

### *A Testament To District 6:*

A auto-ethnographic exploration into how the District Six Community came together during the Covid Pandemic as residents to prevent the spread of Covid-19 and at the same time created a collective consciousness.

### *Research Question:*

To what extent has my experiences and senses of 'home' making been affected, shaped and influenced by 'being' in District Six during the Covid-19 Pandemic as a Neurodivergent Individual.

### *Methods/ Materials and Themes*

The entry point of the following project is to convey it through a Qualitative Research methodology. This approach is justified by doing these practices and exploring it through qualitative driven data and reflection, observations, and conversation.

Shared senses of this community are intersectional. I therefore had to re-familiarise and situate my own positionally within the context of the how the pandemic affected my movements within District Six.

Points of data collection are encompassed by participant interviews, through open ended questions and dialogue.

Each aspect of exploration encompasses the writings of the following auto-ethnography as they are multi-focal yet personal; they allow for an insider, and outsiders perspective.

As a neuro-divergent Anthropologist and to the best of my knowledge I had to experience the interpersonal connections in the community through "differing mental or neurological function from what is considered typical or normal (Oxford English Dictionary, 2021)". In other words, neurodiversity "recognises that both brain function and behavioural traits are simply indicators of how diverse the human population is (Resnick, 2021)".

The value of this is demonstrated in this project by following methodological approaches in theory and reflexive practice.

Based on my experiences of District Six's scenery during the Covid 19 Pandemic I am using an auto-ethnographic and reflexive epistemological approach that seeks to bring out the true nuances of the difference between me being in District Six as a neurodivergent individual and a culture that I have crossed paths with and come to know as a community.

My data sample derives from the diverse individuals whose ages and gender differ however, as for their 'home' making senses became the contextual importance for the purposes of research. To achieve this, I always had to be aware and critical towards myself and be reflective outside of my own space.

The following image you see is the 'park'. A central theme and common space where residents gather and walk past each day. Every day there are different faces from the previous day.



There were days when there were no faces to be seen especially when the children of the community would go to school during the pandemic.

*Silence echoed through an empty park.*

My mother and I moved to District Six from the Southern Suburbs. Immediately once this was known, we became District Six's newest arrivals and what struck me immediately was how closely we became the observed as we were the outsiders from a privileged background.

My mother and I became the objectified subject, whilst those who already were in the community very much embodied unconsciously as the role of the observer.

Coming to understand this, I had to detach the Ethnographic and Anthropological rules of academia and through this detachment, attach myself to the rules of everyday living in District Six.

During the past week, I have been doing a lot of reflection as to what Anthropological Fieldwork is and I find that I am still finding myself on a path of questioning the past three years of 'doing' Anthropology.

I asked myself the following as I move across the streets of District Six:

*How does one 'do' Anthropological Fieldwork?*

What may make sense to me as an Anthropologist may not necessarily make sense to another Anthropologist, however, I have come to realise that over the past three years, especially the first year Anthropology for me has been done and taught in the classroom, and in first year, we as Anthropologists were teased slightly by the beauty and potential of fieldwork as we were required to produce weekly journals.

Little did I know back then that 'doing' anthropology is much more than this. I then went back and looked at my journals from my first year and saw the potential of doing true fieldwork.

For me Anthropology was not truly reflexive, if I were to take the approach I did in the first year, my observations would be factually inaccurate and bias.

It would not adequately describe the stories in the streets of District Six and its people and community, especially over the duration of a week's project.

Landscaping District Six during the pandemic has recently been rather quiet and what stood out in these moments of stillness as I took my time to re-familiarise myself with the community as a conscious process. It's strange to think that we have come to a point in time where our freedom is restricted and when those restrictions are lifted, we choose to confine ourselves even more?

