

2017

## A Revolt of the Masses: Culture and Modernity in Early 20th Century Spain: From Bullfights to Football Games

Katrine Helene Andersen  
*University of Copenhagen*, kandersen@hum.ku.dk

Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/priamls>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

### Recommended Citation

Andersen, Katrine Helene (2017) "A Revolt of the Masses: Culture and Modernity in Early 20th Century Spain: From Bullfights to Football Games," *CALL: Irish Journal for Culture, Arts, Literature and Language*: Vol. 2: Iss. 1, Article 9.

doi:10.21427/D7W42D

Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/priamls/vol2/iss1/9>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Ceased publication at ARROW@TU Dublin. It has been accepted for inclusion in CALL: Irish Journal for Culture, Arts, Literature and Language by an authorized administrator of ARROW@TU Dublin. For more information, please contact [arrow.admin@tudublin.ie](mailto:arrow.admin@tudublin.ie), [aisling.coyne@tudublin.ie](mailto:aisling.coyne@tudublin.ie).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](#)

## **A Revolt of the Masses: Culture and Modernity in Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Spain: From Bullfights to Football Games.**

**Katrine Helene Andersen**

Department of English, Germanic and Romance Studies  
University of Copenhagen, Denmark  
kandersen@hum.ku.dk

### *Abstract*

This article discusses the consolidation of mass culture in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Spain and analyses the discrepancy between the intellectual debate about Spanish culture and public behaviour. Bullfighting has throughout history been a much debated theme amongst intellectuals, and it has been banned by kings and the Church on several occasions. Nevertheless, there has always been an audience. In early 20<sup>th</sup> century, football entered the scene of popular culture in Spain and gained very quickly in popularity. The article discusses the presence of the two and analyses the contribution of bullfighting and football to the process of modernisation and globalisation in Spain. José Ortega y Gasset's view on culture as a production of value and his idea of the revolt of the masses serves as a prime theoretical backdrop for the study.

*Keywords:* bullfighting; football; popular culture; Ortega y Gasset; civilisation; globalisation

The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a turbulent period in Spanish history both politically and socially. The loss of the last colonies in 1898 was a major blow to the national self-esteem for a nation fumbling for stability and longing for the greatness of times past. Amongst intellectuals the debate about the future of Spain was fierce while the broader public seemed less engaged with the future and more engaged with the present. Around 1900 new types of leisure were introduced in Spain, namely football and cinema; thus the seriousness of the political and intellectual situation was counterweighed by the public quest for excitement and entertainment.

This study will discuss the consolidation of mass culture in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Spain and analyse the discrepancy between the intellectual debate about Spanish identity and culture, on the one side, and public behaviour, on the other. Especially José Ortega y Gasset's take on

the situation will serve as a theoretical backdrop. The popularity of bullfights will be analysed and compared to the popular newcomer football, and it will be considered whether this renewal of the popular cultural scene was the consequence of a civilization process and a modernisation of Spanish tradition or the result of globalisation.

### **The debate on culture and the situation in Spain**

Today's discussion about culture and cultural life has revealed the difficulties in defining what culture actually is. The term has gone from being an intellectual matter having to do with the cultivation of the soul and inner qualities in Aristotle and Cicero to becoming a term that denominates a pattern of behaviour and tradition. It has been a transition from within to without, from being to behaving. Yet we are not completely comfortable with culture as a practical phenomenon but would like for culture to sustain an educational and intellectual purpose. Therefore when we talk about our cultural inheritance, we talk about art and literature or about celebration of religious traditions, but not about our more trivial and popular habits. We are still eager for culture to connote something beyond our everyday practices. Reading a book and going to the theatre are cultural, whereas going to a football game is not: this is *popular* culture. It seems that if too many people participate it is not a cultural but a popular event. In other words, culture seems to be incompatible with the idea of the masses. The historical period of this study covers a moment in history when "culture" was still on the threshold between philosophy and anthropology; therefore the term "culture" will be applied when referring to the intellectual debate, and "popular culture" will be used in reference to behaviour and the practises of the public.

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century was a hectic period for Spain. Both politically and socially the country was undergoing changes. The complicated process of restoration of the monarchy after the first republic in 1874 had left the country in an unstable political situation, which was made worse by the loss of the last colonies in 1898. These decisive events in Spanish history motivated the debate amongst intellectuals on the identity and future of the country. The crisis led to reflection on Spanish values and ideas. The political situation was debated alongside the Spanish traditions, and intellectuals were quick to divide themselves into two groups; on the one side those who believed in a particularly Spanish culture and argued that the future of the country should be found within Spanish frontiers; on the other side those who warned about a possible degradation of the national spirit and believed that the country should look to Europe to become modernised.

