

# 5.4 Time and Stasis

Reading and Doing Ethnography  
Social Anthropology 314

Social life isn't just about motion  
in time; time also stops.

# The stasis of being a student

*I observed a lone female student sitting with her book and cigarette in one of the seating areas under the tree. I watched as she anxiously and continuously stopped reading to look around her. I looked at other students, alone and groups, all of which continuously looked around them as if waiting for something to happen. The only conclusion that I have is that they're looking for something or someone to distract them from their work or other friends – waiting to be seen. This space reflects the interiority of students – on one hand we are frantic, stressed about work, lectures and deadlines, and yet on the other we are waiting to be seen, waiting to find ourselves and struggling to just be in our own space between all this. Therefore, the time students have between classes is entirely occupied with the hope of the next thing to happen.*

# The stasis of Franschhoek in the mid 80s

*I left South Africa because I couldn't stand the waiting any longer for something, anything, to happen. (42)*

*The life of those white South Africans with whom I talked... impressed me as somehow truncated. I found signs of anxiety, helplessness, vulnerability, and rage that were not very far from the surface. Their experience was not open-ended, expansive, and adventurous. It did not elicit optimism and positive excitement. It was limited... mechanical, numb, and muted. Dead would be an exaggeration. It was infused with uncertainty or at times what appeared to me to be a compensatory overcertainty, a stubborn and harsh pragmatism. (43)*

# Questions

- >> What is the great diversity of morbid symptoms that Crapanzano refers to?
- >> What is implied by the title?
- >> I find it strange that even though this was based on the Apartheid era, little has changed even though so much time has passed. South Africans still seem to have the basic fear of becoming a community but yet judgement of their country seems one of the most common pastimes.
- >> Why does Crapanzano, describe Ruth Visser as a "handsome woman" at the beginning?
- >> Why do you think the British were so concerned and aware of themselves and their behavior/culture when living amongst their white counterpart, the Afrikaner?

# Questions

- >> Why did he not introduce 'otherness' earlier into the chapter?
- >> Why does she sympathize with the coloureds ?
- >> why did she sympathize with the coloureds?
- >> Being from the states while in Wyndal could you relate to the whites of South Africa? and due to the fact that the Afrikaners won the war against the British do you feel that the Afrikaners had more pride in their heritage and more pride in being white?
- >> Does waiting come with the sympathetic emotion?
- >> Is Ruth Visser justifying theft and other criminal behaviour while at the same time in a sense accusing the "volk" of being the culprits? As she says "but they have no one".

# Questions

- >> Page 22 states that the researcher came to South Africa to study the "effect on domination on the dominating" with the black-white divide and that he was an American. Seeing that the researcher proposed to do research in a racially sensitive country, doesn't his choice of words [domination - white/ dominating - black] adhere to racial superiority as he is doing research on the dominated group as white on the minority group as black. I find this quote problematic and offensive.
- >> What does Crapanzano mean by saying "The past gives us security while we are waiting?"
- >> Can ideologies like racism truly change over time? Just reading about the way Ruth raises her kids makes me question this. Because, as seen in today's world many people can be aware that it is wrong for a long time but you would still have ignorant people. Superiority and inferiority complex comes into play.
- >> Could time/stasis in this case also be applied to tradition in the sense that people feel as if something has always been done, then it cannot be changed?



Writing exercises

Describe a moment when things  
happened faster than you could  
keep track

Describe a moment when time  
stopped

Describe some rhythms from your  
fieldsite