

Violence and sport, 1800-2000.

Through most of human history, displays of violence, either between humans or animals, have been an integral component of sport. Just as physical aggression was present in most people's daily and working life, so inevitably was it an uncontroversial element of their recreational life as well. Violent sports have not only been global in reach they have also extended across every social rank, though they have been largely a male domain, with many societies placing restrictions on the extent to which women might participate in sports of any kind whether as participants and spectators, and particularly those involving displays of aggression.

Yet the past two centuries have witnessed an unmistakable redrawing of the place of violence in sport. Starting in Britain and progressing from there to western Europe, the United States and Australia, governments have actively sought to eliminate sports which involved staged acts of aggression between animals. At the same time, sporting organisations have imposed ever greater regulation around the violence that human combatants might perpetrate against each other – opening, in the process, a space for female involvement, firstly as spectators, and in the second half of the twentieth century as participants. Outside the West, however, opposition to violence in sport has been more muted. Whilst most non-western societies have been involved in the move to restrict the extent of violence that humans might commit in the name of sport, they have been far less interested in imposing restrictions on sports that involve animals. Here, the force of tradition' has invariably trumped the self-styled 'humanitarianism' of the western abolitionists.

It is helpful to begin by thinking about out the range of violent sports enjoyed in the past, many of which have now disappeared from the industrialised world. These fall broadly into two categories – sports encouraging violence amongst animals and those involving violence between human combatants. Sports involving animals – often labelled ‘blood sports’ by their critics – can be helpfully divided into two distinct categories: staged fights or contests between animals or between animals and humans; and hunting. Staged combats generally take place in an enclosed or semi-enclosed area and usually between domesticated, rather than wild, animals. Cockfighting and dog-fighting are the most ubiquitous forms of blood sport, having been recorded in some form in most corners of the globe. The underlying principle of such fights is to match the animals as equally as possible – their appeal lies in placing bets on a contest with an unpredictable outcome.¹ Most countries have had many additional local blood sports determined by the native animal population and by tradition – badger-baiting, bull-baiting, bear-baiting, ratting, bull-running and bull-fighting to name a few from western Europe.² These sports are much more varied in nature, and are not necessarily enjoyed as opportunities for gambling. The bull-running, or jallikattu, in Tamil Nadu, for instance involves tying a bag of coins between the horns of a bull and setting him loose in the streets. Participants chase the bull down and attempt to untie, and claim for themselves, the bag of coins. Like countless other bull-fighting and bull-running traditions that have been recorded around the globe, jallikattu is essentially a festive, community event – an occasion for community cohesion and displays of masculine bravery.

¹ George Ryley Scott, *The History of Cockfighting* (London: C. Skilton, [1957]).

² The most studied of these has been the Spanish bullfight. See Timothy J. Mitchell, *Blood Sport: A Social History of Spanish Bullfighting* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).

Hunting differs in principle from animal combats in that the animals are wild rather than domesticated and are hunted in their natural habitat – some animals hunted by men armed with guns, others by men working in tandem with other animals, usually dogs or birds.³ In reality, though, this ‘pure’ form of hunting has been hard to maintain in the past two hundred years – an era of unprecedented population growth, urbanisation and industrialisation throughout the world. In many parts of the globe, pressure on the land has forced hunters to pursue animals that were semi-tame, or even tame, and much of their hunting takes place in enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces rather than in the wild.⁴ Nonetheless, it is helpful to maintain a distinction between staged animal combats and hunting, less because of an innate difference between these sports and more because humanitarian reformers have always insisted in differentiating between the violence that occurred in animal combats and that which occurred on the hunting field.

Sitting alongside those sports involving animals and violence were a wide range of sports involving interpersonal violence. Various forms of human combat have existed across the globe since the beginning of time, though the precise form they have taken has varied widely. In East and South Asia, martial arts have dominated.⁵ In the West, bare-knuckle

³ Richard Hummel, *Hunting and Fishing for Sport: Commerce, Controversy, Popular Culture* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1994); Emma Griffin, *Blood Sport: Hunting in Britain since 1066* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

⁴ Ibid.; John Fletcher, ‘The Impact of Hunting on European woodland from medieval to modern times’, in Keith Kirby and Charles Watkins, eds., *Europe's Changing Woods and Forests: From Wildwood to Managed Landscapes*, pp.116-124.

