

Anthropology

Personnel and Administrative Changes

During academic year 2019–2020, Elting E. Morison Professor of Anthropology Stefan Helmreich served as head of the [Anthropology Program](#). Owing to the transformation by the dean of the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (SHASS) of the Global Studies and Languages Program into the more language instruction–focused Global Languages, two anthropologists from that program, M. Amah Edoh and Bettina Stoetzer, joined Anthropology, starting July 1, 2019. Also on that date, Beth Semel, a recent PhD from MIT’s History, Anthropology, and Science, Technology, and Society (HASTS) program was appointed as a postdoctoral associate for two years. Héctor Beltrán began a one-year postdoctoral associate appointment on July 1, 2019, before starting his assistant professorship with us on July 1, 2020.

Highlights

AY2020 has been like no other. Between the global Covid-19 pandemic that hit in the early months of 2020 and the widespread and ongoing uprisings around matters of racial injustice in the United States that began in late May 2020, this has been a time of struggle and reckoning, nationally, as well as internationally. MIT Anthropology responded to both the pandemic and to calls for racial justice in ways that are detailed in the final two segments of this document.

Fall 2019 saw Anthropology organize and host the biennial Social Sciences Visiting Committee, leading a November 5–6 event that presented MIT Anthropology, History, and the Program in Science, Technology, and Society (STS) to the committee in order that it might lead conversation about individual program priorities and challenges. We in Anthropology emphasized our work to educate future engineers, scientists, and managers to think critically about cultural difference, and to work responsibly in multicultural, globalized societies. We also joined our colleagues in History and STS, with whom we govern the doctoral program in History, Anthropology, and Science, Technology, and Society, in presenting our PhD program to the visiting committee. Our three units presented a united front on matters to do with graduate student funding—a recurring challenge for us. We were heartened that the visiting committee report, finalized and certified by early August 2020, heard our concerns.

Fall 2019 also saw the unfolding of the Jeffrey Epstein scandal, which led to a self-examination by MIT of its practices of soliciting and vetting donors and benefactors. More, the scandal put a fresh spotlight on matters of gender inequity around the Institute, which manifests not only in the distribution of prestige and resources, but also, and very troublingly, in instances of harassment experienced by women, queer, trans, and nonbinary faculty, staff, and students. Professor Heather Paxson together with Professors Lisa Parks, Caroline Jones, T. L. Taylor, and Helen Lee formed the Senior Women’s Faculty Council, a voluntary, grassroots group open to all tenured women-identifying members of the faculty, to support faculty women of all ranks at MIT, and help address any barriers to their success.

Faculty Highlights

Assistant Professor M. Amah Edoh (who joined us in 2019), received the Everett Moore Baker Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching in June 2020. She also received a grant from the African Culture Fund to produce and curate, along with Togolese artists, a group show titled *Memory Work* to be held in Lomé, Togo, at the end of 2020. She continued work on her ethnographic monograph, *Our Grandmothers' Cloth: Materiality, Class, and Global Membership in the Age of "The New Africa."*

Professor Stefan Helmreich received a Teaching with Digital Technology Award from MIT Open Learning for a class he co-taught with Graham Jones, 21A.157 The Meaning of Life.

Associate Professor with Tenure Graham Jones hosted a second conference of linguistic anthropologists and continued to expand a research network of linguistic anthropologists spanning over a dozen universities. He also received a Teaching with Digital Technology Award from MIT Open Learning for a class he co-taught with Professor Helmreich, 21A.157 The Meaning of Life.

Associate Professor Amy Moran-Thomas received the 2020 James A. and Ruth Levitan Teaching Award. Her book, *Traveling with Sugar: Chronicles of a Global Epidemic*, was published with University of California Press in November 2019.

Professor Heather Paxson continued her five-year term as co-editor of *Cultural Anthropology*, one of our discipline's flagship journals, a position that carries with it an appointment to the Executive Committee for the Society for Cultural Anthropology (a section of the American Anthropological Association).

Associate Professor Bettina Stoetzer received a fellowship from the Rachel Carson Center for the Environment, Ludwig Maximilian University, which enabled her to spend spring 2020 doing research in Germany.

Professor Susan Silbey was named recipient of the 2019–2020 James R. Killian Jr. Faculty Achievement Award, in recognition of her extraordinary professional achievement as an MIT faculty member. On February 11, 2020, she gave the 2019–2020 Killian lecture, titled "Resilience of Law: Stories from Everyday Life."