Angel Ganivet (1865-1898) called for a thorough examination of Spanish values and ideals. He believed that, as everything else in Spain, the political system lacked originality but was a mere imitation of other systems. The solution to the political and intellectual crisis of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was to be found in the Spanish tradition and spirit, and the reconstruction of Spanish national character should be built on tradition.<sup>1</sup> Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936) was another intellectual to consider the identity of and current crisis in Spain. The positive attitude towards Europe of his early years was later substituted by scepticism towards modern European culture, and instead he advocated for primacy of Spanish culture and spirit. He argued that a “Europeization” of Spain inevitably would result in a “Spanification” of Europe since Spain, after all, was part of Europe, even if not in the centre of Europe.<sup>2</sup> Leading this Europe-friendly position was Joaquin Costa (1846-1911) who believed that the solution to the Spanish crisis and backwardness was Europe. Europe was a modern example for Spain to follow in order to construct a valid system.<sup>3</sup>

It was in this intellectual climate that José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) began his intellectual career and he supported Costa in the claim that Spain was old-fashioned and in urgent need of modernisation: Spain was the problem and Europe was the solution. For Ortega modernisation was not exclusively a political project but a pedagogical one. He felt that the Spanish crisis was not merely a political crisis or a question about loss of power in an international perspective, it was a cultural crisis. In order for Spain to become a modern society it was imperative to acknowledge the current situation and recognise that for centuries Spain had not evolved intellectually, politically or culturally. Spain did not only need political reformation but cultural evolution.

In a speech given on March 12, 1910, Ortega gives his first account of what culture is and the impact the contemporary crisis had on cultural life in Spain:

Cultura es labor, producción de las cosas humanas; es hacer ciencia, hacer moral, hacer arte. Cuando hablamos de mayor o menor cultura queremos decir mayor o menor capacidad de producir cosas humanas, de trabajo. Las cosas, los productos son la medida y el síntoma de la cultura. Los españoles –esta es nuestra grave maldición- hemos perdido la tradición cultural: dicho más vulgarmente, hemos perdido el interés por las cosas.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Ángel Ganivet: *Idearium español y el porvenir de España*. Buenos Aires: Espasa-Calpe, 1949 (first published in 1897).

<sup>2</sup> Miguel de Unamuno: ‘Sobre la europeización.’ In: *Ensayos I*. Madrid: Aguilar, 1951, p. 901-920 (first published in 1906).

<sup>3</sup> Joaquín Costa: *Reconstitución y europeización de España y otros escritos*. Madrid: Instituto de Estudios de Administración Local, 1981 (first published in 1901).

<sup>4</sup> José Ortega y Gasset: ‘La pedagogía como programa social’. In: *Obras Completas I*. Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1946, p. 494-513, p. 91: “Culture is work, production of human things; it is production of science, of moral, of arts. When we talk about major or minor culture we mean major or minor capacity to produce human

Cerezo Galán clarifies that the term “producción” is to be understood as the production of value and not as industrial production or work.<sup>5</sup> Culture goes beyond the individual and spontaneous life and unites us with other individuals; it is what objectifies our relation to others. Therefore culture is an important manifestation of what and who we are. However, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Spain had lost its interest in things and its ability to produce things of value, Ortega argues. Instead the country had been taken over by an individualist spirit that complicated the spirit of community and unanimity.

According to Ortega, the individual is nothing without the collective and therefore education was necessary in order to improve the sense of community in Spain, which had been severely damaged for centuries. Education should respect the social dimension of man and thus nourish the sense of community in order to improve the cultural level. In *Meditaciones del Quijote*<sup>6</sup> he defines culture in opposition to spontaneous life or individual life. Spontaneous and individual life is immediate while culture is life when it has been lifted to a higher level of reflection. Therefore culture cannot merely be instinctive habits and practices but is a privileged degree of human life. It is life in its plenitude because it is what makes us not just biological and individual beings but social beings. When Spain found itself in a cultural crisis, it was because Spain, unlike other European countries, lacked a sense of community and had failed to understand the value of a cultural identity.