⁵ Thomas A. Green, Joseph R. Svinth, *Martial Arts of the World: An Encyclopedia of History and Innovation*, Volume 2, 175-182, 2010.

fighting has always been more popular.⁶ Generalising about the nature of these sports in an impossible task owing to the enormous global variation, but at heart, they involve displays of fighting strength and skill between two (invariably male) opponents. In addition, many team sports which are today considered to be 'non-contact', such as football, involved high levels of physical violence in 1800. More generally, these sports always took a non-standard format. This is not to suggest that they were not governed by rules. Parameters such as the rules of combat, the size of teams and pitches, or the length of play were all subject to rules, but these rules tended to vary from one village or region to the next. As a result, team sports in 1800 looked very different to those of the present day. They were characterised by very high levels of interpersonal violence and though rule bound, they were played according to local custom rather than by national, standardised sets of rules.⁷

Opposition towards the use of violence in sports began in Britain, with an organised campaign against cockfighting and bull-baiting. It is significant that the country's first anti-violence movement of any significance was targeted towards animals, rather than any of the human constituencies at risk of violence – children, wives, apprentices, or servants. As such, it is worth looking in detail at the campaigners' objections towards blood sports and asking why they found such a fertile reception in early nineteenth-century Britain?

Many religions have expressed concern about the use of animals, which are after all part of God's creation, for sport and recreation, and Christianity is no exception. Since the sixteenth

⁶ Kasia Boddy, *Boxing: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013).

⁷ Jeffrey Hill, *Sport In History: An Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); J. A. Mangan, ed., *Europe, Sport, World: Shaping Global Societies* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2001); David G. McComb, *Sports in World History* (London: Routledge, 2004).

century, Puritan reformers had been objecting to sports such as cockfighting and bear-baiting – both on the grounds of the time-wasting and gambling implicit in such activities, and owing to the cruelty to animals they involved.⁸ Towards the end of the eighteenth century, however, a new, secular strain of criticism began to emerge, objecting to the mistreatment of animals not simply as an abuse of God’s creation, but upon humanitarian grounds as well. Although these reformers ranged widely over human treatment of animals, as their ideas began to filter into popular consciousness, these concerns crystallised around a small number of blood sports. In the process, criticisms of hunting were entirely filtered out, and working-class blood sports such as cockfighting and bull-baiting were targeted as the only serious form of animal cruelty that needed to be addressed. From the 1790s, public outrage over the persistence of these two ancient sports continued to mount, and as it did so, parliament soon turned its attention to these sports as well. Criticism that had originated in newspapers and drawing rooms, rapidly transmuted into a divisive political and class wrangle that was to last nearly forty years.⁹

The first bill to attack blood sport was Sir William Pulteney’s ‘Bill for Preventing the Practice of Bull-baiting’, introduced in 1800.¹⁰ It had the narrow goal of outlawing (in Pulteney’s words) ‘the savage custom of bull-baiting’, but despite gathering considerable support in the

⁸ Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500-1800* (London: Penguin, 1983). Edward Barry, *Bull Baiting! A Sermon on Barbarity to God’s Dumb Creation, Preached in the Parish Church of Wokingham, Berkshire* (Reading, 1802).

⁹ Emma Griffin, *England’s Revelry. A History of Popular Sports and Pastimes, 1660-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁰ James Turner, *Reckoning with the Beast Animals, Pain, and Humanity in the Victorian Mind* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 15.

House, it faced eloquent and lengthy opposition from Sir William Windham, the Tory MP for Norwich.¹¹ Windham derided the bill as evidence of ‘a busy and anxious disposition to legislate on matters in which the laws are already sufficient’, and his impassioned defence played a large role in the ultimate defeat of the bill – it was lost by just two votes.¹² Windham had successfully tapped into a widely held concern that by interfering in men’s private pleasures, Parliament was stepping into new and dangerous waters. ‘It should be written in letters of gold,’ declared the *Times*, ‘that a Government cannot interfere too little with the people; ... whatever meddles with the private personal disposition of a man’s time or property is tyranny direct.’¹³ It was a powerful critique, and one that protected working-class blood sports for a number of years.

Further attempts to introduce legislation to prohibit bull-baiting were made over the next two decades, but reform was delayed until the 1820s, when Richard Martin – dubbed by his friends ‘Humanity Dick’ – a large Irish landowner and keen practitioner of all field sports, mounted another, this time successful attack on blood sports. His ‘Bill to prevent cruelty to cattle and horses’ received royal assent in 1822. This Act outlawed acts of cruelty to farm and draft animals, but did not in fact outlaw bull-baiting in the way Martin and his supporters had hoped: bulls had been expressly omitted from the final act by a government sensitive to the criticism that it was meddling in spheres it had no right to touch.

