Animal Practices and the Racialization of Filipinas in Los Angeles

ABSTRACT

Many factors contribute to the racialization of minority groups in the United States. Some individual characteristics, such as skin color or phenotype, are an obvious holdover from colonial times. Cultural differences in representational practices, customs and rituals, and belief systems are now more significant in racialization. Although not typically a focus of academic scrutiny, some of these differences involve contrasts in nature-society relations, and more specifically, nonhuman animal-society relations. In order to examine the relationship between culturally based animal practices and racialization, we organized and conducted a focus group consisting of low-income inner-city Filipinas living in Los Angeles, California. Analysis of focus group data reveal that Filipinos in southern California are subject to racialization by Anglos because of their culturally based animal practices, in particular the traditional Filipino practice of treating dogs as food animals. The experience of racialization appeared to engender cultural relativism and tolerance toward the animal practices of other non-Anglo groups.

In May 1993, while Los Angeles still wrestled with racial tensions following the 1992 uprising, City Hall hosted a cultural exhibit by Filipino artists that further challenged race relations in the city. One particular artwork was a banner, titled “Ugat Pilipino: Filipino Roots,” which depicted a monkey roasting a dog on a spit (see Figure 1). The caption read: “This
is America.” The banner also contained many powerful political symbols such as a Catholic rosary, a Star of David, and a Swastika, interpreted by some as comparing Filipino oppression by Americans to Nazi oppression of Jews. The monkey alluded to a nineteenth century American stereotype of Filipinos, while the roasting dog represented what to mainstream America is one of the most controversial Filipino customs: dog eating. The banner was later removed, but not before sparking further controversy in both the Anglo and Filipino communities.

Such events reveal a poorly understood dimension of cultural difference, attitude toward nature and, in particular, animals. The banner episode also suggests that cultural differences around attitudes toward and treatment of animals may fuel processes of racialization.

This article seeks to clarify relationships between cultural background (linked to race/ethnicity or national origin) and animals. In particular, we wish to explore how cultural norms shape nature—society relations and how such cultural differences shape attitudes toward animals among Filipinos in southern California. We also focus on links between culturally divergent attitudes toward animals and racialization. How do animal-related practices demonize this group? How does the group justify its own practices and thus resist racialization?
Racialization and Human-Animal Relations

Racialization is the act of classifying a group of people by assigning them real or imagined biological or cultural characteristics that subsequently are used to justify mistreatment or exclusion from mainstream society (Torres & Ngin, 1995). Social Darwinism perpetuated racialization in the nineteenth century, and, though long ago discredited, its legacy lingers (Kleg, 1993).

Although government officials and business leaders no longer may advocate openly policies that promote racism, past policies may continue to produce destructive impacts on members of minority groups long after these policies have been rescinded (Doob, 1996). In fact, segregation, racially defined poverty (and privilege), and bigotry continue in our society because they are beneficial to the majority group (Omi & Winant, 1994; Harley, Rollins, & Middleton, 1999).

Fundamental to racialization is a dominant/subordinate relationship, distinguished by any one of numerous factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, class, disability, sexual orientation, or culture (Shaefler, 1997). Some characteristics such as skin color or phenotype are an obvious holdover from colonial times. Yet, the basis of racist ideology has little to do with biology and a great deal to do with one group (Anglos) retaining hegemony over others (non-Anglos) (Pulido, 1996). In addition, cross-cultural conflict around everyday practices and representational behavior or social customs also may fuel racialization.

One such set of practices that can spur racialization revolves around attitudes and practices toward animals (Whitley, 1998). These “out of the norm” practices sometimes are explained in the context of deviance rather than as part of the process of racialization, for example, dog fighting (Forsythe & Evans, 1998). In our research, however, the objective was to understand how diverse cultural practices involving animals might serve to strengthen a pre-existing relationship rooted in colonialism, post-colonial imperialism, or homegrown power struggles between dominant and subordinate groups, deepening racialization. Frequently, a dominant group uses culturally based interactions and practices surrounding animals to label a subordinate “other” group as “savage” or uncivilized, further reinforcing the power/control relations between those groups (Elder, Wolch, & Emel, 1998). For example, some cultural groups exhibit practices that lie on the extremes of Western cultural norms. Particularly
offensive to mainstream Americans is the consumption of companion animals who are socially constructed as “pets.” Conflict also arises when animals considered noble or revered for their intelligence and grace become food items. Other activities deemed cruel by most Westerners include recreational pursuits involving harm to particular animals. Ignoring the myriad harms done to animals in the West, Westerners may point to such practices to exotize distant peoples and racialize cultural or ethnic groups such as international immigrants. Interestingly, such racialization may stimulate a heightened cultural relativism surrounding animal practices, allowing the marginalized group to legitimize their own animal practices as well as those of diverse others (Wolch, Lassiter, & Brownlow, 2000).

