GenHET Newsletter

Issue 2

July 2020

We return with the second issue of our newsletter, with more news and activities at the start of the 2020 summer season. We want to thank all of you for your continued support and kind words after our first issue. And a warm welcome to our new subscribers that have joined our network!

In the past months, the discussion of racial inequalities worldwide has become extremely urgent. And our scientific communities are not immune to these developments. We are committed to continually report, discuss, and act on this front. We are working to bring you content that will engage our science community to step up and participate actively in eradicating these inequalities. In this issue, we bring you articles, opinions, and resources that summarise the events of the past couple of months. Just a first small step to ignite a movement forward.

Keep in touch with GenHET

If you have news or other information you would like to share via the newsletter, contact us at GenHET.Admin@cern.ch. Visit us at our website genhet.web.cern.ch where you can find out more about our activities and initiatives.

Via GenHET website

To get future announcements, make sure you subscribe to our network here.

Via Social Media

Follow us on Twitter! We are @GenHET_

GenHET Newsletter

Issue 2, July 2020.

Black Lives Matter

As scientists, we cannot remain silent or uninvolved after the recent murders of black US citizens. Together with a strongly rising worldwide grassroots movement we support the struggle of people of color (POC). The current social developments, racism, and inequalities are a call for us to learn, reflect, and act within our scientific community.

Racial inequalities are not a recent nor a US-based phenomenon. Postcolonial Europe, failing to learn from its own history, showed its xenophobic and chauvinist face once again during the recent immigration crisis. This recent article captures the experience of POC in Europe which "ignores both Europe's colonial past and its own racist present". France and Germany, the two biggest economies in the European Union, do not even collect demographic data on ethnicity.

We invite our readers to take a moment to reflect on their "white privilege" (if this is their case). How has this helped them go through many situations in life without them even realizing this was the case? How much more difficult the lives of POC are for aspects that they, as white, may consider trivial?

Supporting Protests Against Racial Inequalities

GenHET statement on June 2nd in support Black Live Matters movement, posted on genhet.web.cern.ch.

GenHET aims to promote diversity in the academic environment. We need a society that unconditionally supports minorities regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, economic status, nationality, political or religious views, and disability.

We acknowledge the struggle of the African American community that today is fighting for their rights in the United States.

We condemn any form of discrimination. We will continue to propose initiatives to guide our community towards diversity and equal opportunities and to prevent all forms of discrimination, including those based on race.

GenHET Newsletter

Issue 2, July 2020.

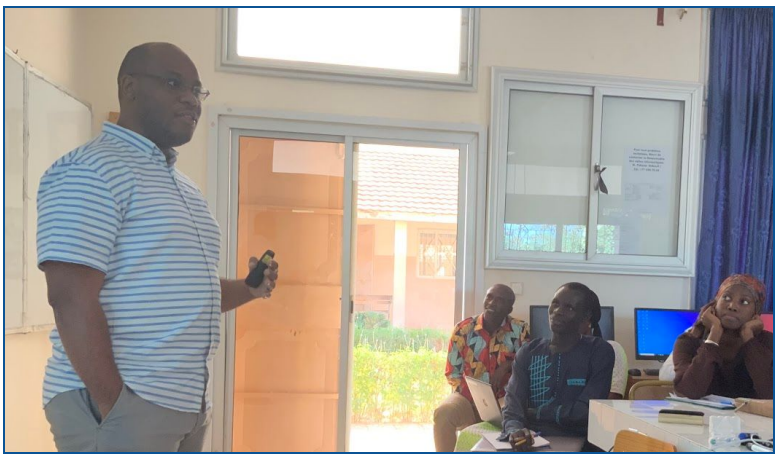
American Racism and Science, by Ibrahima Bah

Dr. Ibrahima Bah is an Assistant Professor at Johns Hopkins University. His field of research is theoretical high-energy physics and cosmology. His work explores the relations between quantum field theories, string theory, and gravity via the framework of holography.

American racism toward black people is deeply rooted in its culture, history, and way of life. American society has yet to reckon with the toll of its original sin across the ages, and truly acknowledge the marginalization and the continued devaluation of people of color. It has not acknowledged the degrees to which American exceptionalism and wealth are built on the backs of its marginalized groups. Dealing with American racism will require the undoing of American culture to something anew. The privileged will fight to their last bone to prevent that. The fight and demand for true equality in all aspects of American society must continue and the efforts of every single individual must renew with greater fervor, audacity, and hope.

