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### *Abstract*

This study is a social anthropological approach to the role of bullfighting in the symbolic creation of Spain. By analysing the historical circumstances that turned an ancient ritual of fertility into the expression of a victorious nation and its dominant elite, this work discusses the role of rituals in the generation of ordered social life through a process of symbolic negotiation of power. Along this process the National Feast of Spain helped to create a national identity very much related to the aristocratic and military ideology of the *Reconquista*.

The Durkheimian model of ritual as a means of social control has played an important role in the development of modern theories of ritualisation. This study stresses the part played by bullfighting as arena for social intercourse among *all* full-members of a society otherwise profoundly divided by class. The outstanding military exploits that followed the *Reconquista*, not only consolidated the ideology and dominant position of the bellicose aristocrats but allowed the rise of bullfighting to become the National Feast. In bullfighting people of all social extraction come together and express their convergence and contradictions as individuals, but also as classes, genders, institutions, minorities and so on. The strategic character of bullfighting adapting to different social and political circumstances while expressing the politics of symbolic negotiation may constitute a good example of the effects and limits of ritualisation in the construction of ordered social life.

One of the most remarkable aspects of bullfighting in Spain is its character of official celebration. Despite its cruel and bloody character, bullfighting has not only survived but somehow consolidated its position in Spanish society. The survival of bullfighting in a "hostile" European environment seems to obey to several factors: its symbolic power, very much related with the bull as some sort of Spanish totem; its appeal among Spaniards of any social origin, in a country extremely conscious of its closed ranking system; its role as an arena for symbolic negotiation, as one of the few places in which different social classes meet; and its strategic character that permitted the introduction of "revolutionary" changes in its practice and symbolism.

The final remarks point out the challenges posed to bullfighting by commercialisation, the rise of regionalism, the competition of association football, the new role of women in Spanish society and the recent attempts trying to separate bullfighting from the State.

Keywords: Spain, Bullfighting, State rituals, ritualisation, symbolism,