This omission kept the reformers busy for the next decade, but the precedent set by the landmark 1822 Act made their task rather easier. In 1835 they secured the passage of the

¹¹ *Parliamentary History* xxxv (1800), col. 202.

¹² *Ibid.*, col. 203.

¹³ *The Times*, 25 April 1800.

Protection of Animals Act, which extended protection from livestock to domestic animals and made it illegal to keep any place for the fighting or baiting of any animal, wild or domestic. Overnight, enjoying a bull-bait, bear-bait, or dogfight became a criminal offence, and fines and prisons served to convince anyone who might think otherwise. This Act, consolidated and extended to include cockfighting in 1849, was the first major piece of legislation passed to prohibit blood sports in the western world.¹⁴

The outcome of these new laws was initially mixed. Bull-baiting, being near impossible to hide from the authorities, was relatively easy to suppress. Despite some very public displays of opposition in the immediate aftermath of the Act, local authorities speedily and effectively used their new powers to round up those involved and consign the sport to history.¹⁵ A cockfight or badger-bait, however, was much more easily shielded from prying eyes, and so was its disappearance far more protracted. In an attempt to enforce the law more rigorously, a self-proclaimed body of 'divers benevolent persons' formed itself into the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) in 1824, and started collecting funds to assist individuals in prosecutions. In 1835, the Society received the first of many royal patrons (the Duchess of Kent) and in 1840 Queen Victoria, a patron since 1835, granted it permission to prefix 'Royal' to its name.¹⁶ As the new society grew in size and importance it

¹⁴ J. H. Porter, 'Cockfighting in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: from popularity to suppression', *Report and Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature and Art*, 118 (1986), pp. 63-71.

¹⁵ Griffin, *England's Revelry*, pp. 235-49.

¹⁶ The RSPCA is considered in: Rob Boddice, *A History of Attitudes and Behaviours Toward Animals in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-century Britain: Anthropocentrism and the Emergence of Animals* (Lampeter:

took to hiring constables to walk the streets and apprehend offenders. Its officer corps grew steadily, totalling 120 by the end of the century.¹⁷ The RSPCA played an important role in translating the new legislation into effective action against working-class blood sports. It was a pattern that would be widely repeated in the western world. Passing legislation often proved more straightforward than enforcing it, and these private enforcement societies played an important role in rendering the reformers' ambitions into reality.

Though the elimination of working-class blood sports proved to be protracted, the general trend was clear: by the end of the nineteenth century, bull-baiting had disappeared, and cockfighting and dog-fighting had been firmly pushed underground. Sports that people of all social ranks had enjoyed for hundreds of years had been cast out of the realm owing to the changing values of a small, but powerful, minority who no longer took part. It marks a turning point in the history of blood sports, and one is inevitably led to ask: why did the Victorians impose such an intrusive piece of legislation?

One argument that we have to reject is that this was the spontaneous flowering of a new compassion for animals. It is certainly true that this period did see the awakening of some sensitivities surrounding animal suffering, but most of these views were expressed in poetry, literature and art, rather than in mainstream society. Throughout this period, cruelty to animals was ubiquitous. Animals were used in every aspect of life, and were inevitably much abused in the process. For most people, animals were there to fill stomachs, work machinery, and move things about. Animals could be seen everywhere: horses, donkeys,

Edwin Mellen Press, 2008); E. S. Turner, *All Heaven in a Rage* (London: Michael Joseph, 1964) pp.129-30, 146-7. See also Turner, *Reckoning with the Beast*, pp. 40-5.

¹⁷ Harrison, 'Animals and the state', *English Historical Review* (1973) 83, pp.786-820, esp. 789, 794.

dogs, cats, cattle, sheep and poultry filled streets, markets, gardens and fields. The sight, sound and smell of animals were an inescapable part of everyday life. People's lives and homes were shared with animals, and there was little room for sensitivity and compassion in this world, and ample scope for cruelty and ill-use.

