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Stonewall and its legacy in Iberia

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Before the events leading up to the Stonewall riots in the United States, across many European countries, psychologists, jurists and educationalists had begun to examine the realities of "homosexual life". The old consensus of the first half of the century, characterized mainly by silence, repression and incarceration, was giving way to, if not a flowering, at least a new understanding of same-sex practices.[1] The early decades of the twentieth century had not just been about repression, however, and, in many countries, they in fact offered ample opportunity for a relatively free gay existence. Despite this, we cannot claim that there was an inexorable progressive acceptance of homosexuality from the post-war period onwards across all European nations. Indeed, as numerous historians of Britain have argued, the decriminalization of male homosexuality in 1967 led, for a time, to more rather than fewer arrests and convictions. General trends can and should be assessed, but as a recent volume on European sexualities has shown, we need to be attentive to individual countries' histories and political contexts before making any generalizations.[2] This is particularly the case of those countries such as Spain and Portugal that were under dictatorship at the time of Stonewall.

Recent work on the two Iberian states has shown a rich history of LGBTQ expression in the post-dictatorship period (1974 for Portugal and 1975 for Spain). Earlier homosexual life has also been the subject of extensive enquiry. This research has shown that well before the period of gay liberation, places such as Sitges in Catalonia and Cadiz in Andalusia provided a relatively free space especially for international visitors. Towns on the Costa del Sol and the Costa Brava enticed foreign tourists with the promise of freer attitudes than those they were accustomed to at home as the regime sought to modernize its image and cash in on the emerging tourist phenomenon.[3] Although the treatment of lesbian and gay individuals by the authorities was different according to nationality, with a more permissive attitude prevailing for foreign visitors and harsher sentences for locals, the Spanish regime's opening up to mass tourism and consumption proved ever more difficult to regulate and control.[4]

In the case of Portugal, Anglophone studies such as that of Donald West, whose ground-breaking first edition of *Homosexuality* was published in 1955, two years before the British Wolfenden report, recorded the presence of a gay subculture in tourist towns. These towns, mainly in the Algarve in the south of the country, attracted youths who charged for sex, giving rise to one German police report stating that "a quarter of the male tourists visiting Southern Portugal are homosexuals seeking adventures and prepared to pay".[5] Such a phenomenon was also recorded by the Danish police officer J. Jersild in his book *Boy Prostitution*.[6] Despite living under the corporativist, Catholic and fascistic *Estado Novo* (New State), established in 1933 by the Coimbra economist Dr. António de Oliveira Salazar, such a phenomenon is evidence of an element of agency and sharp business acumen on the part of local young men,

driven partly by poverty but also in some cases by desire under the dictatorship. Other incidents, however, showed not only agency but resistance. As reported by the same German police officer, T.P. Becker, officials in the south-western Portuguese town of Lagos attempted to put an end to same-sex activity by rounding up "some of the most popular of the juvenile homosexuals".[7] Subjecting them to a practice commonly employed by the Iberian dictatorships against political opponents, the "reds" or the "socially undesirable", officials ordered that the youths have their heads shaved, their scalps painted and then be paraded in the market square in order "to excite public scorn".[8] The humiliation did not go to plan, however, producing the contrary emotion, arousing "sympathy for the branded youths" from the local population.[9]

Repression in neighbouring Spain was more systematic and even harsher. Legislation on "public scandal" comprised an elastic set of measures to control "vice". Homosexuality, in particular, was anathema to the new virile and militaristic politics of Nationalist Spain that emerged victorious after the Civil War (1936-1939). The subsequent incorporation of "National Catholicism" into the regime's ideology, confirming the position and power of the Church, sealed the moral mission of the New State, which meted out severe repression to dissidents of all types.[10] Concerns about sexual morals took root in the Francoist regime's early years and the reports on public morality of the early 1940s, based on data largely provided by the local and provincial delegations of the fascist Falange and other public bodies, detailed misdemeanours such as the practice of nudism, sexual inversion and homosexuality. Concrete legislation on homosexuality followed in 1954 and resulted in incarceration and exile, in most cases to the penitentiary internment camp of Tefía on Fuerteventura in the Canary Islands. By means of a harsh regime comprising forced labour and religious indoctrination, the state hoped that the "scourge" of homosexuality would be eliminated. The severe 1954 legislation was altered as late as 1970 as the "immorality" of the 1960s and the threat of unacceptable aspects of the opening towards Europeanization grew.

