



**UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE CÓRDOBA**  
**FACULTAD DE LENGUAS**



**CULTURAL IDENTITY: DIFFERENT WAYS OF CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY  
FOR FIRST- AND SECOND-GENERATION IMMIGRANTS IN *THE NAMESAKE*, BY  
JHUMPA LAHIRI**

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Directora de Tesina: Julia Inés Martínez  
Alumna: Verónica Inés Flores  
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## ABSTRACT

In the globalized world in which we live nowadays, there are many people who move to other countries to study, to work, to escape from political or religious repression, or to look for a better lifestyle which they think they will not attain in their homeland, and, as a result, different cultures come into contact. In this “contact zone” of cultures, new identities are constantly constructed with shared characteristics from the own and host cultures. This is specially so in the case of immigrant parents who raise their children —sometimes born in another country—in a culture different from theirs, and who face the dilemma of whether to instill the mother culture, ignoring —and often debasing— the new culture, or to assimilate the new cultural elements and accept their children’s acculturation process.

In this paper, I will attempt to explore the construction of identity in the novel *The Namesake* (2003), by Jhumpa Lahiri. Being a writer with a hyphenated nationality herself, Lahiri describes in the abovementioned novel the experiences of immigrants from India in the United States. Once settled in the American continent, Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli give birth to their son Gogol, and they are put into the dilemma of raising him according to the Indian customs or accepting the American practices, which Gogol begins to assimilate. To analyze how the first and second generations construct their hybrid cultural identity in the novel, I will explore theories about identity, hybridity, interculturality, and acculturation, which will provide a framework for understanding the similarities and differences among the characters.

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*“You are damned right I am an American. And I am an Indian. Who are you to tell me that I can’t love two places? No one, no one can cut boundaries into my heart.”*

Roshni Rustomi<sup>1</sup>

## I. INTRODUCTION

Various cultural studies and social theories have analyzed the concept of cultural identity from different perspectives. On one end of the spectrum, there is essentialism, which asserts that there exist some objective traits of particular groups of people that are inherent, eternal, and unalterable, determined prior to the individual based on their shared history. On the other end, there are non-essentialist theories, which consider culture as a construction, as not being fixed, but movable and in constant change due to the relations with others. For this study, I will approach the concept of identity from a non-essentialist point of view because, as Kathryn Woodward, Professor of Sociology at the Open University (United Kingdom), states, when adopting a non-essentialist position regarding identity, identities are fluid, have different elements which can be reconstructed in new cultural conditions, and are not fixed essences locked into differences which are permanent for all time (1997, p. 29). If we understand cultural identity in this way, it will not surprise us that, for example, a person who was born in India (or to an Indian family) and who holds an American passport may retain elements from both cultures and may not feel locked into one single cultural identity.

Immigrants’ experiences in their quest for identity and their construction of a hybrid identity have awakened the interest of many researchers, who have attempted to analyze this phenomenon to gain a better understanding of modern social behaviors. As well as theorists, many post-colonial writers have described these hybrid identities in their fictional works, as in many cases they themselves have hyphenated nationalities<sup>2</sup> and they write from their own experience as minority subjects in another country. Literature, as a product of culture, sheds light on crucial issues of contemporary society.

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<sup>1</sup> Rustomi, R. (1999). “Thanksgiving in a Monsoonless Land.” In Mazziotti Gillan, M. and Gillan, J. (Eds.) *Growing up Ethnic in America. Contemporary Fiction about Learning to Be American*. New York: Penguin (p. 330).

<sup>2</sup> By “hyphenated nationalities” I mean subjects of double nationality; for example, Gogol –the main character in *The Namesake*– has a hyphenated nationality since he is an Indian-American; he was born in America, but his family is from India.

Fiction writers who relate the analysis of specialists in social and cultural themes to the depiction of the situation of immigrants help us gain a new insight on these issues and a better understanding of the meaning and value that our current globalized world places on ethnic differences. Being a writer with a hyphenated nationality herself, Jhumpa Lahiri describes in her novel *The Namesake* (2003) the experiences of immigrants from India in the United States. Primarily presented through the filter of Ashima, an Indian immigrant, and her son Gogol, born in America, it depicts their struggles to figure out whether they consider themselves Americans, Indians or both.

It is my contention that cultural identity in *The Namesake* is constructed and that there are differences between the ways in which Ashima and Gogol construct their identities, as they are first- and second-generation immigrants. The questions which will lead my study are the following: How is the cultural identity defined? What are the cultural elements that influence the characters' self-definition in *The Namesake*? How are the differences between first- and second-generation immigrants revealed in relation to the ways they construct their identity in *The Namesake*? In order to analyze how the first and second generations construct their hybrid cultural identity in the novel, I will explore theories about identity, hybridity, interculturality, and acculturation, which will provide a framework for understanding the similarities and differences between the characters. As to methodology, I will approach the novel from a sociocritical point of view, taking into account the context of production and reception, as well as the social and ideological dimensions. The novel will also be analyzed from a descriptive and comparative standpoint. First, I will use a descriptive method to explore how cultural identity is constructed in the plot of the novel. Then, from a comparative perspective, I will draw a comparison between the protagonists, Ashima and Gogol, to illustrate the ways in which they construct their identities.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The most salient trait of human beings is their inherent nature to socialize by means of a shared culture that includes similar customs, practices, languages, values, and world views, and that defines social groups such as those based on nationality, ethnicity, religion or common interests. Since the beginning of humanity, culture has been passed on from one generation to the next, leading many scholars to study the

processes of socialization in an attempt to understand if culture is a construction or an essence to human beings, and what makes people feel identified with a certain culture. In the nineteenth century, the term “culture” was used as a synonym of Western civilization, implying the superiority of the Western world. At that time, it was impossible to think of multiple cultures or to recognize the status of minority cultures. When colonies started to achieve their independence, and new economic and political contexts led to more migratory movements, different cultures became visible and came into contact with one another. Today, it is recognized that cultural identity based on ethnicity is not necessarily exclusive. People may identify themselves with a culture in some circumstances and feel as part of a particular culture in others. In this paper, I will analyze the concepts of identity, hybridity, interculturality, and acculturation in relation to the construction of cultural identity in the novel *The Namesake*, by Jhumpa Lahiri, and I will compare and contrast the ways in which the main characters construct their identity and deal with their hybridity.

