

Observations of an Eavesdropper
*¿Corridas de toros: ballet o barbarie?**
Bullfights: ballet or barbarism?)

[*Tim Sadée, <http://www.rnw.nl/espanol/article/corridas-de-toros-%C2%BFballet-o-barbarie>]

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For some twenty years now there has been an on-going debate in Spain over the question of the bullfight: Should it be retained or should it be outlawed? Is it brutality or is it part of the national cultural patrimony? A large part of the Spanish population is divided into two camps on the issue – *los taurinos* y *los antitaurinos* (those in favor and those opposed), and feelings run high.

The *antitaurino* position can best be summed up in the following statement by the journalist and author Manuel Vicent, “*Si el toreo es cultura, el canibalismo es gastronomía*” (If bullfighting is culture, canibalism is gastronomy.) [Helena Escoda, *Análisis de la tauromaquia desde sus raíces*, <http://www.animanaturalis.org/840>]
The *taurinos* answer that such statements critical of *la fiesta nacional* are: “... *tonterías, barbaridades, sandeces, estupideces ... decir folletás ... que nacen y acaban en el desconocimiento y lo absurdo.*” (dumb remarks, idiocy, nonsense, stupidity ... really outrageous statements ... which are born of and end up in ignorance and absurdity.) [Jaén Taurino, marzo 7 2010, <http://jaentaurino.com/?cat=36>]

Both sides of the issue are well represented by celebrities. Among the *antitaurinos* are such figures as actors Fernando Tejero, Rossy de Palma, singers Alaska and Amparanoia, fashion designer David Delfin and Barcelona footballer Carles Puyol. In May 2010 the Flamenco/hip-hop group Ojos de gave a benefit concert in Barcelona in favour of abolition. [Paul Richardson, “Why bullfighting is making Spain see red”, *The Observer*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jun/06/bullfighting-outlawed-catalonia>]. The *taurinos* count among their membership such historical luminaries as *Goya y Picasso; Rafael Alberti y Federico García Lorca; Orson Welles y Ernest Hemingway; Miguel Hernández y Ramón Pérez de Ayala; Néstor Luján, Pere Gimferrer y Miquel Barceló...: poetas, novelistas, dramaturgos, pintores, escultores, músicos, cineastas... [...Goya y Picasso; Rafael Alberti y Federico García Lorca; Orson Welles y Ernest Hemingway; Miguel Hernández (poet), Ramón Pérez de Ayala (writer), Néstor Luján (journalist and author), Pere Gimferrer (poet, critic and translator) and Miquel Barceló (painter) ... poets, novelists, dramatists, painters, sculptors, musicians, filmmakers ...]* (<http://www.porlibertaddeiralostoros.es/manifiesto.html>).

Conflicting headlines dramatize even more the national divide: *Corridas de toros: el arte del engaño* [The Bullfight: the Art of Deception], *España: las corridas de toros, patrimonio cultural de la humanidad* [Spain: The Bullfight, Cultural Patrimony of Mankind (a satirical article)], *Valencia y Murcia también declararán las corridas de*

toros como 'Bien de Interés Cultural' [Valencia y Murcia Will Also Declare the Bullfight to be an Asset of Cultural Value], *La tortura no es arte ni cultura* [Torture Is Neither Art Nor Culture], *El Refugio recoge más de 60.000 firmas contra las corridas de toros en Madrid* [El Refugio (Authors' Note: an animal protection organization in Madrid) Gathers 60,000 Signatures Against the Bullfight], *Madrid protegerá las corridas de toros, que Cataluña debate prohibir* [Madrid Will Protect the Bullfight, while Catalonia Is Debating its Prohibition].

Even the royal household is divided when it comes to *la fiesta brava*. As stated in the headline of an ABC article on March 25, 2010, *El Rey defiende las corridas de toros*. He is quoted as having responded *Por supuesto* [Of course] when asked if he supported the bullfight. In the article he described *el toreo* as *un mundo cultural y artístico fecundo* [a fertile cultural and artistic world] (<http://www.abc.es/20100325/toros-/defiende-fiesta-nacional-201003251623.html>.) However, Queen Sofía ... *no va a los toros porque le horrorizan ...* [... does not go to the bullfights because they horrify her] (*La familia real y los toros, De todo corazón*, <http://blogs.20minutos.es/martacibelina/2008/06/05/la-familia-real-y-toros/>). The above-cited Paul Richardson quotes her as saying, "Making a bull suffer in the plaza for the public's enjoyment while a few people do business? Let them do what they want, but I won't share it." (Why Bullfighting is Making Spain See Red)