Even if we were to grant that the reformers were genuinely concerned about animal cruelty, there is something suspicious in the targeting of blood sports. Of all the forms of cruelty that animals might face, cockfighting and bull-baiting were surely the least of their worries. A cockfight was a combat between two evenly matched animals fighting freely. The concept of a fair fight was also intrinsic to the sport of bull-baiting, and by the late eighteenth century, the sport was in any case already very much on the decline. Cockfighting and bull-baiting both bore more than a passing resemblance to all forms of hunting and coursing as animal combats lay at the hearts of these sports two, yet neither attracted criticism of any real note. Furthermore, the systematic abuse and overwork of the millions of horses that powered the English economy was surely a greater evil than any of the uses to which animals were put in the name of sport. Blood sports were marginal forms of cruelty in a society in which the use and abuse of animals was extremely widespread. If the Victorians *really* cared so much about animals, why did they not focus on more pressing cases of cruelty?

The answer of course may be found by switching our gaze away from the animals and back to ourselves. Early campaigns against blood sport were not about animals, but about the human spectators. Animals naturally fight, but what Britain's early reformers found objectionable about these fights was the fact they were orchestrated by humans for their own pleasure, excitement and financial gain. In arguing that bull-baiting and cockfighting

should no longer be tolerated, the literate classes were promoting their own vision of a progressive and compassionate society.

Inevitably, it was the poor that needed to be saved, and the oft-used accusation of class bias is not too far from the mark. With the exception of a small but dedicated core of wealthy gentlemen who continued to support cockfighting, the poor were the primary supporters of most forms of animal fighting and baiting by the early nineteenth century. According to one writer, bull-baiting was popular with the 'the most unfeeling, and least humane, part of the very lowest, and most abandoned orders of the people... *brutes*; the very scum and refuse of society'.¹⁸ So long as animal cruelty was focussed upon blood sports, it could also be categorised as something that other people did.¹⁹ By casting the perpetrators of cruelty as ignorant and unenlightened, Victorian reformers inevitably defined themselves as the vanguard of progress and civilisation; this was a way for the middle classes to reaffirm their own status as humane and enlightened individuals.

Western Europe followed the British example with varying degrees of enthusiasm. The United States, with its shared Puritan heritage and longstanding concerns about vice and immorality, was the nation most receptive to the British example. Proposing a bill to

¹⁸ William Taplin, *The Sporting Dictionary and Rural Repository* (London, 1803), pp. 44, 93-6. Likewise, when Pierce Egan's fictional hero Tom went to the Westminster pit to watch a monkey baiting he found 'a motley group... all in rude contact, jostling and pushing against each other'. Pierce Egan, *Life in London, of the Day and Night Scenes of Jerry Hawthorn, esq. and his Elegant Friend Corinthian Tom* (London, 1822; repr. 1859) p. 259.

¹⁹ See also Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate. The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 126-57.

strengthen the laws governing cockfighting in 1830, the representative of Westmoreland County, Samuel Bushfield, described cockfighting as a 'kind of vice' and a crime 'of great magnitude'. He continued, 'All kinds of vicious people attended them; some to bet money, some to satisfy criminal curiosity, and many to spend money which ought to be applied to the support of many of their families. Apprentices and the children of honest parents have their morals ruined by attending such gaming places; indeed they are often tempted to steal money to spend it in this way.' Yet despite Bushfield's eloquence, the resulting legislation was a compromise: cockfighting itself remained legal, only the betting on matches was prohibited.²⁰ This was a pattern often replicated in the US during the twentieth century, as legislators struggled with the concept of interfering in what private individuals did in their leisure time.

Just as in Britain, so in the States the cause of blood sports was subsequently taken up by the animal protection societies. And once again, although the remit of these societies was animal cruelty in general terms, they proved to be particularly exercised by the use of animals in sport. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was founded 1866 and the American Humane Association was established a decade later. Both played an important part in pressuring state legislatures to abolish not simply betting on cockfights, but the organising and watching of such events. But American animal protectionists always faced a greater battle than their British counterparts, for although there was considerable sympathy for the anti-vice message of their campaign, there was also much stronger sentiment in favour of personal liberties. Abolition of cockfighting proceeded on a state-by-state basis and it was a protracted process, with parts of the south not outlawing cockfighting until the

²⁰ J. Thomas Jable, 'Aspects of Moral Reform in Early Nineteenth-Century Pennsylvania', *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 102/3 (Jul., 1978), pp. 344-363.

twentieth-first century (Louisiana was the last state to outlaw cockfighting; it did so in 2008).²¹