For my analysis, I will consider cultural identity to be an ever-changing process and not a fixed and immovable object. To support this stance, I will refer to the concept of cultural identity of Madan Sarup (1994 and 1996) and Stuart Hall (1990 and 1996), as well as to the ideas of hybridization and interculturality developed by Homi K. Bhabha (1994) and Néstor García Canclini (2000 and 2004). Furthermore, I will discuss the psychological effects studied by John W. Berry (1997) in relation to the process of adaptation to the new culture that immigrants undergo.

## **II.A. Cultural Identity**

Madan Sarup, a British professor and author of books on education and race, has explored the meaning of identity from a post-structuralist point of view. Being an immigrant from India in Britain himself, he argues that “identity is not to do with *being* but with *becoming*”<sup>3</sup> (1994, p. 98). He contends that we do not have a homogeneous identity, but that, instead, we have several contradictory selves. For him, identity is a process, which is difficult to grasp, and it is social structures, as well as the temporal and geographical contexts, which determine the way we are and transform our

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<sup>3</sup> Italics are my own to emphasize the complex nature of identity –not as something fixed, but as a continuous process.

identities. Sarup (1996) also states that “identity is a construction, a consequence of a process of interaction between people, institutions and practices” (p. 11).

The non-essentialist concept of cultural identity that Sarup discusses is central for the argument I will present in this paper. In *The Namesake*, Ashima’s and Gogol’s construction of their identities is influenced by different situations they go through, for example, migrating, giving birth to a son in a foreign land, growing up in a family with customs that are different from those of the nation in which they live, visiting India and their relatives, or experiencing strong emotions such as a parent’s death. I am particularly interested in Sarup’s idea that “identity can be displaced: it can be hybrid or multiple” (p. 1). I will attempt to analyze Ashima and Gogol’s hybrid identity since, when in America, they do not feel totally Americans, but when in India, they do not feel totally Indians either. This is related to Sarup’s concept of home and his definition of a migrant as “a person who has crossed the border. S/he seeks for a place to make ‘a new beginning,’ to start again, to make a better life” (p. 1). The idea of place and home that Sarup poses is crucial to understand the dilemmas the characters in the novel try to solve, since “it is usually assumed that a sense of place or belonging gives a person stability” (p. 1), and we tend to associate the place where we belong to with home because, as Sarup writes, “roots are in a certain place. Home is (in) a place” (p. 1). Yet, there are many complications in having a sense of belonging for immigrants: they feel as if they were of both places: they belong to the community in the homeland, with whom they share certain traits, and to a community in the present home, with whom they begin to feel identified as well.

In the same line, Stuart Hall, a Jamaican-born cultural theorist and sociologist who lived and worked in the United Kingdom, also considers identity a construction or, in his own words, a “‘production’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (1990, p. 222). Cultural identity is related to those aspects of our identities that arise from our belonging to distinctive ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious and national cultures. However, for a hyphenated individual, the elements of home, identity and belonging are not always congruent. Hall is one of the founding figures of the school of thought that is now known as British Cultural Studies. This group of thinkers challenges the traditional concept of culture as the product of a social elite and replaces it with one that approaches culture as a process

in which ordinary people have an active and positive role (Elgue de Martini, 2003, p. 16). The relation between the concepts of culture and power proposed by Cultural Studies changes the concept of cultural identities, which were thought of as something fixed, coherent and stable, giving rise to new and fragmented identities which are in crisis by the experience of uncertainty.

As well as Sarup, Stuart Hall (1996) also speaks of dislocation or displacement to explain the effect on individuals when they lose a stable sense of self and of their place in the social and cultural world (p. 597). For this theorist, rather than thinking about identity as a finished product, we should consider it an ongoing process of transformation. In his chapter “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” included in *Identity: Community, Culture and Difference* (1990), Hall argues that what we are has to do with one shared culture and history, and with “a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’” (p. 222). That is to say that, although our identities are related to something that already exists and to our past, we have become what we are because we have been transformed and are being transformed by our present context. This idea of a dialogue between past and present in constructing cultural identity is relevant for my paper since I will discuss how 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, and that makes her feel she does not belong to the United States. Besides, I will examine how Gogol’s identity is transformed when he learns his name was inspired by a past event in his father’s life.

Hall claims that now we can conceive of subjects as becoming fragmented and composed, not of a single, but of several, sometimes contradictory and unresolved, identities at different times (p. 598). This produces the post-modern subject, conceptualized as having no fixed, essential, or permanent identity, but contradictory identities pulling in different directions. As a result, identity is formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented in the cultural systems which surround us. The idea that identity is historically, not biologically, defined and that subjects may assume different identities at different times will contribute to understanding the process the characters in the novel go through in constructing different identities throughout their lives.



## **II.B. Hybridity and Interculturality**

In my analysis of Lahiri's novel, the notions of hybridization and interculturality developed by Homi K. Bhabha (1994) and Néstor García Canclini (2001 and 2004) will also contribute to my study of the construction of the hybrid and intercultural identities of the characters. Homi Bhabha, an Indian-born theorist and professor, is considered by many to be the father of hybrid theory. Bhabha (1994) argues that cultural encounters result in something new and substantially different that cannot be traced back to a specific origin (p. 10). This space is neither here nor there and it enables us to "elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves" (p. 56). His idea of hybridity is developed within conditions of colonization in which the colonized has been traditionally regarded as a passive subject forced to accept the hegemonic colonizer's ideology and culture. Bhabha disagrees with this traditional concept of social encounter arguing that both the colonizer and the colonized are influenced by the contact between the two cultures, and that both cultures' bodies, signs and practices are integrated. In the colonial era, hybridity was seen as representing the lowest possible form of human life. However, in post-colonial discourse, hybridity is celebrated, since straddling two cultures leads to the ability to negotiate difference. Bhabha defines the area of interweaving and creation of a new mode of being as a "third space" (p. 218), and he proposes that "these in-between spaces provide with the framework to elaborate (individual or group) self-hood strategies that create new identity signs, and innovative sites of collaboration and questioning, in the attempt to define the idea itself of society" (p. 18). The concept of a hybrid identity constructed in a third space disputes the notion of a fixed and immovable identity or culture, since this place opens up the possibility for negotiating and reinterpreting identities in a continuous process of hybridity.

Although Bhabha's concepts are mainly contextualized in the binary oppositions of colonized and colonizer, I find his theory very useful for my paper because there are similarities with the experience of immigrants who try to define their identity. Bhabha's metaphor of home is interesting to describe the sense of ambivalence in hyphenated individuals who have the feeling of not belonging and who live in a space of in-betweenness, which Bhabha describes as "unhomeliness." According to Bhabha,

to be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the “unhomely” be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres. The unhomely moment creeps up on you stealthily as your own shadow and suddenly you find yourself... And it is at this point that the world first shrinks... and then expands enormously (p. 26).

