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“Diaspora or Home? Identity and belonging in recent fiction of the Indian diaspora”

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The question, 'When are you going home?' can be responded to in the following manner: home is here, in my migranthood.
Rey Chow (qtd in Fortier 157)

1 Introduction – “Diaspora or Home? Identity and belonging in recent fiction of the Indian diaspora”

One might wonder why an Austrian student with no relation to an Indian nor any diasporic background might write a thesis about exactly that. I first came to know the concept of 'diaspora' during my studies at Macquarie University in Sydney, in the context of a course on literature of migration, which greatly stimulated my interest in this field of literature and caused me to read Meera Syal's *Anita and Me*. This novel captivated me in such a way that I wanted to incorporate an analysis of this text into my thesis. As much as to why I am writing about the Indian diaspora.

An explanation of the title chosen and of its components seem in order here. Diaspora, originally referring solely to the experience of the Jewish people has come to reference the scattering of any people from its homeland who still maintain a strong connection to their homeland. As Avtar Brah notes in “Thinking through the concept of diaspora”, it is a concept intrinsically connected to that of movement, of displacement. This movement, from one’s country of origin to another country, is connected with the loss, the leaving behind of one's original home. The question imposes itself whether, in emotional terms, this leaving behind is possible and whether there is a chance of creating a new home in the ‘diaspora space’.\(^1\)

“Home” is a concept familiar to many people around the world who are lucky enough to have one. Home is a place strongly connected with feelings of belonging somewhere, of security. A sense of home is created by a specific language, place and by sensory experiences of sounds, smells and tastes.

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\(^1\) This is a term that I borrow from Avtar Brah (1996: 181, see also 208-209).
Moreover, home refers not only to a specific place, but also to an imagined space filled to the brim with feelings, ideas, images, memories, traditions, rituals and, of course, people. Home is where you feel most welcomed, where you feel solidarity, strength and warmth, and belonging. Thus, home is a most concrete personal concept and the question whether it is possible to construct a “home away from home” (Clifford, “Diasporas” 302) has to be answered by everyone for himself.

Yet, the place that this feeling of connectedness refers to does not necessarily remain the same within any person's life. While at first home is the place you grow up, it might become a reminder of childhood when you move to another place and live there long enough to develop a feeling of being at home there. One could say, home is where the heart lies. Yet, in the diaspora, “identities are not rooted in only one 'home'” (Woodward, Identity and Difference 17-8). Thus, home does not only refer to a fixed origin but is subject to change due to living in another place. This is a point also Avtar Brah makes:

Where is home? On the one hand, 'home' is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality. (Brah 1996: 192 qtd. in Cohen 10)

Moving to another place, having to create another home, I would argue, also has a grand influence on the diasporans' identity, the feeling of belongingness, of identification with either the culture and place of origin or the culture of the place of residence, which also entails the possibility of creating a new, a 'third space' out of this tension of split identification. However, this process of creation might not always be an easy task due to the constant consciousness of being the 'other' in the host society, and which thus has an influence on the diasporan's subjectivity, his or her sense of self.2

A frequent metaphor for describing the experience of diaspora and of belonging is that of the tree which spreads its roots in order to find different routes to the

2 Subjectivity, identification and belongingness are the three components of identity established by Gilroy, as will be seen later.
sources of water and other nutrients it needs. Furthermore, a tree, like a family, sows similar yet not identical seeds, who, as Gilroy avers, might grow in different places and thus produce another tree, a similar one yet formed differently. While the new tree is growing, its path is crossed by other influences than its 'parent' was. This, in metaphoric terms, is supposed to relate that different generations of diasporans experience living in the diaspora – I will use this term both as referring to the concept as well as to the space where people create a new life for themselves – in differing ways. This generational gap in experiences will provide another focus for my analysis.

Thus, having already hinted at the parts and structure of my paper, I would like to present this in more straightforward terms. In the following chapter, I will provide an overview of the scholarship of the concept of 'diaspora', which is not exactly an unequivocal one. Chapter three engages in a discussion on some theorisations on the concept of 'identity', including some of the contributions made by Benedict Anderson, Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, and Paul Gilroy. In my chapters four to six I aim to investigate whether these theories find any appliance in fictional renderings of the diaspora experience for Indians, and if so, which of these are applicable. I am well aware that the Indian diaspora forms, on the one hand, only a part of the South Asian diaspora, and on the other, is very heterogeneous in itself. I have decided on grounds of the authors' background and the limited scope of a thesis to concentrate solely on the Indian diaspora. Thus, the novels I have chosen for analysis are all attributable to authors of the Indian diaspora. The first text is, as already mentioned, Meera Syal's *Anita and Me*, a semi-autobiographical coming of age story, set in 1960s rural England. The second novel, *Mangoes on the Maple Tree* by Uma Parameswaran, deals with two Indian families living in the diaspora in Canada. I am going to refer to the immigrant generation and their children born abroad as first and second generation, respectively.³ In this respect, this novel is an exception as also the older two of the family's children have been born in India and thus share their parents' memories. Finally, I will analyse *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri, which is set in America, and, true to its title, highly intertextual,

³ This seems to be a common terminology, as Shariff (465) uses the same distinction.
which bears many problems for the protagonist of the second generation, not knowing where he belongs. As for the structure of these chapters, an analysis of the experiences of the first versus the second generation will be provided, their different or even diverging affiliations to the immigrant generation's home and host country, their country of origin versus that of residence, as the parental generation might feel nostalgia for what they have left behind, romanticising an imagined place. This part is followed by a discussion of some of the cultural signifiers such as language, food, and traditions, which are important markers of boundaries between the diasporic community and the host society. Finally, further themes or topics will be discussed in case they are salient in the respective novel. In my conclusion, I will draw the strings together, showing how the three novels differ in their representation of the diasporic experience.
“Diaspora” has become a global word that fits the global world. It has been a proper noun, in the Septuagint Bible, and a quasi-proper noun— that is, a closed category— for Armenians, Greeks, Africans, and others. Today it is a common noun. It “speaks” for itself.

Stéphane Dufoix (108)

2 Coming to terms with diaspora – delineating a concept

2.1 Introduction

In this first chapter I would like to describe and summarise some of the scholarship on ‘diaspora’. Yet, I regard it necessary to clarify that in the limited scale of a diploma thesis, only an overview of this highly intricate, expanding and—in the academia—fashionable concept can be provided. Its academic discussion is far from unified or achieving a common understanding, which is also exemplified in this quote: “Not only do scholars fail to agree, but also the attempt to define diasporas leads to static, historical approaches that assume the existence of communities, rather than explaining why “diasporic” communities might arise or decline” (Waldinger xiv).4

Hence, in this chapter I intend to first provide a brief history of the term ‘diaspora’, subsequently present several definitions and then try to arrive at my own definition, or rather, rehearse those points which I regard as conclusive and useful for my purposes. As a following sub-chapter, features inherent of diasporas will be described—also in this field, no consensus has yet been found. Furthermore, I will name several attempts at finding typologies of diasporas, that is, what different types of diasporas exist. In the following section, a description or characterisation of diasporas as well as of diaspora consciousness will be included, succeeded by a discussion of several terms which are connected to the diaspora concept but are no immediate constituents of it, as well as a brief discussion of the Indian diaspora, as the novels I am

4 See also Kokot 2.
going to analyse in the second part of my thesis are fictional representations of the diaspora experience of Indian migrants.

2.2 A concise history of the term 'diaspora'5

The term 'Diaspora' (spelt with a capital 'D' it refers exclusively to the Jewish diaspora) derives from the old Greek word *diaspeiro* (Dufoix 4) or "speiro = to sow, dia = over" (Sheffer 9) and means dispersion (Mayer 8). Kokot refers to two different scholars who have discussed the early usage of the term: According to Cohen (*Global*, 1st ed. 1997), the Greek dispersion in Asia Minor was originally termed 'diaspora'. Tölölyan ("Rethinking Diaspora(s)", 11 referred to in Kokot 2), however, names the history of the Jews and their Babylonian exile as the earliest example of a diaspora.6 In contemporary religious discourse, diaspora refers to every religious community living among a community of another belief (Kokot 2-3).

From the 1960s until now, however, the use of the term diaspora has broadened into a concept detached from its Jewish model. Clifford claims that the term has come to describe new forms of "multi-locale attachments, dwelling, and traveling within and across nations" (Clifford 219). It has thus come to refer to various and also more contemporary experiences of, for instance, migration, exile and expatriation, which has also been stated by Fludernik, who sees a "proliferation of self-styled diasporas" (Fludernik xvi). Thus, 'diaspora' has "replaced such terms as 'exile' and 'foreign community’" (Dufoix 30).7 Sommer mentions the usage of the term in current theorisations on multiculturalism and states that 'diaspora' "has been applied to all expatriate groups who chose, or were forced, to leave their native countries for a variety of reasons including

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5 For a more detailed history of the term than provided here, see Sheffer 8-9. For a history of the term, focusing on the 1980s and onwards, see Kokot 3.

6 For a concise history of the Jewish diaspora, see Dufoix 5-10. For a lengthier history of the Jewish diaspora, see Mayer 36-63. For the history of the Jewish, Greek and other diasporas in ancient times see Sheffer 36-48. For a brief overview of the emergence of 'diaspora' as a general concept see Dufoix 19-21; for the seven main usages of the term, see Dufoix 54-55. For further examples of the usage of 'diaspora' see Dufoix 13.

7 See also Tölölyan 1991: 4-5 qtd. in Clifford 216; Dufoix 32; and Sheffer "Diasporas" 83.
indentured labour and the slave trade” (59). However, I believe that in its contemporary usage, ‘diaspora’ does not only refer to peoples whose dispersal was forced, but, due to the influences of globalisation, I regard it as increasingly important in the experience of people who migrate due to economic reasons.

2.3 Defining diaspora

Dufoix defines ‘diaspora’, in its current usage and meaning as a “national, ethnic, or religious community living far from its native land – or its place of origin or reference – in several foreign territories,” or even “[a]n ‘alien’ cultural group living in a single country” (54). He further argues that “[d]iaspora” now means “ethnic community separated by state borders” or “transnational community” (30).

Sheffer provides two definitions, the first from 1986, reads as follows: “Modern diasporas are ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin – their homelands”; the second, from 2006, includes the revised notion ‘ethno-national’ diasporas, which are defined as “groups permanently residing outside of their countries of origin, but maintaining contacts with people back in their old homelands [...]” (1). He has also proposed a lengthier, but also more detailed definition:

an ethno-national diaspora is a social-political formation, created as a result of either voluntary or forced migration, whose members regard themselves as of the same ethno-national origin and who permanently reside as minorities in one or several host countries. Members of such entities maintain regular or occasional contacts with what they regard as their homelands and with individuals and groups of the same background residing in other host countries. (9-10, italics in original)

A third definitions has been provided by Safran, who states that, among other features, members of a diaspora “retain a collective memory […] about their original homeland […]; […] they believe that they are not […] fully accepted by their host society […]; they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal
home”, wish to return there and also “continue to relate [...] to that homeland in one way or another” (83-4).

Finally, I would like to mention Robin Cohen’s common characteristics of diasporas, which he has formulated in his introduction to diasporas and can be considered as constituting his definition of the diaspora phenomenon and, on the other hand, can also be interpreted as referring to a collectivity of diasporans. However, it is important to notice that no modern diaspora will fulfil all of these features “throughout its history” (Cohen 6, see also Clifford 219).:

1. Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions;
2. alternatively or additionally, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions;
3. a collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history, suffering and achievements;
4. an idealization of the real or imagined ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation;
5. the frequent development of a return movement to the homeland that gains collective approbation even if many in the group are satisfied with only a vicarious relationship or intermittent visits to the homeland;
6. a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history, the transmission of a common cultural and religious heritage and the belief in a common fate;
7. a troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group;
8. a sense of empathy and co-responsibility with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement even where home has become more vestigial; and

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8 Cohen has also provided a typology of diasporas, which, as they are not relevant for my analysis, I will only mention for the sake of completeness. He differentiates between the ideal types of 'victim', 'labour', 'trade', 'imperial' and 'deterritorialized' diasporas. For further details see Cohen 1-18. An in-depth discussion of each of these types follows in his chapter 2-5 and 7. Other typologies have been established by Sheffer, who distinguishes between 'historical', 'modern' (these are what I am going to analyse) and 'dormant' as well as 'state-linked' and 'stateless' and 'incipient' and 'organized' diasporas (see Sheffer 21-23 and 73-75, and 93 for the last categorisation).

9 For a further set of characteristics of diasporas, see Safran 364-5. I will not, however, go into detail about Safran's criteria as a refraining from them is noticeable in Clifford's critique, who especially rejects the centrality of the wish of return, which is notable, for instance, in Safran's work.
9. the possibility of a distinctive, creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism. (Cohen 17)\textsuperscript{10}

For my analysis I will not use not so many general statements but I would like to briefly summarise and mention those points which I regard as useful. I am in accordance with Safran's and Cohen's statement that a collective memory of the homeland plays a significant role for people living in a diasporic situation\textsuperscript{11}. The wish of return, however, is not central in my understanding of diasporas, because I believe that people adapt, in one way or another, to their host countries and get used to the changed conditions – as diasporas usually come into existence in the 'First World' industrial nations. I also agree with Sheffer's definition, and I believe that members of diasporas support each other and keep together in their host countries. Hence, the way I perceive the concept of diaspora is as a mixture and a synthesis of all of these definitions, although it does not take up all of the qualities mentioned above. I would define a diaspora as an ethnic group which has either been forced to migrate to one or more countries or done so deliberately, for example due to expectations of better work options and a higher standard of living.

Apart from the above mentioned points, I am also in agreement with several of Cohen's criteria, (although I regard the first two as reasons or ways of establishing diasporas) especially with his insistence on the idealisation of the homeland, a 'strong ethnic group consciousness'\textsuperscript{12} as well as his suggestion that diasporans belonging to one ethnic community, but living in different countries, support each other.

Fludernik has provided an insightful discussion of Cohen's nine criteria. First, she claims that at least several of the criteria have to be met in order for a diaspora to develop (xii). She further states that Cohen's second type is

\textsuperscript{10} See also Mayer 13 and Sheffer 1986 qtd. in Dufoix 21.

\textsuperscript{11} The centrality of a collective memory is, for instance, visible in Anita and Me as well as The Namesake, where the first generation sits together every Saturday to talk about their memories. This is also the case in Mangoes on the Maple Tree – here it is especially the second generation who politicizes about India and the status and behaviour of Indians in the diaspora.

\textsuperscript{12} A strong ethnic group consciousness is discernible in all three novels.
representative of many present-day diasporas, such as the South Asian diaspora, which, in accordance with Vijay Mishra, she defines as a ‘new’ diaspora, as those motivated by economical and professional concerns who move especially to the English-speaking countries of the West; this category is also “represented in most recent South Asian fiction” (Fludernik xiii). In my analysis, however, I concentrate solely on the Indian diaspora, which will be discussed later.

Concerning the third and fourth of Cohen's criteria, Fludernik argues that they work for all immigrants, while she considers the fifth criterion to be the “least relevant to most diasporas” (xv); I absolutely agree with Fludernik in this point. According to Fludernik, Cohen's sixth and seventh points are not equally present in all modern diasporas; yet, I believe that they do indeed play a role. The eighth feature is considered to be highly important in the construction of a diasporic identity (Fludernik xv-xvi). In contrast to Fludernik, I would claim that it is the 'strong ethnic group consciousness' which is significant for a diasporic identity to develop. Cohen's ninth criterion has to be considered as “an alternative to the myth of return” (Fludernik xvi). To conclude this section, I would argue that all these definitions share certain positions while diverging in their emphases.

2.4 Features of diasporas

The question now arises as to the features endemic to diasporas. Apart from Cohen's extensive investigation and analysis of diasporas, another overview has been provided by Brubaker, who has put forward three core constituents of diasporas, which rather bear a focus on the individual diasporic experience. These are

(1) Dispersion. […] It can be interpreted strictly as forced or otherwise traumatic dispersion; […] more broadly as any kind of dispersion in space, provided that the dispersion crosses state borders; […] (2) Homeland orientation. The second constitutive criterion is the
orientation to a real or imagined ‘homeland’ [...] (3) Boundary-Maintenance. [...] (Brubaker 5-6, bold in original).

The last criterion has been summarised by Cohen as “the processes whereby group solidarity is mobilized and retained, even accepting that there are counter processes of boundary erosion” (9). Especially the second and third of these terms are going to be fundamental parts of my analysis, apart from the cultural signifiers mentioned below. They will provide a framework for my analysis of the chosen fictional renderings of the diasporic experience.

Sheffer's common characteristics require criticism as they blur the difference between diaspora as a phenomenon and the individual diasporan's experience. They read as follows:

- All diasporas have been created as a result of voluntary or imposed migration.
- In most cases, decisions to join or establish diasporic entities have been made only after migrants have settled in their host countries.
- Diasporans generally have been determined to maintain their ethnic identities and have been capable of doing so. Those identities have been important bases for promoting solidarity within diasporic entities.
- Most diasporas have established intricate support organizations in their host countries.
- They have been involved not only in economic activities in their host countries but also in significant cultural and political exchanges with their homelands and other diasporic entities of the same national origin.
- They have maintained contacts with their homelands and other dispersed segments of the same nation.
- In some cases, blatant hostility and discrimination have forced individuals and groups to join or establish ethno-national diaspora organizations. (Sheffer 83)

While his first, fourth and fifth criteria (the last one only to some extent) rather refer to the larger concept of diaspora, the other points are more indicative of an individual's experience. For Sheffer, the most important common feature uniting all diasporas as such, however, is their "shared identities and behavioral patterns, which are closely related to a real or imagined homeland" (12), which

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13 Brubaker is also referred to in Waldinger (xi). Furthermore, the second and third of Brubaker's features are to be found especially in Anita and Me and Mangoes on the Maple Tree.
has also been termed “imaginary homeland” by Salman Rushdie and whose members have been called “imagined communities by Benedict Anderson. He further states that apart from “actual contacts” with the homeland, also “virtual links” are a prerequisite for the persistence of a diaspora. These links are, for example, narratives and memories – personal as well as collective; they are important for the psychological needs of people living away from their original homeland to be able to maintain their distinct identities. (Sheffer 55) I understand this summary as representative of several key features of diasporas: an emotional connectedness with the homeland, stemming from a common language, history, memories, and regional and religious characteristics. This will also be an important factor for the following analysis, as I want to investigate the cultural and ethnic identity of diasporans (– when applicable –) in terms of cultural signifiers such as language, food, clothes, music and traditions.

In my opinion, those who preserve the language, memory and the traditions of the homeland, which is essential for maintaining a distinct ethnic identity and an emotional connectedness to the country of origin, belong to a diaspora. Furthermore, I believe that perpetuating a boundary to the host community might be necessary in order to develop a diaspora consciousness, a concept which will be explored later. Finally, sustaining relations to the homeland, that is, to the relatives left behind, be it by sometimes travelling there or keeping in contact via the new technologies, also seems important.

2.5 Describing and characterising diasporas

How can diasporas be described and what are the issues that people living in a diasporic situation have to deal with each day? 14 How can someone not having

\[\text{14 Many scholars have also commented on the role of women in the diaspora, stressing that especially women may have to face severe hardships, due to “the combined pressures of ‘race’ and gender” (Sommer 160, see also Appadurai 42) as well as having to deal with the “demands of family and work” (Clifford 227). On the other hand, they are also regarded as being more active in maintaining inherited traditions brought along from the home country and being given the opportunity to newly negotiate gender roles, which might be a chance for empowerment. As the female characters in my novels are not represented as having to face hardships more severe than the male characters, I decided to just briefly mention this}\]
this experience try to understand what living in the diaspora is like? And what are the main theoretical positions and findings Diaspora Studies have to offer? First, it has to be noted that the concept has made a considerable development in esteem; while it once was used pejoratively, nowadays diaspora carries a positive connotation (Dufoix 29). A qualification seems to be necessary in this context: it is doubtful whether this is also true for the members of the Jewish diaspora. Secondly, diaspora is always closely connected to displacement, which, on the one hand, entails a traumatic rupture, and, on the other hand, also involves a relationship to two different places, the diasporans’ current location and their original home. This “dual loyalty” (Lavie and Swedenburg 14) also means that “[d]iasporic populations frequently occupy no singular cultural space” (Rouse 1991 referred to in Lavie and Swedenburg 14).

Vijay Mishra has coined the term ‘diasporic imaginary’, which consists of two core components or characteristics: an emphasis on the “communal rather than the individual experience and a strong sense of displacement shared by all members of the “ethnic enclave” in question” (V. Mishra 423 qtd. in Sommer 159), which is reminiscent of Benedict Anderson’s concept of ‘imagined communities’. The ‘diasporic imaginary’ furthermore “suggests that people who identify themselves as part of a diaspora are creating an ‘imaginary’ – a landscape of dream and fantasy that answers their desires” (Fludernik xi).

Given the fact that diasporas can only be found in the wealthy Western states of the North (S. Mishra 163) – I would argue that this has to be generalised into the wealthy, industrial states of the West, which then also includes countries such as Australia – it is important to notice that, although diasporas “may enjoy the abstract rights and privileges of citizenship […] [they may not be given the right to live their] culture-specific practices […]” (S. Mishra 133) due to the fact that their culture is obviously distinct and ‘foreign’, that is, the culture of the members of the diaspora is different from that of the majority and might thus be met with suspicion on part of the ‘indigenous’ population of the host country.

aspect of the scholarship on diaspora.
Mayer further maintains that diasporas as such often come into being later on: as the projections of the second generation, born abroad (31). This is a claim I cannot fully accept, as I believe that preserving the memory of the home country is also of utmost importance to the first generation. Mayer also states that diasporas, like nation states, do not have one single history but rather have to be considered as constantly being remade, as being constructs (25). In this context it also seems necessary to mention that Sommer claims that, while members of diasporas tend to think of themselves as belonging to homogeneous entities, they have to be considered “as heterogeneous as any other imagined community” (161). These remarks are very much in accordance with what, for instance, Stuart Hall states about identity, a concept which will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter.

As far as a description of the diasporic situation in general is concerned, it is said to entail “dwelling, maintaining communities, [and] having collective homes away from home” (Clifford 221). Clifford further summarises that “[d]iaspora cultures thus mediate, in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place” (224). Thus, it is necessary for diaspora cultures to preserve their community and sustain some of their traditions, “customizing' and 'versioning' them in novel, hybrid, and often antagonistic situations (Clifford 230).

Moreover, the reason for moving away from a home country is not important for understanding the nature of diasporas, as people usually make a decision about staying or leaving again only later on, after arrival. “Only when migrants reach welcoming host countries where they intend to reside permanently do they begin to consider assimilation, integration, or joining or establishing diasporic entities” (Sheffer 77). These, then, can be considered as constituting some of the possible survival strategies of diasporas (see also Sheffer 80). Sheffer further states that those diasporans who want to keep and defend their identity will naturally try to sustain their relations to the homeland (24), while “[i]t is more difficult to withstand assimilationist opportunities when host societies are more tolerant” (93).
Finally, the question arises why diasporas actually persist and do not disintegrate by returning to their original home countries. The possibility exists that, while living in the diaspora, people might remove themselves from their homeland and not be able to identify with it any longer, “politically, ideologically, or socially, or because it would be too inconvenient and disruptive, if not traumatic, to leave the diaspora” (Safran 372). Diasporic and ethnic consciousness are then being strengthened by the return having changed into a strong myth, joining the members of the diaspora together (Safran 372). This collective production of a myth about the homeland, as well as the presentation of the culture of origin as desirable is psychologically understandable “as a reaction to the diaspora’s “particular condition of displacement and disaggregation” (V. Mishra 442 qtd. in Sommer 160) and as a token of resistance to the pressures of assimilation to the dominant culture” (Sommer 160).

2.6 Diaspora consciousness

The experience of living in the diaspora is also closely connected to a specific 'diaspora or diasporic consciousness', which I would like to denote as the knowledge and awareness of the persisting difference to the majority of a country's citizens in terms of culture, ethnicity, and social and financial advancement. Clifford summarises this experience in the following manner:

Diaspora consciousness is [...] constituted both negatively and positively. It is constituted negatively by experiences of discrimination and exclusion. [...] Suffice it so say that diasporic consciousness “makes the best of a bad situation.” Experience of loss, marginality, and exile (differentially cushioned by class) are often reinforced by systematic exploitation and blocked advancement. This constitutive suffering coexists with the skills of survival: strength in adaptive distinction, discrepant cosmopolitanism, and stubborn visions of renewal. Diaspora consciousness lives loss and hope as a defining tension. (224-225)15

15 These skills of survival are especially to be found in the character of Gogol, who in trying to distance himself from his heritage, arrives at safeguarding it.
Fludernik further maintains that diaspora consciousness forms part of what is now called 'identity politics' (xviii), and traces a development from an individualistic stance to seeing oneself as being “situated within an ethnic and cultural community to which one belongs” (xviii), which represents a new form of collective identity. Gilroy posits diaspora consciousness thus: “[It] highlights the tensions between common bonds created by shared origins and other ties arising from the process of dispersal and the obligation to remember a life prior to flight or kidnap” (Identity 328). He further summarises the constitution of diaspora consciousness and its difference to the nation as follows:

Life itself is at stake in the way the word suggests flight or coerced rather than freely chosen experiences of displacement. Slavery, pogroms, indenture, genocide and other unnameable terrors have all figured in the constitution of diasporas and the reproduction of diaspora-consciousness, in which identity is focused less on common territory and more on memory, or, more accurately, on the social dynamics of remembrance and commemoration. This historical rift between the location of residence and the location of belonging sets up another tension: between consciousness of diaspora-dispersal and affiliation and the distinctive modern structures and modes of power orchestrated by the institutional complexity of nation-states. Diaspora-identification exists outside of and sometimes in opposition to the political forms and codes of modern citizenship. (Gilroy, Migration 293)

One further aspect concerning a diasporic consciousness needs mentioning: that of different generations and their necessarily different relationships to home and host country, which are going to form an integral part in the following analysis. The parental generation has not experienced racism in their home country, as all are of the same colour. “The tensions between the old and new homes create the problem of divided allegiances that the two generations experience differently” (Radhakrishnan 123). He therefore questions how the two generations should interact (122).

A few questions concerning diaspora consciousness that remain unanswered have been formulated by Safran. He asks for the time necessary to develop such a specific diasporic consciousness and for the conditions required for its persistence. He also wonders “[w]hat factors or conditions – for example,
language, religion, relative deprivation, and political disabilities – are necessary or sufficient for the maintenance of a homeland myth” (Safran 376).

Diaspora consciousness is, I would argue, also connected to what Clifford calls “[f]undamental values of propriety and religion, speech and social patterns, and food, body, and dress protocols” (227). These instances are what I would like to call ‘cultural signifiers’ in my thesis. Mishra calls them “markers of difference” when he claims that “transmigrants find solace in self-familiarising practices. They cling to mother tongues and exotic sartorial habits, they run ‘ethnic’ outlets and form suburban enclaves, and they build culture-specific meeting halls and places of worship” (S. Mishra 133).

2.7 Connected but contrasted terms

It is also necessary to distinguish and set apart the concept of diaspora from other, related terms and concepts. As the scholarship on diaspora has developed in the orbit of cultural studies, thus entailing a far more extensive field, including concepts such as multiculturalism or globalisation, only a selection can be presented here. The first of these is the distinction between diasporans and immigrants or migrants. Sheffer refers to immigrants as “temporary sojourners” (17); he further terms those immigrants who integrate into the host society and break the ties with the home country, thus showing a continued interest and loyalty to the homeland to be an essential feature of diasporas (90). Sheffer moreover names organization as likely being the most significant factor for differentiating diasporans from migrants, although he qualifies this remark by stating that “usually only the core members of ethno-national migrant groups actually join ethnic organizations or become involved in their operation” (79). I would argue that this qualification is of utmost importance, as I am not convinced of the centrality of organisations in the context of diasporas.
The second important, related term is 'transnationalism'. According to Clifford, diasporas can be understood as forms of transnational cultures (Clifford 220, 234-5); Mijal Gandeslman-Trier also underlines their transnational networking across the borders of nation-states (qtd. in Kokot 10). Also Tölölyan, an important diaspora scholar and editor of the journal Diaspora,

views diasporas as exemplary communities that upset bounded categories in a number of senses: political, territorial, cultural and psychological [and claims that] diasporas are emblems of transnationalism because they embody the question of borders, which is at the heart of any adequate definition of the Others of the nation-state. (Tölölyan 1991: 6, qtd. in S. Mishra 132)  

In using an etymological analysis of the word, Mishra finds that “transnational would denote that which lies outside the national” (S. Mishra 131, emphasis in original), thus showing that diasporas question borders and boundaries. This also relates to the claim that diasporas can, like nation states, be understood in terms of Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities' (Mayer 8). Clifford goes along with that when he considers 'diaspora' to have become a “master trope”, which represents a subversion of nationality because of the fact that diasporans do not belong to exclusively one nation (Clifford, Routes qtd. in Mayer 12). This underlines Fludernik’s claim that “[d]iasporas create chaos and dilemmas for the traditional nation-state and for those caught between the battle-lines” (xxxiv). Sheffer even goes as far as claiming that diasporas are “precursors of globalized political systems” (258), which shows that diaspora is also closely connected to globalisation, as it is an effect, a consequence arising from it (Fludernik xxii). Kokot also states that 'diaspora' has come to be an umbrella term for a variety of concepts/expressions dealing with globalisation and its effects (1-2); the term 'transnationalism' discussed above may serve as an example. Finally, Roy Sommer refers to the adjectives ‘diasporic’ and 'transcultural' as two adverse responses to multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity. He argues that

[ e]thnic minorities have to meet at least two challenges: the external pressure of assimilation to the traditions of the cultural majority and

16 See also Krings qtd. in Mayer 8.
internal tensions between different generations within the diaspora itself. They may respond to these challenges by adapting to the new way of life or by holding on to the traditions and beliefs of their homelands. These two attitudes may be labelled 'transcultural' and 'diasporic'. (Sommer 177)

2.8 The Indian diaspora

“First, it is important to make a distinction between information about and knowledge of India and an emotional investment in India. [...] It would be foolish of me to expect that India will move my son the same way it moves me. It would be equally outrageous of me to claim that somehow my India is more real than his; my India is as much an invention or production as his.”

