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Macario B. Lacbawan

Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, Germany, lacbawan@em.uni-frankfurt.de

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Assembling Barbarity, Dirt, and Violence: A Provisional Note on Food and Social Analysis

Macario B. Lacbawan

Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, Germany
lacbawan@em.uni-frankfurt.de

Abstract: The key to understanding any social phenomenon is to follow how actors tread the social landscape and describe how they form groups, fuse meanings, and create associations with different frames. In this paper, I employ Bruno Latour's reconceptualization of assemblage to trace how NGOs and other actors create assemblages by fusing or defusing dog-eating with discourses on dirt, epidemic, and human rights. More specifically, NGOs such as *LinisGobyerno* and *Animal Kingdom Foundation* (AKF) produce assemblages that align dog-eating with sanitation, violence, and epidemic. Conversely, supporters of the practice try to invert these claims by foregrounding dog-meat consumption as an entitlement that is protected by both local and international legal codes. This paper also engages with previous attempts to analyze dog-eating and their failure to deal with the quotidian ways in which actors bundle the practice with multiple frames. Rather than presupposing how peoples' discursive understanding of food as inflections of deep binary-oppositions, or an epiphenomenon of productive forces, I opine that we must refocus on how actors themselves interpret contentious food practices by following their action in a flattened social world.

Keywords: Assemblage, Northern Philippines, Dog-eating, Food, Bruno Latour, Social Analysis

Each year, around 300,000 dogs are slaughtered for their meat in the Philippines (Yap, 2012). This figure persists despite the presence of a law on animal welfare and a growing protest from both international and local non-government organizations. Instead of bowing to such pressure, the Philippine government has promulgated the Indigenous Peoples Right Act (IPRA, Republic Act No. 8371 (1997), which indirectly recognizes practices of indigenous communities, such as dog-meat eating, as "sacred" cultural heritage. As a result, the existence of two conflicting legal codes (protecting animal rights

vs. cultural rights) has made the consumption of dog meat an ambivalent practice that polarizes Philippine society between those who advocate for animal welfare and groups who lobby for indigenous peoples' rights. As dog-eating is linked to cultural rights and animal welfare, a dominant view explains its contentious nature as an epiphenomenon of how it transgresses state regulations. Unfortunately, such analysis has exclusively couched a highly ambivalent practice within the ambit of legal normativity but fails to recognize the non-legal frames that amplify dog-eating into an issue beyond a judicial script.

The binary-oppositions between law vs. culture and tradition vs. “modernity” have become a ready-made analytic frame that is invoked in dominant analysis on dog-eating.

In this regard, how do we interpret peoples’ reaction to contentious food practices such as dog-eating? How do we understand food without resorting to an elucidation that invokes binarism or an assumed antagonism between heritage and law or culture and social change? In this research, I provide an alternative explanation of how different social actors assemble dog-eating into an object of conflicting symbolic interpretation. More specifically, I analyze published materials on dog-eating to identify how NGOs and other actors create assemblages by fusing or defusing dog-eating with discourses on dirt, epidemic, violence, and human rights. Two specific but interlocking research questions guide my discussion: (a) what are the meanings that key social actors embody toward dog-eating? and (b) how are these meanings assembled and what specific elements are amplified and silenced?

Before I turn to my analysis, I first provide a review of recent discussions on food by noting how scholarship on eating is dominated by competing emphasis on materialism and deep structures. Next, I engage with the concept of assemblage by tapping into the work of Bruno Latour (2005) and present how his core assumptions operate in my discussion. The other half of this paper’s discussion applies this framework by analyzing the fractious issue of dog-meat consumption in Northern Philippines.

Essentialist, Materialist, and Other “-ists”...

There is something peculiar about food that makes it elusive as an object of social analysis. Compared to other social processes (i.e. labor, social movements and revolution) which have preoccupied the interest of scholars, the corporeality and contingency in gastronomy make food and the act of eating difficult to pin down under the purview of abstract analytic frames like class, ideology, hegemony, or even culture. Yet, as in most cases, the quickest path that scholars tread to reach an explanation is to

throw premature accounts that essentialize food as a residual element. As if it is an unknown force that hovers in midair, food scholars tend to pull concepts as explanatory *deus ex machina* and produce either plain tautology or “weak” analysis (Alexander & Smith, 2003). While this delivers merit as a scholarly exercise, it plays with the danger of subsuming a complex phenomenon under one overarching frame. A representative literature of these opposite poles could be gleaned from the works of some of the most prominent scholars in the social anthropology of food like Marshall Sahlins and Marvin Harris.

Omniscient Matter

Contentious food practices have received a fair amount of attention in the social sciences. In anthropology alone, one encounters Marshall Sahlins’ structuralist account of food abhorrence in American cuisine and the efforts of Marvin Harris (1966) to provide a cultural materialist analysis of India’s most revered cow. I will not try to present a review of their works but to emphasize the crucial elements that can be useful in my analysis. To my mind, the study of food in its present form has been experiencing a partial “weakness or paralysis” in view of the dominance of materialist and essentialist explanations.

The former is best captured in Marvin Harris’ long engagement with a materialist brand of anthropology. His works are an anthropological version of Marx’s thesis about the infrastructural base as the genesis of meaning and social practice. In one of his most polemic articles published in *Current Anthropology*, Harris (1966) opined that the sacredness of cow in India is an emergent practice, a consequence of the greater benefits that one accrues from this animal, either in the form of traction or as a source of cheap fuel for domestic use. Accordingly, this “positive function” allows a functional homeostasis where the physical and social environments exist in a symbiotic relationship that is kept in place by the sacred cow complex. To illustrate his claim, Harris enumerated how prohibiting consumption of beef springs from the positive benefits that an Indian farmer generates by not slaughtering his cow. For example, a cow is an

additional traction for hauling, transport, irrigation, and ploughing in a labour extensive agriculture. Cows also provide cheap fuel for domestic consumption in the form of dung while their hide serves as a raw material for India's leather industry. Amidst these "positive" functions, Harris considers the cattle's sacrality as a powerful norm which protects these benefits by culturally prohibiting people not to consume beef. I quote,

...explanation of taboos, customs, and rituals associated with management of Indian cattle be bought in "positive-functioned" and probably "adaptive" processes of the ecological system of which they are a part of, rather than in the influence of Hindu theology. (Harris, 1966, p. 51)

To be fair, Harris' argument must be understood within the larger debate of anthropological practice in the 1970s where the dominance of ethnohistory and neoevolutionary theories has dislodged the role of productive forces as constitutive elements. Fresh from his ethnographic work in Mozambique, Harris has realized that the infrastructural layer of production is fundamental to any understanding of culture. From such an intellectual milieu, Harris tried to resurrect Marxist tradition in anthropology and put forward an argument on how culture is homologous and contingent to its "positive" function. To a large degree, Harris' argument about a cow's favourable function implies that the benefit of eating beef stew is outweighed by the various benefits that a farmer can enjoy by keeping the cattle alive.

Yet, Harris' cultural materialist account comes not without a warning. If we follow his framework to explain dog-eating, we can elucidate how a dog meat provides protein and possibly an ingenious symbolic mechanism to keep a constant supply of food. However, this frame does not account the pivotal role of highly-charged public discourses as equally-influential structures that guide people's decision about their food habit. It falls short, for example, in decoding the racialized and nationalist rhetoric that has played recently in the state-wide prohibition on beef consumption in some Indian states. While we may accept that food taboos have developed out of

utility, Harris' cultural materialism does not provide a convincing framework to engender an explanation about the coercive discourses and frames that have come to mobilize food prohibitions in other societies.

