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Bullfighting as dark tourism: cultural experience or anachronism?

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New research in the fast-emerging domain of tourism and animal ethics indicates that the instrumental and utilitarian use of animals in tourism is no longer accepted as a favorable norm. Some of this pressure is coming from the tourists themselves who are increasingly questioning the ethics of such uses. We test this premise through research on one of the most contested forms of animal-based tourism in the form of the Spanish bullfight. Our purpose was to gain a qualitative understanding of ethical issues related to bullfighting, as well as to offer insight for understanding factors that affect tourists' overall evaluation of travel experience at this attraction. The study is informed by a framework on animals as dark tourism attractions, with the central aim of investigating the attitudes of tourists toward bullfighting as one of several variables included in the framework. Emphasis was placed on looking for patterns in concepts and how they are communicated; understanding intentions of individuals; identifying propaganda and bias in communication; and understanding consequences of communication, particularly as it relates to a tourism destination's image. Employing a thematic analysis of 74 TripAdvisor posts, dated from May of 2014 through to November 2022, we found that the majority of posts reflected negative perceptions associated with bullfighting, including cruelty, unfair "fight," and torture. In contrast, a minority of posts reflected positive perceptions, including culture, ceremony, pomp, and history. These findings have potential implications for the image of tourism destinations, such as Spain, as dark tourism attractions.

KEYWORDS

dark tourism, bullfight, ethics, Spain, animals

1 Introduction

New research in the fast-emerging domain of tourism and animal ethics indicates that the instrumental and utilitarian use of animals in tourism is no longer accepted as a favorable norm. Indeed, some of this pressure is coming from the public themselves who are increasingly questioning the ethics of such uses. For example, after the January 2013 release of the documentary *Blackfish*, viewers pressured artists who performed at SeaWorld to cancel their shows and corporate sponsors to end their partnership with SeaWorld. Protests were also held outside SeaWorld and at cities around the world ([The Conversation, 2021, June 21](#)). The documentary drew attention to the plight of Tilikum, an orca held and forced to perform at SeaWorld in the United States of America. With dropping attendance, an 84% decline in income, and a 33% drop in share price in 2016, SeaWorld announced the end of its orca breeding program in 2016. *Blackfish* had ultimately led viewers to empathize with Tilikum, with some viewing the company as "dishonest and reckless" ([The Conversation, 2021, June 21](#)).

In this study, we test this premise, i.e., that the use of animals in tourism is no longer seen as a favorable norm, by researching on one of the most contested forms of animal-based tourism in the form of the Spanish bullfight. The purpose of this study was to gain a qualitative understanding of ethical issues related to bullfighting, as well as to offer insight for understanding factors that affect tourists' overall evaluation of travel experience at this attraction. The framework of animals as dark tourism attractions underpins the study, with the central aim of investigating the attitudes of tourists toward bullfighting. Attitudes are one of several variables included in the framework. Emphasis was placed on looking for patterns in concepts and how tourist attitudes are communicated. Overall, we sought to understand the intentions of individuals, who included both past and future tourists, as well as other commentators. We also sought to identify propaganda and bias in communication, and understand the consequences of communication, and the implication of tourists' attitudes, particularly as it relates to a tourism destination's image. In the following section we review key literature that is the foundation of the study.

2 Literature review

A broad range of animal-based tourism types exist, from animals in captive settings, animals used as workers, animals forced into combat and competition, animals pursued for sport and subsistence, and wildlife viewing and ecotourism (Fennell, 2012). Several of these practices are morally contentious, with advocates and critics citing historical, cultural, legal, economic, and animal welfare reference points to support opposing positions. However, a few animal uses are sharply and fervently divided according to their moral acceptability. Bullfighting is one of them, with approximately 180,000 bulls killed globally annually (Humane Society International, 2023). Commentators on the cultural complexity of bullfighting in Spain sometimes step away from the moral issues of the practice, focusing principally on Spanish cultural identities as they relate to bulls (Douglass, 1997). Such an approach is possible; however, it is difficult to avoid being pulled into the debate on the moral acceptability of this culturally embedded practice.

According to Marvin (1994), bullfighting is steeped in cultural tradition and ritual, which he argues is centered on the differences between humans and nature. In terms of tradition, bullfighting occupies Spanish culture to such an extent that there are three national periodicals which are devoted to the subject, two pages of all national and regional newspapers cover the practice, and hundreds of thousands of books (Pitt-Rivers, 1993). Furthermore, the Lidia breed of cattle has been genetically selected for aggressiveness (Pelayo et al., 2016), with funds (>€100 million/year) given to Spanish farmers from the European Union to raise fighting bulls (PETAUK, 2016).

The first psychological investigations of the Spanish bullfight occurred in the 1950s, with Desmonde (1952) arguing that the bullfight is akin to a religious ritual with the ritual murder of the father by the son. Similar conclusions were found by Hunt (1955), who argued that the bullfight is foremost a ritual, but also a sport, festival, form of art, tradition, and a tragedy in the dramatic sense

of the word, and to Pitt-Rivers (1993), a cult or cult of the bull. Many of these themes, especially art and ritual, were documented in Hemingway's (1932/2003) *Death in the Afternoon*, in which he described the emotional and practical display of man against beast. Hemingway observed that any event that inspires passion and love for such an activity is equally capable of inspiring hatred of it too. Hemingway's book inspired countless male tourists from the U.S. to travel to Spain as a sort of "rite of passage" into manhood (ArcNews, 1999).

