

Phillips, L.G., (2022). Holobionts, happiness and policing in a suspended world. In D. Harris, A. Markham, & M.E. Luka (Eds.) *Massive/Micro Autoethnography: Creative learning in COVID times* (pp.229-242). Palgrave/Springer.

keywords: *autoethnography, happiness, holobiont, COVID-19, Singapore, policing, symbiosis*

We have “lost something” or are struggling to let go of what has been lost (Ahmed, 2010) in a global pandemic that has affected all. I have lost and am lost; disconnected from family and community, my human relation assemblages, but also my relationality and attachment to homelands.

“..On the 18th March 2020 Singapore Government advises to defer all travel abroad with immediate effect” (Ministry of Health, Singapore 2020, March 18).

I am cut off from those I make with/ world-with – sympoietic entities: holobionts (Haraway 2016, p. 58). I am married, have three sons, a mother and five siblings, and many friends scattered around the world, yet I am in a room on my own in a city of 5.7 million (Department of Singapore Statistics, 2020). I have never before in my life spent so much time alone. Though I know I am not alone in my loneliness, there are many alone, so much more than before this pandemic.

I moved from Australia to Singapore in July 2019 for an academic position, not long before my youngest sons (twins) turned 18, with the reassurance I could get on a plane and be there within a day. One of my sons is hospitalised just before the travel ban and I cannot be there. Swollen with grief and despair from the severance of mothering relatings (holding, nurturing, being there), I numbly seek momentary happiness in the pleasure sensations of chocolate, alcohol, and swimming. I know this is a simplistic association of happiness as Locke (1690/ 1997) defined “those things which produce the greatest pleasure” (p. 247) and Ahmed (2010) named in her discussion of happy objects. But I am human and succumb to these available pleasures to numb and ease the pain.

Making sense of COVID-19 time and dislocation

To make sense of what is going on in my lived experiences and witnessing of COVID-19, I wrestle with the concept of holobiont (Haraway, 2016), in tension with happiness (Ahmed, 2010) and policing (Ranciere, 2010) in micro and macro scales across the places I am anchored.

This concept of holobiont, as a ‘symbiotic complex’ (Margulis, 1991) or ‘product, temporary or permanent, of the association between its constituent bionts’ (Margulis, 1993), is widely known to be

have been introduced to biology by Lynn Margulis (Baedke et al, 2020; Haraway, 2016). I was introduced to the concept in Haraway's (2016) *Staying with the Trouble* who likens her sociological definition to Margulis' as

symbiotic assemblages, at whatever scale of space or time, which are more like knots of diverse intra-active relatings in dynamic complex systems, than like the entities of a biology made up of pre-existing units (genes, cells, organisms etc.) in interactions that can be conceived as competitive or cooperative (p. 60).

Key words in this definition that appeal to me – are 'symbiotic assemblages', 'intra-active relatings' and being 'competitive or cooperative'. I am interested in the relatings of organisms (symbiosis) be they living or non-living and they are not always mutually beneficial (cooperative), as simplified definitions claim. Amidst a pandemic, we acutely know that symbiotic relatings can be parasitic (competitive) and there are so many other "patterns and processes of situated and dynamic dilemmas and advantages for the symbionts/holobionts is only beginning to surface as biologists let go of the dictates of possessive individualism and zero-sum games as the template for explanation" (Haraway 2016, p. 60). So it seems the relatings can also be other than competitive or cooperative. Haraway's use of 'intra-active relatings' also appeals because of the use of 'intra' to attend to what emerges within organism relatings (see Barad, 2010 on *intra-action*). Though throughout Haraway's writing on holobionts she also includes the more commonly used biological term of 'interactions', to also attend to activity between organisms.

