

Violent Games: Towards an Historical Understanding of the Portuguese Bullfight*

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In June of 1999, a curious debate was taking place on the floor of the Portuguese Parliament. At its center was the question: should the law that forbids the killing of bulls in the country's arenas be modified? Following a series of events that have had as their principal protagonists a small border town (Barrancos), animal rights groups, the courts, and, last to arrive, political parties and opinion groups, the discussion has raged on. This debate poses a number of problems to the historian, whose attention is naturally aroused by the constant use of such words as "tradition," "civilization," "community," and "history" in the speeches that proliferate and intersect in the newspapers and other media. The study that follows tries to formulate and resolve some of these problems, notably those connected with justifications or condemnations of the bullfights based on "Portuguese tradition" and its supposed "medieval origin."

By examining, *à la* Hobsbawn, the different steps involved in processes such as "inventing tradition," and by looking specifically at the role of games in medieval and early modern Iberian societies, I hope to contribute to the discussion of the historical relationship of violence and Portuguese society. Using contemporary examples, my investigation will look objectively at the historical depth and complexity of the processes of symbolic re-elaboration and claims of identity currently taking place, while also observing their fabrication by the various mechanisms of communication, political negotiation of normative models, and shared or contradictory discourses on violence.

Barrancos, A Fetish of Identity?

First, a brief summary of recent events: in 1998, animal rights groups persuaded the courts to enforce a 1928 Portuguese law in the town of Barrancos, a decree that specifically forbids bullfights resulting in the killing of the bull in arenas. Barrancos, located on the southern border of Portugal, is a small village with approximately 2000 inhabitants. As a part of its annual festival, a rather modest bullfight takes place in which a bull is killed in a delimited space of the town square, which serves as an arena. In 1998, following an order of the Lisbon Tribunal, authorities summoned police to supervise the festival. The police attended without intervening in the festival's events, which included a bull being killed in the village's improvised arena. This episode quickly became a political affair when numerous voices were heard protesting the people of Barrancos' defiance of the "State's authority" and of the legal order. The course of the "case of Barrancos" thus began in the public sphere, spurring debate in Parliament as to the relative legality of bullfights.

An exhaustive analysis of the many arguments that have proliferated since August 1998 in both political and judicial settings is outside the general scope of this study. Suffice it to say that, with predictable banality, these arguments develop under the pressure of subsequent events. They focus on the problem of the legal framing of so-called "local traditions," and they pragmatically skirt the problems in the interpretation of symbolic conflicts that bullfighting raises. Animal rights groups and associations have linked the Barrancos case to a more general discussion of the validity of the bullfight—a spectacle they would prefer to see banned. One will note that, in a generalized fashion, the identity argument obviously taints the discussion. For example, the Lisbon Tribunal's decision states, "it may well be a question of simply imitating the Spanish tradition, and not establishing a Portuguese tradition or one specific to Barrancos" (Tribunal da Relação de Lisboa, Autos de Agravo, Proc. 7689/98). Indeed, in opposition to the Spanish custom of killing the bull within the public space of the "corrida," it is common knowledge that the same practice is not part of "Portuguese tradition." This is merely one among an entire constellation of stereotyped images that have contributed to the definition of a national identity. In an effort to have specificity legally recognized, defenders of the position of Barrancos appropriate this very stereotype and use it in another line of argument.

Situated on the border, Barrancos belongs to the "Raia." The "Raia" acts as an operative notion for a scholarly tradition that claims the border region

