



DiGeSt

Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies

Editorial

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DiGeSt Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies, Volume 9, Issue 1

<https://doi.org/10.21825/digest.84822>

Print ISSN: 2593-0273. Online ISSN: 2593-0281

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DiGeSt is hosted by Ghent University Website: <https://digest.ugent.be>

Editorial

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For some years now, diversity and gender studies have been conducted in a perpetual state of societal crisis. Where the editorials of our previous General Issues had to acknowledge the pernicious consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the present one is written against the backdrop of the Russian Federation's aggression in Ukraine and the global economic fallout it has engendered. And once again, a cynical rule of thumb applies: not only do marginalized groups suffer disproportionately from the war's direct and indirect impact. A secondary ramification of the military stalemate and the economic fallout it actuates is the eclipsing of other inequalities and injustices that merit our critical attention, including those structured by systems of socio-cultural difference. Commonplace historiography and pop-cultural glorification make it all too easy to perceive open warfare between nations as an exceptional moment of history-in-the-making. But its apparent eligibility to our undivided attention comes at a clear cost, however, pushing the brutality of other conflicts from the public eye and obscuring how food and energy shortages are not an abstract economic problem but a bleak material reality for sizeable parts of humanity. In formal political terms, moreover, it creates opportunities for governments and state actors to redirect attention from deficits of governance to the 'necessities of war' and the 'injustice of the aggressor', side-lining questions about their own moral and political failures. To be clear, this is not at all a call to ignore the Russo-Ukrainian conflict – the pertinence of which to diversity and gender studies is undeniable. Rather, we intend to emphasize the importance of critical scholarship on subjects far removed from the headlines of mediatized public consciousness – which at times like these risks being overshadowed.

With this in mind, DiGeSt: Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies remains ever committed to giving platform to research that critically addresses socio-cultural difference and its ramifications. To attend to this mission, the editorial team has welcomed several new members since the publication of our Spring 2021 General Issue. Since February 2022, **An Van Raemdonck** has assumed the position of editor-in-chief, taking over from Tina Goethals. Similarly, editorial board member **Leni Van Goidsenhoven** has accepted the invitation to act as our new "What Are You Reading?"-editor, replacing Leah Budke, whose role became vacant after finalising her dissertation in the Fall of 2021. Today, we want to thank Tina and Leah – not only for their commitment to the journal itself, but for their warm, thoughtful presence in the editorial team too. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to work with them, and we can only aim to match their passionate engagement with the field in the future. With this 9(1) General Issue, we continue the course previous editorial teams have laid out for the journal, and consciously position the journal as a space wherein all scholarly discussions related to diversity and gender can take place – including those that have long escaped our critical attention.

With its **Ageism Roundtable** – initiated and edited by DiGeSt board member prof. Dr. Katrien De Graeve – this General Issue aims to address one of these oft-neglected areas of asymmetrical power structures. Premised on the observation that the intersection between age and gender is all too easily overlooked in popular and academic debates alike, the contributions it features shine a critical light on commonly held assumptions about age and ageing in mainstream discourse and feminist scholarship. The result is a heterogenous collection of reflexive essays that touch upon a broad array of related issues. From an analytical engagement with the problematic notion of age in feminist theory and activism by **Katrien De Graeve**, it turns to a personal account of experiencing and resisting ageism authored by **Anja Meulenbelt**. Laying bare how the prospect of aging is in and of itself iniquitously available to marginalized groups, **Ryan Backer** then poignantly articulates the need for intersectional approaches to age activism, whereas **Sara De Vuyst** departs from her conversations with queer women and non-binary people to highlight subversive aspects of unruly joy and humour in queer aging. Subsequently proposing that the very technologies used to ridicule and silence women may be reappropriated to foster intergenerational activist encounters, **Katrien Jacobs** argues for a 'deepfake feminism', which ties into the roundtable's final essay. Herein, **Aagje Swinnen** highlights that age is a movable marker,

and ageism is predicated on a lifetime of internalization; injecting critical engagements with age in the educational curriculum is therefore a crucial step towards intergenerational solidarity. Hence, the Ageivism Roundtable touches on theory, activism, art and education – merging experiential and personal registers with scholarly and analytical perspectives to produce a multifaceted account of the interplay between age and gender.

