

### Case 3: Spanish Ban on Bullfighting

In March 2010, thousands of protesters gathered in Madrid, the capital of Spain, holding signs that said “Stop Bullfighting!” and displayed grotesque pictures of bulls downed in the bullfighting arena.<sup>1</sup> The demonstration is the work of over fifty animal rights and anti-bullfighting organizations and the product of a vigorous debate in Spain over the propriety of bullfighting. “Torture is Culture,” the protesters’ slogan, succinctly highlights the conflict between those who advocate protecting bullfighting as an art form deeply embedded in Spanish culture and those who argue that bullfighting should be banned as animal cruelty.

Bullfighting “is an art-form that deserves to be protected and that has been part of Mediterranean and Spanish culture since time immemorial,” Esperanza Aquirre, the regional Partido Popular president of Madrid, has stated.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, despite the protests, the conservative regional government of Madrid has given bullfighting legal protections as a cultural and historical practice emblematic of Spain, and the regions of Murcia and Valencia have followed suit. News about bullfighting is published in the art section—not the sports section—of Spanish newspapers.<sup>3</sup> The spectacle of bullfighting has both inspired and been glorified by iconic artists and writers like Francisco Goya, Pablo Picasso, Ernest Hemingway, Federico Garcia Lorca, and Orson Welles. And just recently, the story of the celebrated matador Manolete, who was gored to death in the bullring in 1947, was glamorized in a film by the same name—starring Adrien Brody as Manolete and Penelope Cruz as his mistress, actress Lupe Sino.<sup>4</sup> The movie was filmed without harming real bulls, a choice that gained the approval of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) but did not shield the film from the criticism of other animal rights and anti-bullfighting groups.

“It is inadmissible to release a film in which the hero is a matador,” a French anti-bullfighting organization called Alliance Anticorrída announced in response to *Manolete*, encouraging its members to boycott the movie. Groups like Alliance Anticorrída, PETA, and The Humane Society believe that bullfights are simply ritualized slaughter and should be banned as animal cruelty.<sup>5</sup> They point out that thousands of bulls are killed each year, that the animals die slow and painful deaths, and that the bullfight is not a “fair fight.” During the first stage of a bullfight, men on horses (*picadores*) and men on foot (*banderilleros*) lance the bull in the neck and back to make it harder for him to lift his head. The *banderilleros* then disorient the bull further by making him run in circles. Only then does the matador

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<sup>1</sup> “Thousands march against bullfighting in Spanish capital,” *Expatica.com*, Mar. 28, 2010, [http://www.expatica.com/es/news/spanish-rss-news/thousands-march-against-bullfighting-in-spanish-capital\\_33920.html](http://www.expatica.com/es/news/spanish-rss-news/thousands-march-against-bullfighting-in-spanish-capital_33920.html); see also “Suffering laid bare in call for end to bullfighting,” *The Times*, Oct. 10, 2008, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article4916866.ece>.

<sup>2</sup> Giles Tremlett, “Madrid protects bullfighting as an art form,” *The Observer*, Mar. 7, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/mar/07/madrid-protects-bullfighting-art>; Stephanie Feldstein, “Bullfighting Demonstration: Torture is Not Culture,” *Change.org*, Apr. 6, 2010, [http://animals.change.org/blog/view/bullfighting\\_demonstration\\_torture\\_is\\_not\\_culture](http://animals.change.org/blog/view/bullfighting_demonstration_torture_is_not_culture).

<sup>3</sup> Giles Tremlett, “Spanish region set to ban bullfighting,” *The Guardian*, Dec. 17, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/dec/17/bullfighting-spain-catalonia-ban>.

<sup>4</sup> Anita Brooks, “Blood, bulls, and boycotts: Manolete strikes again,” *The Independent*, Mar. 30, 2010, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/blood-bulls-and-boycott-manolete-strikes-again-1930679.html>; Frank Gray, “Blood of the matador,” *The Guardian*, Jan. 7, 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2008/jan/07/spain.art>.

<sup>5</sup> See PETA Media Center, “Bullfighting: A Tradition of Tragedy,” [http://www.peta.org/mc/factsheet\\_display.asp?ID=64](http://www.peta.org/mc/factsheet_display.asp?ID=64) (last visited June 21, 2010); The Humane Society International, “Bullfighting,” <http://hsi.org/issues/bullfighting/> (last visited June 21, 2010).

confront the bull with his cape and sword. And if the matador fails, an executioner kills the bull. Fueled by this grotesque characterization, anti-bullfighting sentiment has grown so strong that in the region of Catalonia a public petition called for a ban.<sup>6</sup> In response, the Catalan parliament has made steps to ban the practice by removing the bullfighting exemption that is currently a part of the region's animal cruelty laws.<sup>7</sup> The proposal will go to a final vote this year.

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<sup>6</sup> Henry Chu, "In Spain, Catalonia grapples with proposal to ban bullfighting," *The Los Angeles Times*, June 20, 2010, <http://www.sacbee.com/2010/06/20/2835492/in-spain-catalonia-grapples-with.html>; "Spanish bullfighting should be given UNESCO protection," *The Telegraph*, Mar. 5, 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/spain/7377754/Spanish-bullfighting-should-be-given-UNESCO-protection.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Graham Keeley, "Catalan Parliament passes landmark vote to ban bullfighting," *The Times*, Dec. 19, 2009, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article6961985.ece>.