is distinct from the rest of the country, and in particular, distinct from urban and coastal parts of the country represented by the capital (the systematic formulation of this notion may be found in a text contemporary with the legal norm in question, viz., Basto, "A fronteira hispano-portuguesa"). This is a first attempt to situate the debate on grounds of territorialization and definitions of identity. It is also a first attempt to question what it means to be Portuguese, taking into consideration a diversity that is defined by the mediation of ethnology and history. By noting the specificity of people from the border ("raia"), the reality that this concept evokes appears once again as a place of definition *par excellence*, a place for the fabrication of national identity itself (Sahlins). Recognizing the legitimacy of the bullfights of Barrancos does not merely emerge as a form of negotiation with "borders," that is, with these territorial zones where difference with the "other" (in this case the Spanish as a stereotyped entity) becomes blurred and diluted. It also allows the people of Barrancos themselves to appropriate their own practices. Thus, the bullfight that culminates in the killing of the bull becomes a sign of differentiation, and as such it presents the entire repertoire of attitudes inherent to a supposed autonomy that would permit the people of Barrancos to negotiate their belonging to one or another of the affective national communities. One curious behavior serves as an example of this: since the 1970s, as a gesture of defiance, people from the small towns that make up the "raia" have ritually jeered the Spanish flag on occasions of crisis. The media have duly promoted this gesture, intended to incite the country's emotions.

On this slightly anecdotal ground, a rather simplistic set of oppositions becomes apparent. In the different areas where it succeeds in mobilizing differentiated positions, these oppositions contaminate nearly every aspect of the debate. An opposition, linked to the spilling of the bull's blood, is established between the civilized (us, the Portuguese) and the uncivilized (the "other," the Spaniard with whom the "barranquenho" identifies), or between the repulsion felt by the civilized person when confronted by the spectacle of the suffering animal and the enjoyment derived from the same scene by the uncivilized. In regards to the last opposition, one should note the efforts of ecologists, inspired by discussions taking place in Spain and Latin America about the interdiction of bullfighting. Brazil in particular, where bullfighting has been banned, has been used to exemplify a symbolic extension of the "mild customs" of the Portuguese national character. In the proliferation of discourses in the media, other oppositions have been made, notably the

opposition between community (“us,” i.e. Barrancos) and society (“the other,” i.e. Lisbon, associated with the State and authority). These are two antinomic social orders that allow various antagonists engaged in the public debate a permutation of positions—in particular, from those of political agents. Of equal significance is the opposition between the “popular” and “folkloric” bullfight that underlies a possible integration of Barrancos’ practices, viewed as rustic and justifiable according to “local traditions,” and the urban leisure-time activities in which all violence directed against animals must be prohibited.

At this point, some facts drawn from the available studies conducted on the sociology of the leisure-time activities of the Portuguese and on the specific social field of bullfighting should be mentioned (Capucha). In 1994 a maximum of 500,000 people attended various bull-related spectacles, a figure obtained from a direct enquiry made by a state department (*Direcção Geral dos Espectáculos*) and probably closer to the facts than published national statistics. This figure represents one of the smallest numbers of spectators for this sphere of activity. The public attending these events is concentrated primarily in Lisbon and in the southern cities (in particular, those in the Setúbal and Santarém regions), with the highest concentration being in the extreme southern region of Algarve. This fact is obviously connected to the enormous impact of the tourist industry in this region. This, in turn, has led to recent construction of an arena for bullfights in the small city of Albufeira. Construction of an arena in such a town demonstrates signs of occupancy and frequentation that are not negligible in relation to the significant under-attendance in other regions of the country. Out of a total of 61 set and 34 traveling venues where bullfights took place in Portugal that same year of 1994, few of these places reached its maximum capacity, according to the available statistics. Most were often partially empty. Within this context, approximately a mere 300 professionals organize some 250 shows each year (and it should be mentioned that this number is obviously underestimated, given the unknown number of unauthorized shows that take place).

Within this framework one must include the annual bullfight of Barrancos, which hardly corresponds to the folkloric image that has been evoked by the media. In fact, this bullfight conforms to the same framing and uses the common mechanisms of this type of public spectacle. The law, for instance, requires a specialized agent, the “director of the bullfight,” whose

job is to preside over what happens in the arena much like a soccer referee. Control is further reinforced by engaging the services of professional bullfighters such as the “matador” or “toureiro,” as well as the mechanisms necessary for providing the indispensable element of this activity—which represents an increasing portion of expenditures required in organizing these events—the bull itself. These facts can help us avoid the trap of a radical contrast, postulated but not problematized, between the “modern” or current world and the “traditional societies” for which Barrancos seems to have become today’s symbol in the Portuguese media.

