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## Civic Engagement as Empowerment: Sharing Our Names and Remembering Our Her-Stories—Resisting Ofuniversity

### *The Women Who Write*

Linda Henderson, Ali Black, Gail Crimmins  
and Janice K. Jones

### Introduction

This chapter draws upon the dystopic narratives of survival and surrogacy in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1988). It is set against a global context of increasingly corporatised representations of the academy, where universities reward and promulgate positivist illusions of meritocracy, certainty, and productivity over the messy and complex experience of being human. And, where women's academic careers are impacted by years of contract work, probation, and academic theft.

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L. Henderson  
Monash University, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

A. Black · G. Crimmins (✉)  
University of the Sunshine Coast, Maroochydore, QLD, Australia  
e-mail: gcrimmin@usc.edu.au

J. K. Jones  
Southern Queensland University, Toowoomba, VIC, Australia

Shaping our chapter as a script-like narrative of characters and scenarios based on our lived experiences, we use Atwood's novel and storylines from the television series to speak of and to hierarchical regimes inflected by patriarchal dominance. Determinedly rebellious, we reveal the 'below-stairs' reality of university business and carve a space for our lived experiences—re-positioning ourselves not as the public persona of academia, but as beings Ofearth, Ofourselves, and Ofeachother.

The television series of Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood et al. 2017, 2018) is a dystopian story where society has been taken over by a fundamental regime. Women have no rights and are subservient to men. The Handmaids are fertile women tasked with breeding and supplying the regime with more children. As surrogates, they are both important and oppressed, ignored and overlooked. They are caught up in a network of surveillance and audit where their daily chores and worth are tied to their capacity for (re)production. Their ability to produce is their only value. Should they conceive, the babies the Handmaids give birth to are not regarded as theirs, but the Commander's and his wife's. Should the Handmaids not produce they will be sent to The Colonies.

The Handmaids are not meant to have an identity, to see or be seen, and they are forbidden to use their real names. Instead, they are given new names which consist of the word 'of' coupled with the first name of their Commander. They must wear a particular uniform that reveals their status and hides their female bodies and their individuality. Their headwear disables their peripheral vision.

Ofuniversity also has its uniform and yokes which it drapes over shoulders to ensure allegiance and compliance. Too often, the design and markers of belonging are explicitly gendered, the lines and structures masculine. And with these markers, codes of behaviour, vows of silence:

**The performance begins.**

## Opening Scene: Daring to Speak Our Names

We learned to whisper almost without sound. In the semi-darkness we could stretch out our arms, when the Aunts weren't looking, and touch each other's hands across space. We learned to lip-read, our heads flat on the beds, turned sideways, watching each other's mouths. In this way we exchanged names, from bed to bed. Alma, Janine, Delores, Moira, June. (Atwood 1988, p. 4)

We are *The Women Who Write*, a collective of woman academics working/writing together to survive the ruthless academic machine. We are refusing to forget *our* names, our identities. With vulnerable stories, we are revealing 'hidden transcripts' and what occurs 'offstage' (Scott 1990, pp. 4, 13–14); those gendered affective assaults that women academics experience yet rarely voice. Here, though, we *are* speaking—back to the structures and strictures that try to determine our worth using a set of numbers that deidentify us and name us Ofuniversity. Together we stand to say: 'We are more-than' a number. 'We are more-than' a cog in the academic machine.

## Scene One: Stories of Academic Surrogacy

Give me children, or else I die. Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? Behold my maid Bilhah. She shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her. (Atwood 1988, p. 88)

The academy makes women 'a producer of profit and a reproducer of power structures' (Kirby 1996, p. 105). We are caught up in the (re)production. We need to (re)produce to survive.

### Handmaid One:

[She cares about her students and her creative work. This course is a creative conception of voice and viewpoint. But, the baby is swathed and passed to another.]

*We were told academics did not 'own' courses, but this course carried my DNA, looked out at the world through my eyes, spoke with my tongue after seven years of creative rebirths. Students responded with visions of an imagined future and gave exceptionally positive evaluations. The course gained awards for innovation and teaching excellence.*

*Almost midnight. I'm at my laptop finalising assessment rubrics a few days before the 'go live' date, when the course disappears off the screen. A technical glitch? Wrong. **My course has been given to a new male employee** 'to fill up his workload'. Senior management know the importance of this course to my application for promotion to Associate Professor.*

*My appeals are rejected: it would be 'unfair' to this new member of staff to change his workload at 'this late stage'. 'If I like', I can provide 'reasons to be considered for examiner next year'.*

*My self-image – 'the creative academic'– peels back revealing a thing hunched in front of a laptop, serving the machine. When the university offers voluntary 'severance' I am one of many who apply. A line manager advises only 'a single sentence' is required: why I have no useful contribution to make to the university. There are no public announcements, no recognition of the years of labour. Names disappear off the email lists. The administrator comes to tick her checklist that I have not stolen any equipment. I shut down the computer, hand over keys, take my name plaque from the door and drop it in a rubbish bin as I walk away.*

### **Handmaid Two:**

[She created and developed the project to fruition. Her work is repossessed and renamed.]

