Cinematic Adaptation and the Problem of Citizenship: Mapping Women’s Diasporic Authorship in a Post-9/11 World

DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Scholarly attention to cinematic adaptation remains a neglected site of inquiry in contemporary cinema, literary, and cultural studies. The lack of attention may be due in part to the theoretical limitations of scholarship on adaptation and the moralistic systems of evaluation it relies upon, usually aimed at assessing a text’s faithfulness to source material. This dissertation intervenes in traditional understandings of cinematic adaptation by proposing that adaptation is a site of social transformation, and an important technology in the mapping of historical and social time. In this dissertation, I address the distinctive racial logics instigated by the events of September 11, 2001, and the role of the adaptive process in shaping their circulation in American culture. I argue that adaptation and post-9/11 racial logics share similar meaning-making processes. They both transplant ‘old’ narratives into new settings, signifying a new location in time and space through repetition and reiteration. This alignment allows racial logics to appropriate the adaptive process, and introduce particular racial narratives and ideologies into the textual meaning-making process. Not only do these narratives articulate regimes of space, time, gender, and race that reflect the effects of racialization after 9/11, but they also help to create models of citizenship complicit with a post-9/11 racial order.

Focusing on women writers and filmmakers from the South Asian and Iranian diasporas, I examine how post-9/11 racial logics align with cinematic adaptation through...
three sites of citizenship formation: the transformation of women’s political performance and self-making in the adaptation of Marjane Satrapi’s novel *Persepolis*; the creation of female cosmopolitan subjects in Gurinder Chadha’s retelling of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* in her film *Bride and Prejudice*; and the distinct engagement between gender and the nation in the representations of South Asian American citizenship in Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel *The Namesake* and its adaptation by filmmaker Mira Nair. The influence of post-9/11 racial logics on the adaptive process, in each of these texts, results in images of female citizenship that adhere to a post-9/11 racial order, prefacing modernness, cosmopolitanism, and a Westernized, liberal feminist point of view. While cinematic adaptation works as a technology of racialization, the female-female authorial pairings that I examine in this dissertation do on occasion subvert the patriarchal regimes that keep post-9/11 racial logics in place. As a result, Chadha, Satrapi, and Nair also use the adaptive process to speak back to the masculinist narratives of loss, heroics, and hostilities popularized in the wake of 9/11.
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Chapter 1

Introduction: The Racial Politics of Cinematic Adaptation in the Post-9/11 World

In February 2010, the Bollywood-produced film *My Name is Khan* premiered to a global audience, debuting over one weekend in Mumbai, Berlin, and Abu Dhabi. *My Name is Khan* is a notable film in a number of ways, including its star power, its geographic scope, and visual narrative.¹ The most significant feature of *My Name is Khan*, however, is its subject matter: the film addresses the mistreatment of Muslim Americans (specifically the South Asian Muslim community) in the U.S. following the events of 9/11. Shahrukh Khan portrays Rizwan Khan, an Indian Muslim man with Asperger’s Syndrome who immigrates to San Francisco. He falls in love with a Hindu woman, Mandira (portrayed by Bollywood star Kajol), and the two marry despite the objections of Rizwan’s family. The events of 9/11 reunite the divided family, but also instigate the brutal beating of Rizwan’s stepson. After his stepson is killed, Rizwan wanders around the U.S. in pursuit of a meeting with President Bush, in hopes to challenge the characterization of Muslim individuals and communities as a threat to American society. *My Name is Khan* catalogues the discrimination Muslims faced after 9/11, including general harassment, *hijab* pulling, surveillance and detainment by the government, and tension between Muslim Americans and other ethnic groups. It also

¹
retains the epic, melodramatic style of a Bollywood film, unabashed in its portrayal of the pride Rizwan feels for both his religion and his adopted country.

*My Name is Khan* is a refreshing response to the more muted Hollywood depictions of the post-9/11 racial landscape, where representations of racial, cultural, and religious difference in films like *Crash* and *Babel* often revolve around white characters’ experiences and point of view. Instead, the film attempts to place South Asian Muslim identity at the center of the American dream, and, more significantly, rewrites several national narratives in order to include Muslim communities in the mythology of the post-9/11 nation. For example, in the third and final act of the film, Rizwan and his family come to the aid of the fictional town of Wilhelmina, Georgia during a devastating hurricane. While the Wilhelmina storyline is a thinly veiled allusion to Hurricane Katrina, the representation of the town itself draws heavily from classic Hollywood representations of rural black life, complete with sharecropper cabins, a chorus of “We Shall Overcome,” and a set of supporting characters that appear to emerge straight from *Song of the South*. The contrived representation of Wilhelmina, one already entrenched in American cinematic history, suggests that *My Name is Khan* is more concerned with the role of the Muslim subject in American mythology than in its actual history.

I chose *My Name is Khan* to introduce my discussion of cinematic adaptation, citizenship, and racialization in the U.S. after 9/11 for a number of reasons. First, *My Name is Khan* is part of a growing conversation between Hollywood and Bollywood over the role of South Asian identity in the post-9/11 world. It attempts to insert South Asian subjects into the American imaginary through a series of social themes echoed in similar
films, including an emphasis on heteronormativity and cosmopolitanism. *My Name is Khan* also highlights the contradictory racial narratives – contingent upon both temporal exclusivity and historical longevity – that inform racial politics in the U.S. after 9/11. The film reflects the popular sentiment that 9/11 ‘changed everything,’ transforming citizenship and exposing new enemies of the state through what Nadine Naber identifies as a set of new “racial logics” (“Look…!” 279). The third act, however, unwittingly calls attention to the long history of racist narratives and racial tropes in American culture, and their role in disciplining citizens and normalizing categories of citizenship long before the events of 9/11. Finally, *My Name is Khan* borrows from a full panoply of cinematic and popular texts in order to claim a space for South Asian Muslim subjects in the American imaginary. In true Bollywood style, it echoes the plots of *Rain Man, Jerry Maguire*, and *Forrest Gump* in Rizwan’s journey to speak to the president; *The Terminal* and *America, America* also provide characterization, while images of the rural south cite *Song of the South* and *The Color Purple*. The informal adaptation of these texts in *My Name is Khan* alludes to the ways in which old stories, whether racist national narratives or the plot of *Forrest Gump*, help inform ‘new’ texts.

The convergence of these three themes in contemporary film – textual appropriation, racial politics in the U.S. after 9/11, and models of a cosmopolitan, transnational South Asian identity – is not a coincidence. I see the alignment between appropriation, racialized subjects, and 9/11 narratives as an effect of Johar’s, and other filmmakers’, attempt to map the post-9/11 racial landscape in the U.S. through the medium of film. My dissertation turns to women writers and filmmakers from the South
Asian and Iranian diasporas, examining how cinematic adaptation affects representations of citizenship in the wake of 9/11. I propose that the distinctive racial logics instigated by the events of 9/11 appropriate the adaptive process. These logics introduce particular racial narratives and ideologies into the textual meaning-making process, helping to craft models of citizenship in line with a post-9/11 racial order. I focus on three sites of citizenship formation: the transformation of women’s political performance and self-making in the adaptation of Marjane Satrapi’s novel Persepolis; the creation of female cosmopolitan subjects in Gurinder Chadha’s retelling of Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice in her film Bride and Prejudice; and the distinct engagement between gender and the nation in the representations of South Asian American citizenship in Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel The Namesake and its adaptation by filmmaker Mira Nair.

Scholarly attention to cinematic adaptation is a neglected site of inquiry in contemporary cinema and literary studies. This dissertation attempts to fill some of that gap, and contribute to the growing field of adaptation studies. Writing about cinematic adaptation in relationship to representations of citizenship, race, and nation, I envision the adaptive process as more than just a textual exchange or a swapping of codes. Instead, I see adaptation as a site of social transformation, and an important technology in the mapping of historical and social time. I propose that adaptation is a dynamic force in articulating post-9/11 racial logics, creating representations that condense the competing terms of racialization into consumable spectacles of race and gender. Like the racist characters straight from classic Hollywood cinema embedded in My Name is Khan, both adaptation and racialization transplant ‘old’ narratives into new settings, signifying a new
situation in time and space through repetition and reiteration. It is the similarity between the two processes that enable racial logics to appropriate the adaptive process, disciplining racialized subjects through narratives about multiculturalism, the threat of the alien terrorist, liberalism and liberal feminism, and civilizational differences.

In the three cinematic adaptations I examine in my dissertation, representations of South Asian and Muslim femininity are at the center of these racial narratives. The particular images of womanhood in the films, as well as the adaptations themselves, reflect a larger cultural trend around images of South Asian and Muslim femininity in American popular and political culture. Ideologies of gender, race, and place embedded in popular representations of South Asian and Iranian women tell stories about cultural and civilizational differences that distribute and normalize effects of power specific to post-9/11 racial logics. These narratives, in the adapted films, produce idealized models of female citizenship that preface modernness, cosmopolitanism, and a Westernized, liberal feminist point of view. As a result, representations of female citizenship and subject-making in *Bride and Prejudice*, *Persepolis* and *The Namesake* speak through South Asian and Muslim femininity about a Westernized, feminist, cosmopolitan, and non-threatening citizen-subject compliant with a post-9/11 racial order.

Each film engages the adaptive process in order to formulate an idealized citizen-subject. In *Bride and Prejudice*, this model of citizenship is manifested through Bollywood star Aishwarya Rai. Rai portrays Lalita, a modern-day Elizabeth Bennett in Chadha’s adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*. Her film is more than just a contemporary retelling of Austen’s novel: it is a film that combines conventions of both Bollywood and
Hollywood, including several stand-alone musical numbers. She also transposes Regency England onto contemporary India, replacing the novel’s emphasis on class and social conflict with transnationally-themed storylines. The combination of Rai, Bollywood-style dance routines, and the film’s overall cosmopolitan feel feeds into the type of exotic, modern models of womanhood expected in representations of South Asian femininity. The film, however, manages to subvert this gaze in its exaggerated re-presentation of those gendered Orientalist stereotypes and assumptions.

*Persepolis*, on the other hand, centers around political performances and modes of subject making within the nation. The animated film, along with the series of graphic novels that served as source texts, describes Satrapi’s childhood in Iran during the Iranian revolution and subsequent rise of the repressive regime that followed. Challenging Western assumptions about Muslim femininity, the novel *Persepolis* forwards Iranian women’s bodies as dynamic sites of self-making and citizenship. The film, however, revises the political composition of these performances for its post-9/11 audience, forgoing the novel’s characterization for representations of a Westernized and humanist vision of political subjecthood. Nair’s *The Namesake*, while taking on familiar topics and subjects, attempts to subvert the models of citizenship institutionalized by post-9/11 racial logics. Both produced in the years after 9/11, the novel and the film speak back to a particular effect of these logics, namely the erasure of South Asian American history and identity by post-9/11 narratives of multiculturalism and national belonging. They address this erasure by turning to the past, chronicling the immigration of a newly married Bengali couple in the late 1960s to the U.S. and tracing the evolution of their relationship,
including the growth and maturation of their son. Nair, however, departs from the novel’s emphasis on assimilative citizenship. She instead turns her attention to the role of transnational formations in shaping the identity and agency of the film’s characters. As a result, she transforms the modes of citizenship demanded by post-9/11 racial logics into a type of transnational, flexible citizenship that displaces the primacy of the nation in determining categories of belonging for South Asian Americans.

As these descriptions suggest, the interplay between citizenship, adaptation, and racial identity is both complex and powerful. The rest of this chapter describes in detail how two distinctly different processes – post-9/11 racialization and cinematic adaptation – come together in order to produce these particular representations of citizenship. It begins with a brief discussion of citizenship. In my dissertation, citizenship serves as a site of regulation and self-making influenced by a number of intersecting social discourses, including political ideologies, race, gender, religion, and globalization. I then address the ways in which the events of 9/11 instigated a crisis over categories of citizenship in the U.S., making it a ‘problem’ for certain ethnic and religious minorities. I argue that this crisis takes place through competing discourses of spatiotemporal exception (the perception of 9/11 as an unprecedented event that ‘changed everything’) and racial otherness that coalesce around three narratives: the threat of the alien terrorist, the irreconcilable differences between civilizations, and the promise of the multicultural nation. I then turn my attention to the ways in which representations of South Asian and Muslim femininity in Western popular and political culture perpetuate and normalize these narratives – especially those included in cinematic adaptations.
In the wake of the images, narratives, and rhetoric instigated by these narratives, adaptation itself plays a unique part in the proliferation of racial logics. The second half of this chapter examines cinematic adaptation as a social and textual phenomenon primed to synthesize the competing discourses fueling racialization after 9/11. I begin by examining traditional understandings of cinematic adaptation, as well as scholarly interventions in theorizing formal changes, processes of textual transfer, and discursive relationships between texts. Traditional understandings of adaptation have stressed importance of fidelity and loyalty to a source in adapting it. Many of these intervening scholars argue that each text in an adaptive relationship reflects, and articulates, the social and historical context in which it was produced. As a result, they see an adaptation as a unique discursive event, independent from its source text and unmoored from regimes of fidelity or textual faithfulness. Some scholars also combat myths of fidelity by highlighting the intertextual relationship between and among texts. They forward the idea of palimpsestic textuality, in which various iterations of a text or narrative are overlaid on top of one another, but never fully erased. Joining the two in conversation, I argue the adaptation of ‘new’ context and ‘old’ meanings mimics the meaning-making processes present in post-9/11 racialization. I then conclude the chapter with a brief description of the ways in which these processes align in each of the adaptations.

Drawing across several fields – including adaptation studies, American studies, 9/11 studies, citizenship studies, cinema studies, and diasporic cultural studies – my research is both transnational and interdisciplinary in its scope. I envision this dissertation as a body of research that falls under what Chandra Talpade Mohanty calls a “contested
citizenship project” (15). Such a project, she argues, should not only interrogate the normative construction of citizenship as male, heterosexual, and white, but also examine the role of empire – particularly American empire – in the construction and maintenance of the global imbalances of power that perpetuate these particular representations of citizenship. Mohanty charges the field of Women’s Studies with undertaking anti-racist, anti-imperialist, and anti-misogynist work in order to effectively make “feminist analysis dangerous to empire” (18). While my dissertation necessarily lends its attention to formations of racial identity and citizenship in cinematic adaptation, it is a project grounded in feminist thought, and draws heavily from feminist scholars of citizenship, as well as the South Asian diaspora and Iran. My hope is that my dissertation, by examining post-9/11 citizenship through the lens of cinematic adaptation, brings together seemingly disparate textual, cultural, geographic, and political sites under the rubric of feminist analysis in an effort to heed Mohanty’s call to the field.

**Defining Citizenship, Contesting Citizenship**

As part of a “contested citizenship project,” the formation of citizen-subjects is a significant site of analysis in my dissertation. The following section briefly outlines scholarly definitions of citizenship important to this analysis, including the ways in which modes of national belonging are shaped by various regimes of time, space, and place. Citizenship refers to a combination of rights and obligations individuals acquired through membership to a state. Traditional concepts of citizenship have emphasized its role as a legal agreement between a particular nation-state and its polity. Toby Miller, however,
argues that citizenship includes forms of belonging that extend beyond the juridical. He suggests that there are several interconnected zones of citizenship, including economic, political, cultural, and communicative, that help compose membership in a state (“Introducing…” 1). These zones constitute a “contested and contingent field” through which individuals make claims on the state in the form of rights (Isin and Wood 5). Aihwa Ong emphasizes that citizenship is foremost a regulatory mechanism, linking individuals to various economic, political, familial, and cultural regimes sanctioned and managed by the state. She draws from Michel Foucault to argue that the organized practices that constitute citizenship – including the ways that individuals belong to the nation – are a key feature of governmentality, a type of disciplinary power in which the state and associated civic and social institutions seeks to manage the conduct of individuals through the administration and ordering of knowledge (Flexible Citizenship 6). Knowledge about citizens as both individuals and as populations transmits a relation of power that governs the ways in which citizens may act on their own behalf. I argue that representations of South Asian and Muslim women convey particular forms of knowledge about female citizen-subjects. This knowledge seeks to manage the conduct of individuals by forwarding an idealized model of female citizenship that emphasizes individuality, autonomy, and freedom.

Individuality, autonomy, and freedom are all characteristics of the political ideology of liberalism. The legacies of liberalism, including neoliberalism, are key knowledge regimes in the modes of governmentality that in my dissertation. Liberalism, defined by an emphasis on human freedom, the rights of the individual over his or her
body, and a non-interventionist state, has shaped understandings of citizenship in
Western nation-states since the seventeenth century (Marston and Miller 94). Ong argues
that neoliberalism, although often understood as set of economic policies, is a
contemporary regime of knowledge that draws from established forms of liberalism in
order to encourage citizens to optimize their own economic and social potential as
individuals and consumers, while discouraging them from making claims on the state
(Neoliberalism as Exception 3). Neoliberal states seek to manage the conduct of citizens
through an emphasis on individualism, self-management and discipline, and privatization
(Isin and Wood 146). Both liberalism and neoliberalism also inform the production of the
feminist ethos through which the films’ articulate claims on citizenship, creating female
subjects through the familiar tenets of sexual autonomy and freedom of choice. In
addition, neoliberalism serves as the prevailing mode of governmentality in the U.S., and
thus helped dictate modes of conduct through which citizenship was made problematic,
and reconstituted, following 9/11. The series of adaptations I examine were, in some form
or another, staged, produced, and received in this geopolitical context. I argue that, within
the alignment of each adaptation with post-9/11 racial logics, it is the reformatting of
representations of political performance through regimes of liberalism and neoliberalism
that ultimately creates modes of citizenship compatible with a post-9/11 world order.

Theorizing Citizenship in Space and Time

Citizenship is a formation not just defined by ideology, but also contingent upon
specific registers of space and time. Individuals experience and arrange the social world,
according to David Harvey, through the conception, coding, and reproduction of space
and time. The coding of time and space also bind citizens to the nation both spatially and temporally (247). Modern concepts of citizenship primarily rely on the territorial components of the nation-state: citizens are born in, reside in, and belong to various states (Moallem 54). Socially shared understandings of time can serve as the basis for group identity formation, as well as help shape the collective experience of a particular event (such as 9/11). The legal and socioeconomic terms of citizenship also change over time (Marston and Mitchell 101). In addition, the growth of certain socio-spatial arrangements, including the expansion of urban space, have influenced the ways in which groups organize and make claims on the state (Marston and Mitchell 110).

The spatiotemporal contours of citizenship work to ideologically link citizens to the state. The nation itself is drawn through a number of gendered territorial and temporal metaphors, including the division of public and private space, its designation as a ‘homeland’ or ‘mother country,’ and the progress of history. These metaphors naturalize both the nation itself (as ‘mother’) and the gendered division of space within the nation, while at the same time justifying its need for protection (Moallem 73). The territorial terms of citizenship tie citizens to the state through terms of spatial exclusion and inclusion, separating, isolating, or abjecting those who do not belong. Space and time, and their bearing on citizenship, are key factors in my analysis of cinematic adaptation as a social process. Because modes of national belonging are always tied to a specific spatiotemporal context, the textual manipulation of space and time serves as one of the ways in which Chadha, Satrapi, and Nair shift the terms of citizenship, often to reflect post-9/11 racial logics, in the texts they take up.
The social and cultural regimes of a particular spatiotemporal context also shape the formation of citizen-subjects. Traditionally, theories of citizenship forwarded an understanding of citizenship that is both universal and homogeneous. Theoretical citizens were presumed equal before law, with equal access to political and economic enfranchisement (Rosaldo 259). Unsatisfied with theories of citizenship that forward the image of the citizen-subject as an abstract social, political, or laboring body, feminist scholars like Ong, Lisa Lowe, Sunaina Maira, and Minoo Moallem emphasize the importance of social and cultural regimes in this process of subjectification, as key sites through which individuals are defined and define themselves as citizens. Ong argues that modes of national belonging are mediated through a variety of localized “disciplining structures,” including familial, religious, work, and community relationships (Flexible Citizenship 14). The regimes established by these structures – Ong refers to them as “cultural logics” – not only seek to manage the conduct of citizens in their everyday lives, but help define citizenship as “lived experience” by shaping citizens’ senses of self, their actions, and their ambitions (Ong, Flexible Citizenship 4; Sui 9). Citizen-subjects are produced through cultural logics engaged in defining and managing social locations such as gender, sexuality, race, and religion.