Science and scientific institutions are not immune to American racism. Scientific professionals must acknowledge the privileges afforded to them in American society and must find ways to support their colleagues, students, and researchers of color. They must acknowledge the hurdles that exist for them and find effective ways of removing them. As importantly, they must acknowledge their merits and contributions in all aspects of scientific endeavors.

I have, of course, and continue to face the many different struggles that exist for people of color. I have also been fortunate and lucky to have important allies, supporters, and mentors from all backgrounds who have paved a way forward for me. I believe one of the most effective ways to exact change is for me to pay it forward with greater fervor and dedication. It is important to devote part of my professional life to seek out talented young scholars of color and from other marginalized groups, provide them with mentorship, and work to create a community that can support them, appreciate and nurture their potential, and celebrate their contributions in science. I welcome all my colleagues to join me in these endeavors and to find their own ways to exact change.



GenHET Newsletter

Issue 2, July 2020.

Educate yourself

Links, articles and other useful resources

Wednesday, June 10th was an important day in our community: there was a call within STEM researchers for a strike to mark the start for our commitment to eradicate the persistent systemic racism in academia and STEM. Various organizations, such as Arxiv and Nature joined the strike.

Particles for Justice
#ShutDownSTEM

These websites include an extensive list of resources and information to start the process of educating yourself and start actions. One study we recommend is

The Time is now: Systemic Changes to Increase African Americans with Bachelor's Degrees in Physics and Astronomy, from AIP.

There are several networks and associations devoted to black groups in STEM. Here we have collected a few, which you can follow via social media.

- Supporting black women, girls, and non-binary POC in STEM at vanguardstem.com.
- Decolonise STEM has various collectives operating within and outside academia involving black and indigenous scientists. Two groups can be found here and here.
- Tech education and hackathons directed to black girls at blackgirlscode.com.
- Increasing representation of black STEM professionals entering tech here.
- Follow #BlackInTheIvory on Twitter, and learn about their movement in Nature magazine here.
- Extensive list of initiatives to increase diversity in physics at Medium.com.

GenHET Newsletter

Issue 2, July 2020.

Webinars and Roundtables in our Physics Community

Some actions within our community

Call for action on diversity and inclusion in academia: Special Invisibles Event

In solidarity with the June 10th strike, the members of the Elusives ITN project organized a special Invisible event. You can watch the recording and download slides here. This event was devoted to the general failure in achieving an inclusive and diverse academia, particularly in physics and STEM. In particular, the presentation of Prof. Hitoshi Murayama (UC Berkeley and IMPU Tokyo) included several statistics that reflect on the urgency among all of us to have a meaningful reaction to our stark reality.

Racism in science and society - Angela Saini in conversation: WIT @ CERN Event

Women in Technology (WIT) at CERN hosted a great conversation with science journalist Angela Saini, author of 2019's Superior: The Return of Race Science on June 17th, The discussion examined how "race" arose as a tool of oppressive classification; how it has been given a veneer of scientific and intellectual respectability by bigoted pseudoscientists throughout the centuries; why and how racist pseudoscience has returned recently under the auspices of "intelligence studies", evolutionary psychology, & "race realism"; how such pseudoscience is used by contemporary white supremacists to justify their racism and build power; and how the thin intellectual veneer of racism contributes to inequality and prejudice in our academic institutions. Check out more here.

From Passion to Action - Levers and Tools for Making Physics Inclusive & Equitable: APS webinar

On June 24th, a group of North American organizations in physics organized a roundtable webinar, with Prof. Stephon Alexander (Brown University & NSBP President) and Prof. Lisa Randall (Harvard University) as facilitators of the event. The panel discussion featured an excellent selection of physicists who have been actively involved with increasing diversity in physics and improving its culture. We would like to highlight the participation of Farrah Simpson (Brown University, NSBP Board Student Representative & Graduate Student) who was extremely eloquent and compelling, and Arlene Modeste Knowles (AIP, TEAM-UP Project Manager) who presented concrete and effective actions.