*Four years ago, on my own, I wrote a university grant to partner with four other universities. It was a seven-million-dollar project.*

*I got the grant.*

*Now, there is an opportunity for a high-profile step-up grant. I've led the project on my own to date (and without maternity cover when I gave birth to my daughter). Somehow, I've held my shit together. As I prepare to go for the step-up grant, I receive communication 'from the top' stating I 'may be named' on the application 'BUT' my 'senior male colleague' (who has not been involved in any way with the project to date) will be the 'Project Lead'.*

*On reviewing the grant documentation, I see my name has been removed.*

*It's hard to know whether the sacrifice to my maternity leave was worth it. There is no recognition I was the one who achieved the original funding status. The message is clear: A junior female staff member can take risks, not receive maternity cover, and go the extra mile to ensure a project's credibility. However, if she is successful, **'her' project will be taken away, and her words and name deleted.***

### **Handmaid Three:**

[She led the application process to recognise the collective work. She knew the pain of sacrificial labour.]

*I was part of a team of five academics who worked together to design and deliver a large whole-of-university initiative. The Project Lead was a man, the four co-leads were women – yet, the reality was we all co-designed and co-coordinated the project. In recognition of the collaborative design and support for student learning, we were urged to write a national teaching award application. I took carriage of the application process – developing the application during a week of recreation leave. While colleagues contributed specific sections, I crafted the seven-page document. We decided to present our names alphabetically as co-designers of the project.*

*We were successful. The national award was received at Parliament House. When the announcement was made in the press and through intra-university communications, **the name of the male was listed first. My name was listed last.** The name-ordering listing no longer alphabetical. **The male gained a promotion because of the award. The women did not.***

These are secret stories of women's lived experience in recent past, told in ways to protect our existence. Like the Handmaids, we share them whilst wearing our Ofuniversity uniform. These stories of trauma, robbery, and renaming, whilst not uncommon, are generally not shared or made public. Many of us know the conditions of helplessness, rage, and fatigue that follow these types of abuse. Perhaps it is the utter shock and despair of being displaced as unwilling surrogates in reduced circumstances that creates a pressure for these stories to be told.

The stealing of work, the erasure of women's names and identities, is not merely used to support individual male academics' careers, but is deployed as a rationale for the disproportionate representation of women in the lower levels of academia, and the glut of male academics in senior positions (Grieshaber 2016). The perpetuated narrative: 'men are more productive than women'.

## Scene Two: Stories of Supervision and Serving Time

...this may not feel ordinary to you right now but after a time it will...  
this will become ordinary... (Atwood et al. 2017)

In the *Handmaid's Tale*, the central Handmaid, Offred/June, intends to be a survivor. Her survival is a serious, necessary business. Her public identity/performance as Handmaid is continuously precarious. As a 'new recruit', she must engage in the play and adhere to her role/part thoroughly and exhaustively. She must **(re)produce**. She hopes she is 'lucky'. She hopes she will be assigned to a fertile male so she can demonstrate 'her' fertility. Her fertility is being monitored. She is under surveillance. She is on probation.

We recognise the personal risk of speaking up and speaking out. The risk feels even greater during short-term contacts and probation. We carry the risk, and the academy carries the power.

### Handmaid Four:

[*'Under his eye'*. She is on probation. Should she be retained? Is she in the long-term interests Ofuniversity? She moved universities. She had already met probation requirements, twice, but the move means probation all over again.]

