

**Open**

**Stellenbosch**

**Public anthropology,  
again.**

# **Public anthropology is about communicating**

1. Forming an anthropological view about the world.
2. Teaching it to people, writing for it, transmitting it.

**But before you can  
communicate...**

**Listen first.**

**How does an  
anthropologist listen?**

# **How does an anthropologist listen?**

- Surrender your structural narcissism.
  - Tune in to their interests.
  - Tune in to the context.
    - Listen slowly.

**To whom does one listen?**

**— to people not like you;**

**to the "other."**



**This does not presume that you should give up any of your own views, just that you should slow them down momentarily.**

**I'll listen first**

# Questions

- What do you observe autoethnographically, as a student in this module?
- What is something you would change about this module?
- What is something you like about this module?
- What other question would you want me to ask you?

**Let's listen to Ruth**

**An interviewee of Vanessa's.**

## **Activist friendships**

***Ruth: So like friendship? Like my closest friends on campus happened because of Open Stellenbosch. I was reflecting on it a lot at the beginning of the year about how if I wasn't part of Open Stellenbosch I wouldn't know pretty much everyone I know. And it was such a scary thing because I've grown so much because of the people I know and if they weren't there, who would I be.***

***And it occurred to me that at the beginning I was assimilating into Stellenbosch culture and turning a blind eye, and just like I need to get my degree, I need to get out of here and the sooner out of here the better. But then there were people I could turn to and they were like you don't need to assimilate and you don't need to turn a blind eye.***

# A question

***Van: So how do you then actually constructively and effectively survive in this space if, to put it bluntly, it is a violent space for you to exist in?***

***Ruth: I have lots of trips to Cape Town. I spent my first semester this year nearly every single weekend in Cape Town. It's like going between friends' houses. So the girl that I became really close friends with, she had anxiety and her anxiety was just getting a lot worse here in Stellenbosch. And she couldn't sleep anymore, and her parents said we're pulling you out.***



***And one of the first weekends, I went back this semester, her mom said this is your room, every time you come back this is where you'll stay because you need to get out of that space. And that support was really useful because my parents aren't here uhm, my mom's family stays in the Western Cape but they're not as fully understanding as my parents are.***

# Acquiring skills

***I am positive that something will happen again and we will be needed. I mean we trained people, Perxy and I did people training sessions because both of us had done public speaking and debating before, so before you could speak on behalf of OS you need to be trained and we did the training. I mean Perxy knew the statements like the back of his hand. I dealt with interviews and responding to questions. I learnt so many skills in OS.***

# **Practical and theoretical education**

***Had I left, I would not have gotten as much out of classroom education as I did. I've gotten such a rich education now, uhm, practical and theoretical education because of OS which I would not have gotten elsewhere at such a young age. I think that's really important. Sure I can like join other organisations when I'm older, but that you don't learn in your first year. You don't learn how to speak, write press statements, chair meetings, how to figure out how you gonna get a mass meeting going.***

# **Safe space?**

***Van: Has the movement provided a space of refuge  
to just lay it all out?***

***Ruth: I think Steve Biko was that space. But end of  
2nd semester, I felt it had become such a toxic  
space. We had done so much throughout the year  
and we thought everything was going well.***

***But like, especially like during FeesMustFall, one of the nights we were bringing comrades from UWC here. I never want to repeat a night like that. I was sitting on twitter, on Facebook, on my phone and someone else's phone; calling and communicating with people at UWC telling them this is the spot, this is the car, the license plate. Calling people who were driving, saying look out for this person, this is what they are wearing etc.***

***Alongside trying to organise food and medical supplies because people had been shot at. I remember feeling stressed out being there. And I think so many people felt that way. It was no longer a space where we could come to for safety and let loose. It had become such a stressful space, people were running there during FeesMustFall for refuge. It was stressful and people were feeling anxious and stressed because we didn't know what was going to happen next.***

**What themes  
emerge here?**

# **What themes emerge here?**

- What counts as Stellenbosch culture?
- Need for multiple spaces, alternative homes
- Spaces of refuge become spaces of anxiety
  - Meaning of education
  - Origin of friendship



# **Racism and sexism**

***So we were talking about why South African society is not equal. Myself and a group of people said it's because of the economic disadvantages and the way the society was structured that has led to it. And I turned around and this guy said to me "well you're only saying that because you're brown" and I was like "no!", and he said I need to go back to Zuma and the monkeys and, started pulling monkey faces at me.***

***I just looked at him and I was just like I'm so confused. What are you doing? I said to myself this is a weird place to be. And the woman who was also shouted at because we were talking about feminism, the two of us became like best friends. We stuck together.***

***Van: Do you think you  
experience and your  
experience in the movement  
would have been different had  
you been a man?***

***Ruth: Oh yes! Definitely!***

***So, I feel like for me as a woman I had to constantly prove that I can be there, I am smart, and I can be intellectually like whatever especially because I was a lot younger than a lot of the people. I was in first year and quite a lot were in third year, post grade and some second year. So for myself I constantly felt like I had to prove that I can do this, I can be in the same space as you and I do what I'm reading about.***