Essentialized Deep Structure of Eating

Another strand that dominates the landscape of food studies presupposes the presence of rigid structures. These forms of analysis spring from Marshal Sahlins' argument about the existence of deep structures which regulate human behaviour. For Sahlins (1990), culture is akin to a deep structure that controls human behaviour, a pre-existing structure that is coercive and autonomous but historically contingent. While it is contingent, it has an enormous impact as it guides how people understand their world. To demonstrate his argument, Sahlins tried to explain the aversion towards dog-eating in American society as a replication of codes that order animals in a classificatory pattern.

For him, the primary reason why Americans do not recognize a dog as an edible meat stems from its role as a recipient of human emotion. Unlike chicken, pig, and turkey, dogs stay at the fringe of American diet as they are domesticated to become an object of human emotion. Sahlins (1990) believed that a binary opposition between object-subject is modulated into another grouping which differentiates internal from external self. Since dogs are objects of human emotion, they become part of man's internal self, either as pets or as friends. And as they are extensions of the human self, consuming dog-meat is tantamount to cannibalism. On the contrary, it is permissible to enjoy pork steaks and chicken stew since these animals are externalized and domesticated for consumption. Quoting his own words,

The distinction between 'inner' and 'outer' thus duplicates within the animal the differentiation drawn between edible and tabu species, the whole making up a single logic on two planes with the consistent implication of a prohibition on cannibalism. It is this symbolic logic that organizes demands. (Sahlins, 1990, p. 99)

A parallel cultural code inflects the disgust over the eating of innards or internal organs. Consuming pig intestine, liver, and kidney often produce a sense of horror as they signify the other side of edible-inedible/inner self-outer object binaries. The preference for external parts (i.e. meat and fat) over innards emerges from how Americans mark animals in relation to human body parts. This means that the inner-outer binary informs how “we (Americans) conceive our innermost selves as our true selves” (Sahlins, 1990, p. 99) and anything external can be eaten. Therefore, animal organs, such as liver, intestines, and kidneys, are not different from human liver, intestines, and kidneys and eating them is synonymous to consuming the innards of another human being or the internal organ of your own family member. Sahlins then claimed that dog-eating is cannibalism.

Can the pet vs. food binary explain our case or must we subject our analysis by assuming the quintessential presence of deep structures? For one, there are clear drawbacks in Sahlins’ account of dog-eating, which could be attributed to his close affinity with structuralism’s predilection for binarism. More than this, the complexity of American diet is difficult to elucidate by simply deploying a Saussurean or Levi-Strauss-inspired structuralist approach. If we read the prohibition as an inflection of internal-external or subject-object binary, we might fail to interrogate how internal organs are made into popular cuisines (i.e. pig’s feet, goose liver) or account the diachronic transformation of guts into a soul food associated with America’s Black community. Similarly, a closer look at the function of dogs in Philippine society would render such binary weak. Dogs have always been utilized not simply as pets, but more importantly as sacrificial animals in death rituals or in rites to avert witchcraft. The binary becomes conceptually irrelevant as dogs could be construed both as a pet and as food.

Above all, while the strength of Sahlins’ framework in elucidating the role of competing structures allows for an alternative reading of food practices like dog-eating, it fails to account the processual unfolding of meaning as it presupposes an *a priori* existence of deep structures. Such a tendency re-echoes a severe form of essentialist stance (Fuchs, 2005) or

an illustrative example of downward conflationism (Archer, 2000). Although he is able to provide an alternative to Harris’ materialism, Sahlins had nevertheless committed the same mistake by presupposing an unavoidable presence of universal structures that short-circuit social phenomenon as an inflection of binary-oppositions. Are there any possible alternatives to ameliorate the weaknesses in Harris’ and Sahlins’ explanations? In the following section, I will turn to my own work and revisit my analysis for some answers.

Weakness in the Strong Program: A Failed Alternative?

Explaining contentious phenomenon such as dog-eating needs an analytic framework which recognizes the conjunctural contingencies that pepper the banter among involved social actors. In this regard, the analytic tools of the *Strong Program* in cultural sociology, which borrows its concepts from symbolic anthropology and structuralism (Alexander & Smith, 2003), provides novel ways to elucidate the problematic function of cultural structures. By emphasizing on an old assumption about the universality of binaries, the Strong Program sees social analysis as a “social psychoanalysis” (p. 4) of how public meaning is an articulation of deep structures. The stress on structures recycles an old idea of an autonomous binary codes that autonomously alters social reality (Durkheim, 1965; Levi-Strauss, 1963). As such, in the Strong Program, the independence of economic sphere as the foundation of meaning and structure do not hold a permanent influence over superstructure because collective codes and public discourses are considered independent social facts that impose coercive effect over human affairs (Durkheim, 1982).

In my previous work, I have argued for an analysis that transposes the Strong Program of cultural sociology into food studies by taking into account how ambiguity is an epiphenomenon of competing legal binaries that separately advocate for the protection of animal welfare and recognition of dog-eating as a cultural heritage (Lacbawan, 2014). In that research, I unpacked

the meaning-structures that inform the contested food practice of eating dogs in the Philippines. By employing the structural hermeneutics of Strong Program, I analyzed the interaction of meanings employed by two groups of social actors: animal welfare advocates and supporters of cultural rights. The debate, however diverse, is informed by binary oppositions that frame dog-eating in a polarized image. On the one hand, the animal welfare group considers dog-eating as a violation of animal rights and an insignia of barbarism. On the other hand, the practice is treated as a sacred component of ritual that has spiraled into a national symbol of Filipino culture since the 1970s. As a result, the antagonism of these legal principles has thrown dog-eating into a contemporary illustration of cultural ambiguity, or a liminal marker that is host to conflicting notions about heritage and identity in the Philippines.

Unlike a powerist or class-based analysis, the Strong Program emphasizes the autonomy of cultural structures as constitutive elements in the distribution of power and resources. In this way, the fractious issue over dog-eating results from the clash of different cultural notions of food and never an exclusive outcome of how Filipinos break legal codes that protect animal welfare. Specifically, competing views of sacrality and dirt are utilized to invigorate the social banter among NGOs. What emerges from such an analysis are an innovative fusion of structuralism and a hermeneutically-driven account of how diverging meanings are amplified and determined by deep structures. Nevertheless, the Strong Program does not appear without a caveat. While its strength in explaining the role of competing structures allows for an alternative reading of food practices like dog-eating, its promise of capturing processes of symbolic interpretation is straight-jacketed by simply invoking Durkheim's binarism as foundational structure of all human interactions. Moreover, while I have outlined the nuances of how dog-eating is strategically truncated as an ambivalent icon of different frames, a recent re-reading of my empirical materials has revealed several elements that I missed in my previous work; elements that find no coherence when interpreted as a reflection of the antagonism of culture and animal welfare. These

slippages from binaries will comprise the whole argument of this paper.

More than what I have discussed as an inherent lack in my work, the weakness also lies in the predilection to forward an assumption about the nature of food even before the conduct of an analysis. I argue that this tendency has brought more problems than provide answers to the works of Marvin Harris and Marshall Sahlins, including myself. To commence an investigation on food by subsuming its character to productive forces or deep structures runs the risk of an incomplete, if not, tautological explanation. Again, I do not completely discredit the novelty of a class-based or a materialist analysis. But to start an inquiry that seeks to "verify" the existence of such analytic concepts in the empirical world delivers an incomplete work. To subject food as homologous to productive forces or as derivatives from structures denies the creative (or destructive) acts through which individuals give or defuse meanings. By approaching deductively social analysis with a predetermined assumption about the subject, one fails to observe interactions that do not confirm his analytic framework. For instance, Marvin Harris has unwittingly turned a blind eye to cultural codes that lend sacrality upon India's cattle while Marshall Sahlins is incapacitated to deal with the diachronic transformation of internal organs into popular cuisines.