To date, few researchers have considered how cultural differences in attitudes toward animals might contribute to racialization or, in turn, how the experience of such racialization might reshape attitudes toward the animal practices of other social groups. Research on attitudes toward animals had its beginnings in the late 1970s and focused on measuring the strength of attitudes, the design of appropriate scales, and on testing people’s scientific knowledge about animals (Kellert & Berry, 1980; Kellert, 1984). The roles of demographic variables such as ethnicity and cultural background, however, have not been considered in any detail, a significant omission as animal related practices and attitudes often are used as cultural markers to define groups internally, among members, as well as by others external to the group.

Some investigators have begun to explore links between culture-based animal practices and racialization. Research in this area has focused on how being placed on the other side of the human-animal divide has dehumanized minorities and how this construction of them as “other” serves as justification for their mistreatment (Spiegel, 1988; Sibley, 1995). Emel (1995, p. 708), suggests that “representation and identification are instrumental to oppression and resistance” and that “how we represent and identify ourselves and others, whether they be animals or people, means everything for what and how we feel or don’t feel.” More recently, research has focused on how understanding of other culture groups and their attitudes and practices toward animals may lead to animal-linked racialization and that this, in turn, may work to perpetuate and sustain power relations between dominant and subordinate groups (Elder et al., 1998).
Thus, a dominant group may misunderstand cultural practices and attitudes toward animals expressed by a minority group and may view the practices as harmful, or inappropriate, and target these groups for animal rights campaigns. This lack of understanding may further exacerbate the problem of racialization.\(^3\)

**Racialization of Filipinos in the United States and Los Angeles**

Filipino immigrants to the United States are unique in that from 1898-1946, the Philippine Islands were a U.S. territory and residents were thus considered “American wards” (Almirol, 1985). In addition to establishing military bases in the Philippines, the United States also instituted a nationwide public education system, utilizing Anglo teachers and emphasizing English (Ong, Bonacich, & Cheng, 1994). Further promulgating cultural ties, the United States Navy recruited Filipinos during the first quarter of the twentieth century (Allen & Turner, 1997). Thus, most Filipino immigrants were familiar with American culture and norms before their move to the United States. However, like other ethnic minorities, Filipino immigrants found that they were segregated from native-born whites, routinely denied service in restaurants and other public facilities, prohibited from owning or leasing land, and legally forbidden from participating in inter-racial marriages, specifically, with Caucasians (Takaki, 1989).

Filipino migration to the United States occurred in three waves and was distinctly gendered. The initial wave arrived prior to the 1930s and consisted of young male agricultural and domestic workers. The second wave, following World War II, consisted of predominantly male agricultural workers imported to replace Japanese farm-workers interned during and after the war. The third and largest wave, mostly women and professionals, arrived post 1965 after passage of the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act Amendment, which allowed for greater numbers of immigrants but favored families of naturalized U.S. citizens and professionals.

Simultaneously, with the passage of the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act, the Philippine economy faltered, particularly after the election of Ferdinand Marcos as President of the Philippines and his subsequent declaration of martial law. Because of these events, approximately two-thirds of Filipino
immigrants arriving after 1965 were well-educated professionals, predominantly doctors, nurses, lawyers, and accountants (Almirol, 1985). This resultant “brain-drain,” along with high rates of extreme poverty perpetuated a downward economic spiral that continues unabated. On the environmental front, practices such as dynamite and cyanide fishing, deforestation, and collection of endangered species for profit are on the rise (Singh, 1996; Haribon Foundation, 1999; Ghosh, 1999). Thus, political and economic conditions coupled with environmental degradation continue to provide impetus for large-scale Filipino migration to the United States. The impact of this migration is evident in Los Angeles where in 1990, according to census data, 76% of Filipinos residing in the city were foreign born. A disproportionate number of the 76% were highly skilled (Ong et al., 1994).

In 2000, there were more than 918,000 Filipinos in California. Yet, the Filipino community is often invisible on the Southern California landscape. This could be attributed to their historical ties to the United States and Spain (i.e. language, religion, Hispanic surnames). In addition, Filipinos come from a culturally diverse country and differentiate among themselves, especially as to region of origin and religion. These factors have led to fragmented settlement patterns and the absence of a geographically identifiable community comparable to Los Angeles’ Chinatown, or Little Tokyo, or the Chinese “ethnoburb” of the San Gabriel Valley (Allen & Turner, 1997; Li, 1997). Instead, small Filipino enclaves have emerged in downtown Los Angeles, Carson, West Long Beach, Oxnard, and, more recently, inner suburbs with high shares of Filipino residents in Silver Lake, Glassell Park, and Eagle Rock (see Figure 2).