The ways in which gender shapes categories of citizenship, for example, is an increasingly important site of feminist sociological and anthropological analysis; Maira, Kamala Visweeswaran, and Ong examine how gender regimes affect modes of belonging for various populations, while Lauren Berlant, Moallem, and Lowe analyze how gendered subject positions like mother, wife, and citizen-soldier, for example, often serve
as avenues for political participation and mobilization. Similarly, citizenship is normatively sexualized. Jasbir Puar and M. Jacqui Alexander argue that modes of national belonging often demand heteronormativity, prohibiting queer bodies from occupying the subject position of citizen, despite legal or economic ties to the nation-state. Moallem suggests that religion also serves as a nationalized site of citizen-making. Citing the rise of Islamic fundamentalist policies in post-revolutionary Iran, she argues that the state sacralized citizenship in an effort to create a form of Islamic nationalism (15). In Chapter 3, I explore this relationship further, arguing that Iranian women must mediate national belonging through a type of idealized Muslim femininity mandated by the state.

*Race, Place, and Citizenship*

One of the social regimes key to crafting categories of citizenship is that of race. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, in their influential work on racial formation theory, suggest that race emerges from historically specific processes that are both dynamic and fluid (10). Racial categories intersect with gender and sexual regimes sanctioned by the state in order to create localized – in both space and time – modes of exclusion and inclusion within the nation, as well as hierarchies of race and racialized groups. Ong and Visweswaran stress the intersection of class and race in determining racial meanings. Ong argues that the racialization of ethnic groups entering the nation operates along class lines; these groups are inserted into the nation’s racial hierarchy based on their potential as human capital and consumers (*Flexible Citizenship* 12). Examining South Asian immigration to the U.S., Visweswaran emphasized the colonial class structures in shaping
migration patterns and the strategies through which South Asians immigrants have accessed and organized capital (22).

The formation of racialized citizenship through these intersections of class, gender, and sexuality in post-9/11 U.S., and to a lesser extent post-9/11 Europe, serve as the general geographic and temporal foci of my investigation into the relationship between race and citizenship. My emphasis on Western modes of racialization is not exclusive of non-Western cultural logics that may inform both source texts and their adaptations; for example, *Bride and Prejudice* draws heavily from the narrative and visual cues of Hindi cinema, while Persian art and the social norms of post-revolutionary Iranian inform representations of citizen-subjects in *Persepolis*. Because, however, the ‘problem’ of citizenship is localized in space and time to a contemporary American context – albeit with significant global repercussions – the particular history of racialization in this nation-state remains central to my analysis.

*Globalization, Transnationalism, and Cultural Citizenship*

Equally important to my analysis is the impact of globalization in shifting the contours of citizenship over the past 65 years, most notably its role in displacing the primacy of the nation in creating and governing modes of citizenship. Globalization is an economic phenomenon marked by flexible modes of production and accumulation, technological advancement, and flows of goods across discrete national boundaries. Because globalization produces uneven effects, the accompanying flows of capital and culture are often conditional, heterogeneous, and continually changing. The term transnational is a descriptive tool that characterizes these flows, signaling the
interconnected and elastic movement of bodies, ideas, and capital through the
organization of space and time particular to globalization and late capitalism (Braziel and
Mannur 8). The increasing impact of transnational flows on the organization of
commerce, labor, and technology has displaced singular claim of the state on the conduct
of its citizens; globalization has produced multiple regimes of governmentality that
intersect and compete in shaping the knowledges and practices that govern individuals
(Maira, “The Intimate and the Imperial” 64). Miller suggests that competing influences
on globalized populations “complicate the executive government’s expectation that “its”
people will be faithful to the state” (Cultural Citizenship 35).

The effects of globalization dismantle normative categories of citizenship kept in
place by the state, clearing the way for groups marginalized in those categories to resist
regimes of governmentality through a practice Miller calls cultural citizenship. Scholars
have taken up cultural citizenship though two broadly conceived frameworks: as a
counter-hegemonic movement against normative categories of national citizenship, or as
a mode of subject making that seeks to subvert the state through transnational flows of
culture and capital. For scholars working in the field of Latino cultural studies such as
Rosaldo, Flores, and Benmayor, cultural citizenship is a mode of national belonging that
emphasizes cultural identity as an organizing principle in the acquisition of group rights
(Maira, “The Intimate and the Imperial” 67). Premised upon the expression and assertion
of cultural difference, it seeks to affirm cultural differences, including the language,
practices, and histories of ethnic minorities, as beneficial to greater social good while at
the same time enfranchising marginalized groups through cultural expression.
Ong envisions cultural citizenship as a set of cultural practices and identities instigated by the changing needs of individuals and the state in the era of globalization. She argues that individuals and nation-states “respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions” through flexible forms of subject-making she later names flexible citizenship (*Flexible Citizenship* 6). Unlike Miller and Rosaldo, who see cultural citizenship as a counter-hegemonic move induced by globalization, Ong reiterates the power of the state – as well as localized regimes of the family, religion, and community – in shaping the actions and agency of citizen-subjects. She argues that cultural, or flexible, citizenship is the set of subjectivities, strategies, and configurations that enable individuals to negotiate between localized regimes and transnational movement of capital.

While flexible citizens never fully evade state control, they do use transnational connections and transitory flows of human capital to subvert some of its effects. For migratory subjects, these practices of flexible citizenship produce multiple modes of belonging. Lok Siu, for example, draws from both Ong and Rosado to argue that strategies of flexible, and cultural, citizenship allow diapsoran subjects to operate as political and cultural agents in multiple settings. In her study of members of the Chinese diasporic community in Panama, she argues that belonging takes on the shape of a “triangulation” between diasporic community, homeland, and nation of residence (8). Gita Rajan and Shailja Sharma, on the other hand, have noted growing forms of cosmopolitan citizenship, especially among South Asian immigrants to the U.S. and England. Cosmopolitanism, for Rajan and Sharma, is not an apolitical celebration of
mobility between cultures and geography (as Ong cautions against), but instead describes a mode of citizenship created through the distinct patterns of transnational migration forged by South Asian immigration. They argue that the cosmopolitan citizen “occupies a range of fluid subject positions” unmoored from a particular nation-state (‘Introduction’ 2). Both Siu and Rajan and Sharma suggest that the movement back and forth between states, identities, and cultures ultimately creates alternative forms of community and belonging that circumvent some normalizing regimes of the nation-state.

These two approaches to cultural citizenship are equally important in my analysis of cinematic adaptation as a vehicle for addressing the ‘problem’ of citizenship after 9/11. Undoubtedly, the aim of the films is necessarily counter-hegemonic, using representations of specific cultural practices and identities in order to challenge Western assumptions about Iranian, Indian, and Muslim identity, non-Western modernity, and Iranian and South Asian femininity. In the texts themselves, however, representations of citizenship highlight the regimes of gender, race, and nation through which citizen-subjects are made, and make themselves. In Persepolis, for example, a state-mandated model of Islamic womanhood serves as a template for Marjane and her friends’ conception and performances of female selfhood, while in Bride and Prejudice, normative expectations around modern Indian femininity frame Lalita and her sisters’ attempts at romance, independence, and self-expression. The adaptations also highlight the ways in which characters practice a type of flexible citizenship by juggling localized regimes of gender, family, and religion with opportunities presented by transnational flows: in Nair’s version of The Namesake, for example, the performance of idealized
Indian femininity both enables and disarms its female characters. The adaptive process itself plays a role in joining these two frameworks. It serves as a vehicle for cultural citizenship by expanding the impact of source texts like Persepolis or The Namesake and disseminating representations of cultural pluralism to large, mainstream audiences or, in the case of Bride and Prejudice, ‘updating’ a classic text to reflect a globalized world. At the same time, each adaptation revises its source text in order to underscore the importance of localized cultural logics in shaping gendered performances of citizenship both within and across nation-states.

**Spatiotemporal Exception, Racial Narratives, and the Crisis of Citizenship After 9/11**

The contours of citizenship are never fixed, but instead vacillate according to the economic, political, and social demands of the nation, as well as the transnational flows that have come to supplement, and occasionally subvert, modes of belonging. Lowe notes that national crises can drastically and quickly change these demands. She argues that events like tragedy, war, and disaster disrupt the “stability and coherence” of a nation’s collective identity and call into question the presumably stable categories of race, gender, class, and sexuality and their role in forming citizen-subjects (3). In this section I argue that the events of September 11, 2001 instigated one such crisis over categories of citizenship. Not only did the events of this day precipitate changes in who qualified as an ‘American,’ but changes in the nation’s social, legal, and institutional structures that followed in the aftermath of 9/11, including the revision of immigration
policy, the rise of the ‘war on terror,’ and the military invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, also affected modes of belonging to and exclusion from the nation. Citizenship became a ‘problem’ for groups marginalized, excluded, and scrutinized as a result of these shifts.

Two competing narratives frame this crisis over citizenship. On the one hand, the temporal and spatial idioms most commonly used to describe 9/11 endow the events of that day, and the ensuing new, post-9/11 era, with a sense of unprecedentedness and historic uniqueness. Idioms such as ‘Ground Zero’ and the ‘homeland’ set the stage for an equally unprecedented response by the state, especially in the modes of governmentality deployed in the name of defining – and denying – citizenship. The cultural logics, however, that frame these categories of inclusion and exclusion rely upon racial tropes embedded in the national imaginary long before the events of 9/11. The thoroughly rehearsed narratives of civilizational rhetoric, terrorist monstrosity, and the multicultural society ultimately helped frame membership to the nation after this watershed moment in American history.

The unprecedented scope and nature of the attacks on 9/11 quickly led to the sentiment that the events of that day “changed everything.” It marked, for many, a newly realized vulnerability to attack, introduced a new threat to the nation in the form of the alien terrorist, and ultimately ushered in a new world order in which “rogue states and terrorists” became clearly defined enemies of the U.S. (Bush). These narratives often deploy metaphors of space and time in order to describe 9/11 as a sui generis moment in American and world history. Mary Dudziak, for example, suggests that 9/11 also serves as a site of periodization, creating a temporally distinct ‘before’ and after’ through which
historical narratives form (2). The ‘new’ post-9/11 era was one in which distinct representations of ‘evil’ and accompanying images of terrorists became central to cultural meaning-making and regimes of governmentality. Amy Kaplan also notes that “a narrative of historical exceptionalism” often serves as a discursive framework for public commentary about 9/11 (56). Through this discourse of exception, 9/11 transcends periodization altogether, an occurrence so profound and unique that it refuses comparison to time and history. This temporal metaphor of ‘exception’ helped create space for the state’s unprecedented response to the crisis, serving as part of its public justification for the detention, imprisonment, and deportation of immigrant men, illegal wiretapping, and overt profiling of ethnic and religious minorities that took place in the aftermath 9/11.

The spatial idioms associated with 9/11 mirror temporal claims of newness and exception. The designation of the space where the twin towers fell as “Ground Zero,” for example, has the effect of spatializing this new, post-9/11 era. ‘Ground Zero’ is a territorial symbol of a break from the past, literally post-9/11 writing time – or lack thereof – into space. Another spatial metaphor popularized after 9/11 is that of the ‘homeland,’ most notably in the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. Kaplan argues that the notion of the ‘homeland’ also evokes a sense of “radical insecurity” (59). Its space infers both collectivity and sovereignty as a geographically bound site that organizes identity around the idea of ‘home.’ While its popularization is specific to the post-9/11 era, Kaplan notes that the ‘homeland’ links the nation to the image of an idealized past, before globalization challenged the authority and security of national borders. The homeland is an interiorized space that must be protected – at all
costs – from intruders, enemies, and foreign threats. Circulating as the idiom for national space in the post-9/11 era, its use in relationship to post-9/11 narratives of temporal exception endows it with a sense of radical and temporal separate-ness. As these narratives of exceptionalism and historical novelty played out on the space of the homeland, it signaled both a return to a racially purified past and a break from that past, a division united by threat of the racialized other.

*Articulating National Belonging in Space and Time after 9/11*

The spatiotemporal idioms used to describe 9/11, such as the ‘homeland,’ create a nation clearly demarcated in both space and time. The redrawing of the nation instigated a re-envisioning of citizenship. It has produced equally divisive modes of national belonging in the form of an ‘us vs. them’ mentality, one that reflects the shoring up of spatial and temporal boundaries through the grouping of people, other nations, and regions into clearly defined categories of good and evil. The division of nations into clearly marked categories of good and evil is not unlike the moral demarcation of space that took place in the U.S. during the Cold War; then-President George W. Bush’s famous axiom “you’re either with us or against us” echoes this Cold War-era rhetoric (“You Are Either…”). In dividing the globe into sides, the President’s statement maps out the globe into clear spaces of good and evil, ‘free’ or ‘terrorist,’ and ultimately ‘ours’ or ‘theirs.’ The naming of Iran, North Korea, and Iraq as an “axis of evil” (and later, the creation of a “coalition of the willing”) during Bush’s 2002 State of the Union echoes this impulse to classify space as either ‘good’ or ‘evil,’ a spatiotemporal categorization I return to in Chapter 3. Within the nation, the clearly defined line between ‘us’ and
‘them’ requires regimes of governmentality that detect and expose threats to the nation. Inclusion within the nation, according to Puar, rests on displays of “aggressive heterosexual patriotism” (117). The threat of ‘them,’ however, was consolidated onto the terrorist figure, a presumably male, anti-American, anti-modern, Middle Eastern, and Muslim fundamentalist other (Volpp 147). Compounded by images of a terrorist lurker, or a hidden terrorist sleeper cell, the terrorist figure not only gave the elusive, amorphous, and evil ‘them’ a clearly defined racial, gender, and cultural identity, but also completed the mapping of ‘us’ and ‘them’ onto the national imaginary.

**Recycling Racial Narratives in a State of Exception**

The spatial and temporal terms that framed 9/11 drew divisive lines between citizens and enemies of the nation in unprecedented ways. The cultural logics that link categories of inclusion and exclusion to certain bodies, racial and ethnic groups, and gender identities, however, are not unique to the post-9/11 era. They recycle modes of racialization used in the service of producing citizen-subjects and modes of inclusion in the U.S. over the last century. Naber argues that these post 9/11-racial logics fall under two general categories: civilizational thinking, which presumes a distant, racialized ‘other’ based on assumed religious, cultural, geographic differences; and national narratives of racism, which renders ethnic minority groups within the nation as inferior, threatening, and in need of control (“Look...!” 279). Gender and sexual regimes are central to the ways in which racial logics are taken up and enforced. Post-9/11 narratives about racial otherness rely upon, for example, the queering of the male terrorist body, as
well as the trope of the victimized Muslim woman, juxtaposed against an autonomous and free Western femininity. In this section, I address three of these gendered narratives: civilizational rhetoric, terrorist monstrosity, and the multicultural society. While all three rely upon rehearsed racial tropes, they are harnessed in this ‘new era’ in order to create gendered categories of inclusion and exclusion for the post-9/11 nation.

Civilizational Difference and Racial Otherness

In the first of these racial logics, civilizational differences serve as the root of conflict between people in the East and West. It is a belief fostered by political scientist Samuel P. Huntington’s thesis that culture and religion – in his view, civilizational issues – would replace ideological or national differences as the primary sites of conflict in the post-Cold War world. He divided the globe into civilizational groupings, among them the Western world (U.S. and Europe, and commonwealths like Australia), and the Muslim world (located only in the Middle East) – the latter characterized by its violent border wars. Insisting that differences between these two civilizations render their ethical, political, and cultural systems fundamentally incompatible, Huntington’s thesis is a key component of the ideological framework that has bolstered the post-9/11 ‘us vs. them’ mentality in the U.S. After 9/11, rhetoric about civilizational differences fixated on religion, positioning a Judeo Christian West as “inimically hostile” to the Muslim world (Rajan and Sharma, “Introduction” 26). This particular variant of civilizational rhetoric signaled a turn to religious identity as a means of both interpellation and self-identification in the post 9/11 U.S. It endows Islam and Islamic culture with an “exaggerated significance in popular and public culture,” and at the same time marks
Muslim individuals as possible threats to the state (Rajan and Sharma, “Introduction” 26). Maira, drawing from Edward Said’s foundational work on Orientalism, argues that post-9/11 civilizational thinking has also justified a type of “imperial governmentality,” in which knowledge regimes frame the Muslim world as barbaric, anti-modern, and patriarchal, and thus in need of civilizing (“Belly Dancing” 327). In addition to positioning Muslim cultures as backward and violently sexist, the rise of civilizational thinking since the 1970s has homogenized Islamic cultures and provoked the “conflation of the categories of “Arab” and “Muslim”’ in Western public discourse (Naber, “Introduction” 4). Both the civilizational division between East and West and the Orientalist racialization of Muslim subjects are produced through a gendered logic: the irrational, emotional, feminized East awaits conquest and civilizing by a masculinized, rational West (Volpp 154). The otherness of Muslim civilization is ultimately transferred onto Muslim women, whose assumed passivity and victimization comes to serves as the “symbolic…marker dividing Western values of women’s freedom (to be uncovered) from Islamic constraints” (Bhattacharyya 49). As I suggest later in the introduction, representations of Muslim women in American political and popular culture have increasingly acted as a site for the circulation of the civilizational discourses that inform post-9/11 racial logics.

The gendered knowledge regimes that inform civilizational thinking not only help construct the Muslim ‘other,’ but also manage various categories of identity and belonging for American subjects. Since the events of 9/11, civilizational rhetoric has played a large role in framing citizenship in the U.S., forwarding images of Western
society and its citizens as free, democratic, feminist, and modern against a backdrop of backwards, repressive/repressed, and fundamentalist figures of a Muslim world. David Palumbo-Liu stresses, however, that civilizational rhetoric often serves national political interests and policies. He argues that civilizational tropes that circulated in the U.S. after 9/11, for example, made claims on behalf of the national political goals, a measure he suggests that has effectively made civilizational concerns synonymous with an American political agenda (134-135). Nation and civilization are conflated in this post-9/11 civilizational rhetoric, much like Cold War rhetoric, through idioms of belonging, including a shared way of life, and shared cultural values like freedom, democracy, and equality. The attacks on 9/11 became assaults on these shared values and practices, and the war on terror, and subsequent invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, became nothing less than a battle against evil to defend a civilization’s way of life – as opposed to a politically-driven national agenda.