Professor Christine Walley received the 2019 Keepers of the Calumet Award from the Calumet Heritage Partnership (a consortium of community organizations in the Illinois and Indiana Calumet region) for her documentary *Exit Zero*. The documentary also screened from August 26 to September 1, 2019 in various city parks in Chicago as part of the Chicago Onscreen Film Festival.

Anthropology received internal and external funding for a number of new initiatives and projects. Manduhai Buyandelger received SHASS funds to conduct ethnographic research on virtual and augmented realities. Professor Jones's graduate student, Crystal Lee, received a National Science Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant to investigate the history and practice of creating tactile information systems. Professor Silbey's graduate student, Ethan Poskanzer received a J-WEL (Abdul Latif Jameel World Education Lab) Workforce Learning Innovation Research Grant for travel to West Africa to research entrepreneurship training.

In AY2020, Anthropology hosted one visitor during fall term. Adel-Jing Wang was a visiting professor from Zhejiang University in China, and spent time working on her book about the culture and politics of sound art in China.

Teaching and Curriculum

In spring 2020, Manduhai Buyandelger taught 21A.141 Images of Asian Women: Dragon Ladies and Lotus Blossoms, a subject cross-listed with Women's and Gender Studies (WGS). She also designed and taught a new graduate level class, 21A.529 Virtual and Other Realities. M. Amah Edoh was on leave fall 2019 and in spring 2020 taught Art, Craft, Science, along with 21G.025 Africa and the Politics of Knowledge. Stefan Helmreich taught one of the HASTS graduate program's required classes, 21A.859 Social Theory and Analysis in fall 2019 and co-taught the very popular undergraduate class, 21A.157 The Meaning of Life with Graham Jones in spring 2020. During fall 2019, Graham Jones taught 21A.502 Fun and Games: Cross-Cultural Perspectives and co-designed and co-taught, along with Seth Riskin of the MIT Museum, a special topics subject, 21A.S01 Paranormal Machines: Technologies of Enchantment in Science, Art, and Culture, which was featured on MIT News. In spring 2020, he co-taught 21A.157 The Meaning of Life with Stefan Helmreich. During fall 2019, Amy Moran-Thomas offered a newly designed version of a formerly offered subject about speculative fiction. She revised the subject and renamed it 21A.508 Culture and Ethics in Science Fiction Worlds. In spring 2020, she once again taught one of our core introductory classes, 21A.00 Introduction to Anthropology: Comparing Human Cultures, and offered a new class 21A.312 Planetary Change and Human Health. This was prescient, allowing for the Covid-19 pandemic to be seamlessly woven into class discussions. In fall 2019, Heather Paxson taught 21A.155 Food, Culture, and Politics, one of our program's CI-M (Communication Intensive in the Major) classes, and in spring 2020 she taught For Love and Money: Rethinking the Family, which is cross-listed with WGS. Susan Silbey taught her two graduate level research methods classes, 21A.809 Designing Empirical Research in the Social Sciences and 21A.819 Qualitative Research Methods. Bettina Stoetzer taught a CI-H class (Communication Intensive in the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences), 21A.123 Race and Migration in Europe, and was on leave during the spring. Chris Walley taught one of our CI-H classes, 21A.461 What is Capitalism? in fall 2019 and taught 21A.120 American Dream: Exploring Class in the US and 21A.420 Environmental Struggles, in spring 2020.

This year we hired three lecturers to augment our undergraduate offerings. Xenia Cherkaev offered 21A.01 How Culture Works, one of our core introductory courses, and Franco Rossi taught 21A.5000 Technology and Culture, also in the fall. Technology and Culture was taught by Ashawari Chaudhuri in the spring. This class has been so popular that we now offer it every semester and in order to do so, usually have to hire lecturers. Postdoctoral Associate Beth Semel offered the new class, 21A.151 Language, Communication, and Culture in spring. Buyandelger was the faculty mentor for Xenia Cherkaev, and Helmreich was mentor to Rossi and Chaudhuri.