Further to the word holobiont, I am drawn to the etymology (and Haraway acknowledges this too). 'Holo' comes from the Greek word 'holos' meaning "whole, entire, complete" as well as "safe and sound" (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2020). So I wonder about the association of safe and soundness with wholeness, that there is safe and soundness when whole. In making sense of symbiotic assemblages in these strange times of loss and lost-ness, I also look to Ranciere's (2010) thesis on policing of assemblages, as a symbolic division of who is counted what can be partaken, alongside Ahmed's (2010) theorising of happiness.

My sense of time throughout the pandemic has become more fluid and less demarcated. I, like many, have lost track of time. To share my lived experiences and analytical thinking of what is going on here, I have gone back and located dates of Singapore government announcements to signpost the catalysts for amplified dislocation, policing, and unhappiness.

"...20th March 2020 Stricter safe distancing measures to prevent further spread of covid-19 cases"

Operators of venues which are accessible to the public are required to implement the necessary precautionary measures to ensure separation of at least a metre between patrons...Where seats are fixed, including our hawker centres, operators should ensure alternate seats are marked out. (Ministry of Health, Singapore, 2020, March 20)

Public spaces become restricted with red or yellow Xs. These Xs police social behaviour on public seats, playgrounds, outdoor exercise spaces, seating at cafes and restaurants. Disobedience can incur a \$10,000 fine or six months in jail (*The Straits Times*, 2020, March 27). Safe distancing ambassadors are hired from March 26th to ensure the public stay one metre apart from each other (Ang, 2020). Public seating can no longer host human bodies. In the public spaces of a city that I am getting to know, there is nothing to do but move along, just as critical philosopher Ranciere (2010) defined policing and the assertion of space as 'nothing but the space of circulation'. I can move through local places, but not linger to take time to get to know and be- or relate with.



Figure 11.1: "X demarcating do not sit here on bus seat"



Figure 11.2: 'No access to public seating'

"...24th March 2020 Tighter measures to minimise further spread of COVID-19"

22. Any Singapore resident or Long-Term Pass holder who leaves Singapore from 27 March 2020, in disregard of the prevailing travel advisories, will be charged at unsubsidised rates for their inpatient stay at public hospitals, if they are admitted for suspected COVID-19 and have onset of symptoms within 14 days of returning to Singapore. Singapore residents will also not be able to claim from MediShield Life or Integrated Shield Plans for these treatments at public and private hospitals.

23. Any work pass holder or his/her dependant who leaves Singapore from 27 March 2020 will be deprioritised for entry approval³ and could see significant delays before they are allowed to return to Singapore if they persist in travelling abroad and return infected. (Ministry of Health, Singapore, 2020, March 24)

If I leave Singapore there is a serious risk that I will not be permitted back in, and I am the only source of income for my partner and me, through an employer in Singapore. My son tells me he is okay and that I don't need to return. I accept that I am stuck in Singapore.

"...3rd April 2020 Singapore Government Multi-ministry taskforce announces circuit breaker¹ to commence from 7th April"

All workplaces close. Only suppliers of food and healthcare remain open. I accept being apartment-bound, and think I can continue to satiate the despair with chocolate, alcohol and swimming, but the apartment pool is taped, with heavy fines for usage². The humidity ranges from 70-90% in Singapore. Swimming is my saviour.

Pools no longer host swimmers.

Playgrounds no longer host playing children.

Outdoor fitness equipment no longer hosts exercisers.

Theatres no longer host performing artists and audiences.

Stadiums no longer host athletes, sports players and spectators.

Restaurants no longer host diners.

Libraries no longer host readers.

Museums no longer host visitors.

Night clubs, bars and hotels no longer host drinking and dancing.

¹ Singapore Government marketing speak for lockdown.