Radhakrishnan (125, emphasis in original)

The Indian diaspora is very diverse in origin, as there are various castes, religions, and especially languages in the present state of India. I decide to deal specifically with the Indian diaspora – in contrast to the South Asian diaspora, which would also include, for instance, expatriates from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka or Pakistan – because all of the authors whose novels I have chosen for analysis were either born to parents stemming from India (Meera Syal was born to parents originally from the Punjab; Jhumpa Lahiri was born to Bengali parents), or born and raised themselves in India (Uma Parameswaran was born in Madras). Furthermore, the diasporic families depicted in the novels are exclusively Indian and, in my analysis I will try to find out to which degree India is important to, or what kind of role it plays, for the first and second generations.

While Cohen mentioned the Indian diaspora as an example of a labour diaspora (18), Safran regards the Indian diaspora as such because of “its spread across three continents, its long history, its auxiliary (or middleman) role within host societies, and the varying attitudes of its members – ranging from integrationist to particularist” (369). As differences to the case of the prototypical diasporas he refers, for example, to the homeland which has never ceased to exist and has not encouraged return migration. However, a call for qualification is ringing
here; Partition has torn apart the 'homeland' for many Hindus and Muslims, as Pakistan was split off and, in 1971, East Pakistan became Bangladesh. In his account of the migration history of Indians, Dufoix states that Indian migration did not really begin before the nineteenth century on a large scale (41-46). He further mentions four different phases of emigration from India: first, during colonial times; then, after independence from Great Britain in 1947, to Western countries, especially to English-speaking ones; third, to the countries of the Persian Golf since the enormous growth of the petroleum industry in the 1970s and 1980s; and fourth, emigration of skilled and highly qualified workers, especially to the United States since the 1990s, which has been called a “brain-drain”.

And yet, this phenomenon of the “brain-drain” is “gradually being replaced by 'brain gain', which, tellingly enough, is being called 'the diaspora option'” (Jean-Baptiste Meyer et al. qtd. in Dufoix 104). Thus, it is theorized as having positive effects on the diasporans' home country. This also relates to the changed policy of India toward its emigrants. Since the 1970s, it has paid more attention to them and does not simply encourage integration into the host society anymore as it recognizes their value and support, for instance in bi-lateral relations or in financial terms. Furthermore, India has passed a law which grants its diasporans Indian citizenship (Dufoix 91). By these measures, the ties between the diaspora and the homeland are reinforced and strengthened.

Now I would like to turn to the question of Indian identity in the diaspora. As Fludernik (xxxii) commented on the consciousness of the Jewish diaspora as such as a reaction to their estrangement within the host society, the same can be claimed for any diaspora feeling the effects of otherness. Also Uma Parameswaran points to the fact that diasporas have to face “the threat of being relegated to the status of the 'Other'” (Parameswaran referred to in Fludernik xxix). An insightful comment on Indians in the US has been provided by Radhakrishnan, who, it can be reasoned due to the publication year of his article (2003), must have gained this insight sometime between the 1990s and 2003:
During the last few years, I have talked and listened to a number of young, gifted Indian children of the diaspora who, like my son, were born here and are thus “natural” American citizens. I was startled when they told me that they had grown up with a strong sense of being exclusively Indian, and the reason was that they had experienced little during their growing years that held out promise of first-class American citizenship. Most of them felt they could not escape being marked as different by virtue of their skin color, their family background, and other ethnic and unassimilated traits. Many of them recited the reality of a double life, the ethnic private life and the “American” public life, with very little mediation between the two.” (Radhakrishnan 122)

Finally, Radhakrishnan also comments on the relationship of the first generation of emigrants to their original homeland, which gives much insight into the longings and desires of diasporans. The quotation given above, however, also shows that, generally speaking, the second generation also regards itself as diasporans. I would argue, however, that each and everyone has to make this decision for him/herself. Furthermore, the quote leads to the next chapter on identity, which will allow a focus for the following analysis to be developed and give some direction to the summary of the theories on diaspora provided above. The analysis is supposed to show that a diasporic identity is constructed very much by longing for something that can only be kept alive by clinging to the memories, traditions and language of the home country, to cultural signifiers.

Very often it is when we feel deeply dissatisfied with marketplace pluralism and its unwillingness to confront and correct the injustices of dominant racism that we turn our diasporan gaze back to the home country. Often the gaze is uncritical and nostalgic. [...] We can cultivate India in total diasporan ignorance of the realities of the home country. By this token, anything and everything is India according to our parched imagination: half-truths, stereotypes, so-called traditions, rituals, and so forth. Or we can cultivate an idealized India that has nothing to do with contemporary history. Then again, we can visualize the India we remember as an antidote to the maladies both here and there and pretend that India hasn't changed since we left its shores. These options are harmful projections of individual psychological needs that have little to do with history. (Radhakrishnan 128)

As the quotation by Radhakrishnan impressively demonstrates, diasporans have to face many hardships, may be exposed to racism and have to overcome the fact of having left behind their country of origin, their 'roots', and their relatives. However, it is necessary to notice that the step into 'the diaspora
option’ is, in contemporary times, usually one made due to economic reasons; therefore, an idealisation of the home country, though inherent in diasporas and their consciousness as such, is not of much avail. The experiences made in the host country by diasporans (that is, whether they are met with hostility, suspicion, or friendliness) as well as diaspora consciousness – based not only on the tension between the 'location of residence' and the 'location of origin', but also preserving the language, memories and traditions of the homeland – are crucial factors in the formation of a diasporic identity.

2.9 Conclusion

So far, a brief history of the development of the term diaspora has been provided, various attempts at defining this theoretical concept as well as at establishing some of its features have been investigated. Furthermore, a description and characterisation of the diaspora experience as well as of diaspora consciousness has been incorporated. In addition, a relation to several terms which are connected but not intrinsic to the concept of diaspora has been established. And finally, a brief discussion of the Indian diaspora has been included. I regard these remarks as important for my thesis in order to be able to gain an understanding of the concept of diaspora and what living in the diaspora engenders. The next chapter deals with an overview of the scholarship on identity. I regard these two theoretical chapters as relevant for the analysis of the novels to follow because they provide a framework and a background. Migration to a foreign place and establishing or joining a diaspora there implies a fundamental move in one's identity, due to identity being constantly transformed and changed, as will be seen in the following chapter.
It is not a question of knowing whether I speak of myself in a way that conforms to what I am, but rather of knowing whether I am the same as that of which I speak.

“[…] the grip on the present, the confidence of being in control of one's destiny, is what men and women in our type of society most conspicuously lack.”
Bauman (8)

3 Discovering identity

3.1 Introduction

Dufoix states that “Diaspora' has become a global word that fits the global world” (108). I claim that this statement can equally be applied to the concept of 'identity', given that 'fits' be replaced by 'is used by'. 'Identity' has become a well-known and much-used concept that is no less fashionable than that of 'diaspora'. These two concepts are not only practically equally popular within academia, they are also intrinsically intertwined and linked. In contrast to diaspora, however, identity is a term also used by the wider public. Identity also plays a crucial role in conflicts over “cultural, ethnic, religious, “racial”, and national differences” (Gilroy, Camps 106). Furthermore, the term identity has changed in recent years due to the influence of globalisation (Elliott and Du Gay xi). In the wake of globalisation, people find themselves increasingly in haphazard and uncertain situations; identity has thus become a safety-net, an anchor and a mediator between “the often discrepant approaches to understanding self and sociality” (Gilroy, Camps 105).\(^\text{17}\)

Yet, the term 'identity' denotes a very complex concept that has lured representatives of various academic disciplines into investigating its depths and pitfalls; among these disciplines can be named sociology, psychology, philosophy and cultural studies\(^\text{18}\), which shows that identity can be approached from various angles and perspectives. Hence, scholars and lay persons talk

\(^{17}\) See also Gilroy, Camps 107 and Identity 312.
about various identities – which can be distinguished into individual identities and collective identities. Collective identity leads people to disintegrate their individual identity in a larger group, be it a nation, an ethnicity, or a community of other sorts (Gilroy, *Identity* 304). Mayer also maintains that collective identities develop at borders, at boundaries to others, therefore they are historically contingent and situational (5). Further labels given to various sorts of identities are national, political or cultural identities, as well as societal, ethnic, 'racial', class or gender identities. Woodward, for instance, differentiates between "global, national, local and personal" identities (1). Concerning cultural identity, I would suggest, a connection exists with ethnic and national identity, or rather, that the latter are constituents of cultural identity. I will concentrate on a cultural studies perspective with a brief preceding excursion to a psychological aspect of identity – the role of the family in identity formation.

In this chapter I intend to provide a concise overview of the scholarship on 'identity' and show some of the manifold angles that identity can be approached from, although my focus will of course be on a cultural studies perspective. Therefore, a good portion of this chapter deals with notable authors in the field of cultural identity. Starting with Benedict Anderson, whose concept of 'imagined communities' has been crucial for any further theorisations, I will continue by discussing Homi K. Bhabha's concepts (hybridity, Third Space, the beyond) as well as Stuart Hall's ideas (for instance, representation, difference, and hybridity). My intention is to round off this chapter with a discussion on Paul Gilroy's contributions on the matter and bring this into connection with the concept of 'diaspora', in order to build a bridge between the two theoretical chapters. As a final point, I will refer to the role of memory and belonging for

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18 See also Simon 3 and Gilroy, *Camps* 101. A sociological perspective, for instance, is presented by Elliott and Du Gay in *Identity in Question*. They establish a connection between identity and three concepts: postmodernity, postmodernism, and psychoanalysis. For further details see the introduction to the volume by Elliott and Du Gay.

19 Individual identity is also mentioned by Roy Sommer, who refers to Charles Taylor's highly influential essay "The Politics of Recognition". His position is that the behaviour of family and friends vis-à-vis the 'self' is crucial in constituting individual identity. Taylor, whose main interest lies not with the individual migrant but, rather, with cultural or collective identities of diasporic minorities, transfers the problem of recognition from the private to the public sphere (Taylor qtd. in Sommer 151-152).

20 This point is also made by Kelly, who draws attention to the boundaries “from within and those from without, self-identifying and being identified by others” (42).
diasporic identity. In my conclusion, I want to recapitulate those concepts brought forward which I consider as most useful and of most avail for my analyses.

### 3.2 Approaching the concept of 'identity'

#### 3.2.1 A psychological perspective

Before doing a cultural studies analysis, I would like to make a brief foray into a psychological perspective concerning the importance of the family in identity formation.\(^{21}\) I regard this as crucial for my thesis, as my novels deal with migrant families who live in the diaspora. For instance, the protagonist of my first novel chosen for analysis is a child – at this age the family plays an enormous role in identity formation. Fortier refers to the family as being a central factor, because it is “where ethnic emblems circulate, are rehearsed and deployed within a system of inter-generational responsibility” (Fortier 166). For me, this signifies that the family can be considered to be the first and therefore foremost factor for passing on cultural traditions – and thus also part of cultural identity – from one generation to the next. This does not mean, however, that the family is the sole source of identity, it can only lay a foundation, as identity is always subject to change.\(^{22}\)

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21 Fortier argues that women especially bear the brunt of constructing cultural identity. She further claims that the role of women is being given too much weight within the family, but outside of this sheltered realm is not being paid enough attention (3).

22 Gilroy also claims that the family – this refers now more to the parental generation, I suggest – is also an area where identity has undergone significant changes (Camps 107). In accordance with Woodward (1), he asserts that traditional gender roles are now subject of negotiation. I therefore reason that both sexes have to find new ways of dealing with the changed situation of their position, and also their power, not only within the domestic but also the public and political spheres.

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3.2.2 Different views on identity

In *Diaspora politics*, Sheffer provides a list of four different approaches to “ethno-genesis and to ethnic identity”. These are a) the primordialist, given, or essentialist, b) the instrumentalist, c) the psychological and ethno-symbolic and mythical, and d) the constructionist view (18-19). The constructionist view is the most contemporary approach and “assume[s] that nations essentially are modern social constructs, artifacts [sic] created by “cultural engineers” and elites who “invent” traditions in order to organize newly enfranchised masses into new status systems and communities” (Sheffer 19). Perceiving nations as 'social constructs' is, I gather, a reference to Benedict Anderson's notion of 'imagined communities', which will be discussed later.

In Identity and Difference, as well as in Between Camps, Gilroy provides an overview of how 'identity' is used terminologically. He identifies three main uses, but refers to them not by the same, yet similar terms. Identity can be seen as 'subjectivity', as 'identification' and as 'belongingness' (*Identity* 314-316). In *Between camps*, the terminology Gilroy uses is “identity as subjectivity”, “sameness understood as intersubjectivity” and “social and political solidarity” (108-110). When understood as subjectivity, identity refers to the 'self', an internal, individual identity embodied in a person who is furnished with self-consciousness (*Identity* 314, *Camps* 108). Woodward defines subjectivity as “our sense of self. [...] The positions which we take up and identify with constitute our identities” (39). This last statement underlines that also subjectivity, like any form of identity, cannot be regarded as stable but is constituted by various positions we take up at various points in our lives.

In terms of identification, identity refers to a social process the individual is going through and is a key word in differentiating between “what counts as the same and what as different” (*Camps* 109).23 This 'intersubjectivity' means that

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23 See also Woodward: Identification “describes the process of identifying with others, either through lack of awareness of difference or separation, or as a result of perceived similarities [...]” (14).
identities of “selves […] are formed through relationship with others, [through]
conflict and exclusion. This

add[s] layers of complexity to deliberations about how selves – and their
identities – are formed through relationships of exteriority, conflict, and
exclusion. Differences can be found within identities as well as between
them. The Other, against whose resistance the integrity of an identity is
to be established, can be recognized as part of the self that is no longer
plausibly understood as a unitary entity but appears instead as one
fragile moment in […] dialogic circuits […]. (Gilroy, Camps 109-110)

In terms of 'belongingness', Gilroy regards identity as referring to solidarity in
social and political terms, which implies notions of “ethnic, racialized and
national identity” (Identity 315). He suggests the idea of “movement as an
alternative to belongingness which is based on place” (Gilroy, Identity 318). And
this, I would argue, is the gist of the matter; in the contemporary world,
movement, turbulence, upheaval are the major issues and therefore force us to
regard them as the 21st century's alternative to old ideas about identity. Further
approaches, further views of identity, will be presented in the following section,
which deals with the most distinguished theorists in the field of identity studies.

Before discussing these theorists, however, I would like to mention one further
issue intrinsically connected to identity: the body. For my purposes, I would only
like to advert to the danger of associating or equating the body with identity, as
also Gilroy warns against the inherent danger of ‘othering’ and perceiving 'the
other' as a threat (Gilroy, Identity 308 and Camps 104). For the individual living
in this 'other' body, his/her body is “[n]o longer a site for the affirmation of
subjectivity and autonomy, identity mutates. […] [Thus t]he scope for individual
agency dwindles and then disappears” (Gilroy, Camps 104 and Identity 309).
Therefore, I would argue, being 'othered' due to one's bodily appearance can be
regarded as a threat to one's individual identity.
3.3 Notable theorists

3.3.1 Benedict Anderson

Benedict Anderson is a prominent scholar in the field of identity, in particular concerning national identity, as he is known for his concept of 'imagined communities'. In his introduction to *Imagined Communities*, Anderson states that nationalism is far from being outdated and will thrive for quite some time yet to come (3). He starts from the notion that “nationality, or, as one might prefer to put it in view of that word's multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind,” (4) and then asks why these concepts are so much connected to emotional issues. He therefore suggests that, instead of treating nation as if it were an ideology, “[i]t would […] make things easier if one treated it as if it belonged with 'kinship' and 'religion', rather than with 'liberalism' or 'fascism'” (5). To me this means that he seeks to break the concept free of any ideologically-oriented connotation and rather tries to situate nation – or the state of being a nation – in the realm of blood or cultural ties, as I perceive religion as a part of culture. Taking all my reading on identity into consideration, however, makes this idea appear rather static, belonging to the category of 'essentialist' identities. Nevertheless, his concept has had enormous influence in the theorisation of identity.

In light of all these considerations, Anderson's definition of nation reads as follows: “it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (6). He explains his choice of the word 'imagined' such that it is impossible for every member of a particular nation to know all of its other members (6). It is also 'limited' due to the boundaries, the borders that every nation has, marking it as a discrete entity. Additionally, it is 'sovereign' because the concept stems from a historical period when the aristocracy as well as the church lost their firm grip on humanity. Finally, nations are 'communities' because, in spite of all of its shortcomings, fraternity and companionship are

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24 For Anderson's views on the connection between nationality and language as well as the rise of nationalism, see pages 192-197.

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central to every nation (Anderson 6-7). Branach-Kallas and Więckowska state about this classic definition that this ‘imagined community’ “depends on its history, literature and other cultural discourses” (7). Thus, the nation’s members’ identity is regarded as “homogeneous, stable and unchanging in time” (7). Homi K. Bhabha, nonetheless, challenges this supposed homogeneity, as he regards “nationalist representations [as] highly fragile and unstable constructions” (7). Bhabha’s stance will be further explored in the following section.

A further aspect brought forth by Anderson is the issue of forgetting the traumatic upheaval engendered by leaving one’s origins. He suggests that “[o]ut of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives,” which he explains to be the source of a “conception of personhood, identity, which, because it cannot be remembered, must be narrated” (204, emphasis in original). Thus, due to different surroundings, second generation immigrants or diasporans develop an identity that is different from their parents’; and in order to reconnect with them, lacking shared memories, they need narration as a substitute for memory. This, however, I need to qualify, is a process which does not only apply to migrant communities but is a common experience between each and every parent and child generation.

3.3.2 Homi K. Bhabha

Hybridity is a concept common in post-colonial studies, which I would like to briefly explore before presenting Bhabha’s usage of the term. Papastergiadis suggests that “[h]ybridity has become one of the most useful concepts for representing the meaning of cultural difference in identity” (14). It has been criticised as representing a sort of ‘global identity’ and for the fact that it can only work when the mutual influence of “movement and bridging, displacement and connection” is taken into account. (Papastergiadis 15). A further point of criticism of hybridity are its biological connotations, as the concept was originally borrowed from biology. Nonetheless, in the writings of Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall, hybridity is used to describe identity as always uncompleted –
not only because “origins, influences and interests are multiple, complex and contradictory” (Papastergiadis 14) – but also because it is formed in interaction with others. Simon formulates this perspective thus: “[i]identity results from interaction in the social world and in turn guides interaction in the social world” (2).

Homi K. Bhabha uses the concept of 'hybridity' as an “interpretative mode for dealing with […] the juxtapositions of space, and the combination of 'time lag' out of which a sense of being is constructed that constantly oscillates between the axioms of foreign and familiar” (Papastergiadis 192). And while a hybrid identity does not come into being by adding one cultural identity to another, former, fixed cultural identity (a notion that is most strongly rejected by Bhabha), its emergence is rather due to “the dual process of displacement and correspondence in the act of translation” (Papastergiadis 194). Also Kley mentions that Bhabha's concept of hybridity is often misunderstood as referring to the mix of two cultures that were pure forms before that mix. Instead, Bhabha has to be regarded as 'finishing with the business' of purity and essence of cultures – and their conception as distinct, existing within boundaries – that are subject to mixture and hybridisation (Kley 56). Homogeneity is thus a concept that has to be completely abandoned and left behind, as it does not and did not exist and recurs to a static view of identity (Kley 57).

In his discussion of Bhabha's work, Papastergiadis also draws attention to the fact that the notion of ‘agency’ must not be neglected in the discussion about hybridity, as every individual is endowed with the faculty of reason and the capacity to consciously deal with experience. Contemporary forms of agency have to be seen in light of the process of identification which is never complete, just like identity cannot be regarded as a fixed essence (192). “Identity always presupposes a sense of location and a relationship with others. However, this attention to place does not presuppose closure. For the representation of identity most often occurs precisely at the point where there has been a displacement” (193). Therefore, identity “emerge[s] in a context of difference and displacement” (193). This context entails a tension between the two.
colliding cultures. “It is in this tension that a 'third space' emerges which can effect forms of political change that go beyond antagonistic binarisms between the rulers and the ruled” (195).

Hence, the concept of the 'third space' is another important contribution to understanding identity. It specifies that identity “derives from a social context [, which] implies fluidity and hybridity of identity” (Kelly 33) due to change in interaction with others. Kley regards the concept as representing a state of insecurity that develops due to preceding experiences, which have left a mark on the respective person (63), but the “third space displaces the histories that constitute it [...] (Bhabha, 'Third Space' 1990: 211). This enables a “relational” view of identity, (as well as 'situational', I would argue) because it is produced and constantly changed in relation to and in relating with other people. Bhabha explains the 'third space' as the space of enunciation, which is required for the production of meaning when two people, or two 'places' communicate (Bhabha, 'Cultural Diversity' 1995, 208).

It is only when we understand that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation, that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or 'purity' of culture are untenable [...]. It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew. (Bhabha, 'Cultural Diversity' 1995, 208)

Bhabha's elaboration reminds me of Stuart Hall's concept of 'positionality', of the fact that every statement, every enunciation is 'positioned'. This concept, however, will be explored later. The 'third space' is intrinsically connected to hybridity, it enables hybridity, as both terms denote a state of 'in-betweensness'. “It is in this space that we will find those words with which we can speak of Ourselves and Others. And by exploring this hybridity, this 'Third Space', we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves” (Bhabha, 'Cultural Diversity' 1995, 209).

25 Also Frankenberg and Mani maintain that “identity is both relational and situated” (278).
Another well-known notion of Bhabha's is the 'beyond', which, he claims, is the current prevailing figure of speech concerning culture. This 'beyond' are the innovative processes that result from the expression of cultural differences, which he also calls “in-between' spaces” (Location 2). The concept “signifies spatial distance, marks progress, promises the future” (Location 5-6). Hence, the 'beyond' is also a space which encroaches on the present (Location 10).

Via a reference to Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks, where Fanon recognizes the crucial importance – for subordinated peoples – to assert their indigenous cultural traditions and retrieve their repressed histories (Fanon referred to in Bhabha, Location 13), Bhabha suggests an understanding of the 'beyond' as a boundary as well as bridge that “captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and world – the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations” (Bhabha, Location 13). In connection to 'home', he suggests that the boundaries between home and world, the private and the public, become blurred (Location 13). Within the context of migration, I regard this blurred relationship as very accurate and to the point. The lives of migrants are often subject of political and societal, that is, public, discussion in their countries of settlement. Furthermore, this observation is in line with Woodward's statement that, since the new social movements, which began in the 1960s, the personal has become the political and identity has become “a major factor in political mobilization” (Woodward, Identity 24). Bhabha is in accordance with this, referring to the reorganisation of the domestic sphere – that is, the changed balance of power between the sexes – he claims that “the personal-is-the-political; the world-in-the-home” (Bhabha, Location 15).

In his article “Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences”, Bhabha presents one of his further contributions to cultural theory, the two notions embedded in the article's title. I will not go into detail about this terminological and conceptual differentiation; yet, in this article Bhabha insists on the on-going
constructedness of culture. This is a point which I regard as useful for my analyses and which I believe must never be forgotten.26

3.3.3 Stuart Hall

“Cultural identity and diaspora”, from 199027, is one of Stuart Hall's most well-known articles and a significant contribution to cultural studies generally, as well as providing several highly useful insights for my analyses. While starting from a completely different point of view than I do – his point of reference is the 'new' cinema of the Caribbean and its historical development, while my object of analysis is literature written by Indian migrants living in the diaspora – his first point is that cultural practices and representations are always 'positioned', that is, the individual concerned in the respective interaction always comes from a specific background; the discourse of diaspora experience is no exception concerning this 'positionality'. This point is also made by Woodward, who states that meaning and subject positions are produced through representation, which can thus be regarded as establishing individual and collective identities (14). Furthermore, “who speaks, and the subject who is spoken of, [...] are never identical, never exactly in the same place” (Hall, Identity 51). Hence, identity is a constant, uncompleted process of production, which is “always constituted within, not outside, representation” (Hall, Identity 51).

Hall then proposes the possibility of regarding cultural identity from two different perspectives. The first perspective presents cultural identity as 'oneness', to use Hall's terminology, signifying that it derives from “one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', [...] which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (Identity, 51). This collective identity is not subject to historical

26 Bhabha also puts forward the concept of 'cultural time'. Essentially, this means that while the majority and the minority try to regard each other's culture as equal, and see equal worth, the majority usually does not take the “borderline’ temporalities of partial, minority cultures” (Questions 56) into account.
27 His earlier article “New Ethnicities” from 1989, focused on black politics in Britain, implies basically the same general remarks.
influence or change and thus, obviously, representative of an essentialist approach to understanding cultural identity. Yet, Hall argues that it must not be underestimated in its impact: the rediscovering of such "hidden histories" has been of enormous influence for social movements such as feminism or the 'writing (and speaking) back' from the perspective of the colonised (Hall, *Identity* 52).

The second perspective recognises that, apart from many similarities, cultural identity also lives by difference. Although the history of the Indian diaspora can in no way be compared to the terrible historical period of slavery and the slave trade, I would argue that this difference is nonetheless a concept also applicable to the Indians living in the diaspora. They cannot be compared to the Indians 'at home' anymore as a changed environment influences people and always leaves traces. Hall's words are these:

[c]ultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. [...] But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. [...] [I]dentities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (*Identity* 52)

He further claims that the past will always have an influence on the present, but the relation to it has changed, as moving, migrating, has created a rupture. Thus, the past is "always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position [...]" (Hall, *Identity* 53 and 58).

In order to understand this fact – that identity does not occur in a straight line from a fixed point of origin – Hall suggests that identity forms between and under the influences of two axes: "the vector of similarity and continuity; and the vector of difference and rupture" (*Identity*, 53). If I understand him correctly here then this phrasing can be regarded as a summary and an interweaving of the

On the other hand, difference (in the sense of Derrida's notion of 'differance'), also entails that “meaning is never finished or completed, but keeps on moving to encompass other, additional or supplementary meanings [...]. Without relations of difference, no representation could occur” (Hall, *Identity* 54). Hence, the all-time favourite notion of ‘positioning' comes again into play.\(^{28}\) Finally, Hall refers to the diaspora (again he refers exclusively to the Caribbean experience, but I consider his remarks to be applicable in a broader context):

I use this term here metaphorically, not literally: diaspora does not refer us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return, even if it means pushing other people into the sea. This is the old, imperialising, the hegemonising, form of 'ethnicity'. [...] The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference, by *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. (Hall, *Identity* 57-58, emphasis in original).

This passage has been quoted by many theorists; it is, from my experience, one of the most cited, one of the most crucial in any discussion about diasporic cultural identity. One of the reasons for its popularity might be the fact that it neatly summarises and brings together the 'old' and the 'new', essentialist and constructionist views, on cultural identity, while clearly taking up a stance, clearly avowing the 'new', constructionist perception, regarding cultural identity in its diversity, plurality, hybridity and historical contingency.

Apart from emphasising the notions of hybridity, positionality, and historical contingency in a discussion of identity, Hall also draws attention to viewing identity as a story (Hall qtd in Kelly 33).\(^{29}\) The term 'identity-story' is thus

\(^{28}\) Also Woodward underlines this statement that representation is a means of 'becoming' which enables people to take a certain position and thus “are able to reconstruct and transform historical identities” (21).

\(^{29}\) This idea is also mentioned in his article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, printed in, amongst others, *Identity and Difference*.  

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emblematic of the fact that identities are never the same but constantly represent a position that someone is taking in a specific situation, a specific context. This relates to the various aspects that constitute what is commonly referred to as 'individual identity'. By this I mean that individuals are never the same in every situation and phase of their lives, as well as in contact and dialogue with different people or situations; for instance, individuals usually behave differently, 'position' themselves differently, in interaction with their family, their friends, their colleagues from work, and with people they might just scantily be acquainted with or just have got to know.

'Identity-stories', on the other hand, seem important insofar as Eakin suggests that identity is also connected to narration, as “the idea [of] what we are could be said to be a story of some kind” (ix). He further maintains that self-narration, be it about the present or the past, happens according to social constraints, protocols and rules, rules we have learned in our lives in order to be accepted by our interlocutors (Eakin 23-9). And, while the stories we narrate may be governed by certain rules, we “merge with them: in this sense our stories are our selves” (Eakin 30). This idea, I argue, connects very well with the concept of 'the other' about which Hall states that it is a position one is relegated to by the actors of this process of 'othering'. The position as 'the other', the migrant who comes from a different background, is then internalised (Hall, Identity 52) and surfaces in the stories we 'they' narrate.30

Stuart Hall, in his essay “Who Needs 'Identity'?”, (1996) published in Questions of Cultural Identity, answers this question as follows: In trying to “rearticulate the relationship between subjects and discursive practices [...] the question of identity recurs – or rather [...] the question of identification” (Hall, Questions 2, emphasis in original). He explains the intricate concept of identification thus: It gets meaning from both discourse and psychoanalysis and is defined in the following manner:

30 However, Jha reminds that nationalist discourse first consumes 'the others' but then they reappropriate that gaze and look (or write) back (53).
In common sense language, identification is constructed [as the] recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics within another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation. In contrast with the ‘naturalism’ of this definition, the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed – always 'in process'. [...] [I]dentification is in the end conditional, lodged in contingency. 31 (Hall, Questions 2-3) 32

Moreover, “in late modern times [identities have to be regarded as] increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions” (Hall, Questions 4).

Furthermore, Hall stresses as most important that “identities are constructed through, not outside, difference” (Questions 4, emphasis mine), “that is by what it is not” (Woodward 2). Thus, it is not only “the relation to the Other” which makes identification and identity-formation possible (Hall, Questions 4). He therefore uses identity as a concept which enables a meeting between two processes: the first being that individuals are subjected to and “subjects of particular discourses”, the second implying that subjectivities are produced (Hall, Questions 5-6) “through and within discourse” (Hall, Questions 10). Identities are thus representations of subject positions every individual is forced to take up. 33 This “representation is always constructed across a 'lack', across a division, from the place of the Other, and thus can never be adequate – identical – to the subject processes which are invested in them” (Hall, Questions 6). 34 In his study, Papastergiadis has included a concise overview of Stuart Hall's and Homi K. Bhabha's work in the field of cultural identity:

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31 Gilroy also states that the “grasp of identity turns instead towards an emphasis on contingency, indeterminacy and conflict,” which is reminiscent of chaos theory, and thus leads to “new understandings of self, sameness and solidarity” (identity 334-5).