The ritual of bullfighting corresponds to several defined "acts" from the entrance of the bull into the ring to the entrance of picadors (horsemen who stab bulls with lances), the stabbing of charging bulls with banderillas (decorated barbed darts), and the last act of killing the animal with a sword after breaking the animal's will and bringing it to a state of domestication (Acquaroni, 1966). The event takes ~20 min (Belmonte, 1937; López-López and Quintero Venegas, 2021), a relatively quick dispatchment given the psychological and physical impairments that bulls must endure in preparation for battle. Bulls are weakened with drugs, have sandbags dropped on their spines, horns are shaved, disrupting their balance, and petroleum jelly is rubbed in their eyes to impair vision (PETA, 2023). The spectacle becomes even more questionable given the certainty that bulls feel pain and experience suffering. The zoologist and animal behavior specialist Casamitjana (2015) is decisive in writing that

yes, all behavioral evidence shows that bulls and cows suffer in bullfights; yes, they do suffer in all types of bullfights, even in those that do not end with their deaths; and yes, all aspects of any bullfight, from the transport to the death, are in themselves causes of suffering (p. 4).

Resistance to the bullfight is not a recent phenomenon. As Shubert (1999) writes, during the nineteenth century onwards, intellectuals, some Spanish and some international, pointed fingers at the bullfight as a representative example of what was wrong with Spain. Among them were the sociologist and anthropologist César Graña and Joaquín Costa. The latter issued a compelling statement to make Spain a genuinely European country by eliminating the bullfight. He wrote,

We want to breathe the air of Europe... The bullfights are a great evil that harm us more than many believe... from the perversion of public feeling to lowering us in the eyes of foreigners, there is a dismal series of comparisons that degrade us (Costa, cited in Shubert, 1999, p. 2).

The debate on the moral acceptability of bullfighting in the Spanish press has also made parallels between war, terror, and torture (between human groups) to the violence applied by humans to animals. Scholars contend that torture has always been a part of culture (Mosterín, 2008), with animals often being a scapegoat for society's ills. Animals, thus, have a political role in quelling the upheavals and insurgences that would otherwise serve to destabilize society (Dolger, 2012).

The contentious nature of bullfighting includes a corresponding recording of participant interest over time. Studies indicate that bullfighting is now less popular than it

once was. Data from the Spanish Ministry of Culture and Sport illustrates that while 2,684 bullfighting events were held in 2009, 1,425 events were held a decade later in 2019, with only 8% of the Spanish population attending bullfighting events (Humane Society International, 2023). A study for World Animal Protection (2023) by Ipsos MORI found that only 7% of Spanish citizens between the ages of 16–24 favored bullfighting. In a study of 2,522 Spanish citizens, María et al. (2017) found that the perception of bullfighting differed according to several moderating factors, including gender, age, occupation, origin, and nationality. Women and the younger age cohort were less in favor of bullfighting and showed higher scores on animal welfare. Rural over urban citizens favored bullfighting, while students more than citizens in other occupations were against bullfighting. The general finding is that more citizens are against than for bullfighting.

The decline in bullfighting in Spain has mobilized advocates to politicize the practice. Catalonians have used their ban on bullfighting in a nationalistic sense to move away from the centralist Spanish authority. Black (2010) identifies these clear lines in political philosophy by stating that “the species *homo Catalan* is revealed (through the ban) to be closer to the “more advanced” *homo europeus* than to the more primitive *homo hispanense*” (p. 236). The situation has become so dire that four former bullfighters are running for political office to maintain bullfighting as a cultural practice, given the Spaniards’ diminishing support for the sport (Wheeler, 2022).

Given the erosion of support by Spanish citizens, bullfighting relies on money from the tourism industry (Humane Society International, 2023), and other attendees being young girls, wives, and business persons on their phones (McCormick, 1997). Several international NGOs, such as PETA, World Animal Protection, and Humane Society International, have issued statements on how cruel the practice is. Similarly, several prominent tourism operators, such as the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) and their members, will not work with bullfighting operators.

Despite its continuance, only some tourism studies have investigated bullfighting in a country that is consistently a top international destination. A study by Cohen (2014) confirms that the bull’s fighting ability is diminished through the physical and psychological trauma that bulls are made to endure. He argues, therefore, that the bullfight is an example of staged authenticity (MacCannell, 1973), with the audience unaware of the degree to which the bull is incapacitated before the actual event occurs. A study by López-López and Quintero Venegas (2021) on bullfighting in Mexico is emphasized in more detail, below.

2.1 Dark tourism

Scholarship on dark tourism emerged during the mid-1990s based on the work of Foley and Lennon (1996) and Seaton (1996). Defined, it is “the act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering and the seemingly macabre” (Stone, 2006, p. 146). Until recently, dark tourism has been restricted to human individuals, events, and places. However, the canvas has broadened by including events involving animals as dark tourism. Animals as sentient beings who died or suffered due to human intervention, or even animals that died or suffered due to ecological crises, are now