Despite being perhaps the most easily assimilated of Asian groups into Western society, Filipinos still face prejudice, the most glaring example of which is economic exclusion. Filipino immigrants have a higher level of educational attainment than the population of the United States as a whole and often are far more proficient in English when compared with other immigrant groups. Yet, frequently they work in positions for which they are over-qualified and often are paid less than their Anglo or Japanese counterparts (the exception is Filipina nurses, who are paid comparably to Anglo nurses) (Ong & Azores, 1994). Another example of this exclusion is the long-standing debate over whether the United States should recognize Filipino World War II veterans and afford them benefits commensurate to those of U.S. veterans.
Figure 2
Filipinos also suffer from more overt forms of discrimination based on cultural difference such as those linked to contrasting customs involving nature-society relations. Specifically, certain animal-related cultural practices continue to exacerbate racial intolerance of Filipinos (and other Asian groups) by Anglos, especially the practice of treating dogs as food animals. For example, in a recent survey of attitudes toward marine wildlife conducted in Los Angeles, more than a third of Asian-Pacific Islander respondents reported feeling looked down upon because of their animal practices, the animals they ate, pet-keeping habits, and animal training practices (Wolch, Griffith, Lassiter & Zhang, 2001).

**Organizing the Filipina Focus Group**

To gain a better understanding of race-relations and links between attitudes toward animals and racialization, we designed and conducted a series of focus groups with low-income women of diverse race/ethnic background in Los Angeles. We chose a focus group methodology because it encourages participants to interact with one another and express their ideas in a relatively casual setting. This setting often aids an investigator in obtaining information that might not be forthcoming in a more formal atmosphere or revealed in a standardized survey. Thus, this technique is well suited to the task of clarifying issues of culture and race/ethnicity and identifying the socio-economic contexts of attitude formation. With respect to our selection of low-income women (as opposed to more mixed focus groups), prior research has revealed significant differences in attitudes toward animals when gender and class are taken into consideration (Munro, 2001; Lockwood, 1999; Kellert, 1996; Driscoll, 1995). In particular, critical texts from Merchant (1980) to Adams and Donovan (1995) have explored gender differences in attitudes, differences that have shown up with some degree of consistency in the empirical research on attitudes toward animals (Kellert & Berry, 1980, p. 111; Kellert, 1999, p. 103). With exceptions, however, women’s attitudes have only occasionally been the focus of this research (Driscoll, 1987, p. 32; Herzog et al., 1991, p. 190). Therefore, we restricted participation in our focus groups to those with relatively homogeneous backgrounds, specifically low-income, inner city women of color. Groups thus differed from each other primarily because of race/ethnicity and immigrant status.
Here we describe and analyze a single focus group involving Filipina women, recruited through a Filipino American community-based organization and convened in central Los Angeles. The group consisted of nine low-income Filipina women residing in central Los Angeles, the majority of whom were born in the Philippines and ranged in age from 22 to 59 years (see Table 1). Without exception, and reflecting recent Filipino migration to the United States, all of the women had some college education, two-thirds possessing college degrees. Four of the immigrant women were from Manila; only two of the women had originated in non-urban areas of the Philippines, and neither one was from ethnic tribal regions of the country. During the session, participants were very open, forthcoming and made light of many of the more controversial topics, often joking and laughing among themselves. This perhaps was an attempt to diffuse any uncomfortable feelings brought on by the nature of the discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>L.A. Residency in years (followed by city/state of birth)</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Type of animal experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gloria</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23 (Los Angeles, CA)</td>
<td>College Degree</td>
<td>Lab, Pets, Farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22 (Los Angeles, CA)</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>Pets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5 (Omaha, NE)</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>Pets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruby</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10 (Manila, Philippines)</td>
<td>College Degree</td>
<td>Pets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadine</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>11 (Manila, Philippines)</td>
<td>College Degree</td>
<td>Pets, Farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>7 (Manila, Philippines)</td>
<td>College Degree</td>
<td>Pets, Farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorna</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1 (Manila, Philippines)</td>
<td>College Degree</td>
<td>Pets, Farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vera</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>19 (Philippines)</td>
<td>College Degree</td>
<td>Pets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>18 (Philippines)</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>No pets, but animals in home</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants were asked a range of questions regarding their general environmental beliefs, traditional forms of human-animal interaction, attitudes toward animals, and knowledge, perceptions and behavioral interaction patterns. Specific questions dealt with: experiences with marine animals, including collection of these animals for food; family traditions of raising animals
for food and hunting/fishing; elimination of predators; experiences with animals in the wild; recreational activities involving animals; superstitions; religious teachings about animals; cross-cultural changes in attitudes regarding animals; cultural relativism; responsibility for animal stewardship; and gender differences toward animals.

The discussion was tape-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using QSR NUD*IST, a qualitative, non-numerative, research computer program designed for textual and narrative analysis. This program was chosen because it enables researchers to evaluate and cross-reference data from multiple focus groups; the Filipina focus group analyzed here was one of a larger number conducted with women from other race/ethnic backgrounds. Thus, although the sample size of the Filipina group is relatively small, the total number of participants in all focus groups was much larger. Moreover, the focus group itself lasted more than two hours. This amount of discussion generated a larger set of statements on varied topics, necessitating the use of an analytic tool enabling subject-specific and respondent-specific statements to be tracked and compared. Detailed notes taken concurrently with tape-recording during the focus groups identified speakers. Each focus group member received a number, and note-takers then attributed dialog to each speaker. Immediately following the focus group, tapes were transcribed and notes were reviewed for accuracy. Text was coded, assigned to a particular conceptual “node,” and subsequently processed creating an “index tree” (see Figure 3). In this case, nodes tended to fall into one of three “umbrella” categories: (a) practices, (b) perceptions and knowledge, and (c) values and attitudes.

