Transnational Guinea Pigs: Food, Development, and Ethics in the Andes

Lecture by María Elena García

Tuesday, March 16, 2010 6:30 PM
Multipurpose Room, Sophia Gordon Hall

In recent years, traditional Andean animals like guinea pigs, alpacas and llamas have been seen as offering new commercial opportunities across the Americas, transforming the way that these animals are treated and consumed. Formerly found in indigenous communities alone, these animals have become common fare in the finest Bolivian and Peruvian restaurants. They have also migrated to North America as part of a proliferation of llama and alpaca farms. This talk will examine the cultural and ethical consequences of the transnational processes that have taken guinea pigs, alpacas, and llamas from the Global South to the North, and in particular, the cultural re-framing, scientific breeding, and export of Andean guinea pigs. In approaching the study of animals in transnational political economies and development agendas as a set of cultural, economic, and ethical questions, this study engages scholarship on international development and critical animal studies, fields previously studied in isolation from each other.

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Co-sponsored by the Office of the Dean of Arts & Sciences, Department of Anthropology, the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, and Latin American Studies