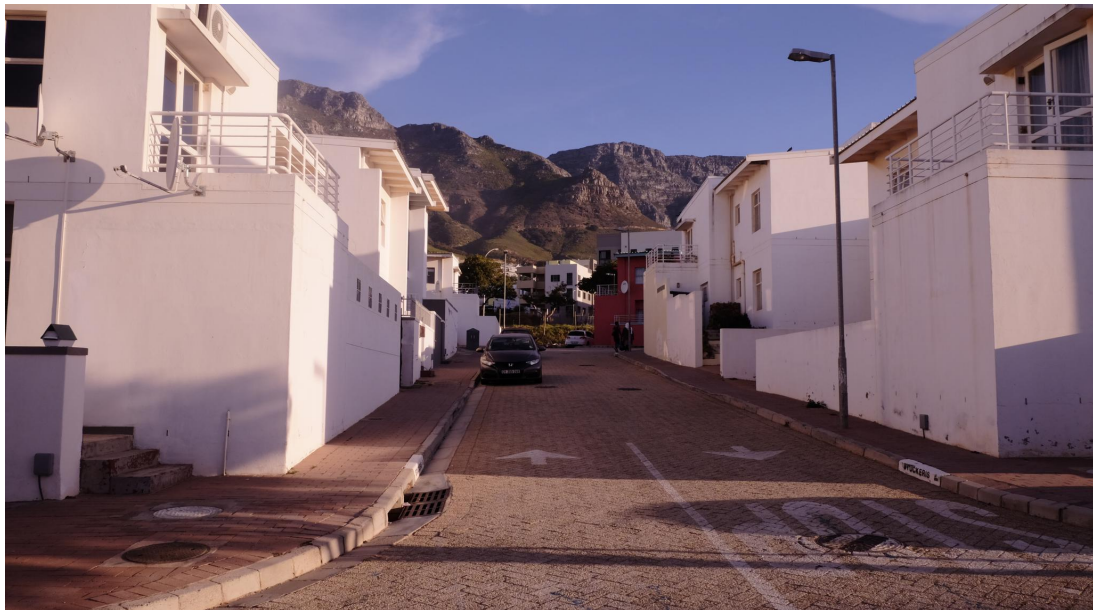
These are my fears I have come across in doing an Auto-Ethnography as an insider to the District Six community.

To distance myself from this fact would be cruel towards myself.

Thus, instead of doing this, it came light as to how I might express sensory experience? It's become countless now, adapting to the normative behavioural patterns of a community.

*Taking a Minute:*

*Scene Scapes*



### *Taking a Second minute.*

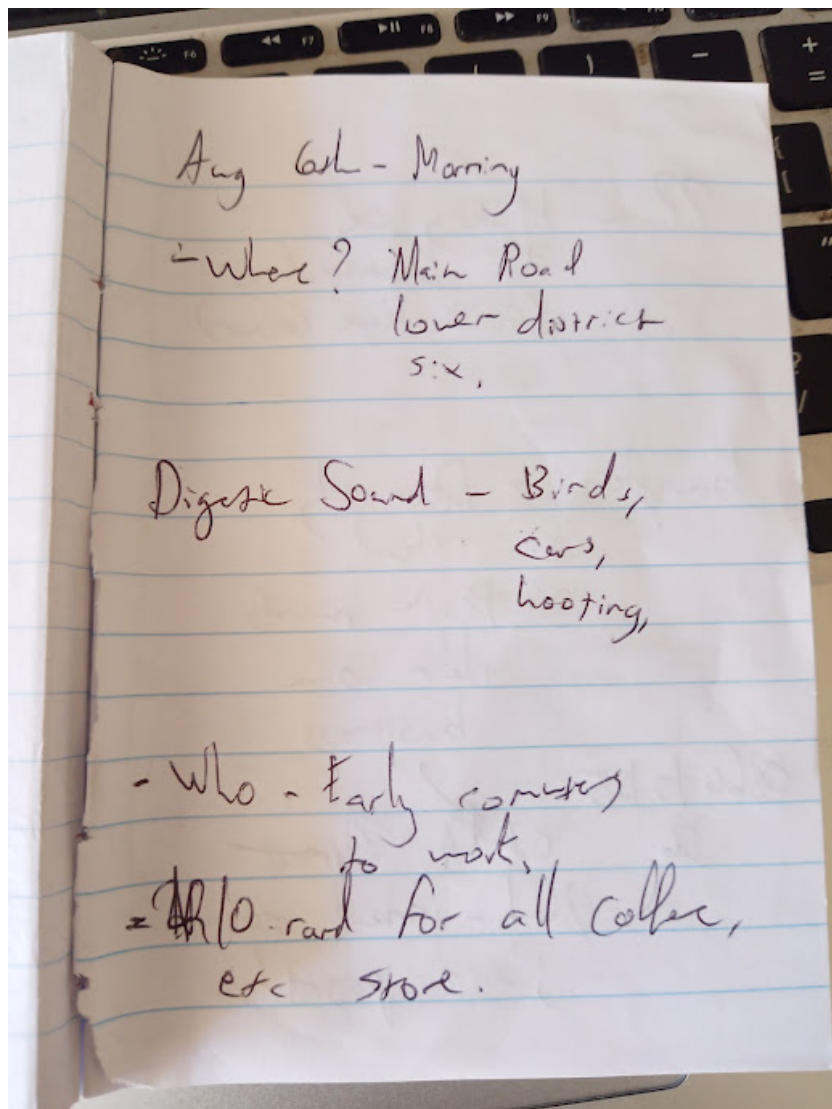
Looking back at the journey of phases we embarked upon as a collective class of scattered Anthropologists began at the point of self-reflection and then getting accustomed to using our bodies and senses as research instruments.