**Controversial Animal Practices**

Certain animal-related practices of Filipinos have raised criticism in the West. These include destructive fishing techniques, recreational pursuits, and culinary traditions, specifically, dog eating. This is particularly significant given that, in a national survey, dogs ranked as the most favored domestic animal species (Kellert, 1996). Whereas the topic of controversial fishing practices (such as dynamite and cyanide fishing) did not arise during the focus group session, it is noteworthy because of the amount of attention it has received from Westerners and its harmful effect on marine ecosystems (Barber & Pratt, 1998; Broad & Cavanagh, 1993; Singh, 1996).
Figure 3. Coding Tree

- Basic information
  - Age, Education, Animal experience, LA and US residency, Member of animal organization

- Practices
  - Individual Family, friends
    - Cultural
      - Cross-cultural
        - Religion
        - Recreation
        - Food
        - Service
        - Companion
        - Elimination
        - Other
        - Gendered

- Perceptions/knowledge
  - Individual Family, friends
    - Cultural
      - Cross-cultural
      - Gender

- Values/attitudes
  - Individual Family, friends
    - Cultural
      - Cross-cultural
      - Gender

- Marine
  - Practice
    - Perceptions/knowledge
    - Values/attitudes
    - Experience

- Animal construction
  - Domestic
  - Wild
  - Food/non-food

- Anthropocentric
  - Negativistic
    - Dominionistic
    - Stewardship
  - Utilitarian
    - Aesthetic
    - Animal welfare
    - Other

- Biocentric
  - Environmentalistic
    - Naturalistic
    - Stewardship
  - Animal rights
  - Other
These practices could result in racialization of Filipinos, as hypothesized by Elder et al. (1998, p. 87), who argue “[w]ith globalization of environmental degradation and the rise of international efforts to prevent species extinction, local groups may risk racialization by virtue of animal practices occurring in their ancestral or natal-origin countries or regions . . .”

Racialization and economic marginalization are distinctive processes, although often they go hand-in-hand. It is clearly not possible from our research to supply concrete evidence of any economic marginalization that might be associated with the racialization of Filipinos specifically because of real or perceived animal practices such as reduced wages, housing discrimination, or other forms of economic exclusion. However, our focus group participants did report feeling stigmatized or looked down upon because of the association between certain controversial animal practices and Filipino cultural traditions (whether or not they, as individuals, engaged in such practices).

During the focus group, discussion revolved around culture-based animal-related practices surrounding food and recreation. In particular, there was dialogue concerning dog-eating, the treatment of certain food-animals prior to slaughter, and cockfighting.

*Dog-Eating*

Every culture has its own ideas about which animals it considers acceptable for human consumption. In the Philippines, this set of “food” animals includes dogs. The use of dogs as a source of sustenance dates to ancient times and was in fact, prevalent among many different societies on all continents (Cansdale, 1953; Simoons, 1961; Titcomb, 1969; Farb & Armelagos, 1980; Tannahill, 1988; Bustad, 1991; Toussaint-Samat, 1992; Coe, 1994; Milliet, 1995; Thurston, 1996; Hawaiian Humane Society, 1997; Kittler, 1998). The more recent social construction by Euro-Americans of dogs as pets proves problematic for those who consider them a food item. Dog-eating is reportedly common in China, the Koreas, and the Philippines (Cordero-Fernando, 1977, p. 420; Fernandez, 1986; Tannahill, 1988; Toussaint-Samat, 1992; Kittler, 1998) Comments obtained from our focus group corroborated this for the Philippines. Indeed, dog-eating also is represented as part of popular Filipino culture, examples of which can be found in the recent movie *Azucena*, and in Hagedorn
(1990). In addition, several members confirmed that the practice of dog eating continues among Filipinos living in the United States.

The issue of dog-eating among Filipinos is complex and, as established by focus-group members and documentation (Cordero-Fernando, 1977; Fernandez, 1986), is tied to tradition, religious beliefs and economics. Though many Filipinos eat dog, it is not a universal practice either in the Philippines or among Filipinos living in the United States. Likewise, the consumption of dog meat also varies according to class and area of residence (Simoons, 1994; Gibson, 1986; Dozier, 1966). Focus group members specifically identified Mindanao, Northern Philippine tribal areas, and some urban areas as locales where dog meat is consumed.

