DiGeSt

Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies

Editorial: Studying diversity and gender in times of Corona

Florian Vanlee, Mieke Vandenbroucke & Tina Goethals

Studying diversity and gender in times of Corona
Editorial

Florian Vanlee
Editor-in-Chief
florian.vanlee@ugent.be

Mieke Vandenbroucke
Associate Editor and co-editor of this issue
mieke.vandenbroucke@uantwerpen.be

Tina Goethals
Editor-in-Chief
tina.goethals@ugent.be

It is perhaps uncommon for editorials to engage explicitly with previous iterations, but the very times we now live in are uncommon, and urge us to step beyond our usual habits and practices. Roughly one year has passed since the publication of the last editorial accompanying a General Issue of DiGeSt: *Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, and the events that have unfolded over de course of the past twelve months require this text to interact explicitly with its predecessor.

Due to the changes that have again taken place in the journal's editorial team, for instance, we cannot but replicate the previous editorial's announcement to share that Ladan Rahbari's flag as editor-in-chief has passed to **Florian Vanlee** in September 2020. **Mieke Vandenbroucke**, on the other hand, provisionally resumed her former role in response to Tina Goethals' prolonged absence, and assisted in supervising the production of this second General Issue to appear exclusively online. Indeed, where the introductory text of the 7(1) issue in the Spring of 2020 celebrated DiGeSt's entry into an open access format that better reflects the journal's convictions on the need to make scientific insights freely available to scholarly and lay audiences alike, the publication of the current issue perhaps marks its maturation into these new conditions. Trials and errors have been substituted by habits and procedures. Where the shift from print to pixel sometimes felt uneasy at first, DiGeSt is increasingly enjoying the affordances of its digital rebirth – evidenced, for instance, by the growing number of contributions that include visual material in the last and current issue.

But these formalities are of course almost inconsequential compared to the fact that this editorial must *yet again* address the COVID-19 pandemic as an invariable presence in all our lives. Since the combative commitment to solidarity in the face of a seemingly *temporary* crisis expressed in our 7(1) issue, *Corona* has become a permanent companion for everyone – to some a mere nuisance, to others an existential threat. It is now clear that the pandemic requires more than ad hoc responses from academia and those working in it, and calls for a serious reconfiguration of scholarly practices of publication and communication. Consequently, we have over the course of the past year reflected on ways to productively address the COVID-19 pandemic beyond mere organisational interventions – such as the postponement of our 7(2) Special Issue on parenthood to alleviate the considerable workload of the guest editors and authors involved, or practicing lenience concerning deadlines for prospective authors and enlisted reviewers. These are certainly important choices to make and principles to adhere to, but do not so much capitalize on the possibilities offered by scholarly publishing inasmuch as they consciously attempt to circumvent the less beneficial role it could play in circumstances already difficult enough by themselves.

But with the **COVID-19 roundtable** included in this General Issue, which has researchers reflect on the pandemic's impact on their professional and/or personal lives and activities in a less formally academic register, DiGeSt has now opted to face the pandemic head on. Premised on the conviction that journals can do more than just alleviate conditions for scholars, the roundtable provides a space for sentiments and critical examinations about COVID-19 and its implications to be expressed. Not only because it allows scholars working in diversity and gender studies to therapeutically engage with the challenges, difficulties and crises they have faced in their private lives or research practices as a result of *Corona*, or with the often unprecedented measures taken to curb its spread. Perhaps more importantly, it fulfils an archival function. It documents the highly personal observations and experiences of a selection of scholars – often treated as too inconsequential and subjective in peer-reviewed publications – and turns them into something to be taken seriously, into something *citable*. Indeed, the contributions by **Luce Beeckmans**, **Anne-Marie D'Aoust**, **Valerie De Craene**, **Maria DiCenzo**, **Kristien Hens**, **Anneleen Kenis**, **Robert McRuer** and **Anne-Christel Zeiter** offer an in-depth perspective into the ramifications of the pandemic on the individual authors' lives, research practices and intellectual processes, but equally constitute a critical topography of COVID-19's multifaceted impact on diversity and gender studies. In doing so, they contextualize the regular contributions of this General Issue, which have been produced in exactly those difficult conditions engaged with in the roundtable essays.

But in addition to the Roundtable contributions, this General Issue also includes five research articles by early career scholars and established academics, working in various disciplines engaged with gender and diversity studies. Addressing a diversity of subjects like pop-cultural representations of femininity and sexuality, gender dimensions to far-right discourse in German-speaking countries and Portugal, deaf education and sign language acquisition in Serbia or self-presentational practices of young people on social media, the contributions included in DiGeSt's 8(1) issue highlight the broad societal relevance and intellectual depth of contemporary diversity and gender studies.

In "The Visual Digital Self: A Discourse Theoretical Analysis of Young People's Negotiations on Gender, Reputation and Sexual Morality Online", **Burcu Korkmazer**, **Sander De Ridder** and **Sofie Van Bauwel** deploy an innovative methodological design based on participants creating 'good', 'bad' and 'ideal' social media profiles to conduct an in-depth analysis of how young people's modes of online self-presentation reflect visual performances of aesthetic and neoliberal subjectivities. In doing so, they point to the interplay between self-determination and self-monitoring, where the former is seen to underlie ideal types of self-curating online visibility, while the latter articulates sexual morality in dominant conceptions of 'bad' self-presentations.