Francisco Molina Artaloytia has identified the late 1950s and mid-1960s as a key period in the re-positioning of psychiatric and medico-legal models of homosexuality in Spain.[11] In 1959 Dr. Valentín Pérez Argiles presented an essay on homosexuality before the Zaragoza Royal Academy of Medicine, justifying the scabrous topic by the need to examine it in light of a range of scientific theories .[12] The essay presented homosexuality as a contagious form of degeneracy that had links to somatic difference, with female homosexuals envisioned as hirsute and in possession of an over-sized clitoris. The best means of combatting the threat lay with preventive legislation, a prospect endorsed as well by the legal expert Luis Vivas Marzal in his 1963 acceptance speech for the Valencian Academy of Jurisprudence and Law.[13] In 1970 that hoped-for sanction came into being as the new "Law of Dangerousness and Social Rehabilitation", which mandated the incarceration and "treatment" of homosexuals in specially designated centres.[14] The greater visibility of gay subcultures especially on the coast, changing gender expectations and higher female employment rates together with internal opposition in Franco's Spain overlapped with bouts of repression of "dissident" behaviour

from the sexual through to the emerging nationalist movements, especially in the Basque country.

One alternative for Spanish lesbians and gay men, if their financial situation permitted it, was to spend periods abroad, notably in France. This migration recuperated an earlier nineteenth- and twentieth-century tradition and before the end of the regime, in 1972, small numbers of gay liberationists began to disseminate materials printed in France.[15] These took the form of the review *Aghois*, which called for the end of restrictive laws and sent letters to prominent public figures demanding an end to discrimination. The journal's French counterpart, *Arcadie*, published a special edition in 1970 on the Spanish law, an edition subsequently debated in the Spanish parliament and cast as the defender of Spanish "homophiles".[16]

The spectacle of the dictatorship in crisis and the hope for an impending change, in addition to the favourable terrain that had been prepared by *Aghois* and gay militants such as Armand de Fluvià, inspired the creation of the Catalan Gay Liberation Front as the regime began to crumble. This organization made its presence felt in the many demonstrations called after Franco's death in 1975. The resulting police brutality was extreme and it was only after the elections of 1977 that the nefarious 1970 law was repealed (as late as 1984). On 26 June 1977, a few days after these first democratic elections in over forty years, a vociferous demonstration surged down the central Ramblas in Barcelona. When this was attacked by the national police, trans marchers, despite having been placed at the rear of the demonstration so as not to "compromise" the image of gay liberation, fought back and defended the demonstrators. The late June date and the prominent role of trans people in resisting police violence resonated strongly in Catalan and wider Spanish society and echoed events at the original Stonewall riot.

The movement to rescind the 1970 legislation was buoyed up by such demonstrations and was consolidated by the development of a counter-culture that sought to root out the last vestiges of the dictatorship. Numerous publications, such as *Ajoblanco* and *El Viejo Topo*, demanded the "detoxication" of youth culture and the free expression of sexuality. A powerful trade union and neighbourhood committee movement, although not always pro-gay, radicalized Spanish society in the late 1970s. Legislation on the decriminalization of homosexuality in other European countries and the association wrought between "modernity" and sexual freedom, together with a climate that endeavoured to reject what the dictatorship had prized, created the circumstances for the law's removal. To this day, the Ex-Social Prisoners' Association still campaigns for compensation and greater transparency with respect to the action of the old law and its harmful consequences.