Historically, dishes prepared from dog have played a significant role in the celebrations and feasts of Filipino people. This continues today with the presence of dog-meat dishes on the menu at many weddings and christenings. In fact, this is so commonplace that recipes for “Dog-stew: Wedding Style”, are available on the Internet (see Figure 4; MasterCook, 1996). Just as with meat from pigs and chickens, dog-meat is a major source of protein for some Filipinos, especially the urban poor and those living in rural areas (Manipon, 1998, p. 1). In rural areas, dogs are commonly raised expressly for food. In cities, however, Azucena (dogmeat), considered a delicacy and prized as an aphrodisiac, is found in restaurants or sold by street vendors (Anonymous, 1999a; Manipon, 1998). Among the urban poor, consumption of dogmeat is more opportunistic. According to several sources, dogs killed by passing vehicles are “automatic candidates for the dining table” and stray dogs are fair game for urban dog eaters (Cordero-Fernando, 1977, p. 419; Manipon, 1998, p. 1; Secter, 1982).

Though common, dog-eating in the Philippines has drawn international attention and criticism. In the early 1980s, the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) launched a campaign to protest the treatment of dogs in the Philippines (International Fund for Animal Welfare, 1999). Also during that time, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, after viewing pictures of dogs being prepared for slaughter in the Philippines, publicly criticized the practice, which prompted then Philippine President Marcos to threaten prohibition. However, this threat did little other than to raise the price of dogmeat and force sales underground (Secter, 1982).
In 1998, the practice of dog-eating in the Philippines was outlawed by the first Animal Welfare Act ever instituted in that country. However, this legislation contains many easily exploitable loopholes. Consequently, it is not unusual to find dogmeat openly sold in specialty shops in Manila, Luzon, and surrounding rural areas. For example, the law provides exceptions when the killing is “done as part of the religious rituals of an established religion or sect or a ritual required by tribal or ethnic custom,” thus allowing violators broad latitude. Despite the loopholes, there has been some tacit enforce-

Figure 4. Recipe For Stewed Dog

Stewed Dog (Wedding Style)

3 kg Dog meat, * see note  
1 1/2 c Vinegar  
60 Peppercorns, crushed  
12 Cloves garlic, crushed  
1/2 c Cooking oil  
6 c Onion, sliced  
3 c Tomato sauce  
10 c Boiling water  
6 c Red pepper, cut into strips  
6 Pieces bay leaf  
1 t Tabasco sauce  
1 1/2 c Liver spread, ** see note  
1 Whole fresh pineapple, cut 1/2 inch thick

1. First, kill a medium sized dog, then burn off the fur over a hot fire. 2. Carefully remove the skin while still warm and set aside for later (may be used in other recipes) 3. Cut meat into 1” cubes. Marinate meat in mixture of vinegar, peppercorn, salt and garlic for 2 hours. 4. Fry meat in oil using a large wok over an open fire, then add onions and chopped pineapple and saute until tender. 5. Pour in tomato sauce and boiling water, add green pepper, bay leaf and tobasco. 6. Cover and simmer over warm coals until meat is tender. Blend in liver spread and cook for additional 5-7 minutes.

* you can substitute lamb for dog. The taste is similar, but not as pungent.  
** smooth liver pate will do as well. Suggested Wine: San Miguel Beer  
Posted to MC-Recipe Digest V1 #

Recipe by: Joe Sweeney  
From: Sweeney  
Date: Sun, 8 Dec 1996 20:30:38 +0800 (HKT)

Yield: 30
ment. In January 1999, Philippine police seized 880 pounds of dogmeat bound for restaurants (Anonymous, 1999a). The following month they seized approximately 1,320 pounds (Anonymous, 1999b), further evidence that, although illicit, the practice continues. Though sworn to uphold the law, some officials are hesitant to prosecute law-breakers or will seek clemency for offenders. Enforcement is difficult because of the widespread involvement of Filipinos from all economic backgrounds, prompting one provincial prosecutor to predict that the law will become dormant (Anonymous, 1998).

Focus-group members characterized dogmeat as a predominantly male food preference and thus spoke of dogeating as a gendered practice, an observation supported by Simoons (1994, p. 222). Participants indicated that it was common for men to eat dog while drinking beer and likened it to “beer and nuts”. Pulutan (fried dog), is a popular dish and is customarily consumed with alcohol, in “drinking sessions,” while raw dog-meat is consumed with gin (Manipon, 1998; Gibson, 1986, 152). It is widely believed among Filipinos that eating dog testicles increases male virility, reportedly making one feel more manly (Manipon, 1998; Secter, 1982).

Several focus-group participants maintained that Westerners have a condescending attitude toward Filipinos because of their practice of dog-eating. As one participant elaborated: “when people hear . . . Filipinos eat dogs, they like thumb their nose, or, they look down on you, like, ‘Why do you guys eat dogs?’ You know, they don’t understand that . . . it’s part of the culture . . .”

In an attempt to explain the contrasting cultural construction of dogs, another participant stated: “it’s just here in America that they consider them pets. . . . That they start imparting like these attitudes that ‘Oh, that’s wrong’”. Clearly, the participants were aware of the basis for the discrimination to which they are subjected.

