

## K.S. Maniam's Bestiary: Reading Animality and Identity in Selected Stories

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### Abstract

This essay scrutinises K.S. Maniam's fictional animals by going beyond the confines of metaphor to interrogate the concept of animality and how animality impinges on diasporic identity. I examine the writer's impulse to animalise the notion of national belonging especially through the strategic deployment of the animal mask which reveals the shared domination of migrant and animal. I argue that Maniam's critique of animality not only suggests that migrant and animal lives are interlinked but also informs his re-envisioning of the diasporic self. I posit that Maniam's "new diaspora" advances the notion of diasporic self as 'becoming-animal.'

**Keywords:** animality, identity, diaspora, domination, animal mask, becoming-animal

K.S. Maniam's fiction abounds in animal tropes and imagery which have justifiably drawn much critical attention. The tiger and chameleon from "Haunting the Tiger," the eponymous mouse-deer of "The Pelanduk," the sacrificial goat Mani from *In a Far Country*, and the camel Periathai – the first-generation Tamil immigrant nicknamed as such after the cancerous lump on her shoulder, her peddler's burden of saris, and the way she humps over her tinker tools – in his first novel *The Return* spring to mind. However, there are many other lesser-known beasts such as the tortured pig bellowing in pain in a ritual slaughter in "Terminal," the scavenger crow "pecking away at the wastes of history" ("Arriving" 132) in "Arriving," the trussed up iguana "dredging up some ferocity" ("The Pelanduk" 99) before it is killed and skinned for the cooking pot in "The Pelanduk," and the stone eagles adorning the gate-posts of the rubber-planter's house, "their claws thrust into green orbs" (*Haunting the Tiger* 51) in "The Eagles," which inhabit Maniam's fictional universe. In this essay, I re-evaluate the significance of Maniam's bestiary by foregrounding the links between animality and diasporic identity in selected short stories.

Analyses of Maniam's animals have focused primarily on the writer's preoccupations with the construction of Malaysian-Indian identity and the "destiny for a culturally lost people in Malaysia" ("Fiction into Fact, Fact into Fiction" 264), largely framed by the writer's own first-hand experience of the insulated world of the colonial rubber plantations where Tamil-Hindu indentured labourers and, subsequently, their descendants, eked out a living, and his acquisition of the mother tongue, Tamil.

These indelible life circumstances had “exposed [him] to an environment and a language that would trail [him] for the rest of [his] life” (“Fiction” 263). In this context, animal motifs in Maniam’s fiction are prominently deployed in a variety of allegorical settings including myth-inspired rituals such as tiger-hunting which symbolises the diasporic subject’s quest for belonging in a new country and the desire to possess the indigenous spirit of “tiger-land” (“Haunting the Tiger” 42), the endangered Malayan tiger being a nationalist symbol. As Maniam himself expressly notes of his distinctive tiger/chameleon motif in “Haunting the Tiger:”

There are, then, two ways to identify with the land: the way of the tiger, and the way of the chameleon. The way of the tiger is the continual and ritualistic immersion into the spirit of the land so as to be reaffirmed; the way of the chameleon is the blending into whatever economic, intellectual and social landscapes that are available. (“The New Diaspora”)

Either route is fraught with challenges. With reference to “The Pelanduk,” Sharmani Patricia Gabriel reads the hunting of the Malay mythical *pelanduk* – a mouse-deer likened to the illusory golden deer from the Hindu epic *Ramayana* which was instrumental in the abduction of Sita, and hence must be killed – as the dislocated diasporic subjects’ attempt “to preserve the purity of their ancestral culture” (243) in the face of a threatening, dominant (i.e. Malay) community. Furthermore, the desire – albeit misplaced – to capture and possess the mystical tiger in the other story reveals “the ritual of assimilation and cultural dominance implicitly operating in the nationalist mythology of the nation that requires ethnic communities to jettison their cultural history if they are to be included and accommodated by the state” (244). She argues that Maniam rejects both propositions. Commenting on the same subject, Bernard Wilson posits that “Haunting the Tiger” is “not only about maintaining a diasporic consciousness *and* embracing a new national vision but, just as importantly, it narrates the kaleidoscopic range of *otherness* within Malaysians and Malaysia” (399). The protagonist Muthu fails to reconcile himself to the notion that the key to national belonging is not to see the tiger as the other but to acknowledge that “Self *is* Other” (which, I will argue later, includes the animal other), and that “to create an essential space of individual and mutual identity,” he “must immerse the ideological fabric of his existence in a multiplicity of alterity” (Wilson 403). In my view, this multiplicity of otherness could be what Mohammad Ewan Awang, in his study of the Hindu Self in Maniam’s novels, refers to as the “sum of all identities” which characterises Hindu spirituality and invokes the underlying Hindu concept of the “non-duality (oneness) of Self (*Atman*)” (4). Elsewhere, Andrew Ng, in his study of