*It's my fault. I am forgetting too much. Tonight, I will say my prayers... for emptiness, so [I can be] worthy to be filled... with self-denial, semen and babies.* (Atwood 1988, p. 193)

*I am finding it harder to recall my name.*

*It is my fault. For this is what I desired – to work in the Ofuniversity. I worked hard to get here. I sacrificed health, friends and family. Now, my family is broken and I do not know how to mend the shards. So, I return to what I know: the work of a Handmaid – the property Ofuniversity.*

*Numbers and outputs surround me, demanding my attention. They direct me in ways that insist I make myself count and demonstrate my ability to maintain long-term (re)production. **I display obedience and piety. I demonstrate my fertility and productivity.***

*I am learning that underneath this Handmaid's uniform is a life longing to escape. I dare to hope I may be worthy of being more-than just a surrogate. I am learning that my access to 'the master's tools' (Lorde 1984), can break open cracks and reveal this other life that is seeking to escape.*

*Returning to a previous Commander, I misguidedly think I have already proved my worth as his Handmaid and recognition will be mine. So, I write and ask for recognition for my continued years of faithful service, and for the probation period to end. I have already met the stipulations. Security is all I seek.*

*My request is considered an 'unnecessary' request – 'Why bother? You are fertile and meeting the work assigned to you – and, it would be considered suspicious by the regime. Continue your obedience – we appreciate your fertility and what it produces. In due course your outputs and your faithfulness will be rewarded'.*

### **Handmaid Five:**

[She (re)produced year after year, but it was never enough.]

*I was on teaching-intensive-fixed-term-casual-contracts for five consecutive years, which contravened the university's legally-binding Enterprise Bargaining Agreement. I ought to have been employed on an ongoing contract. I spoke to my Union Representative. He agreed my casual employment contravened the law and he could, should I wish him to, develop a 'case against the university'. 'However,' he cautioned, a similar case had been taken against a university in another state several months prior, and although the court ruled in favor of the Union, the academic was made redundant shortly after the ruling. I sat with the injustice of this conundrum for months. To take a stand against my unlawful contract meant risking my livelihood, my (unstable) foothold in academia. **I (ashamedly) stayed silent and carried on with my work, fully aware of my self-exploitation.***

### Handmaid Six:

[She brought skills and expertise. They wanted her, but they didn't want to acknowledge her properly. She was both important and overlooked.]

*I have been working in academia for decades, got my PhD in my first five years – a condition of probation. I have little to show in terms of status and position. Is it the breaks I took to be a mother? Or the time I gave to the care of my aging, dying parent?*

*I have moved to different universities/locations to support the financial/emotional/health needs of my family. My outputs have been consistent. I have achieved the standards and the requirements of probation three times – eleven years all up! This last move I had hoped to have my previous experience recognised, perhaps move 'up' a rung.*

*I got offered the job but was told it was 'not possible' to be employed at the level I had achieved at the previous university. 'The rules', 'unfortunately', 'due to how the job was advertised'. 'But', I would be employed at the 'top of the lower band' (a band I had passed six years previous). 'And', I could go for 'promotion' quickly and return to the higher level. A few months later, an unsuccessful applicant for the job I won – a male – had a position created for him at the level I was told would/could not be advertised or made available. I guess they told the truth in that the senior role given to him was not advertised at all. The university rules meant I couldn't apply for 'promotion' until I had worked there for three years. I estimate a loss of \$120K in income during this time. **I lost something of myself too, a sense of my own worth.** Perhaps I should have stayed where I was before? Stood my ground and risked unemployment? Or just grown a penis? As Offred/June says at the end of Episode Nine – 'Smart Power' (Series Two): 'Well fuck that!'*

The conditions described by the 'Academic Handmaids' in this chapter, are a feature of the neoliberal culture. Workloads are so heavy and expectations of productivity so high they can only be achieved by workers who have no relationships or responsibilities that might constrain



their productive capacities (Lynch 2010). This kind of ruthless culture breeds heightened competition, individualism, and ‘care-less workers’ (Lynch 2010). And, the manoeuvres of power are subtle. As Spooner (2015, p. 5) suggests: ‘Sometimes the antagonist isn’t wielding a gun. In this kind of attack, there is no person or event that can be met head-on with a protest or a strike. There is no explosion, no great conflict, no epic battle’.

When academic promotions/periods of probation are based on being leads on grant applications, recipients of national teaching awards, and producers of successful courses, names matter. When we serve our time but our names or achievements are erased and replaced by males and males’ names, two things happen. First, we become unwilling surrogates. Second, the promotion of men in academia is cast as a meritocratic process (Grieshaber 2016). It’s believed the reason there are more males than females in the Professoriate, is men legitimately fulfilled the criteria and women didn’t (Mihăilă 2018).