Filipino-Americans also suffer from cultural discrimination in the form of time-space displacement, as described by Elder et al. (1998). In this instance, controversial animal practices of their homeland are attributed to Filipinos living in the United States, further fueling racial anxieties. For example, several focus-group members brought up the Emmy Awards in 1998. During the televised awards program, emcee Joan Rivers (an American comedienne)
signed off for a commercial break by referring to Filipino dog eating. “We’re going to a commercial break, so you have time to feed your dog, or wash your dog or, if you’re a Filipino, you can eat your dog!” That national television accepts this type of discriminatory comment is evidence that these animal-linked racial stereotypes still endure.

**Treatment of Food Animals**

Westerners have also chastised Filipinos for the methods used to prepare certain animals for slaughter. Because food preference is culture-based, the way in which food is prepared may become the basis for racialization (Wolch et al., 2000; Emel & Wolch, 1995). According to Elder et al. (1998, p. 83), “taboos about which animals bodies to eat (and which body parts) are common amongst contemporary peoples, with the result that outsider groups not observing such taboos may be viewed with disgust and disdain.” One focus group member, Wendy, described how Westerners in the United States reacted when they saw “Chocolate Meat,” a popular ethnic Filipino food: “when you eat it here, everyone just kind of like looks at it . . .” This food received its name because the pork meat is simmered in blood until it takes on a dark color, resembling chocolate. Also referred to as Dinuguan (pork meat and intestines, simmered in blood), this dish as well as others containing ingredients such as duck embryos, tripe and various internal organs, is likely to be unfamiliar and possibly repulsive to many Westerners. Filipino restaurants in the United States carry such food (Hansen, 1989).

Discussion of another controversial culinary practice arose during the focus group. Some rural and tribal Filipinos commonly beat the animal they are going to eat just before killing it. They use this practice in the preparation of both fowl and dog. Further research into the subject corroborated their assertions that the practice does indeed exist. One recipe for preparing fowl requires the beating be done with a light stick, to prevent the breaking of any bones, while another simply calls for the animal to be beaten to death. The preparation of dog takes a little longer, according to this source: nine hours, in which the tied-up dog is beaten with a small cane (Hamilton-Paterson, 1996). One justification for this practice is that it is based on practicality. Beating the animal is said to cause the blood to coagulate, resulting in less blood loss.
during slaughter and also tenderizing the meat, producing a “flushed, creamy texture” (Hamilton-Paterson, 1996; Daoey, 1999). Not all recipes call for this type of preparation. Some call for the swift killing of the animal, for instance the clubbing of a dog with a blunt object, said to take three blows before the animal expires. Yet another method requires the live dog be hung upside down while its throat is cut (Manipon, 1998; Hamilton-Paterson, 1996).

Recreation

Filipinos also may be racialized for their recreational activities involving animals, many of which are linked to gender and revolve around gaming/gambling. Such animal-related activities usually involve two animals of the same species pitted against each other, a situation that often results in the death of one of the combatants. Examples given by focus-group members include cockfighting, spider-wrestling and dog-fighting.

According to the women in the group, cockfighting is a predominantly male activity driven by “machismo.” So ingrained in the culture is this “sport” that President Marcos labeled it “wholesome recreation and amusement.” Despite widespread poverty in the Philippines, the popularity of cockfighting has not waned, and every Sunday finds Filipino men from diverse economic backgrounds drawn together at cockpits to bet on their favorite bird (Fineman, 1986, p. 14; Wallerstein, 1998, p. 14). In rural areas, where money is scarce, fighting cocks are selected from native stock. In large metropolitan areas such as Manila, where the gambling trade is more lucrative, cocks often are imported at great expense from foreign breeders (Henderson, 1999).

Though extremely popular in the Philippines (though not exclusive to the Philippines), cockfighting has resulted in much consternation in the West, especially among animal rights activists. In the United States, many states have passed legislation banning such activities. Ironically, despite such prohibitions of cockfighting, the United States, particularly the southern states, export many of the top fighting birds in the Philippines, often for $1,000 or more per bird (Wallerstein, 1998, p. 14; Henderson, 1999). Meanwhile, the Philippines export neck feathers of the dead gamecocks to the United States to be made into fishing lures (Roces, 1978, p. 1595), because in the United States male chicks are killed soon after birth and do not reach maturity.
Attitudes Toward Animals

In addition to being racialized in part because of their animal practices, Filipinos and other Asians also are distinct with respect to their attitudes toward animals in comparison with other groups (Wolch et al., 2001). Attitudes expressed by focus-group members during the session were overwhelmingly anthropocentric, with much discussion devoted to the utilitarian value of animals. In discussions of their reactions to the attitudes and animal practices of other cultural groups, the women employed cultural relativism as a way to normalize differences, in what appeared to be a strategy designed to resist their own perceived racialization.

Socio-economic conditions in the Philippines have likely played a significant role in the formation of utilitarian attitudes toward animals. Often, animals play multiple roles, and much of the focus-group discussion centered on practices involving animals as both pets and food. Further, there was a consensus among focus-group participants that in the Philippines, animals are raised “for a purpose, not just as pets.” Ana recounted her childhood experience in the Philippines of raising a pet pig that later became a meal: “I remember our pig named Bridgette. She was ready to be killed and I cried, but after that I ate her (laughter). It was so good!”