The unhomely individual feels first disoriented and marginalized, but then assumes his position and disrupts the clear-cut relationship between the dominant power and the subject. The rewriting of home by these subjects articulates a new identity and a resistance to the domination of imperial power, which leads to new possibilities and expansions. I will attempt to explore hybridity in the characters of *The Namesake* and determine if they identify with the American culture or the Indian culture, or if they can be considered to be in “in-between spaces” as regards their construction of identity.

Similar to Bhabha, Néstor García Canclini, an Argentinian writer, professor, anthropologist and cultural critic, also examines the concept of hybridization. In his paper “La globalización: ¿productora de culturas híbridas?” (2000), García Canclini defines hybridization as “the socio-cultural processes in which discreet structures and practices, which existed separately, are combined to create new structures, objects and practices” (p. 8)<sup>4</sup>. For this critic, the process of hybridization is associated with the phenomenon of globalization, which he depicts as the phenomenon taking place in the second half of the twentieth century, “when the convergence of economic, financial, communicational and migration processes accentuates the interdependence of almost every society and generates new influxes and structures of supranational interconnection” (p. 2). According to García Canclini, globalization should not be considered an extension of the imperial and colonial expansion that started in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, since in the process of globalization, rather than homogenizing national cultures, more complex exchanges and hybridization are produced. The studies of hybridization have helped to identify and explain that, instead of identity, there are identities and multiple memberships which give rise to hybrid cultures. Besides, the theories on social hybridization have evidenced the prolificacy and innovative potential of this multiplicity of identities.

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<sup>4</sup> All translations into English of texts originally written in Spanish are my own.

According to García Canclini, in our contemporary context, it is not enough to say that identities cannot be characterized as self-contained essences with no history. We are witnessing how members of cultural groups appropriate heterogeneous cultural messages and elements that restructure more or less stable historical groups (ethnic groups, nations, classes) (p. 10). The processes of hybridization bring to an end the binary way of thinking and the attempt to order the world in “pure” or “authentic” identities (p. 10). Related to the concept of “third space” or “in-betweenness” defined by Bhabha, García Canclini concludes that there does not exist a pure, single culture; instead, there is a mingling of different traces from all cultures, and these mixes gain relevance in a study of hybridization. What is more, he claims that we have gone from a *multicultural* world to another, globalized *intercultural* one. García Canclini (2004) explains that for multicultural theories, “cultural diversity is accepted, underlying their differences and proposing relative politics which often reinforce segregation,” while interculturality implies that “the different are what they are in relationships of negotiation, conflict and reciprocal loans” (p. 14). This author celebrates hybridization since it helps to account for the kind of connections that can be established by different symbolic systems when they converge in a certain cultural context.

García Canclini’s position contributes to my analysis of *The Namesake* since he states that, rather than making us assert the existence of self-sufficient identities, the study of cultural processes and new courses of segmentation gives an insight into different ways of positioning among heterogeneity and helps us understand how hybridizations are produced (p. 12). The idea of a globalized intercultural world proposed by García Canclini is important to my paper since the characters are immersed in a cultural context in which different groups converge and negotiate their condition to accept their hybrid identities.

## **II.C. Acculturation**

In order to understand the process immigrants undergo in their search of identity, and how this is seen in the protagonists of *The Namesake*, I will refer to the concept of acculturation as defined by one of the main scholars in this field, John W. Berry, Professor Emeritus of Psychology at Queen’s University (Canada). Often overlooked, when moving to a new country, immigrants may experience feelings of loss, culture

shock, separation from family, and language difficulties, which can all contribute to distress. In order to understand these feelings and help immigrants to cope with them, a group of psychologists have focused on studying the influence of cultural factors on the development and display of human behavior. This new branch of psychology is called Cross-Cultural Psychology, and it poses questions regarding what happens to individuals who have developed in one cultural context when they attempt to live in a new cultural context. Berry (1997) contends that, although culture is a powerful shaper of behavior, it would be simplistic to think of individuals as continuing or changing their behavioral repertoire in the new setting; instead, he thinks that there is some complex pattern of continuity and change in how people go about their lives in the new society (p. 6). Immigration leads to the emergence of culturally plural societies in which individuals and groups need to work out how to live together, adopting various strategies that will allow them to achieve a reasonably successful adaptation. In these intercultural societies, two issues are raised: the degree to which people wish to maintain their heritage culture and identity, and the degree to which people seek involvement with the larger society.

Acculturation has been studied by many psychologists and anthropologists since the beginnings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and has been defined as “the process of change that occurs when individuals from different cultures interact and share a common geographical area following migration, political conquest, or forced relocation” (Organista, Marín & Chun, 2010, p. 101). I am interested in Berry’s studies, since he has classified the multiple types of responses or, as he calls them, “acculturative strategies” (2010, p. 129), that an individual can have toward the culture of origin and toward the other group. Berry describes the strategies that an individual assumes regarding acculturation as “assimilation” (an individual’s wish to diminish the significance of the culture of origin and his desire to identify primarily with the other culture), “integration” (an individual’s interest in maintaining the original culture while learning and participating in the other culture), “separation” (an individual’s wish to hold on to the original culture avoiding interaction with the other culture), and “marginalization” (an individual’s attitude that shows little involvement with the original culture or with learning the other culture) (Organista, Marín & Chun, 2010, p. 110). Berry’s model considers two dimensions: *cultural maintenance* (to what extent

individuals assume a negative or positive attitude toward their mother culture and identity), and *contact and participation* (to what extent individuals become involved, positively or negatively, in other cultural groups) (1997, p. 9). I will depart from his concept of the multiple responses that an individual can have to acculturation in order to analyze the different strategies that the characters in the novel of my corpus assume to assimilate into and integrate with the American culture, or to separate and marginalize from it.

Having established how I interpret cultural identity and having summarized the theories which support my conception of it, I will advance with the analysis of the novel. In the following section, I will answer the questions I posed in the Introduction as regards the cultural elements that influence the characters' self-definition in *The Namesake* and the differences between first- and second-generation immigrants in relation to the ways they construct their identity.