This was especially important for my own curiosity as I looked around my room, from a central location. (see photos below). I then took the experience we did in class which saw us look at the space we occupy and how we do so with our bodies and senses. In praxis I walked around in the park because of its centrality. Doing so through a neurodivergent sensory experience was very blurry. And here's where a-bit of luck strikes.

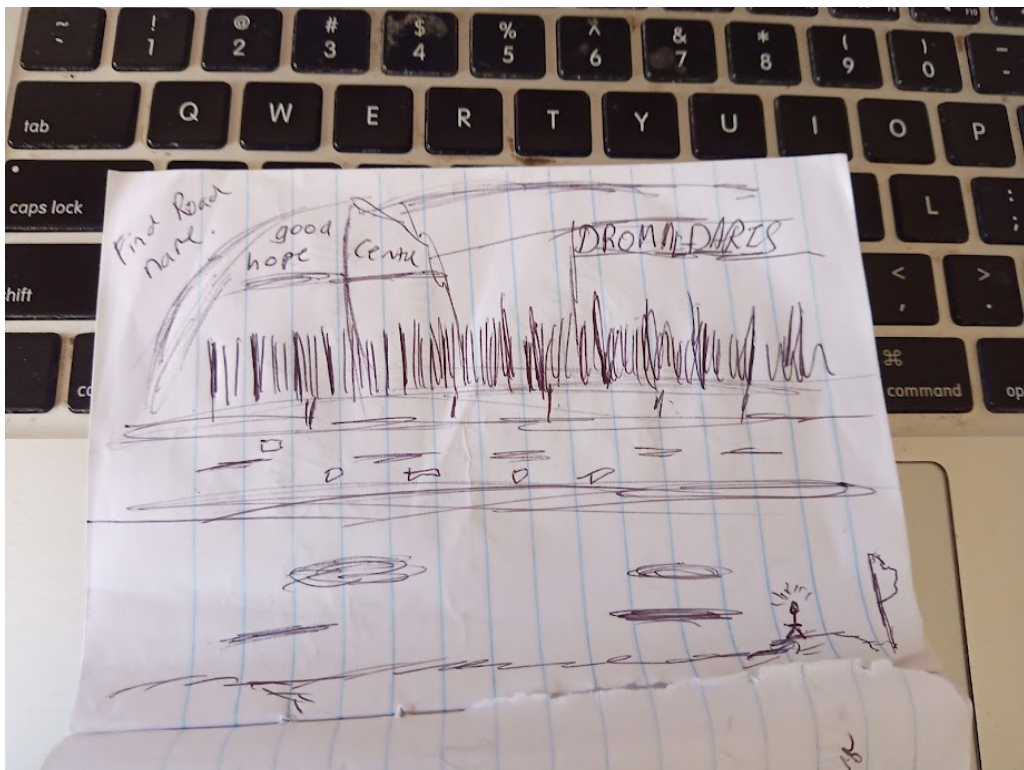
I suffer from myopia which means that almost anything about 6m away from me begins to blur almost as if it were a mirage. Respectfully, taking some agency in preparation for the field trip knowing I would not have my glasses, I began taking what Ethnographic terminology calls "field notes" which are intended to be a point of entry into auto-ethnography as I sought to situate myself, a process of grounding oneself.

An excerpt from my field notes;

The point of this ethnographic practice is to take down as much detail as possible (hence sense-scapes). The reasoning for this is that our memories are faulty and when you look back at your research, the days blend into one another. They really, really do.