Assembling Eating: Towards an Alternative

How then must we study food or any social elements if we do not start with analytic assumptions? Do we simply abandon concepts such as class and ideology and dive into our analysis without tools to help us wade through the complexity of the social world? How do we account dog-eating without jumping to binaries or to commit analytic violence? In this section, I want to extend my discussion and explore the concept of assemblage in Bruno Latour's work and come up with a more convincing argument about its applicability to dog-eating.

An enduring legacy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1988) lied in their assumption about the

ontological nature of the social world as *rhizomatic*. This means that society is only amenable to explanation by allowing multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points and not subsuming causality to binarism or to a definite entity. Contrary to Levi-Strauss' binarism or Harris' material functionality, Deleuze and Guattari (1988) painted a rhizomatic image of the social world in which actions and structures do not sit at an opposite pole trying to determine the path of the other. Instead, like a rhizome, human interaction moves into different directions that contingently shift in focus and orientation without following a specific recipe of action. Any attempt at elucidating social reality must commence by looking at points of connection between semiotic chains, power organization and the immediate circumstances of social struggle. In this model, culture and society are like surfaces that spread to all possible directions, filling in fissures and carving their own niche. They are maps of a wide array of forces and influences with no beginning or end. Conceiving the world as a rhizome does not necessarily evoke an image of a social field where all imaginable forms and things exist in a chaotic relationship. Rather, multiple elements are gathered into a single context or alignment (Li, 2007) that attempts to prescribe intended effects—productive, destructive, or informatics. The process of aligning or the production of points of convergence is what constitutes an *assemblage*. Quoting their words,

In a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata, and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification. Comparative rates of flow on these lines produce phenomena of relative slowness and viscosity, or, on the contrary, of acceleration and rupture. All this, lines and measurable speeds constitutes an *assemblage*. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 3)

Relatedly, the concept of assemblage as a non-hierarchical line of articulation and alignment has informed Latour's attempt to put forward a new "sociology of the social" which is predicated on an effort to explain the networks of interaction or trace the social world by following "the actors themselves"

(Latour, 2005, p. 12). From Deleuze's and Guattari's original conception of assemblage as lines or nodes, Latour believed that sociological explanation has the ability to catch individuals by following their traces (Luckhurst, 2006). An investigation must capture,

...individual with their often wild innovations in order to learn from them what the collective existence has become in their hands, which methods they have elaborated to make it fit together, which accounts could best define the new associations that they have been forced to establish. (Latour, 2005, p. 12)

This implies that one must start by following the network or the twist and turns of actors' movement and emphasize how they form groupings or assemble diverse discourses and meanings into one association. Assemblage then is the process through which social actors, in a network of relation with other actors, fuse, defuse, and refuse meanings and discourses into coherent lines of articulations and justifications (Boltanski & Thevenot, 2006). This network of relations is composed of different actors (or actants in Latour's word) who forge and break alliance and association to fulfill their claims. Each of them tries to convince other by expanding the network of relationship while building coherent lines of articulations or durable assemblages (Spinuzzi, 2008). In short, an assemblage is one that is built from intersecting actors whose end goal is to convince others by expanding their network of supporters. In every attempt to form coherent lines of articulation, objects, individuals, and social institutions win acceptance of a distinct form of knowledge or claim (Latour, 2005).

In this paper, I argue that the debate over dog-eating in the Philippines springs from competing attempts at creating durable assemblages out of multiple frames and meanings. These alignments endeavor to propose and deify a horizon of meaning or an order of justification (Forst & Gunter, 2011) from which the practice of dog-eating must be understood. In such a horizon, the role of dog is spelled out and the boundary that separates accepted and an anomalous account of dog-eating is enumerated to its minute detail. Hence, the emphasis on assemblage points to

an analysis of how dog-eating is contingent to the active process of producing alignment or conjuring order out of “ensembles of heterogeneous elements” (Ong & Collier, 2005, p. 5). Each of these attempts at assemblage tries to silence opposing ideas and create a discursive boundary within which dog-eating must be approached.

Latour’s definition is underpinned by a fundamental assumption about the nature of human interaction. At its core is the principle of generalized symmetry where entities in an assemblage have to be treated equally by describing them in the same terms. Certainly, differences are indelible elements in society but they are only realized and generated in the network of relations. There has to be no *a priori* order relation as sociological investigation should not be tied to an almost clichéd framing of society from “structural” or “interactionist” account or to customize tools of analysis that would render different means to interrogate various elements separately (Latour, 2005). How does the principle of symmetry fit to my overall project? In contrast to how social action is elucidated in other sociological traditions by deductively adopting an analytic focus (i.e. class, ideology, discourse, culture), I want to launch my investigation by tracing how NGOs and other social actors try to build assemblages out of various meanings and frames to dog-eating. More specifically, I am putting forward an important image of action as a highly contingent process. That is, peoples’ engagement with dog-eating should not be easily interpreted as a residue of abstract external realities but rather an on-going project which results from the interactions of various elements. Interpreting dog-eating as a project of assembling signifies the active process where individuals or social groups orders a gamut of elements to construct an interpretation.

Briefly, I explore the ways how specific assemblages on dog-eating are deployed and created into a particular configuration that keeps on changing or adaptive to contingent forces. Social actors build assemblages by bundling one meaning to another and shifting their strategy according to the nature of the problem. My main argument is to situate the debate over dog-eating as a result of conflicting attempts at assembling various elements by diverse actors into

enduring assemblages. These assemblages invoke different means of linking often-conflicting elements into an encompassing alignment through 1) appealing to public health, 2) spatial designation of sanitation, 3) projection of a violent eater, 4) aestheticization of eating, 5) external, and 6) internal domestication of food entitlement. I will explain each of these elements in the following discussion.

Methodology of/in Assembling

Despite the complexity of the issue, there are identifiable players that hold dominant voice in the debate on dog-eating. While groups who oppose dog-eating enjoy extensive social capital, those who advocate for dog-eating as a heritage or as a cultural practice has no institutionalized alliance that can devote time and energy to the issue. Most of them are reporters and academics while others are heads of government offices or members of the Philippine Parliament. For instance, Cecil Afafe is the former editor-in-chief of *Baguio Midland Courier* and Isikias Picpican works as chief director of the Saint Louis University Museum in Baguio City. Nevertheless, the lack of noticeable group does not indicate lesser influence. Using a broadsheet that has extensive local readership, the contest to recognize the cultural and heritage element of dog-eating puts the banter more contentious. These actors possess massive influence in public debates as they were once local officials themselves or heads of influential bodies that are at the frontline of the debate on dog-meat eating.

The most visible animal-rights groups, LinisGobyerno and Animal Kingdom Foundation, have a parallel objective but operate in different geographical scale. Unlike LinisGobyerno, Animal Kingdom Foundation (AKF) considers itself as an NGO that focuses on national issues related to protecting dogs. It has a partnership with UK’s *International Wildlife Coalition Trust* and the *Animal Welfare Institute* in the United States. With a far-reaching linkage and source of funds, AKF maintains a dog-pound, an adoption center, and even offers legal assistance to individuals who are interested to file cases against violators of animal-rights. Together with

other animal-right advocates, AKF has also initiated the call for the amendment of the Animal Welfare Act in 2012.

LinisGobyerno is a civil society group composed mostly of activist and journalist in Northern Philippines. When it was created in 2000, it named itself as a group that participates in an all-out war against government corruption (LinisGobyerno, 2006). To date, LinisGobyerno was able to register more than a hundred cases against government officials and private companies for corruption and misconduct. However, their advocacy for dog-eating only started in 2002 when AKF partnered with them to investigate the dog-meat industry in Baguio City. Since then, LinisGobyerno has made dog-eating as a component in their campaign against the failure of the state to implement the Animal Welfare Act (1998).