### III. ANALYSIS

*The Namesake* (2003), by Jhumpa Lahiri, tells the story of Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli, a young couple whose marriage is arranged by their families in India and who leave their home country to settle in Boston. Once in the United States, their first son, Gogol, is born, and some years later, their daughter, Sonia, is born. Mainly centered on the characters of Ashima and Gogol, the novel develops to portray the difficulties Ashima faces to meld into a new world without forgetting the old while raising her child, who also feels torn between finding his own unique identity without losing his heritage. In my analysis of the novel, I will first focus on a sociocritical perspective and I will then compare the different ways in which Ashima and Gogol undergo the process of constructing their own hybrid identity by considering cultural elements such as home, social relationships and social spaces, language, and customs.

Sociocriticism proposes the study of literary works in their context of production and reception (Elgue de Martini, 2003, p. 9). This theory gained relevance since the surge of social movements such as feminism and post-colonialism in the 1960s, when the marginalized and unheard voices of minority groups began to receive attention. According to sociocriticism, the content of the literary text, the referential aspect of language, as well as the author and the reader's life experiences, are central to the study

of literature. In order to discuss the social dynamics described in the novel by Lahiri, we should take into account that it was published in 2003 and that it describes Gogol's and his family's life from the 1970s until 2001, when the United States and the world were shocked by the news of the terrorist attacks perpetrated on the World Trade Center. This event is relevant to approach the novel because it was after this year that positive discourses on multiculturalism shifted to the stigmatization of minority identities and old colonial tensions were brought to the fore, ending up in the United States' declaration of war against terror in the Middle East and more restrictions on immigration into America. In the novel, the detailed allusions to New York's architecture and its buildings can be interpreted by the reader who is standing historically after the attacks as constant hints of what happened in 2001. New York calls Gogol's attention since he was a child, and he finally moves there to pursue his career as an architect. During a trip with his family, Gogol is amazed at the city's architecture: "On the tour they were driven past sites like Rockefeller Center and Central Park and the Empire State Building, and Gogol has ducked his head below the car's window to try to see how tall the buildings were" (Lahiri, 2003, p. 127). The use of visual images like this one puts the reader in Gogol's perspective to see the incredible city of New York through his eyes and, at the same time, serves as a foreshadowing of the attacks. The author masterly decides to end the story before the terrorist attacks, as this makes the reader reflect upon and draw their own conclusions about whether this world-convulsing event was a turning point or not for Ashima and Gogol in their construction of a hybrid identity. Besides, the open ending signifies the existence of the unlimited choices the characters have and the multiple directions they can take. This refutes the theory that we are born with one identity. Quite the opposite, everything we are is the result of our choices; we construct our own identity in terms of our efforts and actions.

As well as the immediate historical context, the author's experiences are also relevant in a sociocritical analysis of the novel. Jhumpa Lahiri, like Gogol, has a hyphenated identity; she was born in London to a couple of Indian immigrants who moved to the East Coast in the United States when she was two years old. Growing up between two cultures, her ambivalence over her identity can be reflected in Gogol's experience. In an interview she offered at John Cabot University (Rome, Italy) on the

release of *The Namesake*, she was asked about the conflicts she felt growing up as the child of immigrants. She answered that,

It was always a question of allegiance, of choice. I wanted to please my parents and meet their expectations. I also wanted to meet the expectations of my American peers, and the expectations I put on myself to fit into American society. It's a classic case of divided identity, but depending on the degree to which the immigrants in question are willing to assimilate, the conflict is more or less pronounced. My parents were fearful and suspicious of America and American culture when I was growing up. Maintaining ties to India, and preserving Indian traditions in America, meant a lot to them. They're more at home now, but it's always an issue, and they will always feel like, and be treated as, foreigners here. Now that I'm an adult I understand and sympathize more with my parents' predicament. But when I was a child it was harder for me to understand their views. At times I felt that their expectations for me were in direct opposition to the reality of the world we lived in. Things like dating, living on one's own, having close friendships with Americans, listening to American music and eating American food - all of it was a mystery to them... As a young child, I felt that the Indian part of me was unacknowledged, and therefore somehow negated, by my American environment, and vice versa. I felt that I led two very separate lives ("A Conversation with Jhumpa Lahiri," 2003, para. 6).

From her answer, we can see some similarities between her and the characters of Ashima and Gogol. First, she mentions the fear and suspicion her parents had of America and American culture; this is also depicted in the novel as Ashima progresses through labor and "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" (Lahiri, 2003, p. 6). The adjectives used to describe life in America depict Ashima's feelings towards American culture and help understand the uncertainty she experiences while imagining herself how she will manage to raise a child and instill into him Indian practices away from her loved ones. Besides, Lahiri tells that her life was marked by the conflicts implied by growing up in a family of immigrants and trying to construct her own hybrid identity. This is reflected in the character of Gogol, who also struggles between meeting his parents' expectations and trying to fit in the American society. When he is six months old, his parents throw a party for his Indian friends to celebrate Gogol's *annaprasan* or his first consumption of solid food. At the ceremony, "Gogol frowns,

and his lower lip trembles. Only then, forced at six months to confront his destiny, does he begin to cry” (p. 40). This passage shows that, from a very early age, Gogol refuses to participate in traditional Indian rituals and it anticipates the confusion he will feel by growing up in an immigrant family in his youth.

Early research on how immigrants live in their new intercultural setting assumed that they would inevitably be absorbed into the receiving society, in a unidirectional process. However, Berry (1997) proposes that there are two independent dimensions underlying the process of acculturation: individuals’ links to their cultures of origin and to their societies of settlement (p. 21). These links can be manifested in a number of ways, which result in a complex psychological process with lasting effects on an individual’s identity. Newcomers experience a feeling of loss of their homeland and family and have to adapt to a new home, create new social relationships and social spaces, sometimes speak a new language, and observe new customs. Ashima’s struggles as regards her identity largely arise from her belief in roots, but as the novel develops, she also begins to adopt some elements of the American culture. The creation of something new while retaining distinct characteristics of her culture enables her to construct her true hybrid identity. Besides, children of immigrant parents also face struggles when trying to fit in with their peers while keeping up with their parents’ expectations as regards their cultural roots. Gogol shuttles between identities and this is a source of conflict. However, little by little he begins to understand he cannot ignore his Bengali roots and accepts his hybrid identity.

Lahiri’s writing style is also interesting and gains relevance in the study of hybrid identities in the characters of her novel *The Namesake*. In the story, there are very few sound descriptions, and the story is mainly told through flashbacks and characters’ descriptions of their situations, instead of dialogues. I believe this is a strategy the author uses to emphasize the characters’ issues regarding their cultural identities. The lack of sound details serves as a kind of introspection, which helps the reader look into the characters’ thoughts and feelings, and reflect upon their struggles at being torn between two cultures.