viewed as part of the dark tourism spectrum. Panko and George (2018) wrote about the immorality of the underground animal sex tourism industry, while López-López and Quintero Venegas (2021) focused their investigation of the Mexican bullfight from a posthumanist perspective. As a theoretical lens used infrequently in tourism studies (Cohen, 2014) and tourism studies involving animals (Fennell, 2012), posthumanism provides ontological and epistemological guidance for deconstructing events like the Mexican bullfight. Based on Facebook and TripAdvisor bullfighting pages, López-López and Quintero Venegas (2021) explored cultural heritage, masculinity, and ethical issues of the practice. The authors found themes related to the commodification of death, bullfighting as a sophisticated cultural tradition, and bullfighting as a form of art as “*ad verecundiam* (“if the master says it, it must be true”) and *ad antiquitatem* (“if something has been done since time immemorial, it must be right”)” (p. 75). Aspects of masculinity were expressed online through reference to the terrero as a hero in the face of danger—a spectacle of dominance—and bulls as members of the nonhuman working class. Ethical issues for tourists involve the naivete of not knowing what was involved in bullfighting, as well as the image of the bloodied bull in the last seconds of life and certain death.

Research on animals as dark tourism attractions advanced considerably through the development of a prototype framework by Fennell et al. (2021). These authors outlined three main categories in their prototype, with several subsections. The first section on characteristics of animals suffering and death included subsections on status and setting of the animal(s), sources of suffering/death, the role of animal(s), the temporal period, and the scale of suffering/death. The second sections on the subjective/normative nature of animal-human relationship leading to suffering/death has two subsections. The first is on the negative-positive emotional state of human handlers of animals, while the second refers to animal ethics theories describing how animals are/were being used. The final section includes tourism industry demand and supply. Here, there is a focus on Kellert’s (1984) attitudes toward animals (e.g., dominionistic), as well as an important link to Stone (2006) spectrum of dark tourism products. These products include dark fun factories, dark exhibitions, dark dungeons, dark resting places, dark shrines, dark conflict areas, and dark camps of genocide.

The Spanish bullfight was one of several examples of animals as dark tourism attractions in the Fennell et al. (2021) prototype. Referencing the previous sections and subsections, above, the Spanish bullfight was characterized as follows:

- Status and setting: captive live animals in built environments.
- Source of suffering and death: human-induced.
- Role of animals: (a) Competitor, forced to compete against humans; (b) entertainment, used primarily as entertainers for the pleasure and profit of humans.
- Temporal period: animals referenced in the present day.
- The scale of suffering: population level, with more than one animal of the same species suffering or dying due to the practice.
- The negative-positive emotional state of handlers: indifference based on neutral emotions and attitudes to the animal as an attraction.

- Animal ethics theory: contractarianism.
- Tourists' attitudes toward animals: oscillating between, primarily, moralistic and dominionistic.
- Dark tourism product: from dark fun factories to dark conflict areas, closely bordering on dark camps of genocide from the ritual sacrifice of bulls.

Fennell et al. (2021) write that future work in tourism studies will open up new channels of research and practice that widen the circle of morality in emerging from the dark. Such includes focusing on the anthropocentric dimensions of tourism phenomena and space for humans and animals as entangled agents (Alaimo and Hekman, 2008) in so many different contexts.

3 Materials and methods

This qualitative study collected and analyzed data from 74 posts from 62 participants found on Tripadvisor, the “largest travel guidance platform,”¹ dated from May of 2014 through to November of 2022. The posts were searched using the key word(s) “bullfight” and “bull fight,” looking for English and Spanish language posts from tourists wishing to view bullfights and the responses they received from other Tripadvisor members. Two posts were eliminated because they focused on touring a bullfighting ring, and the commentators did not actually attend a bullfight. All other posts were recorded on an Excel sheet, along with titles of the post, where applicable, demographic details of the commentator, as provided, and the date of the post.

The majority of collected posts related to bullfighting in Spain, while a minority referenced Mexico (four posts) and Portugal (eight posts). Saturation of data was achieved when the same arguments for and against bullfighting, as well as repetitive descriptive words appeared in the posts. A thematic analysis was undertaken following the steps of data familiarization, initial coding, theme searching, reviewing, defining, and naming (Braun and Clark, 2006).

In step one of the thematic analysis, the posts were read three times in the process of data familiarization. Step two, initial coding, involved looking for negative and positive words or phrases which were then placed in a table (see Table 1). These words and phrases were assigned to either the positive or negative column and the number of times the word or phrase appeared were counted and recorded in terms of frequency. Step 3, theme searching, involved stepping back to once again look at each comment, in whole, but also within context of its relationship to the posts of other commentators (meaning comments that were made by two or more individuals conversing through their posted comments). During this process, all of the posts were then transferred to a Word document, where themes were identified through the use of multi-colored highlighting available within the software package. In the final step, the multi-colored highlighting was reviewed, redefined, where appropriate, and theme names chosen using either the words of the commentators or concepts to represent the words of the commentators. The results of this process are detailed in Table 2. Table 2, in combination with the multi-colored

highlighting Word document, was used as the foundation for the write-up of the results.

4 Results

The results of the analysis are presented in three stages. First, Table 1 illustrates the patterns in concepts (drawn from commentator phrases) and key words appearing within the posts and also the titles commentators applied to their posts. Table 1 categorizes these in terms of frequency and in the context of negative or positive focus. Words mentioned more than once in the same post, or in a subsequent post by the same commentator, were assigned a frequency count of one. Table 2 demonstrates how these concepts and key words merged into themes. Finally, we present a narrative, to demonstrate evidence of these themes through the use of direct quotes drawn from the commentators' posts.