National Narratives of Racism and the Threat of the Alien Terrorist

National narratives of racism, unlike the sweeping claims of civilizational rhetoric, stage inclusion and exclusion from within the nation itself. Like civilizational rhetoric, they generated modes of belonging long before 9/11, linking citizenship to various sites of racialization, including immigration, multiculturalism, and terrorism. For example, Lowe argues that the shifts in immigration laws help regulate who belongs to the nation. Specifically addressing the series of legal acts (spanning from the mid nineteenth century until 1965) that barred Asian immigrants from becoming citizens in the U.S., she argues that citizenship served as a technology of racialization that culturally, economically, and
legally disenfranchised Asian Americans and solidified their status as racial others, even as they participated in nation-building projects. Ali Behdad argues that a deep ambivalence toward immigration underscores the regulation of immigrant subjects. While America is a nation of immigrants, he argues that the racial marking of immigrant-subjects as non-members enables the state to create categories of belonging in accordance with its own political, social, and economic needs. ‘Alien’ is a necessary idiom in the regulation of citizenship, describing one who remains outside of the nation’s political and socioeconomic structures and at the same time delineates the boundaries of the nation-state through the racialized figure of the foreigner (156, 175). After 9/11, the association of terrorism with the Middle East exacerbated the status of the immigrant body as alien. Immigrants, especially Middle Eastern immigrants, were labeled as potential threats to the nation in a “new national imaging as to what bodies are assumed to stand in for “the citizen” and its new opposite, “the terrorist”” (Volpp 159). The looming threat of the ‘alien terrorist’ also led to the conflation of Middle Eastern, Arab, South Asian, and Muslim identities into a large and amorphous racial grouping. Naber attributes this new formation to the “racialization of Islam,” noting that the legacy of Islamophobia in the histories of European and American empire helped fuel post-9/11 anti-Muslim policy and attitudes (“Introduction” 2). Shaped by anti-Muslim sentiment, the trope of the immigrant ‘alien’ still functions as a technology of exclusion, unifying the various racial, ethnic, and religious identities it conflates under the sign of the terrorist.

The alien became a potent racial symbol in the aftermath of 9/11. It has enabled unprecedented levels of racial profiling and surveillance of ethnic and religious groups in
the U.S. (Volpp 150). It has also rendered certain bodies suspect at the nation’s borders and in its public spaces, including airports and airplanes, immigration services, border checkpoints, and in workplaces. Racialization after 9/11 also criminalized the bodies of potential alien terrorists, especially men. Arab, Muslim, and South Asian men faced detention, deportation, and violence at the hands of the state. Although many of those detained, profiled, and assaulted were legal citizens of the United States, the exclusionary practices revoked their citizenship “as a matter of identity” insofar as they no longer stood as representatives of the nation (Volpp 156). 9/11 also transformed anti-immigrant rhetoric, shifting its focus on immigration and border to immigrant groups already in the country. Immigrants and ethnic minorities deemed closest in relationship to the racial, geographic or religious identities of known terrorists became threats to national security. Naber argues that working class immigrants in particular were held in the American national imaginary as direct links – perceived closer to their geographic origins – to terrorist organizations (“Look…!” 281). Men and women presumed to be terrorists because of their racial identity or religious affiliation faced violence, assault, and occasionally death, while the homes and places of worship of Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh Americans became targets for hate crimes and property damage (Young 14, Volpp 148).

Despite incidents of racial prejudice and violence before 9/11, the overtly racist tone and open hostility sanctioned by the attacks makes the effects of post-9/11 racial logics unique. The process of racialization is nonetheless mediated through the well-established trope of the alien. Coupled with the threat of terrorism and positioned in opposition to the citizen-patriot, it has proved to be a key idiom in national narratives of race after 9/11.
The specter of the terrorist, however, is not completely formed around the figure of the immigrant alien. Jasbir Puar and Rai argue that the terrorist is also constructed through discourses of racial and sexual monstrosity that date back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Their analysis is heavily indebted to Foucault’s argument that power operates through these monstrous figures in order to regulate the conduct of the populations in which they appeared. Monster figures in the dawn of modernity often represented sexual deviancy; racialized figures like the Hottentot Venus, the gypsy, or human/animal hybrids all marked, according to Puar and Rai, as a departure from normative sexual practices, spaces, desires, and acts. The current figure of the ‘terrorist monster’ functions much in the same way: the terrorist is constructed as a sexual deviant, as either a failed heterosexual or with an irreparably damaged psyche as a sociopath degenerate (often hypothesized as the result of poor mothering). Both figures, according to Puar and Rai, draw discourses of sexual and psychic monstrosity through civilizational rhetoric that identify Islam or localized cultural practices as the root of deviancy (119). Furthermore, the terrorist-monster bears with it a disciplinary force, regulating performances of national belonging and normalizing the “aggressive heteronormative patriotism” embedded in the post-9/11 performance of citizenship (117).

Puar and Rai, drawing again from Foucault, note that the spectacle of the monster always emerges hand-in-hand with a body in need of correction, linked together through the same discourses of sexual and racial deviancy. They argue that the ways in which power works in relationship to the body distinguishes these two figures, albeit tenuously: on the corrected individual to produce citizen-subject and through the monster, which
serves as a site of regulation. Popular American culture has dramatized this tension between the ‘correctable citizen’ and ‘monster’ in films like *Rendition* and television shows like *West Wing* and *24*. In these representations, the intentions of a racialized figure (usually male) are called into question, and he (or his family) must perform a feature of normative post-9/11 citizenship – a display of patriotism, condemnation of terrorism, or an embrace of the “American way” – in order to prove that he is not a terrorist monster, but instead a citizen (130). In the group of cinematic adaptations I examine, the tension between correctable citizen and terrorist emerges in representations of the immigrant body. *Bride and Prejudice*’s Mr. Kholi, for example, is a wealthy NRI living in Los Angeles, who is well on his way to acquiring economic and legal citizenship. However, his hyperbolic performance of American cultural norms – including over- (and mis-) use of slang, his affinity for velour tracksuits, and dated cultural references – make his performance of citizenship, and with it normative heterosexual masculinity, less than convincing. In Mr. Kholi’s overzealous performance as an American lurks the specter of the deviant terrorist, as the monster to his correctable citizen, and one who would reject the normative behavior that Mr. Kholi so tenuously clings to. It is not his patriotism, however, that is called into question by the film, but Kholi’s potential as a sexual deviant: he travels to India in order to find a ‘traditional’ bride but fails to woo Lalita or any of her sisters. Mr. Kholi’s urgency in finding a wife is not driven simply by a wish to fulfill personal desire or tradition. Instead, returning to the U.S. with a bride in tow corrects his potential deviancy via heteronormativity, and thus secures his status as citizen.
Racial Inclusion and the Promise of the Multicultural Nation

While post-9/11 racial logics work to exclude certain bodies from the nation, they also provide modes of citizenship through which some racial and ethnic identities are recuperated and sutured into the nation-state. Modes of post-9/11 inclusion rely heavily on discourses of multiculturalism to normalize the division between acceptable diversity within the nation, and the alien otherness that defines the terrorist. Lowe describes multiculturalism as the process through which ethnic minorities and other marginalized groups gain recognition and acceptance into the state. She argues that multiculturalism serves as a mode of assimilation for ethnic minorities entering the nation, in that it dictates modes of cultural expression acceptable for inclusion within the nation (60).

Multiculturalism also imagines nation as a diverse place, emphasizing tolerance and equality in its inclusiveness. Lowe argues that, enabled by the discourse of pluralism, cultural expression within multiculturalism “aestheticizes ethnic differences” and erases racialized imbalances of power and fraught histories within the state (9). She also argues that multiculturalism falsely suggests that all cultural groups have equal representative force within a democratic nation. Naber argues that multiculturalism’s emphasis on plurality and visibility obscures the widespread and systemic violence against ethnic minorities in the aftermath of 9/11. She suggests that multicultural rhetoric, which created the illusion of a diverse but unified nation, obscured practices of racial profiling initiated and institutionalized after 9/11. The national focus on diversity and what Arif Dirlik calls “culture talk” emphasizes individual hate crimes against immigrants and ethnic minorities as the result of a few individuals in an inclusive society, in order “to cover up the
systematic institutionalized nature of the violence” (85; Naber, “Introduction” 3). At the same time it accounts for racial difference, the implied political neutrality of multicultural discourse often conceals institutionalized racism.

The reformulation of citizenship and belonging after 9/11 uses the explicit and implicit racial lines drawn by multiculturalist discourses in order to create categories of inclusion. The idiom of the melting pot – that the national body subsumed racial or ethnic difference through the identification of all citizens as simply ‘American’ – creates a definitive ‘us’ to contrast against a clearly excluded ‘them.’ For ethnic groups already cast as suspicious after 9/11, these lines of inclusion were drawn around a binaristic division between ‘good’ and ‘bad.’ Naber, for example, argues that the state rhetoric around racial inclusion distinguished ‘good’ Muslim citizens from potentially threatening – namely noncitizen – ‘bad’ Muslims or Arabs. ‘Good’ Muslim identity is contingent upon full and contributive membership in American society, and a firm condemnation of Islamic fundamentalist ideologies (“Introduction” 3). Because ‘good’ citizens and ‘bad’ terrorists emerged in part through racial logics, South Asian Americans found themselves in the position of endorsing racial profiling in order to ‘prove’ their loyalty to the nation, a mode of civic participation Rajan and Sharma identify as “coercive citizenship” (“Introduction” 26). Effectively a disavowal of race, this type of ‘coercive citizenship’ requires ‘good’ national subjects to de-politicize their ethnic identity by placing it outside boundaries of history, detached from the long legacy of racialization and the exclusion of immigrant groups from the U.S. Multiculturalism, while not necessarily explicitly linked to the idioms of the post-9/11 racial landscape like the ‘alien’ and ‘monster terrorist,’ is a
key component of this era’s racial logics. All three of the adaptations included in my analysis grapple with the effects of multicultural discourse. *The Namesake* and *Bride and Prejudice*, for example, attend to the tropes of American multicultural nation in representations of shared national space, immigrant life, and South Asian cultural practices. Multicultural discourse, however, ultimately frames the relationship between audience and film in each of the films, providing ideological justification for the mass consumption of cultural and ethnic difference.

Post-9/11 racial logics create categories of exclusion and inclusion by recycling well-established racial tropes and discourses like multiculturalism, in contrast to the spatiotemporal assertion of newness, uniqueness, and exception that have come to define the post-9/11 era. It is only though these two frameworks that citizenship emerges as a problem. Certain ethnic and religious groups have been excluded from the nation by the convergence of old racial tropes and new racist assumptions fueled by the ‘war on terror.’ Furthermore, in this new state of exception, those groups can no longer rely upon the established guidelines, norms, and laws that govern citizenship in order to claim membership to the nation. The ‘problems’ created by these dual forces can be literal: individuals targeted as suspects, including legal citizens, face physical expulsion from the nation through detention, deportation, and imprisonment, as well as harassment in the form of profiling, surveillance, and hate crime. The ‘problem’ of citizenship, however, also refers to the double binds members of ethnic minorities face in choosing modes of inclusion offered by the multiculturalist nation – often at the expense of ethnic, geographic, or religious specificity.
Muslim and South Asian Femininity, Feminism, and the Proliferation of Racial Logics

Citizenship has become a ‘problem,’ in part, because of the magnitude with which these racial logics have taken hold in American society. The effects of racialization after 9/11 extend beyond the policies and practices of the state. Various mechanisms instead ensure that its effects spread throughout the nation’s cultural, social, religious, and media institutions; I propose that cinematic adaptation is one such mechanism. One of the ways in which cinematic adaptation distributes racial logics is through its recirculation of particular images and subjects that normalize a post-9/11 racial order. In the three adaptations I examine, representations of South Asian and Muslim womanhood often take on this role. The specific images of femininity in *Bride and Prejudice*, *Persepolis*, and *The Namesake* are part of a larger social trend taking place around contemporary representations of South Asian and Muslim femininity, in which particular images of South Asian and Muslim women are deployed in Western political and popular culture in order to disseminate the effects of power specific to post-9/11 racial logics.\

The ideologies of race, place, and gender embedded in these images forward an idealized model of citizenship for women, both within and beyond the nation, crafted through the tenets of liberal feminism. The image of the veiled and oppressed Muslim woman, for example, provides a discursive venue for the articulation and normalization of civilizational thinking. Not only must she be saved from her barbaric religious and cultural system, but the gender and racial ideologies that inform this image – of a passive, victimized, and othered femininity – implicitly assert the superiority of Western
civilization based on women’s access to rights and freedom. Similarly, the circulation of a middle-class, cosmopolitan South Asian femininity popularized by films like *Bend it Like Beckham, Monsoon Wedding, Bollywood/Hollywood*, and the text I examine, *Bride and Prejudice*, places modernness, Westernization, and liberal feminism at the center of ‘good’ post-9/11 citizenship.

**Muslim Femininity and Civilizational Thinking**

The figure of the Muslim woman has increasingly acted as a site of distribution for the civilizational discourses that feed into post-9/11 racial logics. An “intensified preoccupation” with a particular type of Muslim femininity – racialized as Arab or Middle Eastern – has taken place through a number of cultural sites, including mainstream news coverage and political, state, and feminist rhetoric (Maira, “Belly Dancing” 318). Images of faceless, veiled Muslim women have served as an impetus for invasion and war in Afghanistan; Muslim women have come under scrutiny in the U.S. and countries like France over the prohibition of *hijab*, while a type of Orientalized, ahistorical, and exotic version of Muslim femininity is at the center of American trends like belly dancing. These images also find their way into films like *Submission* and television shows like *Private Practice, Law and Order: SVU*, and *Army Wives*. A constraining discourse frames representations of Muslim femininity: Muslim women are almost always depicted as oppressed victims of a patriarchal culture (the veil being the most present sign), and in need of protection by Western ideological or military force. Moallem, for example, argues that justification for invasions of Afghanistan revolved around “Afghani women as the ultimate victims of the Taliban” who were “in need of
protection from their barbaric fundamentalist men” (161). The exoticized and sexualized femininity invoked by belly dancing, on the other hand, relies on the Orientalist tropes of harem, particularly the sexualized and disempowered state of ‘kept’ women. Under this design, Western female bodies and Muslim women’s bodies signify civilizational affiliation. Relying on representations of Muslim women as oppressed, veiled, and othered, civilizational rhetoric effectively spatializes cultural difference. Muslim women living in the West, Muslim cultures outside of the Middle East, and conflicts over women’s political, economic, and cultural enfranchisement in the West are all erased under the effect of this ideology.

In the post-9/11 era, the liberation, education and general “uplift” of Muslim women has served as justification for the invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, and policies that abject certain ethnic and religious communities from the nation (Volpp 152). Post-9/11 representations of Muslim femininity, however, cite a long history in American culture of articulating civilization differences through representations of Muslim femininity. In this history, the figure of the veiled Muslim woman also asserts the superiority of Western civilization through the empowerment of its female citizen-subjects. These assertions are mediated through the rhetoric of liberal feminism. Liberal feminism combines characteristics of liberalism – such as rationality, autonomy, and individuality – with a feminist emphasis on equality and women’s emancipation from patriarchal traditions (Tong 11). Liberal feminism not only seeks to empower women through political enfranchisement, but also links agency to women’s sexual and corporal autonomy. It relies on practices and technologies of the self rooted in
neoliberal modes of governmentality institutionalized in the U.S. and Europe that produce citizen-subjects as “free, self-managing, and self-enterprising individuals” (Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception* 14). The oppression of Muslim women is constructed through and against the bodies of Western and Westernized women as imagined by mainstream liberal feminism, who embody the markers of a liberated and empowered womanhood, such as individuality, sexual expression, and autonomy (Bhattacharyya 50). The corresponding model of womanhood incited by images of Muslim women “becomes the favoured incarnation of femininity and an image to elevate more troublesome models of feminine embodiment,” functioning as symbols of civilizational and moral superiority of the West (Bhattacharyya 51). The articulation of civilization differences through representations of Muslim femininity produces a series of truth-effects about Western female subjectivity as well, allowing Western and Westernized women to understand themselves as ‘free’ subjects against the specter of their oppressed Muslim counterparts. Likewise, this particular representation of Muslim femininity also enables the fabrication of a national identity around the procurement and promotion of women’s rights.

*South Asian Femininity and the Spectacle of Docile Citizenship*

Racist ideologies embedded in civilizational thinking are often obscured in a liberatory discourse about Muslim women’s bodies; representations of South Asian femininity, defined not by religion but buy national and ethnic affiliation, often take on the form of cultural spectacle. Much like images of Muslim femininity normalize appropriate modes of self-expression and citizenship for women, the spectacle of South Asian femininity forwards an idealized citizen-subject that stabilizes gendered, classed,
and religious divisions between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ categories of racialized citizenship.

Since 9/11, South Asian culture – most notably as represented through Bollywood – has become a site of fascination in the West. Bollywood-inspired texts like *Slumdog Millionaire* and *Bombay Dreams* have capitalized on Western audiences’ fascination with racialized spectacle, offering up elaborate staging and bright visuals for consumption, with seemingly ‘modern’ representations of South Asian femininity at their centers. Both exotic and modern, cosmopolitan and resolutely foreign, South Asian women’s bodies present a version of non-threatening, “docile” citizenship that forward appropriate modes of national belonging and inclusion within both Western and South Asian nations, a model of citizenship I discuss at length in the next chapter (Desai, “Bollywood Abroad” 120). Gayatri Gopinath argues that normalization of ‘good’ citizenship through the spectacle of South Asian femininity also follows a gendered logic: the Pussycat Dolls’ playful rendition of *Slumdog*’s “Jai Ho” and the celebratory tone of films like *Monsoon Wedding* and *Bend it Like Beckham* conceal the ways in which South Asian men, as potential alien terrorists, have been made both hypervisible and invisible by the state (“Bollywood Spectacles” 161).

Under this logic, the same white male gaze that fetishizes and sexualizes representations of South Asian women also subjects South Asian men to surveillance and suspicion, and facilitates their expulsion from the nation through incarceration and deportation. The gendered division of visibility forwards a mode of inclusion that reconciles the racism of post-9/11 racial with the demand for a multicultural and racially inclusive nation – without disturbing the trope of the masculinized alien terrorist. This
representation of the ‘good,’ cosmopolitan, and docile citizen draws from particular classed and religious models of citizenship as well. The model of South Asian femininity called upon in this context mirrors the paradigm of the ‘model minority’ embedded in the American imaginary, according to Jigna Desai. She notes that the American preoccupation with South Asian femininity fixates upon a middle class, Hindu, educated, urban subject (“Bollywood Abroad” 120). Subjects who do not adhere to this model, she argues, often remain othered and alien in the American imaginary. This arrangement of idealized citizen-subjects through the constraining discourses of class, gender, nation, and religion forward images of racial inclusion and identity that do not challenge the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ categories of citizenship created by post-9/11 racial logics.

The rhetoric of liberal feminism also shapes contemporary images of South Asian femininity. While it serves as a spatializing force in Western iterations of Muslim womanhood, liberal feminist rhetoric shapes representations of South Asian female citizen-subjects around a temporal division. The articulation of a liberal feminist ethos by these subjects signifies a modern worldview. This is especially true for the in-depth representations of South Asian female subjectivity narrated in English-language films: Desai and Gopinath both argue that in films like Monsoon Wedding, Nair’s Mississippi Masala, and Bend it, a Westernized, liberal feminist ethos accompanies sexualized spectacles in representations of South Asian female subjectivity. In these films, feminist conflicts over love, sexual autonomy, and competing models of ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ womanhood help create modernized and cosmopolitan subjects at their center. As I argue in Chapter 2, these representations of South Asian femininity offer a
subjectivity easily recognized by a Western audience and confront stereotypes about victimized and passive Third World women. At the same time, female subjects created through this rhetoric bear out the effects of post-9/11 racial logics. They link modernness – as articulated through the tenets of liberal feminism like sexual autonomy, individualism and self-motivation – to ‘good’ citizenship, while ‘backwardness’ remains associated with the idiom of the alien terrorist.