In continental Europe the process of eliminating violence towards animals in sport was also highly uneven and encountered resistance of a different nature. Whereas American abolitionists faced objections from those who believed in personal freedom, in parts of Europe animal protectionists were stymied by the power of tradition. In France, for example, cockfighting was prohibited by law in 1951. This was already more than a hundred years after the British example and it included an important exemption: those regions with an uninterrupted local tradition of such fights were permitted to continue the sport. Nord-Pas-de-Calais claimed this exemption and remains to this day home to dozens of cockpits, or *gallo-dromes*, and to a lively, and entirely legal, cockfighting scene.²² Efforts to outlaw bullfighting in Spain met similar resistance. Whilst cockfighting was abolished in most parts of Spain in the twentieth century, opponents of bullfighting have as yet signally failed to overturn arguments promoting the sport as a unique and ancient national tradition. Here, as in France, successive governments have been persuaded that protecting native tradition is more important than attempting to ban sports which contained elements of violence.²³ The experiences of both countries are an important reminder that the forces of modernisation and industrialisation do not automatically quell violence against animals in the name of sport.

²¹ Jon Griffin Donlon, *Bayou Country Bloodsport: The Culture of Cockfighting in Southern Louisiana* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2013).

²² Richard Holt, *Sport and Society in Modern France* (London: Macmillan, 1981).

²³ Mitchell, *Blood Sport*.

The partial and piecemeal nature of reform is also evident in the large areas of sporting life that have generally been exempted from reform. Despite the unmistakable hardening of attitudes towards working-class blood sports in most of Europe and North America, attitudes towards hunting have changed far less. Even in the case of hunting with hounds, which generally involves staging a fairly contrived combat between a supposedly wild animal and trained hunting dogs, western opinion has shifted far more slowly, and indeed in many quarters has shifted hardly at all. Since the nineteenth century, animal protectionists maintained a strict distinction between 'blood sports' and hunting, and the ideological insistence that these form separate categories of sport has played an important role in protecting all forms of hunting with hounds.

Once again Britain has been at the front of the prohibition movement. The Hunting Act of 2004 banned the hunting of wild mammals with dogs in England and Wales, and still stands out as a rare piece of legislation that restricted hunting through animal welfare, as opposed to conservation, motives. Just as with cockfighting, however, hostility towards hunting in reality encompassed a wide range of concerns not all of them centred upon violence or cruelty towards animals. The Hunting Act owed as much to the new social and political sensibilities ushered in with Labour's landslide victory of 1997 as it did to concerns about animal cruelty.²⁴ Nor have these concerns about hunting translated effectively beyond Britain's shores. In continental Europe and the United States, hunting continues to enjoy a largely unchallenged place in society. In these countries, not only is hunting protected by law, there is very little in the way of public disquiet about the hunters' activities.

²⁴ Griffin, *Blood Sport*.

Beyond the West, hostility towards the use of animals in sport has been much more muted and animal protection arguments have done little to undermine the popularity of traditional animal combat sports such as cockfighting and dog-fighting. Cockfighting bans have been introduced in parts of South America (Brazil in 1934; Argentina, Chile, and Paraguay in the later twentieth century) but through most of Asia the sport remains legal. Across large parts of the globe, concerns about animal cruelty have failed to dent what are widely regarded as ancient and legitimate traditions involving animal combat.

In order to understand the enduring popularity and legality of cockfighting across large parts of the globe, it is necessary to appreciate the ancient roots of cockfighting. In China, for example, evidence of cockfighting has been uncovered from the Zhou period (sixth century B.C.). In the following 2,500 years, cockfighting has featured in Chinese literature, philosophy and poetry. It has been linked to important spring festivals and been enjoyed by all from the emperor to the masses. Furthermore, cockfighting in China has been situated within the yin-yang principles of Taoist belief. In this belief framework, cocks are given the same yang symbolism as the sun and this provides a space for cockfighting to fill in the renewal spring festival of Hanshi. Hanshi was marked by extinguishing of all fires and the eating of cold food for three days, followed by the relighting of fires. Whilst Chinese reformers have long raised concerns about the animal cruelty, crowds and betting they believe to be associated with cockfighting, they have been unable to overturn the sport's very broad social and cultural basis of support.²⁵

²⁵ Robert Joe Cutter, *The Brush and the Spur: Chinese Culture and the Cockfight* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1989).

In fact, cockfighting has been slotted into a wide variety of very different religious and belief systems across the globe. In Bali, for example, cockfighting is linked with Balinese Hinduism. Here it plays a role in religious purification rituals designed to expel evil spirits, with the blood of the losing chicken offered as a sacrifice to the spirits. Likewise in India, cockfighting has a very long history. It is mentioned in literature from the Sangam period (from 3 B.C.) and has since then been enjoyed in both secular and religious contexts. In many nations, then, cockfighting is regarded not simply as a recreational pursuit, but as a practice with deep historical, religious and cultural roots. And inevitably, these cultural traditions have not been quickly and easily erased in the march towards modernisation.

