

Portuguese Journal of Social Science
Volume 20 Number 3

© 2022 (2021) Intellect Ltd Editorial. English language. https://doi.org/10.1386/pjss_00036_2

EDITORIAL

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The Portuguese Rainbow: LGBTQI+ Rights and Experiences

ABSTRACT

Portugal has made a remarkable progress in promoting the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI+) people since the turn of the century. However, the knowledge produced in social science on the experiences of LGBTQI+ people in Portugal demonstrate the shortcomings and challenges of the transition from legal rights to lived experience. This issue is built around the rights as they relate to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sexual characteristics and to the experiences of LGBTQI+ people in Portugal, contextualized at the European and international level. The issue includes articles that, taken as a whole, provide domestic and international reader's critical knowledge about the LGBTQI+ community and lives in Portugal by the hand of some of the country's leading scholars in this area.

KEYWORDS

LGBTQI+
SOGIESC
Portugal
rights
policies
legislation
experiences

In contrast to a past with a long 'void', Portugal has made a remarkable progress in promoting the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI+) people since the turn of the century (Cascais 2006; Vale de

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Almeida 2010; Santos 2013; Hines and Santos 2018; Afonso 2019). Although it started this journey late Portugal currently occupies the top position in any assessment of the protection of LGBTQI+ rights. The advances made, mainly through legislation, justify the country's fourth place in Rainbow Europe 2021 (ILGA Europe 2021). However, the knowledge produced across the various social science disciplines on the experiences of LGBTQI+ people in Portugal, of which the articles in this issue are examples, demonstrate the shortcomings and challenges of the transition from legal rights to lived experience.

This issue is built around the rights as they relate to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sexual characteristics (SOGIESC) and to the experiences of LGBTQI+ people in Portugal, often in a comparative European and international perspective. The gap between rights and experiences is one of the characteristics of the Portuguese rainbow, which is one that appears to be much more colourful at a formal than at the a practical level, where the sky remains quite grey for a considerable number of the LGBTQI+ population that the storm caused by the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted (Gato et al. 2020; Saleiro 2022). This is a gap, which as this issue shows, widens considerably when sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions and non-normative sexual characteristics intersect with other categories of discrimination, such as gender, ethnicity and citizenship. Besides the speed at which rights have been implemented one after the other in law since the start of the century, one of the characteristics or specificities of the Portuguese rainbow is the failure to monitor the pace of their realization and respective translation in the lives of LGBTQI+ people, whose explanations are explored in some of the articles in this issue. One reason for this situation is the differentiated pace between the legislative and public policy developments related to SOGIESC that have only recently started their journey. The concern with building bridges between the knowledge produced in the social sciences and through public policies is also apparent in the set of articles published here.

This issue includes articles that, taken as a whole, provide domestic and international reader's critical knowledge about the LGBTQI+ community and lives in Portugal, contextualized at the European and international level by the hand of some of the country's leading scholars in this area. The issue also seeks to help contribute towards making visible the heritage of LGBTQI+ studies produced in the social sciences in Portugal – in anthropology, psychology, sociology and others – albeit while necessarily not exhaustive in terms of its coverage of the epistemological and disciplinary positions, thematic areas and subjects covered. While in some cases this is a consequence of the clear impossibility of encompassing this diversity, in others it reflects the absences in national Academe, reproducing, for example, the greater invisibility of some of the identities covered by the acronym. This is clearly the case with respect to the issues affecting the intersex community in Portugal.

The six articles in the issue cover the LGBTQI+ community in general, with some focusing more specifically on sexual orientation or gender identity. They cover the various stages of life, from youth to old age, and various topics, ranging from education and health to social care.

The first article is a self-ethnographic essay that highlights the diversity of this issue. Addressing the fact the personal is political, the renowned academic Miguel Vale de Almeida, who is also an LGBTQI+ activist and former MP, critically analyses the development of LGBTQI+ rights in democratic Portugal, developments in which he was frequently one of the leading protagonists.

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The author sets out three periods in the recent history of Portuguese democracy, identifying the peculiarities of the Portuguese context in its relation to rights, movements and the LGBTQI+ community: the post-revolutionary period when there was no political space for identity issues; the 1980s and 1990s, when the first structured claims emerge; the twenty-first century, which is described as the period during which LGBTQI+ claims became part of the political agenda and the consequent acquisition of SOGIESC-related rights. Vale de Almeida also identifies challenges for the present and the future, beginning precisely with the distance that separates the progressive and advanced legislation from its actual practice and implementation, referring to the need to strengthen public policies. To be effective and have a real impact on people's lives, legislation and public policies should be devised and implemented from an intersectional perspective as part of an overarching anti-discrimination policy. The text ends with a list of articles, books and data sources that can help the reader access more information on the main issues and developments surrounding LGBTQI+ rights, challenges and characteristics in Portugal.