My analysis is a textual analysis of editorials, government policy releases, newspaper columns, and op-eds written by NGOs and published in four Philippine broadsheets. All the sources cover a wide range of opinions and sentiments about dog-meat consumption. All texts are published online, except print newspapers, including the *Manila Bulletin*, *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (PDI), *The Junction*, *Baguio Midland Courier* (BMC), and *Sun Star Baguio*. Apart from printed texts, I also collected my data from official webpages of LinisGobyerno (<http://www.linisgobyerno.org/>) and AKF (<https://animalkingdomfoundation.wordpress.com/>). These online sources are platforms for publishing recent accomplishments such as successful police entrapment operations or to appeal for funds from donors.

Plotting the traces of how actors associate various meaning is possible by following texts and public discourses. In this way, the hermeneutically-driven method of Geertz (1973) is taken as a model that will guide how I trace the “codes, narratives, and symbols that create the textured webs of social meaning” (Alexander & Smith, 2003, p. 13). I analyze selected published materials on dog-eating in the Philippines to identify how NGOs and other actors create assemblages by associating dog-eating with notions of dirt, epidemic, violence, and human rights. Editorial, newspaper articles, and government press releases represent the on-going social banter as

they reflect the horizon of meaning that informs the social configuration of public opinion on dog-meat consumption. These texts and other written works for public consumption are expressions of opinions and textualized compendium of differing public sentiments. To subject them to interpretation allows us to follow the curve of assemblages as they serve as inscriptions of social meanings. I have to make clear, however, that assemblages do not simply refer to the ideas that every member of the community holds. Instead, they point to structures of signs that facilitate attempts of NGOs and other actors at aligning multiple views on dog-eating into coherent claims.

Assembling Dog-Eating

An important dimension that must be emphasized about peoples’ understanding of food is the slippery relationship between meaning and action. The volatile relationship surfaces from how social actors strategically bundle and associate their behavior to a symbolic landscape where actions only attain a new function relative to how they could lend veracity to discursive claims. In this section, I provide an illustration of how dog-eating is cast into different assemblages to map a boundary within which the practice is normatively understood by multiple actors.

To provide a context to the following sections, the first part of this chapter revisits my previous work on dog-eating and highlights the religious layer of the practice. The second portion identifies three pivotal means that NGOs, which lobby against dog-eating, employ to form coherent interpretive assemblages against dog-meat consumption. LinisGobyerno and its allies conflate the practice as a danger to 1) public health, 2) sanitation, and 3) a moral symbol of violence. On the other hand, supporters of the practice have taken their frames into a strategic inflation of food consumption by internally aligning dog-meat eating as an expression of a right protected by national legislations. Not only do they resort to internal alignment but also an external expansion or a universalization of their arguments by invoking international legal principles.

To reiterate, these frames have analytic implication on the current discussions on dog-eating. As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, the existing literature is truncated by an overemphasis on how dog-eating transgresses state laws on animal welfare or the binaristic opposition between modernist narrative and heritagization. Scholars, for instance, failed to grasp the complexity of the debate by easily subsuming their discussion within a Marxist or structuralist account. These frameworks fail to understand the possibility of how social actors navigate a landscape filled with inconsistencies.

Mise-en-scène: The Gastronomic Field

The popularity of dog meat as a food varies across regions although it is regularly described as a delicacy among the indigenous communities in the Northern provinces. Due to the strict implementation of the Animal Welfare Act (1998), there is no official statistics to date apart from an estimate from the AKF of 200,000 to 300,000 number of dogs being butchered every year for human consumption. The center of the industry is in Baguio City, a former American colonial hill station where I lived for more than eight years as a student. During the entire duration of my studies, I have observed how the number of restaurants, which serves dog meat, started to dwindle after the Animal Welfare Act was implemented in 1998. Still, one could visit these restaurants and request for a dog-meat but this has to be done clandestinely because they no longer include it in the menu (see Figure 1).



Fig. 1 A menu of a restaurant in Northern Philippines that includes dish prepared with dog-meat (Powel, 2011).

Among the indigenous *Igorots* in the north, dogs play a pivotal role as a ritual offering in death and cleansing ceremonies (Lacbawan, 2014). It is often used when the ritual *dao-es* is performed to appease the spirit of a dead person or to revert a curse that is caused by witchcraft. This ritual requires the family who sponsors a *dao-es* to summon the village elders and prepare food for all community members who will attend and participate. In most cases, the number of elders who perform the ritual is between 10 and 20 but it could be more if the family belongs to a big clan. In one *dao-es* that I witnessed in 2002, there were 17 elders who performed *dao-es* for a person who nearly died in a car accident.

The ritual is done in wakes or immediately after a dead person is buried. As for illness, it is only executed if the family believes that witchcraft has been committed. If this is the cause of death, the elders will request the family to prepare a pair of dog and chicken as an offering. To start the ritual, the elders will gather around the sick person who sits next to the lifeless body of a freshly butchered dog. One by one, they will stand and spew litany of words while stomping their feet. Each of them will speak about the sick person and later on throw harsh phrases towards the lifeless animal. At this moment, the elders are “inciting” the dog to hurt the person who sponsored the witchcraft. The *Igorots* believe that the soul of a lifeless dog will seek revenge by “barking and gnawing” (*gunggungan na ya ngabngaban*) the person who performed the witchcraft. Since the dead cannot return to life to seek revenge, his soul shall accomplish the task by “commanding” the dog.

It is important to note that among the *Igorots*, dogs are considered brave and fearless as they possess a “hot” (*menpuos*) blood. But the emic understanding of “hot” has to be qualified as it could signify different meanings, apart from its denotative reference to heat. The *hot* character derives from what locals consider as dogs’ short-temper and territorial behavior, especially when they are provoked. This is precisely what the *dao-es* tries to achieve—to incite the dog to hurt the person who is responsible for the witchcraft. Aside from its ritualistic function, the “warmth” also applies to eating as it provides a way to survive the cold and nippy weather in the mountain, not to mention

as an aphrodisiac. Overall, dogs are endowed with human characters (i.e. fearless) which, for the locals, make dogs appropriate as ritual objects to counter witchcraft or perform cleansing ceremonies after burial (Lacbawan, 2014). But the ritualistic layer has taken another dimension and even side-stepped as dog-eating enters the realm of public debate.

What is unique in the current debate over dog-meat consumption is the banter that has divided social actors who separately emphasize modernist narrative and heritage discourse. Each of these stakeholders engage in a strategic interpretive tactic to derail or avoid an impasse with their opponent. The antagonism between the modernist rhetoric with arguments that portray the practice as a heritage has opened up several portals of meaning-construction where agents struggle to build and claim legitimacy by drawing upon a specific normative and hermeneutic field. Again, one must be wary not to subsume these multiple interpretive assemblages as epiphenomena of the binary opposition of modernity vs. tradition or of law vs. culture. Instead, these frames are resultant strains of how multiple actors exploit and navigate the web of public meanings in their effort to construct logical claims about dog-eating.

Consuming Dirt and the Construction of Food Epidemic

One frame that finds no presence in the ongoing discussion on dog-eating is the perplexing attempt to link the practice to discourses of dirt, epidemic, and violence. Perceiving dog-eating as a desecration of animal rights has been the most visible frame among NGOs but approaching it as a source of danger to public health is one tactic which they utilize to circumvent any disagreement from supporters of cultural rights. Specifically, policies on public health present an alternative apparatus to frame dog-eating by removing its relationship to other laws that codify the practice as an essential element of Filipino heritage. These alternative policies do not invoke animal welfare but they are instrumental in assembling a coherent frame to stop dog-meat consumption. Clearly, this act of maneuvering within the bounds of law is reflective of how social actors navigate the gamut of policies without necessarily being guided by an assumed binaristic opposition between culture and law or tradition and change. Let us consider some examples.



