

My name is Dr. Melissa Jogie and I currently work at the University of Roehampton in London. I'm affiliated with other universities, The Australian National University in Australia, the University of the West Indies and University of New South Wales, which are places that I've done my graduate training and my undergraduate training. I also have a visiting fellowship at Oxford University

Please can you tell us a little bit about your background in higher education?

My experience in higher education started in the Caribbean, where I attended and did my undergraduate degree. I was always drawn to a bit of research in terms of looking at cultural identity and looking at diaspora, and I did all of my postgraduate qualification training in Australia, and all of my academic training in Australia, which leads for a very interesting question about how I ended up in the UK, so, in Australia, I started looking at issues of social justice and equality, and now in the UK - I've migrated over here for personal reasons - but also because half of my research for my PhD was done on looking at comparative issues between Australia and the UK.

So, I found that coming over here and getting a bit of experience, it's the accessibility, the global network and the diversity of the staff and the institutions, is part of what attracted me to be here it's, the whole world comes to London essentially, so it's been a real a good opportunity to grow, and it's very fast-paced compared to if you look at academia in different countries, the pace tends to be quite different. So, I've only been here for a couple of years, so I'm a newbie, it's been quite challenging doing the transition from being trained in a different country and in a different institution and then coming over and essentially recreating, relearning the British culture of academia, and I think that each country does have a certain

culture of academic practice and research practice and teaching practice in higher education.

Please can you tell us about your journey into Academia and any role models who may have encouraged you to pursue an academic career?

My journey in academia is quite an international one. I often call myself like a child of the Commonwealth, it's taken me around the world and I've been exposed to social issues across the globe. I found that it's really difficult to say that because I thought in the UK, we're talking about, trying to bridge a lot more interdisciplinary work and trying to get on the bandwagon of looking for more equity and fairness and justice in both how we research new knowledge and information, and also, how we build our higher education community. I found that it's very difficult to maybe find one role model that, across the globe, that I aspired to be like, when I was doing my undergraduate degree there were people around me who I liked for particular contributions to knowledge.

My postgraduate degree, I became a lot more aware of the role of women, and how few of them were involved in doing more intensive research, and more teaching in higher education, and coming to the UK and being exposed to issues with the BAME network, and the fewer numbers of people who are from black and minority backgrounds who work, and do research and lead, particularly who are intersectional, these intersectional groups, especially the women in higher education, the under-representation of those numbers has made it really challenging to find role models per se, that you would exactly want to be like.

I have the privilege of knowing a few of the BAME Professors that are across the UK, and I've always been inspired hearing about their journeys, and the contributions that they've made. In terms of, I think, you know, with every day there is a new

challenge in higher education, and you have to charter your own course and try and be the cornerstone, and each institution has its own challenges and merits, so I find that I feel inspired by my students, and what they look for in mentors, and you can see that light bulb moment click when they feel like they can be like you, or like others, so I feel the role modelling really comes from your colleagues, and the people around you that you see do, do the jobs, not just the people who win the big bids and have the big titles, but the everyday people who make the programs run and make the students attend and engage, and, particularly with COVID-19, have facilitated the transition that we've had to do, from, you know, from face-to-face learning to blended styles, to completely online. So, in a way I think the nature of role models in academia is changing, depending on the task, and you know, I would, I would advise, don't try to be like any one person, try to attribute all the qualities into things that you aspire to be more like.

What are the challenges facing universities in terms of diversity, equality and inclusion, and what are they doing about it?

When it comes to diversity, equality, and inclusion, you know, a lot of my research looks at some of the changes that we have to make socially, for issues of social justice, which fits nicely into some of the institutional drives that universities across the UK have been, um, championing towards.

There is a division between Russell Group universities and the post-1992 universities, the newer universities, where we take in very different types of students, not just by race, but by background, by accessibility, by meritocracy, all of these things do need to factor in, you find that the drive to try and change and develop you know, practices, that are inclusive and give a sense of belonging for students as well as academic staff and practitioners and professionals, there could be a lot of pressure so I don't envy the institutions that have to try and create

spaces of equity and inclusion because raising some of these issues, there's no simple solution when it comes to equity and inclusion and, you know, systematic racism, or all of these social injustice issues are deeply uncomfortable, and they're deeply embedded, you cannot include and include for everyone at all times continuously, it's just not a possibility, so how do we work within the constraints of that?