religion in Maniam's fiction, delves into the significance of ritual sacrifice, violence, and scapegoats. Discussing how animal sacrifice functions to deflect violence from and provide a sense of legitimacy to the community, he argues that the "failure of the scapegoating myth" in "The Pelanduk" in which a human being inexplicably ends up a victim instead of the animal, is "a barbed criticism against rigid adherence to religio-traditionalism which fails to accommodate or negotiate with other cultural forces, thus resulting in its believers' social disenfranchisement and political marginalization" (135). He argues that the ritual killing of Mani the goat in Maniam's second novel *In a Far Country* and the grotesque and horrifying way in which the animal's headless body continued to run around "corroborated [the protagonist] Rajan's view of the community's profound religious emptiness" (141) in that the goat was killed "purely as a ritual and for the meat it would provide the community – *not* for the underlying [spiritual] significance of this act" (141).

Despite these extensive debates on Maniam's symbolic animals, no attempt has been made to study both the writer's impulse to *animalise* the diasporic subject's struggle for national belonging and the ubiquitous and irrepressible 'presence' of other species in his fictional world. This essay complicates the more familiar interpretations of Maniam's menagerie by going beyond the obvious metaphorization of animals and foregrounding the slippage between symbols and their material referents for a closer look at animal-human relations and attitudes towards animals in general. This is crucial because, as Kate Soper reminds us, "animals mediate our relations to the world and each other in an immense variety of ways" (82).

For Neel Ahuja, "when literary critics reduce nonhuman characters to symbols, they may foreclose transspecies relations underlying representation" (559). I contend that by locating Maniam's fictional animals at the intersection of critical animal studies, ecocriticism and postcolonial critique, new light may be shed on the transspecies relations in the stories. At the same time, I am not insisting that we regard Maniam's nonhuman creatures from an animal advocacy and animal rights standpoint. My reading of animality in Maniam's short fiction ties in with Michael Lundblad's argument that studies on *animality* rather than animals per se "expresses no explicit interest in advocacy for various nonhuman animals, even though it shares an interest in how we think about 'real' animals" (497). Certainly, there are recurring details in Maniam's stories which touch on 'real' (i.e., actual, extra-discursive) animal issues such as animal abuse, carnivorism, the human-animal boundary, as well as animal agency. In fact, it can be said that Maniam's fiction throws issues of animal domination and objectification into sharp relief – animals as prey, animals as sacrificial scapegoat, animals as spectacle, animals as commodity, and animals as meat or "absent referents" (Adams 66) – as if he were mapping the animal question onto his fictional diasporic space. I explore what some of these concerns may reveal about the writer's

rendering of animality and the way animality impinges on diasporic identity in a multispecies world. These explorations lead me to posit that it is through his critique of animality and its politics that Maniam re-envision the diasporic self.

This essay is premised on the assumption that animality – conventionally construed as animal nature or behaviour, including the perceived carnal and bestial qualities (e.g., sexuality, rapaciousness, ferocity) associated with animals that people distance themselves from – is a contested construct much like race and gender in that it is based on essentialist and prejudiced ideas about the human-animal dualism and species superiority. Tracing the history of Western thought and civilization, Mario Ortiz Robles asserts that animals “as we know them are a literary invention” and that this invention has been “instrumental in the development of human culture by creating the conditions of possibility of our own invention as civilized beings” (2, 4). Furthermore, it is the strict human-nonhuman separation that underpins the idea of civilization. In his own theorizing, Robles engages with Giorgio Agamben’s concept of the “anthropological machine” – the exclusionary “discursive apparatus created by Western culture to create a categorical distinction between humans and animals” (Robles 178) – which constructs animalised humans (slaves, barbarians, and foreigners) and humanised animals (e.g., the ape labelled as the wild man) for insidious biopolitical experiments. The function of these “hybrid figures” is “not the blurring of categorical difference but its reaffirmation” (Robles 146-47). I argue that, to some extent, Maniam’s treatment of animality de-centres these rigid categorisations of the human and nonhuman realms and tacitly exposes species boundary as something which is “not fixed at all, but always temporally and politically contingent, continually constructed and policed by the processes of representation itself” (Huggan and Tiffin 152). Erica Cudworth states that “species is constituted by and through ‘human’ hierarchies – ideas of animality and of ‘nature’ are vitally entangled in the constitution of ‘race,’ gender, class and other ‘human’ differences” (21). In a similar vein, Rosi Braidotti asserts that all the ‘others’ (non-white, non-masculine, disabled, old, zoo-morphic, organic, etc.) created by humanist Man’s “dialectics of otherness” are “rendered as pejoration, pathologized and cast out of normality, on the side of anomaly, deviance, monstrosity and bestiality” (68).