GenHET Newsletter

Issue 2, July 2020.

Corona Times

This section collects items related to the Covid-19 crisis and your reactions to it. Contact us by e-mail or via twitter, and we will try to incorporate them in the next issue.

Working from Home

Collecting personal experiences related to family and childcare from our GenHET members.

Dr. Ioana Coman-Lohi

Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands

The past few months have been a balancing act between work and parenting, even more, delicate than under normal circumstances. I must say I found the time at home with my daughter precious, knowing she is healthy and safe. But she is little and needs to be kept engaged, which has fragmented my days. Coping with the interruptions and dividing my attention has been the biggest challenge.

It is true that I have managed to do research during her naps, late into the night, or multitasking — working while she was painting, drawing, playing with lego... the list goes on. I found activities that could hold her attention and hopefully benefit her development and in doing so, carved some time for myself. Despite all the planning and careful scheduling, I have nevertheless had online meetings with collaborators on which she decided it would be fun to drop in. So I found myself discussing results while also bouncing her on my knees or letting her colour all over my papers. Progress with work has been more variable and unpredictable than usual, but I am relieved the time spent at home has not been wasted academically.

Now I have started taking my girl back to daycare because it is also important for her to be with children her own age, so life is returning to a more familiar schedule. Looking back on the last couple of months, overall I feel positive. It is true that I have struggled to keep everything going, knowing that I could or should be able to do better on all fronts. But I am sure my experience has been far easier when compared to the hardships of other parents and the extra time I've had with my daughter as a result compensates all the effort.

GenHET Newsletter

Issue 2, July 2020.

Dr. Mariana Graña

Permanent Researcher, CEA/Saclay, France

Working at home with children was, in summary, hard, but I should not forget the positive aspects of it. On the positive side, my children got to know my work much more closely. On one hand, they can now answer the typical question that we get from people outside academia: "what do you do during your day?". They can appreciate now that the work of a theoretical physicist is very varied. (I think before they had the idea that I was doing calculations all day long). On the other hand, I got to share with them much more about the questions we are trying to answer, and the passion we put in it.

On the negative side, it took very long for them to understand (and they yet haven't, completely), that even if mummy is not in a video call, she should not be interrupted. This too frequent interruption was the hardest part for me. I wanted to start working on two new projects that I was extremely excited about before the lockdown, and I just could not. I never had the time and mental space needed to get going on those ambitious projects. Now I have the fear of being scooped by somebody without children who found this period particularly productive, and if this is so I will be very upset by the unfairness of the situation. As far as I am concerned, it also took me a while to realize that it was acceptable to lock myself up in the office while I was "officially working" and not in charge of them, even if I wasn't teaching, or I didn't have to "attend" a very important meeting. I should have done that earlier, and more often, a locked door is a barrier they are able to accept, and furthermore I would say that they even need, in order to assimilate the notion of "mummy is working, she is at home but she's working".

Teaching was also a challenge. On the positive side, I think my children admire me more because I am also a teacher, but my students are 25 years old! But it was a constant struggle for my husband to keep them reasonably quiet and not interrupt during the whole duration of the class (two hours in the morning and two in the afternoon). And there was no way my 5-year-old boy would let me not introduce him to my students, so I had to do it (since I was teaching a small class, it was fine to do that, and in some sense I am happy that the students saw that their string theory teacher is also a mother. I doubt there will ever be another opportunity for us to show this in an equally crude way).

GenHET Newsletter

Issue 2, July 2020.

Dr. Andrea Thamm

Lecturer, University of Melbourne, Australia

Andrea's field of research is theoretical high-energy phenomenology, with emphasis on Beyond the Standard Model Physics. She is a member of the GenHET working group and organizer of the 1st Workshop on High Energy Theory and Gender. Andrea gave birth to her first child in January 2020, congratulations! Her thoughts during these new challenges are:

"I think having a supportive partner is the only way to work from home with young children. My husband and I swop roles every 24 hours: one of us is on baby duty, the other one gets to sleep and work. If only nature wouldn't tie the baby to the boob."