This preoccupation was however not shared by the public, which became an even greater cause for concern for Ortega y Gasset in his later writings. The popular inclination towards leisure is one of the key problems treated in his most famous work *La rebelión de las masas*.<sup>7</sup> Here he claims that the rise or revolt of the masses had caused a crisis, not only in Spain, but in Europe. The masses had taken over and they left no room for the individual or for minorities. The term *mass* is not a political or a social distinction but a philosophical one. It designates the totality of a group of people with no particular qualities. The mass is made up of mediocre men (*el hombre medio*) who do not stand out and do not aspire to be anything special. The mediocre man or the mass man does not have an individual personality and he seeks to be identical to everybody else. The problem is that the mass has convinced itself of

---

things, of work. The things, the products, are the measurement and a symptom of a culture. The Spanish –this is for us a serious curse- have lost our cultural tradition. In more vulgar terms: we have lost interest in things” (my translation).

<sup>5</sup> Pedro Cerezo Galán: *La voluntad de la aventura*. Barcelona: Ariel, 1984, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> José Ortega y Gasset: *Meditaciones del Quijote*. Madrid, Cátedra: 2012.

<sup>7</sup> A collection of articles and conferences published most likely in the 1920's and as a book for the first time in 1930.

its authority and believes that it is within its right to impose its *tópicos de café* (café discussions) on others, in spite of not possessing any goals or objectives. “Hyperdemocracy” Ortega calls it.<sup>8</sup>

Ortega admits that the rise of the masses has led to a general higher level in culture and education: we are now where only the aristocracy was before, he claims. However, the contemporary Spanish and European crisis was the result of a lack of ideas. The mass of early 20<sup>th</sup> century did not know where to go. Europe and especially Spain had been demoralised and there was no longer a clear future and no longer a clear world power: ‘Where do we go when we do not know where we want to go?’ and ‘Who shall guide us?’ are some of the questions the philosopher asks. There was no longer a clear point of gravity towards which the human ideals should be directed, and consequently life was headed towards temporariness.<sup>9</sup> According to Ortega, all man does today is temporary, and nobody feels the necessity of things anymore. Everything is reduced to momentary pleasures with lack of authenticity. An act is only sincere when we feel the necessity of it while unnecessary acts are falsifications of life.

However, the diagnosed cultural and political crisis that engaged Ortega and other intellectuals at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was contrasted by the eagerness for fun and games in the broader public. This contributed to the rise of a culture of the masses and of popular culture, especially in the bigger cities. The industrialization of the 19<sup>th</sup> century continued well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and during these years Spain underwent frenetic change as far as customs and new traditions are concerned. The urbanization was a natural consequence of the industrialization; work was easier to find and was better paid in the cities; and since the foundation of the labour unions and the socialist labour party (PSOE) the workers had been secured better working conditions and better pay. For these reasons many left rural Spain, where *caciquismo*, political and social despotism by local ‘bosses’ and bad working conditions were common, to search for work in the cities. Even women were able to work, and with a new family structure, which in some cases offered double income, the economic possibilities were no longer an excuse for not participating in the city life of leisure. The legislation on working conditions and the fixing of a minimum wage was accompanied by a law which assured Sunday rest in 1904. These developments provided the perfect setting for the flourishing of popular culture in Spanish cities in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Football and cinema became increasingly popular alongside the more traditional

---

<sup>8</sup> José Ortega Y Gasset: *La Rebelión de las masas*. Madrid: Austral, 2007, p. 86 (first published in 1930).

<sup>9</sup> Ortega, *Rebelión de las masas*, p. 243.

bullfights and *zarzuelas* (light operas). The difficult situation that had characterised Spain since the beginning of the Restoration in the 1870s and the general sense of crisis amongst intellectuals were counterweighed by a demand for diversion and fun in the public.

### **The reaction of the public**

When educational interchange and technological advances enabled new inputs to the entertainment scene, Spain was quick to adopt the new tendencies as its own: football in particular quickly became a tremendously popular sport. It is worth mentioning that before football became prominent many traditional celebrations and activities were an important part of Spanish everyday life. *Verbenas* (street parties), *ferias* (fairs) and *zarzuelas* (light operas) were, alongside bullfighting, always an integrated part of Spanish popular culture and tradition.

