

“WHAT IS IN A NAME?”: DISLOCATION AND RELOCATION IN
THE NAMESAKE

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses Jhumpa Lahiri's *The namesake*, focusing on naming as a metaphor for the processes of dislocation and relocation of first and second generation of Indian immigrants in The United States. More specifically, it depicts how an ambivalent, “mimicry” name serves in a successful process of relocation.

KEYWORDS

Postcolonialism, dislocation, relocation, ambivalence

POSTCOLONIALISM, DIASPORA, DISLOCATION, AND RELOCATION

What's in a name?
That which we call a rose
By any other name
would smell as sweet.

*W. Shakespeare*¹

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The namesake*, published in 2003, tells the story of an Indian family who migrated to the US. When their first son is born, they struggle about his name as he is supposed to have both a private and a public name according to their tradition. This is due to a delayed letter from a relative who was supposed to have the honor to name him, his private name, Gogol, ends up becoming his public name.

As a result, naming occupies a central point in the narrative as the name “Gogol” will

¹ SHAKESPEARE. *Romeo and Juliet*, p. 107.

bring distress both to him and his family. For his parents it feels as if they had failed to follow an important cultural tradition from their homeland. However, for Gogol, it carries a feeling of dislocation and of not belonging, as it is a meaningless name for him since it is neither American nor Indian. Therefore my hypothesis is that naming in *The namesake* symbolizes the feeling of the hybrid subject who lives between two worlds, an imagined one, and the “concrete” one which forces the characters to deal with their migrant heritage.

Lahiri’s novel is inserted in the field of Postcolonialism, a term which has been used since the late 1970s by literary critics “to discuss the various cultural effects of colonization.”² Consequently, Postcolonial Literature is seen as a result of the historic rupture between colonies and metropolis. Besides, according to Elleke Boehmer, it is often associated with “metropolitan, diasporic, migrant, and minority spaces” and “postcolonial literature itself is now widely perceived as a reflection of that globalized world, or as a part of that cross-planet re-figuration”.³

The namesake is also contextualized in the field of diaspora studies as it tells the stories of subjects who have migrated from India to the US. The term diaspora refers, generally, to the movements of migrations, that is, the dispersion of peoples across the globe. There is, however, a distinction between old diaspora and new diaspora. The old diaspora is defined by Alex Weingrod and André Levy as referring to

the Jews, the Greeks, and the Armenians, peoples who lost or were driven from their homelands and then resided different lands as dispersed minorities (diaspora is a Greek word, meaning, appropriately, “scattered seeds”), and yet continued to both dream and plan to someday “return home”.⁴

The new diaspora, on the other hand, includes a number of different peoples, has different causes, and the desire to return is no longer an important issue. Therefore, the new diaspora is defined as being

scattered about as a result of the global trends that shape the contemporary world. As we know, these new diasporas have emerged from the worldwide movement of millions of persons, which in turn has been caused by inequalities, modern information and production technologies, powerful multi-national corporations that frequently shift production across the world, as well as the more familiar “old-fashioned” reasons of famine and war.⁵

² ASHCROFT; GRIFFITHS; TIFFIN. *Post-colonial studies: the key concepts*, p. 168.

³ BOEHMER. *Colonial and postcolonial literature: migrant metaphors*, p. 246-247.

⁴ WEINGROD; LEVY. On homelands and diasporas: an introduction, p. 4.

⁵ WEINGROD; LEVY. On homelands and diasporas: an introduction, p. 4.

Therefore, when the term is used in this work, it refers to the new diaspora (Spivak) as the Indian diaspora is mostly due to the process of colonization and the end of this historical period. Thus, as far as Postcolonialism is concerned, the term diaspora is directly linked to it, as the modern diaspora is characterized by the movement of the once colonized people to the metropolitan centres.⁶ Furthermore, as these authors argue, the diasporic movement has also been crucial to break with the hegemony of the center:

The development of diasporic cultures necessarily questions essentialist models, interrogating the ideology of a unified, “natural” cultural norm, one that underpins the centre/margin model of colonialist discourse.⁷