As evidenced in Table 1, a plethora of codes appeared in the initial stages of data analysis. The codes took the form of single words, or phrases. The codes overwhelming fell within the negative side of the table. For examples, negative words such as cruelty, atrocity, killing, disturbing, distressing, and brutal described commentators' personal experiences with attending a bullfight, or their warnings to others wanting to attend. On the other hand, a smaller majority of positive words such as tradition, culture, pomp, ceremony, history, and entertaining reflected similar personal experiences of attending a bullfight. Two counter opposing codes emerged early in the analysis reflecting a larger debate surrounding the issue of animal cruelty and animals as food: those who felt bullfighting was cruel vs. those who argued that the killing of animals for food was equally cruel. The few commentators who posted on the killing of animals as cruelty used this argument as a defense of bullfighting, as well as a general statement against animals as food. This finding is more fully explored in the Section 5.

As illustrated in Table 2, five themes emerged from the second phase in the data analysis process: (1) concern/care for the bulls, horses and matadors; (2) skill of matadors/picadors; (3) warnings/advice to tourists; (4) bullfighting vs. domestic livestock debate; and (5) cultural argument for and against bullfighting. Due to space limitations the four most developed themes are analyzed: (1) concern for the bulls, horses, and matadors/care of bulls; (2) warnings/advice to tourists; (3) bullfighting vs. domestic livestock debate; and; (4) the cultural argument for and against bullfighting. The following paragraphs provide evidence of these themes through the words of the commentators.

4.1 Concern/care for bulls, horses, matadors

The commentators (C) who spoke on this theme mostly spoke in terms of concern for the bulls, while a few expressed concerns for the horses and matadors. C1 stated, “After one horrible and cruel kill of a bull, I left the arena with tears running down my face,” adding, “I don't understand this type of cruelty...” C43 advised a commentator seeking information on attending a bullfight, that “Spanish bull fighting is bloody and ends with the bull being humiliated and slowly killed in the ring.” C46 sarcastically added

1 Tripadvisor. *About Tripadvisor*. Retrieved on February 2, 2023, from <https://tripadvisor.mediaroom.com/us-about-us>.

TABLE 1 Initial coding results.

Negative words	Frequency	Positive words	Frequency
Horrible	x	Tradition(al)	xx
Cruel(ty)(est)	xxxxxxx	Culture(al)	xxx
Atrocity (Portugal)	x		
Killing/killed	xxx	Pomp	X
Tears	xx	Ceremony	X
Disturbing	x	Interesting	X
Distressing	x	History	xx
Brutal	xx	Until it is illegal, we must keep opinions to ourselves	x
Awful	x	Morals aside	X
Blood/thirsty for blood (then go to Spain as opposed to Portugal)	xxxx	Bulls impressive (in field/in ring)	X
Weakened	x	Excitement (comes from crowd)	x
Suffer(ing)	x	Once in a lifetime	xx
Torture/torture chamber/taunting	xxxxxx	Animals for food equally cruel	xx
Not enjoyable	x	Something to experience	X
Put to death	x	Feed the captives before put to death	X
Disappointing	x	Locals enjoy (cheering)	xx
Injury	x	Visual feast of colors, blood, passion/costumes	xx
Tiring	x	Worth a watch (but expect cruelty)	x
Bad	x	Entertaining	x
Sad	x	Wanted to see a bullfight while they still exist	x
Injury to matadors/death	xx	Can be wonderful	x
Lack of care/harm of animals (horses, bulls)	xxxxx	Loved going to bull fights (Mexico)	X
Wounded/stabbed	xxx	Great fun/good times/great evening out with locals (Mexico)	x
Animal abuse for entertainment	x		
So-call shows	x		
Terrible about self	x		
Horrified	x		
Terrible spectacle	x		
Wish to “unsee”	xx		
Morbid	x		
Inhumane	x		
Sadistic show	x		
Not fun	x		
Hard to watch/many tourists leave	xx		
Seats uncomfortable	xx		
Hot/unsheltered	Xxx		
Unnecessary	X		
Repetitive (matadors follow same format)	X		
Should be called bull killing or seriously injuring	x		
Worst experience of my life	x		

(Continued)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Negative words	Frequency	Positive words	Frequency
Not worth your time	x		
Will not buy tickets/attend again/never go back	xx		
Difficult to watch	x		
Last thing a tourist would want to do in Spain/don't support (donate to charity instead)	xx		
Children should not be allowed to view	x		
Not for the weak hearted/not for faint of heart	xx		
Bull goes to knees as if asking for mercy	x		
Sword does its job	x		
Bull dragged out of the arena	x		
Less dramatic than one may think/dull	x		
Dislike of bullfighting/not my thing	xx		
Do not go unless you have mental health issues	X		
Many of us Spanish people fighting to put end to barbarity/it does not represent us	x		
Fortunately "dieing" out in Portugal	x		
Amazing anyone would like them ... that says a lot about/hopefully they will be made illegal (Mexico)/unfortunately still legal	xx	If you want to go, go. Don't be swayed by the naysayers	x
Unfair fight/bull does not stand a chance/bull loses every time	xxxxxxx	Ban/do not fund or support this event	xxx
Thought bullfight would capture a portion of Spanish culture/did not like it	x	Look for other events to attend (bull jumping) less cruel and more interesting	x
Times are changing	x		

that as "Long as it's [sic] had nice food for a while it could be wonderful entertainment for some people." C46's true meaning is demonstrated in their further comments that "It's torture whether it's a bull or a lovely fluffy cat." C3 remarked that it was difficult to "not only watch the bulls suffer, but the horses too." C5 admitted not realizing that the horses are "also harmed during the fights," adding, "I'm almost positive that the horses that we witnessed being hit died." C15 remarked that "we had several bulls who took down and hurt the matadors."