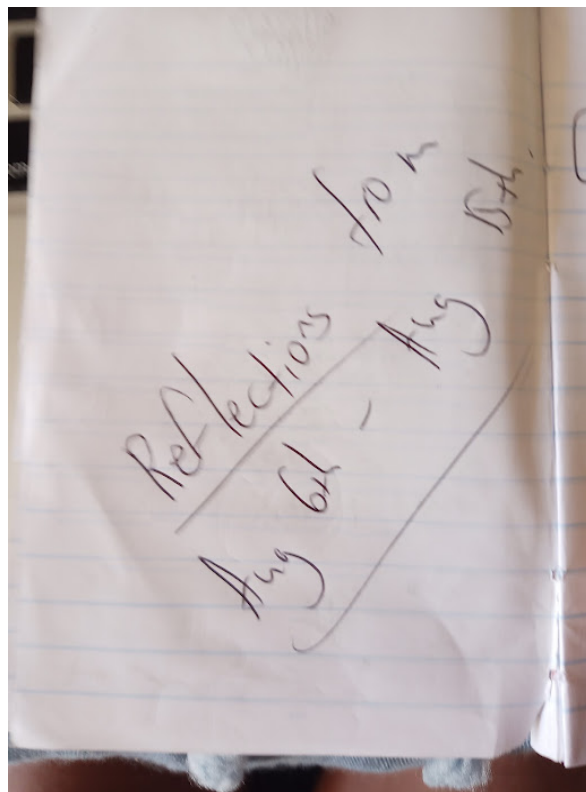






~~SECRET~~  
Code Switching in  
Do -  
Drug use - "Tik kope"  
↓  
as a sites  
observed? Ethical  
or not?  
need to decl.  
What happens  
when you can understand

As I explored the field on this early Friday morning, the District six was very quiet. Many of the children within the community were going to school and the misty due was starting to lift as the sun started to rise. The vast potential of the paper and pen in relation to practicing field notes is how it brings to the forefront sub-topics of exploration, topics of discussion which yield both relevance and content towards the overall purpose of the following ethnographic expression.



[Embodying the Anthropologist.](#)

Tuesday September 21st, 02:41

I'd like to say, my mind does it; wondering, found somewhere side-tracked, I think?

The first relation that comes to mind is the one I have with myself and who I am in relation to the pandemic itself and how over the past two years, the pandemic undoubtedly has changed my social relations. I cannot ignore that fact that as an introvert and neurodivergent by nature, the world I experience is psychologically different than neurotypical individuals. Hence, I find myself here at 3am writing.

It beckoned me as a I tried to sleep; I can't wake up at 6am to finish for 8.

I love the quietness and the underground techno music. Right now, I am glad. Last year I spent half the at my mothers and half at Res. Come this year, I have been at my mom's home and for the past two months we have been hosting a student from Saudi Arabia who has come to South Africa to learn English, and he teaches me Arabic too. Which is cool.

So, at home there are two people I interact with on a daily basis. As someone who loves their own company, maintaining connections has been so difficult.

I cannot answer cold calls (out of the blue), my response time is very delayed and so is my sense of time (neurodivergent 'time blindness').

Sensory factors have very much defined my navigation of space and time with people and sadly, my glasses broke over 4 months and being without them is not a great experience.

Not having my glasses has disabled me from doing more I guess, but it's okay. Under the regulations, I have adhered to them in some ways. It's also very much been a year of people coming and going in and out of my life, assuring myself that I take lesson from this and that's been a common theme this year.

Unforeseen circumstances have shaped my navigating social relations. I have two friends who come over regularly, otherwise it's been me and my mom mostly.

*An example of HOW **not** to write an appeal.*

-----

On the 29th of December 2020 at 16:17 here I find myself looking at what I wrote 272 days ago. As it reads below

'Home'

an oddly strange yet fulfilling time, I think when writing what you are planning to document for your appeal to do Special Course; the community of district 6 could be the course material

Home is District Six.

02:55 - Stuyvesant

03:01 - Sits infant of desk - intention (work)

03:17 - 6 minutes of not doing work.

03:17 - Told myself I was going to work.

04:53 - sense anything new?

04:54 - proceeds to put headphones on and plays 'another idea' by Marc Rebiellet.

The song opens a little like this "You know sometimes I just feel like I'm in a, like a creative rut you know? There's no possible way I could come up with another idea... another idea". And as his voice iterates "you know when you can come up with another idea, fuck it dude. Just get up, get infant of your shit, pump it out baby. No one gives a fuck about your creative integrity.

None of it matters.

All that matters is that you're here, working. Making shit. Yuh. Uh another idea 'go ahead and make that shit'.