As has been the case for several years, faculty participation in HASTS as well as in PhD programs in the Sloan School of Management, the Department of Urban Studies and Planning, and the Program in Art, Culture and Technology, continues to be well in evidence, with faculty members serving as graduate student advisors and on dissertation

committees. Buyandelger served on four dissertation committees—one each at the University of California at Santa Cruz, Aarhus University, Harvard University, and the Max-Planck Institute. Helmreich served on 16 doctoral committees (six as principal advisor). Three of these were outside MIT (one at New School University, one at Harvard University, and one at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution). Graham Jones served on three dissertation committees (two as principal advisor) and also supervised the linguistic anthropology postdoctoral associate and one undergraduate UROP (Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program). Moran-Thomas served on two dissertation committees and was advisor to one full anthropology major and one Course 21E (Humanities and Engineering) major. Paxson served on seven dissertation committees (two as principal advisor). Three of these were outside MIT (Yale University, Harvard University, and Washington University). She also supervised an undergraduate UROP. Silbey served on seven dissertation committees (four as principal advisor). Bettina Stoetzer was a dissertation committee member for a student from Harvard and she was advisor for one undergraduate student. Walley served on 11 dissertation committees (four as principal advisor) at Harvard University, University of Lausanne, and the Paris Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po). Walley was also advisor to one Course 21E major.

Publications

Héctor Beltrán published “Code Work: Thinking with the System in México,” *American Anthropologist* 122, no. 3 (2020): 487–500, doi: 10.1111/aman.13379.

Buyandelger’s book, *A Thousand Steps to Parliament: Women Running for Election in Postsocialist Mongolia*, is under review with the University of Chicago Press. She published a research article, “Out of Oppression: Biographies of Reconciliation and Re-collection” (in Russian) in *New Literary Observer*; and published an invited essay, “Spirits,” *Indonesia* 109 (2020): 85–89, doi: 10.1353/ind.2020.0000.

Melissa Amah Edoh wrote a book chapter, “From African Print to Global Luxury: Dutch Wax Cloth Rebranding and the Politics of High-Value” in *African Luxury: Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. Mehita Iqani and Simidele Dosekun (Bristol, England: Intellect Books, 2019); and contributed an essay for the book, *Being Material*, ed. Marie-Pier Boucher, Stefan Helmreich, Leila W. Kinney, Skylar Tibbits, Rebecca Uchill and Evan Ziporyn (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019).

Helmreich co-edited the book *Being Material* (with Marie-Pier Boucher, Leila W. Kinney, Skylar Tibbits, Rebecca Uchill and Evan Ziporyn) (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019). He published two academic journal articles: “Wave Theory ~ Social Theory” *Public Culture* 32, no. 2 (2020): 287–326, doi:10.1215/08992363-8090094; and “Reading a Wave Buoy,” *Science, Technology, and Human Values* 44, no. 5 (2019): 737–761, doi: 10.1177/0162243919856095. He published a co-authored article with David Jones, “The Shape of Epidemics,” *Boston Review*. He published a co-authored article and film with Francisco Alarcon, “Ocean Amplification: Rising Waves and North-South Asymmetries,” *Strelka*, a Russian architecture and design journal. In addition, he published a book chapter, “Wave Law,” in *Blue Legalities: The Life and Laws of the Sea*, ed. Irus Braverman and Elizabeth R. Johnson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020). He also published a short commentary, “Seagoing Nightmares,” *Dialogues in Human Geography* 9, no. 3 (2019): 308–311, doi:10.1177/2043820619878571.

Moran-Thomas' book, *Traveling with Sugar: Chronicles of a Global Epidemic*, came out in December 2019, published by the University of California Press. She also published a journal article, "What is Communicable? Unaccounted Injuries and 'Catching' Diabetes in an Illegible Epidemic," *Cultural Anthropology* 34, no. 4 (2019): 471–502, doi:10.14506/ca34.4.01.

Paxson published the article, "'Don't Pack a Pest': Parts, Wholes and the Porosity of Food Borders," *Food, Culture, and Society* 22, no. 5 (2019): 657–673.

Silbey published the article, "The Every Day Work of Studying Law in Everyday Life," *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 15, no. 1 (2019): 1–18, doi: 10.1146/annurev-lawsocsci-110316-113326. In addition, she co-authored the article "Bias and Belief in Meritocracy in AI and Engineering," *LSE* (blog), April 3, 2019, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2019/04/03/bias-and-belief-in-meritocracy-in-ai-and-engineering/>.