_Cultural Fascination and The Spectacle of Racial Difference_

Accompanying the dissemination of racial logics after 9/11 is a new urgency in witnessing the spectacle of racial difference through representations of South Asian and Muslim femininity. A collective cultural desire to see these images reproduced directly affects why – and how – texts are selected for adaptation. This need to ‘see’ often captures the authors themselves. As anxiety over civilizational and cultural differences coalesced around representations of South Asian and Muslim femininity, source texts like _The Namesake_ and _Persepolis_ (novels about South Asian and Muslim-Iranian subjects written by South Asian and Iranian women) have acquired a type of renewed cultural capital, making them ripe for adaptation. Authors like Satrapi and Lahiri are young, hip, globally savvy, serving as sites of cultural and ethnic authority, as well as embodiments of racialized femininity. Rajan and Sharma argue that the popularity of Lahiri’s fiction, for example, can be attributed in part to the Western cultural fascination with South Asian culture in the post-9/11 world. She provides, much like the subjects of _Monsoon Wedding_ and _Bend it Like Beckham_, access to South Asian cultural practices through an exoticized and cosmopolitan female subjectivity (“Theorizing Recognition” 153). They
also argue that an increasing interest in narratives about globalization, transnational flows of culture and capital, and exposure to sites of “ethnic differences” have fueled the popularity of this group of filmmakers and authors (152).

The cultural fascination with Muslim femininity has taken on a particular form in relationship to Iranian women. It has fueled the popularization of the English-language memoir written by Iranian women in exile in North America. A group of autobiographical narratives have emerged on the American literary scene in the past ten years, in which Iranian women writers, such as Nahid Rachlin, Marina Nemat, and Roxana Saberi speak specifically about the burdens of Islamic femininity under the repressive post-revolutionary regime.11 Azar Nafisi’s memoir Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books is a well-known example of this phenomenon. Nafisi’s memoir revolves around the members of a book club she led in Tehran during the 1990s (she was a professor of literature at University of Tehran and Allameh Tabataba’i University). She chronicles the struggles of her seven ‘students’ to reconcile their personal and political lives with the Islamic regime through the works of famous authors, including Jane Austen and Nabokov. A bestseller in the U.S., Reading Lolita in Tehran has come under fire from Iranian scholars in the U.S. for reinforcing stereotypes about Muslim femininity as inherently oppressive, while glorifying the ‘freedom’ afforded to women in the West. Nina Naghibi and Andrew O’Malley argue that Nafisi and Satrapi use memoir to both “challenge the stereotype of the self-effacing, modest Iranian woman and to write themselves back into the history of the nation” (223). Their analysis points to the ways in which the claims on female subjectivity are bound to the truth-effects of post-9/11 racial
logics: these gendered acts of self-assertion serve as a type of metaphorical unveiling, according to Naghibi and O’Malley, effectively ensuring that Iranian women exchange idealized Islamic womanhood institutionalized by the Iranian state for a Westernized, and secular, point of view (223). The popular narrative of these memoirs no doubt helped to create the cultural and economic impetus to reproduce *Persepolis* on the screen.

The role of South Asian femininity in facilitating spectacles of ethnic and cultural difference has contributed to the growing prominence of Bollywood (a cinematic culture itself anchored in elaborate and staged spectacle) in American culture. Bollywood has served as a repository of images and figures of South Asian femininity, and its increasing popularity has made its stars more recognizable, and bankable, in the West. *Bride and Prejudice*’s Aishwarya Rai certainly stands as one of Bollywood’s most successful crossover stars. A former Miss World and popular actress in both Hindi and Tamil language cinemas in India, Rai began to appear in Western-based media, including film and print advertising, in the mid 2000s. The international popularity of Rai – who is often called “the most beautiful woman in the world”– certainly reflects more than just a Western fascination with South Asian femininity; the rising economic power of India, and growing markets for Bollywood cinema in other regions of the world, have helped make her a global star (*60 Minutes*).

What’s most remarkable about the rise of Aishwarya Rai, however, is the way in which her star persona is premised on an idealized cosmopolitan female subjectivity. Beautiful and exotic, she performs a type of modern Indian womanhood in her informal role as ambassador for India on talk shows like *60 Minutes* and *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. 
At the same time, her comfort in a variety of linguistic and cultural settings and international career articulates a type of global savviness. Rai, however, is not the only Bollywood star to appear in the series of adaptations I examine. Irrfan Khan and Tabu, each well known Bollywood actors, play Ashok and Ashima Ganguli in Nair’s adaptation of *The Namesake*, and Anupam Kher portrays Lalita’s father in *Bride and Prejudice*. The casting of Bollywood actors reflects the need to speak about cultural difference and racial inclusion in mainstream American culture. The stars themselves offer up a type of cosmopolitan appeal and cultural authenticity that fuels the articulation of ‘good’ global citizenship in the films’ representations of modern South Asian subjectivity.

The proliferation of racial logics after 9/11 through representations of South Asian and Muslim femininity created a cultural and economic context that inevitably influenced, if not instigated, the cinematic adaptations of *The Namesake*, *Persepolis*, and *Pride and Prejudice*. The adaptive process itself also serves as a mechanism of proliferation, dispersing images of female subjectivity in new forms and to new audiences and through unique modes of meaning-making. The re-presentation of certain images, narratives, and subjects through cinematic adaptation endows these objects with an added significance, as topics important or relevant enough to inspire reproduction in another medium. Cinematic adaptations align racial logics with a desire to watch by marking the objects, subjects, and narratives deemed worthy of a second look. Adaptations in particular “grant a kind of objective materiality” to the discourses that they chose to take up, endowing them with “visible, audible, and perceptive form” (Stam, “Introduction: The Theory and Practice” 45). Cinematic adaptation has a doubled effect
on the proliferation and penetration of discourse: an adaptation presents both source and adapted text as vehicles for representing and reproducing cultural difference. Adaptation offers a rationale to revisit prior texts, histories, and subjects that might contain these narratives, while at the same time it creates new forms of racial and gendered spectacle. Modern diasporian authors and filmmakers like Lahiri, Nair, Chadha, and Satrapi use cinematic adaptation to create easily consumable – and be easily consumable – spectacles of cultural difference, forwarding narratives and attitudes optimistic about bridging cultural, racial, and geographic gaps. In the next section, I discuss how the process of adaptation helps generate those spectacles, and the models of female citizenship that stabilize a post-9/11 racial order.

“New” Texts and “Old” Roots: Cinematic Adaptation and the Distribution of Racial Logics

Adaptation is not simply a staging ground for the recirculation of certain images and ideologies; it is uniquely suited to the task of producing images influenced by racialization after 9/11. The meaning-making processes involved in transferring a text to the screen mirror the dual mechanisms of post-9/11 racialization. Much like the tropes of alien terrorist and civilizational other rely on well-established racial discourses projected onto a seemingly new spatiotemporal dimension, adaptation transposes the ‘old’ narrative of an established text onto a ‘new’ discursive platform. Cinematic adaptation engages in several meaning-making processes that enable this transposition. First, adaptation produces distinct textual iterations. Each one reflects what Robert Stam calls a “new state
of affairs,” informed by the sociocultural and historical contexts in which the adaptation was conceived and produced (“Introduction: Theory and Practice” 11). Formal differences between literature and film also influence the adaptive process, shaping the ways in which representations of time and space work to create historical and social context.

At the same time, cinematic adaptations are intertextual productions that depend on similarity and overlap with a source text. These processes enable post-9/11 racialization and its corresponding representations of citizenship to appropriate the adaptive process. The ‘new state of affairs’ signified through an adaptation, for example, recalls the cultural logics that framed the 9/11-era as both unique and exceptional. An adapted text, as a result, may produce a spatiotemporal landscape that not only reflects post-9/11 time and space, but its status as an exceptional moment in both space and time. At the same time, adaptations also draw from intertextual references in order to align adaptations with particular modes of citizenship, histories of racialization, and political ideologies. The combination of both processes – a ‘new’ text with ‘old’ roots – normalizes the similarly contradictory forces at work in post-9/11 racial logics.

*Cinematic Adaptation as a New State of Affairs*

Julie Sanders describes adaptation as a contradictory process. Adaptation, he suggests, attempts to invoke the past in its citation and reiteration of a particular text, but only with the aim of reenacting a radical departure from that past (9). The tension between continuity with and departure from the past is at the center of both the adaptive process and much scholarly writing on the subject of cinematic adaptation. In general,
scholarly attention to cinematic adaptation remains a neglected site of inquiry in contemporary cinema and literary studies (Stam, “Introduction: The Theory and Practice” 3). This lack of attention may be due in part to the theoretical limitations of traditional understandings of adaptation, which often revolves around evaluating a film only in relationship to the past, in terms of its fidelity to the original source material. Fidelity, as I argue in the concluding chapter, is a moralistic system of evaluation that takes on a gendered regime of time and space. Fidelity regimes seek to stabilize teleological narratives of development, history, and nation, which ultimately marginalizes the transnational and cross-cultural collaborations of diasporic women writers and filmmakers.

In recent years, the analytical interventions of poststructuralism, feminism, and postcolonial and ethnic studies, along with the introduction of reception, intertextual, and performative theory into cinema have challenged the primacy of fidelity in studies of cinematic adaptations. Many of these interventions have focused on challenging the epistemological and ontological assumptions that structure the linear relationship between a source text and its adaptation. Poststructuralist shifts in the organization of fields of knowledge and the diminished role of the author or auteur dismantled the stable, fixed hierarchies of value that structured the relationship between novel and film. The deconstruction of ‘copy’ and ‘original’ as concepts, along with the interrogation of normative assumptions around race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality, questioned the status of cinematic adaptation as parasitic or exploitative of a past textual formation (Stam, “Introduction: The Theory and Practice” 11). Foucault, on the other hand, nullifies
the role of author as ‘originator’ of a text, while his attention to the anonymity of discourse highlights how each text, regardless of its status as copy or original, functions as an independent discursive event. Francesco Casetti names the discursive domains through which these events emerge – including the historical, social, and cultural contexts of their production and circulation – a “communicative situation” (83). For Casetti, adaptation is less of a “repeating” or “rewriting” of a particular novel for the screen and more of a “recontextualization of the text” (83), where narrative elements like plot or characters are reformulated (and discursively remodeled) through a particular communicative context.

Casetti’s theory suggests that cinematic adaptations do not simply reproduce the past, but instead represent a “new state of affairs,” including the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which the adaptation was conceived and produced (Stam, “Introduction: The Theory and Practice” 11). As a result, the adaptation and its source text “occupy two entirely different places in the world scene and in history” (Casetti 83). This ‘new state of affairs’ is reflected in the text itself, often emerging in attitudes, narratives, and relationships that match the “current ideological configuration” of gendered and racial relations of power. The comportment of characters, and even set design and costuming, may also reflect the sociocultural context in which they were produced. Adaptations often re-imagine historical events and figures through contemporary communicative contexts. These contexts can shift over time; Linda Mizejewski argues that cinematic, literary, and theatrical representations of Sally Bowles, for example, are continually reworked in relationship to changing attitudes toward
Nazism. As a result, the rewriting of her body as a type of corporeal sexual “border” has changed over time (35). Often, the retelling of a history can indicate a crisis in modern life, and the adaptation of historical texts often serves as a nostalgic look back to so-called ‘simpler times’ (Welehan 12). The reproduction of racial, sexual, and economic hierarchies in these adaptations reveal anxieties over shifts in modern social hierarchies and identities. Scholarly interventions such as post structuralism, postcolonial theory, and feminism have influenced the ways in which cinematic adaptation reformulates the past. Tim Watson argues that Patricia Rozema’s adaptation of Austen’s Mansfield Park speaks back to Austen’s novel, completing the novel’s allusion to England’s colonial ties with direct references to slavery in the Bertram’s Antigua plantation. Watson argues that revisions to historiography and literary criticism enabled Rozema to ‘write back’ to Austen, filling in the structuring absence of colonialism with a critical awareness gained through modern intellectual interventions (53). Imelda Welehan, however, argues that return to the past always creates an “anachronistic way of looking” in which new norms translate old contexts (12). Accordingly, the revision of Mansfield Park – and its rejection of slavery – requires a type of modern subject, one fully invested in projects of self-making, autonomy, and liberalism realized long after the publication of the novel.

In this dissertation, I am interested in examining the ways in which transnational flows shape the adaptive process, especially in creating new communicative situations. While adaptation theory lacks any substantial scholarship addressing the relationship between the adaptive process and transnationality, Shohat emphasizes that adaptations and ‘translation’ of culture travel through already-established pathways and relations of
power (71). I argue that this is the case for the ‘translation’ of Jane Austen’s novel in *Bride and Prejudice*, where British colonial rule, globalization, and other Austenian cinematic adaptation enabled the transfer of the source text to contemporary India. Other scholars argue that translation, as it interacts with adaptive process, generates unique effects. For example, Zhen Zhang suggests that adaptation of Western literary texts in Chinese cinema render each film a type of “contact zone” between languages, cultures, and ideologies (149). In Chapter 3, I argue that the potential contact zones between American and Iranian political cultures are erased by the substitution of liberal, left-lean American voices – both metaphorically and literally – for Iranian ones.

Formal differences between film and literature also suggest that cinematic adaptation is not just a simple repetition or parroting of an original text. As Linda Hutcheon points out, more than just one formal code is involved in composing a text, and differences in formal composition makes literal adaptation an impossibility. Traditional understandings of adaptation attempted to identify formal equivalencies between the two mediums, often through a universal code, or models of ‘high’ and ‘low’ forms of signification. Instead of finding equivalencies, Hutcheon frames the shift from literature to film in terms of gains and losses (16). While film does not possess what Millicent Marcus calls “double articulation of written-spoken languages” it is created and represented in registers absent in literature, including audio and visual formats (20). As a result, film possesses formal elements unique to its medium. Formal techniques like montage, soundtrack, mise-en-scene, and continuity editing create multiple and simultaneous sites of signification, which in turn produces representations of subjectivity,
temporality, and place unique to film. The formal components of film also precipitate a specific representation of time and space. They render cinema a “time-medium” in which space is represented through movement, both the passing of time on screen and the movement of frames through the projector (Marcus 3). Mainstream Western cinema relies on realism to organize representations of space and time, including an emphasis on continuity and coherence. This imperative, in turn, has institutionalized particular visual conventions and editing techniques such as continuity editing and shot-reverse-shot sequences, to ensure that transitions through shots, scenes, and time remain seamless and imperceptible to the audience (Stam, “Introduction: The Theory and Practice” 11). By offering up a particular representation of reality, the formal representation of space and time in a film perpetuates its ideological content: In Chapter 4, I examine how shifting spatiotemporal contexts in the cinematic adaptation of The Namesake subvert practices of national belonging demanded of South Asian American citizens after 9/11.

Genre and intertextual considerations particular to film also influence the adaptive process. For example, a source text may shift in order to fit a genre specific to the filmic medium. The social comedies of Austen’s novels, for example, are often ‘interpreted’ in Hollywood-style adaptations as romance narratives. Furthermore, the intertextual network through which films are produced and received also affect meaning-making, including star personas. The formal and generic elements of film and literature ultimately influence the ways in which they are received – a difference described by Marcus as the distinction between reading and viewing. She argues that, while the linearity of literary narrative requires a “deferred synthesis,” the simultaneous signification of formal
elements in the cinema makes the reception and synthesis of a film immediate (17). In Chapter 3, I argue that the formal and generic convention of film, including continuity editing, help to universalize Iranian female subjectivity. These formal elements, which are exclusive to the film version of *Persepolis*, ultimately transform the novel’s representation of subject-making specific to the Iranian civic body into a general model of a liberal humanist subject.

Theorizing cinematic adaptation as both a historical and formal ‘new state of affairs’ offers a rich analytical framework for thinking through adaptation in relationship to post-9/11 racial logics. Conceiving of source text and adaptation as two separate utterances sets the stage for a comparative analysis, drawing the two texts into conversation with each other in order to examine differences in formal components, historical contexts, subjectification, and ideological commitments. Equally important is the way in which the outcome of the adaptive process – the production of a fresh ‘state of affairs’ – mirrors the construction of time and space after 9/11 as new and unprecedented (in other words, its own new ‘state of affairs’). In the following chapters I argue that this alignment is generative, and racial logics often appropriate the adaptive process in order to create representations of modern, feminist, and Westernized Muslim and South Asian female citizen-subjects.

*Intertextuality and Citing the Past*

While the historical and formal distinctiveness of each textual utterance is important, adaptation is a process that threads texts together through the play of difference *and* similarity. Adaptation, at its heart, relies upon textual linkages, parallels,
and allusions to structure the relationship between those two texts. In adaptation, the exchange between old and new takes place through a number of mechanisms, including palimpsestic textuality. The image of palimpsest provides a useful tool for envisioning the relationship between film and novel, both textually and between histories, temporalities, and epistemological schemas. A concept developed by Gérard Genette, the metaphor of the palimpsest builds the images of one text overlaying another. A palimpsest refers to a writing tablet, used before the popularization of paper, in which text has been washed or wiped off and then used again. The original writing often remained, even after its erasure. Dudley Andrew argues the palimpsestic relationship between the two texts in an adaptation is one of engagement, rather than replacement (191). The idea of the palimpsestic text certainly displaces the temporal linearity of textual production retained in traditional understandings of adaptation through its implication of transparency, mutual meaning-making, and intertextual interaction (Sanders 11). It also retains discursive singularity of the texts while acknowledging shared meaning in spaces of alignment. The contradictory forces that inform post-9/11 racial logics find a home in the metaphor of the palimpsest: the multiple, overlapping layers of a palimpsest acknowledges the ‘newness’ of a layer, whether historical or textual, without ignoring the meanings, images, and histories that lie beneath. By enabling the incitement of stories, images, and ideologies that normalize this doubled meaning-making process, the palimpsestic textuality invoked by cinematic adaptation sets the stage for images to reflect and reproduce these logics -- and the corresponding representations of female citizenship.
Traditional understandings of adaptation, because they have emphasized fidelity as the structuring framework for the relationship between source and adapted texts, have emphasized the authorial and textual primacy of the source text. Contemporary theories of adaptation, while still stressing the adapted texts as individual discursive iterations, also displace the primacy of fidelity by stressing the importance of the intertextual relationship between novels and films, as well as with other textual and cultural forms. Theories of intertextuality and performativity forwarded by Kristeva, Derrida, and Butler point to the ways in which texts – all texts – cite other texts. Troubling the concept of a ‘source’ or ‘original’ text, these theories re-imagine the relationship between literature and the cinema as mutually productive. Seemingly ‘originary’ source texts are themselves citations, reiterations, and combinations of other texts. The continual process of citation inherent in cultural production ensures that a text functions as an “open structure,” drawing from and contributing to an “infinitely permutating intertext” (Stam “Introduction: The Theory and Practice” 15). Intertextuality frames both adapted and source texts as assemblages of these citations and textual iterations. Racial logics harness these citation chains during the adaptive process, using intertextual references in order to align adaptations with particular modes of citizenship, histories of racialization, and political ideologies.