While both the *taurinos* and the *antitaurinos* present their arguments publicly, the *antis* seem to have more to say. As Roger Mailor, a reporter for Madrid's daily El País, states, *Mientras que los científicos, intelectuales, artistas y catedráticos antitaurinos siempre tienen una nevera llena de artículos para publicar sin esperar nada a cambio, en el lado de la afición hay que rogar, mendigar y convencer para que alguien exponga su postura*. [While the scientists, intellectuals, artists and professors opposed to the bullfight always have tons of articles ready to publish without expecting anything in return, on the side of the fans one must pray, beg, and cajole someone to state his position.] (*Última estocada en Cataluña*, Escito por rosajc, <http://lacomunidad.elpais.com/toros/posts>)

The *antitaurinos*, as has been suggested above, have no end of things to say. *Análisis de la tauromaquia desde sus raíces* describes itself as ... *una reseña analítica para calificar de embrutecedora la práctica de correr toros* [an analytical review to classify the practice of the bullfight as brutalizing]. The author cites examples from the past of the death of bulls at the hands of mounted noblemen armed with lances in tournaments *cuya finalidad era embrutecer al pueblo...* [the purpose of which was to brutalize the people] (Helena Escoda, <http://www.animanaturalis.org/840>).

The theme of brutalization is continued in a devastatingly satirical article titled *España: las corridas de toros, patrimonio cultural de la humanidad* [Spain: The Bullfight, Cultural Patrimony of Mankind] (Carlos de Urabá , kaosenlared, <http://www.kaosenlared.net/noticia/espana-corridas-toros-patrimonio-cultural-humanidad>). The article describes the bullfight in terms of blood and suffering, all the while condemning the Spaniard for taking part : ... *el toro saca la lengua y vomita sangre* [the bull's tongue protrudes and it vomits blood]; *El dolor es parte inherente de la filosofía hispánica, es el*

climax y los canibales aplauden. [Suffering is an inherent part of the Spaniard's philosophy; it is the climax; and the cannibal applauds.]; *El triunfo del torero es el triunfo de todo un pueblo, es el triunfo de España. Humillar a un animal indefenso es la mejor terapia para exorcizar los más bajos instintos.* [The triumph of the *torero* is the triumph of an entire people; it is the triumph of Spain. Humiliating a defenseless animal is the best therapy for exorcizing the worst instincts.]

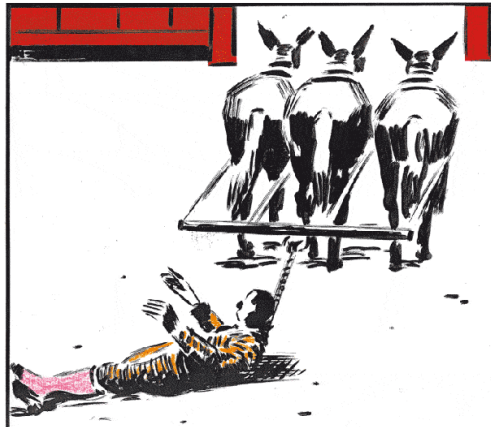
The response of the *taurinos* to such an attack is classically Spanish: "*No le gustan las corridas de toros? No vaya y no joda mas!!!!*" [You don't like the bullfight? Well, don't go and quit your bitchin'!!!] (http://www.facebook.com/posted.php?id=12236440852&share_id=106309599415900&comments=1)

Catalonia has taken the *antitaurino* stance one giant step further; there is a movement there to outlaw the *fiesta brava*. According to a New York Times article, "Regional lawmakers are expected to decide soon whether to abolish bullfighting once and for all here in Catalonia. Signs indicate they'll vote yes, which would make this northeastern coastal region the first on the Spanish mainland to approve such a ban." There are critics, however, who feel that the movement is a *mero politiquero* [just political maneuvering]; that the real motivation is Catalonia's desire to declare its independence from the rest of Spain, rather than concern for animal welfare (June 20, 2010, <http://dailyme.com/story/2010062000001592/spain-catalonia-grapples-proposal-ban-bullfighting.html>).

One newspaper, ABC, has gone on record as supporting the bullfight against such movements, stating, *Fiel a su línea de defensa de las raíces culturales españolas, ABC ha prestado siempre una especial atención a la Tauromaquia... sabemos bien que la Fiesta ha ido siempre unida a la historia de España, que expresa las circunstancias de cada momento y la psicología del pueblo español.* [Faithful in its defense of Spain's cultural roots, ABC has always paid special attention to the bullfight... we well know that the bullfight has always been tied to the history of Spain, which expresses the circumstances of each moment, as well as the psychology of the people of Spain.] (<http://www.porlalibertaddeiralostoros.es/manifiesto.html>).