The experience of India illustrates the obstacles faced by the animal protectionists. The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act of 1960 legislated against the unnecessary pain or suffering of animals and included inciting animals to fight within its provisions. The Act provided a clear statement of India's claims to modernity, but the combined forces of culture and tradition have proved more powerful than the rhetoric of modernity and reform. The conservatism of Indian society has stood in the way of effective elimination of the sport and most attempts at repression have focused on the betting that accompanies cockfighting rather than the sport itself. Not only have the police been notoriously reluctant to interfere in cockfights, there have also been disagreements amongst the courts concerning whether or not cockfights are covered by the provisions of the Act, particularly those held within temples or associated with Hindu festivals. The passage of the Act has done little to eliminate back-street cockfighting; indeed economic growth has in some instances provided an impetus to the growth of cockfighting. In Andhra Pradesh, for instance, the annual festival of Makar Sankranti has become the occasion of large, spectator cockfights with high-level betting in excess of Rs 1000. With local politicians, MPs, prominent businessmen and

even film celebrities visiting coastal Andhra during Sankranti to participate, cockfighting became big business in the decades following the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. Inevitably small fines of no more Rs 25-100 and a local police force which is at best indifferent, at worst complicit, has failed to provide any form of deterrent to those who want to participate.²⁶

It is clear that the elimination of violence from sport is not a linear and universal process. In the West, violence towards animals in sports became increasingly controversial around 1800, though abolition attempts were almost always directed towards animal combat sports rather than hunting and rarely extended to more general concerns about the mistreatment of animals in agriculture and transport. Britain led the way and whilst the pace and motivation of the animal protectionists have varied across Europe and the United States, the general trend is unmistakable. Cockfighting and dog-fighting are no longer mainstream activities in the West; indeed in most western nations organising or watching animal combats is a criminal offence. At the same time, however, many non-Western nations have been far more hesitant to interfere with sports that are regarded as belonging to ancient or religious traditions. Although a number of nations in Asia and in South and Latin America and have passed laws outlawing animal cruelty, some have been unclear about whether traditional sports fall within the remit of the new laws and lax enforcement efforts have often rendered the legislation a dead letter. Other countries have not attempted to legislate against popular blood sports. As a consequence, cockfighting and a host of other animal combat sports remains legitimate and popular pastimes across significant parts of the globe.

²⁶ *Times of India*, 8 Jan. 2012

The history of inter-personal violence in sport has followed a rather different trajectory from that of violence between animals. Whereas the West has diverged sharply from other parts of the globe since 1800 with an ever more successful animal protection movement, no such divergence is evident with respect to human combat sports. The trend here has been towards ever-greater regulation rather than prohibition, and the move towards tighter regulation has been shared in western and non-western nations alike.

Men have made sport out of fighting with each other since the beginning of time, and this tradition remained firmly in place in 1800.²⁷ Indeed, most governments have traditionally looked favourably towards their indigenous fighting sports and customs, regarding them as a means of encouraging strength, courage, and manly vigour, as the foundation of a strong, fighting nation. Enthusiasm for human combat sports has hardly waned over the past two centuries. Admittedly, some abolitionist pressure emerged in parts of the west in the twentieth century, yet this never gained the strength and momentum of the animal protection arguments. When it comes to violence in sport, reformers have sought to control and contain that violence, rather than to eliminate it.

In the West, much of the impetus for limiting the degree of violence permissible in hand-to-hand combat emanated, once again, from Britain. Whilst it is difficult to reconstruct exactly how bare-knuckle fighting was conducted in Europe at this time, it is clear that high levels of violence were tolerated. A manual from early eighteenth century Britain provided

²⁷ For an early example, see: Christian Mann, 'Gladiators in the Greek East: A Case Study in Romanisation, 124-149', in Zinon Papakonstantinou, ed., *Sport in the Cultures of the Ancient World: New Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2013).