² See <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/residents-condominiums-amber-road-fined-covid-19-bca-12658112>

The whole notion of any hosting, even dinner parties, weddings, funerals, any kind of party has been and continues to be banned or controlled in size and spacing. The holo-bionts we can form are restricted to those we live with. Never before in my lifetime have I witnessed populations worldwide surrender their civil liberties to this scale. We are policed *en masse* to the minutest detail. The scale of movement control measures restricting Singapore constitutional rights (Neo & Lee, 2020), unthinkable months ago, are now every day. I can be fined if I swim in my apartment pool, if I go outside without a mask on, if I do not keep one metre away from others, if I meet with anyone outside my household. In Singapore, there is minimal objection to movement control measures (Woo, 2020), unlike Australia (e.g., see BBC News, 2020) and the USA (e.g., see Brennan, 2020). As Woo explains, Singapore is known for its high level of social compliance among citizens and residents, built on political centralisation from Singapore's single party-rule, stringent laws and extensive co-optation of political and business interests, since independence in 1965.

The only authorised purpose for movement *through* public spaces is for exercise or grocery collection, amplifying the policing of 'move along' (Ranciere, 2010). In public spaces, we are now reconfigured as exercise or grocery shopping automatons. I see hundreds of people running and walking, not to get anywhere, just for exercise every day. There is a mindless automation in their activity. We have become "centrally controlled, homeostatic and predictable" (Dempster, 1998 cited in Haraway 2016, p. 61) through centrally-governed anti-hosting measures.

"...between April 5th to April 12th community centres provide reusable masks to each Singapore household" (*Today Online* 2020, April 3)

I am entitled to a government-issued black reusable mask because I have a residential address to show the community centre representatives. I hate the mask; it silences me and blurs my vision as my glasses steam up with each exhale, reducing and impinging my interactivity with the world, yet it is mandated and policed protection³. Migrant labourers⁴ in Singapore do not receive free government-issued masks, because they do not have an address: they live in employer-provided dormitories (*The Online Citizen* 2020, May 16), in warehouses in industrial estates, some housing as many as 24,000 (Ratcliffe, 2020).

³ From April 14th mask wearing outside home is mandated (Ministry of Health, Singapore, 2020, April 14).

⁴ The migrant labourers who are the labour behind Singapore's built environment share sleeping rooms with as many as twenty others. They are black, largely immigrants from Bangladesh and India, who sacrificed significantly to earn SGD 500-700 a month in Singapore. They are not recognized as humans in Singapore, they have no rights, no health care. They are slaves, who are carted in the back of trucks, like cattle, squatting on the tray in rows – no seats, no seat belts.

Some appear to be squatters at the building sites where they labour. I hear their voices in the dark as I pass.

On 9th April I receive footage from a friend that a migrant worker had recorded of their relocated 'home' in a multistorey carpark (an attempt to control the spread of COVID-19): bunkbeds spread across the open space, no privacy, no cooking facilities, minimal toilets and electrical points (Min, 2020). Migrant labourers have only received masks from philanthropic donations. The Singapore Prime Minister only declared that the Singapore Government would count migrant labourers as a population of Singapore to provide COVID-19 preventative measures and healthcare after extensive cluster outbreaks occurred and international media exposure tainted Singapore's world leading reputation in controlling COVID-19 (Ratcliffe, 2020). For a long time, policing (as in the symbolic societal divisions defined by Ranciere [2010]), in Singapore has been conducted according to a narrative in which colonialism (and consequentially racial hierarchy) is celebrated (see Thum, 2019). The Singapore narrative is carefully curated as to what is made visible to the world and who can be heard or, as Ahmed asserts, "Citizenship provides a technology for deciding whose happiness comes first" (2010, p. 133). Though I am not a citizen of Singapore, my employment pass has higher status, because I am white and I am educated⁵ and I have the privilege of a listed residential address that the government counted. My health is privileged.

21st April 2020 announced tighter measures as well as an extension to the Circuit Breaker until 1 June 2020

If you do need to go out, then go by yourself, not as a group or as a family. Even when exercising outside, do so only by yourself, and only in your own neighbourhood. (PM Lee Hsien Loong, 21 April, 2020)

As I work daily on accepting liberty losses, I realize they are primarily comforts, middle-class comforts. I have become so accustomed to having these comforts readily met. I am wracked with a constant internal struggle with what I desire to make me feel happier and more comfortable to ease my despair, and loathing at the weakness of my selfishness. As Ahmed tells me "Happiness: a wish, a will, a want...[is] rather like the face of privilege" (2010, p. 2, 11).

