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## THE BULL AND THE BAN

### ABSTRACT

On July 28, 2010 lawmakers in the Spanish region of Catalonia, after years of discussion, suddenly voted to ban bullfighting. On November 9, 2015, the Parliament of Catalonia voted to initiate the process of Independence from Spain. This article tracks the relationship between these two events.

KEY WORDS: National bullfight (*corrida*), local taurine spectacles, Catalonia, ban, animal rights.

### RESUMEN

El 28 de julio de 2010, los legisladores de la región española de Cataluña, después de años de discusión, votaron de repente prohibir las corridas de toros. Por otro lado, el 9 de noviembre de 2015, el Parlamento de Cataluña votó para iniciar el proceso de independencia de España. En este artículo se analiza la relación entre estos dos eventos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: corrida, espectáculos taurinos locales, Cataluña, prohibición, derechos de los animales.

In 1997 I published a book, based on at least ten years of anthropological fieldwork in the 1980s, titled *Bulls, Bull Fighting and Spanish Identities*.

What follows are some of the things I said in the Introduction and other chapters:

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<sup>1</sup> After living in Barcelona (1970-1978), Prof. returned to the US to pursue her PhD (1987) in Anthropology. Publications include *Bulls, Bullfighting and Spanish Identities* (1997), where bullfighting is used as a vehicle to explore the many Spanish national and local identities, and, *Barren States: the Population 'Implosion' in Europe*, (2005) about low fertility in contemporary Europe. She has also co-authored with Fernando Operé *Los españoles y la España de Hoy: Historia, sociedad, y cultura* (2007). Currently she is a Professor of Anthropology at the University of Virginia.

For many Spaniards of my generation, bullfights are a minor, unimportant nineteenth century survival, part of an arcane worldview associated with General Franco and his supporters. These people—who identify with the liberal, modern, service-oriented, artistically Avant-guard, culturally innovative, democratically open, internationally respected Spain of the 1990s—become irritated when they hear the word “bullfights” in any analysis of “Spain.” “Not more bullfights!” they cry. “That is not what Spain is.”

Nevertheless, bullfights exist in Spain, and their numbers are not diminishing. This is because bullfighting, *los toros* (literally, the bulls), continues its role as a multivocal symbol with many contested meanings. For a Spanish citizen, it is almost impossible not to be involved in this contest.

Bullfighting inevitably evokes political responses. Many Spaniards fear that any analysis of the bullfights will focus on them as the *essence* of Spain. But certainly in talking about the bulls, one ends up discussing some very important issues and relationships, both historical and contemporary in Spain. These debated issues lie at the very core of Spanish identity.

After the repressive dictator General Franco’s death in 1975, there was an almost immediate return to the historical discussion about nationality and national symbols. Scholars began to take seriously one particular national symbol—the bulls—that had been intimately tied to the dictatorship, yet which strangely continued to thrive in democracy.

Most work on bullfights has dealt with one kind of spectacle, the *corrida de toros*. Criticism of these studies often focused on the invalidity of an analysis for all parts of Spain. Yet the *corrida de toros* is just one of at least sixteen spectacles or games with bulls. It is the most well-known form and is “performed” all over Spain but it is not the most numerous. There are many more local forms.

This analysis discusses the whole phenomenon of *los toros* in Spain, not just one or another of its forms. My investigation suggests that these spectacles, taken in contextual relationship, create a dynamic discourse about significant cultural categories in Spain. Specifically these different taurine formats are used to talk about male/female, urban/rural, national/local, class and political relationships; hierarchy and equality; history; worldview, and most importantly for this work, the construction of the Spanish state and Spain’s relationship with “Europe.” The idea that underlies all of these topics is the Spanish opposition between “modernity” and “tradition.”