Other participants, such as C11, expressed their concern in terms of the lack of fairness in a bullfight. For example, C11 stated "the bull does not stand a chance." C15 experienced the event as "very brutal and not even close to a fair fight." C12 also spoke of an unfair fight involving "8 to 10 men vs. a loan [sic] bull." Similarly, C24 suggested a bullfight "would be fun if the Bull and the Matador just fought each other with the matador not allowed to have a weapon or friends to stab the bull in order to slow it down." C24 added, "Even a boxing match starts out as a fair fight." C4 in speaking of their group's tour to a bullfight felt the name "bullfighting" was a misnomer, and that rather it should be called "bull killing." This commentator added it would be better to "kill the bull with one gun shot." Perhaps one of the most poignant comments is that of C12 who stated "almost every time the bull gets wounded, [it] goes on its knees as if asking for mercy." C25 compared bullfighting to "a trip to a torture chamber... [to] watch while someone is stabbed over and over again, to become weakened

by blood loss as onlookers cheer their demise." C7, under the post title of "The bull lose [sic] every time," "was very surprised to know that the Bulls lose their life while the audience watches and cheer." C7 added, "it was an experience that I don't care to revisit. Ultimately, the Bull's [sic] suffer before they collapse and die." C43 compared Portugal's approach to bullfighting to that of Spain, stating, "Portuguese bullfighting is very different... The bull leaves the area alive but I believe is, like most other bulls not used for breeding, is then humanely slaughtered for meat ... The bulls are so healthy and fit."

4.2 Warning and advice to tourists

Many commentators who had personally experienced a bullfight felt the need to warn other tourists. For example, C5 warned that "If you care about animals at all, you will be horrified." C40 commented on someone looking to attend a bullfight in Portugal, stating, "So if you are thirsty for blood ... maybe Spain is a better destination for you." C40 perceived Portugal's approach to bullfighting less violent, while C5 implored others to "not support this or fund this by attending such inhumane behaviors." Similarly, C6 asked people to "not support" bullfighting, advising that "the horses [sic] vocal cords are cut so they can't [sic] scream when the bull hits them, and the bulls shoulder tendons are lanced until cut and they can't [sic] hold the head up anymore." C6 asked, "Is this

TABLE 2 Theme searching, reviewing, defining, and naming.

Theme name	Words phrases to demonstrate existence of theme
1. Concern/care for bulls, horses, matadors	Suffering, weakened, put to death, bull goes to knees as if asking for mercy, injury, tiring, wounded, stabbed, bull dragged from arena, killing/killed, torture, taunting, unfair fight, sword does its job, should be called bull killing or serious injury, lack of care/harm of animals (horses, bulls), injury to matadors/death, cruelty, inhumane, animal abuse for entertainment, does not always end well for the man, weakened by pain and actually killed, suffering, Animal tortured and killed slowly and viciously for nothing more than entertainment of the baying crowd, deliberate slow torture of an animal for pleasure, bull humiliated, bulls death is horrific and is done for entertainment, protracted slaughter, cutting off their ears whilst still alive, unfair fight, bull does not stand a chance, bull loses every time, as a "sport" only boxing where the winner is victorious by inducing concussion in the opponent rivals the brutality. How about tying a firecracker to a cat's tail and making it run around for a bit with some rousing music and people wearing fancy costumes? Long as it's had nice food for a while it could be wonderful entertainment for some people. The bulls are so healthy and fit (re Portugal), bulls bred for corrida have a better life than those bred for slaughter, the bulls have pampered lives and are infinitely better treated than domestic livestock that ends up on Sunday dinner plates, butchered for their meat which is sold at a premium
2. Skill of matadors/picadors	Requires immense bravery and skill, most skilled and brave, rely on own athleticism to stay healthy (picadors), entertaining the crowd and eventually killing the bull, entertained by some of the immaculate cape work displayed, demonstration of horse riding, bull enters ring and faces team who bring the bull to the floor
3. Warnings/advice to tourists	Last thing a tourist would want to do in Spain/don't support (donate to a charity instead), not for the weak hearted, not for faint hearted, hot, unsheltered, seats uncomfortable, do not go unless you have mental health issues, thirsty for blood then go to Spain as opposed to Portugal, not worth your time, many tourists leave, many tourists feel sick at the first sight of blood and leave the bullring, if watching an animal suffer a slow painful death is your thing, go for it, urge you as a human being to rethink, try recortes, a variation (on bullfighting). I discourage tourists to see bullfights. Please don't support this barbaric spectacle, children should not be allowed to view, controversy Bloody, will not buy tickets/attend again/never go back, repetitive (matadors follow same format), dislike of bullfighting, not my thing, less dramatic than one may think, dull, not enjoyable, horrible, tears, wish to unsee, atrocity (Portugal), morbid, awful, difficult to watch, terrible spectacle, sadistic show, barbaric, brutal, so-called show, bad, unnecessary, not fun, not clean fun, hard to watch, worst experience of my life, will not buy tickets, never attend again, never go back, feed the captives before put to death, abhorrent monstrosity, horrendous, not a pretty sight, abomination, unpleasant (Mexico) Pomp, ceremony, pagentry, worth a watch (but expect cruelty, wanted to see a bullfight while they still exist, morals aside, can be wonderful, great fun, good times, great evening out with locals (Mexico), visual feast of colors, blood, passion, costumes, interesting, once in a lifetime, something to experience, bulls impressive (in field/in ring), locals enjoy (cheering), camaraderie of fans, music, entire atmosphere, beautiful buildings and interesting stories related to it, an iconic place (Sevilla), interesting building
4. Bullfighting vs. domestic livestock debate	Ban/do not fund or support this event, look for other events to attend (ex. Bull jumping is less cruel and more interesting), amazing anyone would like them ... that says a lot about them, hopefully they will be made illegal (Mexico), unfortunately still legal (in Mexico), thought bullfight would capture a portion of Spanish culture/did not like it, many of us Spanish people fighting to put end to barbarity/it does not represent us, fortunately 'dieing' out in Portugal, times are changing, taken in isolation, bull fighting can't be right, the more enlightened Spanish communities have long since abolished this atrocity, many areas of Spain have already banned this barbaric sport and more will follow, its popularity may be waning but it still exists, it is well past the time it was outlawed across all of Spain, even Spaniards are not supporting it as greatly as they used to Until it is illegal, we must keep our opinions to ourselves, animals for food equally cruel, humanely slaughtered (Portugal), Spaniards feel the bull will end up as dinner one way or another, why one mammal is somehow more noble than the ones they stuff in their mouths is a mystery, my personal argument is that I eat beef and occasionally enjoy the taste of a well-cooked steak. Therefore, I can't have any cruelty issues, we could list all the things that are cruel.. horse racing, selective breeding of dogs ... in my opinion, bullfight is still alive in some cities due tourist that buy ticket ... 80% of tickets sales are tourist
5. Cultural argument for and against bullfighting	It's an old traditional culture in Spain which might be out someday but we do believe that culture is culture. Its popularity may be waning, bullfighting is a long standing cultural tradition in Spain. It is part of the culture. As a cultural experience it's a visual feast of colors, blood, and passion. The cultural experience of the costumes are worth it. It's a tradition, requires immense bravery and skill We wanted to see a bullfight to capture a portion of the culture of Spain. We did not like the event at all. Even Spaniards are not supporting it as greatly as they used to. This barbarity that does not represent us. It is an abhorrent monstrosity that has no place in civilized Spain. I don't care how many of centuries of tradition are behind this abomination it is well past the time it was outlawed across all of Spain." I didn't realize that its being discouraged locally as I thought it was still a strong part of the Spanish culture

