homosexuality  The history of homosexuality in Spain is still waiting to be written, much of it waiting to be unearthed and analysed by social historians and cultural critics. In a country whose sexual mores have been traditionally based on machismo and patriarchy, attitudes to homosexuality have been particularly negative. However, in more liberal, post-Franco times, there is clearly a reluctance to register the existence of Spain’s homosexuals. This is not, apparently, because of a particularly rampant Iberian brand of homophobia, but according to some leading commentators, because the country’s gay communities are wary of ‘deducing social identity from private sexual behaviours’. This division between the private and public domains tends to render problematic any open discussion of homosexual identity. And without homosexual visibility, homophobia becomes the only publicly available language in which homosexual love can be discussed, with troubling consequences.

Historically, the reasons for this silence and invisibility are fairly clear. Under Francoism, censorship, militant Catholicism, sexual repression and a deeply ingrained distrust of marginality and sexual dissidence made it impossible to develop confident homosexual identities. After 1975, despite the ending of repression and the sexual revolution of the 1980s, there were no serious attempts to refashion homosexuality into a cultural or political movement. Certainly, there were struggles to recuperate lost rights and freedoms and gays were part of those struggles. The result is that Spanish legislation on sex discrimination and equal rights is among the most advanced in the world. Yet, such gay liberation activity as there was has not led to the reconstruction of strong and confident gay social identities. During the libertarian movida period of the early 1980s, it became fashionable to include homosexuals in the frantic cultural experimentation of the time. But these activities did not in themselves offer a basis for serious debates on gay politics; gays themselves were anxious not to be pigeon-holed.

Alberto Mira sums up this attitude as one of a-mi-es-que-no-me-gustan-las-etiquetas, or ‘No labels please, we’re Spanish’. This suspicion of lapel-badge politics means that noted Spanish homosexuals such as Pedro Almodóvar, Juan Goytisolo and Federico García Lorca, to name only three, are not actually regarded as homosexuals on their home turf. The Spanish way to approach homosexuality would still appear to leave a lot of important issues unresolved. (Ryan Prout)

See also Almodóvar, Pedro; gay/lesbian cultures; Goytisolo, Juan; movida; sexuality.

Further reading.