And I think many institutions are trying to be more public about voicing and articulating inclusion, by opening up that we are looking for people like this, we are trying, not people like this, but we're looking to include groups of people who are from minority backgrounds, who are from disadvantaged backgrounds, being more vocal is opening the door.

The risk and the danger with that sometimes it can be taken as a fad, and you know, you use, you string a certain series of the right words together, and that means you've done your inclusion part, so you find that there can be policies that are shaped, but they're not necessarily followed through with the same amount of rigor and thought, and if we choose to act too quickly and don't take the time to think about what this agenda or these schemes have to look like, we risk cheapening and undermining the effort that's made in the first case.

So, an example would be the drive to decolonise the curriculum. So, many institutions across the UK have championed this as being, adding more diverse texts to reading lists, um, and this is problematic because that's not essentially decolonising, decolonising needs to happen from a thought process, the way we think, and you find that professionals, and senior leaders at universities, need to be open-minded to re-learning, and having uncomfortable conversations, so, saying that institutions want to do something must be complemented by making the efforts to, um, to be part of the process as much as being beacons to champion the way forward. The participation and the willingness to engage is really what the

inclusion and the equity, it will resound in those areas for these minority groups, and that will foster the sense of interest and with that will come the sense of belonging, and I mean these issues change on a, ah, you know, they politically change and they socially change from time to time, so the adaptation and the fluidity also needs to be a sense of mindfulness that we need to have, and constantly reflect on our practices and tweak and amend as we go.

Do you have any advice on how to approach these uncomfortable conversations?

So, I'm not able to speak on behalf of the, um, intellectual community or the cultural communities, and the ethnic groups and religious groups, everyone's unique experience invites a certain amount of difference and nuancing and essentialising of what is important, and these things help us determine where we've come from and opinions on what we've struggled, where we want to go and our opinions of what is success, so within every person's unique journey there are going to be pressure points and things that, and conversations and topics that are uncomfortable.

When dealing with, you know, particularly issues of culture and race that are discomfoting, it's really important to understand that it is okay to feel uncomfortable, it is okay that an issue has been raised, the whole purpose of higher education is to provoke your thinking and your thought process and as I said making these we are at risk in our society of making blanket statements that try to make everyone feel comfortable because if we all come from unique backgrounds and have curated unique narratives about ourselves then, how is it possible that we can say something to a group of people and have everyone feel okay about it, people are going to leave feeling that's not quite right.

Instead, you want to invite people, and you can do this by abstracting your thought process abstracting the point you want to make in your knowledge and making it something general that everyone can feel that they can bring their sense of contribution to and it is okay to disagree, and it is okay to disagree in a safe way.

Some of my work advocates on a notion of cultural safeness and it does say that you don't want to make culture become so um you know, so placid that we talk about it and the meaning is essentially lost, you want to make sure that by trying to contextualise an issue, particularly like the presence of being in our in our institutions, that we don't run the risk of just tick boxing having, you know, a million professors who are black and female suddenly, you know, pushed in the direction to take these particular jobs if that may not be what these specific people want to begin with, and when I say specific, I mean down to their individuality, so completely trying to blanket issues is never really a healthy solution in the long in the long run, in the short term it may work but um dealing with that discomfort inviting the discomfort and pre-empting people that you are going to feel uncomfortable I often tell my students learning is uncomfortable because you are forcing yourself to read and engage and come into terms of things that didn't have a place in your life before, if you knew all of this already why would you be putting yourself through it to learn it again to begin with?

So I think preparing that it is uncomfortable is a, is a healthy way to make people feel reassured that it's, it's okay to raise questions and have discussions that that may not sit with you normally.

As an academic, how do you see the changing environment and the future of academia?

Just like all jobs in the sector and in the world are changing depending on the social issues that are happening or in the sense the health issues with the pandemic, so too academia has moved on from being you know that vision of professors within in large libraries with their noses stuck in books um academia I have noticed as an ECR because I've only completed my PhD.

