

Christine Jeske

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I entered the summer knowing that I wanted to refine my dissertation research topic in preparation for fieldwork I would begin the following summer in 2014. I expected that this research would consider underlying motivations in work-related choices and the role work plays in racial and economic oppression in South Africa. In addition, my aims included choosing a site to base my future research, making connections to other researchers and research institutions, and gaining language proficiency through everyday usage.

Throughout the summer I was pleasantly surprised to discover how much interest the topic of unemployment generated, both in discussion with other researchers and in the many informal conversations that sprang up as soon as I so much as mentioned unemployment. Nearly every conversation quickly brought up the topic of laziness. People expressed that black people, and Zulu people in particular, are inherently lazy, and that this moral failure of laziness is at least partially to blame for their unemployment. Raising the topic of unemployment elicited stories comparing the laziness of Zulu people to the supposed entrepreneurial spirit of whites and any other black person, particularly non-South African blacks. Probing into the question of why so many people attributed to Zulu people an inherent laziness began shaping many of my conversations.

This topic of laziness was of particular interest because it subtly enters into both academic and political dialogue surrounding unemployment, and because of its historic precedent in race relations in Africa and the African Diaspora. Missionary and colonial accounts in South Africa and elsewhere in Africa, as well as accounts of slave owners in the Americas, are rife with complaints of laziness. The logic of much of the historic dialogue on blacks and work was that blacks should be paid *less*, and made to feel *more* poverty, so that they would be induced to develop a moral ethic of hard work at an individual and cultural level. Similar logic of inducing a “work ethic” through suppressing wages plays into discussions I heard this summer blaming high wages, empowered blacks, unions, and welfare for a culture-wide moral failure of work ethic. At a policy level, support for entrepreneurship rides on a wave of neoliberal assumptions that the worker must gather to his or herself the capital, skills, and qualities necessary to create his or her own wealth and to compete in a global competition for employment. As I recognized the shape of this blame-the-worker logic, my motivation grew to examine the questions such a logic ignores.

In probing into this topic, it became apparent that across South African society, people hear and participate in many competing narratives of a good life. These competing narratives include differing understandings of what a “good” life means, how one achieves it, and what social responsibilities one has upon achieving it. Work, I discovered plays key but differing roles in these competing narratives. For some South Africans, having any job is itself a piece of having a good life. For many others, the kind of work matters enormously, and certain kinds of work could even be worse than no work at all. For some South Africans, “hard work” is a key element of how one achieves a good life and is evidence of moral uprightness. For others, the elements one relies upon to achieve a good life lie more in the

supernatural realm of faith and luck, or in the relational realm of good connections. For some, a good life stems from within one's own individual achievements. For others it may more likely stem from provision from "above"—whether from a benefactor, the government, or God. Many conversations also touched on the differing expectations and pressures of responsibility regarding employment that people of different racial, ethnic, gender, and generational groups experience. Many of these differences split along the lines of ethnic groups, generations, gender, and class. Together, these differences in "good life" narratives form the backbone of a dissertation topic that will examine the less quantifiable variables that are intimately tied to choices people make surrounding work.

In addition, I was able to connect to several South African professors of economics, sociology, and anthropology whose work relates to my own and with whom I plan to collaborate. My goal of improving my Zulu language proficiency was less satisfactorily met because most people I spoke insisted on addressing me in English. However, I did find that my language skills improved, and I realized that because my research deals with the whole spectrum of people in a geographic area rather than just non-English-speaking Zulu people, this language may be less important in my research than I originally thought. Finally, I gathered numerous contacts for future conversations, many who helped steer me toward my future research site in the town of Howick. The town provides an excellent setting for the research because within a relatively small area it displays wide racial and economic diversity. There are a range of neighborhoods from rural to urban, with neighborhoods that are nearly all white, all black, mixed, Indian, informal squatter settlements, and legal and illegal immigrant population. Memories of worker unrest and employment controversy are also keenly felt, as residents know well the story of a local employer that laid off all of its workers during a strike during apartheid years.

Thus the summer allowed me to refine my research topic from a general question of how people regard work in South Africa's high unemployment environment, to a specific question: What differing roles does work play among competing narratives of the good life? I look forward to writing proposals and starting dissertation fieldwork on the solid foundation that this summer research offered me.