Illustration 2:

Rabies Kills!

Another compelling reason why AKF is so committed in this advocacy is the life threatening effect of rabies to the public. There is no cure for this kind of viral disease! Hence, the Philippine Congress enacted REPUBLIC ACT NO. 9482 on May 25, 2007, otherwise known as the “Anti-Rabies Act of 2007”. It aims to eliminate humans and animal rabies and prescribe penalties to the offenders thereof.

Did you know that aside from dog bites, you can also get rabies by merely eating its meat? So, for your own sake, do not trade-in nor eat dog meat!

WARNING! New penalties for trading dogs for meat are 5000 pesos for each dog plus 1 to 4 years imprisonment.

Fig. 2 AKF circulated this poster in regional papers after the passing of the Anti-Rabies Law. The text above is a reproduction of the poster’s contents (AKF, 2011)..

In 2007, the Philippine government has introduced the Anti-Rabies Act to safeguard the “right to health of Filipinos” (par. 2) by initiating a structure for the “control, prevention of the spread, and eventual eradication of human and animal rabies” (par. 2) and promoting “responsible pet ownership” (par. 2). Unlike the Animal Welfare Law (1998), the Anti-Rabies Act (2007) does not forbid dog-meat eating. Even so, animal rights groups, such as AKF and LinisGobyerno, have re-appropriated the law and depicted dog-eating as a conduit of rabies virus (see Figure 2). Since then, the law has criminalized dog-meat traders who violate not the Animal Welfare Law but the public’s right to health and “security” from diseases.

From Figure 1, one recognizes how AKF tries to relate dog-eating to rabies and indirectly expand their agenda by creating a link between the consumption of dog meat and the threat of an epidemic. This has become more obvious when the group has registered a complaint against two dog-meat trades in 2008 for violating the Anti-Rabies Law and not the Animal Welfare Act (AKF, 2008). Through this example, one identifies how social actors negotiate within a landscape of rules and regulations by building a strategic association between one policy to another. The AKF and LinisGobyerno have “stretched” the “negative” consequences of dog-eating as a desecration of animal welfare to an imminent threat to public health. In this way, animal-rights advocates have redirected their strategy by presenting the practice as a direct cause of epidemic. The AKF and other government institutions are quick to proclaim the role of dog-eating as vector of infectious virus. A local veterinarian, for instance, has repetitively asked the community not to eat dogs as the virus could infect them. But she did not explain that the spread is not because of consumption but by the likelihood of getting bitten when one slaughters dogs. I quote,

We may get diseases from dog meat like rabies considering that it does not pass through meat inspections conducted by our office and the National Meat Inspection Service because they know it is illegal. (Dr. Brigit Piok interview by JM Agreda, 2010, p. 1).

Clearly, the creation of Anti-Rabies Act (2007) has delivered another legal machinery to brand dog-eating as a threat to public health. This has strong impact on local policies after a number of towns in the Philippines promulgated regulations which framed dog-eating, not as violation of animal rights, but as a potential source of disease. In recent incidences of police operation against restaurants, rabies became the organizing reason to regulate dog-meat consumption away from the original objective of protecting animal welfare. For example, the health officials of Digos City in Southern Philippines has decided to quarantine 21 men after the discarded head of the dog, which they slaughtered and consumed, has tested positive for rabies virus (Dinoy, 2013). Even though the national office of the Philippines’ Department of Health has explained that rabies is not transmitted by consuming dog meat, NGOs like AKF and Animal Welfare Institute have meticulously drew a link between the two and portrayed “rabies as the most serious public health hazard in the country” and dog-eating as “harmful to one’s health” (LinisGobyerno, 2006, p. 1).

On first glance, such an easy shift in tactic could be interpreted as an abandonment of the group’s original objective of securing animal rights. But the change from one goal to another illustrates how they try to assemble dog-eating into a flexible form that is then bent into different frames. This does not imply an absence of structures that guide social actions but reflective of the slippery relationship between “meanings” attributed to food and the accompanying behavior that is imputed in certain food practices. On the one hand, consuming dog-meat is a direct violation of animal welfare—a desecration of a life form that has an inherent right. On the other hand, a dog is ironically morphed into an entity that serves as a container of public danger, a conduit of disease and malevolence.

Geography of Policy: Codifying Spaces of Eating

To further elucidate the intriguing link of dog-eating to dirt and epidemic, we must also understand how NGOs codify physical spaces where consumption is embedded in specific geographies. More specifically,

NGOs have redefined the physical division of a place as constitutive of how specific meat for human consumption is understood. One way to escape the opposition from cultural-right advocates is to bundle the protection of animal welfare with policies that designate spaces for slaughtering animals. In 1975, the Philippine government has enacted Presidential Decree 856, a law that designated specific areas for abattoirs. The decree has explicitly acknowledged that slaughtering animals in places situated near or within residential areas is unsanitary and poses a threat to public health. Anyone who intends to construct an abattoir has to secure a sanitation permit from the national government before s/he can start building the slaughterhouse in a location far from any residential areas. Consequently, animal-rights advocates can use this law and convince the police to raid illegal slaughterhouses without “violating” the right of indigenous communities to exercise their culture. In effect, the owners of dog slaughterhouses violate the Sanitation Code and *not* the Animal Welfare Law. This “legal strategy” is exactly what members of the AKF have been deploying. In 2003, the director of AKF, Greg Quimpo, has registered a case against two abattoir owners who were butchering dogs for a commercial purpose within a residential compound. As expected, the director has decided to use the Sanitation Code instead of invoking the Animal Welfare Law to avoid any backlash from supporters of IPRA. In his statement, he acknowledged the role of dog in rituals but insists on the need to protect people’s health from the unsanitary practices of domestic slaughterhouses,

This is not an overpower of the Cordillera culture where most people insist that eating dog meat is a tradition in the region. It’s all about protecting the people’s health from eating dog and dirty slaughterhouses. (AKF,2008)

Likewise, the codification of physical landscape (i.e. residential area) and the accompanying activities associated to every space do not only permeate how AKF and LinisGobyerno have been constructing their arguments. It also presents how the deployment of state power by local bureaucrats mirror an interesting

illustration of creative assemblage where dog-eating is positioned vis-à-vis sanitation. As it embodies an out-of-place practice, dog-eating becomes an anomalous source of disorder by desecrating state-sanctioned slaughterhouses. For example, this frame is reechoed by the head of the police department in Northern Philippines in an interview conducted after an entrapment operation,

As for the raid of illegal slaughter area, usually it is not considered as a declared *slaughter area...it is an illegal slaughter because it is not allowed by the city government and this illegal slaughter area could be found in an isolated place, the camouflage is used- usually under vegetation where they butcher dogs*. These dogs come from Batangas, Laguna and Quezon. Why? Because dog in this place is [more] cheaper than here in Baguio... Sometimes it is warrantless search, except when the slaughtering is done inside a house, but this raid is actually represented by the sanitations of the city. *The city has a sanitation officer and he is always with us. If the raid happens in the market, we take media with us to glorify the event*. Usually the media is for the purpose of letting the people know what is illegal. Because some of the Cordillerans are claiming that is their delicacy, their food, but it should not be the case. So we have to stop the slaughter of canines (Police Inspector Julieta B. Culili as quoted in Buenaobra, 2009, p. appendix d, emphasis is mine).

As can be seen, the debate has moved beyond the rhetoric of animal-rights and tapped into discourses around public sanitation and health. The lumping of various players (e.g. sanitation officer, police, media) together into one category demonstrates how different frames could be sewn into a coherent alignment. In this way, sanitation is invoked and strategically re-encoded into domestic spaces. Again, this should not be interpreted as an abandonment of AKF’s original goal, but a strategy to avoid what we have mentioned earlier about the antagonism between culture/tradition and policy. In view of the conflicting relationship of Animal Welfare Act and IPRA, AKF tries to circumvent the possibility of an impasse by

bundling their advocacy to policies that complement their agenda but provide means to avoid a possible collusion with supporters of IPRA.