Besides, Lahiri’s circular writing style is related to the characters’ recognition and acceptance of their hybrid identity. There are two passages in the novel which are reproduced at the end of the story to give a sense of resolution to Ashima’s and Gogol’s



struggles with their existentialist confusion. First, at the beginning of the story, Ashima is cooking an Indian meal, but she feels homesick. This same setting is repeated at the end of the story, with Ashima cooking for the party in which she will announce her decision to live in India and America. However, at this time, Ashima is perceived as happy at her decision, so we can conclude that she has come to accept her hybridity. The other passage is on Gogol's fourteenth birthday, when his father gives him the book *The Short Stories* by Nikolai Gogol, and he shows no interest in his father's reasons for this present. At the end of the novel, this scenario is reproduced when, after his father's death, Gogol finds the book in his room and begins to read it. A memory of his father, this book makes him realize the importance of his heritage and helps him come to terms with his hybrid identity.

In *The Namesake*, rather than being a "thing" or an "essence," cultural identity is constructed in the light of characters' links to their homeland and their society of settlement. Gogol verbalizes his confusion as to what culture he identifies with the most when he says: "There's no such thing as a perfect name. I think that human beings should be allowed to name themselves when they turn eighteen. Until then, pronouns" (p. 245). Since naming is an important element in any culture, names could be interpreted as personality identifiers. In the previous quote, "names" could also be understood as "identities;" so there are not any "perfect names," nor are there perfect identities. In fact, our quest to find who we really are is marked by "pronouns," which are the events that shape our definitions of ourselves. The most salient "pronouns" or cultural elements that influence both first- and second-generation characters' self-definition in the novel are home, social relationships and social spaces, language and customs.

### **III.A. Home**

The setting in *The Namesake* has an important role in the definition of who Ashima and Gogol are, and their position in relation to their hybrid identities. Most of the Asian-Indians who immigrated into America in the 1970s were university students as well as professional and technical workers who settled in metropolitan areas of some of the largest American cities, such as New York, Chicago or Boston (Poros, 2012, p. 737). As an engineering post-graduate student at the Massachusetts Institute of

Technology (MIT), Ashoke settles with his wife Ashima in New England and this geographical place has historical relevance in the study of the construction of identity in *The Namesake*. Most of the Pilgrims and Puritans who arrived from England in the seventeenth century stayed in this area, shaping what today is the state of New England. When Gogol learns about this group of English Protestants during a school field trip to the cemetery, he feels attached to them: “[f]or reasons he cannot explain or necessarily understand, these ancient Puritan spirits, these very first immigrants to America [...] have spoken to him” (p. 71). Gogol might feel connected to the Puritans because of their displacement from England and the rejection they experienced, or simply because he realizes that just about everyone in the United States is a foreigner.

Furthermore, the concept of home is closely related to the construction of identity. Madan Sarup (1996) argues that the concept of home is summarized in the expression “[h]ome is where the heart is” as “[h]ome is (often) associated with pleasant memories, intimate situations, a place of warmth and protective security” (2). But for the immigrant, it is difficult to define home as they are torn between two cultures, two places. Is it where they live or is it where the rest of their family is? Sarup says that “it is usually assumed that a sense of place, or belonging, gives a person stability” (1). This means that attachment to a place makes us feel it our home and be more certain of who we are, while physical displacement from the motherland raises questions about one’s identity.

In *The Namesake*, Ashima and Gogol are in a constant search of the place they can call ‘home.’ When Ashima first arrives in the United States, she feels lonely in the new place and misses her family in India. She describes the area where they live as “[l]eafless trees with ice-covered branches. Dog urine and excrement embedded in the snowbanks. Not a soul on the street” (p. 30). Ashima feels frustrated because she misses her home back in India and that influences the way she perceives the new place. Besides, she does not feel her new house is her home: “[i]t is not at all what she had expected. Not at all like the houses in *Gone With the Wind* or *The Seven-Year Itch*” (p. 30). As Ashima feels disappointed with her new house, it is more difficult for her to feel stable, and that causes her to constantly long for her home in India. This feeling can be described in terms of John W. Berry’s acculturative strategies as “separation,” since

Ashima wishes to hold on to her original culture and avoids interacting with or learning about the other culture.

However, Ashima's conception of home, as well as her identity, develops throughout the novel, and she learns to feel at home in both places. After Ashoke's death, she decides to sell their house and spend six months in India with her family, who have stayed there, and six months in Boston with her children. She has learnt to "be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident of everywhere and nowhere" (p. 276). Ashima's decision to live in both places gains relevance if we relate it with her "good name." According to Bengali culture, every individual has two names: a "pet name" —or *daknam*—, which is used by family members and close acquaintances, and a "good name" —or *bhalonam*—, which is used in formal occasions, for example, in official documents or school registers. For Bengalis, good names tend to represent dignified and enlightened qualities, and Ashima —"she who is limitless, without borders" (p. 26)—, comes to accept her new hybrid identity and overcomes her sense of dislocation. In relation to Berry's acculturative strategies, Ashima has shifted from "separation" to "integration," since she has come to learn to maintain her original culture, but she also shows interest in learning and participating in the other culture.

Homi Bhabha (1994) argues that "home and community are ideological determinants of identity; however, individuals respond to these determinants in different ways" (p. 292). Although the idea of home also influences Gogol's search for his identity, the way he responds to home is different from Ashima's. Both Ashima and Gogol do not feel at home in their own house, but while for Ashima this is because it means being away from her roots, in the case of Gogol the reason is that his house is a constant reminder of his Bengali heritage. Gogol struggles against his parents' wish to continue with Indian traditions while wanting to fit in with his American peers. John W. Berry describes this attitude as "assimilation," that is, Gogol wishes to diminish the significance of his culture of origin and desires to identify and interact primarily with the other culture. However, he is not completely assimilated into the American culture, as he feels confused and shuttles between the two cultures because he loves his family.