Although the definition above shows a positive outcome of the dispersion, the term diaspora may also be considered a synonym of displacement, diversity, cultural clashes, and marginalized subjects who live in the border between two worlds. Sudesh Mishra defines this idea as “dual territoriality” as the subject has to deal with conflicts that are caused by a life between “hostland and homeland”. According to Mishra, “[s]uspended between two such terrains (living without belonging in one, belonging without living in the other), diasporas are seen to represent a new species of social formation”.⁸ However, further in his book, Mishra discusses the dichotomous idea of the subject being divided between two worlds, and instead, emphasizes a more recent tendency of considering the subject in relation to a third space, which is symbolized by the hyphen:

In making the joint/rupture between one space and another (or several others), the border is clearly devoid of its own space and yet indispensable to spatial categories. It is the function of the border/hyphen to break up structured unities and pre-given stabilities while positioning them on every side. Inhabiting the hyphen, one is neither absolutely one thing nor another but constituted multiply in the line of fracture which, as logic would have it, is also the line of suture. From the vantage point of the hyphen/border, one is never solely one thing or another, but altogether something else – a veritable third.⁹

Therefore, according to Mishra, the territoriality of the hyphenated subject (in Lahiri's fiction the Indian-American) should be considered through the perspective of the hyphen as it works like a bridge linking the two worlds and forming a subject who is in neither side, but inhabits both.

⁶ ASHCROFT; GRIFFITHS; TIFFIN. *Post-colonial studies: the key concepts*, p. 61.

⁷ ASHCROFT; GRIFFITHS; TIFFIN. *Post-colonial studies: the key concepts*, p. 61.

⁸ MISHRA. *Diaspora criticism*, p. 16.

⁹ MISHRA. *Diaspora criticism*, p. 83.

Accordingly, the focus on the hyphen and the idea of a subject who has characteristics of both homeland and hostland might be translated by the term hybridity which “commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization”.¹⁰ Thus, a hybrid subject is the one that has characteristics of two different cultures, who is not only a product of the diasporic movement after the end of colonization, but also a product of the global and transnational world we live in.

Furthermore, the notion of hybridity breaks with the idea of purity, and therefore as argued by Pnina Werbner also breaks with the idea of nationhood “as transnational social formations, diasporas challenge the hegemony and boundedness of the nation-state and, indeed, of any pure imaginaries of nationhood”.¹¹ However it is important to highlight Homi Bhabha's contribution to the field as he not only talks about the rupture of the notion of purity mentioned by Werbner, but he emphasizes two paramount issues related to hybridity, that is, the problem of representation and of hegemony:

Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other “denied” knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority – its rule of recognition¹²

Although the term hybridity may occasionally have a negative connotation as it gives the idea of a split subject, it symbolizes, according to Bhabha, an assertion of the colonial discourse in the dominant discourse. In this sense, it implies that the colonized may destabilize the colonizer discourse from within.

Therefore, the literary production before the half of the twentieth century had problematic representations of the subject, and the presence of the hybrid subjects is a threat to the previous discourse of purity. As a result, the postcolonial voices changed the hegemonic discourse through the process of writing as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin state:

it is through an appropriation of the power invested in writing that this discourse can take hold of the marginality imposed on it and make hybridity and syncreticity the source of literary and cultural redefinition.¹³

Then, the subject who once occupied this position of marginality, which Ashcroft,

¹⁰ ASHCROFT; GRIFFITHS; TIFFIN. *Post-colonial studies: the key concepts*, p. 108.

¹¹ WERBNER. *The place which is diaspora: citizenship, religion, and gender in the making of chaotic transnationalism*, p. 30.

¹² BHABHA. *The location of culture*, p. 162.

¹³ ASHCROFT; GRIFFITHS; TIFFIN. *The empire writes back: theory and practice in post-colonial literature*, p. 77.

Griffiths and Tiffin define as “the condition constructed by the posited relation to a privilege centre, an ‘Othering’ directed by the imperial authority,”¹⁴ is able to change his/her representation as the “Other” and redefine him/herself to the condition of a hybrid subject.

Besides, the hybrid subject does not belong to only one culture, nor does he/she feel attached to only one nation. Rather, it is possible to observe that this rupture of belonging to a pure culture or a single nation often causes a feeling of dislocation that is explained by Vijay Agnew:

The individual living in the diaspora experiences a dynamic tension every day between living “here” and remembering “there”, between memories of places of origins and entanglements with places of residence, and between the metaphorical and the physical home¹⁵.

