EDITORIAL

In Portugal, we are celebrating the recent legalization of same sex civil marriage (Law 9 / 2010, 31st May). It is an important milestone in the fight for equal rights. Portugal was the eighth country to legalize same sex marriage. The first seven countries were the Netherlands (2001), Uruguay (2002), Belgium (2003), Spain (2005), Canada (2005), South Africa (in 2006), Norway (2009) and Sweden (2009). By the end of June 2010, Iceland became the ninth country to legalize same sex marriage.

Legislative measures can contribute to social change. We believe that the legalization of same sex marriage is another step to a more fair and equal society. But full equality is not yet a reality in Portugal. Other legal measures are necessary and urgent, such as the recognition of same sex families and non-discrimination on access to medically assisted procreation.

The "State-sponsored Homophobia" report presents a “world survey of laws prohibiting same sex activity between consenting adults” (Ottosson, 2010). This report confirms that there still is discrimination based on sexual orientation in many countries around the world.

Even in European Union, where human rights are core values, the situation is not encouraging. The report of the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2009) shows that even though 18 EU countries already have specific legislation that protects against discrimination based on sexual orientation the social situation of homosexuals is not satisfactory. Lesbians and gay men frequently suffer multiple discriminations. And, in this context, invisibility is a common strategy.

Lesbians, as women with a non-normative sexual orientation, have a particular social reality in which discrimination has a number of dimensions. Lesbian invisibility has several causes and diverse expressions.

The challenge for the present number of LES Online was Lesbian Visibility – (in)visibilities and discrimination in different areas of life.

A heterogeneous group of researchers answered to that challenge, offering diverse approaches to this number, which includes issues such as: cultural and geographical factors; the dynamics of privacy; dimensions of sexual and reproductive health; heteronormativity, homonormativity and identities.

Amira Salima writes about the reality of Muslim lesbians, which are deprived of visibility in the public space and that use cyberspace as an alternative to total invisibility. Discrimination and oppression in the public space are present in their countries of origin and in the host countries. For those women, lesbianism and immigration are interrelated factors of discrimination. Through cyberspace, they can cross boundaries, share realities, build resistance, and gain visibility.
Helena Topa addresses another kind of invisibility: the invisibility of some private dimensions of lesbian relationships, such as domestic violence. Her research is based on interviews with victims of violence and examines the specificities of violence in conjugal relationships among women. This research highlighted the increased difficulty in seeking institutional support for those living their relationship in secrecy. It also stresses the urgency of social changes that will allow “breaking the silence”.

The text of Maria José Alves discusses the different dimensions of sexual and reproductive health of lesbians. This paper clarifies the risks of invisibility in this area. It also looks ahead to the positive effects of increasing lesbian visibility not only to healthcare but also to family planning.

Anabela Rocha presents a critical view of lesbian visibility, analysing the importance of the political lesbian subject. This author questions the homonormativity of the movement for lesbian visibility and proposes a universal approach based on the Kantian autonomy of the subject.

Following the discussion started in the previous issue, Maria José Magalhães addresses the relationship between lesbianism and the Feminist movement. She analyses her personal experience of feminist activism in Porto, in the period of the 25th April Portuguese Revolution. In this context, the paper focuses on the role of lesbians in the radical feminist movement. This text is the result of the intervention of Maria José Magalhães at the meeting “Lesbians and Feminist Movements in Portugal: Intersections”, organized by the “LES - Discussion Group on Lesbian Issues”, that took place in Porto at 17th October 2009.

In this issue, we launch the “Book Review” section. We present three reviews on the book of Sáo José Almeida “Homossexuais no Estado Novo”. The published texts have been written for the public presentation of the book in Lisbon (António Fernando Cascais), Coimbra (Graça Abranches) and Porto (Ana Luísa Amaral). The authors have kindly provided their reviews to be published on this issue of the LES Online.

We highlight the launch of this book as a landmark in the Portuguese action journalism. We started this editorial referencing the recent legislative changes in Portugal and its importance for society. But we wish to stress that the publication of books, such as “Homossexuais no Estado Novo”, may have significant social impacts in the direction of the changes that we desire so much.

REFERENCES