In addition to the Roundtable essays, this General Issue includes five research articles by upcoming scholars and experienced academics, working in various areas of gender and diversity studies. In line with DiGeSt's broad scope on diversity and gender studies, their contributions touch on diverse subjects – from the multiplicity of 'feeling at home' to migrant women, queer reinterpretations of pole dancing's queer subversive potential or the role of art in addressing capitalism's care crisis to trans* people's reception of popular trans* portrayals or Iranian women's attitudes to sports and physical activity. Once more, the articles featured in our 9(1) General Issue testify to the kaleidoscopic nature of the field, defying disciplinary orthodoxy and applying a multitude of productive heuristics to diversity and gender in its many aspects.

In "Home and Belonging: African Women in 'Crisis' Greece", **Viki Zaphiriou-Zarifi** discusses field work conducted among migrant communities in Athens, pointing to the fluid but meaningful conceptualizations of a 'sense of home' among African Women. Combining rich ethnographic description with visual data and thorough interpretative analyses, Zaphiriou-Zarifi demonstrates how 'feeling at home' does not necessarily imply a singular affective object, but may indeed involve multiple, sometimes even conflicting spatial and temporal configurations. With these insights, the paper adds to debates on migration – which are often premised on static and ultimately restricted conceptions of 'authentic belonging'. Recognizing the dynamic fluidity of 'at homeness', it concludes, highlights the complexity in how migrant women are affectively and materially invested in their places of residence and origin.

Turning to tensions between feminist and queer perspectives on erotic performances and physical-artistic expressions of sexuality, **Nina Poels** and **Carine Plancke** argue that recreational erotic dancing creates room for practitioners to investigate their sexed bodies and disrupt commonly held notions of sexuality and gender. With "Sex and Desire on the Dancefloor: A Queer Post-Structuralist Approach on Reclaiming Erotic Dances", they point to the limitations of contemporary feminist interpretations of the rising popularity of erotic dancing as a leisure activity, and problematize its insistent characterization of the practice as a postfeminist reflection of neoliberal discourses of the self. Establishing how erotic dancing offers useful and subversive instruments to destabilize the sexual and gendered status quo, the article calls on researchers to be attentive for its counterhegemonic potential.

Premised on a critical examination of the social and cultural forces that sustain today's proliferation of burn-outs, **Sarah De Mul's** "Beyond Burnout Culture? Artistic Imaginations of Care (Crisis) in Barbara Raes' *Zon dag kind* and Els Dietvorst's *Field Guide*" invokes feminist art and theory to reframe 'burnout culture' as a reflection of capitalism's care crisis. Eschewing the commonplace individualization of the burnout as if brought by personal exhaustion and mental pressure, the author forwards late capitalism's political economies as its underlying mechanism. Closely reading two contemporary art works, the article demonstrates that productive interplays between humanities scholarship and artistic practice help us imagine care-based socialities, which in turn are a crucial modality to address the individualization fostered by the neoliberal timeframe we are situated in today.

With "Trans Persons on Trans Representations in Popular Media Culture: A Reception Study", **Hanne Van Haelter**, **Frederik Dhaenens** and **Sofie Van Bauwel** inject an audience-based perspective to queer media studies, decentering the text as its privileged object. Premised on the growing visibility of trans* people in domestic Dutch-language fiction and factual media, the article reports on 13 in-depth interviews with trans* people about their perception of popular trans* portrayals. These show that respondents value increased visibility in mainstream media as an important evolution – acting as a source of

information to trans* and cisgender audiences alike. At the same time, they express critical views about the homogenization of trans* experiences in popular media, both in terms of the limited demographic diversity of trans* portrayals and the dominant frameworks trans* subject positions are understood in.