Immobilized by my own despair, I purchase a sun lounger, to wallow in my middle-class miseries. The sun lounger consumes most of our balcony. I bring it into the lounge room obstructing our apartment door entrance. It is literally and physically a very large elephant in the room. Only the

⁵ The Singapore Ministry of Manpower has multiple classes of work passes and permits distinguished by qualifications, skill and salary. See <https://www.mom.gov.sg/passes-and-permits>

middle class and elite lounge, recline, sunbathe. I have no intention of sunbathing, but rather to gaze at the sky (my only access to nature from our apartment balcony) and surrender to the stillness.

During the apartment-bound time of lockdown, it is the rhythms of the sun that define time, as my lived daily patterns become the same: Rise, yoga, meditate, breakfast, work, walk, dinner, watch COVID-19 news reports, shower, bed. Yet I know time passes in my neighbourhood, as the grass and weeds grow to knee-high. In the lush green footpath micro-forests, insects and birds flourish; naturally-occurring holobionts permitted to intra-act. If I walk through the long grass, small moths emerge. Birds hover nearby to catch an insect feed. Public green spaces in Singapore are usually regularly groomed to reduce insects. My lack of daily insect encounters was alarmingly noticeable when I moved to Singapore. No ants in apartment. No spiders or spider webs noticed indoors or outdoors. No mosquitoes.⁶



Figure 11.3: *Curb-side growth*

Time is now indefinite. Little can be planned ahead with certainty, though I know with certainty I want to return to my sons, husband and home in Australia. In May, I buy two airline tickets (one after

⁶ The insect population flourished in lockdown and when the greenspaces were mowed and whippersnipped again, ants dispersed inside enmasse and mosquitoes, increasing the number of Dengue Fever infections (Li, 2020).

another with different airlines) in my efforts to reunite with family and homelands in June, post circuit-breaker. The tickets give me hope. One after the other they are cancelled. Air travel has made the whole world so accessible, but during the COVID-19 pandemic, scale of place is contained to local neighbourhood and state and country borders. Unfortunately, like many, I'm contained in one of the world's smallest countries.⁷

As I write this, it has been more than five months since residents of Singapore were allowed to leave. And only now are my patient Singaporean friends and colleagues starting to voice the loss of the capacity to travel. There are very few untamed natural spaces in Singapore. I long for the untamed spaces of Australia I corporeally know. An Australian friend tells me to go somewhere to view the horizon. Wide open spaces are readily accessible in Australia, at the beach, on mountain tops, in the desert. My Singapore Strait views are blocked by a metropolis of ships. The only access to a distant horizon in Singapore is by elevating to the top floors of high-rises. I don't have access. I watch Australian films and television, lingering over the nature scenes. An Australian friend sends footage from her deck for a film we are collaborating on. I weep at the weeping gum tree rustling in the breeze in the background, drawn to its soft rhythmic movement.

Through the months of stillness and apartment-boundness in Singapore, I have come to know that I don't belong here. My body and soul ache to be in the holobionts I know. The organisms whose aroma, touch and activity I align with, mutualistic symbiosis. I so long to be on Australian soil, yet I heart-wrenchingly know that I only have access there because of my white privilege (see Bunda et al, 2019) and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' existence, livelihood, dignity and sovereignty was/is denied through genocide, racism, homeland, culture and language severance, violation, theft of peoples and lands, and denial of human rights⁸: the activity of parasitic holobionts. As Goenpul distinguished professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson asserts

In the Australian context, the sense of belonging, home, and place enjoyed by the non-Indigenous subject— colonizer/migrant— is based on the dispossession of the original owners of the land and the denial of our rights under international customary law (p. 3).