Bettina Stoetzer published two book chapters and one article: "Wildes Brandenburg: Engaging Unruly Nature in Berlin's Peripheries," in *Ecologies of Socialisms: Germany, Nature and the Left in History, Politics and Culture*, ed. Sabine Mödersheim, Scott Moranda, and Eli Rubin (Bern: Peter Lang, 2019); "*Ailanthus Altissima*, or the Botanical Afterlives of European Power," in *The Botanical City*, ed. Matthew Gandy (Berlin: Jovis, 2020); and, "Europe's Other Walls" *Anthropology News* 60, no. 6 (2019): e100–e107, doi: 10.1111/AN.1315.

Presentations

Buyandelger gave a conference presentation, "Shamans as Businessmen, Villains, and NGO Leaders: Discursive and Affective Spaces in Urban Mongolia" at the American Anthropological Association's Annual Meeting in Vancouver, in fall 2019.

Over the summer, Edoh gave a talk, "Qualitative Research Methods," to *Avocats Sans Frontières* (Lawyers without Borders) in Brussels, Belgium.

Helmreich gave several presentations, including a talk in September 2019, "The Numberless Waves of the Sea," in New Orleans, LA, at the Meetings of the Society for the Social Studies of Science. At the same meeting, he was a participant in the Sensors and Sensing Practices Roundtable. Also in September he presented "Preverberation, or Techniques of Premonitional Listening" at the Sound/Text Seminar, Mahindra Humanities Center at Harvard University. In October, he gave a talk at the University of California at Santa Barbara called "Propagating Power: Making Wave Spectra in American Physical Oceanography." In November, he presented "The Colors of Saturated Seas" for Hotspots: Migration and the Sea at the Akademie der Künste der Welt in Cologne, Germany. Also in November he gave two respondent commentaries: "Composing, Decomposition, Composting" at the annual meeting of the American Musicological Society in Boston, and "Artificial Intelligence as Fog Machine," in connection with Lucy Suchman's MIT lecture "Artificial Intelligence and Modern Warfare." At the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Vancouver, Canada, he presented at three roundtables: "Wave Sound" for the Sound in the Anthropocene roundtable, "Computing Katrina" for the Challenges in the Study of Environmental Change roundtable, and "Prompt on Irenic Approaches to Anthropology of Science" with Emily Martin for the Roundtable Celebrating 20 Years of the Diana Forsythe Prize.

Jones gave a talk at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in November titled “Civic Discourse, Language Socialization, and Liberal Education.” He was also a discussant for a panel: Making the Occult Public. In December, he gave the workshop presentation “A ‘Category of Exclusion?’: Magic as Religious, Ethnographic, and Colonialist Construct.”

Moran-Thomas gave two talks at MIT in October: “Health and the Afterlives of Plantation Landscapes: Implications for Contemporary Agriculture” for the Burchard Scholars Fellows, and “Chronic Conditions, Care Technologies, and the Problem of Maintenance” for MIT GlobeMed. Also in October, she gave a presentation, “Kinship as/against Dispossession,” for the Mellon Sawyer Seminar panel on The Politics of Kinship at the Center for the Study of Race and Democracy, Tufts University. In November, she gave a colloquium, “Sugar Machine: Medical Technologies and Plantation Legacies in the Caribbean Diabetes Epidemic,” at Brown University and she gave a talk titled “Three Atmospheres: Segregated Infrastructures of Hyperbaric Chamber Access in the Caribbean Diabetes Epidemic” at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Vancouver.

In October, Paxson gave the Odyssey Lecture, “The Life of Cheese: Searching for Value in an Artisanal Commodity,” at Hendrix College, Alabama. Also in October, she presented the paper “Protecting Perishable Value(s): The Material Semiotics of Moving Fermented Foods across International Borders” as part of a five-day invitational symposium on Cultures of Fermentation, sponsored by the Wenner-Gren Foundation in Sintra, Portugal. Paxson gave a discussant commentary titled “On Time, Attention, and Tinkering” as a remote participant for the panel Landscapes of Knowledge: Stories of Agricultural Science that took place at the History of Science Society Meeting in Utrecht, Netherlands, last July. In September, she presented “Navigating Governance: Moving Food through Regulated Borders,” at the annual meeting of the Society for Social Studies of Science in New Orleans. At the same meeting, she gave discussant comments for the panel Governing Food. In December, she gave a presentation called “Artisan Cheesemaking in the United States” at Northeastern University.