32 Bauman puts the difference between identities and identification thus: “Perhaps instead of talking about identities, inherited or acquired, it would be more in keeping with the realities of the globalizing world to speak of identification, a never-ending, always incomplete, unfinished and open-ended activity in which we all, by necessity or by choice, are engaged” (11, emphasis in original).

33 The idea of force recited by Hall derives from Foucault's comment that “power is not only imposed externally but works as the regulatory and normative means by which subjects are formed” (Hall 1993: 23 qtd in Hall, Questions 15).

34 In extension to this view of representation, Hall refers to Lacan's concept of the mirror stage. When the child first recognises itself as a distinct being, it experiences “the dislocating rupture of the look from the place of the Other” (9).
According to Stuart Hall, cultural identity is always hybrid, but he also insists that the precise form of this hybridity will be determined by specific historical formations and cultural repertoires of enunciation. Homi Bhabha notes the rising influence of once excluded voices now challenging the boundaries of what is seen as a Eurocentric project. The affinity of these interruptive voices, Bhabha suggests, offers the basis for rethinking the process of change and the subjects of modernity. (Papastergiadis 189)

He concludes that Hall's position equates hybridity with transformation. This transformation is neither construed as “oppositionality” nor as “a neat succession”. Instead, it “is seen as occurring in a more 'generative' way: as ideas, world-views and material forces interact with each other, they undergo a process of being internally reworked until the old ones are displaced” (Papastergiadis 189).

Papastergiadis further suggests that hybridity can either refer to the relations between centre and periphery or between different peripheries, or as the identity resulting from these alliances (190). And, although Hall regards cultural identities as never complete, this does not entail that a sense of completeness is the ultimate ambition; this incompleteness and on-going process is a source of energy. The anti-essentialist view of ethnicity has brought about a change in its conception, denoting that everyone has a different spatial, historical, experiential, and cultural background, which signifies that we are all “ethnically located and our ethnic identities are crucial to our subjective sense of who we are” (Hall qtd. in Papastergiadis 190, emphasis in original).
3.3.4 Paul Gilroy – Connecting Identity and Diaspora

“Diaspora is a useful means to re-assess the idea of essential and absolute identity precisely because it is incompatible with that deterministic way of thinking.”

(Gilroy, *Identity* 331)

The last scholar I would like to mention concerning identity is Paul Gilroy. Having written an article entitled “Diaspora and the detours of identity”, where he discusses the “tensions between fundamentalist, essentialist views of identity and diasporic identities” (Woodward 47), and also having dealt with that topic in *Between Camps*, I would like to devote a sub-section to his insights; and, in connection with several other notions brought forth by, for instance, Avtar Brah, I will provide a synthesis of the concepts of ‘diaspora’ and ‘identity’. In his contribution to *Identity and Difference*, an article entitled “Diaspora and the detours of identity”, Gilroy maintains that, “[p]rincipally, identity provides a way of understanding the interplay between our subjective experience of the world and the cultural and historical settings in which that fragile subjectivity is formed, […]. To share an identity is apparently to be bonded on the most fundamental levels: national, 'racial', ethnic, regional, local. And yet, identity is always particular, as much about difference as about shared belonging” (Gilroy, *Identity* 301). Identity then becomes a matter of “contingency, indeterminacy, and conflict” (Gilroy, *Camps* 128). This reminds me very much of Stuart Hall's insistence on the connection between sameness and difference.36 In terms of difference, there will always be an opposition between 'I' and 'you', or 'we' and 'them'; this opposition signifies inclusion and exclusion. However, when a group wants to ascertain its identity in political form, “whether this is a nation, a state, a movement, a class or some unsteady combination of them all,” then identity is also about power (Gilroy, *Identity* 302).

Furthermore, the concept of diaspora adverts to in-between spaces and thus aids in defining more up-to-date theories of culture (Gilroy, *Identity* 341). Diaspora, Gilroy states, can be understood as offering an alternative vision of

35 Concerning diaspora, Gilroy draws attention to the concept's connection with masculinism (*Identity* 333).
36 This is one of the insights to be gained from his article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”.

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identity; diasporic identity macerates the connection of territory, identity and consciousness. He suggests the metaphor of similar yet not identical 'seeds' to be 'sown' in different places. This means that, according to the specific place a person or family migrates to, the outcome – that is, the relation to the homeland – may vary. Thus, the term disrupts national discourse and “contributes to the analysis of intercultural and transcultural processes and forms” (Gilroy, Camps 123). Identity in a diasporic situation, intrinsically interconnected with diaspora consciousness, is focused less on territorial belongingness than on the process of remembering the location of origin, which, due to living in the diaspora, is in danger of being forgotten (Gilroy, Camps 124 and in Identity 318). This, however, I believe does certainly not apply to the first generation, and probably also not the following two to three generations. The danger of forgetting one's ancestry, I would argue, is only given when the respective family has assimilated and integrated completely into the host society, through adaptation of the cultural and societal specificities of the country of residence, maybe also through intermarriage, while having severed all ties with the country of origin, including its language, customs, traditions, rituals and stories or myths, as well as having broken all ties with relatives still living there. In this case, the respective family can no longer be regarded as diasporic. In conclusion, diaspora “opens up a historical and experiential rift between the locations of residence and the locations of belonging” (Gilroy, Camps 124 and Identity 329).

3.3.5 Beyond Gilroy – weaving the web of diaspora and identity

Fortier underlines Gilroy's distinction between 'routes' and 'roots' (Gilroy 1997 qtd in Kelly 34), a useful conception for understanding diaspora affiliations, because diaspora is a space “that brings together 'where you're from', 'where you're at' (Gilroy 1991), and where you're going, and reconfigures them into new webs of meaning,” (Fortier 17) because “'where you're at' is not necessarily a single, homogeneous or exclusivist nation, community, or home” (Fortier 163).
I like this terminology of routes and roots. These two words denote a fine
difference – between being rooted within a specific place, history or community,
and being en route, on the way to either one’s roots or walking along different
routes and being constantly in change. Routes and intersections both connote
being on the way, thus constantly changing by making one step after the other.
And, as Gilroy rather prefers routes to roots, this can be regarded as a
“problematising of a “return” [which] is similar to a process identified by Homi
Bhabha as “translation,” an exploration of identities as transformative processes
in the interplay of history and politics” (Kelly 36).

To return to Fortier’s phrasing, I believe that the issue of different generations
needs to be taken into consideration, asking whether younger ones might still
have the same connection to their parents’ country of origin, or whether they still
see it as significant for their lives at all (Fortier 162). In order to deal with the
issue of belonging and home, Fortier refers to Avtar Brah who distinguishes
between

'homing desire' and 'desire for the homeland' as a way of capturing the
problematic of 'belonging' and 'home' in diaspora. Brah introduces this
differentiation because, she argues, 'not all diasporas sustain an ideology
of “return”' (1996: 180). Brah’s distinction is pertinent for it draws our
attention to how claims for ‘home’ may vary. (Brah referred to in Fortier
163)\(^{37}\)

The “homing desire […] is the desire to feel at home, by physically or
symbolically re-membering places as habitual spaces […]” (Fortier 163). The
'desire for the homeland', as it is represented here and as I understand it,
however, is rather a political question of the desire to still belong to the
homeland and be citizens of it. Thus, I would argue, 'homing desire' has more to
do with identity, specifically with the spatial part of identity formation.

One further issue which has enormous influences on the formation of identity,
not only in general but also in a specifically diasporic context, is globalisation.
“bounded belonging” (Gilroy, Identity 303), that is, as I understand, a strong

\(^{37}\) As mentioned in the introduction, Avtar Brah has also coined the term ‘diaspora space’,
which denotes a tension between displacement and rootedness (1996: 208-209).
emotional connection to one specific place, is no longer of relevance, as
globalisation and all its effects lead to a changing perception in the theorisation
of identity (Elliott & Du Gay xi). This change marks an essentialising view of
national identity as negative for the nation-state – and for both its indigenous
and its migrant populations, I would argue. In light of these negative effects,
Gilroy proposes the example of diasporic identities, as diasporas have been
forced to open themselves up to new influences. The concept of diaspora is
thus a new approach for understanding identity which is no longer premised on
territoriality but on solidarity – this solidarity may be encouraged and aided by
the new technologies (Gilroy, Identity 304). These, especially the Internet, have
enabled people all around the globe – diasporas benefit exceptionally from it –
to communicate and share details about their social and cultural lives.38 Jennifer
Kelly also points to the fact that, due to globalisation, the media are an
important factor in the identity formation of the young generation (5). She also
underlines the temporality of identity, something that is in constant flux and
rather “borrowed” than a “fixed essential entity” (Kelly 7).39

Finally, weaving the web between identity and diaspora means understanding
that these two concepts are inextricably linked. Diasporans inescapably have a
different identity-position to start from than people who do not have a diasporic
background. Being a member of a diaspora entails a constant negotiation
between one’s roots, which lie in a different country and culture, and one’s
present surroundings, by that I mean not only place but also people, culture,
life-style (keeping up-to-date with globalisation in mind) and the various
situations that this environment provokes. This negotiation involves a constant
reconfiguring of one’s identity positions and of what or who one identifies with.

38 Gilroy calls this the “communicative circuitry”, which leads to a changed perception of space
(Gilroy, Identity 335).
39 Also Radhakrishnan adverts to ethnicity as changing and “context-specific” (119).
3.4 Re-membering belonging(ess)

In her introduction to Migrant Belongings: memory, space and identity, Anne-Marie Fortier asserts that “cultural identity is at once deterritorialized and reterritorialized” (1, emphasis in original). In an endnote to the chapter, Fortier states that she has borrowed the terms de- and reterritorialization from Deleuze and Guattari. They suggest that, similar to Bhabha’s theory of hybridity, “elements reterritorialize themselves onto each other (Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 214 referred to in Fortier 13). While each element maintains some of its own territoriality, their combined reterritorialization produces a new territoriality” (Fortier 13). To put it simply, regarded from this perspective I regard cultural identities as a constant, ceaseless production of the meeting points in-between, such as between cultures and cultural specifics. Hence, I perceive the terms de- and reterritorialisation as connected to, maybe even synonymous with, the concept of hybridity, and the notion that identities are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew in contact with, and in the context of the outside world. Yet, the terms' root ‘territory’ connotes a connection to place; this seems to me to betray a rather outdated emphasis on spatial origins.

Fortier further claims that notions of “‘home’, ‘origins’, ‘continuity’ and ‘tradition’” (1) are necessary in a discussion centred on migration. In order to be able to live and experience 'home', 'continuity' and roots, Fortier argues that migrants have to put much effort into sustaining their traditions and history in order to produce a feeling of belonging (1). In reference to Probyn, a difference between identity and belonging can be identified:

[The] slide from “identity” to “belonging” [is] in part because [...] the latter term captures more accurately the desire for some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places, or modes of being, and the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fuelled by yearning rather than the positing of identity as a stable state. (Probyn 1996: 19 qtd in Fortier 2)

This quotation underlines that the concept of 'identity' is also connected to that of 'belonging'; Gilroy further adds 'ethnicity' and 'nationality' as connected to
identity (Camps, 98). While words such as continuity, tradition and sustenance might project a rather fixed and stable image of identity, Fortier is very much aware of – and her work is actually based on – the other side of the coin; she approaches identity from a rather fluid, flexible perspective and regards movement and attachment as integral to 'migrant belongings'. In reference to Stuart Hall (1996a), she also states that belonging includes “identity as a momentary positionality” (Hall qtd. in Fortier 2).

In the context of identity, memory as well as attachments to multiple places are also significant notions. Fortier maintains that migrants “create a new cultural identity grounded in memory and multilocality” (157). Mayer also states that the maintenance of rituals and traditions of remembrance is essential for collective memory and thus collective identities in the diaspora (6).[^40] “Indeed, memory becomes a primary ground of identity formation in the context of migration, where 'territory' is decentred and exploded into multiple settings [...] [É]migré identity formation as a practice of re-membering places disturbs fixed notions of spatiality and territory [...]” (Fortier 159, emphasis in original). I argue that the spelling of re-membering with the hyphen bears significance, as it does not only refer to the process of retrieving memories of places, but also highlights that this process entails becoming a member of this place again.

Moreover, I suggest that this quote is indicative of the mixed heritage of diaspora, migrancy and identity formation in these contexts, specifically concerning a spatial stance: while one component of the experience is one of change and fluidity, stability and a continuing attachment are not completely left out of the picture. This is neatly summarised by regarding diaspora as a state of 'betweenness': diasporans experience living in a tension between here and there, between the country of residence and that of origin (Fortier 158).

[^40]: For further information on diasporic and national memory, see Huysssen.
To return the significance of memory\(^41\) in a diasporic context, I would like to mention Sayer who draws attention to “well-known tricks of memory – its ability, for instance, to mix up times, places, and events, to convince us that we perfectly recall things that we never experienced, to feel nostalgia for what we never left behind, weaving them all together into one seamless recollection of a coherent self [...]” (174). I would thus argue that what first and second generations 'know' about or 'remember' of the country left behind does not reflect the (contemporary) reality of the respective country.

3.5 Conclusion

Several of the concepts and ideas presented above will prove very helpful for my analyses of fictional renderings of identities and the diasporic experience in recent literature of the Indian diaspora. Among these I count the notions of a hybrid cultural identity living through difference and constant change, the process of identification, as well as subjectivity. Furthermore, the concepts of 'the other', of belonging(ness), in-betweenness and representation will be of interest in my analyses. The notion of the beyond and Anderson's imagined communities might also come into play. Finally, I also believe that the role of the family in identity formation might prove useful in my discussion of the aspects concerning generational issues in the novels.

In conclusion, I would suggest that the concepts of diaspora and the changed or changing perception of identities described do not only fit together well, they are also very suitable for and capacious in expressing the experience of living in the contemporary world, which is more and more interconnected. Gilroy formulates the workings of the diaspora concept and its connection to identity thus:

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\(^41\) Memory is always collective, in the sense that it is made up of nothing but the common stock of signifiers. But it is also always individual, because a language always presupposes a speaker: "only a subject can understand a meaning; conversely, every phenomenon of meaning implies a subject" (Lacan, Écrits, p. 11). "The signifiers that comprise my memories carry the entire weight of my personal history – it is certainly to be found nowhere else – and yet they also always remain the speech of what is irreducibly other, bearing all its traces too" (Sayer 175, emphasis in original).
[a]s an alternative to the metaphysics of 'race', nation and bounded culture coded into the body, diaspora is a concept that problematizes the cultural and historical mechanics of belonging. It disrupts the fundamental power of territory to determine identity by breaking the simple sequence of explanatory links between place, location and consciousness. (Gilroy, Identity 328)

I also like Gilroy's phrasing of regarding (diaspora) identity as an “outernational project” (Gilroy 1997 qtd. in Kelly 34), as especially the concept of diaspora stresses an erosion of state-borders. Although diasporans still live in countries with borders, their identities and consciousness no longer depend on an essential origin, they are rather formed through contact with other cultures and in the context of the specific circumstances they are living in. One’s origins, however, are usually sought to be sustained. Yet, “[d]iasporic cultural identity teaches us that cultures are not preserved by being protected from “mixing” but probably can only continue to exist as a product of such mixing. Cultures, as well as identities, are constantly being remade” (Boyarin and Boyarin 108).
Papa's singing always unleashed these emotions which were unfamiliar and instinctive at the same time, in a language I could not recognise but felt I could speak in my sleep, in my dreams, evocative of a country I had never visited but which sounded like the only home I had ever known. The songs made me realise that there was a corner of me that would be forever not England. (112)

4 Anita and Me by Meera Syal

4.1 Introduction

In my analysis of Meera Syal's first novel from 1996, I will follow Anna Branach-Kallas's structure in her paper “Travelling in-between: the Nation and the Diaspora in Meera Syal's Anita and Me”. I would thus first like to analyse the Kumar's experiences and their relation to nation – to England but especially to India – before going into a deeper analysis of Meena's character and her development. This structure enables me to draw a comparison between first- and second-generation diasporans and their differing experiences of living in a diasporic situation. I will further include a discussion of the use of cultural signifiers, such as food, language and religion, which I choose to analyse as they can be regarded as representing an integral part of one’s ethnic identity. Finally, the issue of racism lends itself as a topic of investigation as the novel is set in the 1960s, where it was still more pronounced than it is today.

4.2 Getting to know Anita and Me

Anita and Me is set in the late 1960s in the fictional, small, rural mining village Tollington, situated near Wolverhampton in the West Midlands. It tells the story of nine-year-old protagonist/narrator Meena Kumar, the only girl of Indian descent in the village who struggles with the different influences that her Punjabi background and the surrounding English culture, personified by the white Anita Rutter, have on her. As Reichl has pointed out, “the construction of
identity, intentional or unintentional, is one of the major themes of the novel” (192). Ranasingha puts it this way:

Syal's semi-autobiographical coming of age narrative [...] traces a subjectivity and upbringing divided between home and the outside world, a generation gap heightened by the family's migration, although not without ambivalence. Anita and Me conveys both the claustrophobia and security of the close-knit Punjabi circle that influenced the protagonist's formative years. (231)

4.3 Meena's parents – migration from home into the diaspora

The Kumars, having experienced the Partition of India and Pakistan and the ensuing political and social upheaval; as well as not being able to enjoy the education they deserved (“That's why we had to leave, we were poor and clever, a bad combination in India” (212)), decided that they wanted better for their children. However, Daljit, Meena's mother, very much misses India, her home, which the narrator relates in the following manner:

My mother grew up in a small Punjabi village not far from Chandigarh. As she chopped onions for the evening meal [...] , any action with a rhythm, she would begin a mantra about her ancestral home. She would chant of a three-storeyed flat-roofed house, blinkered with carved wooden shutters around a dust yard where an old-fashioned pump stood under a mango tree. [...] She spoke of the cobra who lived in the damp grasses beneath the fallen apples in the vast walled orchard, of the peacocks whose keening kept her awake on rainy monsoon nights, of her Muslim neighbours whom they always made a point of visiting on festivals, bringing sweetmeats to emphasise how the land they shared was more important than the religious differences that would soon tear the Punjab in two. (34-5)

This section is important insofar as it provides an exemplary picture of living conditions in the Punjab, as India is a vast and heterogeneous country, the way and standard of living as well as cultural specificities presumably vary, and it underlines Daljit's close inner connectedness to her native India and the loss she had experienced by leaving for England, which is illustrated especially by the word 'mantra', which implies a notion of repetition and reassurance. These
two, in turn, point again to the necessity for Daljit to re-member her country of origin. The loss experienced by moving to England manifests itself time and again, as she clings to her language, Indian food, clothes, and traditions – all of which will be thematised below – as well as in her choice of a house, a new home, in England: “When she stepped off the bus in Tollington, she did not see the outside lavvy or the apology for a garden or the medieval kitchen, she saw fields and trees, light and space, and a horizon that welcomed the sky which, on a warm night and through squinted eyes, could almost look something like home” (35). This again underscores how important it is for Daljit to recreate her familiar surroundings as best she can, to sustain the ties to her homeland, in order to bear the brutal breach that emigration meant for her. She tries to make her 'location of residence' resemble her 'location of origin' as much as possible in order to feel at home.

The passage further mentions the Partition of India and Pakistan\textsuperscript{42}, which – according to religion – made two peoples who were formerly at least able to accept and respect each other due to the love they both held for “the land they shared” (35). In 1947, the British divided the two Indian provinces of Bengal and Punjab into Eastern and Western parts, thus forming India and Pakistan, respectively. These provinces were set up according to religious beliefs – Pakistan being Muslim and India being mainly Hindu. Partition caused many people to be driven out of their native land and many died. This upheaval triggered many conflicts and wars between the two countries, which are partly unresolved until today (the Kashmir is an example). As Pakistan was later, in 1971, again torn in two, into Pakistan and Bangladesh, the rift became even deeper and also such conflicts as around the region of Kashmir, which endure until today, ensued.

To return to the fictionalisation of this enormously traumatic experience in \textit{Anita and Me}, I would like to discuss Meena's mother in more detail. She is characterised as being a very warm-hearted, loving, affectionate, and delicate

\textsuperscript{42} Meena only learns bits and pieces about Indian history from her parents, who try to protect her against the horrors they have experienced, but her grandmother tells her a story about these events. (231-2)
woman, by no means similar to the English, which underlines that she maintains a boundary to the English, who Meena portrays as her complete opposite: “[W]ith the English people [...] there was something that intrigued me, the brazenness of their behaviour, an absence of sentiment and a boldness of self which I could not see in my parents' almost claustrophobic connection” (86). This remark underlines that Meena's perception as a diasporan, being 'intrigued' rather than maintaining a boundary, is very different from that of her parents. Since Meena herself is rather a tomboy and can thus be regarded to be more similar to the English women described above than to her mother, Daljît's delicateness is problematic for Meena, as she cannot count on her mother for support against the tough reality she has to live with – because of being Indian she is being bullied and humiliated in school (22) and also has a hard time with the neighbours' children whose approval she desperately seeks.

Papa seemed to enjoy these sentimental outbursts of hers and would smile fondly at his sobbing spouse [...] But it irritated the hell out of me. I had to live amongst my neighbours’ kids, who were harder, tougher versions of their parents, and I needed back-up. [...] And whilst I hated the physical pain and the nervous nausea of these ritual 'barneys', what I hated even more was having to hide my bruises and tears from my mother. [...] But mama wasn’t a Yard Mama [...]. (52-53)

So, while Daljît Kumar is not only a very delicate woman, she also dresses elegantly and speaks English perfectly, thus displaying her professional teacher's attitude, as Reichl has pointed out (195). “[F]or her [mother], looking glamorous in saris and formal Indian suits was part of the English people’s education. It was her duty to show them that we could wear discreet gold jewellery, dress in tasteful silks and speak English without an accent” (25). This anxiety or effort to please, to not attract too much attention, caused by the consciousness of being an 'other' – in other words – to remain invisible, unmarked, become 'white', bears fruit, which is exemplified in the following quote:

“You're so lovely. You know, I never think of you as, you know, foreign. You're just like one of us.” My mother would smile and graciously accept

43 Boundary-maintenance is one of Brubaker's constituents of diasporas, see page 11.
this as a compliment. And yet afterwards, in front of the Aunties, she would reduce them to tears of laughter by gently poking fun at […] her English friends. It was only much later on that I realised in the thirteen years we lived there, during which every weekend was taken up with visiting Indian families or being invaded by them, only once had any of our neighbours been invited in further than the step of our back door. (29)

While the mentioning of the Aunties points to the importance of the ethnic community, to the relations to other members of the diaspora, especially the last phrase of this quotation is indicative of a retention of distance between the Kumars and their English neighbours. This boundary, however, exists not without reason. Although the Kumars do at first not seem to have any problems with their English neighbours due to their being foreigners, there are signs of racism, such as the fact that Deirdre, Anita's mother, calls her black dog 'Nigger'. This is definitely no coincidence but rather a sign of her insecurity vis-à-vis the Kumars, who are better educated, have dared to take the step to move to a foreign country and start afresh, something which she will never be able to do; that is, I argue, applicable to all of the Tollingtonians. Also Sam Lowbridge realises that Meena, in contrast to him, “can move on” (314). I will investigate racism in the novel further below in more detail, but for now, in connection with Meena's parents, this passage seems important, as it reveals the wider context the novel is set in; the story does not unfold itself in a vacuum, but is centred within real, historical events, in spite of its implicit claim for fictionality (9). In the 1960s, racist tendencies were visible in Great Britain due to an increased influx of immigrants in the wake of the gradual collapse of the British Empire. In Anita and Me, Mr Kumar tries to soothe his wife who perceives the in their community latent but elsewhere more openly displayed hatred more clearly:

“You take things too seriously, Daljit. They have accepted us, have we ever had any trouble from people round here? You know, like Usha had over in Willenhall, those shaved head boys shouting at them, pushing the kids around?” Mama got up angrily, “Just because it doesn’t happen to us, does not mean it is not happening! And they leave us alone because they don’t think we are really Indian. “Oh, you’re so English, Mrs K!” Like it is a buggering compliment! If I hear that one more time…” (172)
This passage sheds light on the relationship between the Kumars and their English neighbours. Although they seem to be accepted as part of and integrated into the neighbourly community, they still remain very much on the margins because of their Otherness. In other villages, racism even has already erupted. While Meena might not yet be conscious of this fact in the same way her parents are because of her age, Mr and Mrs Kumar identify with other members of the diaspora, although they might not know them simply because they are of the same ethnic origin. Furthermore, this quotation also shows that Daljit Kumar is proud of her heritage and does not want to shed her Indianness “like a snake slithering out of its skin” (146), like her daughter Meena first wishes to. Thus, Mrs Kumar also emphasises her Indian background in terms of clothes and food, which she does not only see as “part of the English people’s education”, but which is first and foremost her own stronghold, her way of coping with living in exile. Concerning Indian food, the narrator realises that it has very much to do with their ancestral home, their native India: “This food was not just something to fill a hole, it was soul food, it was the food their far-away mothers made and came seasoned with memory and longing, this was the nearest they would get for many years, to home” (61).

Therefore, Meena's parents can be considered as pursuing a close connection to India and Indian traditions by clinging to its language, food, and their memories, which they share during their frequent meetings with their fellow Indians, to whom they cultivate an intensive relationship. Having left their family behind, these people, which Meena, according to custom, calls “Uncle” and “Auntie” although they are not related at all, have to replace their relatives from India. The narrator comments about the Uncles and Aunties:

[...] I knew how intensely my parents valued these people they so readily renamed as family, faced with the loss of their own blood relations. I understood this because of the snippets of stories I would hear when the grown-ups would sit around on the floor, replete and sleepy, exchanging anecdotes that reinforced their shared histories, confirming that they were not the only ones who were living out this unfolding adventure. (31)
I would argue that especially the choice of the phrases “these people they so readily renamed as family” and “reinforced their shared histories” are very telling, as they underline the feeling of alienation of people who have migrated to a foreign country as well as their need to continue the traditions they have grown up with and preserve their collective memories, their “shared histories” by talking about the past, exchanging memories of their former lives. They do so often during Mr. Kumar’s “mehfils” (71), which the narrator defines as musical evenings, where the adults would sit on the floor, sing folk songs called “ghazals” (72), eat Indian food and talk in Punjabi. The fact that these Punjabi words are not translated directly, but can only be understood because of the context, the story around it, shows that these encounters between the Indians are very exclusive – Indian-only meetings which do not allow for any intruders. Even Meena, who is Indian in origin but has grown up in England, betraying her in-between state, feels excluded during these events when her father sings of their lost homeland. “During these ghazals, my elders became strangers to me. […] [T]ragedy and memory illuminating their features[,] […] There was no point in my being there; when I looked at my elders, in these moments, they were all far, far away” (72). This shows that Meena, living in two worlds, is excluded from the closed Indian circle, because she does not know much about her cultural background and also – especially – because she does not speak Punjabi fluently. Furthermore, not only Meena feels excluded, sensing her in-betweenness, also a distance to the reader is built up.

However, it is also during one of these mehfils that Meena learns about Partition, “of some people not knowing until the day the borders were announced, whether they would have to move hundreds of miles away, leaving everything behind them” (71) and thus makes a move towards re-membering the diasporic community. The narrator tells about these gatherings in their house, which are also indicative of a strong ethnic group consciousness, as being common and very important for the adults – the first, immigrant generation – who had experienced the Partition and the ensuing move into the diaspora as a profound bereavement. During one of these evenings, Meena recounts that “[t]here was a murmur of consensus, subdued, fearful maybe
because of all the old wounds being reopened. [...] In the silence that followed, I felt a hundred other memories were being briefly relived and batten down again” (73-4). These quotations again underline the enormous psychological effect that the Partition and the diasporic experience following in its wake must have on these people. They have to deal with the loss of their roots, which I would argue are not only cultural but always also geographical, and with being forced to take another route. Living in a diasporic situation thus implies transcending geographical ties and creating a new life abroad. Yet, the country of origin has left a mark on Meena’s parents, which she comes to understand when she remarks:

I realised that the past was not a mere sentimental journey for my parents, like the song told its English listeners. It was a murky bottomless pool full of monsters and the odd shining coin, with a deceptively still surface and a deadly undercurrent. And me, how could I jump in before I had learned to swim? (75)

This flowery, metaphorically laden description of her family’s past and Meena’s own desire to know more about it powerfully describes the influence of her parents’ experiences on her and how they still affect Meena. However, she does not yet fully understand this influence, and because of her trying to be a ‘Tollington wench’ she is not yet a full member of the Indian community but rather occupies a position in-between. Not yet having “learned to swim” is for me a way of expressing that Meena has not yet learned enough about her Indian heritage and how to deal with it; she still has to come to terms with her Otherness. In addition, the above cited passage also emphasises the importance of and the great value that diasporans attach to memories. Collective memories have a powerful function of holding them together, being able to travel back in space and time and relive their shared histories. Jha claims that there is an inherent connection between memory and nation: “Surfing through amnesias, memories and histories we find that the other is neither invisible nor inaccessible” (Jha 45). This ‘surfing’ is exemplified throughout the text by various instances of meetings of the immigrant generation, which enable the elders to relive their memories of the past, of their
country of origin, thus re-membering it, and also relieve themselves of the burden that the past can also mean.