The productive tensions between the old and the new in cinematic adaptation provide a set of ideal conditions for the articulation of post-9/11 racial logics. On the surface, they allow adaptation to work as a technology of racialization by creating subjects, narratives, forms, and contexts that reflect the former’s dual processes,
including the staging of recycled racial narratives in new and distinct spatiotemporal ‘states.’ The popularity of adaptation as a form of storytelling after 9/11 may be due in part to its unique ability to signify a ‘new state of affairs’ through reference to the past. For example, the 2005 film *Jarhead* speaks to the post-9/11 era from the historical past. Adapted from Anthony Swafford’s memoir of the same name, *Jarhead* chronicles Swafford’s role as a Marine Sniper in Saudi Arabia during the first Gulf War. The film’s re-presentation of the invasion of Kuwait – including the timing of its release in 2005 (and the book in 2003) – clearly speaks to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Its images of Arab enemy combatants, Muslim otherness, and veiled women are all objects of fascination in the nation’s current racial crisis. Their placement in the film compel representations of the historical past to signify racial politics of the post-9/11 era, and the new way of thinking about terrorism and the Middle East instigated by 9/11. At the same time, *Jarhead* clearly links the present to events that occurred during the first Gulf War, providing a representation of a war-torn and dysfunctional Middle East, including the dictatorial spirit of Saddam Hussein, which justifies the nation’s current military engagement in Iraq.

**The Alignment of Meaning-Making and the Appropriation of Cinematic Adaptation by Post-9/11 Racial Logics**

Stam, citing Noam Chomsky, argues that adaptations possess a “generative grammar” (“Introduction: The Theory and Practice” 46), in that the transfer of meanings, codes, symbols, and context is not simply reflective, but productive – and bound to social
and semiotic rules that ensure the cohesion, coherence, and relevance of the text. In the three cinematic adaptations I examine, a generative grammar emerges from the influence of post-9/11 racial logics on the adaptive process. This grammar does begin with a reflection: the dual processes of adaptation – the articulation of ‘old’ stories in new spaces – mirrors the competing forces behind post-9/11 racialization (which, at its core, consists of several ‘old’ narratives circulating in a new spatiotemporal context). It is my contention that this alignment allows racial logics to appropriate the adaptive process, and use the adapted text to articulate regimes of space, time, gender, and race that reflect post-9/11 ideological formations, especially in the reconfiguration of citizenship and modes of national belonging. The preceding section offered a general outline of the ways in which the alignment between adaptation and racialization might take place; the following chapters focus on the specific ways in which the appropriation of adaptation by post-9/11 racial logics shape representations of South Asian and Muslim femininity in *The Namesake, Bride and Prejudice, and Persepolis*. In each chapter I argue that the influence of post-9/11 racial logics on the adaptive process results in images of female citizenship informed by liberal feminism and its emphasis on freedom, personal responsibility, sexual autonomy, and individualism. The circulation of these modern, feminist citizenship-subjects in mainstream, English-language films, in return, distributes effects of power specific to post-9/11 racial logics by normalizing civilizational thinking and forwarding models of ‘good’ cosmopolitan citizenship.

The alignment and appropriation of the adaptive process takes place through three central concepts. Translation, for example, structures the transformation of Austen’s
novel *Pride and Prejudice* into Chadha’s film adaptation, *Bride and Prejudice*.

Translation also describes the process through which representations of South Asian femininity in the film take on characteristics of an idealized cosmopolitan citizen. In *Persepolis*, civilizational rhetoric links the adaptive process to racial logics, bringing Satrapi’s graphic novel to the screen. Civilizational thinking guides the adaptive process, and in the process reshapes representations of Muslim femininity. The chronotope, or the ways in which time is written in space, allows both versions of *The Namesake* to examine the gendered pathways through which South Asian immigrants enter into the nation. Nair’s adaptation, however, uses chronotopic motifs to critique the effects of post-9/11 racialization and challenge the primacy of assimilative citizenship for South Asian Americans forwarded by the novel. These operational concepts, although distinct, consistently produce representations of female subjectivity that respond to the ‘problem’ of citizenship in a post-9/11 world, whether writing with or against the racial logics that shaped them.

*Bride and Prejudice*

I begin my in-depth analysis in Chapter 2 with Gurinder Chadha’s retelling of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* in her 2005 film *Bride and Prejudice*. Chadha’s film is one in a series of critically and commercially successful films directed by South Asian women working and living in the South Asian diaspora, a group also including Mira Nair and Canadian director Deepa Mehta. They make English language films about South Asia and the South Asian diaspora, primarily produced, distributed, and made for Western audiences. Gopinath and Desai argue that, in these films, female South Asian
diasporan filmmakers create subjects that are complicit with a post 9/11 racial order, rendering the racialized bodies of potentially dangerous terrorist subjects manageable and non-threatening through representations of a modern feminist South Asian femininity. They also argue that these films serve as Bollywood-inspired ‘translations’ of South Asian subjects for Western audiences. *Bride and Prejudice* is no exception: the film’s protagonist, Lalita, is an independent, intelligent 20-something woman working for the family agricultural business in Amritsar, a city in northwest India. She is headstrong and modern, yet embodies a type of idealized model of Indian femininity. Aishwarya Rai portrays this modern Elizabeth Bennett; she renders Lalita both worldly and exotic, priming cultural spectacle and cosmopolitan citizenship for Western consumption.

Unlike the other films in this genre, *Bride and Prejudice* is adapted from Austen’s famous novel. I argue that Chadha not only engages Austen in her particular interpretation of Elizabeth Bennett, but also ‘translates’ feminist revisions of Austen in other cinematic adaptations to shape modern Indian femininity through the truth-effects of post-9/11 female citizenship. *Bride and Prejudice* translates *Pride and Prejudice* to present day India, effectively ‘modernizing’ the gendered class conflicts of Austen’s novel into more timely crises over globalization, immigration, and national identity. Lalita’s cosmopolitanism and feminist ethos extends beyond the personal fulfillment narratives of other contemporary Austen adaptations in order to resolve and manage conflicts brought about by the effects of globalization and global events like 9/11.

In this chapter, translation serves as the mechanism that aligns adaptation and racial logics. It functions as a type of operational logic throughout *Bride and Prejudice*. 
It ties together the film’s distinctive stylistic and narrative features: introducing Western audiences to India via Bollywood, the film is simultaneously a Hollywood translation of Bollywood stylistic conventions and a Bollywood-inspired translation of Jane Austen, not to mention a modern musical interpretation of a classic text of English literature. As a result, translation also structures the spatiotemporal relationship between various texts and forms the film takes up, linking India to the United Kingdom and the U.S., and Regency England with contemporary India. The mechanism of translation enables Chadha to create ties between Austen, adaptation, and Bollywood that constitute the film’s female South Asian subjects as cosmopolitan citizen-subjects. Translation, however, is not a politically neutral term. In this chapter I argue that a translated text does not reflect a universal understanding of the world, but instead recreates a representation of reality that reflects and normalizes particular epistemological regimes. Here racial logics and adaptation align through the formal conventions of Western cinema. Enabled by its narrative alignment with Bollywood, *Bride and Prejudice* occasionally circumvents the typical Hollywood focus on verisimilitude for the playfulness and artifice of Bollywood. The jocular, artificial mise-en-scene of the film disrupts the effects of colonial relations of looking, including a teleological model of modernity, and the presentation of Orientalist stereotypes as ethnographic truths. This particular interpretation of Bollywood film culture resists some of the racial logics produced by translation, particularly those that shape female cosmopolitan subjects.
Persepolis

Chapter 3 turns its focus to representations of Iranian female subjectivity in the cinematic adaptation of Marjane Satrapi’s graphic novel Persepolis. Published in 1999 in French, Satrapi oversaw an adaptation of the novel in 2006 in French and English. Both novel and film are texts produced in exilic space; Satrapi left Iran as a young adult in the early 1990s, and wrote her novel and the screenplay for the adaptation in French and found both French and American backers for its financing, including distribution by Sony Picture Classics. As a result, the film has primarily been screened in Europe and the U.S. It has received considerable praise by the American press and its filmmaking body, including an Academy Award nomination for best foreign picture.

Unlike the transnational scope of Bride and Prejudice and The Namesake, however, the narrative of Persepolis takes up post-revolutionary Iran as a site of subject-making. The geographic and cultural chasm between the setting of Persepolis and its perceived audience offers a different set of complications: while Muslim women, including those from Iran, have become sites of fascination in Western culture, the normalization of civilizational thinking after 9/11 has deemed Iran an “axis of evil” and closed it off in both space and time. Both versions of Persepolis take place in the same historical time period, drawing from similar temporal cues in order to contextualize the fall of the Pahlavi regime and rise of the Islamic Republic in Iran. While the novel, however, anchors practices of the self in the nation’s post-revolutionary civic body, the spatiotemporal foreclosure of Islamic Iran in its cinematic adaptation circumvents this
mode of subjectification. The transfer of *Persepolis*’ bodies from page to screen ultimately reflects this foreclosure, reworking representations of civic self-making through the truth-effects of post-9/11 female citizenship, ultimately producing a Westernized and humanist vision of political subjecthood.

Civilizational rhetoric guides the alignment of post-9/11 racial logics with the adaptive process in Chapter 3. Written in two volumes in the 1990s, the novel version of *Persepolis* explicitly challenges the effects of this ideology in its representations of Iranian women’s self-making and political performances. Changes in racialization after 9/11 shifted the goals of civilizational rhetoric, intensifying the urge to create specific and clearly delineated categories of ‘us’ and ‘them.’ As a result, civilizational rhetoric erased the spatiotemporal context of these performances and forced the cinematic adaptation of *Persepolis* to stage its subject-making in a post-9/11 context. The film reflects this new place in space and time by replacing the normative regulations of the civic body with technologies of the self aimed at producing: a ‘self’ who is Westernized, feminist, and liberated. The formal conventions of the cinema help normalize this shift by making civilizational thinking part of the filmic language through continuity editing, generic conventions, and narrative condensation. Not only do they make these changes to ensure that the film’s representation of female political subjectivity reflects the truth-effects of 9/11-era racial logics, but they forward an image of Iran as politically and culturally backwards, as a place that Marjane and her friends must escape in order to set themselves ‘free.’
Chapter 4 explores a different relationship between racial logics and adaptation in Mira Nair’s adaptation of Jhumpa Lahiri’s 2002 novel *The Namesake*. While Nair takes up South Asian femininity as a site of dissemination and normalization, she writes against racialization, challenging the primacy of multiculturalist assimilation in representations of South Asian American citizenship. In this chapter, I argue both Lahiri and Nair are writing back to a particular effect of post-9/11 racial logics, namely the erasure of South Asian American history and identity by post-9/11 narratives of multiculturalism and national belonging. Once contained by the category of ‘model minority,’ after 9/11 South Asian American identity was deemed suspect by the state, or grouped with the multiculturalist nation at the expense of historical and cultural specificity. In *The Namesake*, both Lahiri and Nair attempt to remap the terms of citizenship erased by the racialization of South Asian Americans after 9/11. Consequently, both authors rely upon spatiotemporal cues in order to dictate the gendered modes through which South Asian immigrants are incorporated into the nation. Throughout the two versions of *The Namesake* the chronotope – or the representation of time (historical, narrative, and formal) in space – works to align textual meaning-making with the effects of racialization, ensuring that those cues work in the service of validating and defining South Asian American citizenship.

Foregrounding the nation itself in producing racialized citizenship, Lahiri’s novel works from familiar models of national belonging and assimilation as a way to challenge
the nation’s discourses of exclusion after 9/11. She draws from chronotopes that write time on and through American institutions, such as the university and the hospital. Nair, on the other hand, circumvents the novel’s emphasis on assimilative identity, offering a point of view doubtful of the security and mobility promise by assimilation. She instead highlights the development of transnational ties, practices, and communities as alternative modes of citizenship. As a result, Nair deploys chronotopes that revolve around movement, in the film’s representation of trains, airports, and bridges. The historical specificity of South Asian American identity thus emerges in the film through the ways citizenship remains in excess of the nation, informed by transnational exchanges of culture and capital that circumvent the state in the creation of immigrant citizen-subjects.

Unlike the other adaptations I examine, Nair does not reshape the film’s representations of South Asian femininity to ‘fit’ post-9/11 racialization; if anything, she responds to racialization by restaging citizenship in excess, and often in opposition, to its logics. The film, nonetheless, reflects the ways in which South Asian femininity works as a site of incitement to speak about post-9/11 racial logics. The spatiotemporal shifts that drive the film’s focus on transnational modes of citizenship building also fulfill the need to speak through South Asian femininity. Nair’s choice of Bollywood star Tabu for the lead role of Ashima, for example, endows the character with a modern, cosmopolitan sensibility (although distinct from Lahiri’s cultural cache). However, Nair refuses to conflate this representation of cosmopolitanism with a liberal feminist model of female subjectivity. Instead, she creates a spatiotemporal context in which the terms of female citizenship so clearly laid out by characters like Lalita and Marjane – including their
articulation of individualist agency, sexual autonomy, and individualism –no longer follow the easily consumable models of female subjectivity forwarded by *Bride and Prejudice* and *Persepolis*. These characteristics, as rendered through the film’s representation of space and time, instead work toward building a mode of flexible citizenship that subverts the racial logics at work in the post-9/11 nation.

I conclude the dissertation by addressing the relationship between authorship and adaptation. One consideration in focusing on women filmmakers and authors of Iranian and South Asian diasporas is the relatively mainstream success of their work, despite the male-dominated industries in which they work; films like Chadha’s *Bride and Prejudice* and Nair’s *The Namesake* were modest box office and critical successes on both sides of the Atlantic, while *Persepolis* garnered international attention, including an Academy Award nomination in the U.S., I argue that their gendered authorial position enables them to challenge the foundational mythologies of adaptation: the regime of fidelity, in which adapted texts are evaluated in relationship to their faithfulness to a source text. I argue that the tenets of fidelity are implicitly gendered, namely through the rubrics of loyalty, lineage, and loss that compose the relationship between texts. The gendered terms of fidelity erase women’s roles as authors, while upholding a male-dominated literary canon and teleological narratives of history. Chadha, Satrapi, and Nair, however, circumvent the constraints of fidelity – and its erasure of women’s authorship – by choosing to adapt the work of women writers (and in the case of Satrapi, herself). Female-female authorial pairings subvert the gendered relations of power that uphold the fidelity relationship, and
displace the regimes of loyalty that attempt to tie women filmmaker to patriarchal regimes of knowledge.

In order to contend with the far-reaching impact of the events on September 11th, the scholarly work that takes it up must engage multiple analytical frameworks, broad in scope but attuned to the specific constellations of culture, politics, and capital that have shaped American culture in the post-9/11 era. With careful attention to representations of historical context, gendered embodiment, and visual and narrative rhetoric, I hope that my dissertation yields an interdisciplinary assessment of 9/11 that achieves this analytical balance, contributing its unique approach to both texts and social context to the growing body of scholarly work in 9/11 studies. By specifically addressing the role of cinematic adaptation in this process, I also hope to expand the analytical frameworks that inform adaptation studies. I see adaptation as a site of social transformation, with the ability to synthesize and condense conflicting events, ideologies, and cultural logics into a singular set of images. Even more significant is that pairings between women writers and filmmakers of the South Asian and Iranian diaspora are fueling this transformation. Filmmakers like Chadha, Satrapi, and Nair must make their authorial claims between the cultural demand to see particular representations of racialized subjects, and their desire to critique the modes of subjectification through which these subjects appear. Finally, I hope that my dissertation achieves Mohanty’s goal of a “contested citizenship project.” In response to her call, my dissertation attempts to chart the ways in which gendered models of citizenship – articulated through representations of South Asian and Muslim femininity – disseminate and normalize the effects of racialization after 9/11.
Chapter 2

‘Translating’ Jane Austen and Bollywood Cinema in Gurinder Chadha’s *Bride and Prejudice*

When *Slumdog Millionaire* began to generate Oscar buzz in late 2008, the film’s setting – shot on location in Mumbai – inevitably generated inquiry about its relation to that city’s own film industry, Bollywood. Media coverage of the 2008 sleeper hit repeatedly referenced the film’s ties to Bollywood cinema, citing everything from director Danny Boyle’s fondness for Bollywood classics, to the film’s romance-conquers-all narrative, to its Bollywood-inspired dance number over the closing credits. While *Slumdog Millionaire* recalls the staged social realism of Mira Nair’s 1986 film *Salaam Bombay!* more than the elaborate spectacle of Bollywood film, the film was nonetheless billed as a meeting of Bollywood and Hollywood. Furthermore, the critical and commercial success of *Slumdog Millionaire* inspired a number of Bollywood-inspired moments in American pop culture: star Shahrukh Khan introduced the film at the 2009 Golden Globes; the Pussycat Dolls covered an English-language version of “Jai Ho,” a song from the film’s soundtrack; and UC-Berkeley Bollywood dance team Ishaara débuted their own interpretation of “Jai Ho” on *America’s Got Talent* in the summer of 2009.
*Slumdog Millionaire* is just the latest model in a succession of texts designed to introduce Bollywood to Western audiences. Andrew Lloyd Webber, for example, collaborated with Bollywood composer A.R. Rahman (who also scored *Slumdog*) on the 2002 musical *Bombay Dreams*, while filmmakers like Baz Luhrmann, Gurinder Chadha, and Mira Nair have all alluded to the stylistic conventions of Bollywood cinema – including elaborate song-and-dance numbers – in their films. Bollywood is the informal name for the Hindi-language cinema based in Mumbai, India. It is an influential and prolific film industry, producing more than 800 films a year (Ganti 3). The most common genre in Bollywood cinema is the “masala” (or mix) film, which combines elements of drama, comedy, romance, and action. In masala films, family conflict, love triangles and star-crossed lovers, and melodramatic narratives of moral redemption take center stage, stylized through song-and-dance numbers, brightly lit and colorful costuming and mise-en-scene, and a general emphasis on artifice and spectacle. Contemporary Bollywood is also highly intertextual, referencing Hollywood and European film cultures, MTV, and current South Asian political and cultural events. Bollywood is extremely influential in India, and the popularity of its films and star system helps set trends in South Asian popular culture. It also has a wide reach beyond South Asia, popular with audiences in South East Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East, and in cities in North American and Western Europe with large South Asian populations such as Chicago, New York, Toronto and London. Bollywood-inspired texts like *Slumdog Millionaire* and *Bombay Dreams* not only capitalize on the popularity of Hindi cinema in the South Asian diaspora, but also on Western mainstream audiences’ fascination with racialized
spectacle in the elaborate staging, bright visuals, and exotic representations of femininity in their films.