Turning to online discourse propagated by Portuguese far-right political actors, **Rita Santos** and **Sílvia Roque** discuss the paradoxical role played by motives of gender equality in "The Portuguese Populist Far-Right and the Intersection of Antimigration and Antifeminist Agendas" and point to the co-optation of traditionally feminist themes in femonationalist agendas. These discourses lament the 'gender ideology' that supposedly shapes and directs contemporary feminism to attack and discredit it, emphasizing cisheteronormative and cispatriarchal constructions of family and nation instead. Ultimately, these femonationalist discourses are shown to first and foremost serve an antimulticulturalist and ethnonationalist agenda rather than gender equality.

Similarly "'*The Great Replacement*' – Reproduction and Population Policies of the Far Right, Taking the Identitarians as an Example" by **Judith Goetz** addresses gendered discourse found in the political agenda of far-right actors in German-speaking countries. Based on a critical discourse analysis of online communication of the 'Identitarian' movement and their activism against the perceived 'replacement' of European populations, the article demonstrates how this seemingly novel emphasis on population policies in fact constitute an update of traditional far-right talking points and critically assesses the position of gender-specific aspects herein.

Focusing on sign language, **Dragana Raičević Bajić**, **Gordana Nikolić**, **Mihailo Gordić**, **Kimberley Mouvet** and **Mieke Van Herreweghe** report on in-depth interviews in "Language Attitudes towards Serbian Sign Language and Experiences with Deaf Education in Serbia" to historically and educationally contextualize Serbian Sign Language and identify shifting dynamics in students' attitudes vis-à-vis its use compared to the oralist tradition still favoured by teachers. In doing so, they argue for an emphasis on teacher training to allow for a cultural-minority linguistic perspective to arise that would construct deafness as a human variety rather than a disability in Serbian deaf education.

Reporting on a textual analysis of TV series *Supergirl*, finally, **Maxine Dewulf-Helskens**, **Frederik Dhaenens** and **Sarah Van Leuven** employ a queer postfeminist perspective in "Superheroines and Superstereotypes? Queer Postfeminism, Intersectionality and Female Superheroes in *Supergirl*" to trouble simplistic accounts of contemporary popular culture's engagement with notions of gender and sexuality. Demonstrating how the series both reproduces conservative gender assumptions and subverts hegemonic conventions about sexuality, the article calls for a nuanced mode of analysis at once vigilant for neoliberal co-optations of feminist politics and receptive for the ways in which such narratives might still destabilise conventional views of gender and sexuality.

These research articles are followed by a sizeable and diverse "What Are Your Reading?" section. This segment offers scholars at the onset of their career in diversity and

gender studies a space to reflect on works with particular relevance to their own inquiries, and consists of seven in-depth engagements with a variety of works in the field. The contributions of **Anne-Sophie Bafort**, **Martha Claeys**, **Katelijne Malomgré**, **Emma Moormann**, **Anna Ropianyk**, **Lotte Spreeuwenberg** and **Vanessa Van Puyvelde** demonstrate how the ideas and findings of established scholars working in diversity and gender studies support further exploration and find original applications in the studies of early career researchers. Addressing a multitude of subjects – ranging from the pedagogical potential of translanguaging, the implications of critical assessments of misogyny on the notion of 'pride' or reconfigurations of gender discourse based on precolonial Yorùbá culture to ethical questions surrounding selective abortion, intersectional perspectives on queer Muslims, the importance of embracing discomfort to dismantle systems of oppression or the need to historicize feminist perspectives on gender relations – this issue's "What Are Your Reading?" section reflects the heterogeneity of contemporary diversity and gender studies.

In the face of the original contributions included in this issue – as roundtable essays or research papers, the important work of others involved in the publication process must not go unnoticed either. Firstly, this General Issue has only been made possible by the largely invisible work of our interns **Kika Van Robays** and **Noor Berckx**. In normal circumstances, they would have fulfilled their commitment to DiGeSt in close physical proximity to the editorial team, but here again, COVID-19 deprived them of an 'ordinary' internship. But they simply excelled in their work, difficult conditions and virtual collaboration notwithstanding. Their support and proactive approach were seminal to the production of this General Issue and they deserve special recognition. Additionally, DiGeSt's "What Are You Reading?"-editor **Leah Budke** did not only succeed once again in compiling a varied and insightful section reflecting the literature early career diversity and gender scholars are drawing from today. She did so while finalising her PhD dissertation too, and our gratitude for her commitment is only matched by our respect for her fortitude. Finally, we would like to explicitly acknowledge the crucial role played by the anonymous peer reviewers involved in assessing the articles included in this General Issue. Their insightful comments and constructive feedback have undoubtedly played a beneficial role to the overall quality of this 8(1) General Issue of DiGeSt.