

which is affirmative and gives due attention to the views, texts and theories that are read through each other, rather than critique... not setting up one text against another but rather a detailed, attentive and care-full reading of the ideas of one through another... (2017: 46)

Below we elaborate on the Slow scholarly processes where we engaged in the use of multiple modalities and technology to deepen our engagement and sustain the writing process.

Creative meaning-making through multi-modalities and spaces

Bozalek (2017), drawing on the work of Haraway (2016) describes Slow attentive engagement as 'the ability to "render each other capable" (Haraway 2016: 1) through "becoming-with" our readings, writings and feedback to each other' (Bozalek, 2017: 42). By exploring our practice through multi-modalities, and in different spaces, we rekindled the joy and laughter in our work. We experienced our own writing and confidence growing through this process of intra-action and unfoldment. Our Slow collaborative readingwritingbecoming was rendered through multi-modal engagement in sculpting, writing poetry, drawing, concept development, walking, swimming, using free and creative writing and incorporating different formats and applications of technology. These reflections capture our Slow reading-writing-becoming through what Bozalek describes as in-depth 'processes of writing as they unfold' (2017: 45):

We could go back to other readings and re-read it within the context. We could read Slowly and deeply and we could then speed up to pick up the traces of our conversation, follow the scent and track our thinking. Although you cannot be physically present you can be part of the conversation.

We use different mediums to collaborate such as Google Drive and Mendeley attentive to Slow reading. Enablers to help us to connect Slow reading - technology can be used. Blended different spaces for reading Slow and connecting. The technology helps us to keep a record and we can go back to our notes and via our notes you can follow the conversation. One was in a different place and the others together, but we could interact and talk to one another via notes in Mendeley.

Link between technology and Slow reading, only read on the screen, maybe there is a benefit in going Slow to do it on hard copy, paper. Because I read quickly, I might need to slow down. Because of the collaboration process, I am slowed down. Discussing the article and each makes sure there is a level of understanding. Re-reading and discussing, reading together aloud.

Reading together is like exploring showing each other the wonders we find on the way, stop and see an interesting text or explaining to mates how one understands something.

Reading aloud and thinking aloud Slows you down and then writing comes later. (Reflective notes, 2019)

Another challenge we encountered was finding journals which would provide us with the environment and format within which our ideas could take flight. Few journals provided us with the scope to write in ways which capture something of the complexity of fluid emergent multidimensional processes of meaning-making. Working collaboratively gave us the courage to try out new ways of conveying our experiences.

Standing in solidarity and working collaboratively

Working collaboratively promoted a creative dynamic where ideas emerged and built on each other. Continuously engaging and re-engaging with our writing required awareness of what Nieuwenhuijzen and Wood describe as 'the dynamic process itself leads to an emergent outcome that can be evaluated only after it has been attained' (2006: 89).

Our position of 'getting ahead together' was a conscious stance as reflected below:

We have each other's backs, as women in academia that feel the pressures of the academy that lack the space for support among female academics. We are the CHEC Mates, Sisters that stand in solidarity. Our personal and professional lives merge and we have the space to engage on a deeper level. (Reflective notes, 2019)

Black and colleagues (2017a), as female academics, took a similar stance against neoliberalism in their respective HEI's. They note '...we establish for ourselves a new set of values, an alternative guide for our academic and non-academic practice. In doing so we interrupt and 'rupture the bounds of what is permissible and possible in academia...' (Black, et al., 2017a: 151).

Becoming scholars with and through each other and through different modes and spaces was key to our experience of Slow scholarship. We truly felt ourselves as companion species that lived and thrived off each other and our environments. This quote by Haraway aptly describes our processes of engaging in Slow sympoetic scholarship: 'Getting hungry, eating, and partially digesting, partially assimilating, and partially transforming: these are the actions of companion species' (Haraway, 2016: 65).

Getting ahead together by standing in solidarity and working collaboratively afforded us the opportunity to rekindle the joy and pleasure of readingwritingbecoming.

Finding joy and pleasure through our scholarship

Ensuring the well-spring for joy and pleasure in our academic lives required us to hold the personal and professional spaces for our flourishing. This we felt could only be achieved through sustaining spaces for deepened collegial engagement and Slow scholarship. It required us to stand firm and make the time and space for ourselves to engage differently. We noted that it was

'[a] conscious fight the whole time that we need to push from the inside and not give in' (Reflective notes, 2019).

Joy came through purposeful and attentive processes of reading, writing and letting new insights about our professional practice unfold. It required re-embracing and deepening practices of Slow scholarship. We felt 'it was essential for us to be in the moment and feel that we are doing something that adds value and that matters' (Reflective notes, 2019). Readingwritingbecoming together gave us joy and a sense of accomplishment. Kern, et al. identify joy in their academic practice as a radical practice, they argue that 'joy does things, it can be transformative' (2014: 834).

This sense of accomplishment as Slow scholars came through our deepening or relationality to ourselves, each other, our work, and our institutions. By engaging in acts of Slow sympoietic scholarship we were opening up spaces within our higher education institutions to enhance our collective flourishing and the flourishing of others. Our experience is echoed in these words by Bozalek (2017) who argues for a Slow scholarship, one which 'moves away from instrumentalizing writing, to seeing it as an ethical practice of affecting and being affected, of becoming-with each other as readerlywriters and writerlyreaders' (Bozalek, 2017: 54). From within 'the belly of the beast,' we had begun to challenge the corporatisation of the academy.

Re-Turning: Moving backward, forward and sideways

In this paper, we have charted our journey as three female academics engaging in practices of collaborative academic writing informed by Tronto's (2013) Political Ethic of Care, Slow scholarship (Bozalek, 2017), and Sympoiesis (Haraway, 2016). We explored some of the possibilities and pitfalls of writing collaboratively within the neoliberal HEI context. We highlight key processes which could enable a Slow sympoietic scholarship of 'becoming with and through each other'. This requires us to reclaim and recreate the time and contexts within which we can pay attention to deepening our relationality with ourselves, each other and our worlding. Our experience may be of value to other academics working towards flourishing and Slow scholarship in higher education.

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