From another layer, the spatial codification of slaughtering takes more legitimacy with regard to how dog-eating is understood as conduit of epidemic. If these frames are paired together, it amplifies the practice into a social dilemma that is worthy of public concern. As dog-eating allows the spread of disease and as abattoirs are situated in domestic spaces, consuming dog meat becomes not simply a personal act but a complete violation of a community's right to a safer and cleaner environment. That is, the practice no longer holds claim as a cultural heritage but a floating form that poses a danger to the greater public. Its fluidity is akin to a double-faced character where, on one side, it is a harbinger of disease and filth, and on the other side, it denigrates the neat and clean environment of residential areas. The practice delivers a "dirt" (Douglas, 1984) that poses danger to people, community, and public life. It is a danger to all things pure.

Mundane Violent Eater

Branding dog-meat consumption as a vector of diseases has an implicit pedagogical undertone. For some time, LinisGobyerno and AKF have been supporting mass vaccination for dogs, but such efforts are not necessarily understood as a way to protect animal welfare. Rather, mass vaccination is described as a viable solution to prevent people from consuming their pets. Amidst the promotion of mass vaccination, dogs are aligned to another frame that will form part of a tripartite assemblage. Beside dirt and epidemic, the third face that dog-meat consumption embodies is the presumed penchant for violence among consumers. Take for instance how the following statement denies the cultural layer of dog-eating and presents it as an ordinary finger food that is imputed with cruelty,

Dog meat is not eaten as a meal for sustenance in the Philippines, but rather as *finger food* for men to snack on during drinking binges...
THERE IS *NOTHING CULTURAL OR TRADITIONAL ABOUT THIS*. IT IS A

CRUEL ACT THAT MUST BE HALTED.
(Brown, 2013, p.1, emphasis is mine)

There are two layers that must be dismantled at this point. On one side, the presumed mundanity renders the cultural argument mute. On the other side, the violence imputed in eating dog meat conjures up an image of barbarism and incivility. If taken together, the practice is a mundane form of violence that is no longer hinged on any sacred claims but on the taken-for-granted act of slaughtering and consuming dog meat. This layer is pivotal in relation to the purported sacrality inherent in what supporters of IPRA believe to be traditional in dog-eating. In this regard, if one form of behavior is "detached" from its sacred foundation, it can no longer claim legitimacy as dog-eating has no validity to ground itself as a symbolic representation of anything cultural or heritage. This understanding looms large in public debates that vilify the practice as a mundane and highly commoditized good that is devoid of any religious element.

The only difference between the pre-war issue on dog-eating and the present, is that before our Igorot ancestors ate and butcher dogs for religious rituals. *It is not being served as a delicacy; it is not a day-to-day pulutan* (finger food). As matter of fact, the butchering and eating of dogs (then) is treated with much respect. Our Igorot ancestors believed that dogs can guard our spirits (*ab-abiiik* in Kankanaey dialect). That is why when one meets an accident or witnesses death, a dog should be sacrificed so that the spirit of the dog will guard the spirit of the living to prevent the occurrence of bad luck.

So, what's the big fuss about the present dog meat eating and trading?

...Dog meat eating has become a day-to-day thing, most of it consumed as pulutan (finger food). The sanctity and the religious rituals that go with dog-eating have long been gone.
(Bawang, 2003, para. 5-8, emphasis is mine)

One witnesses an implicit assumption about a break in the temporal continuity of dog-eating as a

traditional practice. Where before it is considered sacred, its entry as a commodity for public consumption makes the “sanctity and religious” dimension vanish thereby converting it into an outdated thing that is only committed to memory. As the practice is no longer couched within sacred grounds, the presumed banality is then coupled with violence. Slaughtering and eating dog-meat become forms of violence as they are accomplished to fulfill their function as ordinary finger food with no religious function. This violence is understood as an absence of foundation, an entry into the world of banal and mundane (Alexander & Smith, 2003). But the image of a violent eater does not only cohere around the banality or mundanity of the practice as it is now amplified and connected directly to the slaughtering of dogs. AKF and LinisGobyerno have been deploying this frame as they describe how illegal slaughterhouses utilize blue torch and brutal force in rendering dog-meat. In short, violence is committed in two forms: an absence of sacred foundation and the use of brutal physical force.

Tripartite Assemblage: Dirt, Epidemic and Violence

Before I move to the next key players of this debate, I want to reiterate what I have established so far. As I have been arguing against the propensity to situate eating as a practice that is slave to external forces, my discussion has elucidated a starkly different picture of how people understand food by stitching various ideas into an assemblage that is deployed and reworked. That is, dog-eating is not simply vilified as an anomalous practice that represents an anti-modernist stance in Philippine society. Rather, NGOs and other social actors try to compose a clean and “logical” horizon of meaning where normative definition of eating is created. In such a world, dog-meat consumption is tied with social discourses of dirt, epidemic, and violence.

I argue that this triumvirate has eluded earlier attempts by other scholars, including myself, who have been working from an assumption that is either moored on a structuralist or materialist approach. Structural accounts will easily crumble

when confronted with such slippages against the presumed dirt in dogs but with an inherent animal right. In the same manner, the cultural codes that are instrumental in creating alignments find no presence when subsumed within an analytic frame that invokes materialist analysis. Nevertheless, I do not want to suggest a gastronomic field of contestation that is devoid of power and the deifying effect of hegemony. I will provide a discussion on this issue at the end of this paper after elucidating how supporters of dog-eating as a practice deal with the debate. In the next section, I discuss two interrelate forms of interpretive assemblage that seek to portray the practice as 1) proper food and 2) an insignia of food entitlement.

Eating My Pet

So far, I have only discussed how followers of animal welfare have created an assemblage by 1) circumventing policies and adapting their strategies and 2) creating alignments along discourses of dirt, epidemic, and violence. Again, it is important to highlight how this group abandons their original goal of protecting animal welfare by subsuming dog-eating not as a violation of Animal Welfare Law but as a desecration of the public’s right to sanitation and health. At this point, it might appear premature to conclude but this form of negotiation illustrates how social action remains in flux as social actors resort to unpredictable and often conflicting motivations to pursue their interests. This conjecture will be clearer if we examine how supporters of dog-eating try to defend the practice not by resorting to arguments couched within politics of heritage and authenticity but by actively tapping into other means that might appear, on the surface, contradictory.

