

# A Forum on Diversity and Inclusion: Thematic Issue for Early Career Researchers

## Introduction

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Over the course of the years 2018–2022, the program for outstanding Departments (henceforth “Excellence Project”) financed by the Italian Ministry of University (L. 232/2016) has had a major impact on the way we do research at the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures (LILEC) of the University of Bologna. This program has fostered a transdisciplinary dialogue on diversity and inclusion, resulting in a wide variety of academic outputs and cultural initiatives, including the creation of this journal. The end of the project has not marked an end to this dialogue. On the contrary, the project has left an indelible mark on the current work of the Department’s early career researchers. The ensuing range of themes and theoretical approaches variably addresses the issues of diversity and inclusion, ranging from border and migration studies to sociolinguistics, translation studies, comparative and multilingual approaches to gender and women’s studies, postcolonial studies and the related fields of World Literature, transmediality and multimodal studies, among others.

Looking beyond the temporal frame of the program and with a view to embrace some of the challenges and opportunities the themes of diversity and inclusion provide, this issue of *DIVE-IN* gathers contributions by former and current PhD students and Postdocs whose work at LILEC has been supported by the Excellence Project.

The issue opens with a contribution by Carmen Bonasera titled “Esperienze e prospettive di sostenibilità del Progetto di Eccellenza ‘DIVE-IN: Diversity & Inclusion’ (2018-2022)”. The article explores the central themes of the Project – which focused on linguistic and cultural diversity, inclusion, and

citizenship – and the ways in which these themes have been translated into research, teaching, and public engagement activities within the LILEC Department. This backward glance aims at providing an assessment of five years of work undertaken with the intent of enhancing the linguistic and cultural richness of our Department through new internal and external synergies.

Francesco Cattani's article – "Transfigurazioni mostruose. Tra rabbia, disforia ed euforia" – focuses on the monstrous body, its excessive nature, and its disruptive power in representing diversity and reconfiguring boundaries. Centred on feminist and posthuman theory, particularly trans\* and transfeminist perspectives, the text engages in dialogue with significant theoretical works, including those by Rosi Braidotti, Judith Butler, Treva Ellison, Kai M. Green, Donna Haraway and Rita Monticelli. Starting from the accusation of monstrosity directed at the trans\* body within heteronormative discourses, the essay shows how trans\* individuals have sometimes chosen to embrace the category of the monstrous, proudly asserting their alterity against a normativity that delineates and excludes.

Veronica De Pieri returns to the body – an extremely fertile hermeneutic category in contemporary criticism – in an essay titled "The Irradiated body: Variations of the Feminine in the Post-Atomic Era". The article investigates the metamorphosis of the female body following the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in relation to the recent incident at the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power station. Having been transformed into a monstrous body due to exposure to radioactivity, the female body of the *hibakusha* ('survivors') fails to comply with the heteronormative ideal of *ryōsai kenbo* ('good wife and wise mother'), but this liberation from reproductive obligations can be translated into a new form of individual agency, according to De Pieri's analysis.

The role of women in society is also at the core of Beatrice Masi's contribution, "Spettralità e lavoro riproduttivo in *Nothing on Earth* (2016) di Conor O'Callaghan", which explores the issue of reproductive labor within a patriarchal and capitalist society such as Ireland. The essay examines how O'Callaghan addresses these themes in a novel where the invisibility of women's work is rendered through the Gothic trope of disappearance, symbolically linked to the setting of the story, one of the many ghost estates that mark Irish territory, a legacy of the rapid (and disorganized) economic development during the Celtic Tiger period.