The idea of dislocation is more complex than the feeling of not belonging to a single place, but it is rather a feeling that you do not belong to your homeland or to the hostland. This feeling of dislocation might be translated by the “Möbius Strip,” which is according to Eliana Reis “a sequence with no beginning and no end, and therefore, with no fixed center” (my translation),¹⁶ and it might be seen as a metaphor for identity as

identity and alterity can be compared to the sides of the Möbius Strip as, in their continuous movement around themselves, they can alternately be seen as outside and inside, front and back. Thus, the subject shows his/her different sides depending on his/her different curves.¹⁷

As the hybrid subject goes from one culture to another, his feeling of dislocation may be caused by a lack of center, by a continuous movement between the two cultures that affects his identity construction.

Besides, the idea of the fluidity of the Möbius strip is also in accordance of Stuart Hall's definition of identity as he contends that it is a construction which is always in process:

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a production, which is never complete, always in process, and always

¹⁴ ASHCROFT; GRIFFITHS; TIFFIN. *The empire writes back: theory and practice in post-colonial literature*, p. 102.

¹⁵ AGNEW. *Diaspora, memory and identity: a search for an identity*, p. 4.

¹⁶ REIS. *Pós-colonialismo, identidade e mestiçagem cultural: a literatura de Wole Soyinka*, p. 86.

¹⁷ REIS. *Pós-colonialismo, identidade e mestiçagem cultural: a literatura de Wole Soyinka*, p. 94, my translation.

constituted within, not outside, representation.¹⁸

Hall also defines identity in relation to diaspora. However, he defines the term taking other points into account, as he considers space, time, history, culture, as well as the Postcolonial agenda:

It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere “recovery” of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past.¹⁹

In this citation, Hall is also taking into account the colonizer discourses that were inserted in the colonized culture. Moreover, Hall is also relating identity to the manner the individuals pose themselves in relation to the colonizer discourse.

In addition, Hall coined the term cultural identities which he defines as how the individual positions him/herself in relation to different discourses: “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*.”²⁰

Consequently the fluidity of the subject, of living in a place but with memories of another which is often called home, reveals the tension between the memory of a home country and its culture in contrast to the new place of residence. Salman Rushdie gives an interesting insight on the role of memory as far as the memory of the home country is concerned. Talking about the writers as well as the migrants position when remembering, he states that, [we] are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back,

even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we also must do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind.²¹

Therefore, when we consider the memory of the subject, it is necessary to bear in mind

¹⁸ HALL. Cultural identity and diaspora, p. 222.

¹⁹ HALL. Cultural identity and diaspora, p. 225.

²⁰ HALL. Cultural identity and diaspora, p. 226.

²¹ RUSHDIE. *Imaginary homelands: essays and criticism*, p. 10.

that his/her memory of the home country may not reflect something real, but that memories may be fictions inspired by the physical distance. In tune with these lines, it is possible to observe that some of Lahiri's characters have a romanticized view of India and that their views represent what Rushdie calls an "imaginary homeland."

As far as memories and relocation are concerned, Carmen Wickramagamage states that "most people envision relocation as a painful choice between assimilation (betrayal) and nativism (loyalty)".²² Thus, the relocation process for Ashima and Ahoke is painful as they often feel they are not faithful to their Bengali culture. Besides, their relocation process will affect Gogol as the choice of his name will directly influence his identity construction, and will be a symbol of his hybrid condition.

NAME AS A SYMBOL OF DISLOCATION AND RELOCATION

Ashoke Ganguli, whose name is "a legacy of the British, an anglicized way of pronouncing his real surname, Gangopadhyay"²³ was born in India. After a train accident that nearly took his life and left him in bed for over a year, he decides after his recovery to change his life plans and be as far as possible "from the place in which he was born and in which he had nearly died".²⁴ Then, after graduating as an engineer, he goes to the US to continue his studies. At the time he is studying to earn a PhD, he goes back to India in order to find a wife, and he has his marriage arranged with a young woman, Ashima. After the wedding, when they happen to look at each other for the first time, they travel to Boston where they are to live several years.