An increased urgency in recreating these images for Western audiences, particularly in the U.S., accompanied the racialization of ethnic minorities in the wake of 9/11. As I argue in the introductory chapter, heightened anxiety over the racial category of “alien terrorist” made many ethnic groups targets of an intense national gaze, including South Asian Americans; as visible minorities they faced not only exposure to racial profiling, but also deportation and imprisonment by the state. Post-9/11 racialization also led to the collapse of the historically and culturally specific markers of South Asian American identity into an apolitical and ahistorical mode of citizenship. Gayatri Gopinath argues that the two phenomena are linked through a gendered logic of visibility. She argues that the American fascination with Bollywood, marked by the “fetishization of South Asian women’s bodies,” indemnifies the erasure of South Asian American men, both discursively and materially, by the state (“Bollywood Spectacles” 161). Jigna Desai suggests that the fascination with Bollywood film culture revolves around a specific arrangement of classed, national, and religious identities – namely an Indian, middle class, and Hindu subject (“Bollywood Abroad” 120). The subjects of these Bollywood-to-Hollywood films mirror the construction of the idealized South Asian American ‘model minority’ in the U.S., and are circulated as examples of “docile” assimilated subjects while other racial minorities are “demonized or made invisible” (“Bollywood Abroad” 120). Desai and Gopinath both conclude that Bollywood-inspired films and cultural productions ‘translate’ South Asian subjects via spectacles of culture, gender,
and nation through which potentially dangerous terrorist subjects are rendered benign and manageable. This chapter investigates the ways in which one such translation – Gurinder Chadha’s retelling of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* in her 2005 film *Bride and Prejudice* – formulates subjects for a Westernized post-9/11 audience, taking up the complex relay of familiarity and difference that feeds viewers’ fascination and assuages their fears.

I take up the concept of translation from the scholarship of Desai and Gopinath, who each argue that women filmmakers of the South Asian diaspora take part in the trend of ‘translating’ Bollywood – and South Asian femininity– for post-9/11 Western audiences. *Bride and Prejudice* offers another ‘translation’ in this tradition, both in its representations of South Asian femininity and formal allusions to Bollywood. I contend, however, that *Bride and Prejudice* exceeds the format of the translation film set out by Desai and Gopinath. The film draws from a variety of other texts in order to create South Asian subjects, namely Jane Austen’s novel and the cinematic adaptations of her novels. As a result, Chadha’s film ‘translates’ this cinematic legacy as well, recycling the liberal feminist ideas embedded in these films’ interpretation of Austen.

This chapter reflects the broader argument of my dissertation by suggesting that, in *Bride and Prejudice*, the translation of ‘old’ texts creates a new state of affairs in which particular representations of South Asian female citizenship articulate and normalize post-9/11 racial logics. The film’s articulation of South Asian female subjectivity is not simply rendered by the translation of Bollywood for Western audiences, like Desai and Gopinath suggest. Instead, I argue that it is the various translations taking place in *Bride
and Prejudice that enable the alignment of post-9/11 racial logics with the adaptive process. The translation of Austen to India, as well as the citation of conventions, genres, and cinematic images familiar to Western audiences, all work through the adaptive process to forward images of ‘good,’ docile citizen-subjects. The idealized femininity that emerges through these multiple and simultaneous translations – in effect, synthesizing the old and the new – ensures that the model of female South Asian citizenship valued most in the film is both obedient and modern, promoting an inclusive, cosmopolitan outlook without disturbing the institutionalization of the alien terrorist in the post-9/11 racial order.

Translated images of Bollywood have emerged from several Western cinematic traditions. They often originate in mainstream filmmaking, in the case of Danny Boyle and Slumdog, Baz Luhrmann’s tribute to Bollywood in Moulin Rouge, or the reference to Gumnaam in the opening sequence of Terry Zwigoff’s Ghost World. Filmmakers and films focused on the South Asian diaspora often incorporate direct references to Bollywood films: in the 1999 film East is East Archie Panjabi’s character Meenah performs a spoof of a Bollywood dance, while Chadha’s first film Bhaji on the Beach reproduces a scene from Purab aur Paschim. In the years since 9/11, South Asian women filmmakers working in the West have taken up the role of translator for Western audiences. Chadha, along with filmmakers Mira Nair and Deepa Mehta, have achieved critical and commercial success with feature length English-language films that reshape the stylistic and narrative features of Bollywood for Western audiences, such as Chadha’s Bend it Like Beckham, Nair’s Monsoon Wedding, and Mehta’s Bollywood/Hollywood.
Their films often feature popular Bollywood actors (such as Anupam Kher, who appears in two of Chadha’s films, Bend it Like Beckham and Bride and Prejudice), Bollywood-influenced song-and-dance numbers, and narrative conventions of the masala film such as elaborate wedding celebrations. All funded and distributed primarily in Europe and North America, these films also share similar emphases on gendered intergenerational and cultural conflict in contemporary South Asian families – usually provoked by the ‘translated’ Bollywood idiom of the Indian wedding. Living in cosmopolitan cities like London, Toronto, or Delhi, the films’ families are enmeshed in transnational circuits of capital and culture enabled by the economic growth of India and the South Asian diaspora, all the while attempting to preserve some understanding of cultural ‘tradition’ in face of a changing global landscape. The films also propose similar models of Indian identity in their representations of young, cosmopolitan female subjects. They engage a Westernized, liberal feminist ethos in order to craft these female subjects, contrasting the spectacle of cultural tradition with distinctly ‘modern’ struggles over independence, autonomy, and self-expression.

Chadha’s Bride and Prejudice follows in this tradition of ‘translation.’ The film’s protagonist, Lalita, is an independent, intelligent 20-something woman working for the family agricultural business in Amritsar, a small city in northwest India. Although located in a less urban space than her counterparts in Monsoon Wedding or Bend It, Lalita and her three sisters are nonetheless cosmopolitan subjects, equally comfortable at home in Amritsar or abroad in the U.S. and England. Bride and Prejudice, however, is also a contemporary retelling of the Austen classic Pride and Prejudice. The film reflects both
the plot and sentiment of its source text, ‘translating’ the novel’s conflicts over love, family, and class into a series of clashes between modernity and tradition, globalization and nation, and homeland and diaspora – all mediated and resolved by Lalita. In the film, the meddling Mrs. Bennett becomes the cliché of the marriage-obsessed Indian mother, while Elizabeth Bennett’s youngest and silliest sister Lydia transforms into the sexually charged Lakhi. The reticent Mr. Darcy remains relatively unchanged as Will Darcy, a hotelier attending a wedding in Amritsar with his friend Balraj and Balraj’s sister Kieran, Chadha’s version of the affable Mr. Bingley and his uppity sister. Will still plays a hand in keeping Balraj and Lalita’s sister Jaya apart; Will and Lalita also clash over their very different understanding of imperialism, Indian tradition, and romance. The two lead characters finally find common ground when Lalita travels to London and the U.S. for a wedding, and the film ends much like with novel: with the marriage of the protagonist to Darcy, and her sister to Balraj/Bingley.

*Bride and Prejudice* also follows a long line of acclaimed English-language Austenian cinematic adaptations, including the 1949 Hollywood adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, the successful 1995 BBC miniseries version of the same novel (starring Colin Firth as Mr. Darcy, which inspired Helen Fielding’s’ novel *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and its own adaptation to the screen, also starring Colin Firth), Amy Heckerling’s 1995 film *Clueless*, Patricia Rozema’s 1999 adaptation of *Mansfield Park*, and Emma Thompson and Ang Lee’s Academy Award winning adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*. Much like the films of Chadha, Nair, and Mehta, these adaptations attempt to ‘modernize’ the Austenian social landscape through the rhetoric of liberal feminism. As a result, the
film’s adaptation of Austen is tied directly to its translation of Bollywood cinema, proposing its own feminist subjects in the tradition of Austenian cinematic adaptations. Chadha exploits these two traditions’ similar emphasis on female subject-making, drawing from ‘modernized’ Austen adaptations in order to align *Bride and Prejudice*’s characters with cosmopolitan, feminist subjects in films like *Monsoon Wedding* and *Bend it*. I argue that this alignment is a process unique to cinematic adaptation, in that these two ‘old’ traditions are synthesized through the adaptive process in order to create new state of affairs. As a result, adaptation shapes the ways in which Lalita emerges as cosmopolitan citizen-subject: her desires, beliefs, and senses of self are all formed as the various translations taking place in the film unfold through, and occasionally in defiance of, each other.

*Bride and Prejudice*’s status as an adaptation also distinguishes it from other films like *Bend it Like Beckham* and *Monsoon Wedding*. The film’s close alignment with the codes and conventions of Bollywood cinema is, in part, justified by its transposition of Austen’s ‘traditional’ social world onto contemporary India. Chadha uses the social and moral cues of this world to introduce conventions of Bollywood cinema considered too conservative or unrealistic for Western audiences. Shared emphases on gender and sexual conservatism, the primacy of the marriage narrative, and even similar propensities toward musical interludes offer Chadha a bridge between the realist codes of Western cinema and the artifice and kitsch-ness of Bollywood, absent in the other films’ gritty and naturalistic portrayal of female cosmopolitan subjectivity. As a result, *Bride and Prejudice* adopts much of Bollywood’s aesthetic form and content, relinquishing the
verisimilitude of realism in its extradigetic song-and-dance numbers, bright sets, melodramatic turns, and exotic locales. The film’s song-and-dance numbers, references to Bollywood, and liberal use of artifice and kitsch ultimately allows *Bride and Prejudice* to subvert some of the trappings of Orientalist logic that befall similar post-9/11 ‘translations’ of South Asian female subjectivity.

**Adaptation, Translation, and the Politics of Racial Containment**

Desai and Gopinath argue that filmmakers like Nair, Mehta, and Chadha’s ‘translations’ of Bollywood film culture function as sites of racial containment. Their films, coupling the spectacle of traditional South Asian cinema with realist conventions of Western filmmaking, forward South Asian subjects who are controlled by and complicit with a post-9/11 racial order. In this section I argue that the tradition of cross-cultural exchange through which these films and filmmakers create South Asian subjects follows a long legacy of racial containment via translation. Translations, whether anthropological interpretations of various cultures, or interlingual translations of ‘foreign’ texts, have played a crucial role in shaping non-Western subjects for Western consumption since the onset of European colonialism (Niranjana “Translation…” 124). Technologies of subjection in translations serve a regulatory function, a “strategy of containment” aimed at creating “hegemonic versions” of subjects easily understood and managed through Western epistemological regimes (Niranjana “Translation…” 125). In many of the contemporary films of South Asian women diasporic filmmakers, post-9/11 racial logics serve as a controlling epistemological framework. South Asian subjects are
translated and contained through racial narratives that propose an apolitical, “nonthreatening bourgeois subject who complies with a multicultural nationalism and global capitalism” (Desai “Bollywood Abroad” 120).

For Desai and Gopinath, the concept of ‘translation’ captures the ways in which films by South Asian women diasporic filmmaker transfer the codes and conventions of Bollywood film – and with them, South Asian identity – through narratives and tropes recognizable to Western audiences. They argue that appeal of these translations centers around the juxtaposition of this familiar model of post-9/11 cosmopolitan citizenship with Bollywood-inspired spectacles of heterosexual romance, South Asian cultural ritual, and national identity. *Bride and Prejudice* certainly follows in this tradition. I argue that its relationship to translation, however, stands out among the other films in this genre, including Chadha’s film *Bend it Like Beckham* and Nair’s *Monsoon Wedding*, because it is also an adaptation. Not only is the process of ‘translation’ complicated by its status as adaptation (as I suggest below, cinematic adaptation is itself a type of translation), but the particular source text informing *Bride and Prejudice* necessitates multiple, simultaneous translations across space and time.

In my examination of *Bride and Prejudice*, I expand upon Desai and Gopinath’s understanding of translation by linking it to the adaptive process. I see translation as the style or mode of adaptation taking place in *Bride and Prejudice*, in line with Stam’s theory of adaptation as “reading.” Stam argues that the trope of reading adequately describes the subjective, partial, and necessarily open-ended nature of the adaptive process; reading defines adaptation as a “turn in an ongoing dialogical process,” as
opposed to the recreation of a singular textual utterance or event (“Introduction” 4). I propose that translation is a form of reading, in that acts of translation guide the adaptive process, shaping the source text’s narrative, aesthetics, and affect into the language of film through selective and subjective reading. A film adapted under the rubric of translation, similar to Amy Heckerling’s modern take on *Emma* in her 1995 film *Clueless*, “answers” the source text “in an idiom that is equivalent rather than closely corresponding” (Harris 45). *Bride and Prejudice* recodes Austen for a completely different cultural, historical, and geographic context – as opposed to the more subtle spatiotemporal and narrative shifts that take place in the cinematic adaptations of *The Namesake* and *Persepolis*. The answering idiom in *Bride and Prejudice*, however, is always in excess of the original. The spatiotemporal shifts required to stage Jane Austen in modern India ensure that the translation travels ‘beyond’ Regency England in both time and space, inflected with the legacy of colonial conflict and its uneven distribution of global power.

I also see translation as a useful analytical tool for mapping the complex intertextual fields through which *Bride and Prejudice* takes shape. Stam argues that cinematic adaptation is necessarily and productively intertextual; the mechanisms of adaptation “get caught up in the whirl of …texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation, and transmutation” (“Introduction” 5). Translation ties together the film’s intersecting stylistic and narrative features: introducing Western audiences to India via Bollywood, the film is simultaneously a Hollywood-driven translation of Bollywood stylistic conventions and a Bollywood-inspired translation of
Jane Austen, not to mention a modern musical interpretation of a classic text of English literature. As a result, translation also structures the spatiotemporal relationship between various texts and forms the film takes up, linking India to the United Kingdom and the U.S., and Regency England with contemporary India. It is these pairings across space, time, and medium that enable Chadha to forge temporary alliances between the contradictory terms of cosmopolitan subjectivity – modernity and tradition, liberal feminism and gender conservatism, national identity and transnational aspirations – that constitute the film’s female South Asian subjects.

I am particularly interested in extending the metaphor of translation to the adaptation of Austen’s Regency-era English novel to modern-day India in part because of the primacy of transference in a translation, which lends itself to the analysis of flows and exchanges of information across time, geographies, mediums, and cultures. This “process of intercultural transfer,” however, affects both the process of translation and its product (Bassnett and Trivedi 2). Translations travel across space and time in routes already mapped through conquests of geography, culture, and economy. As it moves on routes forged through imbalances of power, a translated text accumulates with what Niranjana identifies as a “force” charged by the “asymmetry and inequality” maintained by colonial conquest, political and military aggression, and global commerce (*Sitting Translation* 1). The volatile political contexts that enable translation practices, including colonial rule and the events of 9/11, foreground the unevenness of these transfers in the film. The imbalances of power across time and space not only affect the adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* into *Bride and Prejudice*, but also shape its presentation of South Asian female
subjects, channeling the play between cosmopolitan citizenship and the spectacle of racial difference through the spatiotemporal shifts that take place in the transfer of Austen to India.

Normalization and Appropriation in the Adaptive Process

The operative logics of translation in *Bride and Prejudice* also enable the appropriation of the adaptive process by the post-9/11 racialization. In the introductory chapter, I argued that representations of South Asian femininity disseminate and normalize post-9/11 racial logics. Translation serves as a mechanism of normalization. Translation is commonly understood as an exchange around a neutral transfer between system of codes, whether interlingual or intersemiotic, based upon a set of rules that emphasized fidelity, and a true or ‘essential’ meaning in a text (Lefevere 75). In this understanding of translation, the representation of a given reality remains “transparent” and “unproblematic,” easily transferred from one text to another through a shared set of epistemological and ontological assumptions (Niranjana “Translation…” 125).

*Bride and Prejudice* relies on adaptation – through its translation of both Austen and Bollywood – to perpetuate the assumed ideological neutrality of its race-making and citizenship-forming projects. Adaptation corroborates the usefulness and presumed neutrality of translation by standing in as the mechanism, and offering up the medium, through which this process takes place. Of course, a translated text does not re-present a given and shared reality, but instead recreates a representation of reality that justifies and normalizes a dominant epistemological regime by translations. In *Bride and Prejudice* ‘translated’ subjects and situations help normalize post-9/11 logics by presenting modes
of citizenship familiar to Western audiences. Embedded in these seemingly neutral images are ideological assumptions about what constitutes ‘good’ post-9/11 racial subjects and, at its margins, the specter of the monstrous other.

**Jane Austen and ‘Adapting’ Feminism for Cosmopolitan Subjects**

On the surface, the spectacle of a Bollywood masala film has little in common with the austere world of Jane Austen; similarly, the hybridized aesthetic style of women diasporic filmmakers seems to champion a flexibility of form absent from the institutionalized and canonized conventions of both English heritage films and Bollywood cinema. This chapter addresses ways in which the simultaneous translations taking place in *Bride and Prejudice* assist in its presentation of cosmopolitan South Asian female subjects, channeling the play between cosmopolitan citizenship and the spectacle of racial difference through the spatiotemporal shifts that take place in the transfer of Austen to India.

For contemporary Western audiences, Austen adaptations and translations of Bollywood by South Asian women diasporian directors draw those audiences in through a similar set of conventions. Each genre creates a cinematic world that is identifiably modern and familiar, but at the same time alien and exotic. Films like *Bend it Like Beckham, Monsoon Wedding*, and *Bollywood/Hollywood* proffer ‘good’ South Asian subjects to a post-9/11 Western audience, often via Bollywood-inspired spectacles of romance, marriage, and family; Austen films, on the other hand, harness the spectacle of historical difference through elaborate period costuming and lush visuals of the English
countryside, but seek to attract modern audiences in ‘updated’ versions of her novels’ characters. Chadha exploits these two traditions’ similar goals, drawing from ‘modernized’ Austen adaptations in order to craft a new state affairs for her own film, in which South Asian female citizen-subjects meet the expectations of both familiarity and difference.

Desai and Gopinath both argue that women directors of the South Asian diaspora like Nair, Chadha, and Mehta engage a Westernized, liberal feminist ethos in the translation of Indian femininity in their films. This ethos combines characteristics of liberalism – such as rationality, autonomy, and individuality – with a feminist emphasis on equality and women’s emancipation from patriarchal traditions (Tong 11). It relies on practices and technologies of the self rooted in neoliberal modes of governmentality institutionalized in the U.S. and Europe that produce citizen-subjects as “free, self-managing, and self-enterprising individuals” (Ong, Neoliberalism as Exception 14). I believe that this emphasis on liberal feminism is a truth effect of a post-9/11 racial discourse, in which modern-ness and familiarity are signified through a feminist sensibility – one that allows racial otherness to be read as male, backward, and alien. The hegemonic status of liberal feminism in these regions ensures that the films’ independent, opinionated, and autonomous female protagonists resonate with Western viewers familiar with these modes of self-making. Chadha’s Bend it Like Beckham, Nair’s Monsoon Wedding, and Meta’s Bollywood/Hollywood all spotlight young, modern South Asian women pursuing unorthodox romantic and professional opportunities. In Bend it, for example, Punjabi-British Jess plays football against her parent’s wishes and begins an
illicit romance with her white coach; in *Bollywood/Hollywood*, Sunita is an escort hired to act as an Indo-Canadian man’s girlfriend at his sister’s wedding. For films like *Monsoon Wedding* and *Bride and Prejudice* that take place primarily in India, modern feminist subjects also become symbolic of a modernized and cosmopolitan India. *Monsoon Wedding*’s Aditi, for example, is not a ‘traditional’ Indian bride; she agrees to an arranged marriage in order to escape from a doomed love affair with a married man. Nair presents Aditi’s bourgeois Delhi family as a product of a modern and cosmopolitan India, who challenge the Orientalist vision of India as backward and anti-modern (as well as the romanticized patriarchal family celebrated in Bollywood films). Feminist conflicts over love, sexual autonomy, and competing models of ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ womanhood endow these films with a familiar appeal to Western audiences, highlighted and exacerbated by the exotic spectacle of South Asian marriage ceremonies.