In its hybrid nature, as a living spectacle in which people participate, the bullfight of Barrancos is also a product of processes that fashion and transform Portuguese society as a whole. Moreover, the bullfight creates the possibility of discourses and actions that belong to a historically situated repertoire. While refusing an atemporal conception of this local dimension (Schulte), it remains to be proven that today’s inhabitants of Barrancos constitute a “sub-culture” identifiable *en-soi*, or even a marginalized minority, in spite of the apparent autonomy of their discourse, which has been constructed from the illusionary effect allowed by an ethnographical register that owes almost uniquely to historical contexts that date back to the 1910s or 20s. Certainly the people of Barrancos are speaking out, intervening in the public space, and spreading out before our eyes the attitudinal differences, silences and fractures that are expressed throughout this debate—a debate, however, which tends to be organized in a growing way more around the bull than around the men themselves. Only an investigation that probes more deeply into the very terrain could clarify the mechanisms that allow Barrancos its position as an actor of speech, and discover who is its protagonist and from what local dynamics this speech is produced.

The “specificity” of Barrancos, in its practice of acts perceived as violent, in fact offers a contrast to a stable public composed of those used to the bullfights happening elsewhere with their curious *mélange* of “aficionados” (“enlightened” admirers of this game) and tourists fond of such “typical” commodities. This adept public is precisely characterized by the total absence of externalized violence, while Barrancos is laying claim to a specificity that finds a place in the common perception of bullfighting as an archaic, ludic activity with violent characteristics. It exists at the opposite extreme from the postmodern “*corrida*,” evoked by the figure of the female “*torero*” or by a *demi-monde* of socialites for whom the bullfight affirms a social distinction

that brings them closer to a phantasmatic and bygone era of aristocrats. Inside this same field, agents connected to this activity and to its reproduction are outlining a multitude of strategies that disparage both the most recent public, the tourists (who nonetheless contribute decisively to the survival of this type of activity), and the spectacles that take place on lower levels of social and professional sophistication. Simultaneously, they do not disdain to show their support of the Barrancos cause, which in itself guarantees that the “traditions of bullfighting” will continue.

Where does this specificity of Barrancos come from? How does it become a rallying cry, attached to a debate on violent games and their role in Portugal today? If we move beyond the obvious fetishism of the identity debate, an answer is not readily available. Taking into consideration this complexity, let us look at some problems from an historian’s point of view, following the course of the two major themes that can be isolated in this debate: tradition and civilization. We will do this before returning to a discussion of an important aspect of our common enterprise: the representations and the experience of violence as socially, culturally, and historically constructed.

Hide, Flesh, and Bone: On the Invention of “Bullfights”

The history of bullfighting is a domain where it is possible to follow these lines of questioning, focusing on the construction of the idea of a “Portuguese tradition.” It is often a history written by and for “aficionados.” And in this respect it is singular because it rarely addresses the problems of the signification and the context of ritual and ludic practices from past societies so as to inscribe within them the place of the combat or the “game” with the bull. As often happens with other objects of Portuguese historiography, bullfighting is viewed as self-evident, that is to say, as an object that is readable simply by systematically peeling back the surface of the sources, epoch after epoch. In the texts of the past, bullfight is simply described, remaining for most historians a given object (Claramunt; Rodrigues). To a great extent, because of the scarcity of analysis a great variety of medieval practices are held to be possible antecedents of modern bullfighting, provided that there exists a sacrificial rapport between the bull and man, and assuming that there is a ludic signification in all of the identified cases.

For reasons of clarity, and given the variety of facts mentioned by historians of bullfighting, we should offer a definition of the idea of “game.”