“Spain” is a disputed category within the nation-state called by that name. In a country with various and competing cultural and linguistic traditions, there is no

consensus of what is “Spanish.” Nor is there any agreement as to whether, or how, the whole (the nation-state) should take precedence over the many parts (the regions or ethnic nationalities). Should regions be related in a hierarchical or in an egalitarian way? Put simply, there is an opposition between the one and the many Spains.

Complicating this debate is Spain’s rapid transformation from a pre-Franco backward rural country to a post-Franco modern post-industrial one. Many Spaniards define themselves as modern by denying that traditional customs, such as *los toros*, represent Spain. Ironically, other Spaniards identify with their particular region by clinging to and reproducing local ethnic customs—which often include specific forms of the taurine games.

*Los toros*, thus, serve as a vehicle to talk about two historical Spanish debates about identity. The first is the place of Spain in Europe. This has to do with “modernity.” For almost two hundred years, many Spaniards have seen the presence of *los toros* in their country as symbolic of the obstacle to Spain’s modernization and thus to acceptance into the European community and worldview. *Los toros* symbolize non-Europeaness and must be rejected.

During my fieldwork, when I asked Spaniards anywhere about bullfights, before anything else, the person declared him or herself to either be “for” or “against” the bulls. Although to be “for” or “against” the bulls has regional implications, principally it is a statement about that person’s place in Europe and “modern life.” To be against the bulls is to be “European and modern”; to be for the bulls is to be “Spanish and traditional.”

So, the main accusation against the bulls is that they are non-European. For many Spaniards, to promote this spectacle only perpetuates the myth of Spain as a “cruel” nation (Europe/the English created the Black Legend about the cruel Spaniard.). Furthermore, bullfight detractors often insist (although data shows otherwise) that bullfighting is a dying spectacle. They mean, of course, that “real Spain» is modern now and does not do these “third-world things.»

The second debate concerns regional identity and the place of the various regions in the construction of the Spanish state. This debate had to do with local identity, or “tradition.” Although some regions view themselves as more European than others, the “cultures” also define and reify themselves through local traditions. If they were all modern, they would all be the same, while traditions differentiate one culture from another. Thus, regions often identify with one taurine game and not another. Meanwhile attitudes about the national *corrida* subtly reflect attitudes about a national culture.

Nevertheless, the bull is the thread that ties all of the regions together. The games with bulls change as one moves across the tapestry that is “Spain,” but the animal remains the same. The debate over the *toro bravo* is the truly significant Spanish debate and thus can be said to signify “Spain.” In this case the bull is the totem of “Spain.”

Although the Spanish state has existed for 500 years, a state (a political arrangement) and a nationality (an identity) are two very different categories. The different parts (cultures, regions) of Spain feel they have benefited unequally from union in the Spanish state. The interests of the Center have usually dominated the rest of Spain. Ironically in the last 100 years some of the Spanish geographical and political peripheries have been the most economically and materially advantaged areas, causing those citizens to feel held back by “Spain” and thus, doubly oppressed. Nationalism is a perfect channel for these sentiments. While all regions and communities have acknowledged the reality of their participation in the Spanish state, some citizens in many areas deny that they belong to the Spanish nationality at all. They identify and celebrate only the “Basque” community or the “Catalan” community. For these people “Spain” is the Other. They are not negotiating for space within this cultural category; they want out.

Currently an annual cycle of festivals in different Spanish cities, celebrating their patron saint festival or *fiestas mayores*, always the context of several days of important bullfights, articulates various parts (cultures) of the national state while at the same time evoking a plural, non-hierarchical, vision of the symbolic category “Spain.” The message the cycle conveys is that despite regional differentiation, there can also be integration. It is a third way between one nation and/or various separate nations.

In the 1980s the cycle consisted of six fiestas (and their bullfights) in six important Spanish cities: Valencia, Seville, Madrid, Pamplona, Bilbao and Zaragoza. In many ways, it is logical that these six fiestas form a cycle that symbolically represents and defines plural “Spain» as these cities are among the historically and economically most important. Five of the cities are among the six largest in Spain, which might suggest their importance in native minds. Barcelona, however, is the second largest city and this fact points to the inclusion originally of that other important city in the Cycle.