This connection to India that the parent generation most painfully has, also surfaces when a couple from their neighbourhood dies. It makes Meena's father very sad, as it reminds him of their own families in India, the families they have left behind: "When they go, we won't be with them. We will get a letter, or a phone call in the middle of the night... everything left unsaid" (81). "The loss of a distant parent would be the final proof, that they had left them and would not be returning" (86). These two statements make clear, that, at least for most people, a close connection to their family is important, something that gives people a stronghold in life. It further shows that face-to-face conversations and contact with family members are equally necessary, to be able to show each other love and respect. The second quotation can be read as representing the two sides of a coin: on the one hand, it means that death is final and people do not return from it; on the other hand, it could also be interpreted as referring to Meena's parents having left their parents, their origins forever. That the fact of having left their family behind is psychologically problematic for the Kumars, possibly producing an identity crisis, is also visible because Meena has to "memorise [her] parents' many brothers and sisters by name, occupation, and personality quirks. [...] [A]s if committing them to memory would make up for not being with them" (30). This underlines the different relationship that the Meena and her parents have to their relatives in India, which again underlines their different positions while still being united as diasporans.

The bereavement caused by having left and thereby lost your family, which gives you stability in times of crisis, is most powerfully recounted through the inability of Meena's mother to deal with her life in England as a foreigner any longer and heightened by the events at the Spring Fête, where Sam Lowbridge gives away his true self by dumping a racist speech on the villagers, including Meena and her father, which is going to be discussed below. The Kumars are of course very much hurt by Sam's words. The narrator understands and reports in hindsight:
‘I can’t cope any more, Shyam. Back home I would have sisters, mothers, servants...’ The stars were her family, his family, she was crossing them off one by one, naming them to keep them alive. ‘I can’t do this any more. I can’t.’ [...] When I had whispered up all those silent prayers for drama and excitement, I had not imagined this, this feeling of fear and loneliness. But tonight I finally made the connection that change always strolled hand in hand with loss, with upheaval, and that I would always feel it keenly because in the end, I did not live under the same sky as most other people. (196-7)

I argue that the stars and sky can in this quote be regarded as a symbol for the family and heritage, for one’s roots and rootedness – roots in every respect; the sky's canopy is like the warmth a family gives. And because Meena does “not live under the same sky as most other people”, it can be reasoned that she, as well as her parents and all de- or up-rooted people, all diasporans who have left for foreign shores, are acquainted with the loss that change engenders. Finally making the connection between loss and change also points to a change in Meena's momentary identity position, realising and acknowledging her status as 'other' due to having herself publicly experienced the repudiation of her ethnic community. So, in order to restore the cosmic order for the Kumars a little bit, Daljit's mother comes from India to stay with them for a while.

I would suggest that all of the above cited quotations and passages from the novel show that Meena's parents are still very much connected to and concerned with their ancestral homeland India and with its customs, language, traditions and history. Meera Syal herself, stating that her image of India had until young adulthood been rather 'mythological', suggests that “the cultural resources from 'home' that first-generation immigrants attempt to impart to their children are frozen and fossilised in the 'usual immigrant bubble where Indians abroad are more traditional than their counterparts at “home”, over-anxious to preserve what they remember as the homeland'.”44 This also reminds me of Sayer's statement on the ability of memory to cause diasporans to “feel nostalgia for what [they] never left behind” (174). Yet, while the changing conditions in each and every country must not be lost sight of, Fortier supports “memory [as being] a primary ground of identity formation in the context of

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44 Meera Syal, letter to Ruvani Ranasinha.
migration, where ‘territory’ is decentred and exploded into multiple settings” (159). Thus, memory is still important in the transmission of cultural heritage.

For Meena, however, the story is quite a different one. While she feels different from the English children in village, thus also being aware of her otherness, she is definitely also different from her parents in her relationship to the English and Indian society, respectively. Her identity position is one of in-betweeness, belonging as well as not belonging in either of the two groups. In contrast to her parents, she does at first crave acceptance and membership in the English society, while her parents “only once had [invited in] any of [their] neighbours [...] further than the step of [their] back door” (29). While Daljit longs for her ancestral home, Meena craves belonging to the English. In that, they can be regarded as both having the same need for belonging and both feeling alienated, de-rooted in their present life, their ‘location of residence’. Meena, however, makes a huge development in her quest for finding an identity-position and this, together with her relationship to Anita, will be the central issue in the following section.

### 4.4 Meena – the girl torn between two worlds

During the two years described, Meena Kumar, the 9-year-old protagonist of the novel, makes a huge development in personality and in terms of her affiliations and aspirations concerning her Indian heritage and English surroundings. While at first she is looking for acceptance in and integration into the English society, she later changes her attitude, embracing her Otherness and showing interest in her Indian roots, her heritage. Wilson summarises her first stage such that Meena “develops multiple reference points and identifications: with her family, her school friends, in particular her working class friend, Anita, and other members of the local community. These merge and criss-cross each other so that establishing her real identity creates a crisis for Meena” (Wilson 111). I would argue, however, that in light of a constructionist approach, a 'real identity'
is a problematic term, because identity has to be regarded as being in constant formation and transformation, as establishing itself in dialogue with the other.

Concerning the above mentioned Otherness, Meena characterises herself this way: “[...] I’ve always been a sucker for a good double entendre; the gap between what is said and what is thought, what is stated and what is implied, is a place in which I have always found myself. I’m really not a liar, I just learned very early on that those of us deprived of history sometimes need to turn to mythology to feel complete, to belong” (10). She thereby underlines her sense of being – metaphorically – suspended in mid-air, of alienation, of unbelonging – her sense of in-betweenness. This also explains why Meena lies very often and mostly does not feel too bad about it, she feels it is her right to invent – stories as well as herself, which recalls Eakin's idea of identity-stories. I would suggest that because she does not yet sense a place where she belongs, an identity she can claim her own, she fabricates her own mythology and history. When living together with her grandmother, Meena finally understands:

It was falling into place now, why I felt this continual compulsion to fabricate, this ever-present desire to be someone else in some other place far from Tollington. Before Nanima arrived, this urge to reinvent myself, I could now see, was driven purely by shame, the shame I felt when we ‘did’ India at school…. (211)

However, Meena also takes advantage of her cultural difference and puts it to good use with some of the lies she tells and later categorises as 'harmless' or 'major': “one of my harmless fabrications (telling a group of visiting kids that I was a Punjabi princess and owned an elephant called Jason King), or one of my major whoppers – telling my teacher I hadn't completed my homework because of an obscure religious festival involving fire eating…” (28). It can thus be argued that Meena also sees a small privilege in her position as a minority, making use of and benefiting from other people’s ignorance. Not having a bad conscience about her lies shows that she tries to construct her own reality, a space and history she can claim her own.
On the other hand, Meena’s uneasiness about her difference, her ‘otherness’, is very pronounced and visible. She constantly tries to please and become a full member of the Yard children, which she wants to achieve by becoming friends with Anita Rutter, whom she regards as her “passport to acceptance” (148). Meena then deliberately uses her command of the local accent, which is another signpost, a linguistic ‘sign’, for the divided allegiances of Meena and her parents: “I could tell Anita was impressed by my authentic Yard accent” (122). From that point on, Anita is prepared to include Meena in her circle of friends. They even start a gang together, the “Wenches Brigade” (138) as they call it, in opposition to Sam Lowbridge’s gang. Meena likes Anita as a kindred spirit, another wild girl, who does not fit into expected ways of conduct like her cousins Pinky and Baby, whom she has come to despise because of their politeness, helpfulness, and pleasant manners. These are ways of behaving that Meena identifies as fitting any Indian girl (148-9). And because Meena, at that point, does not yet feel at home in her Indian background, has not yet arrived at accepting and valuing it, she orients herself outwards: “My life was outside the home, with Anita, my passport to acceptance” (148). In spite of her friendship with Anita, she learns that “in an instant, those you called friends could suddenly become tormentors, sniffing out a weakness or a difference, turning their own fear of ostracism into a weapon [...]”, afraid that being an outsider, an individual even, was somehow infectious” (142). As Meena is aware of what being an outsider is like, she identifies with the weak and tries to protect them – in that case Anita’s little sister Tracey, who has been made fun of (141-2). And yet, it is exactly this lesson, becoming an individual via being an outsider, that Meena has to learn, the task that in fact everyone has to fulfil.

Meena expresses her longing for being like the rest of the Tollingtonians also in minor details such as her uneasiness about her parents’ garden, which is only green and does not contain any knick-knack such as garden gnomes: “It was a constant source of embarrassment to me that our front garden was the odd one out in the village” (15); “the odd one out” carries for me an association of language puzzles where you have to look for the word that does not fit in with the rest. This phrase therefore highlights Meena’s status as an outsider, as
someone who is and will always be different, being caught in the space in-between. Meena also expresses this feeling of not-belonging in the following words: “I knew I was a freak of some kind, too mouthy, clumsy and scabby to be a real Indian girl, too Indian to be a real Tollington wench, but living in the grey area between all categories felt increasingly like home” (149-50). In this brief passage the narrator, Meena's older self, reflects on her difficulties finding her place in life, as she did not feel at home in one or the other society, one or the other culture, but in the “grey area” in between. This indicates that home does not only mean a place to live in, a house, but home is a concept laden with many more connotations and associations, such as a feeling of belonging, to a group of people, to family and friends, as well as traditions and little rituals – all the things which make life, in a metaphorical sense – colourful. The fact that Meena feels like living in a grey zone, however, shows that she has not yet found her home, not in her heart. Yet, it must not be forgotten that her parents' home is in fact very colourful. She is surrounded by the smell of her mother's cooking and her saris, by the songs her father sings at his mehfilis, as well as by her loud and 'colourful' aunties.. Thus, this 'grey zone' has only to be understood in a metaphorical sense, illustrating her in-betweenness.

Meena also has to painfully learn and acknowledge her status as 'the other' at the fair, where several boys pair up with Anita and her friends; when the least attractive boy is left with Anita's friend Fat Sally, condescension and hatred towards foreigners is what Meena is exposed to when the boy looks at her:

He came to rest on me, [...] and dismissed me with amusement and yes, relief. He had not got the short straw after all and I knew that it was not because I was too young or badly dressed, it was something else, something about me so offputting, so unimaginable, that I made Fat Sally look like the glittering star prize.” (105)

This experience causes Meena, who is already uncomfortable with herself, to despise her body. Having grown up in England and being knowledgeable about English youth culture and teenagers' means of getting help, getting answers to their problems, she writes to the problem page of a teenage magazine, asking if her skin colour will prevent her from having a boyfriend. The answer given is
most revealing of the ignorance of these so-called 'advisers' about the underlying question, the urgent need of this girl struggling with her identity. While they advise her to use make-up to conceal her actual skin-colour (145-6), to hide herself, they do not realise that Meena is stuck in an identity crisis trying to come to terms with her difference, as well as having all the problems and self-doubts any teenager all around the world has. In consequence, Meena starts hating her skin colour, her entire body and being, because she is unable to escape her visibility as being different:

I had never wanted to be anyone else except myself only older and famous. But now, for some reason, I wanted to shed my body like a snake slithering out of its skin and emerge reborn, pink and unrecognisable. I began avoiding mirrors, I refused to put on the Indian suits my mother laid out for me on the bed when guests were due for dinner, I hid in the house when Auntie Shaila bade loud farewells in Punjabi to my parents from the front garden, I took to walking several paces behind or in front of my parents when we went on a shopping trip, checking my reflection in shop windows, bitterly disappointed it was still there. [...] I was ten years old. (146)

So, at the age of ten, Meena is in a deep crisis struggling with her identity-position as an Indian girl, refusing to accept it. I consider especially the phrase where she “wanted to shed [her] body like a snake [...] and emerge [...] pink and unrecognisable” as most important, because it implies that a problem of recognition. The way she is perceived from the outside influences her own idea of herself ⁴⁵, and thus this phrase expresses her wish for whiteness. Being white means being unmarked, being in a superior position, not having to fear racial abuse or hatred because whiteness is 'invisible'. And while Meena is by then also embarrassed by anything connected with India, be it its clothes or its language and her family – maybe like any teenager – “checking her reflection in shop windows” can be interpreted, I would suggest, as an allusion to Lacan's concept of the mirror stage. While in Lacan's theory this refers to infants identifying themselves as subjects, Meena rejects her subjectivity, her identity, being deeply disconcerted and disoriented due to her difference to the English she feels she should belong to because of her naturalisation in this

⁴⁵ For instance, Woodward draws attention to identity is produced within a “circuit of culture”, which also includes “consumption”, “production”, “regulation”, and “representation” (2).
environment. Ranasinha states that “[t]o a greater extent than their predecessors, the British-born generation is positioned in a double bind between polarities of assimilation and abrogation vis à vis the dominant, white British culture, and the culture of origin.” (250, emphasis in original)

In school, Meena also makes another troubling experience connected with her background. She feels uneasy when learning about India in school, as she does not have much knowledge about it. She only knows what little her parents have told her, which she has embroidered in her imagination, such as her parents' love story: “I kept myself awake imagining them chasing each other around old Indian streets (which were basically English streets with a few cows lounging around the corners)” (32). This shows that her subjectivity is marked and affected by her English surroundings. Moreover, Meena feels that “[she] always came bottom in history; [she] did not want to be taught what a mess [her] relatives had made of India since the British had left them […] (211-2). This feeling of being the last link in the chain does not only apply to India, but also to Britain, thereby doubling her sense of inferiority, insecurity, and maybe even worthlessness, which the narrator expresses looking back on the last years of her childhood: “[I]f Tollington was a footnote in the book of the Sixties, then my family and friends were the squashed flies in the spine. According to the newspapers and television, we simply did not exist. If a brown or black face ever did appear on TV, it stopped us all in our tracks. …” (165).

Furthermore, apart from all the difficulties and hardships Meena has to put up with anyway, she is also exposed to reprimands from her parents due to their cultural background and her misbehaviour. They do not mean to exert pressure on her, but are rather worried to make a good impression and do not give their English neighbours any reason for disapproval, dislike or discrimination against them, which is a sign of the belief held by diasporans that they are or might be met with hostility. This is how Meena reports various admonitions: ”[T]o be told off by a white person, especially a neighbour, that was not just misbehaviour, that was letting down the whole Indian nation. It was continually drummed into

46 See Cohen's point 7.
me, ‘Don’t give them a chance to say we’re worse than they already think we are. You prove you are better. Always.’” (45). In the same vein they tell her: “Just because the English can’t speak English themselves, does not mean you have to talk like an urchin. You take the best from their culture, not the worst” (53). These quotes underline that diasporans have to struggle with earning their respect in the host community; and at failing to do so regard this as a failure not only in front of but also for all their country-men. As diasporans continue to identify with the homeland and, generally speaking, the ethnic community, they might regard themselves as representatives of their countries of origin.

On top of her parents’ admonitions, she is also expected to take an important exam to enable her to receive higher education. While this is indicative of her parents’ wish for a better life for their children, this also coincides with a time in Meena’s life when she has made several steps in her identity-in-formation. She has been greatly influenced by the presence of her Namina, who enabled Meena to re-connect with her Indian background, to learn to value it, as well as by Sam Lowbridge’s appearance at the Fete. These two events have triggered “the process of adjustment to the demands of British society through developing in-between identities” (Wilson 110) and have also caused a change in Meena’s perception of her self, her subjectivity, as well as her belongingness. Meena reflects this expectation of taking that exam by putting herself under pressure, saying that “If I failed, my parents’ five thousand mile journey would have all been for nothing. (213). From all of the above quotations it can be seen that Meena does not only have to deal with all the usual hardships and self-doubts a child growing up has, she also has to deal with her difference, and the fact that her parents have high expectations in her. She is supposed to achieve good grades in school and always be better than her English peers. Such high standards and requirements, I would suggest, produce an extremely difficult situation for a girl living in between two worlds and not knowing where she belongs.

This situation of being suspended between two worlds and not knowing where to turn, where to look, changes for the better when her grandmother arrives. Her
arrival is not only a great relief for Meena's mother, but, together with Meena's long stay in hospital due to having her leg in plaster after having fallen from a horse, is a catalyst for Meena to come to terms with her cultural background. Before going into more detail about Nanima's effect on Meena, I would like to briefly sketch her impact on the first generation, on Meena's mother and their Indian friends, who were flocking to their house, "anxious to meet one of the generation they had left behind and to catch up on the latest news from the Motherland" (201). This, I would suggest, is indicative of the feeling of homesickness, of guilt and longing diasporans feel in connection with their family they have left behind. And although the narrator reminisces about these encounters that the grandmother could not possibly have been a trustworthy source of information concerning the happenings in India because of having lived in a small village (201), the importance and magnificence of this old woman for the parent generation is presented in the following way:

[H]er audience was there not because of what she said but because of who she was, a beloved parent, a familiar symbol in her billowing salwar kameez suit whose slow deliberate gestures and modest dignity reminded them of their own mothers. Of course they would deify her, their own guilt and homesickness would see to that, but how could this small vessel possibly contain the ocean of longing each of them stored in their bellies? It was only when papa lined the three of us up for a photograph, daughter, mother and grandmother, all of us the product of each other, linked like Russian dolls, that it struck me how difficult it must have been for mama to leave Nanima and how lonely she must have been. Indeed, I had never seen mama so fresh and girlish[.] (201-2)

With the metaphor of the ship Syal powerfully alludes to the voyage that emigration, becoming a diasporan, inevitably entails. Crossing an actual ocean, leaving the home you have grown up in, might people make sea- or, in the case of the metaphor, home-sick, longing for what they have left behind. And while this matrilineal connection is fixated like a dye (like Fanon, who, in Black Skin, White Masks, refers to his otherness as fixed by 'the others' as if by a dye) for eternity, Meena finally understands the importance of a strong connection to one's family, its traditions and the memories connected with it, as this is what provides her mother, herself, everyone, in fact, with roots, with something to
hold on to and feel whole and complete. It is therefore clear that her grandmother represents everything they all had been missing intensely.

Meena furthermore comments on Nanima's arrival that hearing Punjabi outside felt strange, as she was only used to hearing it inside, as if it were “an almost guilty secret which the Elders would only share away from prying English eyes and ears” (203). Knowing that all of these strange bearings of the older generation are due to her grandmother’ presence, she is nevertheless surprised and unsure how to react when she perceives “the Elders [as] so expansive and unconcerned [...]. [She] hesitated on the porch step, unsure whether to flee indoors, dreading what the reaction of any passers-by might be, but also strangely drawn to this unfamiliar scene where [her] two worlds had collided and mingled so easily” (204). This quotation illustrates that Meena, at this point, feels drawn to the unfamiliarity of her familial and cultural ancestry instead of being intrigued by the English. Furthermore, it is evocative of the power and the influence that Meena's grandmother has on her – she teaches her respect for her Indian ancestry and further stimulates her interest in India, putting her parents' stories about rickshaws and unexploded bombs into context. While “[a]t first, these remembrances seemed so far fetched, so far removed from anything [she] recognised as reality”, Meena is gradually drawn in by fascination with “a country that seemed full to bursting with excitement, drama and passion, history in the making, and for the first time [she] desperately wanted to visit India and claim some of this magic as [hers]” (211). The phrase 'history in the making', I would argue, further underlines Meena's identity-in-the-making.

Having finally found and embraced her connection with her Indian background, her difference, Meena also becomes fond and quite protective of her grandmother, which shows that Meena has learned to value her background. She comes to her grandmother's aid and defence when she feels that her Nanima is being made fun of, and even worse, pitied in Mr Ormerod's shop. She decides to go inside and help her out, as her grandmother does not speak English (223-5). The condescension that Meena feels towards her beloved

47 See also Schoene-Harwood 161-3.
grandmother also surfaces in encounters with the villagers, which the narrator regards in retrospect:

It was a strange kind of compliment they paid Nanima, wanting to touch and feel her like an imported piece of exotica. [...] She doesn't understand anyway, does she? Do you love? ... Does she speak English, Meena love? ... Your mom and dad speak it lovely, don't they?...’ [...] I did not know whether to swat the ladies away or say thank you. I knew they were being friendly, but it was not somehow a meeting of equals, I felt like we were suddenly the entertainment [...]. (220)

Some of the villagers do not even try to conceal their amusement about the old lady, who in their eyes has a strange-looking appearance, does not know English and is therefore subject to ridicule. Especially the words 'exotica', 'entertainment', and the frequent insertion of 'love', often used when talking to a child or requesting something, are revealing of the villagers' condescension towards Nanima, in fact, towards any foreigners. This condescension is reminiscent of Said's concept of Orientalism, which means that the Occident, the West, occupies the upper scale of the binary opposition between Orient and Occident. The West claims authority and power and appropriates the East into its gaze. Thus, Nanima, seen as the 'exotic other', is orientalised, appropriated by the gaze of the Westerners.

However, there are also other people who are enchanted by Meena's grandmother, being able to dig up some language skills acquired long ago. Meena is thus furious and extremely jealous that one of her neighbours is able to speak Punjabi better than her, to talk to her grandmother and talk to her grandmother more fluently than her (222), as this reveals that Meena occupies an in-between space. Linguistic proficiency in one's mother tongue is an important factor in diaspora identification. Finally, as Meena grows close with her grandmother and acquires some Punjabi, she learns to negotiate her identity, living in two worlds and feeling at home in both of them.
4.5 Food, language and religion in Anita and Me

Finally, I would like to turn to an analysis of cultural signifiers, among which I would like to discuss food, language and religion in Anita and Me. Food has already been mentioned before, in connection with Meena’s parents, for whom Indian food was “soul food […] and came seasoned with memory and longing” (61). Indian food is thus not only seasoned literally by spices, but also metaphorically, by establishing a virtual (by that I mean that food does not enable a physical travel to the homeland), yet very emotional connection and expresses the Kumars’ homing desire. Keeping to the food they remember since childhood is a way of sustaining their ties to India. Furthermore, Meena’s mother refuses to eat at restaurants, “always affronted by paying for some over-boiled, under-seasoned dish of slop when she knew she could rustle up a hot, heartwarming meal from a few leftover vegetables and a handful of spices” (26). I would argue that this again proves how important food is in connection with identity and a feeling of belonging, a feeling of home. Especially the term ‘heartwarming’ can be understood in two ways, while, plainly regarded, it could simply refer to a good, warm meal. On the other hand, it could also mean heartwarming in the sense of the food being a reminder, a means of emotional connection to the homeland, a means of ‘travelling’ back.

For Meena, however, Indian food is not the pick of the bunch as she is much more influenced by her English surroundings. When her mother suggests to Meena to eat some of the “rice and daal” (60), the exact definition of which is, by the way, not given, Meena complains “I don’t want that … that stuff! I want fishfingers! Fried! And chips! Why can’t I eat what I want to eat?”(60). This little outburst, belittling and depreciating Indian food to ‘stuff’, a word that applies to practically anything, shows how very much Meena tries to be English, in every way and how much she has been influenced especially by her neighbour/friend Anita Rutter. However, when feeding chapatti to the horse Misty, Meena feels that this food makes “a real Punjabi horse” (64) out of Misty, thus acknowledging the influence and worth of regional cuisine. When Anita is

48 ‘Homing desire’ has been coined by Avtar Brah (1996: 180), referred to in Fortier 163.
invited to eat at their house and does in fact behave very badly in refusing to eat Indian food and being disgusted by Indian table manners, Meena reverses her former fondness of English food in favour of defending Indian food and manners (253). This is indicative of her awareness of her cultural background, it shows that she acknowledges and defends it in case someone tries to downplay it. This is indicative that she is gradually coming to a new understanding of self, sameness (with Indians, as well as difference to the English) and solidarity with her ethnic group.\textsuperscript{49}

In terms of language it has to be noted that Meena's command of Punjabi undergoes an enormous development throughout the course of the narrative. Meena's knowledge of her parents' native language, I would argue, is a signifier or representative of her identity-in-formation. While at first seeking to be as English as possible, she later on takes a differing identity-position, as she begins to identify more with her cultural heritage. Thus, at the beginning, she has only a very limited knowledge of the language, understanding only a few words. This is mainly due to her parents speaking English at home and using Punjabi only when they do not want Meena to understand, for example when Meena's father is trying to comfort his wife who does not feel well and has troubles adjusting to her life in England:

He'd said it was a migraine and then talked softly to her in Punjabi, which I knew was a sign that something was a secret and therefore, probably bad news. I still recognised a few words in between mummy's sobs – mother, money, and then a furious invective in Punjabi with 'bloody fed up' stuck in the middle of it. (Swearing in English was considered more genteel than any of the Punjabi expletives which always mentioned the bodily parts of one's mothers or sisters, too taboo to sit on a woman's lips.) (24-5)

Her parents thereby create a circle of exclusivity and this, I suggest, can be regarded as a reason for Meena's little interest in her parents' language. This circle of exclusivity does, however, not apply to the white readership of the novel, as the Punjabi words included in the text are usually translated or their\textsuperscript{49} The terms self, sameness and solidarity have been commented upon by Gilroy (Identity, 314-316 and Camps, 108-110).
meaning can be deciphered from the context. To return to Meena's parents, they actually, consciously exclude her from the Indian community, even if only for the best motives, namely that their daughter might have it easier growing up as a foreigner in an English-speaking country. Still, I would argue that this means that Meena lacks a part of her identity, as identity is always formed through difference to an other; there is a hole which only her Nanima can fill. As Nanima does not speak one English word, Meena is forced to learn Punjabi. Also her father averts her to her the necessity of learning her parents' native language in order to be able to communicate with her grandmother and be culturally and personally enriched by her stories and her wisdom. “[P]apa said, ‘You really must learn Punjabi, Meena. Look how left out you feel. How will you ever understand your Nanima, huh?’” (205). Not being able to understand her Nanima represents a boundary for Meena, one which she has to cross in order for her to belong to her native ethnic community. Belongingness is one way of regarding or approaching identity, as Gilroy asserts.50

Finally, although religion is not a very prominent topic in *Anita and Me*, I would like to argue that in terms of traditions, it can be regarded as belonging among the cultural signifiers and is thus worth a little attention. This topic is most salient when Meena's family celebrates Diwali, which is explained to the neighbours as being the Hindu Christmas in order for them to understand the significance of this event. Meena is most disappointed when not one of her English neighbours seems to notice that she is in a festive mood and thus in want of some Christmas/Diwali-wishes (92). At this point, Meena also understands why her parents, in spite of their not being Christian and some of their Indian friends not understanding their support for the Christian tradition at all, also try to celebrate Christmas. They adapt to and adopt the customs and traditions of their surroundings because they do not want Meena to

feel left out … It is not fair, when all the other children are getting presents. Besides, we all get the day off, so why not?’ This was a typical example of Hindu tolerance, the reason, my mama told me, why so many religions happily coexisted in India – Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Sikhism, and especially Islam. (92)

The Kumars celebrating not only Diwali, but also pursuing the Christian tradition of Christmas, is an indication of their perceptiveness of their daughter's needs. As Meena will always be marked as different because of her background and skin colour, they can help her at least in that way by giving her presents when all other children do as well. I would argue that this is important for Meena to establish a sense of equality with her white peers. At Diwali, however, she is disappointed and unconsciously misses India, or at least Indian-predominated surroundings, in order to be able to fully embrace the spirit of the festivity by being able to share it with others. And this is, in the end, what Christmas, or Diwali, is about, sharing love and respect with other people.

The question now arises how the celebration of this festivity is presented in *Anita and Me* and how it is experienced by Meena. She is very disappointed because “[her] parents were celebrating it as they celebrated nearly everything else, with another *mehfil*. This was perfect for them but a major disappointment for me and all my other ‘cousins’ who wanted presents thrown in as part of the package, at least a nod towards what Christmas meant for the English” (98-9). While presents are not the actual meaning, the message of this holiday, I would argue that, from a child's perspective, they are still the main issue. Because of her parents not making an effort to celebrate this festivity with something extraordinary but rather with yet another *mehfil* – a meeting of all their Indian friends where, apart from sharing memories and singing Punjabi songs, “all [they] would do was sit in each others’ lounges [and] eat each others’ food” (25) – Meena decides to treat herself to something special as a present for Diwali. She therefore goes to the fair together with Anita; on their way they do, however, have to pass the Big House, which, among the children of the Yard, is said to be inhabited by a child-eating witch. In order to be protected, Anita makes the sign of the cross over her heart and tells Meena to do the same (100). The narrator then recounts the reason behind this story: a young girl had once drowned in the pond next to the Big House. Anita tries to frighten Meena by pointing out that her bedroom window is right across the House, but Meena replies: “I don’t care! [...] ‘My mom knows loads of prayers anyway. She says them every night in my bedroom, before I sleep.’ Anita laughed. ‘Them’s no
good! The witch is English, in’t she? Yow need proper English prayers. Like Uncle Alan knows.” (101). In this brief conversation it is shown how superstition and childish horror stories reveal the prejudices that the English hold against their Indian neighbours. Anita’s expression of ‘proper English prayers’ implies disrespect and disregard for Meena’s religion, claiming that it is, at least in this case, use- and worthless.

Concerning the tolerance that Meena’s mother claims for her religion mentioned above, it has to be stated that Meena’s parents are indeed presented as very liberal – in fact, they are not overly religious. This tolerance reveals itself in Meena being allowed to go to “Uncle Alan’s Sunday School at the Wesleyan church” (92), which is a Protestant institution and will thus teach children most definitely not about Hindu gods but about the Christian faith. This example shows a link between culture and religion to exist. While the children might be taught about religion, it is rather a matter of culture whether such institutions exist at all. Furthermore, this Sunday School is a meeting point for the children and teenagers; I would argue that it is doubtful whether they go there to learn about religion or whether they attend these meetings because Uncle Alan, the assistant of the vicar, “was the nearest thing [they] had to a sex symbol in a ten-mile radius” (41). In the same vein one could mention Meena’s father, who does not rely solely on religion for his reasoning but rather proclaims a good conscience to be his guidance: “What I do, how I behave, I will do in the name of humanity. And that is that” (92-93).

Meena, however, longs for something more; she craves some knowledge about her parents’ faith and their religion. At her Aunties’ houses she sees wonderfully adorned shrines and is captured by the exoticism, fascination, and glamour that emanates from them. Although she herself belongs to the Hindu tradition, she does not know anything about it and feels deprived: “[...] I continually mourned the fact that we did not have a shrine.” (93). After having seen and heard her Auntie Shaila pray and sing “haunting, minor key aartis” (93) – a word the reader also has to decipher from context only – Meena further complains to her father “Why haven’t you taught me any prayers? I want to go to a temple! I
want to come back as somebody famous!" (93). She is afraid of what her reincarnation might be because she knows she often behaves very badly. Apart from this infantile fear of reincarnation, the demand for knowing some Hindu prayers, some prayers different from the ones she learns in Sunday school, is revealing of her longing for rootedness in her own cultural background.