The second article seeks to reflect on trans lives and politics from a transnational perspective. Drawing on extensive empirical research that combines the documentary analysis of legal and medical developments, multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews in five European countries (Portugal, France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Sweden), Sofia Aboim and Pedro Vasconcelos set out the main results of their research on (1) the plurality of identifications and embodiments found in this population; (2) institutional and legal recognition which, even when based on the principle of self-determination, presents limitations in the coverage of the diversity of trans people and their different identifications and situations and has consequences for what the authors identify as the "marketization" of trans-related healthcare and finally (3) the prevalence of gender violence, transphobia and femmephobia, highlighting the continued importance of male privilege as a central advantage even within discriminated minorities. By investigating the achievements of (trans)gender and gender (trans)politics, the authors seek to draw lessons for both theorization of gender and the politics of gender diversity and gender justice.

The third article takes up and expands on a theme touched upon in the two previous articles, focusing specifically on the remarkable Portuguese journey towards the recognition of transgender people. In it, Sandra Palma Saleiro, taking the conditions imposed for the legal gender recognition of (LGR) as an analytical guide, focuses on three periods dating from the mid-1980s to the present: recognition by recourse to the courts, recognition by diagnosis and recognition by self-determination. Her interviews with transgender people across two research projects separated by ten years capture how changes at the macro level impact the lives of transgender people at the micro level. This analysis is all the more pertinent as there are now, both within and outside Europe, countries experiencing conditions that are analogous to those of the three periods described. The results demonstrate that enshrining the right in law is empowering, and that the transparency and reduction of the conditions required for access to LGR through the principle of self-determination are making it increasingly possible to restore equality between cis and trans people with regard to the right to gender identity, with gains for trans people and for the state. However, the case of Portugal also shows that in order to have a more effective impact on the life of trans people, transgender

recognition policies and in particular those relating to legal identity, must be designed to take into consideration the diversity of the (trans)gender identities and expressions from an intersectional perspective.

The remaining three articles focus specifically on one stage of life: the fourth article on old age and the last two on young people.

The article by Ana Cristina Santos focuses on an emerging theme within LGBTQI+ studies – the experience of older people – and contributed to future scholarship in the field of LGBTQI+ ageing studies in Portugal and across southern Europe. In this timely article, the author crosses LGBTQI+ studies with those of age and life courses to research the experiences of intimacy and care of older adults who self-identify as LGB within the Portuguese context before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The semi-structured interviews conducted in late 2019 and early 2020 and the online qualitative follow-up during the first lockdown (March–May 2020) allow an exploration of the impacts of going through a pandemic for the second time, the isolation and relational loneliness, and the deficit of care networks, while also providing important recommendations for future research and social politics. By capturing the stories of older LGB people in Portugal during the pandemic, this article describes the needs and concerns that are shared cross-nationally, contributing to the identification of patterns in the way that vulnerability deriving from discrimination is aggravated in crisis contexts, such as during a global pandemic.

The first of the two articles focusing on youth shifts from the experiences of LGBTQI+ people themselves to an inquiry into the less-studied experiences of the families of trans and gender diverse youths. Through interviews with parents, siblings and other family members, and from an ecological system framework, in their article Maria João Carmona, Nuno Pinto and Carla Moleiro analyse: (1) (inter)familiar roles and relationships, including during and after the coming out process; (2) the relationship of the nuclear family with the extended family and other families, as well as potential support networks; (3) the family's expectations and experiences regarding the education system and health services and (4) the challenges and experiences regarding the social and legal framework of trans issues in Portugal. The results note the difficulties as well as good practices and positive examples in addressing the rich and diverse experiences of trans and gender diverse youths and their families, outcomes that deserve to be shared. The perspective of family members is in line with the reaffirmation of a more positive assessment at the macro level, namely the legal framework on legal gender recognition, than at the meso-level, namely in the relationship of trans and gender diverse youth with the strategic areas of health and education. The authors defend the need for public policies that will provide better health care provision to trans and gender diverse youths as well as safer school environments.

This Special Issue concludes with an article on the experiences and challenges currently facing LGBTQI+ youths in Portuguese schools. Telmo Fernandes, Jorge Gato, Salvatore Ioverno and Beatriz Alves begin by providing a very useful overview of the public policies and intervention strategies to tackle discrimination that have been created by public institutions and civic society organizations, LGBTQI+ community-based services in particular, as well as a summary of social science research on this subject in Portugal. The second part of the article presents preliminary data from an ongoing study being carried out in Portugal since 2020 as part of a European research project that focuses on the school experiences of LGBTQ and heterosexual

and cisgender youths, enabling comparisons to be made between them. The results demonstrate a greater incidence of bullying among LGBTQ students compared to their cisgender and heterosexual peers; the persistence of non-disclosure of sexual orientation or gender identity to teachers and other school staff; that friends are the exception in the almost generalized disclosure and the greatest support; and who, in general, have more negative school experience and significantly lower school engagement. These resistances (re)discovered in schools coincide with the potential of a new generation that seems to be more willing to embrace diversity in different ways. This means that the school has to change, stressing the need to accelerate the implementation of policies designed to help prevent and tackle homophobic and transphobic bullying while promoting safe and inclusive schools. Inclusive policies should also be followed by a change of paradigm in the way gender and sexualities are perceived and reproduced in educational settings, to enable representations outside the gender binary that are free from heteronormative assumptions.

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