Before 1960 Barcelona also participated in the bullfighting fiesta cycle. Barcelona, the second largest Spanish city, has always vied with Madrid in population, power and influence. Capital of the wealthy region of Catalonia, Barcelona became an early industrial center (along with Bilbao). Barcelona is the center of Catalan culture, language and politics. Barcelona’s *fiesta mayor* is dedicated to the Virgin of the Merced on September 24. Until the Spanish Civil War, the bullfights in Barcelona during these fiestas were nationally important. The Catalan bourgeoisie attended these *corridos* as social events

that were integral parts of their fiestas. At some point after the Civil War, Catalans stopped attending these “non-Catalan” Spanish/Francoist events. The main bullring in the center of Barcelona was left standing but was not used after 1960. Bullfights continued to be given in a new bullring built on the periphery of the city, where non-Catalan, immigrant workers lived and within easy access of the European tourists coming from the beaches of the Costa Brava. The new Catalan disdain for the corrida was an obvious anti-Spanish, anti-Franco message. The move away from the corrida was supposedly a sign of modernization, Europeanization, as well as *anti-Franquismo* and *anti-españolismo*.

Now context for the 2010 ban....

## CATALAN INDEPENDENCE

Part of the Crown of Aragon, Catalonia has shared the monarch of Spain since 1479 when “Spain” was born from the union of the Crown of Aragon and the Crown of Castile. The Catalan Independence movement is a political movement derived from Catalan nationalism, which supports the independence of Catalonia from Spain and France. Recently there has been a substantial increase in the number of people who openly consider themselves *independentistas*. Support for Catalan independence is based on the thesis from the 19th century that Catalonia is a nation derived from contemporary ideology based on the history of Catalonia, the Catalan language, and Catalan traditions. In 1932 under the Second Spanish Republic Catalonia was granted a statute of autonomy and home rule institutions, which lasted until the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the subsequent Franco dictatorship, which abolished home rule and discouraged regional cultures under the ideology of Spanish nationalism and Catholicism.

After Franco’s death in 1975 and the transition to democracy, Catalan autonomy was restored in 1977. Catalan nationalists have governed the region most of the time since then and a parliamentary group calling for full independence has existed since 1980.

The 2006 Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia provides Catalonia’s basic institutional regulations under the Spanish Constitution of 1978. It defines the rights and obligations of the citizens of Catalonia (Spain), the political institutions of the Catalan region, their competences and relations with the rest of Spain, and the financing of the Government of Catalonia. It was approved in referendum by 73.9% of the Catalan voters. On June 28, 2010 the Spanish Constitutional Court published a decision to annul and reinterpret several articles of the 2006 Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia, in particular its use and definition of the word “nation,” saying references to “Catalonia as a nation” and the

“national reality of Catalonia” had no legal interpretive effect. It declared 14 articles unconstitutional and interpreted restrictedly 22 further articles.

Two weeks later on July 10, 2010 the biggest autonomy protest demonstration that had ever occurred in Catalonia took place in Barcelona with an estimated 1.1 million people in the street, led by a banner with the Catalan slogan: *Som una nació. Nosaltres decidim* (We are a nation. We decide).

Many believe that the demonstration was a turning point in the relations between Catalonia and Spain. Five years later a proclamation to initiate the process of independence was issued.