A game is an activity of an organized group, made up of a loose network of individuals, whose behavior is structured according to a set of fixed rules that establish a ludic space-time relationship, providing a final resolution (Huizinga; Elias and Dunning). Consequently, games may have in medieval and modern societies diverse functions for the participants, the spectators (if there are any), and for the society as an ordered entity. In the case of games in which it is a question of combat with, or the ritual/ludic utilization of, a bull, one can detect for instance a large set of problems related to a series of processes of incorporation of social rules that remain to be studied in Portugal, as well as in other Iberian kingdoms of the Middle Ages.

An obvious case is the incorporation of social hierarchies. There was a bullfighting specific to the aristocracy, tied to the equestrian arts and the hunt, and the contrasting “lower” version of the game (*corrida*) with the employment of other animals (notably dogs). In this latter case, the group attacks the animal, with or without the preliminary goal of the combats of the first type. But the medieval game seems also to be related to the incorporation of rules concerning violence that are correctly characterized by a total inversion of contemporary, post-Enlightenment values. The violence in question is in fact that of the animal on man, since the main problem of the combat was one of containing the violence of the bull through the implementation of repressive strategies of the game itself. Underlying these strategies was the value attributed by Christian religion to human life (Sorabji 195-207). This problem is linked to the probable origin of “techniques” for the manipulation of animals, similar to those of modern bullfighting. These techniques, which in the Iberian case can be dated back to the thirteenth century, were used in games taking place in closed or delimited spaces. It also explains the relatively well-known facts concerning the radical interdiction of bullfights established by ecclesiastical authorities—in particular, the papacy—in the final epoch of the Middle Ages and at the beginning of the Modern age.

But there was also in the medieval games using bulls and men the incorporation of notions related to the natural world by the killing of the animal. The killing of the bull precedes its distribution and consumption either by participants in the game or by the community in general. This process is recognizable in a variety of practices mentioned by medieval texts. All have in common a participation in the mytho-ritual complex of the monarchy, in which this relationship between human societies and the

natural order is necessarily interwoven (Benveniste; Hocart). We can cite the following examples: commemorating events on the “royal calendar” (weddings, births, etc.) with bullfights; the ritual meal of a bull (which had often been “fought” just prior) for inaugurations, notably for the feasting of the coronation of royalty; and the sacrificial ritual of killing a bull (preceded by a fight) to demarcate territories, which has been studied within the context of fifteenth-century Andalusia (Delpech). The importance of this mythic complex was not lost by the Papacy, which, during the sixteenth century, pondered the idea of creating an exception by removing the ban on bullfights conducted on the authority of or in the presence of kings.

The strangeness of these practices is also evident in the various inscriptions and uses of the bull’s corpse. For example, in the royal banquets of the fifteenth century, the bull’s hide was used in the creation of a rather strange dish. The hide, once removed, was stuffed with a number of other animals symbolizing the monarchy, for instance cocks and other fowl. Sewn back together and cooked, this culinary monument would then be served to the public during meals called royal “convites” in Portuguese and Castilian (“convit,” in Catalan) (Bertelli; Gomes). The hide also served as a physical support for the royal emblems: bulls, grazing in fields near city walls, would “wear” the royal coat of arms for the entry of the monarchy into the city (Andrés Diaz 328-29). Or the bulls, ornamented in heraldic signs by the inhabitants of the different parishes of the city, would be displayed and later used for games during the coronation of the king.

The bull’s flesh is an essential element in these various practices known from medieval and early modern times. As we have noted, sharing of the flesh is symbolically linked both to the sharing of land in territorial demarcation and to sharing of the royal body during royal banquets. However, the flesh of the bull, utilized in these ways, can only be obtained by the game. Thus, it is difficult to see which is, in fact, at the origin of the other. The bull is killed so as to be eaten; the bull is eaten so as to allow for the existence of the game. The complicated schema of such medieval “bullfights” is also seen in the variety of human roles and activities they involve—be it in cases where whole communities participate in the game before the collective meal, or in cases where agents specifically linked to the killing of the bull are involved. These latter, the “matatoros,” mentioned for example in the thirteenth-century code of the “Partidas” of Alfonso X, are distinguished from other participants in the game because they are paid and because, within medieval juridical

discourse, they occupy roughly the same social space as the butchers, prostitutes, and minstrels, that is, the so-called "impure" professions (Rodrigues 352-53; see also Bennassar).