4.6 Racism in Anita and Me

Apart from the novel's central focus on Meena's growing up, on her coming to terms with her difference, Anita and Me is also very much about racism. The Kumars have to deal with various instances of overt but also covert racism. An example of the latter would be the fact that Mr Ormerod, the generally very nice and patient although messianically religious shop-keeper, is incapable of perceiving the Kumars as distinctly Indian and therefore different from Africans: "You could see it in his face, he'd made the connection, Africa was abroad, we were from abroad, how could we refuse to come along and embrace Jesus for the sake of our cousins?" (21). I would argue that being ignorant about people's heritage and origin can be regarded as a probably unconscious but still existent form of racism.

Furthermore, as I already mentioned, the poodle of Anita's family is called "Nigger" (90). When Meena tells her mother about that – maybe only half-aware of the insult she just heard, although "[she] never called him by name [...]" (140) – her parents get into a heated conversation about colour prejudices other people hold against them, which Meena recounts in the following manner:

My mummy nearly choked when I told her what the Rutter's new pet was called. She told papa and he laughed uproariously. 'It is not amusing, Shyam! These no good ignorant English, what kind of a name is that to say in front of your children, anybody's children?'
'They don't know it is an insult!' papa replied. 'You remember when we went into that paint shop, they had a colour called Nigger Brown and you complained? The shopkeeper was most apologetic...'

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'Black, brown, what does it matter?’ mama continued. 'Just because we are not black, it is still an insult! Have you seen any white paint called Honky With a Hint of White, heh?’

'You ask any man on the street to tell the difference between us and a Jamaican fellow, he will still see us as the same colour, Daljit,’ papa finished off, returning to his paper. (90)

While the 1960s setting of the novel, the time when racism in Britain became an issue, implies that contemporary sensitivities towards issues of 'race' and ethnicity do not apply – 'nigger' was by then still an accepted term given to blacks, this brief conversation nonetheless exemplifies how differently Meena's parents deal with their situation of being foreigners; while her father is only slightly amused and even tries to defend the English, her mother gets into a rage, being much more conscious and alert, and thus also much more enraged by racial abuse. Her disappointment in her fellow human beings reveals itself in such phrases as “[t]hese no good ignorant English”, which shows how she really thinks of them; and in the name she invents for a white paint. Her suggestion “Honky” is known to be a racial slur for white people and is used mainly in the United States. Moreover, as Daljit averts to racist name-calling in front of children, she shows her profession as a teacher. Furthermore, it might include a reference to the word “honky-tonk”, which is a colloquial expression for pub, whose interior design is, from my experience, usually rather held in dark colours. The colour ‘Nigger Brown’, however, is, from a contemporary perspective, most obviously a reference to black people and therefore not to be understood other than as an insult, while at the time of the 1960s 'Nigger' was still an acceptable term for blacks, which is revealed by the English shopkeeper not being aware of any insult whatsoever.

Another instance of racism is recounted when Meena hears the parent generation talk about their version of history, their experiences in finding housing and jobs:

‘You remember, walking round Swiss Cottage, trying to find a boarding house that did not have that sign “No Irish, Blacks or Dogs?” … Hai, the

letters I wrote home, so many lies about the jobs we had, the money we were making. My mamaji still thinks I am a college lecturer… You know that old trick, you ring up and get an interview in your best voice, then they see your face and suddenly the job is gone… (165)

The phrase 'No Irish, Blacks or Dogs' is most telling about the racist attitude that predominated in England in the 1960s. It is incredibly racist and derogatory to put people on the same level as animals; even more so, not only people but entire nations, entire 'races'. The passage furthermore illuminates the reader on the difficulties immigrants had – and probably sometimes still have, although today such measures as positive discrimination exist – in getting a job in spite of having good qualifications, which would most definitely be necessary in order to be college lecturer.

Apart from these experiences with racism, which most probably most immigrants, most diasporans had to digest, _Anita and Me_ is also very explicit about that topic concerning its protagonists and their neighbours. Once again I need to refer to the dog called 'Nigger', which “had now put my relationship, if that was what it was, with Anita into question, at least in mama’s eyes” (91). This shows that the already bad relationship between the two neighbours worsens because of the dog's name. Daljit and Deirdre hardly talk to each other anymore: “[…] I knew what mama’s polite smile meant, what the layers of subtext beneath it were. Not that Deirdre seemed to notice or care that she and mama hardly exchanged five sentences per month” (90).

I contend that the relationship between Daljit and Deirdre is a reflection, a (reverse) mirror image for the relationship between Meena and Anita. Both relations, between the parent as well as the younger generation, worsen over time as also Meena becomes more aware of the value her cultural background actually has for her. While both Meena and Daljit can be regarded as being inferior because of their skin colour, their being foreigners, Meena is more so, at least in the beginning, as she depends on Anita for her acceptance within the community of the English children, within the Yard. Daljit, on the other hand, only seems to be inferior because, in the end, it is her, being a teacher, who has
accomplished more than Deirdre ever will be able to achieve. This is perfectly
exemplified in the following quote:

‘Mrs K, have yow stopped yowr Meena seeing my Anita?’
‘Cos we ain’t good enough for yow lot, is that it?’ Mama and I both picked
up Deirdre’s tone, which was one not of hostility but disbelief; she was
waiting for an answer to the question that obviously deeply puzzled her
and upset her, how could we possibly think ourselves better than her?
[…] [N]ow I could see something else, something unexpected in her face
– she was frightened of us. (215)

Deirdre’s lower position is not only revealed through the content of the text, it is
also further highlighted through her way of speaking, which is marked by a
strong Midlands accent and thus set in stark contrast to Meena’s mother who
“can speak English without an accent” (25). And, although the narrator claims
that Deirdre did not seem hostile, she performs in her incredulous words, due to
her whiteness and her being a native of England, an unjustified position of
superiority.

Meena and her mother also have another, very painful contact with hatred
towards foreigners. Her mother drives Meena to the gurudwara in Birmingham –
the meaning of which, by the way, is not translated but only to be vaguely
understood from context – where Meena is supposed to learn something about
her religion, conscience, and generally, how to be a good human being. Her
parents deem that necessary after Meena has done something particularly
naughty once again. The problem about this journey is that Birmingham is quite
far away and her mother is not a good driver at all. So, because she has some
troubles starting from a hill after the lights had been red and she is rolling back
a little bit, Meena has to get out of the car and ask all the drivers behind them to
reverse a little. Most people react either understandingly (for example: “The bus
driver was pragmatic enough, perhaps because he was Indian and had no
doubt seen much worse back home, and I did preface my pleading with the
word ‘Uncle’, which seemed to do the trick” (96)), or with condescension (“[…] all
wore the same weary amused expression, as if my mother’s driving had only
confirmed some secret, long-held opinion of how people like us were coping

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with the complexities of the modern world” (96-7), which is another instance of orientalising the foreigners), revealing most eloquently the prejudices that the white English population has concerning its fellow human beings from abroad. In that scene, Meena makes explicit, deliberate use of her Midlands accent, in order to show these people that, in spite of her colour, she “was very much one of them [...] that [she] belonged” (97). But an old woman, sitting in the last car of the row, is utterly outraged and very insulting to Meena, something she only wants to run away from to her father’s soothing arms and tell him about:

‘Bloody stupid wog. Stupid woggy wog. Stupid.’ I backed off as if I had been punched and began running up the hill to our Mini[.] I wanted to tell him [my father] about the old lady, but then I looked at his face and saw something I had never seen before, a million of these encounters written in the lines around his warm, hopeful eyes, lurking in the furrows of his brow, shadowing the soft curves of his mouth. I suddenly realised that what had happened to me must have happened to papa countless times, but not once had he ever shared his upset with me. He must have known it would have made me feel as I felt right now, hurt, angry, confused, and horribly powerless because this kind of hatred could not be explained. (97-8)

This encounter is crucial in Meena’s understanding of her being different, of what she might perhaps have to deal with time and again. Such unjustified hurt inflicted by strangers only on account of skin colour is, I would argue, an immense strain on a young girl of a foreign background, who, because of her difference, needs to develop an even stronger self-confidence than her white, unmarked peers. In terms of identity, which is always formed through difference, her sense of subjectivity, this experience can be regarded as crushing Meena, making her painfully aware of a reality that she and her family can never escape. Especially the word ‘wog’ is an excruciatingly racist, derogatory and pejorative slang word in reference to people of foreign appearance. In connection with the adjective ‘stupid’ and its doubling by making an adjective out of ‘wog’ and adding it to the noun, the insult vocalised is being heightened ad infinitum.

One final, but probably the most crucial example of racism for Meena’s development in Anita and Me is the conduct of Sam Lowbridge at the Spring
Fête, who by then had changed his hairstyle from long to almost skinhead-bald (174). After a collection for charity, a discussion erupts among the villagers about how to put the money to use, and while Sam stirs up the crowd, voicing his discontent, Uncle Alan, the vicar’s assistant, tries to calm him down, but the following scene ensues where Sam reveals his true self: “Yow don’t do nothing but talk, “Uncle”. And give everything away to some darkies we’ve never met. We don't give a toss for anybody else. This is our patch. Not some wogs’ handout.’ I felt as if I had been punched in the stomach. (193)”

In this scene Sam Lowbridge openly voices his racist beliefs and claims in front of the whole community, who, it has to be noted in defence, is not at all in accordance with Sam's opinion. In his distinctly colloquial manner of expression, Sam also makes use of pejorative terms such as 'darkies' and again the word 'wog', which, apart from 'Nigger', is probably the worst term in reference to people of darker skin colour. He makes clear that he considers the land on which they all live as well as the money collected for charity to be exclusively theirs and also to remain English-only. This, in turn, is revealing of his general attitude towards foreigners, although throughout the novel he is always shown to like Meena. Thus, he is ignorant of the fact that by such announcements he also disgraces his friend Meena, that she is included when he talks of 'some darkies'. Meena is naturally extremely hurt by Sam's statement and in retrospect the narrator recounts:

In that one moment at the Fête, when Sam had opened his mouth and let the cider and his single brain cell do the talking, he had taken away my innocence. There was nothing in the world I could do to him that would have the same impact, that would affect him so deeply and for so long. […] ‘Meena? Ain’t we friends any more then?’ […] What was the matter with him? Didn’t he understand what he had done? (227-8)

When finally Anita and Meena have an exchange on Sam Lowbdrige's outburst, Anita admires Sam as “dead bloody hard" (195) and Meena retorts “Anita Rutter, yow am a bloody stupid cow sometimes,’ […]” (195). Hence, while showing that she belongs to the English community just as well as to the Indian one by using the local accent, Meena finally learns in the most painful way, from
the people she thought were her friends, that they have not understood a single thing about the cruelty they have inflicted on her, about their racist attitude towards foreigners, even though they have been living door by door for years. This experience marks yet another change in the identity-position she is taking up. Her identification thus lies more with her ethnic and cultural roots than with the English surroundings she long aspired to be belong to. Bromley regards this as a “second stage of her double estrangement” (147), while first she sought to distance herself from her ethnic community, she is now, due to the experience at the Fete and her exchange with Anita, ‘estranged’ from those she aspired to belong to and thus creates her own ‘third space’ when she claims that she “belonged [...] wherever [she] stood [...]” (303).

4.7 Conclusion

As Ranasingha neatly summarises: “[Anita and Me] explore[s] the different generations’ relationship to their ‘host’ and ‘home’ countries, and the impact on identity-formation of their contrasting formative experiences” (224). I hope to have shown in my analysis of Anita and Me that a stark distinction can be discerned between Meena and her mother in their relationship to the respective nations, India and England. This differing relationship is also reflected in the relationship between Meena and Anita and that between their mothers.

The novel has primarily a Bildungsroman-storyline, following Meena’s maturation from rejection to acceptance of her Indian heritage, going as far as embracing it in spite of having sought integration in the English society beforehand. Her grandmother’s arrival from India serves as a catalyst for her to be able to achieve a change in perception and be able to come to terms with her divided subjectivity. At first, Meena is still caught in her rejection of the Indian part of her being: While she was “jealous of this past that excluded [her]” (36), she was also fascinated by “this meeting of two worlds” (36), as she inhabits two diverging worlds herself. After many cathartic experiences

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52 See Bromley 145.
connected with racism and the awareness that learning her parents’ language also means learning about her Indian self, a self she cannot escape but has learned respect and value; so she is finally able to state, after the experience of death of her friend from hospital and her grandmother’s departure:

[N]ow I was reaping the karma of all those lies and longings; I had lost a Nanima, a soul mate and temporarily, a leg […] But this was the oddest thing, this is what I realised, […] that at this moment, I was content. I had absorbed Nanima’s absence and Robert’s departure like rain on parched earth, drew it in deep and drank from it. I now knew I was not a bad girl, a mixed-up girl, a girl with no name or no place. The place in which I belonged was wherever I stood and there was nothing stopping me simply moving forward and claiming each resting place as home. The sense of displacement I had always carried round like a curse shrivelled into insignificance against the shadow of mortality cast briefly by a hospital anglepoise lamp, by the last wave of a gnarled brown hand. I would not mourn the changing landscape around me, because I would be a traveller soon anyhow. (303-4)

No longer torn between divided allegiances to two worlds, two cultures, Meena has learned to build a bridge, being able to walk to either side, inhabiting both worlds equally and no longer rejecting her difference. Bromley formulates what I call a bridge in reference to Syal's own metaphor of the ship mentioned above: “Meena successfully navigates the two worlds and is not caught 'in between cultures', because both are fluid and subject to change, but instead creates a new culture, a third space, which is a synthesis of both worlds” (145). Yet, I would argue, while this lengthy passage indicates that Meena might not be caught in between cultures anymore, she has come to accept and value living in-between cultures, realising that this also a space of possibilities. Her “sense of displacement […] [being] shrivelled into insignificance” means exactly that, I suggest, that Meena has learned to accept her difference. And although she might be a step further in 'arriving' in England than her parents, who still “mourn the changing landscape”, which is indicative of their continued affiliation to their home (country), stating that she “would soon be a traveller anyhow” bears a trace of insecurity about the way she is going. Still being a teenager, Meena cannot be regarded as having settled the issues of ethnicity and identity – even more so because identity is known to be constantly reproducing itself anew in
relation to others and in the context of many variables, including ethnicity. The question in which culture Meena feels more at home, however, remains unresolved, to be seen in her years to come.
Hands that reached out were often the same as the hands that reassured (31).

It is death to sleep on foreign soil and living death to sleep on our own (91).

5 Mangoes on the Maple Tree by Uma Parameswaran

5.1 Introduction

Nalini Iyer, in her review of Uma Parameswaran's first, and rather short, novel writes:

What I found most enjoyable about this novel is that it steers clear of stereotypes about Indian immigrant families. The Bhaves and the Moghes are refreshingly different from some families that inhabit the world of diasporic fiction. There are no daughters being threatened with arranged marriages, no authoritarian parents, no weepy sentimentality about the land left behind.53

In contrast to Anita and Me and The Namesake, in Mangoes on the Maple Tree the second generation has not been born in the country of residence, in Canada. This provides a somewhat different insight into generational differences in dealing with the diasporic situation. However, some disparities in relating to the home and host countries can be discerned, although the novel's focus clearly lies on the younger generation. Two further issues are the richness in poetic as well as colloquial language, as well as racism. Finally, I will conclude by analysing the relationship between the novel's plot with its title, which actually frames the storyline.

Furthermore, contrary to The Namesake this novel provides intimate access to the characters' inner thoughts and feelings, woven together with hints towards Indian mythology and other metaphors, thus leaving the reader with an intense image of the characters' relationships and their dealings, kept in by the flood tide of 1997.

5.2 A family migrating from India to Canada

The Bhave family – Sharad, Savitri and their children Jyoti, Jayant and Krish – have moved to Winnipeg, leaving behind a comfortable life with servants and, as regards Sharad, a professional career as a nuclear scientist. His sister, Veejala, has been living with her husband Anant Moghe and their children Vithal and Priti longer in Canada than Sharad and his family have. The story takes place within three weeks, in 1997, “during the great flood” (Iyer) and is related by several of the protagonists, although the focus lies on Jyoti. Thus, the narrative’s “rhythms rise and fall with the flood waters of Winnipeg” (Iyer).

5.2.1 Focusing on Jayant and Jyoti

The narrative starts with a trope which is also central to Jhumpa Lahiri’s The Namesake, that of travel, which is just another word for voyage\(^54\). In Mangoes on the Maple Tree, this issue is discussed by means of Jayant's plan of going on an extended road trip with his friends. The Bhaves “would never admit aloud that they were proud Jayant was taking to the road with Brendan, Jim and Bob [...]”, as this, I would argue, would be contrary to the typical values of diasporans, that is, keeping to their family and sticking to their roots, which Cohen would call a 'strong ethnic group consciousness'.\(^55\) Eventually, however, being held up by the flood and one after the other young men cancelling, Jayant also decides to stay at home, with his family, to do something useful. Via the intended route of taking to the road, he finds back to his roots, to strain Gilroy’s terminology once more, which is revealed towards the falling of the flood, the closing of the novel, having a relationship and knowing about his aunt's plans to leave her family in order to move back to India, Jayant decides to stay at home. “He thought, I’ll stay. If there’s a christly chance for me to do something for someone, I’d gladly stay here to the end of time. Jeesus, how dispensable we are. I’d stay put even if that stupid parakeet of yours needed me to clean its

\(^{54}\) Avtar Brah observes that “[a]t the heart of the notion of diaspora is the image of a journey” (443).

\(^{55}\) See Cohen’s point 6, page 9.
cage every day. How much more readily would I stay for you” (157). This quotation indicates that, while, in the first place, the reason for him to stay might be his girlfriend, he is even more determined to do so in order to look after his nine-year-old cousin Priti.

Thus, while there is a palpable distancing from India, which will be discussed later in more detail, the second generation still feels connected to the homeland. Both Jyoti and Jayant incorporate this contradiction, though in different forms. Jyoti's connection to her brother, I would argue, stands for her close connection to her ancestry; her relationship with Pierre, on the other hand, is representative of her rebellion, her distancing of her heritage. In Jayant's case, the journey he is about to embark on and the eventual abandoning of the trip reveals both tendencies. Before leaving Jyoti and Krish tell Jayant that he is going to be missed:

“I am going to miss you, Bhau.” He stopped himself short, realizing he had used a forbidden word. Back in Pune, he and all their cousins his age had called all older brothers and cousins Bhau as was the custom, but Jayant had shed his Indianisms fast and he had dinned it out of the others with his derisive taunts. “Oh shit, do you have to call everyone Auntie or Brother or Uncle? And if you must go for all these crappy familiarities, say Auntie Vee, not Vee Auntie, for chrissake.” (6)

This scene reveals how very much Jayant tries to fit into Canadian society, assimilating and adopting Canadian speech while shaking off any language that would connect him to India or identify him as Indian. It is only him who had forbidden his younger brother to continue to refer to him as 'Bhau'. Upon Jayant's harsh answer, however, he and Jyoti get into a fight about their status as foreigners and their background, still revealing Jayant's determination to shed his Indian heritage, to leave that part of his identity behind as he leaves his home.

“I am glad you're pitching out,” Jyoti said coldly, “and I sure hope it gets into that thick skull of yours that we're different, and no matter what we do, we are never going to fit in here. Take to the road, get high, sleep around, but still and all ...” “Fuck off, Sis, you'll see.” “All these expletives, all the in-jargon, you can swear all you want, but you are
never going to be one of the boys. Not that I see why anyone would want

to be. “Don't you come at me with all that crap about morals and Hindu
values and the whole hogwash. I've had an earful from Dad all these
seven fucking years. Him and his pipe dreams about India. Why the hell
didn't he stay there? A nuclear scientist, he was there right from the
beginning, Trombay, Tumba, the whole bit. He'd have been a director of
an Indian Institute of Technology or some national lab by now. Instead,
he quits the place and rots here, selling houses, a crappy real estate
broker, just one step better than an encyclopedia salesman.” […] Jyoti
said, “It couldn't have been easy for him to pack up everything and move
out at age forty, and its no bed of roses here, mowing the lawn and
painting the house and doing a hundred menial chores which used to be
done for him by servants in the luxury of his ancestral home.” (8-9)

Thus, as this fight discloses, Jyoti is aware of their difference, their otherness,
to which they are doomed as diasporans as if “fixed by a dye”\(^{56}\). Due to this
awareness, I would argue, she defends their father, their ancestry, their
heritage. She knows that their Indian heritage and its contrast to their
contemporary Canadian lives will always remain a source of their identity, as
identity is always constructed through difference\(^{57}\). Although one's origins and
cultural upbringing might not be determine one's identity, as this is something
constantly changing, transforming, due to the positions we take up at a certain
moment, they have an influence nevertheless. Especially if one can easily be
detected as an 'other', due to a different way of living, differing values, religion
or traditions, or due to skin colour. Furthermore, this quotation underlines
Jayant's dissatisfaction. Jayant, who “remembered every detail of the proud
family history that had been passed on to him through bedtime stories” (85),
reproaches his father for having taken the possibility from him to engage with
“[h]is inheritance (85)”. By these memories and thoughts he illustrates his
position in-between two cultures. While, on the one hand, striving to 'shed his
Indianisms', he also has a strong ethnic group consciousness. Yet, his cousin
Vithal reproaches Jayant for complaining about his parents, the fact that they
have left India although they had a good life there, and for Jayant's plans of
running away (90). The next minute, however, he apologises to Jayant,
revealing that he has troubles because his mother is going to leave them (92),
and agrees that getting away for a while is a good idea. “As you say, we're all

\(^{56}\) Frantz Fanon, \textit{Black Skin, White Masks}, 109.
\(^{57}\) See Stuart Hall in the chapter on identity.
too goddam alike. We look alike, we speak alike, we think and feel like each other. The whole lot of us. It's like being in a goddam house of mirrors” (91).

To return to Jayant's planned road trip, Jyoti complains that by announcing his plans Jayant “had stolen her hour”, Jyoti complains. Jyoti's relationship with Pierre is another prominent matter in Uma Parameshwaran's novel. They had decided that “they would have a July wedding and move to Edmonton” (4). She has not yet told her parents about this relationship, as she knows that her father, after having lived in Canada for years, would still be disappointed about her “marrying Pierre and not someone of [their] own kind” (4). This is suggestive of the parental generation's unvoiced expectation of a refraining from inter-marriage, and thus indicative of a certain diaspora consciousness and maintaining boundaries to the host society.

Furthermore, it is clear from the beginning that Jyoti is not happy with Pierre, she is only telling herself so. A first instance where this becomes evident is when she reflects about her brother leaving the family for a year, her brother that she is very close to, they are an “extension” of each other (87). Thus, I would argue, Jyoti feels abandoned and unprotected in her relationship to Pierre, lacking her confidant. In her thoughts, Jyoti digresses to a metaphor drawn from her inherited culture.

But closer than this emptiness, beyond these fears, deeper than the resentment, all of which had flared from time to time into searing anguish, was something that was frightening because it was so pervasive. Despair. A dull despair as at some inevitability. A primal feeling. A deer nimbly running towards the lake but braking of a sudden, sensing a tiger near, then moving forward again, driven not by its parching thirst but by a sense of inevitability. Kalidasa must have described tenderness with nightmarish violence. Infinitely more moving than those who showed the violence of life through violent images. Separation, blindfolded walk into the forest, the circumcision blade; Shakuntala's deer, blue water, tiger.

She was exaggerating. For pittosake, he was just going away for a year, and she too had to leave at some point anyway. But she could feel a pall enveloping the family, not just the five of them but the whole family: Priti and Vithal and Aunt Veejal and Uncle Anant; Pierre; and others, shadows now, but hers, their family. [...]
What did the buffalo that roamed the prairies feel when they smelt the muzzle of guns stalking their band? What did the Incas feel when they heard Spanish horses galloping through their land?
Jyoti remembered. [...] Dull pain, pall of despair. (4-5)

I would argue that this lengthy passage is not only exemplary for the narrative style of the novel, for it closely knits together human relationships with rich, metaphoric, even mythical language and stories, whose inspirations are drawn from Indian culture, but also from the culture and histories of the continent where the Bhave family is dwelling now. The reference to the buffalo and the Incas, I suggest, is a metaphor for her own status as a foreigner, fixed in the gaze of the other and unable to escape that powerless position. This reveals that Jyoti is very much aware of her diasporic situation, her status as 'other' in Canadian society.

The key words and phrases of this passage, I believe, are 'despair', 'inevitability', 'pall', and 'Jyoti remembered', the latter running through the whole novel like a red thread, thus indicating that, while at twenty-one she is still a young woman, she derives from and is enveloped by a culture that has existed for thousand of years, and which thus is rich in stories and traditions, she remembers and is thus a member of India, due to her diaspora consciousness. On the other hand, one could also understand the phrase 'Jyoti remembered' bluntly, as simply referring to her remembering her childhood in India, the surroundings, the rituals, which only seems like 'shadows now'.

Regarding the other key words, I would argue that 'despair' and 'inevitability' are a reference to her engagement to Pierre, while 'pall' rather refers to her family which provides her with security and stability. Together, they form a description of Jyoti's perception of her momentary identity position and life-circumstances. While engaging with Pierre, who can be regarded as a detour, as flowing by with the flood tide, the narrative later unfolds that she is subconsciously drawn more to her roots, her family and heritage, embodied by Vithal's friend Sridhar, which is lying over her like a 'pall'. Finally, to return to Pierre, I suggest that he is, figuratively speaking, connected to the flood tide. As Jyoti often ponders
about him and their relationship, the thoughts about that coming to her in waves, this also shows that the flood is another of the metaphors the novel works with.

I would argue that Pierre, Jyoti’s white Canadian boyfriend, that her father likes because he has black hair and eyes like them (19), which are a disguise for him representing British rule in India, and, by extension, Canadian society. The reason for this assumption being that Jyoti, at one point, complains that Pierre has taken “so many decisions for them with such rapidity” (59), not involving her in the process. Furthermore, she constantly has to chant “Pierre, Pierre, Pierre, [...] the way she might a mantra that would resolve all her problems. But Pierre was also a problem” (11) in order to remind herself that it is him who she is engaged to, him who she is going to marry and spend the rest of her life with. Yet, the reader soon learns that it is in fact not Pierre but Sridhar, one of her brother’s Indian friends, who her heart belongs to, thus revealing her continued affiliation to her home country. Therefore, I suggest that while there might be “no weepy sentimentality” (Iyer) about India, it does nonetheless have a very high standing for the Bhaves and the Moghes, who continue to relate to it in spite of living in Canada.

Jyoti cannot imagine being married at the age of twenty-one, especially not to Pierre, who represents suppression by colonial rule and underlines this by taking decisions for Jyoti. “[T]he point was that she felt torn and she shouldn't” (41). The question now arises as to why she feels torn. The simple answer would be that she feels torn between two men – Pierre and Sridhar. The more complex answer would be that she feels torn between affiliations, countries, customs, families, traditions, life-styles, which, in a nutshell, comes down to life choices. Her relationship to Pierre as well as her affection for and attraction to Sridhar are representative of the two cultures she knows, two diverging influences on her identity-formation; feeling drawn to both of them represents her in-between position. This in-betweenness is illustrated when Jyoti admits that she is “stressed out because [she’s] seeing this guy [that is, Pierre,] and feel[s] kind of guilty that [she] like[s] some things he doesn't” (45).
Jyoti also has self-doubts, much awareness of her suspension in-between two cultures, the creative potential of which she is yet unable to grasp. This reveals itself when she is talking to her aunt Veejala. “Maybe I am nothing. Just a blank wall of mirror maybe. Each one sees himself, but not me. I am nothing in myself [...]” (128). This phrasing, which reminds me of Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage, illustrates that Jyoti is still struggling with the identity-positions that are engendered in her being a diasporan, in her hybridity. Jyoti’s attempt at resolving her dilemma lies in asking her aunt to come to India with her, as she has not been back in her home country even once since she lives in Canada. Her aunt declines, revealing that a trip to India would not solve any of Jyoti’s problems, which are also largely due to her relationship with Pierre and the affection she feels for Sridhar. Her inner conflict, torn between two men, two cultures, the former representing the latter, I would argue, is summarised in the following sequence, where she ponders about Pierre and Sridhar and the dichotomy between us/them, and which also reveals that identity, as Bauman has claimed, should nowadays rather be understood in terms of identification. Jyoti’s resolution, for the moment, I would argue, is one of relating to both sides.

They had never talked about [Pierre's] past but that did not mean she had not thought about it from time to time. But no, it was not important, nothing counted except the present and the future. Quite aimlessly but by habit she wandered into the Anthro section. Was it habit or was it because of some subconscious desire, knowing she had run into Sridhar a couple of times in that section during the last year? [...] [S]he saw a black-haired head at a farther carrel. Reflexively, she moved forward to see if it was anyone she knew, why did she do that with every black-haired person, why does it always have to be we-they? Sridhar had said. Why do you identify yourself with all brown faces? He has asked Jayant. She shook him out of her head. She shook Jayant too out of her head. Black hair, Pierre’s hair was black Dad loved him for it. [...] “Paki house.” It was an us/them thing and not because she wanted it that way. (133)

Apart from Jyoti’s and Jayant's perspectives, however, the reader is also presented with several other characters and their views, as “[i] twas always open house at the Bhaves, as all their friends often said” (15). The Bhave’s open house is very popular with the young generation, showing their sense of community and ethnic group consciousness, the fact that their background is important to them.
Jayant and his friends come there regularly, to cook Indian food (58) – all characters seem to enjoy Indian food more than Canadian food, at least it is discussed and emphasised much more than Canadian food. Regarding Canadian food, Savitri tries to find products that fulfil Indian expectations (79) and thus adheres to her culture of origin. They also passionately discuss issues dealing with the clashing cultures of India and Canada as well as the division among the Indians themselves. Among these young men are Jayant's cousin Vithal, their friend Sridhar, who is in love with Jyoti, and Danesh – a newcomer to their community, who still lives according to Indian ways, greeting Jayant's mother “with joined palms, 'Namaste, Mrs. Bhave, it is so nice of you to have me over” (59). Yet, it is he who believes they have to assimilate into Canadian culture to be accepted, to make an effort. The young crowd talking about interracial dating and the guys wondering why so many Indian girls date whites, Danesh hesitantly suggests to integrate. "But you should make every effort to merge, since you are here to stay, Jayant. I mean this is your country. You have to try to assimilate, don't you think? The Canadians would appreciate that” (63).