**Art or Torture? --The Ban:** But first the Catalans returned to the vehicle of *los toros* to make statements about its relationship with Spain. On July 28, 2010--two and a half weeks after the massive Catalan street protest-- lawmakers in the Spanish region of Catalonia, after years of discussion, suddenly voted to ban bullfighting.<sup>2</sup>

The discourse in the Catalan Parliament with respect to a proposed ban on the *corrida* had focused on the ethics of anticruelty, which was due in part to the strength and popularity of the grassroots animal defense organizations. And certainly during the year and a half of consideration, most of the discussion focused on whether the bull suffered pain. “There is incredible suffering in a bullfight. Six bulls are killed each time, not one, and they are tortured for 20 minutes. It is not right to pay money to go and watch that kind of cruelty,” said Deborah Parris who worked with the campaign group Prou (Enough in Catalan) to ban the *corrida* (“Catalonia’s bullfight...” 2010). “The ban is all about progress, banning a barbaric practice, for good” (“Catalonia’s bullfight...” 2010). “Society has evolved and that’s all about losing bad things. Fortunately, Catalan politicians have seen they need to evolve too, so they don’t remain relics—like these traditions” (Jordi Casamitjana in “Catalonia’s bullfight ...” 2010). The anti-bullfight activists vehemently deny a wider agenda.

However, most participants and observers perceived the actual vote and ban as just an expression of an anti-Spanish attitude, especially since it came so closely after the constitutional court had struck out a legal claim to Catalan nationhood one month earlier. “In many ways, however, the ban reflected less on the animal rights than on a political debate of Catalan identity and a push by local parties for greater independence from the

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<sup>2</sup> Catalonia would become the second Autonomous Community to ban the tradition. In 1991 the Canary Islands banned spectacles that involve cruelty to animals, with the exception of cockfighting, which is traditional in some towns in the Islands.

rest of Spain,” noted one journalist (Minder 2010). The headline blared, “Looking for a Wedge from Spain, Catalonia Bans Bullfighting” (Minder 2010). Certainly for many Catalans the bullfight represented a resented discourse of Spanishness that connected bullfights in “imperial Spain with thoughtless traditionalism, the cult of death, honor, Spanish difference, national Catholicism, lack of respect for women and more” (Porcel 2004). It was this kind of Spain against which Catalonia protested. Critics argued that the bullfight constitutes a “symbolic pillar of Francoist Spain and, as a result, in the narrative of national identity it emphasizes values and constructions that the democratic societies should not reproduce” (Beilin 2015:168).

Although the *corrida* has deep roots in Catalonia, nationalists now see it as a “Spanish” fiesta. Yet even in Catalonia, as the numbers of the vote to ban showed (68 to 55 with 9 abstentions), there was deep ambivalence (Beilin 2015: 168). All analyses of the vote clearly show that the vote fell along party lines: independence party members voting in block for the ban; more general pan-Spanish party deputies tending to oppose it. One deputy who voted to keep bullfighting in Catalonia said, “They are trying to get independence and they think if they highlight differences it will help. They don’t like reminders of how much we share,” said Albert Rivera, a deputy with the “mixed group” in Parliament who voted to keep bullfighting alive (“Catalonia’s bullfight...” 2010). One bullfighter, Vicente Barrera, criticized the ban as politically oriented, “Bullfighting is an art, and Catalonia is abandoning for ridiculous political reasons the tradition and culture that make Spain so special” (Minder 2010). Pro-taurine Catalans spoke about losing *their* “freedom.” And of a lack of “respect” (Tosko 2012:75, 107, 113119).

Others used the ban to claim Catalonia’s greater affiliation with Europe than with the rest of Spain. “This is not an attack against Spain but evidence that we, Catalans, support and share more advanced values with the rest of Europe” (Josep Rull, a lawmaker from Convergence and Union, a Catalanist party, in Minder 2010). Here there is “almost an evolutionary subtext at work, the ghost of a politico-ontological chain of being in which the species *homo catalan* is revealed through the ban to be closer to the ‘more advanced’ *homo europeus* than to the more primitive *homo hispanense*” (Dopico Black 2010:236). And as Jose Montilla, the Catalan president, said, “We will have a better Catalonia with this decision” (Roger, Geli, Noguer 2010). One activist went further, “Until all animal cruelty has been banned, Catalonia will not be Europe” (Roger, Geli, Noquer 2010).