The intersecting themes of romantic love and female autonomy that circulate throughout the ‘translation’ films of South Asian diasporic filmmakers do not necessarily depart from the thematic content of Bollywood films; Rachel Dwyer argues that contemporary Bollywood cinema forwards a type of “postmodern love,” in which the consumption of commodities and mass media, tourism, and consumer choice drive romantic storylines (13). In the ‘translation’ of Bollywood, ideologies of choice and individuality are rearticulated through the tenets of liberal feminism in order to secure South Asian femininity to the gendered idioms of ‘modern’ global citizenship. Protagonists like Jess, Aditi, and Sunita often call upon a feminist ethos to challenge the gendered expectations of the protagonist’s family and ethnic community. Jess, for
example, confesses that she desires “more” than the traditional marriage of her sister; during Aditi’s wedding, her cousin Ria breaks her silence about years of sexual abuse at the hand of an uncle, confronting her abuser in front of their extended family. Such representations, according to Desai, aim to confront the Orientalist trope of the helpless and passive Third World Woman, effectively replacing “the victimization of women… with representations of women’s agency” (Beyond Bollywood 212). These narratives rely upon the rhetoric of liberalism in order to endow the films’ subjects with a feminist ethos easily identifiable to a Western audience. They issue a broad, generalized autonomy and freedom of expression for agentive characters like Aditi and Jess, forgoing geographic and culturally specific forms of subject making for what Desai describes as “a Western cosmopolitan consumption and sensibility” (“Bollywood Abroad” 123).

Chadha draws from many of the same tropes of liberal feminism in order to craft Lalita as a cosmopolitan female subject in Bride and Prejudice. Lalita is independent, outspoken, and self-sufficient; determined to marry for love, she defies her mother’s plans to arrange her marriage with her cousin Mr. Kholi. Unlike Chadha’s other film, however, Bride and Prejudice takes its narrative cues from the pages of Pride and Prejudice and translates them through time and space to contemporary India. This particular mode of adaptation is central to the ways in which it crafts gendered conflicts and subjects that appeal to Western audiences, including the dissemination and normalization of post-9/11 racial logics through representations of South Asian femininity. Chadha not only engages Austen in her particular interpretation of Elizabeth Bennett, but also relies upon the feminist revisions of Austen in other cinematic
adaptations to guide the ‘translation’ of modern Indian femininity into a familiar model of feminist self-sufficiency and autonomy. Many contemporary adaptations of Austen’s novels, including Davies’ 1995 *Pride and Prejudice*, Thompson and Lee’s 1996 adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*, Heckerling’s 1995 film *Clueless*, and Douglas McGrath’s 1997 adaptation of *Emma*, employ liberal feminist models of female subjectivity in order to ‘update’ the world of Austen, re-fashioning characters with dispositions and desires that appeal to modern audiences.

Austen did not participate in the feminist political writing taking place in England during the early 19th century, but her novels did focus on gendered conflicts over love and land, including women’s lack of property rights, the trials of courtship and marriage, and familial obligations. Coupled with her skillful use of conventions like irony and free indirect discourse, Austen’s emphasis on women’s status in 19th century English society is often read retrospectively as a critique of gendered relations of power (Dengel-Janic and Eckstein 47). The feminist spirit many contemporary readers (and audiences) associate with characters like Elizabeth Bennett and Elinor and Maryann Dashwood, however, are the work of cinematic adaptation. Filmmakers have made explicit what was implicit in her work, using these themes as an ideological foundation to “refigure Austen’s characters and situations through a contemporary liberal feminist sensibility” (Pidduck 118).

Characters like Davies’ Elizabeth Bennett have become vehicles for exploring modern issues of female selfhood, such as freedom of expression, choice over romantic partners, and intellectual independence. Elizabeth Bennett is frequently lauded for her
self-possession, but Ellen Belton argues that Jennifer Ehle’s performance as Elizabeth Bennett in 1995 amplified this feature of the novel, assisted by Ehle’s distinctly modern carriage (and push-up bra) (186). Belton argues that this modernization of Elizabeth Bennett is directly indebted to the liberal feminist project of “self-advancement and self-enrichment” for women (187); she argues that the last shot of the mini-series – a close-up shot of Elizabeth and Darcy smiling in their wedding carriage – suggests that the romantic resolution between the two characters rests upon prioritizing the demands and desires of the self over familial or social obligation.

_Bride and Prejudice_’s Lalita inherits her desire for autonomy and self-fulfillment from Davis’ interpretation of Elizabeth Bennett. Much like Davis’ Bennett, her feminist spirit comes into full view when faced with choosing between familial obligation or romantic love as a motivation for marriage. _Bride and Prejudice_ offers Mr. Kholi as an answer to _Pride and Prejudice_’s Mr. Collins, Elizabeth’s socially inept cousin and heir to the Bennett’s Longbourn estate. In the novel, Mr. Collins travels to Longbourn in hopes of finding a wife among the Bennett sisters. The film translates Mr. Collins into Mr. Kholi through the paradigm of the American model minority, as a wealthy NRI from Los Angeles who returns to India in order to find a ‘traditional’ bride. Mr. Kholi envisions his supposed assimilation into American culture as a sell, attempting to woo the Bakshi family with his expensive colonial style house in Los Angeles and limited knowledge of American slang. Between his bad manners, bad tracksuits, and condescending attitude toward India, however, Kholi fails to impress anyone but Mrs. Bakshi. Nonetheless, he is key to the film’s strategy of post-9/11 racial containment. Mr. Kholi’s ineffectual and
overzealous performance as an American renders him non-threatening to Western audiences, an easily manageable caricature of the immigrant poseur.

Much like his literary equivalent, Mr. Kholi fixates his affections on an unwilling Lalita before embarrassing them both with a proposal. Mr. Kholi’s status as a wealthy green card holder is not lost upon Lalita’s mother, who regards her daughter’s marriage to Mr. Kholi as an opportunity for immigration and financial gain. Lalita has no interest in becoming Mr. Kholi’s ‘traditional’ bride, a sentiment she expresses in the song-and-dance number “No Life Without Wife.” Lalita’s sisters burst into her room at night as they prepare for bed, teasing her about Mr. Kholi’s attention to her. Lalita is disgusted by what lies ahead for her as Mr. Kholi’s wife and counters their descriptions of her suitor by outlining her own ideal partner. Her narration, highlighted by the repeating lyrical phrase of “I Want,” serves as a means of interpellation into a liberal, heterosexual feminist subjecthood. Through it she acquires the ability to express her autonomy and independence, but at a price: she must also submit to models of feminism that simultaneously Orientalize and Westernizes her desires. The song opens as the sisters mock Mr. Kholi’s outdated understanding of marriage. His “green card, new house, big cash” is no match for the qualities he seeks in a partner, namely a “pretty wife to make him proud” who prepares his meals while he “makes the money.” They complain that he is a rude and self-centered slob, who is willing to exchange his wealth and cultural cache for a wife who will ignore his poor manners, and still adhere to his outdated understanding of Indian womanhood. While they express generalized anxiety over losing independence as his bride – the sisters mockingly sing “what you do don’t matter no
more” to Lalita – their objections to Mr. Kholi as a partner are contingent on a set of behaviors and expectations dictated by Mr. Kholi’s role as a NRI shopping for a ‘traditional’ bride in India.

Lalita counters her sister’s taunts by outlining her ideal partner through a series of generalized feminist truisms. She heterosexualizes her desires through the repeated line of “I want a man,” and demands one who respects and matches her modern, feminist subjectivity. He must be romantic and spontaneous, but he must also agree to “equality and not control” and “not be scared to weep.” Lalita then makes her feminist critique explicit, rejecting the objectification of women in her demand that he “talks to me and not my rack.” Lalita’s counter, echoing the liberal feminist models of subjectivity in *Bend it* and *Monsoon Wedding*, poses a general, superficial solution to the localized ‘problem’ of Mr. Kholi. While her response confirms Lalita’s feminist subjectivity, it also erases the specific historical, cultural conditions under which she and her sisters’ objections to Mr. Kholi take shape. “No Life Without Wife” suggests that the feminist aspirations of equality, autonomy, and freedom of expression are universal fixes for the problems of modern womanhood, regardless of location or situation.

The style and tone of the song, however, ensure that Lalita's feminist subjectivity remains linked to an explicitly Western model of subjecthood. “No Life” articulates its claims on autonomy and independence through the conventions of American pop music and teen films of the 1960s. The song itself is an infectious, girl-group-style dance number infused with rhythmic elements of Reggae and SKA. Perfect for dancing, its upbeat, breezy tone recalls the beach party films of the 1960s, and the Bakshi girls even
dance a modified version of the twist during the song’s chorus. The sisters sing and dance around the house in matching white pajamas, a direct reference to films like *Pajama Party* and *Gidget* – as well as the parody of these films in the 1972 musical *Grease*. By enacting its feminist critique through allusions to American teenage girlhood, the song offers up Western modes of subject making as a replacement for the ‘traditional’ Indian femininity idealized by Mr. Kholi. Lalita’s shifting wardrobe throughout “No Life” seems to mirror this substitution. In the opening shot of the song, a handful of kameez tops hang on a closest door behind Lalita, who sits on her bed in a fitted white pajama top and satin pants. As her sisters enter the room in variations of the same outfit, the kameez in the background suggest that the interpellation into a feminist subjectivity requires that Lalita literally ‘hang up’ her Indian clothes.

In one of the song’s fantasy sequences, Lalita imagines her life with Kholi as his wife, which includes another shift in wardrobe: a montage of their life together depicts Lalita relinquishing control of her money, serving Kholi dinner, and working out on an outdated exercise bike. However, it is Lalita’s changed appearance – unhappily dressed as a ‘traditional’ Indian wife in a sari, wedding bangles, sensible shoes, and an application of vermillion along her hairline – that signifies that she is out of place in such a relationship. The song soon shifts to a wedding fantasy that seemingly suits Lalita, this time dreaming about “what it would be like/to be an overseas bride dressed in white.” It follows Lalita to England, where she roams through the countryside wearing a white wedding gown, in anticipation of her wedding to Johnny Wickham. The song’s clothing styles serve as signifiers for a series of reductive pairings (modernity/tradition, east/west,
and coercion/choice) that link Lalita’s desire for autonomy and equality to a corporeal performance of Westernized femininity.

The familiarity of *Pride and Prejudice*’s well-known plot presents a challenge to its adaptations: audiences already know that Elizabeth and Lalita will reject their respective proposals, so the films must offer audiences another reason to continue watching. In Davies’ *Pride and Prejudice* and *Bride and Prejudice*, Mr. Collins’ and Mr. Kholi’s distinct forms of misogyny allow each of the films to showcase its feminist revisions of Austen’s Elizabeth Bennett, creating a familiar, and compelling, ethical landscape in the modern means through which the two women issue their rejections. When Mr. Kholi does propose to Lalita, she insists that she could not make him happy nor could he do the same for her. Her rejection echoes Elizabeth Bennett’s confrontation with Mr. Collins in both the novel and miniseries. This famous line composes only a small part of the playful and prolonged exchange between Elizabeth and Mr. Collins in the original text; both films, however, shorten the proposal scene in order to highlight Elizabeth and Lalita’s objections to their respective offers of marriage. Elizabeth and Lalita’s satisfaction with an equally independent and intelligent partner is at the core of their happiness and sense of self, and the films’ emphasis on their independence and autonomy offers an emphatically feminist tone to their rejection of Mr. Collins and Mr. Kholi.

The films’ similar articulation of Elizabeth and Lalita’s heterosexual feminist ethos, however, achieves different ends. The mini-series uses the proposal scene to highlight the triumph of Elizabeth’s individualism over her sense of familial duty. A
series of medium close-up shots captures Ehle’s stricken expression during Mr. Collin’s proposal. Her seated position highlights her immobility, and downward angle of the camera exacerbates the threat to her sense of self, conveying her panic over the thought of marrying someone she does not respect in order to save her family from poverty.

The proposal scene in *Bride and Prejudice* follows the same visual pattern, framing Mr. Kholi and Lalita’s faces through a sustained shot reverse shot sequence. The scene, however, makes it clear that Lalita rejects Mr. Kholi because of his desire to bring a ‘traditional’ wife back to the U.S. with him, one who will prioritize his needs over her own. In the novel and its adaptation, Mr. Collins refuses to accept Elizabeth’s rejection, mistakenly believing she is acting out of modesty. The proposal scene in *Bride and Prejudice*, however, uses Mr. Kholi’s entreaties to highlight his mistaken assumptions about Lalita, and all Indian women: that she would desire a ‘traditional’ life, or that the material and cultural lure of America would offer enough enticement for marriage.

Unlike the adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* Lalita stands next to him in the scene, erasing some of the power Mr. Collins held over Elizabeth, and argues with Mr. Kholi over their conflicting expectations for partnership. While Lalita channels Elizabeth Bennett’s self-possession, she uses her rejection to admonish Mr. Kholi for his misguided and Orientalist assumptions. The difference between the two scenes is an effect of the novel – and its feminist variants – traveling across space and time. Not only is the exchange between Mr. Kholi and Lalita one that only makes sense in a contemporary transnational context, but the translation of Lalita’s rejection to the proposal ‘modernizes’ Indian femininity through the rubric of liberal feminism. Lalita’s refusal on the grounds
that she is not the ‘traditional’ wife he desires, attributes her modernness – and the implied modernness of all Indian women – to a feminist-inspired sense of independence and self-sufficiency.

**Cosmopolitan Subjecthood and the Clash Between Tradition and Modernity**

Lalita, much like *Bend It’s Jess* and *Monsoon Wedding’s Aditi*, does not simply model a variant of liberal feminism in her role as cosmopolitan subject. She is equally marked by the spectacle of difference. Dazzling displays of South Asian cultural practice in these films function as sites of fascination and difference for Western audiences, who are ushered into the province of the Other by the non-threatening feminist subjects at its center. The translation of South Asian femininity through these dual modes produces a particular narrative effect: Gopinath argues that the conditions of their subjection “remain firmly embedded within the dichotomous logic of tradition and modernity,” juxtaposing Westernized strategies of subject making with regimes of gender and sexuality dictated by the seemingly entrenched rites, customs, and norms of the South Asian family (*Impossible Desires* 126). In *Bride and Prejudice*, it is the simultaneous translations taking place in the film that activate the opposing forces of modernity and tradition in cosmopolitan subject making. The transposition of *Pride and Prejudice* through time and space, for example, projects the novel’s pastoral and premodern world onto contemporary India; on the other hand, the film’s translation of Indian ‘tradition’ for Western audiences relies on the intertextual power of modern tropes, stereotypes, and stars. Together, they
ensure that subjection serves as a strategy of racial containment, dictating the terms of ‘acceptable’ Indian femininity through models of cosmopolitan subjectionhood.

*Pride and Prejudice* is a comedy of manners, and the novel’s dramatic tension rests upon its characters’ varying commands of social decorum and respectability. The witty and intelligent Elizabeth Bennett is no match for her mother and younger sister Lydia, whose frivolous and outrageous public behavior, not to mention their disregard for social propriety, threaten the reputation of the family. *Bride and Prejudice* draws from these characters’ penchant for spectacle in order to stage moments of racialized difference through their cinematic equivalents, Mrs. Bakshi and Lakhi. Here social impropriety doubles as racial spectacle, where the two characters fail to perform the social and ethical demands of cosmopolitan subjectionhood. Much like her corollary in Austen’s novel, Mrs. Bakshi is fixated on marrying off her four daughters in order to secure the financial future of her family. Her ambitions reflect the transnational context inspired by the film’s translation of Austen to India: instead of hoping to keep Longbourn in the family by making Mr. Collins her son-in-law, Mrs. Bakshi sees Mr. Kholi as a link to economic and social opportunity in the U.S.

*Bride and Prejudice*, however, re-scripts the conflicts induced by the novel’s meddling mother through the trope of ignorant, provincial Indian foreigner. It works to exclude her from its vision of modernity, replacing the social indelicacy of Mrs. Bennett with a type of provincial naïveté stereotyped by characters like Tom Hank’s character in *The Terminal* or the supporting cast of *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. Mrs. Bakshi is clearly marked as un-worldly; when visiting Balraj’s home in London, for example, she mistakes
a Picasso original for Andy Warhol, and incorrectly identifies Barcelona as a city in Italy. Her complimentary tone with the patronizing Mrs. Darcy (she assesses her hotel as “first class”) and persistent adoration for the Queen also invoke the trope of the sycophantic colonial subject. Together, these stereotypes make her appear dated and out of place as she travels with her family in England and the U.S. Mrs. Bakshi’s social ineptitude serves as a strategy of post-9/11 racial containment that owes much of its potency to the particular modes of translation – through time, space, and medium – adopted by *Bride and Prejudice*. Desai argues that as South Asian filmmakers draw from commonly circulating tropes like the ignorant foreigner (or as I discuss below, the Indian mother) in order to translate South Asian cultural norms to Western audiences, they risk naturalizing these stereotypes as part of “traditional discourses on gender and sexuality” (*Beyond Bollywood* 67). Unlike Austen’s Mrs. Bennett, whose melodramatic and self-centered demeanor functions as a comic foil to Elizabeth’s sense of propriety and duty, Mrs. Bakshi’s decidedly antiquated, provincial outlook is easily naturalized as a type of outmoded Indian femininity that clashes with Lalita’s modern and cosmopolitan subjectivity.

The film also translates Mrs. Bakshi through familiar stereotypes of South Asian femininity, suggesting that her fixation on marriage is part of this ‘traditional’ ethos. For example, Kholi’s arrangement with Mrs. Bakshi links her to Mr. Kholi’s traditional method of finding a wife. Her complicity with his marriage scheme is then portrayed as an affront to Lalita’s feminist sensibility; when she finds out that Mr. Kholi has arranged the proposal with her mother, she responds, “I’m sorry, but you should have spoken to *me*”
first.” The film, however, translates Mrs. Bennett’s similar focus on marriage through the stereotype of the matrimonially obsessed Indian mother popularized through characters like Madhuri Kumar in *The Kumar’s at No. 42* and the maternal figures in *Bend it, Bollywood/Hollywood*, and *American Desi*. Geraghty argues that in *Bride and Prejudice*, Mrs. Bakshi is translated and consequently naturalized through “an established set of representations of the Indian mother” – as opposed to “the exaggerated effect of a comedic character” through which Alison Stedman’s performance as Mrs. Bennett takes shape (164). In *Bride and Prejudice*, Mrs. Bakshi’s drive to see her daughters married becomes naturalized as part of her identity. Lalita rejects Mr. Kholi’s offer and her mother threatens to disown her, recalling another famous exchange between Mrs. Bennett and Elizabeth – and Mr. Bennett who counters his wife’s threat with his own promise of disownment to Elizabeth if she *does* marry Mr. Collins. Instead of Stedman’s over-the-top performance (which involved high-pitched shrieking and weeping), stage actor Nadira Babbar plays the scene with more gravity, demonstrating Mrs. Bakshi’s grave anger with her daughter’s rejection of Mr. Kholi. Her severe reaction toward Lalita is not without reason: she argues that her own arranged marriage inspired love – not to mention produced Lalita. To her mother, Lalita’s rejection of Mr. Kholi is thus a rejection of her own understanding of love, marriage, and South Asian femininity. Much like the trope of the ignorant foreigner, this stereotype has the effect of transforming Mrs. Bennett’s exaggerated temperament into a representation of ‘traditional’ Indian values against which Lalita expresses her desire for companionate love and feminist choice.
In the translation of *Pride and Prejudice* to India, Chadha also rewrites Lydia Bennett’s rebellious behavior through the opposing forces of modernity and tradition. Unlike her mother, who is rendered too old-fashioned by the film, Lakhi becomes a cautionary tale of modern female subjectivity gone too far, exhibiting a sexual agency untethered from the mores of ‘traditional’ Indian femininity or the internalized regulation required of liberal feminism. Lydia, in *Pride and Prejudice*, is the youngest and most rebellious of the Bennett sisters. In addition to her open flirtation with men and disregard for social propriety, Lydia is self-centered and careless, features captured best by Julia Sawalha’s performance in the 1995 adaptation of the novel. In a fit of carelessness, Lydia runs off with Mr. Wickham, naively assuming they will be married. Her rebellion threatens the reputation of her sisters and their prospects for marriage, until Mr. Darcy uncovers Wickham’s hiding spot in London and forces them to wed. In *Bride and Prejudice*, Lakhi enacts a diluted version of Lydia’s rebellion. She attempts to secure the affections of Johnny Wickham while he stays with her family in Amritsar, and reunites with him in London. Lakhi’s defiance, however, is short lived: Darcy and Lalita quickly find the pair in London and rescue her from the less-than-noble Wickham. She returns to her family relatively unchanged – a shift from the novel that Dengel-Janic and Eckstein suggest adheres more closely to the “happier happy ending which is required by Bollywood convention” (52).