Aestheticization of Eating

Dog-eating has spiraled into a nationalist symbol that hinges on its proclaimed representation of a pure pre-colonial and pristine Filipino culture (Lacbawan, 2014). Since the state-sponsored nationalist ripple in the 1970s, dog-eating embodies some form of

anticolonial subversion that openly devalues the perpetuated imagination of an uncivilized Philippines by becoming the gastronomic moment of how Filipinos criticize the whole eating sensibility of the old colonial master (Alegre, 1988). Apart from heritagization, there is another way to make an alternative alignment which is constructed by groups who support dog-eating. Food aestheticization is one scheme to invert what animal welfare advocates have claimed regarding the unsanitary nature of dog-meat consumption. A widely circulated article, for example, has attracted reaction when it printed short “recipes” for preparing dog meat cuisine. I quote,

A dog meat chef said the delicacies come in several recipes such as the common “*pulutan*” (finger food) of roasted skin and lean meat fried with onion leaves. “*Spare parts*” are the knuckles, small meat and bones boiled ‘till (sic) tender, while “*pinuneg*” is a serving of intestines cleaned and stuffed with blood and spices and cooked like longganisa (meat sausage). “*Asozena*” or adobo (soy meat stew) is a preferred serving among men who do not want the dog-meat smell. (Guimbatan, 2007a, para. 5-7, emphasis is mine)

To my mind, the publication of these short recipes must be understood in relation to how AKF and other NGOs have vilified dog-eating as filthy and violent. By describing dog-meat as a delicacy, not only do they endeavor to deny the presumed filth and violence inherent in the practice but to elevate it to the same level as other Filipino cuisines. Based from personal observations in restaurants in Baguio City where dog-meat is served, the menu typically includes common Filipino dish but with dog-meat as a main ingredient. For instance, the famous *adobo*, a meat stew braised in vinegar and soy sauce, is cooked using dog-meat instead of chicken and pork. Similarly, stir-fried noodles that are traditionally prepared with poultry are cooked with minced or cubed dog-meat. Unlike other food, dishes made out of dog-meat are more expensive and have higher demand. Oftentimes, it is common to see restaurants closing early as they already run out of dog meat to serve. To reiterate, an important frame that supporters of dog meat have

been deploying is to point the practice within the rubrics of gastronomy, often amplifying how dog-meat cuisines are not different from other dishes made out of poultry or pork.

Internal and External Domestication of Food Entitlement

Apart from presenting a layer of gastronomy, other key players tried to amplify the practice to another dimension. For instance, the regional head of Philippines’ Agriculture Department in the north even extended the function of dog-eating outside its role as a ritual offering to a symbol of emotional bond. In a forum to request the government to exclude indigenous communities from the ban on dog-meat trade, Director Gerry Baliang claimed that “...eating of dog meat is part of northern tribes culture, and sometimes it is a gesture of hospitality when a man butchers a dog and offers dog meat-delicacies to his visitors” (Guimbatan, 2007a, para. 4).

But the most powerful alignment that supporters have effectively employed is to recode the practice by juxtaposing it with other food practices within the Philippines and with other neighboring Asian countries. The goal of which is to articulate the double-standard that undergirds how AKF and the state treat dog-eating, and to redefine the call for its recognition as an expression of human right. To facilitate my discussion, I have prematurely divided these two attempts at assemblage into (1) internal and (2) external domestication of food entitlement. I do not want to suggest a strict empirical division between the two but largely an analytic typology to help me elucidate my arguments. The former refers to how supporters of the practice try to compare dog-eating with cock-fighting or wildlife hunting while the latter invokes practices in other countries which receive little attention of has not generated intense public discussions.

For the most part, supporters have been rallying behind the idea that dog-eating is a cultural heritage supported by the IPRA. In this law, all practices of indigenous communities are recognized by the state as part of the country’s heritage. But invoking heritage laws only shows one dimension of how groups try to

circumvent oppositions. In fact, a more pronounced form of engagement is to tap into a relational banter that seeks to portray the double-standard inherent among advocates of animal welfare. Isikias Picpican's comment represents a sentiment shared by supporters of the practice. I quote,

How can you tell to Cordillerans that dog-eating is offensive? You can't. It's only other people who are visitors to Baguio or who are *visitors to the Cordillera*, who look at dog-meat eating as offensive. Those who comment for example about the market vendors who sell meat only saw it in some British tabloids...they call that savage but which is more barbaric, is it when people engage in *gambling like for example in cock fighting, or horses, watching animal kill each other now that is cruelty*. While if you serve it as a meal to be feasted on by people that is really something...there's a reason behind why people still do it. *They have to understand that is our culture* (Buenaobra, 2009, p. appendix e, emphasis is mine).

Based on Picpican's statement, there are two layers that constitute how supporters align dog-eating within internal discourses. First, animal-welfare advocates are not locals and that they impose a foreign standard to the Philippines. Second, this standard is extremely selective as it does not make issue of other practices that could be categorized as a violation of animal welfare. These two layers try to delocalize the practice by asserting how concerns over animal welfare has no root in Philippine society and the proclivity to translate dog-eating as animal cruelty is, in itself, preposterous because advocates do not oppose the more popular cock-fighting in lowland Philippines or horse-fighting in the South. Such has been the contour of public debates since the promulgation of the Animal Welfare Law. Key players have voiced out the apparent double-standard that demonize dog-eating as "cruelty" (Afable, 2004, p. 18) but does not consider other practices as violation of the Animal Welfare Act.

In a public forum that was organized in 2007 in Baguio City, these frames took an anti-colonial

layer, which is reminiscent of how dog-eating was morphed into a nationalist symbol in the 1970s. Local politicians organized the gathering as a reaction to a series of arrests directed against restaurant owners who served delicacies made from dog meat (Guimbatan, 2007b). The same frame has been articulated but not directed against a colonial master but to foreigners who visited the country and started to castigate the practice. Thus, realigning the opposition to dog-eating is accomplished by pointing its origin from outside and not within the Philippines. This accounts why, according to Picpican, animal welfare advocates are selective of their agenda of policing dog-meat consumption but turning a blind eye to cock and horse fighting. Thus, for supporters, dog *is* a local food in the Philippines but only transmogrified into an insignia of barbarity by foreigners who try to impose their selective standards.

By the same token, invoking practices of other countries is instrumental in repositioning dog as food in Philippine culture. As the former tries to align the practice with horse-fighting in Southern Philippines, the latter form of alignment expands the debate to reframe dog-eating as an expression of human rights protected by an international legal principle. Moreover, as supporters note how animal-rights advocates are hypocritical by ignoring other contentious practices within the Philippines, they too utilize contentious food practices of other countries. Cecil Afable, a former city mayor of Baguio, has written a scathing remark against NGOs supported by foreign donors to pursue their dog-saving agenda,

Dogs are Man's Best Friend. But they can also be raised for food for the gods and the people. The International Body Group, who are complaining against dog trade in our areas, should go to *Taiwan and Korea*, where dog meat is a daily fare to them. It is a *national delicacy*. Eating dog meat to us is part of our *culture* and we do not tolerate anybody especially a *foreign supported group to come and legislate against our culture*. It is a *human right* and we can take this up against them to the *United Nations* as a violation. Even our legislators who try to prohibit the eating of dogs are eating them. The *British* used their

dogs to hunt and kill other animals—and they pay other people to save dogs. (Afable, 2004, p. 18, emphasis is mine)

Afable's article represents how supporters try to juxtapose the practice with other eating practices in the region (Korea and China) and how they employ international policies (i.e. Universal Declaration of Animal Rights) to support what they claim as a violation of human rights. From within the Philippines, they contrast the practice with other contentious food to articulate how animal-rights advocates are selective of their motives. In addition, they also use cases from other countries like dog-eating in Korea and Taiwan to emphasize the status of dog-meat consumption as an accepted delicacy. What is more interesting to highlight in Afable's remark is an interesting reversal of claim where supporters do not plainly treat the opposition as an abject violation of human rights but emphasize more on the presence of similar contentious practices in Britain (i.e. using dogs for hunting). This interesting "reversal" of claims runs synonymous to how animal-rights advocates in the Philippines fail to see cock-fighting as a violation of animal welfare but insist on the presumed barbarity in dog-meat consumption.

Assembling Food and Politics of Culture

These two forms of reversal have played a pivotal role in the debate on contentious food practices and animal rights. By "localizing" and "expanding" their claims to support dog-eating and to demonstrate the selective standard that permeates the advocacy of animal welfare advocates, I see a strategic re-assembling of dog-eating as an expression of human rights. On the one hand, dog-eating as an entitlement to food is deployed behind legal principles, thereby transforming it into an icon of right. On the other hand, invoking culture takes another layer that goes beyond legal principles and invokes culture as "immediate" reason why the practice must be protected from foreigners.