His constant quest for his own identity is illustrated by the different physical spaces he comes across throughout the novel without feeling totally stable in any of

them. As he grows up in his parents' house, he does not feel happy because this is the place where he is called by his pet name, Gogol, and this name represents all his discomfort and struggles to fit into two different cultures. Being away from home at college makes it easy for Gogol to live more comfortably in the American culture under his good name, Nikhil, the short form of which sounds more like an American nickname. In New York, he starts dating Maxine, an American girl who embodies the complete opposite of the Bengali girl his parents would want him to marry. When Gogol goes to Maxine's house, "he is stunned by the house, a Greek Revival, admiring it for several minutes like a tourist before opening the gate" (p. 130). Gogol feels very attracted to Maxine, her family and her house because it is all very different from his family and his house at 67 Pemberton Road, but he is still an "outsider;" he does not identify completely with this American home either. Although he tries to create his home in New York away from his family, he has trouble finding a place in which he feels at home. Gogol's decision to become an architect is also a metaphor for his search of home and identity. As an architect, if he cannot find a home, he might as well build one, just as he realizes that if he cannot find who he really is, he might as well construct his own identity.

His father's sudden death brings Gogol's determination to live as an American and ignore his Indian roots to a halt. This event makes him appreciate his family house as his home because it is in this place where he keeps memories of his childhood, like the book by the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol, which was a present from his father. Gogol realizes that once they sell the house, "[it] will be occupied by strangers, and there will be no trace that they were ever there [...]. Nothing to signify the years his family has lived here, no evidence of the effort, the achievement it had been" (p. 281). Although he has always desired to escape from his house because he resented his origins, he comes to realize that his family house is truly his home. It signifies all the things his parents left behind in India to live in America. As well as Ashima, Gogol has shifted to the "integration" acculturative strategy. His acceptance of this hybrid identity has helped him to overcome his sense of displacement and to find his true identity in the United States.

### III.B. Social Relationships and Social Spaces

Cultural identity is marked by a number of factors such as our social relationships and the social spaces we create with other people. As Homi Bhabha (1994) says, “identity is performed within social spaces” (p. 292); our construction of identity is inevitably determined by the affiliations we create in a particular cultural context. Sometimes, first-generation immigrants tend to socialize with other fellow countrymen because it is easier for them to connect with each other, as they share cultural aspects and they negotiate their identity more comfortably. While the social spaces of this generation are mainly composed of a community of migrants, the second generation tends to feel torn between their private sphere at home and the public sphere at school or other places where they relate to local society members and are exposed to the new culture.

In *The Namesake*, this is reflected in Ashima’s and Ashoke’s social circle, composed of other Bengali families who have settled in Boston. Gogol remembers his parents’ friends when he was a child and he recalls that “[t]hey all come from Calcutta, and for this reason alone they are friends” (p. 38). These families share the same cultural roots and that connectedness becomes a symbol of belonging. However, forced by the circumstances of living far from their homeland, first-generation immigrants start creating bonds with other Americans. Ashima takes a part-time job at the library when her two children leave home for college and Ashoke is living in Ohio for a semester. This is her opportunity to become friends with other American women and to start doing “American” things with them, like gossiping about the patrons over tea in the staff room or going shopping with them to outlet stores in Maine. Although forced by her situation abroad from home, her opportunity to expand her social links allows Ashima to overcome her sense of dislocation and find her hybrid identity in America.

Social spaces are a source of conflict in Gogol’s self-definition. Despite his unwillingness, at home he becomes attuned with his Indian way of life and becomes friends with the other Bengali families’ kids, while at school he mingles with other American children. Gogol shows a kind of displeasure at the fact that his parents do not have American friends, as this would help him to cope with his “in-betweenness.” Gogol remembers his mother being horrified at him for having been taken to a cemetery since, in India, the place where the dead are burned is sacred, and that is why she

refuses to keep the paintings he has drawn in the cemetery. Consequently, Gogol puts them “where he knows his mother will never bother to look, and where they will remain, ignored but protected, gathering dust for years to come” (p. 71). Lahiri’s almost ironic description of Gogol’s idea to keep his drawings shows that sometimes immigrants are left out of the mainstream society and group themselves in communities or neighborhoods where they have a sense of protection, but, at the same time, remain neglected by the rest. Lahiri examines Gogol’s struggles to straddle two cultures when Gogol gets caught up in a dilemma regarding the introduction of his American girlfriend, Ruth, to his parents: “he cannot picture her at the kitchen table on Pemberton Road [...]. He cannot imagine being with her in the house where he is still Gogol” (p. 115). Gogol knows his parents would not approve of an American girlfriend and this makes him feel unhappy. However, Ashoke’s sudden death makes him realize that the links his parents have created with other Bengali immigrants are true and strong. This is seen when his parents’ friends come even from other states to pay their respects. Gogol’s realization that he cannot ignore his Indian roots culminates with his marriage to Moushima, a Bengali girl who is the daughter of one of his parents’ friends. Eventually, Gogol comes to terms with his hybrid identity and learns to accept his American as well as his Bengali social affiliations.

### **III.C. Language**

Language also plays an important role in the construction of identity. The connection between language and the self is so powerful that the famous phrase by philosopher René Descartes, “Cogito, ergo sum” (in English, “I think, therefore I am”), can be reformulated as “I speak, therefore I am.” It is through language that we express our thoughts and represent ourselves. In order to understand the influence that language has on cultural identity, it is important to distinguish between “standard” English and “english,” “the language that has been transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties throughout the world” (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1995, p. 8).

In *The Namesake*, besides Bengali, Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli also speak “Indian english,” that is, the language with hybrid characteristics given by the mixture of British English imposed during the British ruling in India and the local language. Ashima feels ashamed of her “english” because it sounds foreign. At Gogol’s birth, the

nurse asks Ashima if she is hoping for a boy or a girl, and she answers “As long as there are ten finger and ten toe” (p. 7). The nurse’s smiling after her answer makes her realize her error, “she knows she should have said ‘fingers’ and ‘toes’” (p. 7). Ashima’s self-consciousness of her “Indian english” influences her identity, as the way she speaks is marked by Indian traits, but she also desires to erase those traits so no one can see her as a foreigner. Ashima believes that,

being a foreigner is a sort of lifelong pregnancy – a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts [...]. Like pregnancy, being a foreigner is something that elicits curiosity from strangers, the same combination of pity and respect (p. 49).

For her, it is difficult to accept her dual identity and she feels it like a burden; that is why she struggles to accept that the language she speaks reveals her hybrid identity.

Although *The Namesake* is written in English, there are references to Ashima and Ashoke speaking in Bengali to their children and the reluctance of the latter to respond in Bengali. “Thanks, Baba,” Gogol says, [...]. Lately, he’s been lazy, addressing his parents in English though they continue to speak to him in Bengali” (p. 75). Language stands for belonging to one specific culture, and Gogol’s unwillingness to speak Bengali with his parents shows his detachment from his culture of origin and his interest in participating in the American culture. Besides, learning the mother tongue allows for the acquisition of cultural patterns; that is why, within immigrant communities, the promotion of the mother tongue is important for the cultural promotion in the contact zone. However, immigrant children may feel pressured, as they have to speak in the mother tongue at home, but show perfect fluency in the new language outside home, and this causes them confusion as they shuttle between identities.