The beginning is hard for Ashima as she not only misses her relatives, but also has trouble adapting to the new culture. Things get worse when she gets pregnant as it accentuates her fears and afflictions:

But nothing feels normal to Ashima. For the past eighteen months, ever since she's arrived in Cambridge, nothing has felt normal at all But she is terrified to raise a child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, where life seems so tentative and spare.²⁵

When the baby is born, Ahoke and Ashima have different feelings about having a child

²² WICKRAMAGAMAGE. Relocation as a positive act: the immigrant experience in Bharati Mukherjee's novels, p. 194.

²³ LAHIRI. *The namesake*, p. 67.

²⁴ LAHIRI. *The namesake*, p. 20.

²⁵ LAHIRI. *The namesake*, p. 5-6.

in a foreign country. When the baby receives books as presents in the hospital, Ashoke analyzes this fact as a benefit of being born in the US: “[I]ucky boy,’ Ashoke remarks (...). ‘Only hours old and already the owner of books.’ What a difference, he thinks, from the childhood he has known.”²⁶ However, Ashima only sees the negative aspects, showing once more how she feels about living far from India:

Without a single grandparent or parent or uncle or aunt at her side, the baby’s birth, like most everything else in America, feels somehow haphazard, only half true. As she strokes and suckles and studies her son, she can’t help but pity him. She has never known of a person entering the world so alone, so deprived.²⁷

Ashima’s memories of her homeland are constantly present, and they are a source of suffering as nothing seems to compare to the life she had before. Therefore, it is possible to observe that Ashima is the representation of a displaced subject who feels she does not belong to the place she lives, and who is still strongly connected to her homeland through her memories.

The baby’s name is another source of distress for the Gangulis. As it is a custom for Bengalis, the baby is supposed to have both a public/good name and a private/pet name. A letter from Ashima’s grandmother, who has the honor to give their son his good name, has not arrived from India yet. However, when they are to leave the hospital with the baby, they discover that differently from India, they can not leave without his birth certificate, which requires a name. Thus, they see themselves forced to choose the baby a name. They decide to choose a pet name to put on the certificate so that they could wait for the letter. Ashoke, then, remembers the train accident he had had. At the moment of the accident he was still awake reading his favorite author, the Russian Nikolai Gogol, a fact which had saved his life:

The door shuts, which is when, with a slight quiver of recognition, as if he’d known it all along, the perfect pet name for his son occurs to Ashoke. He remembers the page crumpled tightly in his fingers, the sudden shock of the lantern’s glare in his eyes. But for the first time he thinks of the moment not with terror, but with gratitude.²⁸

He decides to call the baby Gogol, which Ashima immediately approves as she is aware “that the name stands not only for her son’s life, but her husband’s.”²⁹ They leave the

²⁶ LAHIRI. *The namesake*, p. 24.

²⁷ LAHIRI. *The namesake*, p. 24-25.

²⁸ LAHIRI. *The namesake*, p. 28.

²⁹ LAHIRI. *The namesake*, p. 28.

hospital and wait for the letter that never comes. Meanwhile, Ashima's grandmother falls ill and is unable to send another name for the boy. However, the Gangulis only have to seriously think about Gogol's good name when he is about to enter kindergarten. At this time, Ashoke considers he has found the perfect name, Nikhil, as it has a meaning in Bengali and it also resembles Nikolai, the first name of the Russian writer.

Gogol is concerned about his parents' decision of giving him a different name: "[h]e is afraid to be Nikhil, someone he doesn't know. Who doesn't know him."³⁰ His parents' explanation that "they each have two names, too, as do all their Bengali friends in America, and all their relatives in Calcutta. It's a part of growing up, part of being a Bengali"³¹ does not convince him of the necessity to have a new name. Consequently, Gogol refuses to answer by his new name at school and the name Nikhil is crossed out from his records.