Given the common use of derogatory animal references in racist, sexist, and other marginalising discourses, I would like to argue that Maniam does not necessarily conflate these discourses with animal discourses because in his stories, even some of the marginalised, racialised characters treat animals with violence and indifference and do not necessarily identify with them. The question I wish to address is: what are the implications of framing the migrant’s struggle for belonging through the lens of animality? What some of Maniam’s fiction suggest – through its alternative and ambivalent inflections of animality – is that species and diaspora (of which race is a constituent) are “intersecting

yet discrete aspects of identity” (Ahuja 558) and that animal and migrant lives somehow overlap, evidenced not only by what Erica Cudworth terms “intersected dominations” (32) but also, to some extent, by their interactions.

### **The animal mask**

It is not too farfetched to say that humans (and by extension, their descendants) transplanted to the rubber estates of Malaya are categorised together with nonhuman others, as Donna Haraway implies through her concept of the ‘Plantationocene’ (echoing the Anthropocene): “The plantation system depends on the relocation of the generative units: plants, animals, microbes, people. The systematic practice of relocation for extraction is necessary to the plantation system” (557). Anna Tsing describes plantation labourers, along with raw materials like plants, animals, and other organisms, as “alienated resources” (Haraway et al. 556). Maniam’s preoccupation is precisely with this sense of alienation and exile (a legacy of colonialism) implicated in the racial and cultural othering of minorities in postcolonial Malaysia, which prompts the migrant to seek a spiritual connection with the postcolonial landscape.

In “The Pelanduk” (1981) and “Haunting the Tiger” (1990), there is a palpable sense that the migrant views the ritual animal hunt as playing a key role in sealing the community’s legitimacy and restoring communal harmony in the larger quest for spiritual integration. In Maniam’s fiction, the migrants’ engagement with animals – be it through hunting, slaughtering, and devouring them, or thinking obsessively of them, even sharing the animal’s proximity with dirt – often demonstrates an ambivalent relation which ranges from one of mastery to, arguably, one of self-reflexive enactment or performance of their own ‘animality.’

In his study of animalisation, animality and minority discourse, Ahuja discusses Fanon’s animalisation theory in *Black Skins, White Mask* in which the colonised ironically embraces animality despite the coloniser’s assumption of “the untamable animality of the colonized:”

I call this strategy, which appropriates the rhetoric of animalization to reveal its ongoing racial, neocolonial, or ecological legacies, the *animal mask*. By ironically appropriating an animal guise, the performer unveils a historical logic of animalization inherent in processes of racial subjection. (558)

I wish to argue that Maniam uses the ironic animal mask to resist the tyrannical logic of animalisation. Maniam’s animal symbolism – often derived from Hindu myth and local folklore – is, as Andrew Ng

points out, “[r]esignified in diaspora” (124) to “manage the community’s existential problems and to provide the means by which it can reshape its destiny” (125). I argue that this re-signification dons an animal mask which reveals, among other things, the shared devaluation of migrant and animal and the oppressive tendency to align the migrant with animality in the same way that – as De Beauvoir famously claims – the female is seen as “more enslaved to the species than is the male” and therefore her “animality is more manifest” (255). Tellingly, in some of Maniam’s narratives, female fertility (or the lack thereof) and childbirth – yoked to a woman’s body – are thematically significant. For example, in the short story “Ratnamuni,” the narrator-protagonist Muniandy finds a wife for his son and describes her as “a girl with the ripeness of Kali, and not of her mind:” “Fertility, *ayah*. There is magic in that. Leela will give him children every year” (*Selected Works* 161).

In the context of diasporic minorities, the strategic animal mask in Maniam’s fiction unveils a multi-layered critique. It exposes not only the underlying legacy of viewing racial others as having a closer affinity with animals (e.g., work animals) but also the postcolonial update of this animalisation: the migrant labourer is compelled to undertake a ritualistic albeit futile hunt of a savage beast (arguably, the diminutive mouse-deer is not a ‘savage’ beast but an uncivilised one at any rate) and is motivated by a brutish desire to kill and possess the beast. The belief is that killing the scapegoat animal will ensure the community’s survival. Additionally, in some way, the beast itself is mirrored in the migrant whose assumed savagery and propensity for violence is nothing short of bestial. The indigenous subject’s ancient knowledge of the animal in question is taken for granted while the animal remains inaccessible to the uninitiated newcomer. At the same time, a charismatic beast is given mythical-national status only to be targeted as a creature which, at its core, remains an animal to be hunted down. The Malayan tiger is a critically endangered species whose precarity is somehow overshadowed by its cultural aura in the folk and national imagination.