instruction for techniques such as head-butting, punching, eye gouging, and choking.²⁸ It is certainly the case that organised prize-fights had an unfortunate tendency to end in death, resulting in unwelcome manslaughter charges for the victorious fighter. It was undoubtedly this which provided the spur for reform of the sport's rules. The first set of boxing rules were introduced by the champion fighter Jack Broughton in 1743, and known as Broughton's rules. Broughton also encouraged the use of 'mufflers', a form of padded glove, though their use remained optional well into the nineteenth century. Broughton's rules were revised and consolidated as the London Prize Ring Rules in 1838, which were in turn superseded by the Queensbury rules in 1867. These mandated the use of gloves and form the basis of the sport of boxing as it is played today. In the US, one advocate of new boxing rules argued that they encouraged fighting which was 'fairer and more harmless', and they certainly did lead to a decline in the frequency with which prize-fights ended in death.²⁹ What we find in the case of hand-to-hand combat, then, is not an attempt to eliminate violence from sport, but a move towards greater regulation around the circumstances in which men fight.

Once this transition had occurred, boxing was able to take its place in western society. It was introduced to the Olympics in 1904 and has been contested at every set of games since, with the exception of 1912 Olympics in Sweden (the Swedish government banned the sport at

²⁸ See Sir Thomas Parkyns, of Bunny Baronet, *The Inn- Play or Cornish -Hugg Wrestler. Digested in a Method with Teacheth to break all Holds, and throw most Falls mathematically* (London, 1727).

²⁹ William Edwards, *The Art of Boxing and Science of Self-Defense, together with a Manual of Training* (New York: Excelsior Publishing House, 1888).

that time).³⁰ These developments have also opened a space for women to take part in the sport. Women participated in the sport informally throughout the twentieth century but only began to assume a formal presence when national amateur boxing associations began to admit women.³¹ Indeed it was Sweden which kicked off this trend, with the Swedish Amateur Boxing Association sanctioning events for women in 1988. Through the 1990s, the US and most European nations followed suit and women's boxing was included in the Olympics just outside the timeframe of this volume - in 2012.

Elsewhere in the world, human combat sports inevitably took a highly diverse form, with not only each nation nurturing its own local customs, but considerable variety between one region and the next. Yet for all this diversity, the same trend towards standardisation is evident. Take the example of Japan. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Japan was the home of numerous distinct fighting traditions - martial arts such as ju-jitsu, karate, and aikido; sword-fighting traditions such as kendo and naginata; and wrestling. Most of these sports claimed heritage back to at least the fifteenth century, and many considerably earlier than that. All the Japanese martial arts and wrestling traditions contained high levels of violence and had held a central place in the culture of the ancient samurai, or warrior class. Although they had ceased to play an important role in military preparedness by the end of the eighteenth century, they were nonetheless still highly esteemed for the encouragement they gave to a man's self-control and fighting spirit.

³⁰ John Sugden, *Boxing and Society: An International Analysis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996)

³¹ Malissa Smith, *A History of Women's Boxing* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014)

Despite their long histories, most modern Japanese martial arts are in reality only loosely related to their earlier forms. Sumo-wrestling, for example, is all that remains of a once far wider set of wrestling customs. Medieval sources reveal wrestling contests that were performed as part of religious rites, or as a spectator event for aristocratic patrons, or for financial gain. Bouts were fought according to locally determined custom and although they did not ordinarily end with the death of one or other opponent, fights to the death were practised in some contexts. The same variety was evident in all the Japanese martial arts, with each practised in numerous different formats and contexts, according to local custom rather than standardised rules.³²

Wrestling was the first Japanese combat sport to undergo standardisation, a process which began unusually early in this instance. The tradition of *tsuji-zumo*, or 'street-corner' wrestling had started to attract the attention of the ruling class in the mid-seventeenth century. Street corner wrestling, as its name implies, took place out of doors, often accompanied by hawkers, jugglers, and theatrical and freak shows. It encouraged crowds to gather and gamble on the outcome, and, in the eyes of the authorities, posed a threat to the social order. The Tokugawa government passed edicts banning it around the middle of the century, but as these proved only partially successful government officials began instructing wrestling organisers to regulate their fights instead. One of the most significant outcomes of these negotiations was the agreement to hold fights within a defined space, giving rise to the *dohyo* - an arena with a clearly defined, circular border of rice-straw bales - which is still employed today. In addition, certain rules for sumo-wrestling were formalised - the

³² P. L. Cuyler, *Sumo from Rite to Sport* (New York: Weatherhill, 1979); Harold Bolitho, 'Sumo and popular culture: the Tokugawa period', in *Modernisation and Beyond: The Japanese Trajectory*, ed Gavan McCormack and Yoshio Sugimoto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 17-32.

