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Redefining balance: Professor Jaga unpacks motherhood, womanhood, and work in Inaugural lecture

As the country wraps up Woman's Month, the University of Cape Town's (UCT) Professor Ameeta Jaga – a leading expert in organisational psychology – will deliver her inaugural lecture titled “Balancing acts: Mothering, Womanhood, and Employment” on Thursday, 29 August 2024.

In what will be the fifth lecture scheduled for August in UCT's Inaugural Lecture series, Professor Jaga will explore the intricate balancing act that women, particularly low-income mothers, face in managing their roles as mothers, income earners, and individuals in a society that often overlooks their unique challenges. Drawing on over 15 years of research, Professor Jaga will share her insights into the systemic and infrastructural barriers that these women encounter and the urgent need for more inclusive and supportive policies.

Professor Jaga, a distinguished figure in the field of organisational psychology, brings a unique perspective to her research. She is a professor in UCT's School of Management Studies and a non-resident fellow at Harvard University's Hutchins Centre for African and African American Research. Her research, which adopts a Southern and decolonial approach, focuses on gendered and social class analyses of work-family concerns, offering fresh insights into these complex issues.

“As a work-family scholar, I see my research as a ‘balancing act,’ much like the lives of the women I study. I have tried to balance work-family knowledge and recommendations that usually come from the global North with local knowledge and appropriate responses for the South African context, especially in my efforts to support breastfeeding in the workplace and reduce barriers to women's employment.

“My research focuses on low-income mothers who are often exploited and who, in their daily lives, encounter infrastructure challenges relating to costly and unreliable public transport, quality and affordable childcare, and accessing maternity protection rights. While we have legislation that makes provision for maternity leave and protects and promotes reproduction rights and even breastfeeding in the workplace, the reality for many low-income women is that they do not benefit from it.

“This is why our project, ‘The Motherload,’ a multisectoral collaborative study [led by Professor Jaga], is so important – it addresses patriarchal gender norms and the state's failures in adequately supporting low-income mothers. Its research advocates for care economies that recognise the complex care realities of low-income mothers and truly support them,” said Professor Jaga.

Professor Jaga's work has consistently challenged the inadequacy of traditional work-life balance frameworks in representing the lived experiences of diverse women. Her engagement with feminist methodologies, such as photovoice, has highlighted the invisibility of low-income women in work-family research and emphasised the need for epistemic justice in knowledge production. Her current project, “The Motherload,” involves

collaboration with a transdisciplinary academic team, women's rights organisations, government bodies, and low-income mothers to create sustainable pathways that enhance these women's economic security, safety, and wellbeing.

The lecture will offer profound insights into the ongoing struggles of low-income mothers and the broader implications for policy and societal change. Professor Jaga will reflect on her personal experiences as an Indian woman, mother, and academic, providing a profoundly human perspective on the challenges of balancing multiple roles in a world that often marginalises women's contributions.

Date: Thursday, 29 August 2024

Time: 17:30 SAST

Venue: Lecture Theatre LC2A, Level 2, Leslie Commerce Building, upper campus

- [RSVP to attend the lecture in person.](#)
- [Watch the lecture live.](#)

Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

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