As a consequence, Ashoke and Ashima have a feeling that they have failed to follow an important tradition of their culture. For them, the refusal of the hospital to let them leave without a proper name for their son, having a son whose pet name turned into a good name, as well as the decision of the school to ignore their wish to call their son Nikhil are examples that, in the new country, they were unable to perpetuate their culture. As a result, when their second child is born, they decide that she will only have a good name to avoid the trouble they had with Gogol: "[f]or their daughter, good name and pet name are one and the same: Sonali, meaning 'she who is golden.'³² Contrary to Gogol, Sonali will not face any problems with her name as they soon start calling her Sonia: "at home they begin to call her Sonu, then Sona, and finally Sonia. Sonia makes her a citizen of the world."³³

When Gogol is young he does not mind his name: "[i]t all seems perfectly normal. It doesn't bother him that his name is never an option on key chains or metal pins or refrigerator magnets."³⁴ However, when he is at high school, his name becomes a concern:

For by now, he's come to hate questions pertaining to his name, hates having constantly to explain. He hates having to tell people that it doesn't mean anything in Indian... He hates that his name is both absurd and obscure, that it has nothing to do with who he is, that is neither Indian or American but of

³⁰ LAHIRI. *The namesake*, p. 57.

³¹ LAHIRI. *The namesake*, p. 57.

³² LAHIRI. *The namesake*, p. 62.

³³ LAHIRI. *The namesake*, p. 62.

³⁴ LAHIRI. *The namesake*, p. 66.

all things Russian.³⁵

Thus, although his name seems Indian, it lacks authenticity as it is a Russian name. Additionally, the name is alien to him as it is linked to a part of Ashoke's past that no one has ever mentioned to him. Furthermore, it is possible to say from his statement that he feels his name has nothing to do with who he is as it is not linked to his identity, and his emphasis that his name is neither Indian nor American may symbolize that he feels he does not belong to any of the two countries he thinks he should be attached to, India or The United States. However, as his father questions him once when Gogol says that no one takes him seriously because of his name, Gogol is forced to admit to himself that he has not been through any distressing situation because of his name:

“Who does not take you seriously?” his father wanted to know (...). “People,” he said, lying to his parents. For his father had a point; the only person who tormented him, 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.³⁶

Hence, the concerns he has with his name might be related to his condition as a hybrid subject, of not belonging, and of not quite seeing himself as entirely American or Indian. In fact, he may feel that his name does not translate well who he is; because it is Russian it does not contribute to telling him who he is: Indian, American, or Indian-American. Besides, as he considers later, Nikhil, the good name his parents tried to give him could be shortened to Nick, and therefore would be a Bengali name that could be perfectly translated into an American name. Therefore, it is possible to say that the distress about his name may be as a result of an identity issue related to his hybrid condition. Having a Russian name only makes it clear to him that he does not share it with any Indian or American. Rather, it is as if his name stands for the hyphen and the third space discussed by Mishra earlier in this text, a fact which makes it unbearable.

Then, at a party at a university when he was still at high school, he went to another floor to get away from the noise and met a girl, Kim. They start talking, but Gogol is afraid to tell her his name,

“Aren't you going to introduce yourself to me?”
“Oh” he says. “Yeah.” But he doesn't want to tell Kim his name. He doesn't want to endure her reaction, to watch her lovely blue eyes grow wide. He

³⁵ LAHIRI. *The namesake*, p. 75-76.

³⁶ LAHIRI. *The namesake*, p. 100.

wished there were another name he could use, just this once, to get him through the evening.³⁷

In an impulse he says, “I’m Nikhil”,³⁸ and that seems to give him confidence enough to go on talking to her, and there he spends the evening kissing a girl for the first time in his life. When he tells his friends what he had done and they are amazed by the fact, Gogol who is also perplexed thinks, “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 nothing to do with it.”³⁹ This passage is another evidence that for him changing his name is like becoming another person, and that, for him, his new name is linked to his identity.

One day while he is waiting for an appointment, he reads in a magazine that any American citizen can change his/her name given that they undergo a simple legal process. After talking his parents into accepting his decision, Gogol goes before a judge that officially changes his name to Nikhil. When he is walking on the street for the first time with his new identity he considers, “[h]e wonders if this is how it feels for an obese person to become thin, for a prisoner to walk free”.⁴⁰

With his new name, Gogol becomes a confident young man. He goes to university where no one knows him as Gogol, and his name becomes a symbol of a successful process of relocation. Now that he has a new name and he is far from home, he begins to behave like any other American boy of his age. In addition, his relation with his family slightly changes as “now that he is Nikhil it’s easier to ignore his parents, to tune out their concerns and pleas”.⁴¹ However, he feels his name does not deny his heritage, but it fits him in two important spaces: at home and at university. It is a fluid name that allows him, like the Möbius Strip, to go from one side to the other, showing different parts of himself according to different contexts. Likewise, it is a flexible name that allows him to perform his identity in accordance to the space he is.