disallowing of hair-pulling, eye-gouging, and blows with closed fists. Referees were introduced to ensure they were followed. Further regulation followed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Together, these reforms sharply reduced the risk of sumo-wrestlers experiencing serious physical harm or dying in the ring. And although this had certainly been far from the reformers' intentions, the introduction of a formal set of rules also gave rise to a nation-wide tournament circuit as wrestlers from across Japan became familiar with a standard set of procedures. As a result, sumo-wrestling, emerged from its medieval origins into a modern spectator sport, fit for Japan's growing urban centres

A similar process of standardisation transformed the complex patchwork of martial arts and sword fighting that had existed in Japan in the early nineteenth century. Swords, for example, had had a significant presence on the medieval battlefield, but with no major wars during the Tokugawa period (1603-1868), sword-fighting had evolved from a form of military training into a spectator sport. Fights were highly choreographed so that fighters might strike their opponent without fear of injuring or killing them. In the eighteenth century, the traditional metal swords were replaced with bamboo so as to allow for a more authentic, full-contact combat, yet despite this sword-fighting techniques, along with other traditional martial arts, fell into decline at the start of the Meiji period in the 1860s. The creation of a new government in 1868 - the Meiji, or 'Enlightened Rule' - marked the beginning of a new era in Japanese history. Successive leaders actively sought to accelerate industrialisation, to modernise, to catch up with the west. In such an environment, the nation's ancient martial arts increasingly appeared to be outdated relics of the past.

All of Japan's ancient combat sports, however, were unexpected beneficiaries of the rise of nationalist fervour that swept the nation in the final quarter of the nineteenth century. The

Sino-Japanese War of 1894-5 and the nationalism it helped to foster prompted a reappraisal of traditional martial culture. The 1890s saw a sharp increase in the number of students joining martial arts associations and the emergence of a number of martial arts organisations active in both codifying the sports and lobbying for them. Kendo was codified into its modern form in the 1890s; in the same decade naginata was revived as a suitable physical recreation for girls; it was codified with the creation of a national centre in 1934. Meanwhile, older ju-jitsu techniques were reconfigured as Kodokan Judo by Kano Jiguro in the 1880s. Kano created a training school and governing body for his new martial art, introduced a system of belts to rank competitors, and established a point system and time-limits for matches. In each of these sports, codification helped to restrict the expression of violence in sport. It did not remove violence altogether, but did sharply limit the degree of harm that combatants could cause their opponents.

Chinese martial arts evade simple categorisation. There are dozens of unique fighting styles and training methods, inspired by different philosophies and religions, each with their origins in distinct periods of Chinese history and regions of the country. Yet despite the great variety of martial arts in China, these too have all undergone a recognisable process of standardisation. The process here was delayed until the twentieth century and was powerfully shaped by China's own unique social and political context. In the early twentieth century, one martial art school after another established its own national association, produced its training manual, and set about organising its own system of national examinations and competitions. The trend towards standardisation was further accelerated in the 1950s with the creation of the People's Republic of China. The PRC, whilst enthusiastic about physical recreation element of martial arts, was suspicious of the ancient traditions and aristocratic lineage claimed by some practitioners. The Chinese State

Commission for Physical Culture and Sports sought to resolve this tension by establishing one, national form of kung fu – Wushu – backed by the All-China Wushu Association, created in 1958. This attempt to iron out the variety of Chinese martial arts was inevitably only partially successful. Nonetheless, the martial arts scene in China at the end of the twentieth century looked remarkably different from that at the century's beginning. Despite a large number of different schools, within each of these schools standardisation was complete. Here, as elsewhere, interpersonal violence in sport now took place within a much more rigorous and restrictive framework.

Clearly, then, the place of violence in world sport is highly complex. Nonetheless two distinct trends are observable. In the first instance, the West has seen a determined, and largely successful, attempt to eliminate sports which manipulate or showcase aggression between animals for entertainment. Although countries in many other parts of the world have attempted to pass some legislation prohibiting animal cruelty, these have tended to be less explicitly focussed on animal sports and far less rigorously enforced. Elsewhere, the weight of tradition has protected animal combat sports from any serious threat of repression. In the second instance, there has been a concerted effort to rein in the degree of interpersonal violence tolerated in martial arts, boxing and wrestling in all parts of the world. Whilst hand-to-hand combat sports remain popular across the globe, regulation has sharply reduced the risk of death or serious injury during competitive events. Violence in sport is still permitted, but the circumstances in which it is allowed to occur are now more tightly circumscribed.