All of this evidence indicates a cultural framework in which violent games involving men and animals functioned very differently from those of contemporary society. In a cultural and symbolic interpretation of today's bullfighting, this cannot be overstated (Pitt-Rivers; see also Déveaux and Saumade). Some observations, pertinent to our discussion, are necessary: the nonexistence of observable differences regarding the practice of killing bulls in various Iberian contexts (the "Portuguese tradition" was obviously created sometime after the eighteenth century), but especially its distinction from the so-called "art of bullfighting" in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Regarding medieval games and "bullfights," one has to keep in mind the following aspects of this question: the very limited role and the specific nature of the participation by professional, remunerated agents in them; the ambivalence of the observable interweaving of certain types of collective rituals and the games with animals; the strangeness of perceptions and representations of violence in these societies. These practices, without contextualization and with only a fragmented knowledge on the part of the historian, are often incomprehensible to our contemporary minds (Farge).

All of this leads us to realize, following a few of the classical studies on bullfighting "traditions" by insightful observers such as Cossío and Ortega y Gasset, that contemporary bullfighting is a phenomenon that is not easily comparable to the practices of the medieval and early-modern eras. This fact has also been underscored in a recent excellent monography on Spanish bullfighting by the historian Adrian Schubert (1999). Cossío had already established the three essential components to an archaeology of bullfighting in the eighteenth century:

- 1) The bull must be viewed as an animal that requires special breeding. The animal is in fact a genetic "fossil," modeled by the practices of bullfighting, and consequently, indissociable from them. These practices cannot be traced prior to the late period of the "Ancien Régime."
- 2) The agents come to represent new types of professionals, such as the "matador" and the "cavaleiro" which become a part of the fabric of bullfighting. This is a condition necessary for the establishment of a unique language, which targets the malleable reformulation of "spectacular" components of this game.

These components could, moreover, become periodically renewable inside the frame of modern professionalised leisure activities, experimenting with several forms of spectacle aiming at commercial profit.

3) And finally, there is a necessary separation of the spectators and the action of the game. This becomes homologous to an entire series of practices of “popular” leisure and their insertion into a complex of festivities distinctive to the final period of the “Ancien Régime.” During the nineteenth century, for example, one observes in Portugal the occasional association of the world of bullfighting with that of the circus. The latter was responsible for creating variants of the spectacle that were later to be banned from the arenas. These spectacles involved, for instance, combats between the bull and other animals (lions, elephants, etc.) (Noronha). It is the separation between the spectators and the game that is at the origin of a spatial and material condition necessary to the modern bullfight: the arena. The first examples of arenas in Portugal, within urban settings, date back to the end of the eighteenth century (Romero de Solis; Abreu).

In endowing itself with more ancient origins, contemporary bullfighting constructed a narrative that sought to legitimize itself according to a few essential elements: the prestige of monarchical traditions, association with the “noble” and “privileged” art of the hunt and combat on horseback, nostalgia for the dominating and instrumental rapport with “wild” animals. And, last but not least, it has created the aura of an activity that hearkens back to an hierarchical social order. This social order is fixed and organized according to microcosmic grounds; even the “reality” upon which it is based is best characterized as a form of fiction. That is to say, as with all games, it is more immediately readable, more condensed, and more intentional than the historical reality it wants to evoke ever could be.

Violent Games and the Process of Civilization

Born in an era of change in Portuguese society in the final period of the “Ancien Régime” (late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries), bullfighting carried, in its many forms during the nineteenth century, the marks of a lively and mobilizing debate. This debate is focused on establishing a definition of “civilization” and the place of Iberian people in it. At the same time, bullfighting, like so many cultural objects and practices, was taking part in the formation of a political discourse regarding the identity and destiny of nations. In Iberian cultures, the relationship of civilization—

