

Public Anthropology

Social Anthropology 242

2017 (4th term)

Who am I, your lecturer?

Eli Thorkelson

I have lived in South Africa for six days.

Who are your tutors?

→ Vanessa Mpatlanyane

→ Jacques Punt

Outline of the course

1. Anthropology, publics and politics
2. Historical anthropology of student protest
3. #FeesMustFall

Assignments

- Two written tests (21 Sept, 19 Oct)
- Two teaching exercises (29 Sept, 6 Oct)
 - Short opinion piece (13 Oct)
 - Participation

Participation

- Lecture and tutorial attendance
- Submission of in-class exercises
- Participation in class debates and group work in tutorials

Questions about Language

**What is public
anthropology
?**

Does SunLearn work?

What is public anthropology?

- Provide policy guidance.
- Reshape how anthropology reaches the public.
 - Study what publics are.
 - Study what anthropology is.
- Study the historical circumstances in which our course takes place.

How can anthropology serve the public?

- New criteria for choosing research projects, like "public interest."
- Changing how we relate to research subjects.
 - Changing our research processes (e.g. PAR).
 - Changing how we distribute knowledge.

Critically examining the public

- Publics are plural: there's more than one of them.
- Publics are the object of boundary maintenance.
 - And sites of identity formation.

Critically examining anthropology

- Anthropology is historically entangled with the colonial state.
- Anthropology is a public; teaching is a public.
- Anthropology is also plural: not just one thing.

Our historical circumstances

- We are in a university
- Universities have a long tradition of student protest
- Recently there have been student protests here

- Can anthropology say anything useful about these protests?
 - What can we learn from them?
 - Can we then teach what we learn?

What is the point of education?

Gaining knowledge?

Or learning to share it with others?

The possibility of a critical anthropology after apartheid

There have been demands to resuscitate anthropology by making it more 'relevant', more 'practical', and by putting an anthropological repertoire to use in service of 'public good'.

The possibility of a critical anthropology after apartheid

Practically, this has meant anything from a commitment to transforming anthropological knowledge into development policy, to the equipping of students with the kinds of market-friendly skills that could effectively deliver them jobs at the end of their anthropology degrees.

The possibility of a critical anthropology after apartheid

'Public anthropology'... seems to invoke, crucially, a distinction between the university and life 'out there' in the 'real world'.

The possibility of a critical anthropology after apartheid

South African anthropology was tarnished with the brush of apartheid to a much larger degree than any of the other social sciences, and had to be able to show its relevance to a new project of democratic nation-building or face extinction.

And for an example of what we might examine...

Combahee River Statement [1977]

In the practice of our politics we do not believe that the end always justifies the means. Many reactionary and destructive acts have been done in the name of achieving “correct” political goals...

Combahee River Statement [1977]

We believe in collective process and a nonhierarchical distribution of power within our own group and in our vision of a revolutionary society. We are committed to a continual examination of our politics as they develop through criticism and self-criticism as an essential aspect of our practice.

**Can public anthropology also critically
examine activism?**

Or revolutionary politics?