To all intents and purposes, “Haunting the Tiger” is a story which lends itself to an allegorical reading. A dying Muthu reflects over his younger days and his encounter with the indigenous Malay man, Zulkifli. Muthu, a second-generation Malaysian-Indian, seeks a spiritual bond with the land, and with Zulkifli as his guide, embarks on a hunt for a tiger that embodies the spirit of the land. Unable to possess the tiger, he imagines taking on the form of a chameleon that can fit into the land, but even that proves unsatisfactory. Finally, he is left broken and haunted by his unfulfilled desire. The spiritual aspect of his quest is reinforced by the narrative’s imagery and symbolism which evoke an otherworldly dimension: the realm of a mystical tiger. Mario Ortiz Robles argues that allegorical readings of literature are possible “not only because animals can be used to illustrate political arrangements; [literary texts] are allegorical because animals form the very foundations upon which politics is built. Politics is that

form of organization whose purpose is to distinguish us from animals” (176). Kate Soper also notes that animals as metaphors and totems have been one of humanity’s “primary means of classification and representation” as in “the classification and heraldic use of animals as emblematic of human social hierarchies” (82). To read “Haunting the Tiger” in this light is to situate the diasporic politics of exclusion and oppression within the framework of animal politics, and to appreciate the writer’s renegotiations of the animal other.

Right from the outset, the land is portrayed as the object of intense longing and, even before the hunt gets underway, it becomes clear that the tiger is emblematised as the land. Finding it would be akin to staking a claim on the land, a dream that eluded the young Muthu and continues to haunt the old, dying Muthu:

But death would not come easily. Instead, there came to him, in the stillness of deep night, like creation, stories, heard or read, the land that resided within sleep memory. [...]

On the mindscape that lay now between life and death, confused and murky, there rose a fresh, green land. (37-38)

Attuned to the tiger/land, Zulkifli tells Muthu, ““You’ve found the thing you want to hunt.”” Zulkifli says that “[his] forefathers had the same look in their eyes.” “Centuries of living here” (42) have contributed to his knowledge of the tiger and tiger-land. For Zulkifli, the pursuit of the tiger is almost purely allegorical as suggested by his cryptic words: ““The tiger I’m going to show you can’t be shot,” said Zulkifli with deep conviction. [...] ‘It’s here all around us. [...] Its stripes are everywhere”” (43-44). Muthu, while also experiencing the enthrallment of the tiger’s domain, is gripped by the desire to see and own the animal: ““I’ll see it and possess it! [...] I’ve to see it clearly,” says Muthu. ‘Face to face”” (43-44). Muthu’s attitude and motive are major stumbling blocks: his “clothes and ideas,” “mind and body smells,” purpose and “way of thinking” are “foreign to the tiger’s nose” (45) and the beast stays hidden. Symbolically, the “land they have been walking on does not yield to their advance” (44). Ultimately, Muthu is unable to “fit into the place where the tiger lives,” and even his attempt to “blend into the landscape” (44), chameleon-like, is futile.

A particularly striking detail in the story is that, at first, the young Muthu’s chosen method to acquaint himself with this alluring land had been wild boar (a native species) hunting: “What better way to know the country than to hunt down a beast that knows it well?” (38). Muthu is not devoid of hunting skills and has no difficulty tracking wild boars. Here, Maniam’s commentary on diasporic identity

intersects with the hierarchical classification of animals as “objects of extreme reverence and fierce taboo” (Soper 82) which, in this case, are represented by tigers and swine, respectively. For the majority Malay-Muslims, boars which belong to the same genus as pigs are regarded as unclean and their flesh is not to be eaten. Arguably, the boar can be associated with the racialised minorities who do not share the same taboo, while the formidable tiger – which, like the mouse-deer, features prominently in Malay folklore – can be associated with the dominant race and certainly with the land itself. In the story, Muthu gradually loses interest in boars, having already killed a couple of them with skill and composure. One night, his attention turns to a tiger as he literally moves beyond his comfort zone. While exploring “the land of his sleep-dream,” he discovers an anthill that had been recently disturbed:

There is the anthill, which he had mentally marked as a signpost, but the conical top has been knocked off and lies crumbled at the base.

Muthu is surprised to see no ants swarm about in alarm; he approaches and peers into the lately-made small cavern. With the torchlight he never fails to carry, he sees a dark rustling mass beneath the lip of the opening. He shines the torch on the levelled anthill earth. If he had not been trained to pick out faint sounds and slight disordering of plants by his boar-hunting nights, he would have missed the barely visible pug mark on the dislodged soil.