a fundamental myth of the Enlightenment—to the perception of violent practices that had been institutionalized in the public space took on particular forms. A debate developed about certain rituals or spectacles that would henceforth be viewed as too controversial, such as the “Auto-da-fé.” A formidable tool used in the social debasement of an individual, leading eventually to the execution of the person, the “Auto-da-fé” has a multi-secular history that is in absolute contradiction to the increasingly important value of “Tolerance.” Because of this disparity, in the eighteenth century the “Auto-da-fé” was withdrawn from important public spaces in urban settings such as main squares, or places associated with secular power such as the royal palaces, and was relocated inside, mainly within churches or cloisters. It was an act of violence condemned to disappear with the extinction of the courts of the Inquisition in the nineteenth century (Bethencourt).

Since the Enlightenment, bullfighting has become a similar object of reflection for intellectuals. This reflection has been focused primarily on two problems: the definition of supposedly universal values and the game as a sign of Iberian particularity. In relation to this latter problem, scholars have sought an object that would help formulate the reasons for the Iberian peninsula’s unique historical trajectory, an object that would explain the “obscurity” and the “barbarism” seen in a panoply of its social practices. The history of this debate is in itself fascinating, providing a thematic center for the passionate evaluation and claiming of national stereotypes, these same discourses being manipulated to launch traditionalist “trends” (“neocastizismo”) from the interior of the field of bullfighting itself (Cambria).

In the constant renegotiation of the terms in which the violent game of bullfighting has survived and has been integrated into “popular” leisure-time activities, one can follow the definitions of socially accepted limits for the use of violence in public in the nineteenth century. Following more and more pressing attention on the part of royal authority itself during the final decades of the eighteenth century, the first systematic regulation of the game appeared in 1776, followed by modalities of repressive discourse that led to interdictions in 1790. By 1820, bullfighting had become an affair of the State and was the object of formal and reiterated interdictions in Portugal. In a contradictory way, it would come to be a practice that was both repressed and tolerated throughout the nineteenth century. The reasons for this intermittent repression can be found in a dispassionate reading of the sources of the epoch (Crespo). The game is repeatedly considered to be *en soi*

“beneath civilized nations.” We find this expression, in those exact words, in all the Portuguese legal rulings. It becomes a veritable “topos” for argumentation, notably in the Prologue to the law of 1928 that is still in use. Already during the great political upheaval that accompanied the end of absolutism in 1820, the crux of this debate resided in transforming the violence of the animal and of the man who kills it into a recreational spectacle, that is, to insert the violence into a new public space that was then in gestation, that of leisure.

Nevertheless, bullfighting found a place, more or less stable, within the festivities of the epoch. Its violent drives “domesticated,” it became a complementary activity to masses and religious feasts, to dances, to festivals, and to other collective “celebrations.” As Jorge Crespo has proven, the initiative to introduce bullfighting into civic holidays—which also distinguishes, in their often commemorative function, bullfights of the nineteenth century from those of today—is in great part the result of the uncertain relationship between the local, peripheral dimension and the central authority of the State. The principle of interdiction, acknowledged by “enlightened,” “modern” sovereigns and recognized by the law, was based on the idea of the inadmissible nature of this game. However, it has survived this struggle because of the pragmatism of local state controls that were more open to religious and political arguments for the existence of the game. As reports from the local authorities and the police attest, bullfights took place on numerous occasions with varied characteristics. They were often promoted by local powers, such as municipalities and powerful religious organizations like the confraternities, perhaps involved in the non-negligible economic aspects of the activity, as was then the case in Spain (Schubert 17-29). The geography of bullfighting in Portugal showed a clear predominance in the central region and in the south of the kingdom. These were areas of large agricultural estates that were previously owned by ecclesiastical institutions and the royal family and later sold to private families and is where the breeding of bulls, necessary to bullfighting, was introduced.