The celebrations of bullfights and their origin have frequently been debated. Some historians trace bullfighting back to the Romans while others, i.e. Nicolás Fernández de Moratín in 1777 and later Larra in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, claim it to be part of the Arab inheritance. According to Fernández de Moratín, one of the earliest references to bullfighting is that of the legend of *El Cid Campeador*, who presumably fought bulls. Even if this claim has never been historically supported, it goes to show how important bullfighting was as an underlining of courage and honour.<sup>10</sup> Since then it has been a frequent and much debated theme: Goya dedicated several paintings to the *fiestas de toros* and *el arte de tauromaquia*, as did Picasso; Lorca wrote poems about it, *Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías*, and Hemingway gave it a treatment in his *Death in the Afternoon*. Consequently, it would be futile to ignore the presence of bulls in Spanish cultural history and therefore the intellectual debate of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century had to include thoughts on the tradition. For some, bullfighting represented traditional Spain and was what defined *lo español*, whereas for others the violence and the brutality of the fights was what maintained Spain as an underdeveloped country and was a testimony of its stupidity.<sup>11</sup> Authors like Maeztu, Azorín and Unamuno claimed that bullfighting, in part, was what kept Spain from evolving and growing. Azorín criticised it for its frivolity and designated it as part of *La España de la pandereta* (Tambourine Spain) and

---

<sup>10</sup> John C. Dowling: The Taurine Works of Nicolás Fernández de Moratín. In: *The South Central Bulletin*, 22/4 (Winter, 1962), p. 31-34, p.32.

<sup>11</sup> Adrian Shubert defends the thesis that modern bullfighting is a sign of advanced capitalism against the frequent intellectual stance that bullfighting was what held Spain back from evolving into a modern country, in his *Death and Money in the afternoon: A History of the Spanish Bullfighting*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

not the real Spain.<sup>12</sup> Unamuno suggested that bullfighting did not infuriate the people or make them more savage, rather it made them stupid. Machado, on the other hand, saw bullfighting as a “sacrifice to and unknown God” and maintained that it was part of Spanish essence and identity.<sup>13</sup> Generally the condemnation of *las fiestas de toros* was more frequent than the celebration and approval amongst the intellectuals. Nevertheless, the people kept approving and applauding.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the popularity of bullfighting was such that it interfered with work, and therefore the usual ten bulls were reduced to six, and it was suggested that bullfighting was to take place on Sundays instead of Mondays. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the popularity of bullfighting had not declined; in the 1920s the fights were adapted to the new society and to the demands of the public. Ventas, the big arena in Madrid, was built and in 1929, the celebration was modernised and the picadors’ horses were allowed to wear protection (“el peto defensivo del caballo de los picadors”).<sup>14</sup> The modernised bullfighting included all social classes and continued to enjoy great popularity unaffected by the intellectual debate, by the political instability and by the increasing popularity of football. Football, of course, had several advantages compared to bullfighting. It was not bound to a season (bullfights only take place in Spain from April till October), the rules were simple and everybody could play. But even so the traditional Spanish *corrida* persevered.

In an article written for *Fortune* magazine in March 1930, Ernest Hemingway describes the situation:

Every once in so often you read in the papers a stock story about how Association Football is putting bullfighting out of business in Spain. It is a story that is usually written by a newspaper man on his first visit to Spain, a visit which may be made during the off season for bullfights when football is in full swing [...] but to conclude that the bullfighting industry is dying out is as silly as it would be for a European visitor to deduce that baseball was finished because of the empty ball parks in America after the World Series.<sup>15</sup>

As pointed out by Hemingway, bullfighting and football coexisted at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when football quickly became a great success in Spain. Only five years separate the foundation of the first team, Foot-Ball Sky, founded in 1897 by students from *La Institución*

---

<sup>12</sup> Term used to describe the uneducated and unillustrated part of Spain.

<sup>13</sup> Adrian Shubert and Marina Sanchis Martínez: En la vanguardia del ocio mercantilizado de masas: la corrida de toros en España, siglos XVIII y XIX. In: *Historia Social* 41 (2001), p.113-126, p.114.

<sup>14</sup> José María Báez y Pérez de Tudela: *Fútbol, cine y democracia. Ocio de masas en Madrid 1923-1936*. Madrid: Alianza, 2012, p. 160.

<sup>15</sup> Ernest Hemingway: Bullfighting, sport and industry. In: *Fortune* 1/3, March 1930, accessed on February 24, 2016 on <http://fortune.com/2013/07/28/bullfighting-sport-and-industry-fortune-1930/>.