something you really want to support??" and pleaded to others to not "go to these sadistic shows." C18 stated, "Bullfighting would be the last on my list too see as a tourist in Spain," adding "Many tourists who go to one leave the bullring at the first sight of blood." C32 who stated, "I am from Madrid," added, "Please don't go to see bullfights. Many of us, Spanish people, are fighting to put an end to this barbarity that does not represent us." C46 urged a commentator who was seeking to attend a bullfight "to rethink," their desire to attend such an event, adding that "it is an abhorrent monstrosity that has no place in civilized Spain."

One commentator, C33, received many responses to their query regarding the appropriateness of taking their nine-year old child to a bullfight. For example, C34 asked C33, "What are your own thoughts as to how sensitive your daughter is to watching torture and blood being spilled?" In a similar line of response, C37 questioned "What loving father would expose

their child to animal abuse for entertainment?" In contrast, C34 reasoned that "Often people really don't understand what happens during a real bullfight," and linking back to C37's comments, added that "shaming, judging, and being critical of people is not as effective as encouraging them to get informed." In an equally reasoned response, C38 stated "that if a child didn't grow up going to bullfights with family or seeing bullfights on TV as part of her culture, then it might be hard for her to watch." C35 offered a practical suggestion that "There are some videos of bullfighting at Las Ventas on You tube, which I would suggest you take a look at, as they may help you to decide if it is suitable or not." On the other hand, some commentators, such as C13, warned that while "It's not for the faint of heart, it's definitely worth seeing once in your lifetime." The title of C14's post was "Worth a watch (expect cruelty though)."

4.3 Bullfighting vs. domestic livestock debate

The analysis revealed another debate between those who felt the killing of bulls in the ring was no different than the killing of domestic livestock for food and those who felt the two were incomparable. C26 was a prolific poster in this debate, and suggested that "...those spouting outrage at the mention of bullfighting should examine the food chain that leads to their roast dinner, they must imagine meat grows on trees, not part of an unpleasant and often cruel process for the creatures it comes from." In another post C26, suggested "Keep telling yourself that the flesh on your plate came from fluffy animals roaming wild in fields having a great old time, it's not close to the reality of their awful existence and their end though, but no doubt makes eating it easier, just like railing against any mention of bullfighting maybe convinces some they are animal lovers." C26 compared the lives of the bulls as having "pampered lives and are infinitely [sic] better treated than domestic livestock that ends up on Sunday dinner plates." C45 also posted on this debate, but took the argument beyond bulls and domestic livestock to animals, in general, to the war in Ukraine, stating, "We could list all the things that are cruel, horse racing, the selective breeding of dogs to fit our ascetics, keeping birds in cages, owning animals *per se*, breeding animals to feed our pets, using animals to test cosmetics, using animals to test medicine oh and the war in Ukraine..." (ellipsis added by commentator).