Another focus-group member, Nadine explained: “In the Philippines, I notice that they raise dogs not just as pets. It’s very common to raise dogs as food too. I mean I think it’s really part of living in that environment.” The women described such a utilitarian view of animals as pragmatic; as Nadine said: “At the end of their service, and they’re [the animals] old . . . they kill their carabao [water buffalo], they use it for food. They [Filipinos] use everything . . . maybe it’s more ecological.” Ana jokingly added “Filipinos are smart, they eat dogs to cope!” Further, the women contended the idea that Filipino cultural practices were cruel to animals. As Wendy proclaimed, “We’re pretty much kind to animals, and then you know, you eat them.”

Several times during the session, participants were quick to point out that dog-eating was “for survival mostly.” Moreover, it is not uncommon for dog owners who are in need of cash, or who would like to get rid of their annoying dogs to sell them to dogeaters, even though they themselves do not eat
dog meat (Manipon, 1998). Lorna explained how she tired of her dog having puppies and therefore gave her to the “people eating dogs.”

I have a dog. I warned her that because I’m so tired of taking care of all the puppies and then giving them away . . . I told her that “you know, this is the fourth time that you gave birth . . . the next time that you get yourself pregnant, I don’t like you (laughter), so I give you away.” And she did [become pregnant] (laughter). My husband gave her to the people eating dogs.

This comment was but one of many exemplifying the utilitarian attitude toward animals shared by members of the focus-group.

Throughout the discussion, a recurring theme was that of the struggle between human needs versus those of animals. Animal rights sentiment was practically non-existent among focus-group members. In fact, many of the women in the group stated that they were unsure as to whether animals had any legal rights in the Philippines. It seems apparent that to take a stand for animal rights in a country in which the people are subjected to extreme poverty is tantamount to denying the needs of the people. This can be seen from a story related by Lorna of how she was baffled that a cousin (residing in the United States) wrote a letter to (then) President Marcos requesting that he ban dog eating:

. . . We are fighting here for our . . . survival here because he is a dictator and you [cousin] should have written a letter, “Marcos you should lift the martial law because you are killing a lot of human beings.” And then you are concerned with the dogs? I mean, we love dogs, but we have to survive first as human beings in this country.

Strikingly, when discussing controversial Filipino attitudes and practices such as dog eating, participants often referred to those who embraced such practices as “they” rather than “we.” In some cases, this usage occurred because they were discussing groups and activities in the Philippines. Although some of the participants were immigrants, most had been in the United States for a long time and could be expected to differentiate people currently living in the Philippines from Filipino-Americans. However, such language also may reveal the deployment of a subtle discursive strategy by which participants might distance themselves from practices that the focus group moderator (an
Anglo) was apt to disapprove. This interpretation is reinforced by, for example, Wendy’s use of “we” when asserting that the Filipinos are kind to animals, but unambiguously, since she goes on to indicate that following kind acts, animals are consumed.

Cultural Relativism as Resistance

Filipinas in our focus group argued for cultural relativism when asked about the controversial animal practices of other non-Anglo race/ethnic groups. One interpretation of this stance is that it constitutes a form of resistance against racialization. By justifying controversial animal practices of other cultures, participants could be implicitly asserting their own right, and the right of their co-ethnics, to culturally based practices. That participants were quick to justify traditional Filipino practices surrounding animals by citing the controversial animal practices of other cultures lends credence to this view. Moreover, participants were especially critical of Western animal practices.

Samantha, for example, challenged the common Anglo sentiment that “other” groups’ animal practices are cruel. She vociferously attacked the abhorrent Western practice of factory farming: “. . . it’s even worse what the huge companies are doing with the chickens in these little boxes . . . their feet grow into the boxes, you know? Which is worse than having them in cages in Chinatown . . .”

The women also pointed out the differences between the United States and the Philippines in relation to how pets are integrated into the social structure, and several members commented on their perception that certain animals in the United States are treated “better than the people.” As Wendy argued, “They overdo it here, though, a lot. When you go to Beverly Hills, you see poodles with bracelets from Tiffany’s or necklaces, stuff like that . . . you won’t see that in the Philippines.”

Despite their criticisms of Western practices, focus-group participants were extremely tolerant of the animal practices of other non-Anglo groups, as evidenced by the assertion of one participant that Mexicans are entitled to continue the controversial tradition of charreada (horse tripping), as a means to preserve their culture. According to Gloria, “[w]ell, I don’t agree in the horse tripping, but I think they have the right to do whatever they want to do.”
In discussing the issue of a Native American group (Makah), granted the right by U.S. courts to hunt gray whales, many focus-group participants applauded the ruling and related this cultural freedom to “empowerment” of the people. Samantha went on to explain, “... if it’s a part of their culture that you’re killing [by banning traditional activities] that’s more like killing the people.”