Muthu is excited and afraid. As he stands there near the partially destroyed anthill, he feels he is not alone. “But what can be so big and yet so gentle?” he thinks. It comes to him suddenly that it can only be a tiger. He will not move and so attract attention to himself, but he knows too that he cannot stand there forever. As he withdraws cautiously and reaches the tree stump, he feels he is being watched by amused and yet fierce eyes. (40)

The passage above provokes thought not only because it sets the stage for an allegorical encounter between the migrant and the land but also because it disturbs the tiger’s putative animality by giving it specifically ‘virtuous’ traits, namely gentleness and the ability to be amused which seem, on the surface, to be at odds with the bestial figure of an apex predator. In *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature*, Mary Midgley asserts that “Actual wolves, [...] are not much like the folk-figure of the wolf, and the same is true for apes and other creatures” (19). Observation of wolves in the wild have



revealed these animals to display meritorious qualities – respectful, loyal, clean, affectionate – that contradict their ‘brutal’ or ‘beastly’ reputations. However, it is the folk-figure of the animal with its ‘animalistic’ qualities which have been seized upon by philosophers, “uncriticised, as a contrast to illuminate the nature of man. Man has been mapped by reference to a landmark that is largely mythical” (19). In any case, regardless of their ‘good’ or ‘evil’ characteristics, Braidotti points out that “animals have long spelled out the social grammar of virtues and moral distinctions for the benefit of humans. This normative function was canonized in moral glossaries and cognitive bestiaries that turned animals into metaphorical referents for norms and values” (69). I would like to argue that although bravery and strength may be the ‘virtues’ that the Malayan tiger is supposed to possess, these are obviously selective and arbitrary; it is ultimately the tiger’s imagined animality that bestows it with a particular aura and magical persona in the folk imaginary. The animal mask here suggests that the same logic of difference that constructs animality – essentialising animals as cruel, monstrous, ferocious, savage, and irrational, thus justifying their continued objectification – operates in the state’s othering of the migrant. Furthermore, in the story, the tiger is *only* a nationalist myth and as such is deliberately portrayed as largely invisible and abstract whereas the boar is given a more visceral treatment from the description of its trotters and tusks to “its blood splattering the heart-shaped leaves and the spongy ground” (38). Maniam shows that, in Muthu’s case, the strong desire to capture the tiger shows him to be a victim of the state’s deception. At the same time, his chameleon’s stance of blending in is also counter-productive because it denotes the coming together of two different and separate entities, while true spiritual integration requires “the painful acknowledgement that Self *is* Other” (Wilson 403). It can be said that the mythologising of the tiger compels the human subject (both indigenous and ethnic) to always haunt/hunt the animal, but the reverse is also true. When the modern nation is built on the domination of nonhuman others and its concomitant domination of human others, the consequence is that, in Dominic O’Key’s words, “the animal will always haunt and follow the subject, forever throwing off modernity’s claim to have left behind animality” (352).

Like “Haunting the Tiger,” the subversive animal mask in “The Pelanduk” also functions to resist notions of absolute Otherness as arbitrary and political in nature and to expose the epistemic schism between humans and animals as well as between groups of humans. The mask also exposes the nationalist belonging myth of the *pelanduk*. Like the tiger, it too is never sighted; Arokian’s claim that the Goddess Kaliamma has shown it to him is doubtful. In the story, the focus is not just on the ritual hunt of the magical *pelanduk* but also on the community’s dietary ways especially in relation to animal consumption and religious notions of purity and pollution. “The Pelanduk” is the tale of an impoverished Tamil-Hindu community living in the dingy Settlement on the outskirts of Pasir Panjang town.

Addressing the community of believers, the resident priest Govindasamy invokes the Rama-Sita myth in which Maricha, Ravana's counsellor, transforms himself into a magical golden deer to enchant Sita. She asks her husband to capture it and is abducted as her husband pursues the deer. When the deer is killed, it reverts to its human form. The priest convinces the religious adherents that they are in the destructive age of Kaliamma and that "it's the deer that leads man to the elusive, magical quality of life! [...] We've to find that deer. In this country, it's called *pelanduk*. Someone has to hunt down and kill the *pelanduk*" (93). In the priest's reckoning, killing the *pelanduk* will end the Age of Kaliamma and save the community from destruction. Two men, Arokian and Pandian, are assigned to hunt the animal, but the story ends with Pandian becoming the ritual victim as he is killed by Arokian under inexplicable circumstances. As Ng points out, the capture of the *pelanduk* can be linked "to a desire for successful integration with the dominant group (the Malays) and the larger society as a whole" (124) or, conversely, to a desire to maintain cultural purity (Gabriel 243).