Relevance towards the theme of 'social ties in pandemic times' is a unique thematic expression. And in doing this project with full awareness of its relation towards the essence of Communities.

District Six encompasses a very large part of South African history. During Apartheid, people of colour were evicted from District Six based on their race and class by the Apartheid Government.

A few days ago, I left the house (lol) and as an Anthropologist I couldn't deny the nature of District Six to be a rose with many thorns. Covid 19's effect on the community was mild, observationally we hardly had any cases of high infection rates. And it's interesting to note; I remember my mom mentioning her own observations and knowledges in navigating District Six which is both our field.

Her 'fieldwork' was how she observed that majority of the shop keepers at the spaza shops in District Six, throughout the entire pandemic continued to operate with the same staff, day, and night; shoutout to the Bodega's of South Africa. Always a good time, many memories.

I've never written an auto-ethnography and I found it very familiar except I was not in a space of immersion where I was the outsider.

I was not someone was from another community which just made it a lot more personal and, uncomfortable as a neurodivergent Ethnographer navigating a pandemic of long-term immersion.

### [Is my project doable in a week?](#)

Ok, so this how my days usually go. Last week I went to one the vintage stores in Observatory, and at the time I had no cap so every single time I wake up, my hair looks like a... umm... whatever, it looks all messed up, and I was too lazy to take a shower or to wet it in the sink.

Note that I also wore my earphones. Anyway, walked into one of the stores, eating my food bar?? saw a few things outside the store and then it all went down.

As I walked into the store which was about 3 seconds something caught my attention. A CAP (wow, amazing comedy skills), but what caught my attention wasn't just the cap it was a shoe and the colour; off white.

Don't really know what to add here, lemme get back to doing nothing.

[End.](#)

[Cont.](#)

*From the 6'*

It was about 4:30 and a soccer ball fell into our yard. Definitive, the years AHEAD had been shaped for a momentary action. Going to the park to see who and why this ball was being tossed around? Nature's boy had been to be scared to actually step into their soon to be intertwined realities.

Many days saw us sitting outside together in the park, smoking a few cigarettes with the usual suspects.

We were very much the youngsters of District Six. I think the beauty of identity is that despite my background; Gamza and I had an instant connection, and this connection was not about me trying to immerse myself as it was organic. As for the insights I gained into the community from our friendship; I cannot replace them. He has taught me the ins and outs of the streets. He taught me survival skills needed within a predominately Coloured Community. "Remember that night before the Pandemic?" Gamza laughs and looks at me.



*This was that night before.*





Shobuz who has shared many of his stories with me and how coming to South Africa was their only option when it came to their socioeconomic status, how they came to South Africa correlates to many of the stories in District Six that belong to coming, belonging, and existing families within District Six.

The time during the pandemic Shobuz speaks about is the regularity of customers who on each day would support his family's business. A mere smile makes his day as he smiled for me, which made mine.

And as much as they may not be native to District Six historically, they certainly form a large part of the community when it comes to accessible goods and how we as a community sustain ourselves with the products they have on offer. A significant aspect of multi-species Anthropology as we as individuals in District Six are brought together by these store owners.

There have been times where I have been too scared to walk to the shops, what happened was that over a span of time. I saw a glimpse into the cultural lifestyles. The excessive adrenaline thrill, that knowingness you are going against your religious belief you mask so well. I saw myself being easily introduced again to a community as such. There have been moments where Doodles would come and seek attention from children due to his ostracised status in District Six for his association with the numbers gang.

Linguistically, look at their hand singles. It's not just a symbol, it's a sign for your own crown.

It's a way of performing without verbal expression an emotion, a statement of who you are in the community amongst a group of men each with their own struggles.



[Where are the the manne now?](#)

District Six, as presentable as it may be to an outsider, is land negotiated territorially, with there being 7 gangs in rivalry.

Anees was taking his time the day he told me, and at first, he was hesitant, very much like to time Junaid told me about his use of crystal meth. My inquisitive self-went with him on an excursion to the terrace. He asked to borrow R20 rand, and I had some loose change, it was at this point where I asked myself, wait, what. This is the illusion of truths, what we do behind the shadows.

To be behind a shadow is different than being amongst them. Being Neurodivergent, shadow work is required.

In the image below the view from my yard, a year, and a half ago there was no building. Chapel Towers did not exist, it was not a part of District Six and now it is. Even during a pandemic, they still managed to have the apartment buildings up by their due date.