On top of that, Joyti suggests that “for dating local style, we have to change some time or another, you know, and come into step with the world around us” (62), which, bearing in mind that she defended her father before for migrating while still clinging to India, illustrates that she is very much aware of both sides of the coin of identification. In connection with Danesh's remark, this triggers a heated discussion of Canadian multiculturalism and an emotional speech about being 'othered'.

“They – white Canadians – don't want us to assimilate. They want us out. We'll be squashed like bugs soon." […] "All these years they led us to believe the isolation was coming from us, that we were communal, parochial, closed within our cultural exclusiveness, etc. etc., but now that we are trying to merge, their real feelings are coming out. They've never wanted us and now we've become a real threat. [...] We have to stay separate from them and stay together, and we've got to show them we have as much right to be here as all those pissed-off whites who've bullied their way into this country these last three hundred years. We've got to stay apart, stay together. That's the only way.” (63)
Vithal's outburst illustrates what diasporans of all generations have to deal with. It is an expression of hostility towards foreigners on behalf of the host society, which abates any will to assimilate. Vithal's solution lies in 'staying apart' from white Canadians and 'stay together' in the diasporic community.\(^{58}\) The 'only way' seems to lie in keeping up a boundary to the host society. They go on about “a zoo called Folklorama where everyone visits everyone else's cage” (63), indicating that they feel alien, misunderstood and treated hostile by the host-society as well as conveying a sense of being exposed as well as being bounded, like animals in a zoo. They make a point of community, of support and keeping together, like an ethnic enclave, within Canadian society. And yet, Jayant retorts that the Indian community in Canada is as diverse as the Indians in the home country, which he claims to be only “[…] a political entity that came together as a nation after a zillion years because the British made it so” (65). Someone else insists on nationhood being the product of “[f]ive thousand years of culture” (65). Yet, Jayant becomes impatient, claiming that the present is all that is important to him, that he does not feel any sense of belonging when faced with Indians who are “mucking up all of Heathrow with their stinking masalas and turbans” (65). Vithal provides a very accurate and telling conclusion of this discussion about political, cultural, and ethnic issues, claiming that “Jayant is himself a prime example of what he is trying to say, that our worst enemies are our own people” (66). This whole discussion is exemplary of the novel's concern, “a negotiation between different cultural values” (Iyer) as well as the “differences that exist within the diasporic community” (Iyer).

While all of these scenes and remarks centre upon the Bhaves' 'open house', I would like to pick up that topic once more. People who are no blood relatives of the family are invited and integrated into the diasporic community solely on the basis of shared origins. One of these characters is Danesh, who has been mentioned before. Another example is Mrs Khanna, who visits the Bhaves only because “their families had been neighbors in Dehli at one time” (43). “[I]t was just as Sridhar said; one felt obliged to be courteous and helpful the moment

\(^{58}\) This reminds of Brubaker's features of boundary-maintenance and homeland orientation, and Cohen's point 7.
one saw anyone who looked like they may be from India” (43). This underlines the clustering of immigrants, their mutual support due to shared origins.

Finally, I would also like to make another comment on the flood that runs through the novel. While I have argued that Pierre can be regarded as floating by Jyoti on this flood, I also see another possibility of interpreting this flood. I would suggest that, read in connection with the young men’s discussion cited above, it could also be regarded as a metaphor for the immigrants’ feeling of being unwanted in Canadian society. This view is supported by the following quotation, where Jyoti complains about nothing else happening anymore, thus indicating a feeling of being bound, within boundaries, Savitri says: “How can you get tired of the flood coverage, Jyoti?! [...] ’There’s so much happening, so many human interest stories’” (154). And human interest stories are the gist of the matter, the centre that all of these discussions and analyses and theorisations revolve around. That ‘human interest stories’ are the central issue of the novel is also revealed by Savitri talking to her daughter about generational relationships:

“As for knowing about one’s parents, we don’t reach out with facts but with feelings. My grandparents, who brought me up, I can now see they were so different from each other. [...] [...] Savitri [...] placed both her hands on her daughter’s head; then, holding the girl’s face between her hands bent down to kiss her on the forehead, combining the ancient rite of blessing with the universal gesture of love. (152)

5.2.2 The parent generation’s experiences

Sharad, missing his home country, not yet being able to make the connection between ancient rites and universal gestures, claims that “[e]verything is overdone here” (19), in connection with his following lecture on “trust and responsibility and good moral backgrounds” (19), this illustrates his contempt of Canadian ways and his diasporic consciousness, never forgetting his own background and the values he had been taught there, which, to be sure, clash with the liberalism of Canadian, or in general, Western, culture. Furthermore,
this scene is told in connection with Savitri's discovery that Jyoti has had sex with Pierre, something both she and especially Sharad disapprove of, indicating the morals of their generation and thus again the clash of cultures and generations.

The divergence in the immigrant generation's attitude toward India is revealed in a discussion between brother and sister, Sharad and Veejala, defending 'back home' and integration, and making a new life, respectively. This is revealed in a scene which starts with Veejala wanting to comfort her daughter Priti because she does not know much about India but wants to go there and ends in an argument with her brother Sharad.

 [...] [Canada] is home to you, and one can have only one home at any given time. So let's not get confused as to what's what. [...]" Sharad, in a voice that took on a deeper timbre because he was so serious, said, “I think children should know about their heritage. It gives them something to fall back upon.” Veejala cut in, “If there's a crutch handy, you, and by that I mean all of us, can bet your last dollar you'll use it whether you need it or not. [...] Whereas if it isn't there, you'll jolly well learn how to move around on your own two feet. And all that baggage from the old country is just a crutch. All that weight on our backs. We have to strike roots here, I know that, you know that, but we sure have a devil of a time doing it. But let's not mess up anything for the kids, okay?” “The past is important. One must have a sense of identity, of pride.” “Sure sure, but we overdo it, Sharad; only those who can't cope with the present tend to live I the past; romanticizing the past is an escape route at best, and it can be toxic.” (36)

The last sentence reminds of Radhakrishnan's warning that, living abroad creates a tendency to romanticise the home country, the life back there, forgetting what was not so good about it and thus might have prompted moving away in the first place, without taking into account the present situation there. Furthermore, this passage reveals the split alliances that the first generation has to the country of origin. Sharad insists on maintaining its culture and traditions, clinging to memories of the past as a source of identity. While the past is in fact part of one's identity, being given a first sense of self by family and the traditions passed on from generation to generation, the past is
nevertheless only one component, as identity is in constant flux and reworking.\(^{59}\) This is a point that Veejala indirectly makes, suggesting that the past is part of one's baggage; comparing it to a crutch makes it seem like a medical condition that 'can be toxic', therefore rendering impossible the task of integrating into the host society. Yet, while Veejala refers to the past as a crutch and emphasises striking roots in Canada, it is her who leaves for India while Sharad and his family are staying. However, one could also argue that Veejala leaves because of being tired of carrying around that crutch of the past, the memory of and longing for the homeland, and of trying to get rooted in Canada.

Sharad's sister Veejala provides a point of divergence between both the parent and the young generation. She is described as a "strikingly good-looking woman, elegantly dressed in an expensive skirt-suit" (33), which reveals her high status in Canadian society, being a university professor, and representing the family's most pronounced integration into Canadian society and its way of living. And yet it is she who is the stumbling block, she who decides to leave her family and go back to India. Veejala's decision of leaving her family and her home in Canada does not only affect her children and husband, also her brother Sharad is deeply bothered, worried and angry. This is shown by his thoughts: "Why did they choose this god-forsaken eternal winter of a hole except so they could foster a sense of family even though so far form home? Just to be near her so they'd have each other to turn to in times of need" (107). This reveals Sharad's true reason for leaving India, he wanted to be near his sister, who he had always felt closest to of all his siblings, as she has always asked him for advice. But now, he is completely perplexed, unable to understand Veejala's decision. For Sharad, family is of utter importance in his world. Hence, this incident reveals that not only the second generation but also the first has its troubles with adjusting to a life in a diasporic situation. Leaving or being left, when one does not have many family members, relatives or friends to fall back upon, I would argue, must be difficult for both parties.

\(^{59}\) At one point, Jayant also claims that all he is interested in is the present, not the past.
In addition to leaving her family, Veejala also quits her job as a professor of astronomy at the university, which causes some uproar in the media and of course also in her family. When asked in an interview for a newspaper article whether she expected the conditions to be better in India and whether she felt discriminated against due to being a woman, Veejala had answered that “she would feel better wasting her life in her native country than in these backwoods” (109) and that “[i]t could be [she was] the wrong color as well” (110), respectively. These statements are suggestive of her reasons for leaving Canada; she feels drawn back to her home country after having lived half her life in Canada, in the diaspora and with a diaspora-consciousness, which never allowed her to forget about her origins. Saying that she might be 'the wrong color as well' points towards a process of Othering, reminding the diasporan of his or her status as foreigner, alerting to the space in-between two cultures which is home for the diasporan. And yet, as Uma Parameswaran has mentioned in Trishanku, one of her earlier works, “the 'in-betweenness' of an immigrant [...] is a space of possibilities” (Parameswaran qtd. in Iyer). This leads to Savitri's reflection about her sister-in-law's leaving: “Veejala, who had lived almost as long outside India as in India, who in appearance, dress accent, food habits, outlook and every variable one could think of, was at home in the western world, was returning to India, whereas they would continue here, with their old ways, old values, old everything. But why not? India had moved on, would move on [...]” (112). I would argue that, keeping Uma Parameswaran's statement in mind, both options bear the promise of change. As circumstances change, also options, positions change, identity is in formation. Veejala is very much aware of both sides of the coin, on the one hand, leaving her husband entails leaving a part of herself behind, like leaving India once did, while on the other hand this might enable her to escape the fast-moving Western world. Talking about her decision to Savitri, Veejala says “’[a]ready I feel as though I have left half my self behind …’ [...] ‘[…] maybe it is my last desperate attempt to do something worthwhile, instead of being tied down to a bloodless rat-race’” (117).
5.3 Reciting, Singing and Language

*Mangoes on the Maple Tree* includes various instances of, what I would call, Canadian or American 'youth-speak'. Especially Jayant but also his siblings as well as his friends use several slang expressions or simply careless speech throughout the novel, examples being “pittoosake”, “Howdee folks!”, “Jeesus”, “chrissake”, “Howzzat” and, “‘Oh gross!' 'Yummy.' 'Don't take a ratch.' 'Oh flip.'” (25). This Canadian- or American-inflected jargon, taken up by the young generation and revealing their adoption of and belongingness in Canadian youth culture, going hand in hand with identification with exactly that, establishes a stark contrast to the mythically-inspired narrative tone and the highly frequent interpositions of Hindu words or phrases enriching the novel and condensing the experience of in-betweenness, pointing towards the first generation’s re-membering of the homeland as well as the second generation’s position between the Canadian and Indian cultures. In the case of language, the younger ones are rather oscillating towards the Canadian side. Other Hindu words which are frequently incorporated are terms referring to food, such as moolah (6) or *dal*\(^60\) and *rassa* (17), or referring, true to *nature* of the title, to various names for grass, such as *darbha* grass or *kusa* grass (5). These terms are italicised in the text and therefore visibly highlighted, creating even more distance for the reader as no explanation of the difference is given whatsoever. Food terms, however, are usually, though there are some exceptions, not italicised, indicating lesser distance. I would argue that this is due to the fact that, in Canada, one might have access to Indian food, but not be able to grasp Indian nature or landscape, nor fully understand its cultural diversity, which, in turn, is due to spatial distance. In addition, I consider it necessary to mention that the parent generation still speaks their native language – Marathi – at home, while Jayant is conscious of the fact that “he and Jyoti had switched to English, and his kid brother, Krish, didn't speak a word of Marathi” (82-83).

Furthermore, the novel is rich in songs and poetry. An example is given when Veejala, massaging Jayant's head, sings a song from “an old movie in which the

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\(^{60}\) The fact that the word 'dal', among others, is not spelled coherently in the three novels underlines India's diversity and the diversity of the Indian diaspora.
masseur guaranteed relief from all aches of head and heart – ‘O sar tera chakraye, ya dil dooba jaaye, aaja pyare, pas hamare …’” (34). A translation is not given, because, I would argue, in this case it would only destroy the atmosphere created, the revelation of the family’s continued affiliation to their origins, their upbringing. Another example is Savitri’s humming of an old song.

“Dane, dane per likha hai khanewale ka naam, lenewale karod denewala ek Ram.’ (On every grain is written the name of the one who will eat it; those who receive are many, but there is only one giver, Ram.)” (112). In this case, I suggest, the translation is provided in order for the reader to better understand the value of rice in Indian culture, which is also underlined in *The Namesake*. Also a love poem by Edgar Allan Poe, entitled “To Helen”, is incorporated into the text when Sridhar makes a confession of his admiration and affection for Jyoti.

Helen, thy beauty is to me  
Like those Nicean barks of yore  
That treacherously o'er the perfumed sea  
Dashed me to bits on yonder rocky shore. (52)

Interestingly enough, the last line that Sridhar recites is not the original one, as Poe continues after 'sea' like this: “The weary way-worn wanderer bore / To his own native shore.” I would argue that this changed line is a hint towards the fact that they have all migrated from their 'native shore' to the 'yonder rocky shore', over there in Canada. Following this poetic revelation is a more straightforward one, where Sridhar blurts out “[d]amn you, I must be mad to come here. God, how I wish I could hate you and have done with you” (57). Jyoti, only then realising that what she mistakes for affection and companionship on both their sides then wishes that “she could fling herself out the door, she could follow it and be with it wherever it was so she could be whole again” (57). The last phrase, 'be whole again', especially illustrates that, in spite of being torn between two cultures, two men, two selves, she is more drawn to her Indian heritage, which could make her whole again, healing the open wound of divided affiliations, a divided self, of in-betweenness. Moreover,

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61 The Works of Edgar Allan Poe in Five Volumes.  
<http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/poe/poe5v.pdf>
this means that Jyoti is very much aware of her position as a diasporan, conscious of her status as Other but not at ease with it.

5.4  Racism in Mangoes on the Maple Tree

The issue of racism is also broached in the novel, in a scene where Jyoti is at Romona's home — a friend of Priti's, who Jyoti intend to pick up. Two boys ring the bell, "collecting pledges for the school band" (95). But Romona, whose parents' are out, replies that nobody was at home.

"Nobodys home," the boy mimicked to his companion. "What you see ain't people, them's ghosts," and both laughed wickedly as they turned away. Jyoti closed the storm door and was about to shut the inner door when she heard the boy shout, "Paki! Paki house!" [...] "Did he say Paki?" Romona nodded again. Jyoti opened the door and walked out in her socks. One of the boys had just thrown a ball of muddy snow at the front window. The other was about to follow, but saw Jyoti come out, and so pretended to clean his gloves with the snow. Jyoti caught the boy by his coat collar and dragged him into the house. "Did you say something?" she asked. (95)

Although Jyoti acts tough, she is "deeply disturbed [as this] [...] was her first encounter with overt racism" (98). Nothing prepared her for what she feels after this incident, neither Vithal's stories nor the discussions of racism in university courses, the word Paki triggering in Jyoti an "uncontrollable spasm of fear and shock" (98). 'Paki' is an expression of extremely racist abuse that cannot be ignored; it emphasises that the person addressed has the status of the 'other', making difference more visible, and practically annihilating the will to integrate into the host society, as this is a proof of hostility towards foreigners, towards diasporans. This is also underlined by the definition of the word given in the Encyclopedia Britannica: "chiefly British usually [sic] offensive: an immigrant from Pakistan or a neighboring south Asian country". In contrast to the dictionary entry, which dates from 1964, the incident described in the novel illustrates that this term of abuse has 'migrated' as well, now also being in use in Canada. Jyoti, while reflecting about the incident, feels racism to be like a black

hole, which is known to be able of sucking in huge masses and thus indicates the power that racism holds over those sub-jected to it, loosing their sense of agency\textsuperscript{63}. Sridhar, however, usually says “[j]ust wait a couple of generations and there'd be a lot more white-brown kids who would solve the problem for us” (99).

5.5 ‘Mangoes and maples don’t mix’ – really?

Finally, I would like to analyse the novel's title. On the one hand, 'mangoes on the maple tree' is a metaphor for the blending of cultures, for hybridisation, each one enriching the other and forming something new.\textsuperscript{64} A first instance is of such a hybridisation is given right at the beginning of the novel, when Jyoti is looking at

one of her childhood crafts that her mother had proudly placed by the side of a framed peepul leaf painting. The peepul leaf had been painstakingly dried and painted upon by a pavement artist on the streets of Mumbai. The mangoes that hung from a brown branch looked so real and three-dimensional that one felt like picking the fruit right off the leaf and tearing through the red-yellow skin with one's teeth to feel the sweet juice on one's tongue. Her own handicraft consisted of her attempts [...] to dry a red maple leaf and paint a white polar bear on it. (1, italics in original)

This passage is an important sign post regarding the novel's title as well as its characters' lives. The former work of art consists of a genuine peepul leaf\textsuperscript{65}, but which is now dried, painted upon, and framed. This leaf is a symbol of the Bhave family and also represents their connection to their ancestral homeland, which, I would argue, entails the realisation that this connection is now 'dried up', it is not alive anymore as the leaf, the family has been torn of the tree (of India). Thus, while the leaf no longer has access to any nutrients gained through the roots of the tree, it has been 'painted upon', mangoes that make you taste and feel them in your mind, have been added. That is, the family has

\textsuperscript{63} For the importance of agency in connection with identity, see pages 27 and 29.
\textsuperscript{64} See Homi Bhabha in the chapter on identity.
\textsuperscript{65} The peepul tree is very "common from India to South East Asia and everywhere in most of the tropical countries". <http://www.indianetzone.com/4/peepul_tree.htm>
migrated to Canada, to live in the diaspora, and while the connection to India might not be as strong anymore as if they still lived there, something new has been created by adding new influences, new people, new insights to their lives. Another instance of such creative adding, of hybridisation, has been crafted by Jyoti, who painting a maple leaf with a polar bear on it, imitates this kind of art but adapts it to the new environment the family is living in, the diaspora. The fact that her mother has framed both paintings and placed them next to each other is indicative of her attempt, or her achievement, of arriving in the host society without any regret of having left. While the picture from Mumbai is a reminder of the homeland, representing the past, Jyoti’s drawing is a representative of the present diasporic situation.

A reference to mangoes and maples is also given when Jayant prepares a “Sundae” with his friends and gives instructions: “[...] don’t ever use maple syrup because both are too overpowering. Mangoes and maples don’t mix” (57-58). This seemingly minor detail is another connection to the novel's title and therefore the whole story's concern with the mingling of cultures, with assimilating and making a life somewhere else, and the troubles and problems that inevitably come with that. Read in connection with the two pictures commented on above, this quotation underlines the frame that separates the pictures. Jayant’s claim that mangoes and maples do not go together is embodied by the drawings standing next to each other but being eternally separated. And yet, it is exactly that, overcoming that separation, which is attempted to achieve by the characters, the people who have chosen to live in the diaspora.

Furthermore, the image of trees repeatedly presents a point of discussion, for example when Sharad talks to his son about their trees at home, figuratively standing for the family's origins in Indian soil.

Roots, son, roots. I often think of our plantain trees back home. Each plantain tree leaves a young sapling before it dries up. [...] it is a symbol of continuity and usefulness; you know how every part of plantain tree – flowers, leaves, trunk – is put to good use. Can we really grow roots
here? [...] And if an Ontario poplar can't survive in Manitoba soil, what chance do we have?” (22)

This brief explanation of Indian trees, their usefulness and symbolism of continuity, presented in opposition to the differentiation of Canadian trees and soil, is indicative of Sharad's close emotional connection to his homeland, his adherence to traditions and his attitude of valuing every part, every member of the community, trying to sustain confraternity. In opposition to this image he poses the question whether they have any chance of assimilating into Canadian culture, feel at home there, develop a sense of belonging while their actual place of belonging is India. This question, this insecurity about developing such a sense of belonging, leaving diaspora consciousness behind and feeling at home in Canada, is heightened by drawing attention to Canada's variety and vastness. However, I would argue that variety and vastness are also present in India and thus this question has again to be understood as Sharad's doubt of the possibility of ever being able to shed his cultural background.

A final recurrence to the figure of the tree the celebration of “the cancellation of [Jayant's] departure for destinations unknown” (175). In order to duly celebrate this, Jayant and his friends, including his girlfriend Donna whom he introduces to his mother as her daughter-in-law (175), have bought a Christmas tree. His little brother Krish wonders what the tree was “doing in the yard so long after Christmas” (175), which Jayant explains as being an evergreen tree, which because it does not have any roots, will fall as soon as the snow melts. This 'planting' of a rootless but evergreen tree can be regarded as a metaphor for the diasporans' struggle to make a life abroad. Having lost their roots, their homeland, they have not lost their connection to it but found it to be a space of new, 'evergreen' possibilities. This is also reminiscent of Uma Parameswaran's play “Rootless But Green are the Boulevard Trees”. Passing a boulevard lined with green trees while the sun is shining means seeing patches of shadow, followed by patches of light. While diasporans might be up-rooted or root-less, first recognising the shadow of a dried leaf, their experience might be followed by or changed into a patch of sunlight, a creative space of hybridity, where new possibilities emerge and new identity-positions can be taken up. This positive
stance on the future, of regarding their cultural background not with a pang of regret but as a source for hybridity, as a 'third space', is illustrated by the following quotation from Jayant talking to his younger brother Krish: “We will plant evergreens and oaks with roots, Krish. And grow mangoes on maples, and jamuns on birches, and bilvas on spruces. God willing we shall.” This shows that the second generation is determined to grow roots in Canada, something which Sharad questions. The younger ones are set to create the third space of hybridity, not only mixing mangoes with maples, but creating a new cultivar which has maple leaves but bears mango fruits. Jayant's final passionate speech is directed at his father; using the metaphor of trees, he insists that both generations are able to deal with the experience of the diasporic situation, that it is right that they are there. Finally, he arrives at showing his father that Canada can also be home, that it is possible to make the connection between ancient rites and universal gestures.

“That’s us Dad, not just you and me with our memories of another land another life but all of us in this modern world in the year 1997, rootless but green for the length of our life, long or short; not a plantain tree that leaves a young one in its place, not an oak tree with its roots stretched a mile radius, this evergreen doesn’t have one christly use, it isn’t good even as firewood but it is there, it is green, it is beautiful and therefore right.” Sharad was deeply touched. Jayant had brought home to him, he said, that trees could and would withstand even this eternally wintry Winnipeg, which was not god-forsaken after all because no place graced by man can be god-forsaken. (177)

5.6 Conclusion

It has been shown that both generations have their problems with dealing with their situation as diasporans. Jayant first tries to leave behind his heritage, which, as his sister is conscious of, is impossible, not last because of her experience with racism. In terms of language, I would argue that the colloquialisms are an equation of the younger generation's adaption to and adoption of the contemporary Canadian life-style of their generation, while the poetic language in connection with hints at Indian stories or mythology are
representative of the family's ties to India. Yet, both Jyoti and Jayant find a way of dealing with their status as 'others', creating for themselves a new, a 'third space' of hybridity by identifying with both cultures. Jyoti, though engaged to Pierre, a representation of the colonisers, as I have argued, feels drawn to Sridhar and thus identifies with both cultures. Jayant, having abandoned his plans of taking to the road with his friends, also arrives at convincing his father that it is possible to strike roots in Canada while not forgetting the home country; that it is reasonable to put the two pictures of the peepul and the maple leaf next to each other. While the pictures might not be able to merge, Jayant displays in his final performance, related through the metaphor of the evergreen tree, that mangoes can grow on maple trees.
“The reader should realize himself that it could not have happened otherwise, and that to give him any other name was quite out of the question.”
NIKOLAI GOGOL, “The Overcoat”

6 The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri

6.1 Introduction

The Namesake has been reviewed by the Boston Globe as “[p]oignant... A novel of exquisite and subtle tension, spanning two generations and continents and a plethora of emotional compromises in between... The Namesake is a story of guilt and liberation; it speaks to the universal struggle to extricate ourselves from the past – from family and obligation and the curse of history” (reprinted on the first page of the novel).

Not only is this quotation an exact and concise rendering of the novel's central concern, it also bespeaks the centrality of intertextuality, that is, the reference to Nikolai Gogol's highly influential short story 'The Overcoat', stemming from the first half of the 19th century. In my analysis, I would like to investigate the relationship to the home and the host country (India and the United States) of the first and the second generation, respectively. This will lead to a discussion of how cultural signifiers such as food, language and traditions are rendered in the context of clashing cultures and civilisations. As a further point, I will examine the importance of name-giving in the novel, the significance that Gogol's name has for his life, how his name gives shape to his life and determines his course. Gogol's relationships to women, which can be connected to his development, the identity positions he takes up, will provide a final point of analysis.

The entire novel hinges on a name: Gogol. Gogol is the protagonist and, beyond addressing obvious questions of personal identity, telling his story through a focus on his name reflects crucial issues of cultural identity, diaspora and multiculturalism. Gogol's story is dominated by the
effect of his name on his relationships to family, friends and lovers; in other words on his affections. (Heinze 193)

6.2 The immigrant generation's (changing) relationship to India and America

The narrative, starting in 1968, told in third person singular and in present tense, and not often giving direct access to the characters' thoughts or feelings – thus leaving very much of that inner world open to the reader's interpretation – is framed by the story of Ashima, Gogol's mother, which is a hint towards the protection a pregnant woman gives her child while it is growing inside her womb. Hence, I would like to begin my analysis with Ashima's relationship to her home country India and to her country of residence, America, in contrast to her husband's relationship to these two countries. I would argue that, in this novel, the diaspora experience, with all its hardships and longings, is much more pronounced for the parent generation, especially for Ashima; while the second generation – the focus clearly lies on Gogol and his troubles with his namesake – rather has to deal with issues of identity formation. Gogol's story revolves mainly around his name and how it influences his path in life, his relationships, his perceptions of his identity, that is, his self, his subjectivity.

Ashima and Ashoke Ganguli (Ashoke eventually becomes a professor of electrical engineering, this accomplishment being a source of pride), Gogol's parents, have an arranged marriage. Before she enters her parents' living room in order to first see Ashoke, she steps into his shoes. This, I would argue is indicative of her acceptance of the proposal, and a metaphor for marriage. Stepping into his shoes means following his path, his footprints, leading to America. Ashima is only asked "whether she was willing to fly on a plane and then if she was capable of living in a city characterized by severe, snowy winters, alone" (9). Her answer, however, is not being given, indicating that probably obedience was expected in that matter. This brief encounter is indicative of the start of their marriage, the fact that it needed time for them to grow accustomed to and finally love each other. Ashima's arrival is described
with the imagery of winter, illustrative of her feeling of unbelonging, missing her origins: “[H]er first real glimpse of America: Leafless trees with ice-covered branches. Dog urine and excrement embedded in the snowbanks. Not a soul on the street” (30).

After eighteen months in America, where “nothing has felt normal at all” (5-6), Ashima finds herself in the maternity ward of the hospital, where a first clash of cultures and cultural practices becomes apparent when she has to change from her sari, a piece of clothing she will always wear throughout her years in America, into a cotton dress, which, “to her mild embarrassment, only reaches her knees” (2) while the American nurse is incapable of folding the sari and ends up shoving it into Ashima's suitcase.

The description of her hours spent at the hospital, during labour, before actually giving birth, provides an insight into her continuously existing emotional connectedness to India, as she reminisces about the way giving birth takes place in India, at one's parents house, and as she constantly calculates what time it would be in India. Moreover, she seeks refuge in a “Desh magazine that she’d brought to read on her plane ride to Boston and still cannot bring herself to throw away” (6), which further underline Ashima's feeling of alienation in America. This is what frightens her most, she is not prepared for “motherhood in a foreign land. [...] [S]he is terrified to raise a child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, where life seems to tentative and spare” (5-6). In contrast to Ashima, who clings to her Bengali magazine, Ashoke, revealing that he has been living in America longer than she, reads an issue of the Boston Globe, while pacing up and down, waiting for his son to be born.

The arrival of their child, however, marks a certain change for Ashima. While at first she seems incapable of handling the new situation, she has to learn how to deal with her life as a mother in exile, a mother who has left her mother country, with the “consequence [of] motherhood in a foreign land” (6) without the help and support of her family. She misses her family very much anyway, but is
reminded of their absence even more at the birth of her son, which, “like most
everything else in America, feels somehow haphazard, only half-true [...] , she
can't help but pity him. She has never known a person entering the world so
alone, so deprived” (25). The last statement, I would argue, can be regarded as
establishing a connection between Gogol Ganguli and Gogol's protagonist from
'The Overcoat', who also leads a life in solitude and utter modesty.

Gogol's birth not only instils in his mother the will to make a new life in America
as strangers are stopping her, looking into the pram and “congratulating her for
what she's done [...] [and s]he begins to pride herself on doing it alone [...]”
(34). It also changes Gogol's father's relation to his past: “Ever since that day,
the day he became a father, the memory of his accident has receded [...]” (78).

A brief excursion to what happened to Gogol's father at the age of twenty-two
seems necessary here. On a fatal train ride in India, going to visit his
grandfather who had passed on to Ashoke his love for literature, especially
Russian literature, Ashoke had been saved by waving with a crumpled page of
Gogol's short story 'The Overcoat'. “Being rescued from that shattered train had
been the first miracle of his life. But here, now, reposing in his arms, weighing
next to nothing but changing everything, was the second” (24). “Apart from his
father, the baby has three visitors, all Bengali [...]” (24), which is indicative of
the community ties that diasporans form and which will be discussed later in
greater detail.