The modes of the game that were later compiled and studied by ethnologists at the turn of the twentieth century also took place in the frontier regions (Beira, Alentejo) or in the Azores. These were similar in that a collective meal, symbolizing the closure of the game, took place within a cycle of religious festivities (Dias; Ribeiro; Leal). This diversity suggested the

establishment of a division, more theoretical than verifiable in all cases, between professional bullfighting and modalities of the game that were not systematically framed by the autonomous logic of that form of commercialized leisure. In the first type of bullfighting, the separation of the public from the action of the game is complete. A space proper to the game, an arena, is required. This, in turn, played a crucial role in the equipping and the urban landscape of cities of the south of Portugal. In the second case, the “bullfight” proper does not exist since the game takes place outside this physical framework and outside regulated practices, and most of all, because its declared purpose is not commercial profit. According to the information available, however, the practices of the 19th and early 20th century show signs of an unequal expansion of the “bullfighting culture” in all of its aspects—prescriptive, economic, and cultural. Since the classification of “popular” games was made taking into consideration the products of this cultural industry, it can be said that these contributed in a decisive way to define what was a “true corrida,” and what was not (Guillaume-Alonso).

Some recent bibliography reproduces this division by making a distinction between two types of “fiesta,” the “rural-ethnographic” and the “urban.” This division, treated as an *a priori* fact, should also be historically situated. With the first type, that of the “rural fiesta,” one author declares the practices “unchanged since the earliest times of the Middle Ages” (Gil Calvo 40). This declaration is made even though testimony from those who observe and describe aspects of these games mention the use of certain protective measures (the use of ropes and certain collective techniques of control, such as wooden stalls) used to weaken and tame the animal, measures that have direct links to the historical process of the repression of violent games: they focus on the protection of men and they laud evasive combat techniques, inculcating the value of human life.

On both sides of this theoretical divide between “genuinely popular” and “commodified” games, the ban on killing the bull in public is a constant, put into place by the State in the nineteenth century. This issue can be spotted in the debates taking place in the “Cortes” of 1821 in Portugal, as well as in Spain, where, in 1807, a law of royal initiative repressing the killing of the bull was decreed. The bans had unequal results because of differences in bullfighting practices and structures between the two countries, and because of the diversity within each country’s own social realities. The arguments used in the nineteenth century to justify this ban on the killing of the animal

stressed the dangerous nature of fostering familiarity with killing. The killing of the bull was seen as a habit that could create a disposition towards murderous violence on the part of the “dangerous classes.” After having been “fought,” the bulls would be killed in the wings of the spectacle, outside of the view and outside the experience of the public. This was done as a means of preventing the bull’s carcass from undermining the culture of “tolerance” and anti-cruelty advocated by legislators and institutions (for a comparison with the situation in England, see Thomas). Consequently, we can say that the limitations placed on the experience of violence were centered on the social and collective dimension of the spectators. Not killing the animal in public was intended to promote an idea of bullfighting compatible with the pacification of the crowd through leisure activities.

The constitution and “domestication” of the public in the nineteenth century is essential to the “process of civilization” described by Norbert Elias (Defrance). The history of bullfighting is another strong case for detecting this same “process of civilization” in Iberian countries. One finds during this era the representation that underlies the contemporary game, but one can also see that the devices of control were concentrated mainly on the spectators and on molding their behaviour and emotional lives, aiming at the “calming down” of possible “cycles of violence” (Elias and Dunning). Through regulation of the professionals’ activities, it is clear that the threat to order posed by the game was what was in question. Becoming a spectacle, bullfighting is inscribed in the logic of the leisure-activity market, powerful ally of social discipline and the normative mechanisms put into place by the State. These mechanisms were focused almost exclusively on the conduct, the “appetites,” “instincts,” and the violent drives of the masses. Moreover, these aspects would be collectively transferred by the crowd onto the bullfighter, the “*toureiro*.” Now, it is time for us to go back to Barrancos and to the debate on human-animal relations.