Other members more directly defended Filipino tribal practices and challenged Western interpretations of progress. Romanticizing the popular construction of natives as living in harmony with nature, the women justified traditional tribal practices. As Nadine argued:

[Tribal Filipinos are] part of the circle, and if you go back to the tribal ways, it’s the right way ... It’s only now that you become modern that it seem[s] ... that circle has been cut off. We don’t hunt anymore. Then we’re not aware of that circle, but it still goes on. We just ask other people to hunt for us.

Certain tribal Filipino practices personally appalled most focus group members. Based on the premise of cultural freedom, however, participants were careful to exonerate those involved. For instance, Lorna related a recent trip to a mountain region in the Philippines in which she was clearly uncomfortable with the practices of the native people but felt she had no right to challenge their customs:

... when I was in the Philippines, I went to the mountain, to the tribal Filipinos and they killed their chicken by beating ... it’s like torturing and they also kill their dogs like that. I mean, ... I’m observing them, but I have no right to tell them that that’s wrong because I have a different point of view ...

Thus, regardless of their personal beliefs, participants almost uniformly asserted the right of all cultures to continue their traditional animal practices.\(^7\)

**Conclusions**

After the controversy surrounding the art exhibit at City Hall in Los Angeles, and the subsequent removal of the banner, the city requested that a representative from the festival committee be present at the exhibit to maintain
“informed dialog” between the artists and the public. To ease the discomfort, the city also conducted a public forum to discuss the controversy. Several days of complaints charging that the removal was tantamount to censorship caused the city to restore the banner. The artist, however, had modified the newly restored banner. Now, it depicted a smiling dog leaping into a swimming pool, as a man in the background barbecues on a grill. Its caption read: “This is America.”

There is a paucity of research into how cultural differences in attitudes toward animals might contribute toward racialization or how such racialization may affect the animal practices and attitudes of other social groups. Further research, particularly in-depth ethnographic studies, will be necessary in order to determine the precise nature of causal relations between racialization and culturally defined animal-practices, and to understand the extent to which cultural relativism is deployed as a subtle form of resistance. Our exploratory focus-group session and secondary research suggest, however, that Filipinos in Southern California perceive that they are racialized due to their culturally based animal practices, in particular the traditional Filipino practice of eating dogs. This is clear from comments of the participants themselves, as well as the controversial City Hall banner that attempted to illuminate this type of racialization and underscore its occurrence, and challenge the dominant Western culture.

People are racialized for a myriad of reasons, most notably for their skin color, but also for their cultural differences. In the West, where racialization reinforces white skin privilege, some key cultural differences involve contrasts in nature-society relations. Los Angeles is a culturally diverse city, yet there is little understanding of this diversity in relation to traditional animal practices, heightening the potential for increasing conflicts and racialization based on cultural practices surrounding animals. Such racialization can prompt the targeted group to employ cultural relativism as a means to legitimize its own animal practices as well as those of diverse others.

Though cultural relativism may be a politically effective strategy of resistance for marginalized human groups, it is often dangerous for animals. For cultural relativism can justify all sorts of violence against them, legitimizing any practice no matter what the cost to the animal in terms of pain and suffering. There is no easy solution to this challenge of balancing respect for cul-
tural difference with the need to defend animals from dire harms. Perhaps only by confronting the subjectivity of animals, and seeing the connections between people and animals rather than the species divide, will we be able to stop the violence toward animals—culture by culture, place by place.

* Marcie Griffith, Jennifer Wolch, and Unna Lassiter, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA).

Notes

1 Correspondence should be sent to Jennifer Wolch, Department of Geography, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA 90089-0255. E-mail: wolch@usc.edu
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2 An example of this is Nájera-Ramírez (1996) who explains how recent negative media portrayals of charreada (the practice of roping the front or hind legs of a galloping horse, causing it to “trip”, for the purposes of entertainment or sport but also causing severe injuries) has reinforced stereotyped notions of Mexicans, while being silent on U.S. rodeo traditions that animal rights activists at least find equally cruel.

3 It is possible that some animal rights groups might elect to target the animal practices of racial/ethnic minorities instead of attacking meat-eating outright, because the latter is too difficult politically. This rationale does not reduce the impacts of such campaigns with respect to their possible racialization effects.

4 Participants received an honorarium of twenty-five dollars to offset any transportation or childcare costs.

5 Prior to the discussions, participants were asked to complete a brief written questionnaire, which allowed us to characterize the groups’ demographic make-up.

6 Names of participants were changed to protect anonymity.

7 In their research on dogmen (men who fight dogs against other dogs), and based on research in deviance, Forsyth and Evans (1998) describe the discursive techniques these men use to justify this ‘sport’. Some of these ‘neutralization techniques’, are similar to those used by the women in our focus group, namely an “appeal to higher loyalties, wherein attachment to smaller groups
takes precedence over attachment to society” and “denial of necessity, in which some actions are unavoidable.” The first identification of these strategies is attributed by Forsyth and Evans to Sykes and Matza (1957) and the second to Minor (1981).

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