Furthermore, the change of names from Gogol to Nikhil can also be related to Rushdie’s idea of a “translated man,”

the word “translation” comes etymologically from the Latin for “bearing across”. Having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It’s

³⁷ LAHIRI. *The namesake*, p. 96.

³⁸ LAHIRI. *The namesake*, p. 96.

³⁹ LAHIRI. *The namesake*, p. 96.

⁴⁰ LAHIRI. *The namesake*, p. 102.

⁴¹ LAHIRI. *The namesake*, p. 105.

normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained.⁴²

Therefore, the name Nikhil translates better his plural identity, and as it was possible to notice before, it seems that Gogol gains more than he loses with his new name. In addition, his name may also be considered ambivalent, as it has a double reading and may be related to Homi Bhabha's concept of mimicry:

Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; ... mimicry emerge as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal.⁴³

Accordingly, the name Nikhil is a result of a process of being accepted, of having a name that is ambivalent, that is, that permits him to have an Indian name that sounds very close to an American one, and thus, as Bhabha explained, it is "almost the same, but not quite".

Moreover, it is important to notice that when Gogol decides to change his name, he could have chosen any name, but he chooses an ambivalent name that can be related to both nationalities he feels he belongs to. His choice is an act of assuming his double belonging, the plurality of his identity, and therefore it can be related to Stephen Greenblatt's concept of self-fashioning which is explained by Jürgen Pieters: "every act of self-fashioning not only presupposes the concomitant production of another against which the self can be defined."⁴⁴ Hence, Gogol's decision of changing his name is a part of a process of defining who is, a process of acceptance and of constructing his fluid identity.

CONCLUSION

In *The namesake* the distressing situations involving the name "Gogol" can be read as a metaphor for both the feeling of dislocation and relocation of the diasporic and hybrid subjects.

First, when Ashima and Ashoke are forced to choose a name for their son in the hospital, it seemed like a betrayal of Ashima's grandmother's wish. Afterward, when Gogol's school refuses to accept his good name, they are constantly reminded that they are not home,

⁴² RUSHDIE. *Imaginary homelands: essays and criticism*, p. 17.

⁴³ BHABHA. *The location of culture*, p. 86.

⁴⁴ PIETERS. *Moments of negotiation: the historicism of Stephen Greenblatt*, p. 57.

but in a place that does not understand their culture and traditions. As a consequence, the process of choosing their son a name shows how dislocated they feel in their host country, how painful the relocation is as they constantly feel like betraying their heritage.

As far as Gogol is concerned, naming is a metaphor for his feeling of a dislocated subject and, his new name a metaphor for the acceptance of his identity as a hybrid subject. Accordingly, it is possible to say that the name Gogol stands for his identity. Just like he does not see himself as neither American nor Indian, his name is also neither American or Indian. However, when he changes it to Nikhil, he feels it reflects better his hyphenated self as it is a Bengali name that can also be shortened to an American nickname, Nick. Therefore, it is a hybrid, ambivalent name and with it he is able to deal better with his private and public life, and he can easily deal with both ends of his hyphenated identity.

In conclusion, *The namesake* deals with both the process of dislocation and relocation that is characteristic of the postcolonial, diaporic subject. Lahiri uses naming as a metaphor of the effects the processes of dislocation and relocation have on the diasporic subject that has to deal with a double belonging, that is, to a place of residence as well as to an imaginary homeland that makes itself present in the heritage and memories of its subjects.

RESUMO

Este artigo analisa o nome como uma metáfora dos processos de deslocamento e relocação no romance *The namesake*, da escritora Jhumpa Lahiri. A partir de tal leitura, investigo também a ambivalência do nome para um processo bem-sucedido de relocação.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Postcolonialismo, deslocamento, relocação, ambivalência

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