*Libre de Enseñanza* whose teachers had studied at Oxford and Cambridge, and the first formalised game was played at the crowning of Alfonso XIII on May 15<sup>th</sup> 1902.<sup>16</sup> A tentative first translation of “football” into *balón pie* survived as *fútbol* as a sign of the global dimension of the sport, unlike basketball and handball which were translated into their Spanish equivalent *baloncesto* and *balonmano*.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, racing and cycling had been the most popular sports, and the practice of sports was limited to military men and young men of high social class. Football, however, was a simple game with simple rules and little equipment needed, and in spite of the royal beginning it quickly became the sport of the masses. In his thorough study of leisure in Madrid in the years 1923-1936, Báez y Pérez de Tudela describes how in a matter of decades, football had become a professional sport without losing its mass appeal: thus the first league game was played as early as 1929. The masses could play and would attend formalised games and cheer for their team. The press was also seduced by the excitement and in the 1920s sports were as relevant a topic to the newspapers as politics. A football game allowed for everybody to form an opinion and became the civilised and democratic way of disagreeing both during the game and after. Games were discussed both by the public and by the media.

Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning find sports and games to be an inherent part of a civilising process. In his introductory study for *Quest for Excitement* Elias discovers a link between the modernisation of England and the importance and characteristics of sports. When England went from being a barbaric country to a democratic parliament and a modern country, the former activity of killing and fighting each other could not just be erased or suppressed, since they are human characteristics. Instead they found a different manifestation under more civilised forms. Sports are, in other words, a civilised way of expressing what in more barbaric times was lived out through gladiator fights or fighting amongst each other. Excitement, play and battle are innate parts of the human being and sports include all these aspects; therefore observing the evolutions in sport practises is both a study of the civilising process, of social behaviour and, thus, of man. The connection between the development of the English power structure and the characteristics of sports in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and past times is a good example of the interaction between sports and civilising processes.<sup>17</sup> Man has always had a violent inclination in so far he uses violence for survival, to defend his honour

---

<sup>16</sup> Báez y Pérez de Tudela, *Fútbol*, p.39-40.

<sup>17</sup> Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning: *Quest for Excitement. Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process*. Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1993, p.28.

and even for fun; but for a parliamentary regime to exist it is necessary to control the violent outbursts of society since civil society is not compatible with physical violence amongst its citizens. According to Hobbes, the whole idea of entering society stems from the final cause of man which is his own preservation.<sup>18</sup> This is best done by uniting in a state of commonwealth or civitas, which means that the power of control is handed over to one person or a group of persons who then control the multitude.<sup>19</sup> Hobbes too believes that man is a violent being who, even so, admits to a bigger purpose which imposes control of these impulses. The control within Leviathan, i.e. commonwealth, is exercised by those designated to do so.

Elias takes his study a step further when he treats the development of human self-control and our threshold for violence. He concludes that we have become more and more civilised as we have learned to control our own impulses towards violence. In a historical perspective there is doubtlessly a tendency towards less violent sports or at least a higher degree of control of violence in sports. Sports as hunting, boxing, racing and some ball games assumed the characteristics of sports and were first called sports in England in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Before that more violent events such as gladiator fights in Rome and even battles and fights served as a channel for the liberation of tension and emotion. Elias and Dunning argue that in modern society our emotional outbursts are controlled by the state order which makes it necessary for us to express feelings in contexts designed to do so. Therefore we pursue leisure and sport to experience emotions which, in former times and in less civilised societies, form part of an everyday life more dangerous and unpredictable than that of the civilised world.<sup>20</sup>

Elias' claim that the transition from violent sports to more controlled and organized events such as football was a part of a civilization process in England is to some extent applicable to the case of Spain. Here the practice of bullfights has been criticised as a barbaric and violent tradition incompatible with a civil society, and several changes have been made throughout history to make the fights less barbaric and more civilised while still maintaining their vicinity with tragedy and death. These changes are not only due to the self-control and the lower threshold for violence integrated in the civilising project proposed by Elias.

Bullfighting has changed and been modified over the years according to the preferences of the kings and the will of the church.

In his article on bullfights from 1828, Mariano José de Larra (1809-1837) describes how Felipe II did not inherit his father's passion for bullfights and became the first king to issue a

---

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Hobbes: *Leviathan*. London: Penguin, 1985, p.223.

<sup>19</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p.227.