Moreton-Robinson argues that white colonisers' sense of belonging in Australia is based on attachment to capital possession. I know as a white Australian I am deeply embroiled in this dirty materialistic possession. Yet the belonging I am aching for is to be with entities I know and love: family, friends,

⁷ Singapore is an island nation of 709 square kilometres (The World Bank, 2020) covered by one city. As an international air travel hub, Singaporean residents average nearly seven international trips across two years (Visa, 2018).

⁸ Australia is the only British settler society without a history of treaty making or constitutional recognition of its Indigenous Peoples (MacDonald & Muldoon, 2006).

trees, creatures, sand, soil, rocks, sea, rivers, lakes – to sensorily, bodily and reflectively be with and in the holobionts I know.

I deeply love and respect the original inhabitants and the ancient resonance of the land of what the colonisers have named Australia (based on Latin for 'southern'⁹). Yet how can I be here when my creation of home is only made possible by the dis-location of Aboriginal Australians. As a white Australian, I'm an unwanted pest – a parasite, multiplying by taking from the host – a toxic holobiont. My happiness comes at the cost of others. Ahmed reminds us that "Empire is justified in terms of the augmentation of human happiness" (2010, p. 123), but it is the coloniser's 'I know what is best for you' paternalistic perception of happiness. I am stained with the legacy of utilitarian happiness: "the universalisation of English morality" (Ahmed 2010, p. 25), the disturbing tension of longing to belong again on stolen land. I am on stolen land here too, but symbiosis is less aligned because there is less of my kind here and I have not spent 50+ years attuning to the rhythms of this land and organisms. I have had more time to world-with and know the situated and historical systems (Haraway 2016, p. 58) of my homelands in Australia (see Phillips & Bunda, 2018; Phillips et al, 2020).

"...Circuit breaker ends June 2nd 2020 Phase One"

At this announcement, my co-habitants of Singapore I have relatings-with are hopeful of returned access to movement and services. However the only businesses to open in phase one post 'circuit breaker' are: "motor vehicle servicing, aircon servicing, basic pet grooming services, school bookshops and retail shops selling school uniforms will be allowed to resume" (Singapore Government, 20 May, 2020).

Singapore is a classist society ruled by elite¹⁰ desires, illustrated by the businesses to open in Phase One. To have the right to own, register and use a vehicle you need to pay in the range of SGD30,000 for a Certificate of Entitlement (that lasts either 5 or 10 years) and you have to bid, as there are a limited number of certificates (Tan, 2020), so the wealthy are more likely to secure Certificates, let alone purchase a car which usually ranges above SGD100,000 (Feng, 2020). Small pure bred 'designer' dogs have also become the trending status symbol, with pet grooming salons in most blocks in my neighbourhood. The needs of the privileged are apparently in person, and now in the permissions in the new accesses of Phase One. I see Ranciere's (2010) explanation of policing clearly at

⁹ For many centuries, 'Terra Australis Incognita' or 'unknown south land' was entrenched in European imaginary. English explorer Matthew Flinders, suggested the name Australia "as more agreeable to the ear" (Government of South Australia)

¹⁰ Singapore Ministers earn between SGD 600 000 to 935 000 and the Prime Minister's earns SGD 2.2 million (earning at least five times more than other world leaders) <http://theindependent.sg/no-surprise-singapores-pm-is-still-the-highest-salary-among-all-world-leaders/>

play here, as the symbolic division of society by that which is separated and excluded and the participation that is allowed. Through such policing of who is counted (those with an address, not the transient, the homeless and dormitory dwellers) and what activity is permissible (home containment aside from seeking food supplies and car maintenance and dog grooming), our functions, places and ways of being are dictated. Competitive holobionts (humans with status symbols possessions) are prioritised.