Silbey, in addition to giving the Killian Lecture, gave a talk titled “Expanding and Increasingly Inscrutable University Audit Cultures: Data, Analytics, and Rising Quantification in Professors’ Work” at the Academy of Management annual meeting in August. In September, she gave a talk, “Women in STEM: Longitudinal Study of Engineers,” for the French Consulate’s Women in Science Workshop held at Northeastern University. She gave two presentations in October, “What is Power” and “Women and Power” for the MIT Provost’s Leader Workshop.

Stoetzer gave a talk, “Feral Fever: Pig-Virus Mobilities in the Border Zones of Global Capital” at the Czech Academy of Sciences’ symposium, Emigrating Animals, Migrating Humans: Belonging, Prosperity, and Security in More than Human Worlds, held in Prague in September. In November, she gave a colloquium, “Feral Fever: Pigs, Viruses, and Humans Co-Evolve in a Deadly Dance” at Sarah Lawrence College. In November, she presented “African Swine Fever: Wildlife Mobilities and Border Politics in Contemporary Europe” at the Feral Atlas Panel of the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Vancouver. She also gave a discussant commentary, “Tracking Ecologies of Nationalism” for the Ecologies of Nationalism panel.

Walley gave a paper, “Embodied Labor and Its Loss: Storytelling through Artifacts in the Southeast Chicago Historical Museum,” for a panel on Deindustrialization, Health, and Embodiment at the Working Class Studies Association’s annual conference held at Kent University, Canterbury, England, in September. At the same conference, she was also a discussant for a panel on the book, *Voices of Guinness*, by Tim Strangleman. She did a podcast presentation on *Recall This Book* hosted by Professors Elizabeth Ferry and John Plotz at Brandeis University in October. In November, Walley presented a paper titled “Balloon Mapping as Method: Fighting Para-Industrial Pollution in the US ‘Rustbelt’” for a panel on Toxicity Beyond the Human at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Vancouver.

Contributions to MIT and Outside Communities

Anthropology faculty members served on a wide range of committees and task forces at MIT. Buyandelger continued to serve on the SHASS Faculty Diversity Committee and on the MIT Faculty Newsletter Editorial Board. She served as the Undergraduate Officer for Anthropology and served on the Anthropology and Women and Gender Studies curriculum committees as well as on the HASTS Graduate Admissions Committee. Edoh served on the organizing committee for My Sister’s Keeper. In addition to serving as department head, Helmreich was the transfer credit examiner for Anthropology and a member of the Anthropology Curriculum Committee. He also was a member of the HASTS Steering Committee and on the Executive Committee for the Center for Art, Science, and Technology. Jones served on the MIT Museum Collections Committee, the Institute Committee for Student Life, and the Digital Humanities Steering Committee, as well as being an application reviewer for MIT’s Summer Research Program. He also served on the HASTS Graduate Admissions Committee and the Computing and Society Curriculum Committee. Moran-Thomas was the SHASS representative on the MIT Climate Action Advisory Committee and was the minor advisor for Anthropology. Paxson served on the Anthropology Curriculum Committee, the SHASS Gender Equity Committee, and on the Student Affairs Committee of the MIT Museum Advisory Board. Silbey served on the Presidential Advisory Board tasked to make recommendations on ways MIT could respond to the report of the National Academies Committee on Women in Science, Engineering, and Medicine. She also served on the Faculty Advisory Committee for MITx, the Committee to Recommend Guidelines for Donor and International Engagements, and she was a board member of MIT Press. Stoetzer was the Anthropology representative for the HASTS Graduate Program Seminar for fall term. Walley served as concentration advisor for Anthropology and was a member of MIT’s Taskforce on the Work of the Future.

Outside MIT, Buyandelger served as an article reviewer for the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, the *Journal of Asian Studies*, and *Études Mongoles & Sibériennes, Centasiatiques & Tibétaines*. She also reviewed a book manuscript for Fordham University Press. She also served on the Clifford Geertz Book Prize Committee in the Anthropology of Religion, awarded by the Society for the Anthropology of Religion, a section of the American Anthropological Association. Buyandelger was the liaison for a signing agreement between Harvard University and the Mongolian government to develop activities to foster Mongolian Studies at Harvard. Edoh reviewed an article for *African Studies Review*. Helmreich served on the editorial board of *Cultural Anthropology*. He was an article referee for *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience; Environmental Humanities*;

Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute; Environment and Society; and Social Studies of Science. He was a manuscript reviewer for Duke University Press, the University of California Press, and the University of Washington Press. Graham Jones served on the editorial boards of *Ateliers d'Anthropologie* and *HAU Journal of Ethnographic Theory*. He was a manuscript reviewer for the University of Chicago Press, and an article reviewer for *American Anthropologist*, *Cultural Anthropology*, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, *Journal of Urban Technology*, and *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology*. Moran-Thomas was a collaborating co-organizer for the Harvard-MIT Friday Morning Seminar in Culture, Psychiatry, and Global Mental Health and a member of the “Contemporary Latin American Anthropology Workshop.” She is on the editorial board of *Current Anthropology*. Paxson served as co-editor of *Cultural Anthropology*, on the Academic Advisory Board of Oldways Preservation and Trust’s Cheese Coalition, and on the executive committee of the Society for Cultural Anthropology (a section of the American Anthropological Association). She reviewed articles for *Journal for the Anthropology of North America*, *Social Anthropology*, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *Science as Culture*, *Anthropology of Food*, and *Food and Foodways*, as well as a book manuscript for Bloomsbury. Silbey was on the review panel of the European Research Council, and is on the Executive Committee and Board of Trustees for the Law and Society Association; the National Committee of Lawyers and Scientists of the American Association for the Advancement of Science; and on the Committee on Science, Technology, and the Law of the National Academy of Sciences. She is an article reviewer for *Work and Occupations*, *American Journal of Sociology*, and *Law and Society Review*. Stoetzer reviewed articles for *American Anthropologist* and reviewed proposals for the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. Walley was a board member of the Working Class Studies Association and a committee member of the 2019 Awards Committee of the Working Class Studies Association. She was a board member for the Society of Visual Anthropology and the 2019 program co-chair for Visual Anthropology at the American Anthropological Association’s annual meeting. She was on the Advisory Committee for a New England Historical Project at New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center. She reviewed a manuscript for the University of Chicago Press and an article for *American Ethnologist*. She is a scientific board member for *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*.

Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, MIT Anthropology quickly moved all of its subjects online and also made certain that each class instructor had a backup instructor who could step in, in case of illness or other epidemic-related hardship.

Many MIT Anthropology faculty were able to write opinion pieces or articles directly on the Covid-19 pandemic. In “Cambridge (MA)—Disruptions, Racism, Virtual Realities, and World Building” published in April 2020 on the blog *American Ethnologist*, Manduhai Buyandelger shared her experiences of teaching during the early days of the pandemic shutdown, giving her students tools to combat anti-Asian racism. During the summer, she wrote “Masks Can Reveal New Possibilities” for the SHASS Meanings of Masks series. Stefan Helmreich co-authored “The Shape of Epidemics” with historian of medicine David S. Jones, on the history of the metaphor of the “epidemic wave,” published in *Boston Review*. Jones wrote “A Collective Cry for Justice” for the SHASS Meanings of Masks series. Amy Moran-Thomas wrote “How a Popular Medical Device Encodes Racial

Bias” for *Boston Review*, examining how white supremacy is built into the oximeters used to track the bodily effects of Covid-19. Heather Paxson spoke on the matter of home cooking during the pandemic, and co-edited a forum for *Cultural Anthropology* on Covid-19 and culture. Susan Silbey co-authored an editorial, “Life after Covid-19: Decommodify Work, Democratise the Workplace” in India’s *The Wire*. Bettina Stoetzer reflected on the movement of wildlife into cities in the Covid age in *Social Anthropology*.

Anti-Racist Work in Response to Police Murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and So Many Others

On June 1, 2020, MIT Anthropology posted the following, collectively crafted statement:

In the midst of Covid-19’s unfolding and unequal death tolls and of ongoing police, state, and everyday violence against Black, Brown, Asian, and Indigenous communities in the United States and elsewhere, we in MIT Anthropology stand against racist white supremacy, believing, with anthropologist Leith Mullings, that:

“Anthropology is uniquely positioned to make a decisive contribution to the critical interrogation of contemporary racism. With its emphasis on underlying social relations and the informal workings of structures, networks, and interactions that produce and reproduce inequality, anthropology has a set of theoretical perspectives and a methodological tool kit that lends itself to interrogation of new forms of structural racism and to unmasking the hidden transcripts of the process through which difference is transformed into inequality. This enterprise demands long-term ethnographic and historical research. . . . [and] must be grounded in a critical interpretation of race not as a quality of people of color, but as an unequal relationship involving both accumulation and dispossession.”