Hidden Violence, or the Art of Being Portuguese

Underlying the alternation between two forms of combat in the so-called Portuguese bullfights—combat on horse, combat on foot—there is a curious presentation, almost a sort of re-enactment, based on a perception of social hierarchies of the “Ancien Régime.” In the first form, the cavaliers wear

stylized clothes, which recall those worn in the eighteenth century (like the wigs worn by judges in English tribunals); in the second, groups of men dressed in livery immobilize the animal by attacking it without any weapons. Remuneration is *de rigueur* in the first case, purely symbolic in the second, since the “forcado” (the combatant on foot) generally receives no money for his participation in the spectacle. This mimetic relationship between “aristocracy” and “people” is nonetheless, as we have seen, a product of the structuring of a domain of a specialized activity subjected to the logic of professional competence and of the leisure-activity market in search of its public since the 19th century. Concurrently, this relationship reproduces a legend of the imaginary autonomy of the game, “frozen” in time and carrying the signs of its own history, by associating it with the end of the “killing of bulls” in public in the eighteenth century. However, this is a universe the valences and meanings of which are becoming more opaque in relation to contemporary mass culture and less susceptible to various appropriations, beyond the sphere of the obvious common denominator of the “national” motif. Bullfighting of the “Portuguese sort” is a product the current definition of which is the fruit of recent history, being particularly cultivated and successfully marketed in Portugal’s “golden decades” of bullfighting, that is, the post-war period until the sixties. The so-called “Portuguese tradition” is a product that strives to sell within a market that fears a total absorption into nearby countries’ bullfighting networks. Its defenders hold fast to it by stressing its uniqueness and making it appear “traditionalistic.” In this small world of Portuguese bullfighting, dominated by the cavalier who propagates a sense of “caste” and social distinction and whose activity depends, to a much greater extent than his “forcado” counterpart, on the economic resources generated by the spectacle, the bullfight represents the continuity of a certain “order of things” (Capucha). As a cultural object in Portugal, bullfighting occupies a space that distinguishes itself from other signs of modernity by playing more and more upon the notion of a “national” logic of identity. This idea is promoted despite the fact that the public of “aficionados” often venture outside Portugal’s borders for the same sort of cultural product. Spain, in particular, where bullfighting includes killing the bull in the arena, holds a specific allure. The world of professionalized bullfighting also relegates “popular” occurrences of the game, which often are nothing more than makeshift versions operating according to the same codes of this ludic universe, to the

minor status of “rustic” activities. Of course, the professionalized world also uses the “popular” game in its arguments for the survival of this menaced activity (bullfighting is still loved by “the people”).

None of these conflicts, however, occupies the center of the debate of Barrancos. The debate currently being held in Portugal organizes itself around violence directed at the bull, while also adopting the universalistic discourse of the values of civilization in which the animal is conceived as a moral subject with its own rights. The anthropocentric and instrumental relations of humans and animals that were characteristic of modern culture are being transformed, in contemporary societies, in a variety of ways (Franklin). Obviously, ordering the debate in this way demonstrates an increasing lack of understanding, if not a total rejection of the internal codes of bullfighting as a specific cultural field. The use of violence, if we understand the term in its etymological meaning of “the projection of physical force against someone or something,” implies lower levels of tolerance in Portuguese society today, but these do not have a general, indiscriminate value; they function in the specific case of the projection of aggressive drives towards the animal. There lies the perception of the violence, invisible elsewhere. One should also realize that the local publics that were so arduously created in the past by older forms of “popular” pastime have given way to the masses avid for the excitement lived and reproduced by visual media, notably, by television. The practices and “traditions” of bullfighting have attempted in vain to adapt to the new media, the characteristics of which seem to impose a stricter respect for specific timings and rhythms of action than the living realities of the arenas allow.

Has bullfighting become a thing of the past? Although the interest in bullfighting is primarily limited to a minority of the Portuguese population, we must not underestimate the capacity for change of a cultural object that still wields the symbols of a number of passionate and mobilizing discourses. The role of the bull has been introduced into this dense network, a move that has modified the perception of the game, and it has forced changes of position and new compromises on the issues at stake. Taking refuge behind the reassuring image of a “Portuguese tradition,” the prevailing discourse of the “fiesta” in Portugal has recently been challenged by Barrancos. The debate invites us to contemplate what it reveals about us all as agents and objects of contemporary violence.

Notes

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