<sup>20</sup> Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning: 'The Quest for Excitement in Leisure'. In: *Quest for Excitement. Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process*. Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1993, p. 63-91.

royal decree to prohibit the *fiestas de toros*.<sup>21</sup> According to Larra, Felipe II assembled the council of Toledo, which in 1565 declared bullfighting incompatible with the teachings of the Church and bullfights were banned on Sundays. In 1567 Pope Saint Pius V determined that anyone who participated in bullfights would be excommunicated; this would also apply to any churchman who attended or any prince who allowed their celebration. *Toreros* were even denied a holy burial should they die in a fight. Later, still during the reign of Felipe II and of Felipe III, bullfighting re-established its renown as a sign of courage; the excommunication was lifted and limited only to men of the church. The church generally did not approve of the practice and a similar canonical law was established in 1682, even if this disapproval had little impact on the Spanish public. Felipe V was the second king to ban the celebration and after him other kings, Fernando VI and Carlos III, disfavoured the fights and in 1785 Carlos III banned it for popular and leisure purposes but allowed fights for charitable purposes. Larra's critical stance on bullfighting is echoed by many intellectuals of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He claims that: "si bien antes eran [las corridas] una prueba del valor español, y ahora sólo lo son de la barbarie y ferocidad" and this opinion was shared by many later intellectuals.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, neither the voice of the intellectuals nor the disapproval of several kings and of the church, affected the public attitudes.

## Conclusion

The variety of leisure in the early 1900s offered the choice between tradition and modernity, between the new trend such as football and cinema and the traditional *espectáculos* as bullfights and zarzuelas. Football was a new modern trend from England that quickly led to international matches, which meant that Spain opened up to the world and the international arena, while bullfighting remained a purely Spanish tradition which, according to Ortega, held back Spain and made the country close in on itself. In *Una interpretación de la Historia universal* he says that the "presence of bulls" in the history of Spain is an undisputable reality but they also contribute to the isolation of Spain from the rest of the world.<sup>23</sup> Even so, the public did not abandon bullfights, and even when Spain became a republic for the second time in 1931 and enjoyed a very modern and liberal constitution, the traditional bullfights continued to be part of Spanish national identity. On its way to modernity Spain kept

---

<sup>21</sup> Mariano José de Larra: 'Corridas de Toros'. In: *Artículos varios*. Madrid: Castalia, 1976, p. 164-178, p. 171.

<sup>22</sup> Larra, Corridas, p.173: "If bullfighting used to be a sign of Spanish courage, now it is but a sign of *la barbarie* and of ferocity" (my translation).

<sup>23</sup> José Ortega y Gasset: *Una interpretación de la Historia universal*. Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1960, p.178-199.

celebrating bullfights: it did not give up on this old tradition as it took on new modern traditions.

According to Anthony Smith, a shared set of traditions and a common cultural or mythical inheritance are primordial aspects of a common national identity.<sup>24</sup> Even though controversial, bullfighting is still particularly Spanish and gives Spain an identity on the international landscape. The bull is still associated with Spain and if we believe Fernández de Moratín's version of the legend of *El Cid* to be true, bullfighting goes back 1,000 years and is one of the earliest and longest lasting traditions of the Iberian Peninsula. Since then the tradition has evolved and changed and what began as a *fiesta* for nobles and kings, mainly celebrated at weddings and official ceremonies, later became a popular and a mass event. At the early stage, it had a ritual connotation to it, such as the idea that the sexual potency of the bull could be transferred to the young couple as described by the king of Castile Alfonso X, *El Sabio*, in his *Cantigas de Santa María* from the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Later it was usually practised at different celebrations carried out by the elite, the sanctification of Santa Teresa in 1622 included 30 bullfights in Madrid and the inauguration of the Santa Tecla Chapel in the Cathedral of Burgos in 1736 also offered a fight,<sup>25</sup> but, over the years, bullfighting became less elitist and less ritual and became a popular event: it became a confluence of elitist and popular culture. Bullfighting was modernised within the civilising process and adapted to the new and less violent demands of the public, but it preserved the traditional Spanish spirit. Timothy Mitchell points out that the many attempts to understand the *corridos* from an aesthetical point of view ignore the fact that it is and always was an emotional issue, and therefore any rational approach to the tradition is unjustified. Bullfighting, being as it is a Spanish tradition, can only be understood in a social, historical and political context. It is far from a phenomenon of the past and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the tradition thrived and blossomed. Mitchell insists on the political dimension of bullfights. A major part of his study pays particular attention to the 18<sup>th</sup> century and argues that Spanish popular culture was fermented in this period. He explains that bullfighting in this period served the political purpose to not disturb the political order and maintain the status quo. As long as the public was entertained, it was unlikely to demand social or political change or, worse, to rebel against the current balance of power:

For after all is said and done, the wave of plebeianization that swept over Spanish cultural life in the eighteenth century did nothing to alter the legal and

---

<sup>24</sup> Anthony Smith: *National Identity*. London: Penguin, 1991, p. 8-14.