“Letters arrive from [India,] [...] composed in an alphabet they have seen all
around them for most of their lives, on billboards and newspapers and awnings,
but which they see now only in these precious, pale blue missives” (36). These
letters that Ashima receives over the years from her lost homeland, her parents,
and that “had sustained her in those days” (161), are prized possessions for
her, she takes them out once a year, “allowing herself a good cry” (160). These
annual revisits of symbols of affection are indicative of her continuing emotional
connection to her country of origin, the country where she grew up.

66 Kral states that her motherhood instils in Ashima a sense of belonging (67).
In 1971, the Gangulis move outside Boston; Ashoke has a new job as assistant professor, providing him with satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment. Ashima, on the other hand, feels lost, more so than after moving from India to America.

For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy – a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that that previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding. Like pregnancy, being a foreigner, Ashima believes, is something that elicits the same curiosity from strangers, the same combination of pity and respect. (49-50)

This quotation shows that diasporans, who are in fact foreigners in their country of residence, are constantly aware of their status as 'others', never able to leave behind a sense of diaspora consciousness. The 'combination of pity and respect', I would argue, refers to the responsibility Ashima perceives. While being aware that what life was like in the home country now belongs to the past, diasporans, having made the move into the unknown (which elicits respect, I would argue), still have to make sure to make a new life, to cope with the new situation. This can be a difficult task and thus elicit pity when not arriving at doing everything right from the beginning.

6.2.1 Food, language and traditions in The Namesake

When Gogol is six months old, his parents celebrate his “annaprasan, his rice ceremony” with their Bengali friends. This ceremony is the Bengali equivalent to baptism, which does not exist for them. “Instead, the first formal ceremony of their lives centers around the consumption of solid food” (38). An explanation for this might be the centrality of rice in their culture, as it is “the Bengali staff of life” (39), thus showing that it is the foundation of every meal, the one aliment that is destined to sustain lives.
This ceremony is an introduction to “a lifetime of consumption” and another occasion for Ashima to deeply miss her own family, as well as a means for predicting the child's future course. “[...] Gogol is offered a plate holding a clump of cold Cambridge soil dug up from the backyard, a ballpoint pen, and a dollar bill, to see if he will be a landowner, scholar, or businessman. [...] Gogol touches nothing. [...] Only then, forced at six months to confront his destiny, does he begin to cry” (40). Gogol's reaction is indicative of his evasive and erring future path, seeking to come to terms with his self, embodied, in his eyes, by the name Gogol, but struggling enormously to distance himself from his name, his family, his heritage. “His refusal is an expression of obstinate passivity” (Song).

His sister Sonia in contrast, at her rice ceremony, tries to shove the dollar bill into her mouth, which points to the fact that she, due to the name Sonia (derived from “Sonali, meaning 'she who is golden'” (62), which is regarded as both pet name and good name and thus indicative of the parents' growing acceptance and adoption of American customs), is enabled to become “a citizen of the world” (62), that she does not have to deal with the same insecurity her brother feels. Her name is a perfectly normal American name, whereas his is not even a first name in Russian, where it derives from, thus no one “shares his name [, n]ot even the source of his namesake” (78). The name Gogol, being a family name, can thus be understood as an overcoat having turned into one's favourite piece of clothing, something one identifies with, such as a first name.

To return to the parents, Ashima and Ashoke become increasingly American, that is, they adopt certain American customs and traditions. ““For the sake of Gogol and Sonia they celebrate, with progressively increasing fanfare, the birth of Christ, an event the children look forward to far more than the worship of Durga and Saraswati” (64). At Gogol's insistence, they get a Christmas tree and fill stockings, according to what their children teach them (285). They also accustom, or assimilate to American ways in many other small details, for instance, Ashoke stops wearing a wristwatch and insisting on tailor-made
clothes. They also allow their children to choose their own food in the supermarket, although they themselves do not eat that food. And yet, they try to instil as much Bengali culture into their children as possible, taking them to dance performances or driving them to “Bengali language and culture lessons every other Saturday, held in the home of one of their friends. For when Ashima and Ashoke close their eyes it never fails to unsettle them, that their children sound just like Americans [...]” (65). The children, on the other hand, attend these classes without interest, wishing rather to be able to pursue their typically American leisure activities such as sports or drawing (66). Still, another example of the parents' attempt at keeping up their old ways is revealed when Ashima is pregnant for the second time. She teaches Gogol Indian poems and deities, telling him that he is going to be an older brother, a “Dada”, thus indicating that her Bengali heritage is of utmost importance to her. Switching on American television, however, shows that, although she speaks Bengali to him, she is careful that he also learns English well enough. Thus, Gogol grows up bilingually, he starts calling his mother 'Ma' after the American fashion, his father 'Baba', which is the Bengali term. However, being able to understand Bengali and fluently speak it – with an American accent that amuses his relatives (118) – he struggles with reading or writing it.

Another custom, the traditional Bengali way of mourning, is revealed at Ashoke's death. Gogol suddenly remembers that, when his paternal grandfather had died, Ashoke had completely shaved off his hair, as it “was a Bengali son's duty to shave his head in the wake of a parents' death” (179). During the first week after Ashoke's death, there are always friends at their house. “His mother has shampooed the vermillion from her part. She has taken off her iron wedding bracelet, forcing it from her hand with cold cream, along with all the other bracelets she's always worn” (179-180). For ten days, the Gangulis eat a mourner's diet, only eating rice, dal and vegetables. As a child, Gogol was bored by this ritual, but now “this meatless meal is the only thing that seems to make sense” (180), underlining the bereavement. I would argue that 'meatless' can here be understood not only literally but also as a metaphor, a reference to the absence of the deceased father. For the religious ceremony marking the
end of the mourning period, Ashima and her children have to look for a photograph of Ashoke. But they find no pictures of him alone, of “his father who was forever behind the lens” (181). The lens of a camera records an image for eternity, takes up the whole spectrum of light, and thus points to Ashoke’s name – ‘he who is entire’, who is at peace with his life.

6.2.2 A sense of community

Over the years, the Gangulis’ ‘circle of Bengali acquaintances [grows] […] They all come from Calcutta, and for this reason alone they are friends.

The families drop by one another's homes on Sunday afternoons. They drink tea with sugar and evaporated milk and eat shrimp cutlets fried in saucepans. They sit in circles on the floor, singing songs by Nazrul and Tagore, passing a thick yellow clothbound book of lyrics among them as Dilip Nandi plays the harmonium. They argue riotously over the films of Ritwik Ghatak versus those of Satyajit Ray. The CPI versus the Congress party. North Calcutta versus South. (38)

Gogol remembers the Saturday evenings of his childhood as a repetition of the same pattern, the parent generation sitting together, eating Indian food and “conversing in the Bengali their children don’t speak among themselves” (63), who rather watch TV or play games and sometimes get food that is to their taste, accustomed to American ways: pizza or Chinese (63).

This formation of community amongst the immigrant generation in order to exchange memories of India, eat Indian food and cling to Indian culture such as music and films, thus becoming re-members, is underlined by Dufoix's statement that “[o]bviously, the concentration of new arrivals within the same city favors the process of (re)constituting fellow feeling” (71). This fellow feeling is materialised in Ashima's address books: She “does not believe in crossing out names, or consolidating them into a single book. She prides herself on each entry in each volume, for together they form a record of all the Bengalis she and Ashoke have known over the years, all the people she has had the fortune to
share rice with in a foreign land” (159-160). Intending to send Christmas cards, “[s]he passes over two pages filled only with the addresses of her daughter, and then her son. She has given birth to vagabonds” (167). The term ‘vagabonds’ is an instance of the trope of travelling67 discernible in The Namesake. Furthermore, I would argue, it can be attributed to Ashima herself, her name signifies 'she who is limitless, without borders', which also points towards a constant travelling in-between two worlds and cultures, but not being bounded by either.

However, while the Ganguli’s circle of Bengali friends in America is increasing, always reminding their children that “in America, Bengali friends were the closest thing they had to family […] (200-201)”, their ties to India wither. “[…] those who know Ashima and Ashoke not by their good names but as Monu and Mithu, slowly dwindle. […] Within a decade abroad, they are both orphaned […] Even those family members who continue to live seem dead somehow, always invisible, impossible to touch” (63). Being so far away from their relatives obviously saddens Ashima and Ashoke. The impossibility of really, physically connecting with their family, being able to visit them whenever they feel like it or even live with them, seems like death to the diasporans because of being so far from them.

And yet, after almost thirty years of living in America, Ashima's and Ashoke's visits to Calcutta have turned more into an obligation. “[I]t was, above all else, a sense of duty that drew his parents back” (142). This sense of duty illustrates the diasporans struggle to do justice to both countries. Wanting to maintain ties with their original homeland requires them to visit India as their family is still living there. And yet, the country of residence has claimed them more, promising “the possibility of a distinctive, creative, enriching life” (Cohen 17), which Fludernik regards as an “alternative to the myth of return” (xvi), at least when both Ashima and Ashoke are still alive. After her husband's death, Ashima is no longer satisfied with living solely in America, as will be seen later.

67 Friedman contends that “Lahiri's novel contains moments and tropes that resemble those of the travel narrative genre [...]”. This, I would argue, is representative of Gogo's path in life, being a constant traveller.
It is necessary to turn back in time a little now. After Ashoke has left for Cleveland, Ashima is alone in the house, a feeling she cannot stand, having been used to being surrounded by people all her life. Yet, for instance, the birth of her son and also the solitude enable her to make another new beginning, as a diasporic situation bears the potential for creative change. She starts her “first job in America” (162), working at the public library, where she also makes her “first American friends” (162). Only when completely left on her own does she feel compelled to connect in America. This is even more the case when Ashoke, on his own in Cleveland, dies of a sudden heart attack. Ashima believes that, in going away, Ashoke “was teaching [her] how to live alone” (183). And “for the first time in her life, Ashima has no desire to escape to Calcutta, not now. She refuses to be so far from the place where her husband made his life, the country in which he died” (183). Not wanting to ‘escape’ from America, the word choice pointing towards a feeling of imprisonment, of bondage, shows that this feeling has dissolved and thus indicates that this bondage has in fact become a voluntary one.

After their father’s sudden death, Sonia comes home from California to stay with her mother (in fact they live together until Sonia is about to get married), and Gogol goes to Cleveland, to identify his father in the hospital, and to clear up his apartments, whose “relentless uniformity [amongst all the other apartments] upsets him profoundly, [although he knows that] his father did not mind, that he was not offended by such things” (174), which shows that his father was comfortable and at peace with himself, the life he made for himself. Not wanting to “leave his father’s apartment empty” (177) is a sign that now, that his father is dead, Gogol becomes aware of the connection he had to his father. “He knows now the guilt that his parents carried inside, at being able to do nothing when their parents had died in India, of arriving weeks, sometimes months later, when there was nothing left to do” (179). Caesar, however, claims that “Ashoke alone seems to have found the balance among the various aspects of self that enable him to live comfortably in a foreign country which his children will experience differently than he does” (108).
6.3 The second generation's travelling between India and America

The second generation moves “fluidly between the private sphere of their Indian home life and the public sphere of their American experience. Their behavior is akin to tourists in their home countries” (Friedman). Thus, apart from Gogol's struggle to shed his name – and thus his connection to his Indian home – like an overcoat, his and Sonia's relationship to India is most openly revealed in their general behaviour like any ordinary American teenagers, which is set in contrast to their travels to India, their parents home country. In 1983, the Gangulis are going to India for eight months, which seems like an eternity for Gogol, knowing that he will not have his own room, his records, especially not his friends, and who knows that “apart from visiting relatives there was nothing to do in Calcutta” (80). The school counsellor suggests that he finishes the school year and goes to India later, that he should stay with relatives in the meantime. But Ashima retorts: “We have no relatives in this country [...] That's why we are going to India in the first place” (79). For her children, however, this trip is like “being plucked out of their American lives”; 'plucked' reminds me of 'plugged', illustrating that such trips to Calcutta amount to being 'unplugged', leaving Gogol and Sonia without a sense of orientation and a feeling of belonging.

There are endless names Gogol and Sonia must remember to say, not aunt this and uncle that but terms far more specific: mashi and pishi, mama and maima, kaku and jethu, to signify whether they are related on their mother's or their father's side, by marriage or by blood (81). Furthermore, although “Gogol and Sonia know these people, [...] they do not feel close to them as their parents do” (81). Gogol and Sonia experience how their parents are being transformed, “slip[ping] into bolder, less complicated versions of themselves, their voices louder, their smiles wider, revealing a confidence Gogol and Sonia never see on Pemberton Road” (81-82). Gogol decides to “surrender to confinement” (83), he begins to draw sketches of the surroundings. Once, their parents even take them on a journey through India, the first time that they are all tourists, taking pictures (84-86).
These quotations illustrate the generational gap concerning the relationship towards India and America. Whereas for the parental generation India is home, their children regard America as home, feeling only loosely tied to India. Furthermore, this passage is also an example of the usage of Indian – or rather – Bengali, terms, showing the complexity of the language. Concerning the above mentioned journey the family undertakes in India, I suggest that it bears significance because, for the first time, Gogol's and Sonia's parents are tourists themselves, for the first time, all four of them have the same starting position, not knowing the terrain. In that, it is the first time that parents and children are linked in their experience and perception of India. For once, the parents do not have a stronger emotional connection to a place due to the people they associate with it, but also approach it as strangers, as tourists (from America). This journey is another example of travelling, which is a recurring trope in *The Namesake*.

On their return in America, they first feel somehow lost, still “in transit” (87), but this feeling soon subsides. “And so the eight months are put behind them, quickly shed, quickly forgotten, like clothes worn for a special occasion, or for a season that has passed, suddenly cumbersome, irrelevant to their lives” (88). However, for Gogol, I would argue, this feeling of being in transit, does not subside. Although that is definitely applicable to the specific situation referred to above, I claim that, nevertheless, 'being in transit', being in-between two spaces and thus creating a 'third space' applies to his entire life, his subjectivity. He is constantly trying to find out who he is, 'dressing' himself in various identity positions like in an overcoat. I suggest that the Russian Gogol's overcoat can be regarded as a metaphor for Gogol's identity positions, for instance – trying to come to terms with his feeling of in-betweenness, of suspension, constantly travelling between Gogol and Nikhil. Years later, Gogol realises that he “feels no nostalgia for the vacations he'd spent with his family, and he realizes now that they were never really true vacations at all. Instead they were overwhelming, disorienting expeditions, either going to Calcutta, or sightseeing in places they did not belong to and intended never to see again” (155).
By referring to the trips to India as 'disorienting' and seeing places where 'they did not belong to', Gogol again stresses where his allegiance lies, in America. He is an American-born son of an immigrant family, but has only loose ties to his parents' homeland. Furthermore, I would argue that, regarded from hindsight as the narrator does, these actual trips to India can be regarded as metaphoric trips to Nikhil's Indian heritage, to Gogol.

As I already mentioned, the trope of travel is a prominent issue in *The Namesake*. Another instance illustrating the importance accorded to travelling by the Gangulis is demonstrated by Ashoke's leaving for Cleveland, where he is to do some research for several months. Ashima, to Gogol's dismay, being on his way with Maxine to her parents' summer house (another incident of travelling as well as of 'betraying his own family'), insists on him coming home to see his father off, the reason being that "for his parents, the act of travel is never regarded casually, that even the most ordinary of journeys is seen off and greeted at either end" (144). The weight being given to travelling shows Ashima's and Ashoke's continued feeling of in-betweenness, of being in transit, having left behind their country of origin. Yet, I need to qualify here, this feeling does not dominate their life in America. However, it is something they have passed on to their son. While for him the point of reference is not India anymore, it has become his own search for his identity, his subjectivity, the positions he is able to take up, as either Gogol or Nikhil, as I already mentioned. Carrying two names makes him constantly travelling between them, if not by travelling between the people who know him as either Gogol or Nikhil, then in his own mind, never completely being able to abandon either of the two.

The importance of travelling, and thus of leave-taking, is further underlined by the various instances where Gogol speaks of his parents "waving, until the last possible moment" (150). Thereby they indicate their continued connection and love for their son, while he is in fact relieved leaving behind his parents', his origin, everything that reminds him of his odd old self, of Gogol. After Ashoke's death, however, the situation is reversed, then it is Gogol who is waving at "his diminished family" (184) when he is leaving, no longer seeking to escape but
rather re-connect with his family, his father. One example of Gogol re-
connecting with his father, re-membering him, is a childhood memory about a
family trip to Cape Cod. His father had taken Gogol by his hand, leading him
towards the lighthouse, the very end. His father had asked Gogol to always
remember that moment: “Remember that you and I made this journey, that we
went together to a place where there was nowhere left to go” (187). Having
been to a place where there 'was nowhere left to go' joins them together
eternally. Travelling back to his family, his roots, every weekend after his
father's death, reveals that there is 'nowhere [else] left to go', as this profound
bereavement of his father's death provokes Gogol to understand what leaving
behind their home country must have meant for his parents. Furthermore,
Caesar interprets this anecdote of their journey to the very end of Cape Cod as
Ashoke's way of showing Gogol that “exploration could be exhilarating” (114).

Furthermore, any event in his life held in honour like birthday parties or
graduation ceremonies never fail to adhere to the same pattern, leaving Gogol
somewhat detached. This feeling of detachment also flares up at his own
wedding ceremony, which will be discussed later. The alienation and
detachment from his Indian background, having created a 'third space', is
exemplified in a scene happening years later, at university, attending a “panel
discussion about Indian novels written in English [...] [which revolves around a
discussion of] 'marginality', as if it were some sort of medical condition” (118). At
this discussion, he learns an expression entirely unknown to him: ABCD, which,
he eventually comes to understand, means

'American-born confused deshi.' In other words, him. He learns that the
C could also stand for 'conflicted.' he knows that a deshi, a generic word
for 'countryman,' means 'Indian,' knows that his parents and all their
friends always refer to India simply as desh. But Gogol never thinks of
India as desh. He thinks of it as Americans do, as India (118, emphasis
in original).

Thus, trying to discard his Indian heritage, the non-existent involvement he
already felt back then (which must not be mistaken for the marginality discussed
by the panelists – there is no mentioning of Gogol being an outsider, an 'other'

118
because of being Indian) reveals that Gogol, born in America, is no confused or conflicted deshi; if these adjectives can be applied to him then only in the sense of his inner conflict with his Gogol-Nikhil subjectivity, a topic which will be discussed below. This indicates that Gogol does not identify with India as such, his alignment is to America. He even avoids ABCDs at college, still trying to reject his parents' way of living: “befriending people not so much because they like them, but because of the past they happen to share” (119).

6.4 Names and intertextuality - Gogol's evolving relation to his name, and his identity

How did Gogol Ganguli come to his name in the first place? After all, as he later realises, no one in the world shares his name with him, not even the writer Gogol, because it was his family name. The reason for Gogol's name is an intricate web of incidents as well as Indian and American traditions or customs. Firstly, according to Indian tradition, Ashima's grandmother is the one who has to choose a good name for the baby, sent in a letter which never arrives, which is lost in transit, suspended, a first signpost that Gogol himself will be 'lost in transit'. Secondly, there is a

a practice of Bengali nomenclature [which] grants, to every single person, two names. In Bengali, the word for pet name is daknam, meaning, literally, the name by which one is called, by friends, family, and other intimates, at home and in other private, unguarded moments. Pet names are a persistent remnant of childhood, a reminder that life is not always so serious, so formal, so complicated. […] Every pet name is paired with a good name, a bhalonam, for identification in the outside world. […] Good names tend to represent dignified and enlightened qualities. Ashima means “she who is limitless, without borders.” Ashoke, the name of an emperor, means “he who transcends grief.” Pet names have no such aspirations. Pet names are never recorded officially, only uttered and remembered. Unlike good names, pet names are frequently meaningless, deliberately silly, ironic, even onomatopoeic. (25-6)

68 By that I mean all of the three aspects proposed by Gilroy, subjectivity, identification, and belongingness (26).
Gogol's parents have not chosen a name for him because they still hope for the letter to arrive and are thus forced by American hospital rules to choose a name for the baby's birth certificate. They settle for Gogol, the writer who saved, in a way, Ashoke's life. It has been suggested to his parents to name him after themselves, but this European and American tradition contradicts the Bengali tradition of regarding “individual names [as] sacred, inviolable [which] […] are not meant to be inherited or shared” (28). And while he does indeed not share his first name with anyone else, Gogol spends “much of his adolescence […] being embarrassed by his name and his culture, and trie[s] his best to reject all things 'Indian'” (Shariff 460). “Gogol comes by his name through a series of random accidents and misunderstandings that will come to represent for him the unexpected trajectory of his family's life” (Kakutani).

Thus, for Gogol, his name is not a matter making life easier, taking it not so serious, although it does indeed become a reminder of childhood, because this name which was initially intended as a pet name turned out to be his good name and is thus in contact with the outer world. And in contrast to his parents, whose good names indeed represent noble qualities and fit them perfectly, his pet name turned good name does not have any meaning at all, apart from the meaning it has for his father, about which Gogol only learns when he has already shed Gogol in order to become Nikhil. His name Gogol is something he constantly has to explain to people, and especially to himself. In addition, this name blurs the boundary between the realms of the familiar and the official, as well as the boundary between first and last names, thus making him utterly unique as well as making it more difficult for him to take different identity positions according to the setting, which is also underlined by the claim that everyone acts differently according to varying settings and situations, that identity develops at borders and boundaries.69

His wish, nonetheless, is to tear down these boundaries. He seeks to shed his uniqueness, become as ordinary and invisible in American society as anyone else, as he first learns about the utter uniqueness of his name on a school field

69 See Mayer and Frankenberg and Mani in the chapter on identity.
trip to a graveyard, revealing names of the first immigrants to America, the Puritans. Gogol learns a further issue his name at entering high school. His English teacher recounts the writer Gogol's “steady decline into madness” (91), a fact that troubles Gogol and he has to reassure himself that he is in no way like the writer. The class then has to read the short story for homework. “To read the story, he believes, would mean paying tribute to his namesake, accepting it somehow. Still, listening to his classmates complain, he feels perversely responsible, as if his own work were being attacked” (92). This passage is indicative of his split relationship to his own name. While, on the one hand, he tries to distance himself from Gogol the writer because he has come to hate the name, he also feels connected to it, due to the fact that Gogol, his name, is part of his identity, part of the way he has come to know himself, part of what has shaped his way in life, his identity-in-formation.

Once, he and his friends are invited to a party taking place at university. It is there where he makes the first step to reinvent himself, to represent himself, as Stuart Hall would say. It is the first time he introduces himself as Nikhil, the first time he kisses a girl. His friends are excited about the news. “It wasn't me,’ he nearly says. But he doesn't tell them that it hadn't been Gogol who'd kissed Kim. That Gogol had had nothing to do with it” (96). This is reminiscent of Stuart Hall's insistence on the fact that every enunciation is in fact a representation – Gogol thus represents himself as Nikhil, thereby detaching himself from the inhibitions he experiences as Gogol. Nikhil allows him to do the things he could not have imagined himself doing as Gogol (such as kissing a girl), and, while “Gogol [...] resists mutation” (76) (not only language-wise but also, generally speaking, in his life), Nikhil can easily be shortened to the utterly common name Nick, which enables him to submerge himself in American culture more than he felt he could do as Gogol, not being as visible, as noticeable anymore, shedding his uniqueness.

Finally, at the age of eighteen, unconscious of the background to, the reason for his name, Gogol has his first name officially changed to Nikhil, the name his parents had chosen to be his good name when he entered the school system
but which, being a small child and being used to being called Gogol, he then refused to take on. “The name, Nikhil, is artfully connected to the old. Not only is it a perfectly respectable Bengali good name, meaning “he who is entire, encompassing all,” but it also bears a satisfying resemblance to Nikolai, the first name of the Russian Gogol” (56). I would argue that, while Gogol might not feel ‘entire’, oscillating between two cultures, names, not knowing with which to identify, he still ‘encompasses all’, that is, both parts, as he unites them in his being. But as a child, Gogol “is afraid to be Nikhil, someone he doesn’t know. Who doesn't know him” (57). Thus, this passage is very appropriate and fitting for the character’s years to come. Although Gogol and Nikhil are united in himself, they will always remain separate entities for him, in fact fulfilling their initial intention, as Gogol is the name his family continues to use, even after his name change. And Nikhil is the name he chooses as an overcoat when he enters into university, seeking to distance himself from his parents, not only in terms of location but also in terms of culture, “which makes the ways in which he is different from other Americans invisible” (Caesar 110). While the name change can be regarded as a re-invention of his subjectivity, his sense of self and his belongingness, as a positioning, as Stuart Hall would call it, it is something that Gogol comes to regret when he learns the reason for his being named Gogol.

In order to have his first name officially changed from Gogol to Nikhil, he goes to the administrative office where the papers have to be handed in. “Inside, Gogol empties his pockets and steps through a metal detector, as if he were at an airport, about to embark on a journey” (98). This sentence is rich in metaphors referring to beginning a new life. In emptying his pockets, he can be regarded to leave his old life behind, to begin a journey, a new part of his life, or rather, a completely new life. He tries to reinvent himself in choosing another first name, allowing him to recreate himself, starting afresh, as if he were reborn. In order to be able to have his name changed, however, he needs his parents’ consent, which they are unwilling to give. Gogol argues that no one takes him seriously, when in fact, “the only person chronically aware of and afflicted by the embarrassment of his name, the only person who constantly
questioned it and wished it were otherwise, was Gogol [himself]” (100). “Then change it,' his father said simply, quietly, after a while. ‘Really?’ ‘In America everything is possible. Do as you wish’ (100). While these words are indicative of the American Dream, it also conveys a sense of resignation, realising that his son does not understand, yet, the significance of his name, the story connected to it. He resigns, knowing that he, Ashoke, has made peace with his life but that his son believes to be incapable of doing so as Gogol. Yet, completely shedding the Gogol-part to his identity, which is a constant site of construction, is impossible, as he finds out soon enough.

I also consider it important that “[n]o one accompanies him on this legal rite of passage, and when he steps out of the room no one is waiting to commemorate the moment with flowers and Polaroid snapshots and balloons” (102). To name this a rite of passage is to equate it with “birth, maturity, reproduction, […] death [or also] […] graduation from school”. Furthermore,

[r]ites of passage […] break the passage of time, representing it as a constant replay of opposed movements. Rather than inexorable processes of growth and decay, the ritualization of the stages of life seems to speak to the discontinuity of personal experience and the oscillation of social life between contrasting moods and phases. (ibid.)

Indeed, for Gogol turning Nikhil, the change of name can be regarded as such a breakage in the time line, as showing personal experiences as commuting, changing between differing stages of life. For the moment, it enables him to lead the life he envisages for himself, to flee from his parents' background and become more American. Thus, feeling freed from “an entity shapeless and weightless [which still managed] to distress him physically, like the scratchy tag of a shirt he has been forced permanently to wear” (76), “[h]e wonders if this is how it feels for an obese person to become thin, for a prisoner to walk free” (102). And yet, although he is now free to introduce himself as Nikhil to his new friends at university, “there's a snag: everyone he knows in the world [and everyone who knows him, including the narrator] still calls him Gogol. […] He will remain Gogol during holidays and in summer; Gogol will revisit him on each

70 <http://www.answers.com/topic/rite-of-passage>
of his birthdays” (103). He thus becomes aware of the fact that, while he has now managed to have a “B-side to self” (76), like on a record by the Beatles he listened to as a teenager, it is impossible to completely erase the A-side. Identity is always formed in connection with the people who constantly surround oneself, such as family and friends, they reflect back on oneself and are crucial in the production and reproduction of one's identity-formation.Shariff further reminds that it

is important to consider the differences between first- and second-generation struggles to understand postmodern identity as fluid and indeterminate. Unlike those who come to the West as young adults, second-generation [Indians] ‘come of age’ in the Western country and thus experience the rites of passage of the Western secondary schools. (Shariff, 458)

Thus, as Nikhil, he is finally able to break free from the boundaries that had bound him all his life, he is able transcend them and reach the beyond, as Homi Bhabha would call it. However, it is problematic that he does not yet feel like Nikhil, but rather, at times, feels like being in a play, “acting the part of twins, indistinguishable to the naked eye yet fundamentally different” (105). Thus, although it was Gogol’s wish to cease to exist under this name and be reborn as Nikhil, he is now a foreigner to himself (like his mother regards being a foreigner as a permanent pregnancy, “a continuous feeling out of sorts” (49)). “The substitution sounds wrong to Gogol, correct but off-key, [out of sorts.] the way it sounds when his parents speak English to him instead of Bengali” (106). During the first semester he comes home twice a month, and on the train journey home, “Nikhil evaporates and Gogol claims him again” (106).

When Gogol returns to his parents' place and refers to New Haven, to the university, where he discovers his love for architecture, as 'home', Ashima scolds him, “telling him that after twenty years in America, she still cannot bring herself to refer to Pemberton Road as home” (108). This is indicative of her persistent diaspora consciousness, revealing that she never settles completely in America, which is her country of residence but not her country of belonging,

71 The importance of the family in identity formation is also expressed in chapter 3.2.1.
72 See Brubaker in the chapter on diaspora.
as much as she might adopt American customs and assimilate into American society. Also Gogol has to learn that leaving behind one's origin is not fully possible, which Kipen, in his review of the novel, expresses in summarising Gogol's maturation:

As Nikhil/Gogol grows up, attends Yale, becomes an architect and gets married, he gradually outgrows his family, or at least thinks he does. Only as he ponders starting a family of his own does Nikhil/Gogol discover that birthrights, unlike short pants, can be handed down but never fully outgrown. (Kipen 2)

Another way of analysing Gogol's evolvement has been proposed by Heinze, who identifies six stages of development. The first of them being 'lost in transit', followed by 'singularity', 'donning an overcoat', 'the Doppelgänger', and 'namelessness' closed by 'arrivals and departures' (Heinze 194-198). I would argue that these terms can in fact be regarded as 'titles' to the steps I have traced in my analysis.