"...18th June 2020 Phase Two commences"

Parks, beaches, pools, retail outlets all reopen. Dining out is permitted. Weddings are restricted to 10 persons and funerals twenty (Ministry of Health, 2020, June 15). I dine out and I swim. They are momentary pleasures. Our movements are surveilled, with every entry and exit to every business traced (through QR scanning and identity card checks) and our temperatures recorded.

I book a flight to Australia carefully negotiating timings and destination according to state quarantine charges and my face to face teaching commitments. Two weeks later I receive text messages and an email that this flight too is cancelled. I book another and move into temporary accommodation. I work, eat and try to sleep. Since I moved to Singapore, I have had trouble sleeping. Perhaps another sign of unaligned/ un-attuned symbiosis.

I sit on a public bench (not marked with a cross) to make a phone call to wish my brother in Sydney a happy birthday. A man wearing a black t-shirt and safety vest marked Ministry of Manpower, quickly appears by my side:

"Excuse me, you cannot sit there."

"Why?" I ask.

"Because if you sit there then others will, and a crowd will gather."

I then pace up and down the street, as the only permissible activity is to move along, while I talk muffled through my mandated mask to my brother at his permissible dinner party of 4. I feel I have no bionts here. My efforts in relatings, are repeatedly blocked and resisted. I float solo in my automaton practices.

Prompt 21 "What is going on here?"

I am in a room on my own. Virginia Woolf (1928/2014) wrote wisdom in this space nearly a hundred years ago:

...if we escape a little from the common sitting-room and see humans not always in relation to each other but in relation to reality; and the sky, too, and the trees or whatever it may be in themselves; if we look past Milton's bogy, for no human being should shut out the view; if we

face the fact, for it is a fact, that there is no arm to cling to, but that we go alone and that our relation is to the world of reality and not only to the world of men and women... (p. 138)

COVID-19 social distancing measures have limited human to human relatings and human to public space relatings and stirred questions of reality and existence. Through reflective questioning in the pause of lockdown, I have come to corporeally realise the holobionts to which I belong; where I am whole and safe and sound in symbiotic relatings to which I am attuned. They are embodied memories of the land that I am drawn to return to and make/world-with (sympoiesis). Imagined happiness: etched with nostalgia from the past and projected to the future (Ahmed, 2010).

Every step I take, every bite I eat, I feel more alienated in Singapore; this is not where I want to be, this is not what I want to eat. I recognise my suffering and what produces the suffering; I have become acutely conscious of alienation. As Ahmed (2010) describes it, "to become conscious of alienation is to become conscious of how one's being has been stolen" (p. 167). I feel estranged. I am seen and felt as a foreigner. Ahmed writes of revolutionary consciousness in the affect alien as "feeling at odds with the world, or feeling that the world is odd" (p. 168). I sense that many may feel such revolutionary consciousness as our movements and participation are policed to extremes we have not known before. A local-to-global sensing of discord, as Ahmed expounds, because "You do not flow; you are stressed; you experience the world as a form of resistance in coming to resist the world" (p. 169). The world is trying to resist the virus whilst resisting each other.

COVID-19 has been the world's main agenda for 2020 dominating the news and conversations. Scientists, the world over, are studying how the COVID-19 virus hosts on humans. There are other species entangled, but in default human-centrism they are scarcely mentioned, except to serve us (eg, hamsters in vaccine trials, in Scott & Lloyd, 2020) or to blame (eg, bats as source of virus in Hayes, 2020). Many of us are wandering aimlessly, lost, fatigued by the policing and uncertainty. Perhaps we are in a moment of suspension "not sure even what it means to being human, or to being alive" (Ahmed 2010, pp.191-192). All I can name with certainty is that I need to be with kin: in/with the holobionts I am attuned to. To be human and alive, I bone-achingly sense it is time to make-with kin, all those species with whom I am in assemblages with (Haraway, 2016) in local spaces/ecosystems/ neighbourhoods with kind attention to our intra- and inter relatings' symbiosis.

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