<sup>25</sup> Shubert and Sanchis, 'La corrida de toros en España'. In: *Historia Social* 41/120 (2001), p.118.

economic balance of power. The nobles remained at the vertex of the social pyramid. Spain's aristocrats may have been a sorry lot, certainly they were for Ortega, but at least they were smart enough to save their own necks by offering their bovid stand-ins to be sacrificed in their place.<sup>26</sup>

This idea changes over time and in the period covered by the present study the cathartic effects of bullfighting were no longer enough: "Spanish history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries demonstrates that the people had plenty of energy left over for uprisings, coup attempts, socialist or anarchist agitation, and civil disorder of all kinds."<sup>27</sup> Mitchell refers to Enrique Gil Calvo who saw bullfighting as a socially useful phenomenon. Unlike Ortega, Gil does not condemn bullfighting and does not see the Enlightenment as an entirely failed project in Spain. He does not share Ortega's fear of the masses but maintains that it is important to distinguish between the real and the official Spain of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Official Spain had failed in its attempt to impose modernity from above, but outside the official framework an extra-official modernisation took place. Gil identifies different functions of bullfighting: the economic initiative which was the result of the institutionalization of bullfighting on foot, before that it was mostly carried out on horseback, and the social initiative confined in the coming together of both nobles and the plebeian masses. The killing of a bull liberates you from your place in the dichotomous social order and provides you with a new perspective and a new awareness of your own autonomy and independence. In this sense tauromachy has an educating effect and provides valuable lessons on the arts of politics. Bullfighting contributed, Gil proposes, to the modernisation of Spain because it implied economic possibilities for the poor, plebeian young men who could try themselves as *toreros*, and social coherence as well as a new industry for the cattle breeders when bullfighting became a mercantile industry.

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century offered a great variety of leisure offers for the public and even if the argument that bullfighting is an uncivil and violent activity incompatible with modernity and with modern age could be made, as it was by many of the intellectuals of the period, the public was not to be dissuaded from the tradition. Not even the obvious alternative football could overthrow the old tradition. Football became the new 'European' alternative to traditional bullfighting but both coexisted in great popularity. If bullfighting earlier had been political in so far as it kept the masses from revolting, football in the beginning of the 1900s

---

<sup>26</sup> Timothy Mitchell: *Blood Sports. A Social History of Spanish Bullfighting*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991, p.122.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p.122-23.

became the political sport per se.<sup>28</sup> Bullfighting involved different social classes and kept at the margins of politics, thus a *corrida* was celebrated on election-day in 1931 and only two days after the proclamation of the second Spanish republic another fight took place, apparently uninfluenced by the new political situation.

Bullfighting had found its own way to modernity and had become less violent, which for Elias was an imperative of civil society. This debate amongst intellectuals was not new but dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century and only underlines the importance of bullfights in Spanish history. When football became popular in Spain, it became a symbol of something else: of the need to be a part of the globalised world. Not only did the sport arrive in Spain as a result of globalisation but the possibility of international games also introduced Spain to the international scene, whereas bullfighting was a strictly Spanish matter. The intellectual climate of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century which was marked by a conflict between tradition and modernisation or globalization found popular expression in the choice between the traditional bullfighting and the modern and global football. At the same time the debate around bullfighting alongside its long history, not least in the fields of arts and literature, has raised bullfighting from the sphere of popular entertainment to the cultural sphere. Bullfighting gives an insight into Spanish history and cultural identity, whether or not you are an *aficionado*, and thus provides an educational dimension contained in the idea of culture while football is a global and popular phenomenon.

---

<sup>28</sup> A football match in itself bears the political connotation of one team against another, whereas bullfighting, for its supporters, is an appreciation of courage and art, i.e. the competitive nature of football versus the skill and challenge-focused nature of bullfighting.