Shifting the focus to the domain of linguistics, Mariangela Picciuolo's "L'analisi del discorso multimodale come metodo di ricerca-azione per l'educazione ai media: un caso pratico di studio" opens with a set of reflections on the rapid evolution of a technological and communicative environment that is characterized by the explosion of new media and the development of prosumers (consumers and at the same time creators of media products). Picciuolo then draws our attention to the risk of confining the educational path to predominant forms of verbal communication, emphasizing instead the need for a Media Education capable of embracing multimodality. From these premises, the article delves into the analysis of multimodal discourse (MDA) as an action research tool in schools. The case study Picciuolo presents is a project entitled "Media Education and Active Citizenship 4.0", which involved 200 high school students between 2021-24, aiming to train them in the critical analysis of multimodal discourse on climate change as represented in the media.

Following this section on linguistics, we return to literature and a gender perspective through Carolina Pisapia's "Towards a Diffractive Reading of the Folkloric Archive Carmen Maria Machado's *In the Dream House* and the Wild Pedagogies". The essay explores *The Dream House* – a novel published by Carmen Maria Machado in 2019 – as a queer rewriting of a folkloric archive in which the motif of persecution within the heteronormative couple is pervasive. Pisapia analyzes Machado's intertextual stance through the category of diffraction, which Donna Haraway borrowed from physics, here applied to folklore studies in relation to the strong entanglement that oral performance entails between the storyteller and their audience. This theoretical framework enables Pisapia to explore how Machado appropriates the folkloric tradition, repurposing its repertoire of motifs and challenging its patriarchal order by reinscribing queer subjectivities and relationships within it. The article then opens another perspective on the so-called wild pedagogy, which implies a form of embodied participation in the educational path on the part of students. While this strategy has been explored mainly in decolonial and anti-racist contexts, Pisapia advocates for the extension of this epistemic freedom to feminist criticism.

Chiara Protani's contribution – "*L'altra Antigone. Rielaborazioni contemporanee del mito di Antigone tra diversità culturale e inclusione sociale*" – investigates the intertextual relationship between contemporary literature and classical myth. The focus of Protani's analysis are contemporary adaptations of the myth of Antigone, notably works centered on the experience of cultural diversity and the related dynamics of exclusion/inclusion. The tragedy of

Antigone has been revisited over the centuries as a tool to give voice to those who are marginalized within the social order. Against this background, several recent rewritings in various European literatures have used this lens to explore conflicts related to migratory flows and the minorities they generate in host societies, including the phenomenon of terrorism. By tracing this comparative overview, the article highlights the symbolic power that this classical tragedy presents in relation to the condition of young immigrants who are suspended between the desire for inclusion within the new society and the socio-cultural coordinates of their family of origin.

This issue of *DIVE-IN* ends with another essay on the body and the multiple identities that exceed heteronormativity, challenging its claim to be natural. Camil Valerio Ristè's "With(out) love from Japan. An analysis of the asexual spectrum in Shirono Honami's *I want to be the wall* and Isaki Uta's *Is Love the Answer?*" studies the contemporary Japanese media landscape to explore the new centrality that asexual and aromantic identity forms have acquired (in social and fictional terms), whether in relation to the LGBTQ+ community or not. After discussing the relationship between these trends in contemporary Japan and socio-economic pressures, which result in a growing absorption in work life among other effects, the essay analyzes two manga texts that explore the tension between the heteronormative expectations of a traditionalist society and the new subjectivities of young people.

In conclusion, this issue of *DIVE-IN*, three years after its founding, aims to assess the research lines that the Project of Excellence invited us all to explore. By following in the Project's footsteps, it also aims to offer early career researchers who have been trained within the Department the opportunity to showcase their investigations, engaging in a dynamic forum on the most innovative aspects of academic research. In other words, this collection of articles bears witness to the ongoing impact the Project still has on our Department, and exemplifies our ongoing mission to foster interdisciplinary dialogue on the themes of linguistic and cultural diversity, inclusion and citizenship.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As the issue was by invitation only, the articles were subjected to a double internal review process – first by the editors, then by members of the editorial board, who availed themselves of external referees when appropriate. We would like to thank all the colleagues who took part in this editorial process.