

THE COUNTERFEITS OF “LGTBI” HISTORY IN SPAIN

Rafael M. Mérida Jiménez

¹In the spring of 2020, a good friend sent me via WhatsApp the image of a new postage stamp by “Correos de España” (the Spanish Mail), which would be released in June. Unable to process my disbelief at its contents, I suggested to her that it must be a joke, one of those to which we have become accustomed during the long weeks of lockdown -and that have often helped us to survive thanks to some good laughs. However, this did not seem to be the case, as confirmed by the official website of this public company.²

The fact is that the Spanish Mail decided to issue a rainbow stamp, for the first time, to honour LGBTI Pride Day, which is celebrated in June in memory of the riots at the Stonewall Inn bar in New York City (1969), which have become a symbol of “sexual minorities” activism around the world. Sounds great to me, of course. Although I no longer buy stamps and do not retain any kind of philatelic passion, as in childhood, when I was excited to review the images of the most exotic origins with a magnifying glass. It seems, from what I see, that “Correos de España” continue to make series with a very pedagogic vocation, as then, without the regional costumes, however, of Sidi Ifni or Fernando Poo, for example, then Spanish colonial settlements in Africa.

The problem is that this stamp has a somewhat whimsical motto, in my opinion: instead of just commemorating the “International Day of LGBTI Pride” -bearing in mind that it’s the first one that “Correos” was devoting to this community-, the company chose to dedicate it to the “Pasaje Begoña (Torremolinos), cradle of LGBTI rights.” Cradle of LGBTI rights? Really? Did the struggle start here? Yes, it seems, according to the explanation given by the official website.

¹Rafael M. Mérida Jiménez is Serra Húnter Associate Professor of Hispanic Studies and Gender Studies, Universitat de Lleida (Catalonia, Spain). Corresponding Author: rmmerida@filcef.udl.cat

²See <https://tienda.correos.es/product/paq-5-sellos-dia-internacional-del-orgullo-lgtbidescription>

What was the historical research that led them to such dubious conclusion? Apparently that wasn't needed. It seems "Correos" decided that other institutions have looked into the issue and accept their conclusions on the matter: the Parliament of Andalusia in Seville and the Congress of Representatives in Madrid. They had decided the location was, indeed, "Cuna de los Derechos y Libertades" ("Cradle of Rights and Freedoms"), with the aim of being promoted as a "tourist and cultural attraction of Torremolinos, Andalusia and Spain."

According to some sources, on June 24, 1971, in Torremolinos, there were some noisy riots as a result of a police raid in bars in that little street, plenty of tourists and nationals. This is not surprising: sadly, since 1954, with the reform of the "Ley de Vagos y Maleantes," and especially since 1970, with the "Ley de Peligrosidad y Rehabilitación Social," controls had intensified throughout Spain -also in Tenerife, Madrid, Valencia, Sitges or Barcelona-, because of a crime so fascinating then as it is now, the "public scandal." Despite this, with more or less fear, spaces of sociability of many kinds, existed in larger cities, especially for "gays" and "trans" people, as recent research shows (such as the ones provided by Alberto Mira or Geoffroy Huard), or as revealed in autobiographical documents from people that were as different, and at the same time twinned by circumstances, such as Armand de Fluvià, Terenci Moix or Nazario.

I think it is very important that the Spanish Mail dedicates a stamp, for the very first time, to Spanish "LGTBI" community. The problem lies, in my opinion, in the touristic race manipulating history. This beautiful city in Malaga is falsely reimagined for the purposes of tourist advertising: rather than being integrated as a part of a journey that enhances the most forgotten historical memory in Andalusia, which deserves support, Torremolinos becomes "the" cradle. A marginal street distorted by interests which are no longer those from who proposed to ignite the flame of memory, but from those who run obstacle courses to be first in fictitious rankings with economic projection.

"Pasaje Begoña (Torremolinos), cradle of LGTBI rights"? This statement is simply a lie. This is illustrated by a volume, slim in its format but very rewarding in its rigour, which appeared in 2019: *Origen del movimiento LGTBIQ en Sevilla*. I admit that I was excited because some of the surviving founders of the "Movimiento Homosexual de Acción Revolucionaria," around 1978, gathered their documentary and photographic archives. In this book we see a photograph of the Riviera cafeteria in Seville, very busy for "gays" since the late 1950s, or another one of the cells at the Gavidia police station, through which so many others have passed since 1962. I must also say that I was shocked that the origin of their efforts was to try and counterbalance the calculated, misleading, version promoted by the usurpation of identity in an institutional act.

I want to believe that this is not a stamp that responds to the will to manipulate and that the

ultimate goal of “Correos de España” was to create the opposite effect of amnesia. I would like to think that the temperament of this company, whose capital is 100% public, is not to empower a clumsy sort of folklore or outdated neo-colonialism, like the one on display in the stamps of Fernando Poo or Sidi Ifni. Unfortunately, however, uninformed people have created a trap and many will fall into it. We missed an excellent opportunity to create a fair and true LGBTI memory.³

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