Despite ABC's decidedly pro-bullfight stance, its editorial cartoons have taken a totally different tack, as have those of El País, and are decidedly non-*taurino*, if not anti, as the following *viñetas* will show:

Mulillas

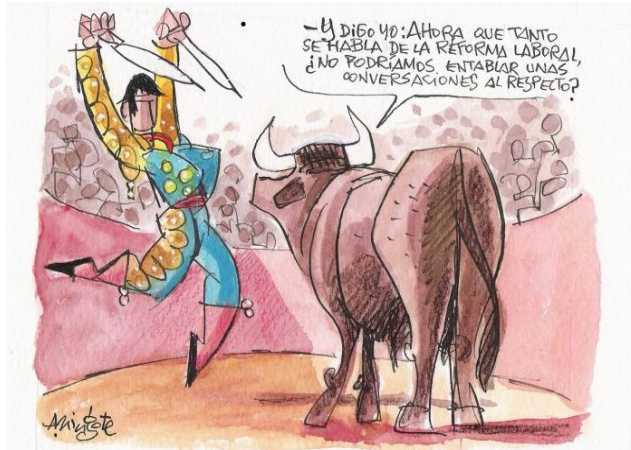


Mules (Authors' note: used to drag the dead bulls from the bullring)

El Roto, El País, Madrid, España, 30-5-10

http://www.elpais.com/vineta/?d_date=20100530&autor=El%20Roto&anchor=elpporopivin&xref=20100530elpepivin_3&type=Tes&k=Roto

In the cartoon El Roto offers us an alternate view of *la corrida*, obviously favoring the bull. Another different view is given by Mingote in the following cartoon from ABC, also showing the bull's side of the issue:



Say, now that there's so much talk about labor reform, couldn't we start a conversation about it here?

Mingote, ABC, Madrid, España, 8-6-10, <http://www.abc.es/humor/>

Our last cartoon from Spain is critical not only of the *torero*, but also of the fans:



I've read that the bulls learn faster than the bullfighters -- the slow learners are the fans.

Mingote, ABC, Madrid, España, 6-6-10, <http://www.abc.es/humor/>

When all is said and done, there remain some important questions regarding the fate of *la fiesta brava*: Will it be prohibited; will it continue as the *fiesta nacional*; or will it die due to lack of interest on the part of the Spaniards? We have seen each side of the first two questions. However, there have been indications that death by apathy might indeed be the fate of *la corrida*: “Según una encuesta reciente, el 68% de los españoles no están interesados en las corridas de toros, siendo los jóvenes y las mujeres quienes menos las apoyan. Los catalanes y los gallegos, con el 81 y el 79%, respectivamente, son los que están menos interesados. Otros datos reflejan que el 82% de los españoles no han asistido nunca a una corrida, mientras que el 87% condenan el sufrimiento animal en los espectáculos públicos”. [According to a recent survey, 68% of the Spaniards are not interested in the bullfight, young people and women being those who support it least. Catalans and Gallegos, with 81% and 79% respectively, are those who are least interested. Other data show that 82% of Spaniards have never attended a bullfight, while 87% condemn the suffering of an animal in a public spectacle.] (Francisco Martín, Presidente de la Asociación Vegana Española (AVE), *Corridos de toros, el arte del engaño*, <http://www.ivu.org/ave/corridos.html>)

Whatever the outcome, it is obvious that in the mind of some Latin American countries the bullfight is most certainly a symbol of Spain, as in this view of the recent financial crisis faced by *la Madre Patria*:



Banegas, *La Prensa*, San Pedro Sula, Honduras, 18-5-10

<http://www.laprensa.hn/Secciones-Secundarias/Fotos/Caricatura>

PS Since this article was submitted for publication the Parliament in Catalonia passed the bill which would make *la corrida* illegal effective January 1, 2012. As might well be expected, the vote was followed by a storm of protests, typical among them were articles carrying such titles as: *Se trata de una maniobra política contra España* [It is a Political Move Against Spain]; *Dicen toros, pero es España* (They Say the Bullfight, But It Is Spain); *Se trata de la libertad* [It's a Question of Freedom]; *Toros, caballos y asnos* [Bulls, Horses, and Asses] (*ABC*, 28-7-10, <http://www.abc.es/20100728/opinion-la-tercera/toros-caballos-asnos-20100728.html>); *Un abuso arrogante* [An Arrogant Abuse]; *Golpe a la convivencia* [A Blow to Coexistence] (*El País*, 28-7-10, http://www.elpais.com/articulo/cultura/Articulos/favor/toros/elpepuesp/20100727elpepucul_9/Tes). Interestingly, in light of the earlier statement that the opponents had much more to say

that the proponents, there were far fewer articles favoring the decision in the two dailies cited here, only three in El País and none in ABC.

Constraints of time and space preclude a more detailed examination of the vote and its echoes. Let us end by recommending that the reader follow the development of the story in the Spanish press, as well see more editorial cartoons on Jim's web site at: <http://web.stcloudstate.edu/jeoneill/>.

We're sure that the story does not end here. As the following cartoon indicates, the bull seems ready for battle with the public, as well as with the *torero*:



Mingote, *Viñetas del día*, ABC, Madrid, España, 28-7-10
<http://www.abc.es/humor/20100728/mingote>