However, the spectacle that was banned was the *corrida de toros*, the national Spanish bullfight. Not two months later on September 22nd of that year, 2010, the same lawmakers voted (by a vote of 114 to 14, with 5 abstentions) to protect and regulate the *correbous*, –the local Catalan form of taurine games that are celebrated in the fiestas of small towns and villages of Catalonia– festivals that include tying flaming wax or

fireworks to bulls' horns and letting them run free, or provoking bulls to chase people on seaside platforms and then plunge into water. The pro-bullfighting crowd howled with accusations of "hypocrisy" ("Alegria..." 2010) and affirmed their vision that "behind this is hidden an identity fight" ("Alegria..." 2010). "They are not arguing about animal rights, but rather the rights of the Catalans and of the Spanish. Perhaps they are the same. By the way, the bulls are not prohibited in Europe" ("Alegria..." 2010). Animal rights groups were horrified and spoke of "Catalonia's Shame," while lawmakers sought refuge in the fact that the *correbous* animals were not killed. "It is not the same thing as the *corrida*. We do not mistreat the animal or stab it," said one villager. Francesc Sancho, a spokesman for CiU party, the major pro-Independence party noted, "If the horns are wide enough, the bull does not get burned" (quoted in Woolls 2010).

Later that summer and fall, regional governments in several parts of greater Spain responded by declaring the *corrida* protected patrimony, and part of Madrid's/Alicante's/Seville's cultural heritage, drilling down on their association and identification with the *corrida*. Then on November 8, 2013 legislation was passed in Congress (144 votes in favor, 26 against and 54 abstentions) making bullfighting an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Spain, and encouraging local administrations to "ensure its protection and develop promotion measures" ("Bullfighting in Spain..." 2013).

**Further action in the Political Arena:** Since 2012 there have been massive street demonstrations for independence in Barcelona every September 11, the so-called National Day of Catalonia. The debate has been about the right to hold a referendum on the independence of Catalonia. On December 12, 2013 the Government of Catalonia announced a referendum on independence had been set for Nov. 9, 2014. The Spanish government stated shortly thereafter, "Such a poll will not be held," saying the referendum was illegal (Burrige 2013). (The poll was in fact held, although a majority of Catalans chose not to participate in the referendum). Then in January 2015, the President of Catalonia announced parliamentary elections for last September 2015 that would serve as a proxy vote on the independence of Catalonia, assuming independence parties won. Parties explicitly campaigning for independence won 47.8% of the total vote –not a majority. Nevertheless, on the 9th of November 2015 the Parliament of Catalonia adopted the *Declaration of the Initiation of the Process of Independence of Catalonia* (72 votes to 63). Two days later, on November 11, 2015 the Spanish Prime Minister threatened to suspend the political powers of the twenty-one key political figures in Catalonia should they push ahead with the provisions of the declarations with the Constitutional Court of Spain to assess the legality of the region's declaration. Tensions remain high between the two governments.

Since then neither the Spanish government nor the Catalan government has been able to form a ruling majority in their respective capitals. Catalonia has been governed by a ruling minority coalition since January 2016. In Spain a ruling minority government was finally formed October 29, 2016.

**Further action in the Taurine Arena:** Nine days earlier, on October 20, 2016, the Constitutional Court of Spain overturned the ban against bullfighting in Catalonia, declaring it unconstitutional, simultaneously outraging separatists in the region and animal activists. The case to overturn the ban had been taken to the Constitutional Court by Spain's main conservative Popular Party, with the backing of the bullfighting sector. "The court voted 8 to 3 against the Catalan ban, finding that lawmakers from the region could not prohibit a practice that the justices said was enshrined in the cultural patrimony of the Spanish state" (Minder Oct. 20, 2016). Since it was part of "Spanish heritage, any decision banning it could only be taken by the central government." An appeal against the Constitutional Court's decision would have to be made before European courts.