It is important to speak the secrets of surrogacy, surveillance and serving time in academia and acknowledge the accompanying ‘hidden injuries’ (Gill 2009). It is time to question the forces that determine which scholarship is legitimised and which is delegitimised (Spooner 2015), *who* is legitimised, and *who* remains unnamed/delegitimised. It is time to disrupt the myths of academic meritocracy that abound, the legend that male academics are never barren.

Our storying together thus highlights how important it is to attend to our lived experiences, share these hidden transcripts and render them knowable and speak-able (Wright et al. 2017). This is activism. This is resistance. This is our research. Excavating and representing incidents of lived experience allows us to make manifest the structural patterns of gender discrimination experienced by women. Our experiences are not individual, one-off, unconnected happenings. They are part of a disturbingly broader picture of male power and privilege (Mihăilă 2018).

## Scene Three: Stories Ofearth, Ofourselves, and Ofeachother

Atwood's *Handmaids* developed their own 'small acts of resistance' through such things as a posture, a gesture, a glance, a story, etchings on a door frame and handwritten letters. These enabled friendship, border crossing, and resilience. We see these aspects reflected in the narration of Offred/June as she reviews/relives past narratives and considers their place in her present. Her memories and observations draw on the sensual and the emotional. This narrating of self is a political act, an act of resistance and an exercise in survival, ethics, and intellect.

Central to the narrative (in *The Handmaid's Tale*) is the notion of voice. The Handmaid women speak and remember their names and stories of who they were/are. Their letter writing to and of each other is a form of camaraderie and retention of self. This resonates closely with *The Women Who Write*, in principle and practice. We speak across space and time, 'exchanging our names from bed to bed'. We are *Linda. Janice. Ali. Gail*.

Through sharing our vulnerabilities, our potencies and our will to survive, we are creating a care-full way of producing valid research that honours the voices of women in academe—research the master must count. And so, we write...

### **My name is Gail, and I am more-than:**

*My name is Gail. On the night I was born there was a huge storm and the midwife suggested my parents call me Gail, so they did. Some thirty years later on presenting my copy of Storm Damage to the poet Brian Patten to sign, he crossed out the title and wrote Gail Damage. Born in a storm, perhaps born to storm? So, Gail is my name and in this chapter, I speak of and in my name.*

*When John Proctor (the central character in the play 'The Crucible' by Arthur Miller) is asked to testify against another to save his own life he refuses; and when asked his reasons Proctor says, 'Because it is my name and I cannot have another'. When Antigone is asked to deny her brother in order to be saved, she refuses. Proctor's and Antigone's resolve remind me of the personal integrity and legacy of speaking one's name/truth, regardless of the consequences.*

*I have my name and I cannot have another.*

*I write my story as a her-story so it is not only the story of the 'Victors' that are heard, but the 'Victoria's and the Vanessa's' too. I write so I don't forget – amidst the spreadsheets of citation indices and student evaluation scores – that I am a woman born into a working-class family in South Wales, UK. I write to capture in social her-story my childhood home, a home that also periodically acted as a local election/political campaign headquarters. Many a time our home was crammed with leaflets, posters, placards, cigarette smoke, mugs of tea, over-full ashtrays, and people wearing 'Ban the bomb' badges on their jackets and hearts on their sleeves. Our hallway was stacked with plastic buckets emblazoned with 'Support the miners', boxes of canned food and cartons of long-life milk, and people calling day and night to organise collections or make donations. The large Anti-Apartheid poster that filled our front window signalled a Tardis of hope and activism.*

*I write to remember – and have remembered – the vitality of my dad (as he enters old-age physically tired, disabled by a stroke),*

*I write to remember days and evenings of my dad, sister and I sitting  
on the floor of the living room folding leaflet  
after leaflet  
after leaflet  
and placing them into piles for  
Cyfatha Street,*

*Treharris Street,*

*Arran Street,*

*Kincraig Street,*

*Upper Kincraig Street,*

*and*

*then we three running up and down the streets delivering them.*

*My dad on one side of the road my sister and I on the other racing-each-other-to-see-who-could-finish-first. My dad always letting us win.*

*I write to remember beliefs beget action/s, and I must envision the change I want for the world – envisage how it should be, could be, must be, and move crumb by crumb towards it.*

*I write to break open a space in academia for women's beings, for my own being.*

**My name is Linda, and I am more-than:**

*Writing has always been my friend, a quiet confidante in whom I can trust. Its swirling affects arrive unannounced, reminding me of who I am.*

*I am a fragile, yet stubbornly strong woman, a mother, yet not a mother, a sister, yet not a sister, a daughter, yet not a daughter. In truth, I am only beginning to learn who I am. But I know my name and I am learning to speak this name. My name is Linda and I write.*