C48 admitted to being "an animal lover," but added that they "... enjoy the pageantry and the camaraderie of the fans, the music, the entire atmosphere." C48 also reflected upon being "told that Spaniards feel the bull will end up as dinner one way or another. Bulls bred for the corrida have a better life than those bred for slaughter." C48 advised one commentator looking to attend a bullfight in Madrid that "If you want to go, go! Don't be swayed by the naysayers." C54 admitted loving his trip to the bullfighting ring, suggesting "there exists some controversy. It comes from animal rights activists." C54 added "My personal argument is that I eat beef and I occasionally enjoy the taste of a well-cooked steak. Therefore, I can't have any cruelty issues."

C53 took up the debate on the opposing side of C26, stating "the animals we carnivores eat are slaughtered in a humane way whereas a bulls [sic] death is horrific and is done for entertainment." Similarly, C46 reasoned, "I have no qualms about eating meat, but I draw the line at deliberate slow, and painful torture of an animal for pleasure." C46 drew upon 20 years of living in the United Kingdom, to comment on the treatment of domestic animals, stating "My overall impression and from observation was that sheep and cattle were very well cared for by the local farmers until they went to market or the local abattoir. I watched our neighbors bottle feeding abandoned lambs..."

4.4 Cultural argument for and against bullfighting

Many commentators debated the cultural aspects associated with bullfighting. While some felt that others had no right to criticize bullfighting as a cultural practice, others felt culture should

not be used as a defense for bullfighting. Those on the side of bullfighting as a cultural practice felt similar to C2 who stated, "It's a [sic] old traditional culture in Spain which might be out someday but we do believe that culture is culture." C26 similarly stated that "its popularity may be waning," but "Bullfighting is a long standing cultural tradition in Spain." C55 and C56 both felt that whether or not you agreed or disagreed with bullfighting "it is part of the culture" (C56). Some participants spoke of the aspects of culture associated with bullfighting, such as C13 who felt "... as a cultural experience it's a visual feast of colors, blood, and passion." C13 added, "...the cultural experience of the costumes are [sic] worth it." C43 commented generally about the Portuguese style of bullfighting, stating "It's a tradition [that] requires immense bravery and skill..."

In contrast, other commentators, such as C15, stated "We wanted to see a bullfight to capture a portion of the culture of Spain," and added "We did not like the event at all." Some Spaniards posted that bullfighting does not represent Spain. In an interesting comment, C59, a Spaniard, stated "Even Spaniards are not supporting it as greatly as they used to." C32 agreed, reasoning, "...this barbarity that does not represent us." C46 stated that bullfighting "...is an abhorrent monstrosity that has no place in civilized Spain," adding "I don't care how many centuries of tradition are behind this abomination it is well past the time it was outlawed across all of Spain." C62 thanked commentators who responded to their request for information on bullfighting, stating, "I didn't realize that its [sic] being discouraged locally as I thought it was still a strong part of the Spanish culture."

5 Discussion and limitations

The analysis revealed that most of the groupings of posts were initiated by an individual seeking tourist information in order to attend a bullfight. Other individuals would then respond to these queries. As noted, the posts were overwhelmingly focused on Spanish bullfighting, while a few were focused on Portugal and Mexico. Overall, commentators who responded to a query projected a pro or negative response and, less often, a neutral stance. Some commentators made multiple posts, taking up the debate for or against bullfighting, from either a cultural perspective or the comparison of bullfighting to the slaughter of domestic animals for food. This latter debate drew some of the most poignant and passionate responses from commentators and much of the evident propaganda and bias in communication was embedded within this debate. Indeed, the goal of commentators on both side of the debate sought to persuade their audience, being future tourists and bullfighting attendees, mostly through the use of ethos and pathos. For example, many who spoke against bullfighting admitted to eating meat, and acknowledged the hypocrisy associated with that; however, some reasoned the lack of comparability between what they perceived as the humane slaughter of domestic animals and the "protracted slaughter;" of bulls in the ring. This was in contrast to a few commentators who contended that domestic animals also suffered in their short lives before ending up as "roast dinner." Certainly, this debate suggests naivety in assuming that domestic animals do not suffer during their lives (e.g., factory farming, transport to slaughter houses); however, many commentators perceived the slow torture and killing of bulls in the

name of “sport,” to be on a lower ethical level than the slaughter of domestic animals.

Another interesting finding is related to the cultural argument for and against bullfighting. Similar to López-López and Quintero Venegas (2021), this study found evidence of cultural patrimony arguments amongst commentators. Cultural patrimony combines elements of the “commodification of death as a cultural expression” (p. 74) and the power relationship between humans (“brave” male bullfighters) with the right, and perhaps obligation, to dominate nature (mother nature), represented by the bull. However, in contrast, many commentators in this study, either independently or through the guidance of other commentators, recognized the ethical issues associated with bullfighting, particularly, as it relates to the moral arguments associated with the killing of bulls as a sport vs. the killing of domestic animals for food. In the first instance, most commentators deemed the killing of bulls for sport as unnecessary, barbaric, and cruel. In the second instance, a few prolific commentators sought to draw attention to the hypocrisy and bias of ignoring how humans raise and consume domestic animals. According to Cahoon (2009), most arguments against killing for sport are drawn from two ethical perspectives. The first is a utilitarianism animal welfare perspective, where the pain and suffering of animals as sentient beings is minimized and their overall welfare is maximized. A utilitarian animal welfare perspective leads to an assessment that the pain and suffering bulls experience in the fight make it an unethical practice. The second is a deontological animal rights perspective which contends that animals have a right to protection from intentional harm (Fennell, 2012). The fact that the bulls are not protected from harm; rather they are purposely and intentionally exposed to harm also points to the unethicality of bullfighting.