News and Articles

A modest collection of articles focused on Covid-19 and academic life

COVID-19: Challenges and action perspectives for inclusive universities.
Impact on Publishing, Nature Magazine
The Pandemic and Female Academic

GenHET members in the spotlight, May 2020

If you have a suggestion for a GenHET member to be included in our spotlight section, please email us at GenHET.Admin@cern.ch.

Congratulations to Masha Baryakhtar (NYU) and Natalie Paquette (Caltech/IAS) for their new assistant professor appointment at the University of Washington!

GenHET Newsletter

Issue 2, July 2020.

LGBTQI+

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI+) Pride Month is currently celebrated each year in the summer to honor the 1969 Stonewall Uprising in Manhattan. To celebrate this month (virtually), take a moment to meet some of the queer members of our scientific community via

LGBT+ Physicists
LGBT @ APS.org

As a working group devoted to gender issues we are interested in addressing issues of queer, trans, and gender non-conforming scientists. In our next issues, we plan to have more content on these topics. If you have information regarding diversity initiatives locally or internationally that are relevant to LGBTQI+ and science, please contact us and contribute to this section.

Reading corner highlights

Some interesting articles, news and other information recommended by members of GenHET

- From outside the high energy theoretical physics community, this letter from Geoscientists in Nature.com on race and racism is worth reading.
- The European Research Area Group presented their position paper on gender equality. You can read about it here.
- A few research articles, old and recent, to keep in your reservoir:
  - Stereotypes about gender and science: women ≠ scientists. Psychology of Women Quarterly.
  - Does mentoring make a difference for women academics? Evidence from the literature and a guide for future research. Journal of Research in Gender Studies
  - Diversity-Innovation Paradox in Science. PNAS. And check also the article in Nature Index regarding this excellent study.

May 21st, Diversity Day!

This day provides us with an opportunity to deepen our understanding of the values of cultural diversity. Read about the UN General Assembly reflections for this year here.

GenHET Newsletter

Issue 2, July 2020.

HET Seminars and Conferences Online

Stay connected to your research community via online seminars series.

Physics in the time of Coronavirus, Google calendar
CERN-TH Virtual Activities
Nordic Remote HET Seminars
HoloTube Seminars on Applied AdS/CFT
Theory Web Seminars
ResearchSeminars.org
Inspire Seminars
BSM Pandemic

At GenHET we also wanted to highlight the excellent initiative of String Pheno 2020: the conference was held virtually from June 8-12, with all presentations by junior researchers without a permanent position. The success of this program initiated a summer program series, which promotes junior members in this area.

Meet the GenHET working group: Dr. Agnese Bissi, Assistant Professor, Uppsala University.

Every issue of the newsletter will include a short profile of one of our working group members.

I grew up in a village on the top of a little hill in the center of Italy. The quiet life there led me to ask myself, and my poor school teachers, tons of questions about whatever was surrounding me. That's when I was hooked on science! During the years, I developed a strong interest in Math, Physics, and Chemistry and I eventually decided to study Physics at the university as I considered Physics to be the best compromise between my three favorite subjects. I still think it was the best choice ever!

I did my bachelor and master in theoretical physics at the University of Perugia. Then I moved to Copenhagen for my PhD studies. I did my PhD at the Niels Bohr Institute, under the supervision of Charlotte Kristjansen. After that, I did two

PostDocs, the first at the University of Oxford and the second at Harvard University. I then returned to Scandinavia, this time in Sweden, where I work as an Assistant Professor at Uppsala University. Here I built my own group, which includes PhD students and Post-Docs. My main research interest is the AdS / CFT correspondence, and I am currently trying to deal with how to study conformal field theories to better understand quantum gravity, mainly using the conformal bootstrap approach.

As a PhD student, I started to realize how lucky I was to have a female supervisor, who soon became one of my professional role models. Being in this situation is definitely not common and I believe this is one of the reasons I am still working as a researcher. Despite being in the twenty-first century, we have the urge to discuss discrimination, gender unbalance, and striking uniformity of our working environment. That is one of the reasons why I am part of the Gen-HET working group (and also of the Board of Equal Opportunities at the department where I work), to better understand the dynamics behind such phenomena. As a human being and a university employee, I would like to improve the sense of inclusiveness of all students, potential students, and colleagues, at any level and regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, country of origin, the color of the skin, among others.