From “Interrogating Racism: Toward an Antiracist Anthropology,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34, no. 1 (2005): 685, doi:10.1146/annurev.anthro.32.061002.093435.

We are dedicated to naming and fighting racism as an institutional and structural form of inequality and violence—work we seek to do in our teaching, our research, and our administrative practice, and work that depends upon a multiracial and feminist determination to support and amplify the works and voices of students, faculty, and staff of color.

Our statement, released in the wake of the police murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd—2020 additions to a long string of US police killings of Black people and others—named MIT Anthropology’s commitment to anti-racist practice and pedagogy. That commitment has always been central to our work, but in an era in which the president of the United States is waging an open war of words and deeds on people of color, international students, women, LGBTQIA+ rights, immigrants, Indigenous people, and, through vilification of rigorous scientific inquiry, the very health of an entire polity, it seemed to us vital to put these words on the screen.

On June 10, 2020 MIT Anthropology joined an academic strike—#ShutDownAcademia #ShutDownSTEM—a day-long event that particularly asked “white and non-Black People of Color (NBPOC) to not only educate themselves, but to define a detailed plan of action to carry forward.” With a number of us teaching classes on computing and culture, we renewed our dedication to advocating not only that MIT’s newly

founded Schwarzman College of Computing expand its efforts to hire faculty from underrepresented minority groups, but also that it work actively against racism and anti-Blackness in the development of computer technologies themselves, a call we amplified from *On Being Black in Computing During These Days*. One of our number led the way on speaking out against a top publisher's plans to release a paper claiming to have pioneered an algorithm that could detect criminality based on facial biometrics, a claim, when it was first made in the 1870s, was already a study in racist pseudoscience. We also directed colleagues' attention to a scorecard tracking MIT's response to the recommendations made not only by the Black Students Union and Black Graduate Students Association in 2015, but also going back to the 2010 Hammond Report on the Initiative for Faculty Race and Diversity and the 2011 Report on the Status of Women Faculty in the Schools of Science and Engineering. We in the humanistic social sciences and arts joined our colleagues in the sciences and engineering in holding MIT accountable for [addressing systemic racism at MIT](#) as well as in confronting the persistent sexism, homophobia, and transphobia that still exists at the Institute. We also expressed support for MIT's work with the MIT Indigenous Peoples Advocacy Committee and MIT's American Indian Science and Engineering Society to create a meaningful [Indigenous Land Acknowledgement](#) statement, one that can be used to address and fight continued dispossession in Massachusetts.

Closer to the discipline of anthropology, we widely promoted the Association of Black Anthropologists' Statement Against Police Violence and Anti-Black Racism as well as the Association of Latina/o & Latinx Anthropologists Statement Against Anti-Black Racism and dedicated ourselves to working with one another and with students to face our discipline's legacy as one wound together with race, racism, and whiteness, even amid its vital anti-racist work. That is work we committed to do in helping one another craft syllabi, strategize about how best to activate strong and safe classroom conversation about racism, and generate strategies for supporting early career scholars (on which last, we were informed by, among other sources, the #BlackintheIvory discussion on Twitter). This is work that takes aim at anti-Blackness as a core feature of US American racism and that also recognizes that the discipline has also to continue to confront its complicity with anti-Indigenous dispossession and with a long history of marginalizing scholars of Asian and Hispanic/Latinx identity and community. It is work, too, that we do—and are dedicated to intensifying—in our classes, including “Race and Migration in Europe,” “Africa and the Politics of Knowledge,” “Images of Asian Women,” “The Science of Race, Sex, and Gender,” “Gender, Race and Environmental Politics,” and “Hacking from the South.”

We recognized that it is not only MIT Anthropology faculty who are dedicated to the cause of anti-racism. Our students and alumni are doing important work in this domain. Anthropology alumna Gabby Ballard '19 spoke at a 2020 Act Now to Stop War and End Racism rally. David Lowry, associate professor of anthropology at Biola University, continues to write and work on behalf of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina, of which he is a member.

Stefan Helmreich

Head

Elting E. Morison Professor of Anthropology