Gogol also experiences duality in his childhood as regards language, and that influences the way in which he constructs his identity. On his first day at school, the principal introduces herself to him and names him after his “good name,” Nikhil. The different way in which his parents say it – “the second part of it longer, sounding like ‘heel’” (p. 58)– calls his attention. As Gogol does not answer the principal’s questions, she asks Ashoke if he can follow English, and he answers: “Of course he follows. My son is perfectly bilingual” (p. 58). Although Ashoke seems to be proud of his son’s bilingualism, he and Ashima always feel disturbed at accepting that “their children

sound just like Americans, expertly conversing in a language that still at times confounds them, in accents they are accustomed not to trust” (p. 65). Immigrant parents have difficulties in realizing their children sound more like people in the new country than like them, as they feel this separates them from their kids. Sometimes immigrant children are even forced to learn the family’s language as a way of maintaining their roots alive. In the novel, besides speaking Bengali to him at home, his parents send Gogol to Bengali classes, but he does not see the point in it. He is not the only one in class to feel that way, since the other children do not show interest in the Bengali language and they wish “they could be at ballet or softball practice instead” (p. 66), that is, activities most American kids do after school. When the family surname in the mailbox is shortened to GANG, he suspects that this is intended for his parents more than for him or his sister, Sonia, as “he is aware, in stores, of cashiers smirking at his parents’ accents, and of salesmen who prefer to direct their conversation to Gogol, as though his parents were either incompetent or deaf” (p. 67). Gogol knows he is more assimilated into the American culture because his accent resembles more the standard American English than his parents’ accent, and this, in turn, makes him feel more integrated in the new society, as he speaks like any other American native speaker.

Language is usually the most salient cultural element that shows the degree of assimilation into the new country. As it can be seen in the novel, while first-generation immigrants experience more difficulties in adapting to the new language, their children, because of their upbringing in schools, grasp the language more easily and are better able, in some cases, to feel part of that society. This, of course, has a relationship with the construction of their cultural identity. Although accepting hybridization is not an easy process, it seems that while Ashima has more difficulties in forming part of the new culture, as she still feels self-conscious of the way she speaks, Gogol’s mastery of American English helps him to learn to adapt himself to American society.

### **III.D. Customs**

When we try to define what culture is, we inevitably think of customs, since these practices become distinct defining traits of a group of people or nation. Jhumpa Lahiri’s detailed descriptions of Indian customs and the contrast with those



observed in America make evident the difficulties the characters experience to maintain certain practices from their homeland while adapting to American ones.

Ashima's dilemma over customs is depicted by her choice of clothes, food and celebrations. Although Ashoke begins to dress like his American colleagues, Ashima's resistance to wear anything but a sari despite the cold weather in Boston can be interpreted as a symbol of her attachment to the Indian culture. This can also be related to the strategy of "separation" defined by John W. Berry in his theory about acculturation: Ashima wishes to hold on to the original culture, avoiding interaction with the other culture.

Food also has a symbolic function in defining one's cultural identity. What one eats determines who one is culturally. In many cultures, it is usually the women who are in charge of cooking and passing recipes onto their children to promote their culture. That is why Ashima makes a great effort to continue cooking Bengali meals and to keep her cultural roots. In the first chapter, she is standing in the kitchen of her apartment attempting to recreate a spicy Bengali snack from back home in Calcutta that she has been craving: "combining Rice Krispies and Planters peanuts and chopped red onion in a bowl. She adds salt, lemon juice, thin slices of green chili pepper, wishing there were mustard oil to pour into the mix" (p. 1). Food is an important element that marks Ashima's cultural transition. She is making an Indian recipe, but she is not completely satisfied because the lack of mustard oil will result in a taste different from that of the original recipe. As the story develops, Lahiri's meticulous description of food continues to evoke emotions in the characters. At the end of the story, Ashima realizes that once in India, she will not have to make her own croquettes, as she will be able to have them in restaurants and these will bear "a taste that after all these years she has still not quite managed, to her entire satisfaction, to replicate" (p. 277). The comparison between the croquettes she can make in the United States and the ones made in India represents Ashima's attachment to her homeland roots and her longing for original Indian food. However, this quote also reflects her hybrid identity, as a sense of nostalgia for all she has been able to overcome in America is implied.

Finally, Ashima's acculturation and self-definition as a woman with a hyphenated identity can be seen in her observance of celebrations. Although she keeps holding Bengali celebrations, she begins to adopt American celebrations such as

Christmas and Thanksgiving. Her hybridity is symbolized in the Christmas cards she makes one year: “a drawing she has done herself, of an elephant decked with red and green jewels, glued onto silver paper” (p. 160). Her drawing of an elephant of Indian design on a Christmas card is a metaphor for Ashima’s adaptation to the new culture without forgetting her Indian roots.

The influence of customs on cultural identity can also be analyzed in the character of Gogol in his approach to naming, food and rituals. According to Bengali practices, an elder member of the family should give the new baby a name –a good name or *bhalonam* in Bengali– which will be used in public. Until that name is chosen, the child is called by a pet name or *daknam*, which is used by family members and close acquaintances. Ashima’s grandmother letter with the name for her grandchild born in America never arrives, and the new parents have to name the baby to get out of hospital. As a young man, Ashoke had been reading a book by Nicolai Gogol just before suffering a train accident, that is why he suggests naming his son Gogol as his pet name in honor of the famous Ukrainian author; and when he goes to school, they will name him Nikhil, which is a Bengali name. This will be a constant struggle for Gogol throughout his life, as he tries to fit in with his peers and he realizes it is not an American custom to have two names: “Living with a pet name and a good name, in a place where such distinctions do not exist –surely that was emblematic of the greatest confusion of all” (p. 118). Apart from being unhappy at having to follow this Indian practice, he is also dissatisfied with his parents because they called him Gogol, which is neither an Indian nor an American name, but, in fact, a Russian surname turned into a first name. At college, he not only pursues architecture against his father’s wish for him to become an engineer, but also adopts a new identity; he will be called Nikhil, separating himself more from his family and roots. After learning the origin of his name and after his father’s death, he regrets having complained about his name:

Without people in the world to call him Gogol, no matter how long he himself lives, Gogol Ganguli will, once and for all, vanish from the lips of loved ones, and so, cease to exist. Yet the thought of this eventual demise provides no sense of victory, no solace (p. 289).