What is particularly striking but unremarked in this tale is the multiple references to animals (both wild and domesticated) as prey and food in the narrative: boar, iguana, fruit-bats, anteaters, rare birds, crabs, prawn, *siput* (snails), frogs, chicken, mutton, and pork. This diverse animal foodscape is accompanied by vague ideas of what counts as edible and wholesome foods. In the story, the minority settlers – conditioned by their priest – are deeply repulsed by what they consider the townspeople's disgusting cuisine as well as poor hygiene:

The men sat in groups, talking about Pasir Panjang and the horrors they had seen in it.

"I've never seen so much filth in my life!" Govindasamy exclaimed. "The dustbins are overflowing and flies settle even on our faces."

"The restaurants are even worse," Kumaran said. "The people sit at tables as if at altars. The waiters come like priests with the offerings. Heaps of crab shells, prawn shells and *siput* shells rise on the tables. The eaters push the food into their mouths as if they have been starving for a hundred years!"

"They eat strange things," Muniandy said. "It was the healthy chicken, mutton and pork in my days. Now you see thin, smooth white legs that are frog's legs. And they cut open a pregnant sow. Take out the foetus, make a soup of the whole thing. I don't know how they can eat that!" (96)

The migrant settlers consider themselves spiritually superior to the townspeople and the children are warned to avoid “the evil in town” (95). The kind of animals devoured by the townspeople only serve to confirm their defilement. The prejudice is mutual for the townspeople also have a jaundiced view of the Settlement’s strange inhabitants: “They saw a dark mass of people gathered at a gaudy collection of puny statues” (91). In her seminal book *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Mary Douglas observes that food-avoidance in many cultures and traditions is usually based on arbitrary and ambiguous reasons shaped by ideas of dirt (42-58). In Islam, for instance, the pig with its cloven hooves and habit of digging the earth and rolling around in mud is regarded as unclean or impure and, therefore, is not to be eaten. In Judaism, pork is forbidden because pigs do not chew their cud although they have cloven hooves which are an approved feature. Furthermore, Harriet Ritvo has shown that the classification of animals as edible or inedible, useful or useless, docile or wild, and so on, is based on “anthropocentric binary distinctions” (13) which also apply to the classification of social classes and racial or ethnic groups. In any case, the settlers have no qualms devouring iguanas, anteaters, and fruit-bats which Arokian – who, like Muthu in “Haunting the Tiger,” is a competent hunter – brings back to the Settlement. The prized *pelanduk*, however, is never brought back, and the failed ritual can be read allegorically as the diasporic community’s inability to engage with the new country or the folly of clinging on to cultural purity, which leaves the community in a limbo. The point I wish to make here is that the migrants’ intolerance of the townspeople’s ritual ‘dirt’ – manifested in the latter’s consumption of supposedly inedible, ‘unclean’ animals – reflects how animals are used to justify status or superiority. Douglas asserts that “dirt is essentially disorder” and that pollution beliefs “can be used in a dialogue of claims and counter-claims to status” as well as “used as analogies for expressing a general view of the social order” (2-3). In other words, the ingestion of ‘dirty’ animals (or the breaking of taboos) can be the justification for controlling, inferiorising, or privileging sections of society. What’s even more ironic is the fact that both Arokian and Pandian are municipal garbage-collectors who regularly come into direct contact with the evil town’s trash. I have argued elsewhere that dirt in Maniam’s short stories has “the capacity to pursue justice by transforming notions of identity and belonging” in that “its singular diffuseness and trans-corporeality negate all forms and claims of essentialism, natural rootedness, and authenticity” (Yeow 722-23). Animals, too, possess an agency defined as “the capacity to affect the environment and history” (Armstrong 415) in that human-animal interactions produce effects that reverberate through time and space. By animalising diasporic space, Maniam taps into this agency as he de-mystifies myths of purity and superiority on the part of *any* community holding on to nostalgia or cultural allegiances, elements he would decry as forms of “cultural entrapment” (“New Diaspora”).

The story ends with a dazed Arokian returning from the *pelanduk*-hunting expedition without Pandian. By his painful admission, it's clear that the thing he had killed was not the enchanted *pelanduk* but Pandian:

“I killed the *pelanduk*,” he said. “Like Maricha it turned back into a man. He was confused and afraid, like us.” (107)

Before this tragedy, the tension between the two men had been slowly building, with Pandian – representing modernity – taunting Arokian for his superstitious beliefs. Such an ending may suggest that “a sacrifice has occurred, and the community can henceforth no longer remain unaffected” (Ng 136), but it may also suggest that what truly needs to be scapegoated is the ontological human-animal difference which underpins the subjection of minorities. It's tempting to read the *pelanduk*-Pandian transformation as a ‘humanimal’ image suggestive of how migrant lives are bound up with animal lives just as Self and Other are closely aligned, something that Maniam's characters do not grasp. It takes a leap of faith to realize that Self and Other are “entwined, inseparable” and that “if one is to reinvent oneself in a transcultural context, also *interchangeable*” (Wilson 403).