The only question still open is the connection to Nikolai Gogol's short story “The Overcoat”. A brief summary of this short story seems appropriate here. Nikolai Gogol's protagonist from “The Overcoat”, Akaky Akakyevitch, is a poor and dutiful clerk occupying a low position, who is afraid of being given more responsibility and does not have a social life. “His very lack of identity is the source of his happiness. This changes when [he] is obliged to buy a new overcoat [...] He becomes his overcoat” (Caesar104). He works very hard and bears many deprivations for his new overcoat, a coat which he possesses for only one day, as it is stolen from him the next day; he dies shortly afterwards and a ghost starts haunting the place where Akaky's overcoat was stolen. Like Gogol's story, Akaky's is one about identity and loss (Caesar 104-105).

Gogol, in contrast to Akaky, is not satisfied with remaining who he 'seems to be' due to the name given to him as a child – one must never forget that identity is a constant process of production and positioning – he seeks to break free. He seeks to break free from his parents, his heritage, and the weight of his name, only to discover later that he will never be able to leave that behind, and, in fact,
does not want to do so. This change in his relationship to his name Gogol is marked by his father's death and the story attached to his name, which his father reveals to Gogol only after he has his name officially changed to Nikhil, taken on another 'overcoat'.

6.5  **Gogol's love interests – various overcoats**73

Having officially become Nikhil, the name Gogol no longer primarily provides ground for searching his momentary identity positions, rather, his relationships to women (in light of their various family backgrounds) become representations, or representatives, of this never-ending quest. Gogol's “emotional life centres on his lovers, and when each woman ceases being his lover, she moves out of his life entirely, taking with her the self he was with her” (Caesar 111). Caesar further suggests that Gogol's relationships are passive attempts at assuming different identities, or overcoats (114). In this vein, Heinze regards the 'overcoat' as a metaphor for “personal and cultural identity, [as a representation of] the continuously changing subject positions that we don, our 'identity choices' and cultural affiliations made in communicating with our surroundings” (Heinze 197).

6.5.1  **Ruth – A first exploration of the overcoat 'Nikhil'**

Gogol's first serious girlfriend is Ruth, raised on a hippie commune is representative of “Utopian enthusiasm” (Song). He gets to know her on a train ride from university to his parents' place. She shows interest in his visits to Calcutta, to his background, and “it occurs to him that he has never spoken of his experiences in India to any American friend” (112). Back at home, he wishes he could visit her at her parents' place in Maine, but that would imply having to ask his parents for their car, “something he has no desire to do. He has no

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73 The idea that Gogol's relationships can be regarded as overcoats that he tries on stems from Caesar, who mentions this in connection with Gogol's first girlfriend Ruth (110). Song speaks about his girlfriends as being “presented as full of allegorical meaning”. Friedman regards them in the light of the rhetoric of wandering, of tourism, as a “'tour' of love and sex”.

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patience for their surprise, their nervousness, their quiet disappointment […] He cannot imagine being with her in the house where he is still Gogol” (115). His parents’ disappointment is indicative of their silent assumption that he would have an Indian girlfriend, stick to his roots. But for him it is impossible to be with a girl in a house where his old self is still dwelling, impossible to leave, held captive like a prisoner.

When Ruth goes abroad for one semester, to study in Oxford, he feels lost and disoriented. For the first time in his life he is able to understand his parents, their suffering due to having left India, their families, their experience of living in diaspora. “He longs for her as his parents have longed, all these years, for the people they love in India […]” (117). I would argue that this longing, this inability to bridge the distance, is also what Gogol feels at his father's death, where he says that the meatless mourners' diet was 'the only thing that made sense'.

Two years later, in his senior year, he breaks up with Ruth and goes home to spend Thanksgiving (another example of the Gangulis' adoption of American customs) with his father at some friends' place. This is when Ashoke finally tells Gogol the whole truth, the missing puzzles to the picture about his name, about what memories are attached to it, especially for Ashoke himself. “[F]or an instant his father is a stranger, a man who has kept a secret, has survived a tragedy, a man whose past he does not fully know. A man who is vulnerable, who has suffered in an inconceivable way” (123). I would suggest that while the word 'stranger' is another hint at the recurring theme of travelling, Gogol then feels close to his father, as he himself is a constant traveller of sorts. He asks Ashoke whether he, his name, reminds him of the horrible train accident of that night in 1961. "'Not at all,' his father says eventually, one hand going to his ribs, a habitual gesture that has baffled Gogol until now. 'You remind me of everything that followed’” (124). Thus, Gogol's birth can be regarded as the birth of a saviour to his father, like the birth of Christ. Gogol made his father 'entire' again, true to his good name. Hence, finally knowing about this hidden layer of meaning to his seemingly meaningless name, this revelation makes Gogol feel guilty. He had not known how to relate to his birthday gift received years ago
(his father had given him a hardbound copy of Gogol's short stories), nor how to interpret his father's resignation when Gogol had decided to change his name, to leave behind the old 'overcoat' (by that I mean not only the name Gogol but also Nikolai Gogol's short story) for a new one. In this context, I would like to mention an interesting observation made by Caesar, who maintains that “[t]hroughout the novel, many of the most significant conversations between Gogol Ganguli and Ashoke begin with Nikolai Gogol, as Ashoke attempts to connect with his son through Gogol the same way that the Russian writer connected him to his grandfather. But Gogol Ganguli rejects these gestures, not recognizing them for what they are” (109-110). In order to summarise this excursion to the relationship between Gogol and his father, I would like to mention an interesting observation made by Caesar, who maintains that

[t]hroughout the novel, many of the most significant conversations between Gogol Ganguli and Ashoke begin with Nikolai Gogol, as Ashoke attempts to connect with his son through Gogol the same way that the Russian writer connected him to his grandfather. But Gogol Ganguli rejects these gestures, not recognizing them for what they are. (109-110)

6.5.2 Maxine – being at ease while betraying his own family

His second long-term girlfriend is Maxine Ratliff, who he gets to know in New York, where he now lives, being an architect. New York is a city his parents neither know well nor particularly like, thus being open for him to make his own, to discover it, make a new life like his parents did by coming to America. Yet, his job is not what he had envisioned for himself as a student dreaming of working on private homes, thus revealing his own sense of un-belonging, of in-betweenness.

Maxine's parents' are representatives of the white upper-middle class, “the Anglo Protestant establishment” (Song). They are well-educated, wealthy people, live in a beautiful building and have a summer residence in New Hampshire and relish in high-end imported food as well as all the other
commodities a huge city like New York has to offer. In short, they are WASPs. I would thus argue that, apart from his love for Maxine, it is the Ratliff's completely different style of living which draws him in. “From the very beginning he feels effortlessly incorporated into their lives. It is a different brand of hospitality from what he is used to; for though the Ratliffs are generous, they are people who do not go out of their way to accommodate others, assured, in his case correctly, that their life will appeal to him” (136). This assurance is something Gogol's parents lack in America, where their diaspora consciousness and background of migration, of being 'others', prevents them from fully feeling at home and at ease. While the Ratliffs are utterly confident and satisfied, not going 'out of their way to accommodate others', Gogol's parents only become more confident, 'bolder, less complicated versions of themselves' when they are with their relatives in India and, at their parties, rather behave “like caterers in their own home, solicitous and watchful, waiting until most of their guests' plates were stacked by the sink in order finally to help themselves” (141).

Therefore, what astonishes Gogol most about Maxine is her ease about and within her life, accepting it the way it is, never wishing to be anyone else than herself. “This, in his opinion, is the biggest difference between them, a thing far more foreign to him than the beautiful house she'd grown up in, her education at private schools” (138). Caesar comments on that difference between Gogol and Maxine: “She has a sense of herself, of the continuity of her life with that of her parents and grandparents that he thinks he will never have, because he doesn't have a sense of what he might have in common with his parents emotionally or intellectually” (111). Thus, not being aware of any connection to his parents apart from biology and a shared cultural background which he seeks to get rid of, he is surprised at how much Maxine respects her parents, at the proximity Maxine has to her parents, living in their house, copying their manner of living. “There is none of the exasperation he feels with his own parents. No sense of obligation” (138), which illustrates the pronounced difference between Gogol's and Maxine's parents.
Although Gogol enjoys experiencing this completely different world, “he is conscious of the fact that his immersion in Maxine's family is a betrayal of his own” (141). Upon celebrating his twenty-seventh birthday with Maxine and her family and friends from around the lake where they have their summer house, he becomes aware of the fact that most of these people will “forget him the next day”. This consciousness of betrayal of his family, immersing himself in a completely different manner of living while rejecting “the home and food and conversational style of his parents” (Caesar 112), as well as the negligibility and unimportance of himself (which is contrary to what he is for his own family), in connection with the parental generation's differences, exhibit and evidence the extreme divergence between Maxine and himself, revealing that, as I would argue, they are both exotica to each other74, and can thus be brought into connection with Edward Said's theory of Orientalism.

This theory of the (by a Eurocentric gaze) assumed superiority of Western civilisation over the Orient, applies very well to Maxine, who, at visiting Gogol's parents' house, at hearing the story about his name, and during the phase of mourning for his father, does not show respect for or interest in his parents' accomplishment, the huge relevance of this story for Gogol's life, and Indian traditions, rituals and ways of mourning, respectively. These instances, I would argue, reveal Maxine's unconscious irreverence of Gogol's background. When mourning for his father, Maxine tells Gogol that he “can't stay with [his] mother forever” (182). And while Gogol senses that she feels left out, useless, he “doesn't bother to translate what people are saying, to introduce her to everyone, to stay close by her side” (182). These examples point to their relationship falling apart – now that Gogol is trying to understand his father, to reconnect with him, while for years he had been seeking to do the exact opposite, shedding his father's past and his ethnic background like he officially shed his name Gogol, he distances himself from Maxine while getting closer with his family, his background.

74 Like, in Anita and Me, Meena's grandmother is to the villagers.
6.5.3 *Moushumi – back to the roots?*

After his father's death, Gogol returns to his mother and sister every weekend. He has only a casual affair, likes the way he is uninvolved. Ashima, nonetheless, is concerned about Gogol, wants him to move on with his life, wants him settled. Hence, she suggests that he call Moushumi, a Bengali woman he knows from his childhood. Although both Gogol and Moushumi refuse being set up by their parents (Moushumi even had to decline various offers of arranged marriages), they meet, feel attracted to each other, and are able to connect because of the past, the experiences they happen to share, thus acting in the same way their parents' had done, which they had disdained so much.

Moushumi tells Gogol that “for most of her life he was exactly the sort of person she had sought to avoid” (212). Seeking to break free, she goes to college and spends a year abroad in Paris, where she is able to re-invent herself, “where being foreign ceases to be traumatic and becomes empowering” (Kral 71).

Immersing herself in a third language, a third culture, had been her refuge – she approached French, unlike things American or Indian, without guilt, or misgiving, or expectation of any kind. It was easier to turn her back on the two countries that could claim her in favor of one that had no claim whatsoever. (214)

In Paris, it had suddenly become easy to fall in love, to give herself openly, “she was transformed into the kind of girl she had once envied, had believed she would never become” (215).

Gogol quickly falls in love with Moushumi. Once, they are eating at an Italian restaurant and the waiter believes they are siblings. “*Si, si, there is quite a resemblance.* ‘You think so?’ Moushumi says. She appears to be at ease with the comparison, looking comically askance at Gogol” (203). “Well, it's just funny to think that all our lives our parents raised us according to the illusion that we were cousins, that we were all part of some makeshift extended Bengali family, and now here we are, years later, and someone actually thinks we're related” (204), “which suggests the way in which they are mirror images of one another,
versions of the same experience” (Caesar 115). Furthermore, this reminds me of Gilroy's metaphor of regarding diasporans, or their children, as similar yet different seeds sown in different places. Although they seem alike, it turns out that Gogol and Moushumi are very different from each other.

Gogol's and Moushumi's relationship is at first going well, his proposal “was something expected – from the very beginning it was safely assumed by their families, and soon enough by themselves, that as long as they liked each other their courtship would not lag and they would surely wed” (225-226). “He is aware that together he and Moushumi are fulfilling a collective, deep-seated desire – because they're both Bengali, everyone can let his hair down a bit” (224). These quotations show the strong ethnic group consciousness of diasporans, their sense of collectivity and feeling more relaxed in each other's company than within their host society, due to not being 'others' but among themselves. Their wedding ceremony\(^{75}\) – a huge, bustling event with Indian food, traditional wedding clothes, and a “watered-down Hindu ceremony” organised by their families – is not to their taste but rather reminds of himGogol “of the many other celebrations in his life, all the birthdays and graduation parties his parents had thrown when he was growing up, in his honor, attended by his parents' friends, occasions form which he had always felt at a slight remove” (220).

It is an interesting detail that the chocolates Gogol finds in their wedding suite turn out to be an “unyielding toffee, requiring more chewing than he expects” (225). This minor detail, I would suggest, is an indication that the marriage is going to fail and a metaphor for his whole life, as Gogol constantly has to 'chew' on the fact that he was named Gogol and does not share his name with anyone in the world. Another telling aspect lies in the fact that Moushumi does not take Gogol's last name (her excuse being that she has already started publishing under her own surname). Contrary to Gogol, who changed his first name,

\(^{75}\) In connection with the wedding ceremony I would like to mention some other traditions presented in the novel. Among them are, for instance, that “Bengalis do not give round figures as presents” (227), or that married women wear vermilion on their part and lots of bangles.
Moushumi is not even prepared to change her last name, she does not want to become anyone else, shed her name like a snake sheds its skin. This, I would suggest, is a first sign of disagreement between the newly wed couple. It is curious that Moushumi does not want to take on another Indian surname although her husband carries a surname, although a Russian one, as his first name, is known under this name to his family. This is an indication that Moushumi, now knowing Gogol as Nikhil while having known him as Gogol when they were teenagers, does not want to forsake her idea of avoiding people who remind her of her past, not only a lonely, bookish past but also one of a feeling of alienation. Yet, ironically, it is this wish to leave behind this feeling of alienation, of being 'others', that makes them a couple in the first place.

Thus, while at first they seem happy together, more and more details are added which indicate the inevitable failure of Gogol's and Moushumi's marriage. She is not satisfied with the apartment they rent, their lifestyle. Furthermore, “[Gogol] doesn't feel jealous of her past [in Paris] per se. It's only that sometimes Gogol wonders whether he represents some sort of capitulation or defeat. He doesn't feel this always, just enough to nag at him, settling over his thoughts like a web” (229-230). First, 'capitulation' reminds me of Gogol's father's sense of resignation, thereby pointing towards a connection, a similar pattern, established by Gogol. Secondly, a 'web', like that of a spider, is intended to catch the prey, which also points to Gogol being caught, if not literally by marriage, then by his divided subjectivity and identification. He develops this nagging feeling after several months of being married, sensing that she is not completely satisfied.

When they are in Paris together, where Moushumi is to deliver a speech on one of her papers, she spends much time with her friends, where Gogol, who would rather get to know the city, feels left out. Moushumi, on the other hand, does not want to be mistaken as a tourist. This is yet another reference to the prevalent travel trope, while Gogol is travelling around the city like a tourist, Moushumi has already made the city her own. Gogol “admires her, even resents her a

76 Like Meena in Anita and Me wants to do at one stage.
little, for having moved to another country and made a separate life. He realizes
that this is what their parents had done in America. What he, in all likelihood,
will never do” (233). His travelling will remain confined to his search for his self,
suspended between Gogol and Nikhil, his identity always in transit.

The next big blow for their relationship arrives by Moushumi accidentally telling
her upper-middle-class friends about her husband's former official name Gogol,
who by then is known as Nick to their friends.

He stares at her, stunned. He has never told her not to tell anyone. He
simply assumed she never would. His expression is lost on her; she
smiles back at him, unaware of what she's done. The dinner guests
regard him, their mouths hanging open in confused smiles. [...] “Gogol,”
he says finally. It has been years since he’s been Gogol to anyone other
than his family, their friends. It sounds as it always does, simple,
impossible, absurd. He stares at Moushumi as he says it, but she's too
drunk to absorb his reproach. “As in 'The Overcoat'?” Sally asks. “I get it,”
Oliver says. “Nick-olai Gogol.” [...] He thinks back to the story he cannot
bring himself tell these people [...]. He'd confessed to her that he still felt
guilty at times for changing his name, more so now that his father was
dead. [...] But now it's become a joke to her. Suddenly he regrets having
ever told Moushumi [...] By morning, half the people in the room will have
forgotten. It will be a tiny, odd fact about him, and anecdote, perhaps. For
a future dinner party. This is what upsets him most. (244)

I consider this to be a crucial passage, revealing Gogol's inner struggles with
his name, with the guilt he feels about having changed his name, and with the
strong emotional issues that are, and were from the very beginning – just think
of his reaction to Gogol's short story in high school – for Gogol, connected with
his name, which has become a signifier for part of his subjectivity. Believing that
these people will either forget this fact or abuse it as an anecdote for a 'future
dinner party' which reminds of his twenty-seventh birthday spent with Maxine
and her crowd in New Hampshire, and regarding this as most upsetting about
the whole situation, this 'coming out', illustrates how deeply, emotionally
connected he is in fact to (the name) Gogol, his father's legacy. In spite of his
own troubles with the simple, though impossible and absurd name Gogol, the
expression 'Nick-olai Gogol' makes his name in fact sound like a 'joke', ridiculing
Gogol, and thus hurting him. While he might not be at ease with his pet name
turned good name, it is still a part of him. His sister Sonia instinctively knew this when she told him, years ago, that he could not change his name, her reason simply being “[b]ecause you can't. Because you're Gogol” (221). Yet, he seems to refuse both identities, both overcoats, which has been suggested by Caesar, who comments on Moushumi that, “like Gogol, her sense of herself seems to come more from refusing identities rather than trying to form one for herself by making sense of her own experiences” (116). Thus,

[T]he familiarity that had once drawn her to him has begun to keep her at bay. Though she knows it’s not his fault, she can't help but associate him, at times, with a sense of resignation, with the very life she had resisted, had struggled so mightily to leave behind. He was not who she saw herself ending up with, he had never been that person. Perhaps for those very reasons, in those early months, being with him, falling in love with him, doing precisely what had been expected of her for her entire life, had felt forbidden, wildly transgressive, a breach of her own instinctive will. (250)

The final blow, ending their marriage, which Friedman describes as her “truly transgressive act” is Moushumi's affair with an old acquaintance of hers, Dimitri Desjardins. Thus, while it was their shared ethnicity that had attracted them to each other is also what drives them apart. Gogol who, upon learning about Moushumi's affair, only comments that “for the first time in his life, another man's name upset [him] more than his own” (283), which is another hint at his deep-seated troubles with his self, equates his marriage, the 'overcoat' he had chosen, to one of his architectural structures.

[T]he shock has worn off, but a sense of failure and shame persist, deep and abiding. [...] It is as if a building he'd been responsible for designing has collapsed for all to see. And yet he can't really blame her. They had both acted on the same impulse, that was their mistake. They had both sought comfort in each other, and in their shared world, perhaps for the sake of novelty, or out of the fear that that world was slowly dying. [...] His time with her seems like a permanent part of him that no longer has any relevance, or currency. As if that time were a name he'd ceased to use. (283-284)

This quotation underlines once more that Gogol and Moushumi were attracted to each other in the first place on grounds of their shared belonging as well as
unbelonging, their shared experience of in-betweenness. Yet, the divorce from Moushumi can be equated with his walking out of the administrative office where he had his first name officially changed. In both cases, he has left behind a 'permanent part of him', which although still lingering with him, does not influence his momentary identity-position any longer. Thus, Moushumi is another representative of the overcoat stolen from Nikolai Gogol's protagonist. Being with Dimitri "reminds her of living in Paris – for a few hours at Dimitri's she is inaccessible, anonymous" (264), and thus Gogol is bereft of his overcoat, an identity Gogol has tried on but found to be unfitting.

6.6  Part-time selves

Now, having told the story of Gogol and his identity-in-formation, I will return to the framing narrative about Ashima, who, "[t]rue to the meaning of her name, […] will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere" (276). Four years after her husband's death, having decided that she will return to India, dividing the year between her home country and America, she throws a final party on Christmas Eve as Gogol realises that her friends

have come to rely on her, [...] to collect them together, to organize the holiday, to convert it, to introduce the tradition to those who are new. It has always felt adopted to him, an accident of circumstance, a celebration not really meant to be. And yet it was for him, for Sonia, that his parents had gone to the trouble of learning these customs. It was for their sake that it had come to all this. In so many ways, his family's life feels like a string of accidents, unforeseen, unintended, one incident begetting another. (286)

Gogol seems "more aware of the contradictions of his life and more accepting of them" (Caesar 117), having found his father's present, a hardbound copy of Nikolai Gogol's short stories during this bustling party, "a celebration of multiplicity and hybridity" (Caesar 118). He seems to calm down, come to peace and realise that, while he had continuously tried to reject the identity-positions
open to him, his task lies in accepting the parts to his self, trying to comprehend 'the string of accidents' in order to create a new, hybrid identity.

Ashima then, although she will return to India, is no longer the same person who has left her mother country more than thirty years ago. Symbols such as "an American passport, American driver's license, social security card" (276) are only a material reminder of the profound influence that her life in America has on her. "Her passport bears the marks of her double belonging, yet it falls short of expressing the complexity of the changes that have occurred in her life" (Kral 68). In this vain, Ashima realised that "though she still does not feel fully at home within these walls on Pemberton Road she knows that this is home nevertheless – the world for which she is responsible, which she has created, which is everywhere around her [...]" (280). Ashima has created for herself a world of a 'third space', effected in the context of 'difference and displacement' and created by the tension between 'colliding cultures'\textsuperscript{77}, which marks her belongingness and identification with both cultures, the influence that both cultures have on her subjectivity. Akhtar puts the psychological effect of migration thus:

\begin{quote}
Immigration from one country to another is a complex psychological process with lasting effects on an individual's identity. The dynamic shifts, resulting from an admixture of 'culture shock' and mourning over the losses inherent in migration, gradually give way to a psychostructural change and the emergence of a hybrid identity. (Akhtar 1995: 1051 qtd in Shariff, 459).
\end{quote}

These final remarks on Ashima, her diaspora consciousness and her coming to terms with her life in America, are summarised by the following quotation from \textit{The Namesake}:

\begin{quote}
She feels overwhelmed by the thought of the move she is about to make, to the city that was once home and is now in its own way foreign. [...] For thirty-three years she missed her life in India. Now she will miss her job at the library, the women with whom she's worked. She will miss throwing parties. She will miss living with her daughter, the surprising companionship they have formed, going into Cambridge together to see
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{77} See Bhabha in the chapter on identity.
old movies at the Brattle, teaching her to cook the food Sonia had complained of eating as a child. She will miss the opportunity to drive, as she sometimes does on her way home from the library, to the university, past the engineering building where her husband once worked. She will miss the country in which she had grown to know and love her husband. Though his ashes have been scattered into the Ganges, it is here, in this house and in this town, that he will continue to dwell in her mind. (278-279).

6.7 Conclusion

In contrast to his mother, who, true to her name, becomes limitless by deciding for both America and India, Gogol cannot see neither his own past nor future very clearly, having never tried to understand the influences on his life or tried to create an identity of his own but rather having lived suspended between two cultures, two worlds, residing and siding more in one or the other for a while. While seeking to fully immerse into American culture, he is incapable of completely shedding his past, his background, his family, his skin colour. Hence, as his love relationships can be regarded as diasporic overcoats and as identities he has tried on, he returns, via American routes (Ruth and Maxine), to his Indian roots (Moushumi), yet leaves them again. At his mother's last Christmas party, when Gogol finally stumbles across the book that his father had given him many years ago, for his fourteenth birthday, he finally reads the inscription his father had written into it: “The man who gave you your name, from the man who gave you your name” (288). Thus points towards the strong emotional connection that Ashoke had to the name Gogol, which his son only learns when it is already too late. Leaving open Gogol's future, the reader is yet presented with a passage which beautifully summarises Gogol's path in life, getting to know and accepting himself as Gogol.

[…] Gogol, defining and distressing him for so many years. He had tried to correct that randomness, that error. And yet it had not been possible to reinvent himself fully, to break from that mismatched name. Marriage, father's death, all accidents. And yet these events have formed Gogol, shaped him, determined who he is. They were things for which it was impossible to prepare but which one spent a lifetime looking back at, trying to accept, interpret, comprehend. Things that should never have
happened, that seemed out of place and wrong, these were what prevailed, what endured, in the end. (287)

Gogol finally realises that it is impossible to change “what could not have happened otherwise” (Nikolai Gogol, 'The Overcoat'), that he will have to come to terms with, comprehend the unplanned, accidental events which gave shape to his life – first and foremost his name, Gogol. This open end, leaving the reader wondering what Gogol will make of his life and its unpredictability, shows that “the protagonist's 'real' personal identity, like his cultural identity, remains ultimately undefinable because there is no such thing as a 'real', 'original' identity.” (Heinze 196-197). With this final comment, which refers back to what has been discussed in the two theoretical chapters, I would like to conclude my analyses.
7 Conclusion

As this paper has shown, there is no simple answer to the question “diaspora or home?” posed in the title. The theoretical chapters have been a first signpost for the ambiguity of the notions of 'diaspora' and 'identity'. While these are terms for theoretical concepts, they still bear significance for the world outside, for the people inhabiting this world, represented in fictional yet no less realistic or valuable renderings of diasporic experiences. Identity is always a complicated issue, for all human beings, it is an intricate construct whose components and influences are not only to be found in the temporal categories of past, present and future, neither are they singularly spatial – either here or there, back home or the contemporary place of dwelling. No, it is also most crucially influenced by the people around us, by their views on life, their views of us, their ways, their traditions and ideals they pass on to each and everyone of us.

In analysing three very diverse novels which are united in being renditions of the experiences of Indians living in the diaspora, I have shown that identity and belonging is a very complex and personal matter which cannot easily be disentangled or understood. In all three novels, a continued emotional relationship to the homeland is discernible, especially as far as the immigrant generation is concerned. The second generation has a more ambiguous relationship to this inherited past, in a way passed on to them without asking for their consent. As Jhumpa Lahiri said, which I mentioned earlier, being the child of immigrants does not make life easier for children and adolescents, who usually have to struggle with coming to terms with their identity, their selfhood, anyway, having a diasporic background or not. This is especially salient in the case of Meena, the main character in Meera Syal's Anita and Me, a child born in England, struggling with finding her place among the other English children,
but who encounters several obstacles and has to face racism due to her being an 'other'. Yet, as it turns out, it is her otherness, the fact that her parents, though with a heavy heart, have made the move from India to England, which enables her, in contrast to her English peers, to move on as well.

Uma Parameswaran's novel *Mangoes on the Maple Tree* shifts the diasporic scenery from England to Canada, and is exceptional in that it portrays two generations as immigrants, two generations who have the same background. In this novel, I would argue, a clear distinction as to whether the first and second generations relate more to India or to Canada, cannot be made. Both generations carry within them a strong sense of ethnic community, which, in *Anita and Me*, rather applies to the parent generation, of diaspora consciousness, while also feeling affiliated to the host country, having created a life for themselves in Canada. Yet, it is the children who enlighten their parents on the possibility of growing roots in the diaspora while not forgetting their ancestry.

Finally, Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* makes another move, south of Canada, discussing an Indian family's experiences in America. I have chosen this wording of 'moving' consciously, as this novel is very much concerned with travelling. Together with the intertext, Nikolai Gogol's short story "The Overcoat", travelling provides the central trope of the novel while the 'overcoat' can be regarded as being a metaphor for the various identities, or identity-positions, Gogol tries on but comes to conclude that neither of them fits him. He, being a constant traveller between his Indian as well as his American cultural identity, does not fully feel as belonging in either of them, although he himself regards himself as more American, 'thinking of India not as desh, but as India, as Americans do'. His feeling of in-betweenness is something he does not share with his father, the person who gave him his name, Gogol, which is to him a constant source of embarrassment and uneasiness. His name is the source of his constant travelling, his inability to identify with himself, his subjectivity and to completely relate neither to his Indian background nor his life in America. Yet, the name Gogol is what intrinsically connects him to his father, to the lasting
relationship in his life, that to his family, which he only comes to understand when it is too late.

In conclusion, as the analyses have shown, identity is a constant site of construction, it is not fixed, but lives in the tension between here and there, old and new, thereby creating a third space of hybridity. I would argue that if not all, then several of the concepts presented in the theoretical chapters have some value for analysing literary renderings of diasporic experiences, as they stress the constructedness and incompleteness, as well as the historical contingency of identity – of selfhood, identification and belongingness. For diasporans, like for all human beings, a feeling of belonging is connected to manifold variables, and thus subject to change. Therefore, the similar yet not identical seeds that have been sown in different places have created very different outcomes, revealing that no generalised decision can be made for either diaspora or home. Also the question whether it is possible to strike roots in the diaspora cannot be answered in straightforward terms. Essentially, this remains a personal matter.
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9 Zusammenfassung

In dieser Diplomarbeit wurde die Darstellung diasporischer Erfahrungen von indischen Migrantinnen und Migranten in verschiedenen Kontexten (Großbritannien, Kanada und USA) untersucht. Dabei wurde zuerst ein theoretischer Grundstein gelegt, der sich mit den im akademischen Diskurs sehr divers behandelten Begriffen 'Diaspora' und 'Identität' beschäftigt.

10 Curriculum Vitae

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Ausbildung
2003                    Matura am Wirtschaftskundlichen Realgymnasium
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2003 – 2010            Lehramtsstudium UF Englisch und UF Französisch
                        an der Universität Wien
2005 – 2010            Diplomstudium der Anglistik und Amerikanistik an der
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Weiterbildung
2005                    WWOOF 6-wöchiger Aufenthalt in Australien,
im Anschluss 2 Wochen Aufenthalt bei einer Familie
                        im Nordosten Frankreichs
2007                    Joint Study
                        Auslandsstudium an der Macquarie University in
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                        Jänner 2008)

Berufserfahrung
2001 – 2008            Klinikum Wels, diverse Abteilungen
2002                    Elektrizitätswerk Wels, Archivarbeit
2004                    Akademie für Gesundheit und Bildung, Wels
                        Mitarbeit im Redaktionsteam bei der Erstellung der
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2004 – 2007            mehrmalige Mitarbeit in der Akademie für
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2006 – 2010            Schülerhilfe Wien
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