Homosexuality in Portugal was dealt with through police harassment, violence and a general all-pervading social sense of shame. The 1886 law, repealed only in 1982, condemned "acts against nature" and with the law of 1912 on vagrants the authorities were empowered to intern lesbians and gays in special centres, often far from their place of residence.[17] The long arm of such legislation in the colonies has only recently been severed with same-sex activity

being decriminalized in the former Portuguese possessions of Mozambique (in 2015) and Angola (in 2019). Certain literary and poetic circles, as in Spain, nevertheless managed to forge a visible (and generally excoriated) expression of sexual diversity in the 1920s and, to some extent, the 1930s.[18]

The 1960s in Portugal, however, signified momentous change for the regime. Internal dissidence was on the rise but so also were the movements of national liberation, and, especially in the African colonies, the ensuing wars of independence. Portugal attempted to suppress these movements across the continents from India to Angola but the combination of a lack of resources, being stretched across several war theatres simultaneously, and growing criticism of the country's colonial role, both within military and civil sectors, meant that victory for the *Estado Novo* would be elusive. As part of these changing realities, middle-class and literary figures could live their homosexuality more openly but it was only in May 1974, some weeks after the Carnation Revolution of 25 April 1974 ending the dictatorship, that a manifesto in favour of the "Freedom for Sexual Minorities" was published by the short-lived Movement for the Action of Revolutionary Homosexuals (MAHR).

Spain was one of the first European countries to allow for same-sex marriage (in 2005) with Portugal following suit in 2010, ahead of the Scandinavian countries and before Britain (2014). Such steps, unless one takes a queer anti-assimilationist[19] or homophobic stance, can be heralded as progressive.[20] Stonewall, however, in the late 1960s and early 1970s was a phenomenon looked upon from afar and the rigours of living under dictatorship were a daily challenge and, for many, a humiliation. It was dynamics other than Stonewall that would provide the momentum behind social change (and eventually the bestowing of LGBT rights) in Iberia – in the case of Portugal, the independence wars, in the case of Spain, rising workers' revolts and the attacks by ETA and in the case of both countries, the growing evidence that the dictatorships would not last forever. There was no automatic route to tolerance and acceptance, however; even in 1974, one of the generals who helped to overthrow the dictatorship, Galvão de Melo, was to declare that the Carnation Revolution had not been undertaken for the benefit of prostitutes and homosexuals.[21]

The lived experiences under these Catholic and nationalist dictatorships, with their years of fascist legacy, invite us to rethink the universalizing approach too often taken by triumphalist LGBT narratives. The gaps between the fortunes of rural and urban LGBT life in Spain and Portugal are immense. While Portugal has, to some degree, managed to integrate migrants from its former overseas colonies, discrimination and racism are rife – contrary to the myth of a cosmopolitan, racially pluralist country – and, in Spain, the marginalization of Latino LGBT individuals is pronounced. Stonewall is certainly a landmark in LGBT history and the transformation enabled by this initial fightback against oppression is not to be diminished or belittled. The two countries of Iberia, in all their diversity from Catalonia to the Algarve, however, help us to rethink this narrative of liberation and enable us to suggest other spaces of contestation that emerged prior to or after June 1969.

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[3] Crumbaugh, Justin. *Destination dictatorship:* the spectacle of Spain's tourist boom and the reinvention of difference. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996.

[4] A recent critical account of the Francoist state's embracing of international tourism and of how it affected nationals and foreign tourists can be seen in Chamouleau, Brice. "Formas de la colonialidad mesocrática: turistas gais en la Costa Brava de los setenta,", *Rubrica Contemporanea* VII(13) (2018), pp. 41-58. Chamouleau, among other insights, argues that "colonialist" practices prevailed among visitors in the treatment of locals, especially when it came to paying for sex.

[5] West, Donald. *Homosexuality*. Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1958, p. 128.

[6] Jersild, Jens. *Boy Prostitution*. trans. Oscar Bojesen, Copenhagen: GEC Gad, 1956. Cf. Edelberg, Peter. "The queer road to *Frisind*: Copenhagen 1945-2012," in Matt Cook and Jennifer V. Evans eds, *Queer Cities, Queer Cultures:* Europe since 1945. London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2014, pp. 59-60.

[7] West, *Homosexuality*, p. 128.

[8] West, *Homosexuality*, p. 128.

[9] West, *Homosexuality*, p. 129.

[10] On the relationship between the Catholic Church, regime consolidation and fascism, see Loff, Manuel. "Dios, Patria, Autoridad: La Iglesia Católica y la fascistización de los regímenes ibéricos, 1933-1945," *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma, Serie V, Historia Contemporánea*, 12(25) (2013), pp. 49-66 (available at http://revistas.uned.es/index.php/ETFV/article/view/12186) [last accessed 10 April 2019].

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