In “Terminal,” a speculative dystopian tale of two friends (the unnamed narrator and Kok Seng), there is a scene which also evokes an uncanny link between the human and the animal. This story with Orwellian overtones is set mainly in a sterile and artificial city where the wary and detached city-dwellers are subjected to intense surveillance and conformity. The story is a commentary on several issues including the effects of rapid modernisation, mass deception, racial intolerance, and the migrant consciousness. Migrancy is alluded to early in the story when the Indian narrator recollects the way his father taunted him by holding up the image of the Indian plantation labourer as a kind of historical bogeyman:

I was going through a difficult time with my father who insisted I help out with his night-market business. If I was late from school or slow to load up the vans, he would fling his version of the Indian's curse on me. “You want to go back to the estates?” he said, sneering. “Be saying, ‘Yes, Tuan’ all the time? Have no time to wipe your nose? Have no time to pull up the shorts after shitting?” (2)

In his study of Maniam's adaptation of science fiction conventions for a postcolonial context, Ho U-minh Mahinda notes that Maniam hints at the fact that the city may be Kuala Lumpur "under the future rule of intolerance and totalitarianism. [...] Maniam believes that Malaysian society lacks a true 'multicultural concept,' in that a base of Islamic values has been forced upon Malaysian society as a whole – all races and their cultures are brought into a common religion and being" (110-11).

Ho illustrates this point by highlighting two specific events in the text: the first occasion is when the two characters seek refuge from the oppressive search lights emanating from "The Tower" (4) in a dingy food court, a clandestine and filthy establishment situated in the outskirts of the metropolis. There, they indulge in a variety of "real food," (10) including the smuggled "flesh of slaughtered, forbidden animals," namely pork (16):

The air reeked of rotting fish bones, badly-cleaned entrails of animals, urine and, faintly, faeces. [...] [Kok Seng] lowered his face into the bowl of offals, liver and rib-flesh cooked in herbs, and breathed in deeply. He savoured each morsel of meat or bone he put into his mouth with the chopsticks and wiped his lips on his sleeves. His neighbours at the surrounding tables were doing the same except that they sometimes hawked and spat or scratched themselves in the armpit. (11)

The repulsive setting is only reinforced by the stereotypically 'primitive' behaviour of the diners.

On the second occasion, Kok Seng invites the narrator back to the same place where the latter witnesses the ritual slaughter of a white pig with a "token pair of tusks as if it was descended from the jungle boar" (15). Kok Seng and another man torment the animal with gratuitous violence, all the while cheered on by the spectators who had begun "to relish the brutality surfacing from within themselves:"

The two men became frenzied and thrust away at the animal. [...]

"Make the cuts! Make it suffer!" [...]

The thin, long blades flashed and red welts appeared on the hide. The arms lunged again and again until the animal was covered with criss-crossed streaks of blood.

"Go for the kill! Go for the kill!" [...]

"The kill! The kill!"

Then the bright skewers descended, almost simultaneously, and plunged into the centre of the animal's breast. A deep, prolonged bellow rent the air.

“Turn the blade! Turn the blade!” (16-17)

Ho points out that this gruesome blood-sport is a cliché of pulp science fiction and that, in the story, it serves as a form of symbolic ethnicity. One of Maniam's “pet hates” (107), symbolic ethnicity is a concept developed by sociologist Herbert Gans which refers to the personal use of superficial ethnic or racial identity markers derived from popular or mass media. I would like to argue that Maniam's disdain towards symbolic ethnicity is evident in his recurring use of the animal ritual motif found in “Haunting the Tiger,” “The Pelanduk,” and other stories.

In “Terminal,” the Chinese diasporian Kok Seng's ritual slaughter of the animal is absurd and ultimately bereft of meaning. Furthermore, his carnivorousness can be understood as “an expression of the power to dictate the categories of ‘edible’ and ‘inedible’ and a potent symbol in the discourse of ‘othering’” (Huggan and Tiffin 178). In contrast, the narrator, though not a vegetarian, returns to his vegetable patch which he labours on carefully and thoughtfully: “Since I got back, I've been working on my vegetable plots. They have taken shape; at least they look like fertile beds where plants can grow. The seedlings are still under protective care in the plastic nurseries. When I was crumbling the dark compost for the topsoil in the beds, I was reminded of the grubby tables in that food court Kok Seng had taken me to” (20). The narrator's authentic relationship with the soil is suggestive of the migrant's sense of care, belonging, and spiritual investment in the land. There is no need for a gory animal ritual to mediate cultural identity or a sense of belonging. Intriguingly, while the pig is in the throes of death, the narrator wonders:

Had the animal turned human? Did I hear someone groan in great pain?