Catalan reaction was swift, seeing the action in political terms. "It's obvious the Constitutional Court never loses an opportunity to attack the legitimacy of the Parliament" of Catalonia, Lluís Salvadó, an official in the Catalan regional government, told reporters. Catalan politicians vowed that very day to never let the bullfight (the *corrida*) return to Catalonia. They never mentioned an appeal. Barcelona's mayor, Ada Colau, promised to keep bullfighting out of Barcelona "whatever the Constitutional Court says."<sup>3</sup>

Animal rights activists, still ignoring the political battle, called the overturning of the ban, "morally retrograde."

**The Bull and the Ban:** I maintain that the Catalans are still intimately engaged with the rest of Spain in its conversation about sovereignty. The battle over their relationship still has a taurine idiom. Ban the *corrida*. We are not Spain. But the Bull is still the Totem.

### Appendix: "Then I am not Spanish..."

The summer of 2016 saw many municipalities throughout Spain consider, through referendum, whether to ban not the national form of the bullfight, the *corrida*, but

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<sup>3</sup> It is unclear what the practical consequences would be of the reversal of the ban. One of Barcelona's bullrings has already been converted to a shopping center, while the other, the Monumental, is also scheduled for other uses (Minder Oct. 20, 2016).

rather their local forms of bullfighting “games.” Recall the Catalan parliament had explicitly exempted Catalan local forms from its ban, so these protests may indicate something different than regional identity politics. An emphasis on the pain inflicted on the animals and the rejection of the bullfight as a kind of torture of animals as a form of entertainment indicates an internalization of the Spanish animal rights groups strategic critiques (Torture: Neither Art nor Culture).<sup>4</sup>

In the summer of 2016 almost always the discourse used by young anti-bullfighting activists of “torture” and “pain” and the “hurt that the animals suffer” was still contested by the discourse of “tradition,” “culture” and “identity (*identidad colectiva*).” In the Comunidad de Valencia, for example, taurine games such as *bou embolat* and *bou en corda* (also *bous al carrer* and *correbous*) are traditionally embedded in patron saint festivals, and often are beloved rituals of local identity. Significantly in 2016 most referendum failed, but citizens in two small Valencia towns did vote to ban these local bullfights during their fiestas, as did the capital city, Valencia itself. The mayor of Valencia even went beyond the local forms and suggested the possibility of not killing the bull in the bullfight (*corrida*)—as in the Portuguese fiesta (what he called a “synthesis” between the “fiesta y respeto a la vida [respect for life].” More referendums were promised for 2017.

Furthermore, in May 2016, the Junta of Castilla and Leon prohibited the killing of the bull in the well-known local fiesta known as *Toro de la Vega* in Tordesillas. This rather gory taurine fiesta had played a large role in the anti-bullfighting cruelty debates for decades. One also hears in these critiques, a recurrence to the modernity argument: it is shameful for a modern country to revere such a barbaric blood spectacle.

Later, on September 20, 2016, only one month before the Constitutional Court overturned the ban in Catalonia, thousands of protestors gathered in Madrid to demand an end to bullfighting per se:

A spokesman for the Party Against the Ill-Treatment of Animals (PACMA) said it was “time to end bullfighting and all other bloody spectacles.” “Bulls feel and they suffer,” said Chelo Martín Pozo, a 39-year-old from Seville who had come to Madrid for the rally. “Bullfights are a national shame and if they represent me, then I am not Spanish,” she said (Agence-France Presse Sept. 20, 2016).

Then I am not Spanish...

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<sup>4</sup> Many animal rights activists may actually hold an almost post-humanist ontology about the equality of all life forms, “animal” and human, and want to “undo the hierarchy” that gives humans the right to kill animals. However, by stressing the pain humans inflict on the bulls (animals), and that animals feel—like humans—(that is, stressing sameness, rather than difference), the activists still situate themselves within the long tradition of Western humanism.



Protesters march past Spain's parliament during demonstration on 10 September, 2016. The banner shows a bull with the word "alive". Photograph: Susana Vera/Reuters.

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