Gogol's identity is closely linked to his name, so it saddens him that one day he might not have family members who can call him Gogol, that one day he might not have anyone who can remind him of his cultural roots.

The theme of food is also relevant in the analysis of Gogol's integration with American traditions. Like other cultural elements, food can make people revisit the past in the homeland and shape the present attitudes in the foreign land. For Ashima, food is a way of keeping her links to the Bengali culture. In contrast, Gogol likes eating American food, as he eats hamburgers at school and he insists that his mother should make an American dinner once a week as a treat. The duality in the food he eats symbolizes his dual identity as a Bengali and as an American-born child. During the plane trips to India, while his parents have Hindu meals for them, he and his sister Sonia have American meals and "Gogol savors each mouthful, aware that for the next eight months nothing will taste quite the same" (p. 81). He is struggling to find his hybrid identity and he rejects Indian food. Even so, after his father's death, Gogol gives a new meaning to his cultural roots. The scene in which Gogol is cooking with his mother to mark the end of the mourning period is described as a moment full of emotions and peace: "They prepare an elaborate meal [...], cooked as his father liked [...]. When they shut their eyes, it's as if it is just another party, the house smelling of food" (p. 181). This description reflects Gogol's acceptance of his hybrid identity and his recognition that food is important to reinforce his cultural heritage.

Lastly, the way Gogol celebrates Indian rituals also evokes his struggle to define who he really is. Through flashbacks we get to know that Gogol's duality was evident in celebrations like his birthday, as he had two parties. One of them was with his American friends "with pizzas that his father picked up on his way home from work, a baseball game watched together on television, some Ping-Pong in the den" (p. 72). The other party was the Bengali one with the Bengali families his parents were acquainted with, food cooked by his mother days beforehand, women wearing saris and men playing poker. The two parties symbolize the division into his two identities and his struggle to accept this. In his father's funeral, another flashback helps the reader understand Gogol's cultural transition and individual growth. Gogol, his mother and Sonia will follow a mourner's diet in his father's honor: "Gogol remembers having to do the same thing when [...] his grandparents died, [...] back then, being bored by it, annoyed at

having to observe a ritual no one else he knew followed” (p. 180). The conflict between his two cultures makes Gogol feel unhappy as a child, but he rediscovers his Indian roots after his father’s death and learns to come to terms with these contradictions.

As it can be seen, the process of acculturation for first-generation immigrants is slower than for the second generation, as the former show more resistance to adapt themselves to the new cultural elements. In *The Namesake*, this claim is possible by the emphasis on the differences between Ashima and Gogol as regards acculturation. However, after a long struggle, both characters come to accept their hybridity. At the beginning, Ashima navigates through her cultural contexts with a close link to her homeland and keeps her traditions in the new land. Eventually, she begins to acculturate with the American culture and learns how to straddle her roots and the dominant culture. As for Gogol, although as a child he resists following Bengali customs and desires to assimilate into the American culture in order to fit in with his peers, his father’s disclosure of the origin of his name makes Gogol appreciate his Indian roots more. After his father’s death, he has learned to embrace his cultural roots and comes to terms with his dual identities.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

There is no such thing as a pure or authentic identity; instead, there are multiple hybrid identities created by differentiation. Following Bhabha’s theory, in the process of cultural hybridity, something different, something new and unrecognizable emerges and a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation is created. In the condition of migration, a “contact zone” develops from the cross-cultural encounter between the emigrant’s country and the host country. In this “contact zone” the emigrants experience identity issues. As a second-generation Indo-American, Jhumpa Lahiri tells us about the ways in which first-generation immigrants, like her own parents, transmit their culture to their American-born children. *The Namesake* depicts the life experiences of a Bengali-American family as they confront the necessity of promoting their Bengali culture as well as of adapting to the main American customs.

In my analysis I have attempted to answer the questions I posed in the Introduction. First, I have explained that cultural identity is defined in the novel as a process, and not as a product. Ashima’s and Gogol’s identities are never complete, but

always in construction in relation to their social context. Besides, I have proved that their identities are not a unique or pure identity, but hybrid identities. Although accepting one's hybridity is not an easy process, both characters come to accept their in-betweenness and learn to live as Indian-Americans in the light of their links to the homeland and the society of settlement. In addition, I have considered home, social relationships and social spaces, language, and customs as the cultural elements that influence the characters' self-definition in *The Namesake*. Finally, I have compared the different ways in which Ashima and Gogol construct their identities. On the basis of Berry's theory, Ashima first adopts the acculturative strategy of "separation," holding on to the Bengali culture and avoiding contact and participation with the American culture. In contrast, Gogol develops the strategy of "assimilation," diminishing the significance of his Bengali roots and identifying primarily with the other culture. However, both characters change at the end of the story and adopt the acculturative strategy of "integration," as they both show interest in maintaining the original culture while learning and participating in the other culture.

*The Namesake* is a novel that celebrates cultural hybridity resulting from globalization and rethinks conventional immigrants' experience. As it has been proved in my analysis, cultural identity in the characters of Ashima and Gogol is constructed, as they are able to come to terms with their hybridity and accept that they can maintain the culture of their homeland while adopting the culture of the foreign land. However, the process of hybridization is not simple. On the contrary, it is only after a long struggle with themselves and the people who surround them that the first- and second-generation immigrants in the novel can accept their hybridity while maintaining their cultural roots.

Lahiri uses the themes of home, relation with people and social spaces, language and customs as metaphors for the effects the processes of dislocation and relocation have on immigrants that have to deal with a double belonging. Besides, the author's decision to tell the story mainly through flashbacks and characters' descriptions of their situations, and the lack of almost any sound details help the reader see more deeply into the characters' issues regarding their cultural identities. Finally, Lahiri's circular writing style implies a resolution in Ashima's and Gogol's struggles with their existentialist confusion, as they come to terms with who they really are.

Accepting their hybrid identities gives Ashima and Gogol a sense of freedom; they have reconciled with their multiple identities and this allows them to navigate through their cultural contexts freely. Instead of becoming a source of disillusion, the condition of immigrant in Ashima and Gogol is transformed into an opportunity to accept their multiple identities. They are able to retain distinct characteristics from their Bengali culture, but, at the same time, they form something new. As illustrated in the epigraph of this paper, no one can tell someone they cannot love two places because cultural identity is a construct and it can be multiple.

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