Perhaps Kok Seng and his fellow slaughterer had made that heart-rending moan. (17)

Like the ‘humanimal’ image in “The Pelanduk,” this telling detail not only destabilises the human-animal divide by reminding us of our own animality but also suggests a transspecies connection to migrant identity. In the next section, I argue that, in thinking through animality, Maniam paves the way towards a new way of thinking about diasporic space and identity.

### **The diasporic subject as ‘becoming-animal’**

Maniam writes that his motivation in writing is “to hold up a counter reality” that “includes and builds on the borderland between cultures found in the country” (“Preface” xi). I would like to suggest that this liminal borderland is where minoritarian identity is negotiated, contested, and undergoes a process of ‘becoming’ that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari outline in their philosophical treatise *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. There are many forms of becoming but the one that is pertinent to this essay is their concept of ‘becoming animal,’ a non-linear, anti-hierarchical process which is characterised by multiplicity, fluidity, and rhizomatic entanglements:

A becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification. [...] Becoming produces nothing other than itself. [...] Becoming is a rhizome, not a classificatory or genealogical tree. Becoming is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing. [...] A becoming-animal always involves a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity. [...] [P]acks, or multiplicities, continually transform themselves into each other, cross over into each other. Werewolves become vampires when they die. This is not surprising, since becoming and multiplicity are the same thing. (237-39, 249)

Apart from serving as a radical model for thinking about both animal and other minoritarian identities, this complex theory challenges our territorialising mindsets. It seems to suggest that in becoming animal, one transcends species and other kinds of boundaries since “in a becoming, one is deterritorialized” (291) and “fixed identities give way to assemblages, alliances, passages and becomings between both beings and things” (Beaulieu 74). This profound ‘becoming’ has major implications for the diasporic consciousness and reflects Maniam’s own re-figuring of diasporic identity outlined in his essay “The New Diaspora.” For Maniam, multiplicity is humanity’s “true nature” and what “the new diasporic man is trying to regain” (“New Diaspora”):

We now talk of diasporas, and the double or triple spaces temporal, cultural, spatial they occupy. Multiplicity in thought, memory and space seems to

define individuals and societies everywhere. It is no longer possible to retain the view that you come from a single-strand dominant culture. The majorities define the minorities as much as the reverse; in other words, the changing periphery causes alterations at the centre, if there is still a centre. (“New Diaspora”)

Maniam emphasises a non-linear and anti-hierarchical multiplicity of temporalities, cultures, and spaces. Like the rhizome which has no centre, this imaginative landscape highlights the incessantly evolving entanglement of minority and majority. In light of Maniam’s “new diaspora,” I argue that the notion of animality in relation to humanity is an immanent aspect of the multiplicity of the new diasporic man. Maniam seems to be envisioning a posthuman, post-racial, or even post-diasporic subject: one that recognises *the common animality* of both the human and the nonhuman while respecting and acknowledging difference. The new diasporic subject as ‘becoming-animal’ is a paradigm that can potentially empower the animal and the migrant while resisting state-sanctioned myths of diaspora and belonging.

Maniam’s “new diaspora” chimes with Avtar Brah’s concept of diaspora space which foregrounds the entanglement of the genealogies of diaspora and rootedness. She asserts that “the concept of diaspora space decentres the subject position of ‘native,’ ‘immigrant,’ ‘migrant,’ the in/outsider, in such a way that the diasporian is as much a native as the native now becomes a diasporian through this entanglement” (238-39). I would like to suggest that the re-constitution of the ‘becoming-animal’ diasporic identity should also foreground the entanglement of animality and humanity as multiplicities that continually cross over and transform into each other. In becoming the Other, all identities, indigenous or migrant, human or animal, are deterritorialised.

To conclude, Maniam’s fictional animals make up a polyphony of voices which is difficult to ignore. Assigned to the ‘natural’ realm, they form the basis for countless oppressive ideologies. To read animality in Maniam’s fiction is to read about “the roles that animals and their representations have played—or been made to play—in colonial and postcolonial transactions” (Armstrong 416). Their presence is particularly potent in the story of diaspora: as exiled, exploited, marginalised, and subjugated beings themselves, their story illuminates the twin and intersected domination of both the human and the animal. In animalising the diasporian’s dilemma, Maniam draws attention to transspecies relations and realities, and I would like to venture, to an ethics of care and empathy for all living beings.



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