Overall, the results of the study provide insights for understanding the factors that affect tourists’ overall evaluations of travel experience at bullfighting events. While many commentators initially perceived their attendance at a bullfight as an opportunity to witness and participate in a cultural experience, the majority came to perceive, either through their own personal experience or from the comments of others, that bullfighting did not and should not represent a modern-day Spanish cultural experience. For example, many commentators who experienced a bullfight, evaluated the experience as being negative, as evidenced in the negative words displayed in Table 1. Certainly, the Tripadvisor evaluations and personal experiences of attending a bullfight have consequences in terms of Spain’s image as a tourist destination, particularly in terms of Spain’s ability to present a more modern, more ethical tourism experience in today’s competitive tourism environment. Interestingly, some commentators, many of them Spanish nationals, felt that bullfighting only existed for its tourist draw. This perspective presents an interesting area for future research. For example, future studies could delve more deeply into who is attending bullfights, as well as attendees’ perspectives on how, if at all, bullfighting is a modern-day cultural experience, or whether it represents an anachronistic experience that does not belong in the modern world (Cohen, 2014).

Following the lead of Alaimo and Hekman (2008), Fennell et al. (2021) argued that humans and animals are indeed entangled agents with many shared experiences, interactions and encounters that shape the natures of both. These intersections occur in marine

and terrestrial environments, at several scales, and through time. Given this interweaving, it stands to reason that there are several dark ways in which humans use animals in the present as well as in the past—and no doubt in the future. If dark tourism is definable as that form of tourism that is focused on places that are recognized for their connection to tragedy, death, and suffering (Isaac and Çakmak, 2013), animals are surely important constituents in the move away from a formally anthropocentric agenda in tourism studies (Fennell, 2014), i.e., an emergence from the dark, as observed by Fennell et al. (2021). How *dark* or *light* these attractions are considered, from a scales of justice perspective, is a topic worthy of further exploration (Fennell and Sheppard, 2021). However, we argue that our case study, the Spanish bullfight, is a stock case of the former, a point made abundantly clear in the Tripadvisor commentaries of our sample, although not in a specific dark tourism context. The next stages of this research would be to connect directly with commentators to see how specifically the dark tourism prototype of Fennell et al. (2021) fits with their opinions, values, and beliefs when it comes to an activity like the Spanish bullfight.

The authors acknowledge that the study is not without limitations. For example, while Tripadvisor is a forum for tourist commentary, the opinions and perspectives analyzed for the purpose of this study represent the viewpoint of a small minority of tourists seeking out a bullfighting experience and therefore cannot be assumed to present a majority opinion or perspective. More research needs to be conducted on the effects of culture, for example, on consumers’ consumption patterns based off of online reviews (Kim et al., 2018). It would be valuable to test the ethical debates that appeared in this study in similar dark tourism experiences, such as the feeding of a live donkey to tigers at a Chinese zoo (Hall, 2021). Second, much of the debate evident in the commentary must be viewed in the context of the fact that stated behavior is often different from actual behavior.

6 Conclusion

This study is informed by a framework on animals as dark tourism attractions, with the central aim of investigating the attitudes of tourists toward bullfighting as one of several variables included in the framework. Emphasis was placed on looking for patterns in concepts and how they are communicated; understanding intentions of individuals; identifying bias in communication; and understanding the consequences of such communication. The analysis revealed four key themes: concern/care for bulls, horses, and matadors; warnings/advice for tourists; bullfighting vs. domestic livestock debate; and, the cultural argument for and against bullfighting. Overall, we found that the majority of posts reflected negative perceptions associated with bullfighting, including cruelty, unfair “fight,” and torture, while only a minority reflected positive perceptions, including culture, ceremony, pomp, and history. These findings have potentially negative implications for a tourism destination’s image, such as Spain, and provide many avenues for further research, particularly in terms of ethical behavior in tourism.

Overall, the key contribution of the study is to expand the scope and nature of dark tourism to include animal encounter

sites through a qualitative understanding of the factors that affect tourists' overall evaluation of travel experience at this attraction, as well as the ethical issues related to bullfighting. We argue that the ethical debates stemming from our analysis can be useful in casting light on other animal dark tourism attractions, whether these are classified as attractions, or not. We also feel that there are ethical tensions that exist between different types of animal-based attractions but also tourist practices. Darker animal-based attractions would obviously be identified based on the type of interaction with the animal, as identified by Fennell et al. (2021). Eating animals as compared to animals used for entertainment is a case in point, as in the case of Anangu Tours in Australia in which tourists could "ride and eat the same animal during one evening" (Australia Red Centre, 2007, online, as cited in Yudina and Fennell, 2013). What is clear, however, is that considerably more work needs to be done to identify, and probably justify, animal dark tourism attractions as a further area of discussion in bringing animals in from the dark. Tourism, both in theory and practice, can ill afford to remain disconnected from the wider debates in society on such issues, while at the same time inducing pain and suffering as subsidiary to the masters of profit and pleasure.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

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