[ella. Gentrification](#)

### Ethical Considerations:

Approaching the field of district six ethically under lockdown conditions made my approach a bit easier to do. It also allowed me to explore both its thematic explorations into how being a neurodivergent individual, has experienced and shaped by communal ties and to what extent have the community members during covid 19 Pandemic taken action in their own hands during this time.

A time whereby a community came together, a community once ostracised to the outskirts of the Cape.

One important take away as to the implementation of ethical practices, this was done under strict adherence to the Covid 19 regulations of the lockdown stage. Interviewing was done with 1.5m social distancing, that was rather odd as we became so accustomed to one another that it was almost too formal to ask to sit at this distance.

However being aware of the focus points of research and as a researcher I had to ensure that this was upheld.



Having embarked on the journey of the virtual field-trip, there was a period of hesitancy in the beginning of the process. At first, I had to think of how I was to approach the field-trip, frankly without any knowledge beforehand.

And then we began, we began as a class and then broke into three groups depending on our chosen topic, mine was topic 2 which was community ties during pandemic times.

Looking back, throughout the entire field-trip I experienced growth, uncertainty, confusion, sending voice notes to Yusra that were too long... 20 minutes... and so I was flagged for that, but I didn't take it personally as I could not have asked for any other mentor.

The field-trip itself asked us to put together an ethnographic expression that did not have an appearance before my inquiry into it. Starting this expression, I decided to do a part auto-ethnography. The field was District Six and for the auto-ethnographic essence I placed myself within my home environment. And it was not as easy as I thought it would be, and I really enjoyed it not being easy as one would think doing an ethnographic expression within one's own community would be doable yes? However, the nature of my doing and being within the landscape of District Six had me re-familiarise my positionally towards my environment and community. Being accustomed to District Six during the pandemic, I quickly realised how intimate my expression would be and this was partly due to the framing of my part auto-ethnographic inclusion. This saw me come to the realization that my project was not a single 'story' riddled about my being. Thus, I had to find a balance. I had to be graceful towards the nature of the project; remembering that although I may have so many things I want to bring out, I need to be contextual and craft my project coherently.

My chosen methodology was that of a qualitative approach, the reason being was that it allowed for an in-depth insight into the lives and experiences of the District Six community.

Instead of solely focusing on singular narratives which I could of done through open ended interviews, I chose to focus on the quality of the overall environment of District Six during the pandemic and how the community fostered a sense of 'togetherness'.

Respecting the community was extremely important as District Six has a legacy, a harsh one and writing about the community, I made it very clear to myself that I was to create an expression that did not come across as an interrogation.

What I found to be interesting in observing my community was how much solidarity had come about due to the pandemic and its restrictions. It's almost as if District Six was protected.

As for the data collected, once always gathered and from then on, I would bring back and show what I have done to those involved in the project and I did this to ensure the represented participants did not feel exploited and also ensured an accurate telling of District Six during the pandemic.

Reflections from the heart of the Neurodivergent

Anthropologist:

When I think about how I experienced the field-trip personally; I found that incorporating an Auto-Ethnographic Approach was most necessary. I say this as it allowed for me to voice myself as the Neurodivergent Anthropologist. Here lies my unfamiliar heart beat. For we are taught in Anthropology about making the familiar, unfamiliar and the unfamiliar, familiar.

The tragedy of life is that we sometimes seek to understand our goals more than ourselves and at this point; goals demand of you certain things, for example a goal I made within the week of the field trip. I was to be present each day. The front and backstage formations of my identity sees the curtains go up and down as I navigated the contextual nature of my fieldwork.

My perspective forms part of this goal. And as my goal is to be present, how do I perceive myself in relation this kind of 'being'?

So, here I sit, about to light a cigarette.

And without making it hard on myself, Anthropology politely throws me over a cliff. For Anthropology is one hell of a ride. And as much as life is a game, there is only so much one can do within an open world; a world of many fields.

And in the field of District Six, where does the beating



heart of the Neurodivergent Anthropologist find some peace and a little bit of chaos?

Here lies my heart in the middle of Dante's inferno.

Here lies my heart written as a rambunctious tale, a tale of voices and screaming souls trying to find harmony by simply 'being'.

---

#### Acknowledgements

Id like to take a moment to thank the Anthropology Department for this gracious, grounding experience. My warmest wishes are extended to all three mentors. To Yusra, thank you for everything. And to you all; soon we shall meet face to face.

Truly,

Ya'eesh Collins.