This attempt to oscillate between an invocation of right, which is supported by local or international

law, and the immediate call for recognition of Filipino culture describes how supporters of the practice strategically deploy their position. It also illustrates how human rights is bundled into two levels- (1) backed by legal principles and (2) by what I call as politics of cultural immediacy. On one layer, eating dog-meat is translated into an entitlement to food as stipulated in the IPRA. In this way, it becomes a legal battle between Animal Welfare Law and the IPRA. However, this takes to a different realm of discourse on right when cultural protection from "foreigners" is invoked as an immediate concern for the government. This, to a large degree, goes beyond the language of laws as a springboard for claims when human right is embedded in "culture". Right to food becomes not simply an issue that is interspersed with legal frames but is taken to a dimension that is synonymous with a humanitarian discourse. In short, for supporters, dog-eating is a human right because it is cultural.

What have I argued so far? Supporters of the practice have aligned the debate along different portals of meaning that straddle from food aesthetics to food entitlement. To invert the discourse of filth and violence, they have bundled up dog-eating to local and international laws to paint a practice that is legally permissible while calling attention to the selective attitude of animal welfare advocates who turn a blind eye to other contentious food practices and only castigate the consumption of dog in the Philippines. More than this, they seek to put forward an argument that locates the practice as an expression of human right supported by IPRA and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or by simply foregrounding the practice as an immediate manifestation of an inherent right to culture.

Strategic Bundling and Assemblage

In an article written by Webb Keane (2003) on the continuing appropriation of *batik* in Indonesian history, he introduced the concept *semiotic bundling* to explain how the "relative value, utility, and relevance" (p. 414) of things shift when users bundle them to other objects. In the same manner, this is how I view the social life of food. Food can be

read as “slave” to imposing structures that serve as discursive sites to propagate certain forms of “proper” eating habit. Such abstract words as animal welfare and cultural rights assume some level of symbolic coercion as they are converted into influential legal codes that define how individuals should “treat” dogs, either as a pet or as food. In the literature of food studies, such analysis reflects the first two strands of analytic framework that we have discussed in the earlier part of this essay. Harris (1966) and Sahlins (1990) looked for explanations outside food, in the material condition of production and deep structures. These approaches are critical examinations of how external elements define how people interpret their eating habit. It is not surprising if concepts like class and structure become crucial analytic tools to explain how domination functions in social analysis.

But this proclivity to juxtapose the meaning that we attribute to food as a cultural moment, which is homologous to an external reality, omits an important feature of social analysis. To my mind, short-circuiting how we interpret food as mirror-reflection of abstract reality (i.e. discourse, class) is almost tantamount to a weak analysis or tautology. In such analytic proclivity, the contour of peoples’ reaction to dog-eating is merely reflective of bigger discourses that hover over them and deploy pre-reflexive interpretations. Although this approach has given us a powerful tool to understand dog-eating, it could not, in my opinion, account the creative act of NGOs and state bureaucrats who fuse (and defuse) frames, meanings, and policies. It can elucidate the deployment of animal-rights as a coercive frame but it is unable to explain how and why they draw links among disease, epidemic, sanitation, and eating. Everything is easily assumed as a consequence of state authority but the exact translation of Animal Welfare Laws in relation to the Sanitation Code and Anti-Rabies Act is absent.

Conversely, dog-eating could be understood as an assemblage that is both contingent and an emergent process. This is particularly apparent in how policies and discourses on dog-eating are created and utilized by key stakeholders. While policies limit action, people can actively deploy them to achieve and circumvent their own restrictions. As we have

discussed, the problematic relationship between tradition and animal welfare pushes advocates to decouple and bundle their advocacy from one law to another, from Animal Welfare Law to Sanitation Code and Anti-Rabies Act. Undeniably, social actors have strategically bundled laws and meanings to their advantage. Dispersed and unrelated discourses of filth, violence, and epidemic are sewn together to make a logical alignment where dog-meat consumption is understood as an anomaly. They mobilize various views that are, to some extent, unrelated to food but become social webs that are openly pulled together to form a web of associated meaning—an assemblage that sets boundaries around dog-eating. Sanitation, space, and violence are taken within one frame in an attempt to convert dog-eating into a practice that is isolated to food and consumption. Similarly, re-coding the practice under the umbrella of entitlement through local and international legal principles present an interesting bricolage where food is creatively bundled with human rights. In here, the expression of right becomes something that could be associated with eating or that the character which constitutes food is extended to a delicious dog stew or a noodle with minced canine meat. In the end, the way people understand food is a formless entity that only assumes a certain level of solidity when disparate and diverging elements are assembled together as ingredients for a social recipe of eating.

Conclusion

The key to understanding any social phenomenon is to follow how actors tread the social landscape and describe how they form groups, fuse meanings, and create associations of different frames. Such has been the objective of this paper—to describe how specific actors have been assembling various discourses to make sense of dog-eating. More specifically, NGOs such as LinisGobyerno and AKF produce assemblages that align dog-eating with discourses on dirt, violence, and disease. From the other camp, supporters of the practice try to invert these claims by juxtaposing dog-meat consumption as an entitlement that is protected by both local and international laws.

Furthermore, to provide stronger counterclaims, the practice is also elevated as food that sits alongside other Filipino cuisines. The competing attempts at establishing dominant frame to understand the practice and the flexibility of interpretation that goes beyond the antagonism of law and culture are the main reasons why the consumption of dog meat is contentious and decisive.

On an analytic level, my analysis engages with existing scholarship on dog-eating by providing an alternative reading which taps into Latour's framework. I argue that previous engagements on dog-eating are unable to deal with the quotidian modes through which actors bundle the practice with multiple frames. Rather than presupposing how people make sense of food as inflections of deep binary-oppositions or an epiphenomenon of productive forces, I opine that one must refocus on how actors themselves understand contentious food practices by following their actions. This is best accomplished by tracing how they create coherent assemblages by associating food with other social elements. In this paper, I unpack how contradictory discourses on dirt, violence, human rights, food entitlement, and aesthetics are woven together by NGOs as they engage in a social banter with other actors. In this process, the supposed antagonism between culture and modernity becomes an overly simplistic framework to understand dog-eating as actors navigate and build symbolic associations that are beyond what is deemed traditional or legal. In the same light, subsuming the practice as a result of poverty or economic condition only offers a limited explanation given the presence of cultural codes that have come to define dog-eating as an icon of/for various discourses.

This paper does not attempt to arrive at a quantitative general presupposition about the nature of all human beings. What I have attempted to establish is that meaning around food practice is a frail formless entity that could be bent in different ways at specific conjunctions. As the possibility of social action is as diverse as the number of people in this world, the role of social analysis is to catch all possible configurations of interpretations, or assemblages, as various agencies come in contact. One assemblage

may not appear in another interaction as every contact could yield different results or outcomes. What scholars must do to construct an explanation is to describe these endless shifts within different contexts. Nonetheless, I do not want to paint a picture of a utopian field of interaction where actors have an equal capital to engage in social banter. However, the presence of an unequal field only emerges as actors participate with others in a network of relationship. What is perhaps crucial for any analysis is not to commence the description of actors' behavior as if they are slaves to prevailing structural conditions. Instead, a sociological investigation of food must begin from a flat social world. What this implies is that we must follow the actors themselves as they move through social grooves of class or inequality and fissures from imposing hegemony or ideology. Lastly, the concept of assemblage promises a new way to understand other contentious food practices. For instance, Japan's whaling practice is an interesting case to illustrate how nationalist and "anti-colonial" rhetoric are bundled with eating. In the same light, food scandal like the current food scare over Maggi noodles in India or Europe's reaction over fake horsemeat in 2013 present startling examples of how eating is assembled along diverse lines, for example, race, ethnicity, caste, and oriental imagination.

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