*Reaching back into my past I have always felt at home when connected to, and belonging with, Ofearth. As a young child, I sought the solitude Ofearth provided me. She held me in her motherly arms in an embrace otherwise unavailable. I learned to commune with the animals. Speaking their many languages, I joined in their songs. My heart would leap with joy as I fell into their worlds.*

*Listen to the laughing  
The Laughing Kookaburras  
Cackling laughter, hooting and chuckling  
Inviting the world to enter their jubilant refrains  
Unique, opening up space  
Falling joyfully into this space  
My Kookaburra laugh received  
With playfulness,  
Reciprocated and welcomed  
Child Becoming-Kookaburra*

*Memories are vivid. I would walk up the mountain and climb up the trees. Higher and higher to sing with the Laughing Kookaburras. Reaching vantage points, finding escape. Solitude, yet never alone, always a cacophony of songs. Becoming-Kookaburra cracking open the binary world I was forced to inhabit as a child. Becoming-Kookaburra was a powerful entering of conversation with Ofearth. It was a moment – an event – of leaving behind the territory defining me as ‘child’ – invisible and silenced. Ofearth gently offering the protection and guidance this child sought.*

*In adulthood, Ofuniversity robbed me of my many languages. It told me how I had to write and what I could not write. Identified as a fertile Handmaid for Ofuniversity, I had to learn the rules of my Commander to survive.*

*Survival is important. But of late, I am learning that survival asks me to return and to recall my name and what it holds. It asks me to dwell with/in the deeply held knowledge and wisdom Ofearth shares with me.*

*Time – not that linear time of humans – but time that is cyclical, rhythmic and repetitive in the way Ofearth provides – has been generous. Patient. She has been waiting. Patiently waiting for my return. I find myself writing/walking with Ofearth. I walk gently, consciously, and deliberately upon her surface. She is, always has been, my teacher, my intimate, my holder of knowledge and beauty. I look to her for wisdom. She counsels me, nurtures me and heals me. In her healing embrace I recall who I am. I am Linda and I write.*

*And so, I am (re)(in)sisting the languages once stolen from me are returned. With this return, I am daring to share her-stories in my name. Stories that show there is more to me than my quantification as a Handmaiden. I am speaking-back and writing-back to Ofuniversity with my body. I am writing about messy complex things that matter: AIDS, death, motherhood, sisterhood, relational spaces. I am coming together with woman I know and love; writing with them joyfully, playfully, experimentally; engaging in the creation/ generation of a 'feminist shelter' (Ahmed 2015) in which to (re)(in)sist that I/ you/we am/are more-than. I am Linda and I write.*

### **My name is Ali, and I am more-than:**

*It is Monday morning. I awake to a new day and feel grateful for my life. The weekend has been spent with my children and I had time to read and relax in amongst the chaos and energy of family gatherings where we celebrated my father-in-law's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. I have been thinking a lot about life, legacy, privilege, family, sustainability, health and hope. Last night as I settled into bed I felt the fear I sometimes feel – this life is fleeting, this life is short, this life is precious, it will soon be over.*

*On this new day, my cat jumps up on the bed to greet me, he rubs his forehead into mine, purring, and demanding affection which I happily give him. My husband has brought me a hot cup of tea and we talk softly about the weekend and hold each other's hand. I enjoy the warmth I feel, in my hands and heart and in my home. This day begins slowly. I have time to sit on my daughter's bed and embrace her. She is a teenager, and these moments don't avail themselves as often as they once did. I savour these moments.*

*In the last years, I have become more conscious about the work/life I am constructing. I want to bring my attention to what matters: To gestures, kind words, touch. I want to listen to my body and my feminine cycles and seasons. I have experienced the dis-ease of overwork in the academy, of competition, of distraction, of not listening to my inner compass.*

*Now I am more deliberate, more intentional. I still get stressed. My work is always demanding something of me. It will never be done. I see my psychologist once a month, a safety net. No longer on anti-depressants, I pay closer attention to what I am feeling. When I notice the ache in my neck and shoulders, and the sense of overwhelm creeping up my throat, I try to course-correct and practice self-care.*

*I choose to work with people I like and on projects I like. I like that I hear myself say 'no thanks' when this criterion is not met. I follow meaning and peace and interest and connection. My work/life feels different as a result.*