In “Women’s (Non) Participation in Sports: Gendered Attitudes, Biopolitics and Women’s Perception of Body and Sports in Iran”, finally, **Ladan Rahbari** and **Zeinab Mahmudabadi** addresses the underlying frameworks that shape how Iranian women perceive sports and physical activity. Showing that participants hold essentialist beliefs about physical traits and activities appropriate for men and women respectively, the article complicates commonplace assumptions about Iranian women’s inhibitions for sports participation – which often emphasize cultural norms and religious prescripts as a primary factor. Drawing on feminist thought on body politics, it demonstrates that discourses on appropriate femininity and gendered embodiment surpass the importance of imposed modesty and faith-based decrees to explain limited participation in physical activity.

As always, the research articles featured in this General Issue of DiGeSt are followed by a “What Are You reading?” section – wherein upcoming researchers in the field discuss the particular value of an existing work on their own inquiries. With their contributions, **Gert-Jan Vanaken**, **Liselotte Van der Gucht**, **Sven Van den Bossche**, **Tessel Veneboer** and **Kika W. L. Van Robaeys** testify to the breadth and depth of contemporary diversity and gender studies, and illustrate how the ideas of established scholars in the field find fruitful soil in the work of early career scholars. From crip theory, critical reassessments of neurodivergence or trans* historiography to feminist autobiographical writing and the creation of a suitable vocabulary for queer studies focused on Chinese culture: this General Issue’s “What Are You reading?” section again highlights the productive multifariousness of diversity and gender studies.

At face value, a General Issue can seem like a crystallization of the featured authors’ research work, materialized in the essays and articles included. But it is much more than the sum of its published parts; without the largely unnoticed work happening behind the scenes, this issue of DiGeSt would not have seen the light in the first place. Editorial intern **Rylan Verlooy**’s reliable and competent help in copy-editing and typesetting the contributions included in this General Issue could not have been more welcome. Combining their internship with DiGeSt with an MA program and a job at Transgender Infopunt, the effort they put into working with the editorial team testifies to their commitment and considerable capacities – and we are extremely lucky for having had such a wonderful intern over the course of the past semester. Additionally, the invaluable work done by the anonymous peer reviewers who assessed the manuscripts touched on in this editorial must not go unrecognized either. Academics’ reviewing efforts are largely taken for granted, and add to the already considerable workload we face in our daily lives. We therefore wish to explicitly thank all the scholars who have voluntarily and constructively commented on the articles featured in this 9(1) General Issue of DiGeSt.

As a final expression of recognition and gratitude, we end this editorial by paying homage to DiGeSt’s founding editor **Marysa Demoor**. After a rich career spanning forty-four years, she became emerita professor in 2021, which in and of itself merits acknowledgement. But in the context of this editorial, it is especially relevant to highlight the pivotal role she has played in putting diversity and gender at the forefront of higher education and research in Belgium and abroad. Having been the driving force behind the predecessor to DiGeSt – the ‘Verslagen van het Centrum voor Genderstudies’ – since 1991, prof. Dr. Demoor ensured the continuation of the journal in its current form when institutional support was withdrawn for the previous publication. Chairing Ghent University’s *Centre for Gender Studies* between 1995 and 2021 – alongside commitments to initiatives like the *Think Thank for Female Professors* or the *Equal Opportunities Committee* of the Flemish Interuniversity Council – she recognized the need for a domestic scholarly outlet to stimulate and disseminate research on diversity and gender, and played an instrumental part in turning this

necessity into a material reality. Her consistent attention for issues of diversity and gender in teaching students and training researchers, moreover, has instilled a passion for our field in new generations of scholars – an accomplishment that far surpasses her commitment to this journal alone.