I got my PhD in 2017. So as a young academic, it's exciting to think of, you know, there's very little information about what should you be doing, how do you progress your career, what should you be doing next? What are the landmarks and the goals that I need to have by next year this time? So, much of our ideas of where we should be are projected by what our peers are doing and the opportunities that are afforded to us in our institutions, so if you are in a more research-led climate you may feel the obligation to produce more teaching you may feel to produce more teaching so depending on the environment you're in it helps shape your academic um your goals but academics by nature are also very competitive and very driven and very independent.

Your PhD process is coming up with originality, things that have not been done before, so this begs the question, why would you follow a mainstream plan of what your future needs to look like? I think we talk about your need to sell yourself, and you know, so many of my colleagues and friends try to maintain this really and I admire them for it, a really humbled approach about what they know, and their humility is really admirable, but we live in a market where you have to put your ideas out there in order for other people to engage.

You have to sell yourself and when I say sell yourself I mean don't just try and make yourself look like you are, you know, writing everything, doing everything, but putting your knowledge out there so that people can engage back with you, and this

takes a certain set of skills, and I feel like it is a skill set that is not really modelled in the sector, particularly in the UK, so I know, for example, in the US most academics have their own personal website, so they have their university affiliation but they do run their own page because this is how we meet people.

We meet people digitally before we actually meet people in the flesh, so you are always going in to meet an academic a little bit more prepared about what they've done and where their views might be, and what you want to ask them, because it's all time consuming and you want to make the best of every opportunity. I think in the UK there's definitely an appeal to try and develop your online presence and to show academics how to curate their story, academia is a profession that you're in for the marathon not really for the sprint, so your contributions have to be slow and paced and curated very, very carefully about indicating your next steps and where you want to go, so I've put up a website, I have tried to start my own personal journey in exploring what that may look like, and it's taken a lot of consideration of what I want to be, you know, 30 years from now, and it's really hard to answer those questions because you never really know but I think it is instead of just showcasing your knowledge without trying to invite others to contribute you have to present your knowledge, package it and then send it out into the world such that others can feel the need to see where you are going, and then be more inclined to engage.

So there is definitely an under researched scope for how academics can start to think about their careers and curate and personalise it to their own identity.

Do you have any tips or advice for people from ethnic minority backgrounds who might be considering a career in academia?

For people who are from like disadvantaged groups or lower socioeconomic backgrounds or from communities who want to get into academia I think my advice would be to.. we hear so many of the rhetoric about oppression and what you are excluded from and how essentially your story could be written for you even before you try, and while those narratives have their own authenticity, and those experiences are for real and they're lived and they are present in our society I feel it's really important that you champion your own story, and even if you have heard of issues of systematic racism or you have heard of other people's experiences, try to maintain that as a bubble of an experience, don't carry the burden of other people's narratives on your back at all times and stick yourself to that particular journey. We're never going to accept change and progress change if we don't, and they allow ourselves to have our own experiences and write our own story, so I have so many of my students who look at me and they're like, we always feel inspired - and that's their chosen word not mine - when we hear you talk, or you do something, and I think it's largely because I teach them with the go get it attitude, and try and maybe mean saying these things is a an example for them to see that you can do it. I often wonder, though, if i were a BAME woman saying a different story about, just talking about my personal struggles, and how it's been difficult, and how I've been shut down from opportunities, what sort of impact is that going to have when my students hear that kind of rhetoric? Are they going to adopt those narratives? And we need to be really careful as academics about the types of narratives that we share, because it does have an impact, it has a seen impact and an unseen impact, and this part of my work is also about trying to talk about progressing theory of activism, and instead of the grassroots issues where we time and time and time again talk about the problems that are always talked about and we don't have solutions that we can really offer, my work is trying to put a placemat on that, and say this is a benchmark

now of what we've talked about, how can we talk about things differently to get some progression and to move the conversation along? Not forget the conversation, but move it along such that instead of just carrying the narratives of other people on our shoulder, or people who come before us, we shape the way forward. And it's important to remember that the equality and the system that we have now was something that people 50 years ago fought for us to have, and that's what we've inherited. We can't wake up in the morning and expect things to change overnight, but what we do now is what's going to determine the state of equity and inclusion, you know, 50 years from now for the people that are taking our place. So I think you have to bear in mind that you're always working in these cycles, and your narrative, though a narrative plays a role in a much bigger picture, so we need to be careful and be very mindful of the impact that we have with our personal narratives.