*I make time for a walk on the beach before my workday begins. A few years back, I couldn't seem to find a way to include exercise, nature and beauty into my working week. All I did was work. My Ofearth walking connects me to something bigger, to wonder and majesty. I love how my senses expand as I connect with the elements, the sand, the waves, the foam, the clouds, the birds, the dogs, the breeze. I return grounded, connected, even more awake to the preciousness and beauty of life. I want/walk/write to stay awake.*

*These women with whom I write connect me to hope, aliveness, and authenticity. With our projects and our writing, we are purposefully sharing our lived experiences and we are remembering who we are. We are beings Ofearth, Ofourselves, and Ofeachother.*

### **My name is Janice, and I am more-than:**

*I sit with my 91-year old mother in the afternoon sun, sharing stories, surrounded by the potted plants she tends with caring hands. The hands and arms that held me as an infant, now almost transparent, her veins a roadmap of life. My first teacher.*

*A breath, a pause. We are both temporary. I have travelled back across the world to spend time with my mother, my daughter and her children. Since forever, my mind is not distracted by work: no more courses to write, deadlines*

*to meet, projects jostling for time and energy. It is time to sit and tell stories, to let the slow afternoon fade, and to water the plants – a silent sharing of time together. I am no longer the academic, the teacher, the wife. Quietly I wonder that just two years would see all the imagined futures fade.*

*Now I walk by the sea. I connect with The Women Who Write: we are story-weavers together and there is magic in our coming together. We are Ofearth, water, salt, fire and air and we create together. The Osprey circling, wheels above me, calling. The rare white Goshawk watches still and ghostly as I stand close. The other-world shimmers through the everyday, speaking through birds, through light. I pick up shells and pebbles, sea glass, wondering at the gorgeous colours and soft fading of each shape, holding them in my hand for just a little time. I dance barefoot, make art with sea-weed and shells, create a sea-witch, a womb, a love poem of silver words written on sea-glass and hidden in the red rocks, waiting for the high tide to wash it away. As we are all – all of us – washed away. Let me hold your hand.*

## Closing Scene: Writing to Create a Feminist Shelter

There is something subversive about this garden of Serena's, a sense of buried things bursting upwards, wordlessly, into the light, as if to point, to say, "Whatever is silenced will clamour to be heard". (Atwood 1985, pp. 161–162)

There is something subversive about women academics speaking of themselves, revealing injustices, making manifest their/our fully embodied-selves through autobiographies and social commentaries, and demonstrating their/our connection to each other and the Earth. These activities fly-in-the-face of the namelessness of women, the 'carelessness' of academia (Lynch 2010), and the individualising nature of neo-liberalist and masculinist regimes where numbers and weightings are valued over names.

We believe it *is* possible to live with/in the Ofuniversity in ways that are caring, open, and respectful. In telling our stories Ofuniversity, Ofearth, Ofourselves, and Ofeachother we are daring to imagine 'a

world in which our heartfelt, personal response to life, our deep listening to others and our careful observations and thoughts about the social, natural and physical world come together to create and recreate our institutions' (Harre et al. 2017, p. 5).

Sharing stories heightens our abilities to listen to our own internal dialogue and gives time to practices that support healing, listening, and responding—practices essential for hope and social justice (Black and Loch 2014) and capable of weaving 'lines of love and forgiveness – *philia*' (Henderson and Black 2018, original emphasis). As *The Women Who Write*, we are working/writing together to give time to contemplation and 'witness consciousness' (Walsh and Bai 2015), in order to 'be-with' our/each other's lived and storied experiences in acts of 'wit(h)nessing' (Snowber and Bickel 2015, pp. 76–77). We are writing to build 'a feminist shelter' (Ahmed 2015), writing in ways that 'create room for us to dwell' and where we can engage in deep listening and long conversations.

We believe in this work, this collective feminist writing that brings forth our voice, our fragility, and our affective experiences. It affords us the opportunity to expose the academic surrogacy/theft with which we have been involved and have suffered. We believe in this work because with it we are reconfiguring the university. We are creating spaces for messy, complex, vulnerable lives and resisting the 'overwhelming bureaucratic impulse to speed up academic production', the preoccupation with 'the game of professional standing' (Back 2016, p. 11). Our vision is one where we both expose injustice and realise our potential 'as people living together to be open and inclusive, and to promote the life, and growth, that helps us flourish as individuals and communities' (Harre et al. 2017, p. 5). Our hope is that our/others' vulnerable storytelling will inspire ongoing communication and activism, encouraging more women to unite—and write—and *touch each other's hands across space* to support one another in (and out) of academia. For we must remember we are *more-than*.



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