*Bride and Prejudice*, however, translates Lakhi’s impropriety and its threat to her family’s reputation as a rejection of ‘traditional’ expectations around Indian female chastity and modesty. The film’s characterization of Lakhi is distinct from the other
versions of the youngest Bennett: while Lydia’s flirtation and ill-conceived elopement are symptomatic of her excessive self-centeredness and lack of self awareness – her father calls her one of the “silliest girls in England” – Lakhi’s rebellion is explicitly sexual in nature. Her appearance is highly sexualized and she is often featured wearing revealing, midriff-baring tops and tight jeans. She, like Lydia, is also a flirt; her sister Maya complains that she is “too outrageous,” texting boys at all hours of the night. Unlike Lalita, Lakhi relentlessly pursues Wickham and attracts his attention through a flirtatious and often physical courtship. Lakhi’s forward manner is an example of the relationship between Indian femininity and modernity defined by Desai: the signification of “Indian’s modernity through the sign of the sexually active female,” routed through liberal feminist ethos which prefaces choice and agency in the expression of sexuality (*Beyond Bollywood* 223). Lakhi, however, takes advantage of liberal feminism’s promise of sexual agency without adhering to its regulatory requirements like restraint, responsibility, and self-respect. She ultimately fails to exercise caution in choosing an appropriate sexual partner and must be rescued by her sister – a decision that disqualifies her as a cosmopolitan subject until she internalizes the proper modes of self-regulation and self-knowledge that liberal feminism requires.

The film relies on the articulation of this liberal, feminist subjectivity in order to ‘modernize’ India, and so the sexual agency Lakhi exercises not only takes Western modernity too far, but is also a rash disavowal of Indian tradition. The film contrasts Lakhi’s wild behavior against Lalita and Jaya’s more appropriate engagements with sexual autonomy and tradition. Jaya, for example, asks her father’s permission to travel
with Balraj and his friends to Goa, who only allows her to go if accompanied by Lalita as a chaperone. Holding up Lakhi as an example, *Bride and Prejudice* suggests that cosmopolitan subjectivity does not require an outright rejection of traditional regimes of gender and sexuality. Instead, the ‘proper’ conduct of Jaya and Lalita matches the familiar liberal doctrine of individualist responsibility with the exotified, Orientalist fantasy of male-controlled female sexuality.

Mrs. Bakshi and Lakhi act as foils for Lalita, and it is her seemingly effortless embodiment of both tradition and modernity through which their failures are rendered legible. As a result, Lalita often serves as the focal point for competing discourses on Indian femininity and sexuality. She, for example, is familiar to Western audiences as a reincarnation of the popular (and potentially feminist) character Elizabeth Bennett; at the same time, the film’s liberal use of soft focus, backlighting, and tropical locales exotify and orientalize her. The film reconciles these opposing idioms of tradition and modernness that shape Lalita through the star power of Aishwarya Rai. Dyer argues that images of stars often resolve contradicting ideologies, staging a “magical synthesis of…opposites” both on and off the screen (26). The former model and Miss World is one of Bollywood’s biggest stars, and certainly one of its most recognizable figures in the U.S. and Europe. Rai’s star image also serves to unite Indian film cultures and Austen, having portrayed the Marianne Dashwood character in a Tamil-language updated interpretation of *Sense and Sensibility*, *Kandukondain Kandukondain*, in 2000. Rai herself often serves as an informal ambassador for Indian modernity in the West, appearing on talk shows like *Oprah*, the *Tyra Banks Show*, and *The David Letterman*
Show and attending prestigious film festivals in Europe and the U.S. During these public appearances, however, her carefully managed image never transgresses the expectations of proper Indian womanhood. In interviews on The Oprah Winfrey Show and 60 Minutes that aired in the years following the release of Bride and Prejudice, Rai emerges as an idyllic embodiment of both: she confronts stereotypes about arranged marriages, living at home, and beauty in India all while coyly deflecting questions about sexuality and sexual practices. She not only poses as the wholesome and domestic South Asian woman – in the 60 minutes segment Bob Simon calls her “India’s good girl” – but also plays the part of Orientalist ingénue, flirting with Simon and making reference to the Kama Sutra. As Lalita, Rai as star enables logic through which tradition and modernity, and familiarity and exotic difference, come together to formulate the female cosmopolitan citizen.

Rai’s star persona often bleeds into her performance of Lalita, normalizing those competing narratives in a synergistic coupling of corporeality and personality. Rai’s status as an international beauty queen and the “world’s most beautiful woman” was not lost on Chadha, who expressed anxiety in the director’s commentary over the star’s striking appearance in relationship to her sisters (to her credit, Jaya’s Namrata Shirodkar was Miss India 1993) (60 Minutes). Rai’s beauty functions as a type of intertext, inevitably projected onto her performance of Lalita. Accordingly, Lalita’s fairness, light eyes, and lightened hair distinguishes her from her sisters and friends – one of her friends refers to her as the “jewel of Amritsar.” Lalita’s beauty seems to single her out, much like Rai, for a fate beyond her hometown. Lalita also has a wardrobe fitting for a former Miss World. Equally comfortable in a salwar kameez or jeans and t-shirt, Lalita’s basic
wardrobe of kurtis and jeans (particularly as she and her family travel in England and the U.S.) seems to channel Rai’s cosmopolitan savviness. At the same time, Rai’s status as Bollywood star inevitably calls upon national narratives of idealized femininity and beauty in her role as Lalita. Rai’s role as a national icon ensures that Lalita’s performance of modern femininity remains inflected with ‘traditional’ Indian values such as modesty and sexual chastity. *Bride and Prejudice* foregrounds the national context of these regimes through the visual juxtaposition of Lalita with Balraj’s Westernized Indian sister Kieran (portrayed by Briton Indira Varma). Poolside in Goa, the film captures Kieran splayed on a beach chair in a skimpy Burberry (an iconic brand synonymous with Britishness) bikini. Lalita, on the other hand, is only shot from midriff up, and appears to emerge from the pool fully clothed in a sarong. Chadha’s commentary directs this contrast back to the star herself, revealing that Rai “wasn’t that keen on doing a bathing scene” and refused to be filmed “coming out of the water dripping wet.” Although Rai’s protests echo feminist objections over the objectification of women in both Bollywood and Western cinematic cultures, Chadha only credits Rai’s commitment to the nation, suggesting that “she’s actually quite…chaste” as a truly “traditional Indian girl.” Here Rai is at the center of Lalita’s embodiment of both modern-ness and tradition. Her profilmic assertion of autonomy over her body certainly authorizes Lalita’s agentive power in *Bride and Prejudice*. At the same time it assures that Lalita, despite those feminist tendencies, will not transgress the normative expectations of femininity and female sexuality through which Rai’s star power acquires its force.
'Take Me To Love': Cosmopolitan Subjectivity and Multicultualist Consumption

Rai’s success as a star and businesswoman also guides Chadha’s modern, feminist-driven interpretation of Jane Austen, according to Geraghty. She argues that *Bride and Prejudice* banks on Rai’s “position as a very rich young woman who controls her own destiny” as a conduit in transferring Elizabeth Bennett’s independence and intelligence to Lalita (165). Lalita proves her savviness and spirit by dropping Wickham for Darcy, securing upward mobility for her and her family and the means to fulfill her destiny as cosmopolitan citizen-subject. Lalita’s cosmopolitan ‘destiny’ of American Darcy and international jet setting, however, extends beyond the personal fulfillment narratives of other contemporary Austen adaptations. Cosmopolitan subjects, according to Desai, are deployed in translations of Bollywood in order to “to imagine and negotiate this difficult position” brought about by the effects of globalization and global events like 9/11 (“Bollywood Abroad” 133). Lalita is no exception: her union with Darcy not only solves the series of translational conflicts that occur within her family, but also attempts to resolve conflict between India and the neo-imperialist ambition that he and his global hotel business represent.

*Bride and Prejudice*, in its transnational translation of *Pride and Prejudice*, effectively re-scripts the gendered class conflicts of Austen’s novel into modernized clashes over globalization, immigration, and national space. While in the novel Mr. Collins is set to inherit Longbourn when Mr. Bennett dies – leaving the Bennett women with no source of income or security – Mr. Kholi does not hold such direct ties to family’s livelihood. Instead, he provides a link to upward mobility in the U.S. and the
potential to create financial and familial ties to the diaspora, an opportunity Mr. Bakshi passed up years before. Similarly, in the novel Lydia disappears with Wickham and threatens the reputation of her family and sisters’ chance for marriage; in the film, however, tension over Lakhi’s tryst with Wickham centers on the severed ties with her family and nation she will potentially face as Wickham’s girlfriend. Wickham is not only not wealthy, but also lives in a houseboat. His home has no foundation, literally adrift, and represents a union that cannot provide Lakhi with adequate ties to India or her family. The central conflict of the film, however, is the clash between Lalita and Will. Unlike the novel’s Mr. Darcy, Will is not a landlord, but a hotelier who has traveled to India in order to buy property. They become quick enemies when Lalita discovers his plan to invest in a hotel in Goa. She chides him, suggesting that such an investment provides only marginal benefit to people in India. The conflict between the two characters is not so much about the acquisition of land in India, but about consumption and appropriation of Indian culture and labor – Lalita accuses Will of trying to turn India into a theme park before calling him an imperialist – that such an acquisition inevitably requires.

The conflict between Lalita and Will rehearses a type of colonial trope that juxtaposes the feminized, untouched nation-state against a heartless and masculine multinational corporation. This reductive pairing presents a version of India that is both non-threatening and easily managed by Western audiences. Indian modernity, while present in the feminist tendencies and contemporary conflicts of the characters, is visually displaced from the narrative. Chadha avoids filming in the nation’s metropolitan
cities, instead shooting mainly in agricultural Amritsar and a resort in Goa. She also plays up the film’s links to the pastoral and premodern world of Jane Austen through the visual conventions of Hindi cinema. For example, the film opens on the pristine image of Amritsar’s Golden Temple at sunrise, citing a Bollywood tradition of beginning films with religious icons for good luck. The shot of the Golden Temple also endows the opening sequence of the film with a sense of timelessness and purity, a feeling immediately confirmed in the film by a montage of Lalita riding a tractor around her father’s farm. These images are the effect of the multiple and simultaneous translations that occur in the process of adaptation, namely the film’s projection of the Austenian pastoral onto modern India and its interpretation of Bollywood conventions for Hollywood. Competing lines coalesce in visions of a premodern and ‘traditional,’ India, exotified and depoliticized for Western audiences. The alignment of Amritsar with premodern England is reinforced visually by other adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*: the façade of the Bakshi family home bears a striking resemblance to Luckington Court in Wilshire, which served as exterior of Longbourn in Davis’ 1995 adaptation. This visual parallel between the two homes not only works to insert the Bakshi’s into a long line of Austenian families, but also signifies the unspoken relations of power – British colonial rule in India – that enables the translation of these texts.

The familiarity of Austen’s novel (and subsequent adaptations) makes the two central characters’ eventual union a given for most audiences; the appeal of their relationship hinges on the means through which they develop affection for each other, and resolve the conflicts that keep them apart. In the case of Lalita and Will, they finally
manage to resolve some of their differences when Lalita travels to the U.S. to attend the wedding of Kholi to Lalita’s friend Chandra. Their reconciliation and growing attachment is narrativized in song, a common device of the Bollywood masala film. The song “Take Me To Love,” with its implication of travel through time and space, utilizes cosmopolitan Los Angeles in order to reconcile the two characters’ conflicting points of views, neutralizing the imbalance of power between First and Third Worlds through the rhetoric of multiculturalism and multiculturalist consumption.

The song begins in a clichéd site of American ethnic consumerism: a Mexican restaurant. Will and Lalita bond over margaritas and Mariachi music, the shared experience of consumption dissolving some of their animosity toward one another. As the stringed accompaniment swells, the song cuts to a romantic Bollywood-style shot of the would-be lovers running through a fountain. Chadha uses many of the conventions of the Bollywood musical number, including an extended montage of local and national landmarks, an army of background singers and dancers, and the liberal use of panoramic and slow motion camera work. These devices endow the song with an epic quality, rending Lalita and Will’s romance transcendent and detached from the political rifts that kept them apart. The song’s emphasis on natural and cultural landmarks like the Grand Canyon, Disney Theater, and the Santa Monica Pier continue to naturalize and depoliticize the union, while the endorsement of multiethnic background singers (the Mariachi band and restaurant staff, a gospel choir, and a group of surfers) places the pairing in a politically neutral multicultural context. With any lingering conflict between Will and Lalita neutralized by the implied racial and cultural diversity of Los Angeles
and its residents, the couple is free to fall in love. Her union with Darcy offers Lalita a material lifestyle that both matches her cosmopolitan ambition and solves the series of family crises. It is Will, for example, that navigates London with Lalita in order to find Lakhi and return her to her family. In addition, Lalita’s eventual marriage to Will and his hotel business complete her mother’s mission of establishing a direct link to American culture and capital – without the drawbacks of Mr. Kholi. The film’s alignment of heterosexual romance with the aesthetization of cultural and ideological difference ensures that its representations of female citizenship functions as a site of post-9/11 racial containment. Lalita fulfills her ‘destiny’ as a cosmopolitan citizen-subject when she demonstrates that ideological conflicts over globalization are easily resolved through the universality of love, the pleasure of consumption, and the political neutrality of multiculturalism.

Bollywood as Source Text: Hybridity and Challenging the Truth-Effects of Translation

_Bride and Prejudice_ presents a less sensational depiction of cosmopolitan sexual identity than in _Bend it, Monsoon Wedding, or Bollywood/Hollywood_. Lalita, although headstrong and independent, is not embroiled in a torrid love affair, mistaken for a lesbian, or earning a living as an escort. The film even sidesteps the novel’s sexual controversy, transforming the affair between Wickham and Lydia into an ambiguous romance between Lakhi and Johnny Wickham. This representation of sexual conservatism uses seemingly ‘traditional’ discourses around Indian femininity in order to
signify difference, distinguishing the film from its source text, from the other films in the genre, and from Hollywood-style representations of romance. It also signifies the film’s allegiance to another set of cinematic conventions: Lalita and her sisters mirror representations of female sexuality institutionalized in Bollywood cinema. *Bride and Prejudice* is heavily indebted to Bollywood, following the codes and convention of the cinematic culture more closely than its other ‘translations’ by Nair and Mehta.

The film’s adaptation of Austen directly enables Chadha’s departure from other, more realist translations of Bollywood. Austen and Bollywood share a similar emphasis on overcoming familiar objections on the quest for romantic love. Austen’s world provides easily identifiable referents for Western audiences in relationship to gender and sexual ideologies, primacy of the family, and focus on romance characteristic of the Bollywood masala film (Dengel-Janic and Eckstein 51). The enemies-turned-lovers of *Pride and Prejudice*’s two protagonists is a plot featured prominently in Bollywood films, along with the uneven social pairing of Jane and Bingley. Much like in Austen’s novels, dance is a staple of the Bollywood film, facilitating social and physical interaction between characters that would be otherwise limited. Adaptation, through multiple and simultaneous acts of translation, activates two distinct ideological projects in *Bride and Prejudice*: it allows the film to maintain an intimate connection with the gender and sexual conservatism of Bollywood cinema without relinquishing the film’s relationship to liberal feminism enabled by the adaptation of Austen’s novels.

Crafting characters more closely within the codes of Bollywood cinema certainly reflects the filmmaker’s attempt to appeal to audiences in India (and elsewhere) familiar
with these conventions. It may indicate Chadha’s wish to bypass some of the obstacles
filmmakers like Mehta and Nair encountered in screening their more sexually explicit or
controversial films in India. Chadha’s choice to closely mimic the codes and
conventions of Bollywood is more than just a calculation of crossover appeal. Enabled by
its narrative alignment with Bollywood, *Bride and Prejudice* sidesteps the typical
Hollywood focus on realism and verisimilitude for the playfulness and artifice of
Bollywood. This shift ultimately inspires moments of subversion in the film that resist
some of the strategies of post-9/11 racial containment produced by translation,
particularly those that shape models of South Asian female citizenship. The kitschy,
playful tone and artificial mise-en-scene of the film disrupts colonial relations of looking,
teleological models of modernity, and presumptions of ethnographic reality that
transform Orientalist stereotypes into the truth-effects of translation.

*Bride and Prejudice* effectively challenges some of these mechanisms through the
practice of hybridity outlined by Homi Bhabha. Writing about South Asian colonial
tropes, Bhabha argues that re-articulation of colonial power by colonial subjects in the
form of stereotypes mocks power dynamics inherent in these stereotypes. The process of
mimicry revalues them into “strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the
discriminated back upon the eye of power” (159). *Bride and Prejudice*’s song-and-dance
numbers stage moments of hybridity and mimesis. The excess already embedded in the
musical interludes not only offers discursive space to exaggerate and mock gendered
Orientalist stereotypes and assumptions, but they also break up the film’s narrative,
offering isolated moments of critique in a distinctly apolitical film.17
Maya Bakshi’s dinner party performance of a cobra dance serves as one such moment of hybridity. Her awkward, robotic interpretation mocks Orientalist relations of looking that inform the translation of both Bollywood through space and time, and the often unspoken assumptions of the audiences who receive them. The cobra (or nagin) dance is a dance number often reproduced in a genre of Bollywood cinema known as the “nagin film.” In these films, a “snake woman,” jilted in love, takes on snake-like powers in order to enact revenge or to take a new lover. Suggestive and erotic, the Bollywood version of the cobra dance serves as male-driven fantasy in which the snake-woman lures and seduces her prey, or is ‘charmed’ into submission by a male wrangler. The cobra dance was immortalized in the 1954 film Nagina and recreated in various b-grade remakes and derivatives (including the upcoming Hindi film Hiss, directed by American director Jennifer Chambers Lynch – a Bollywood first); Maya’s dance is a direct reference to Sridevi’s performance in the 1986 remake of Nagina. Maya’s performance starts innocently as guests politely watch her dance begin. But as she rolls on the floor toward the crowd – citing the song “Main Teri Dushman” from the 1986 version of Nagina – she moves uncomfortably close to her guests, eventually dancing inches away from Balraj, Mr. Kholi, and Will. When she begins to pounce at the men’s faces, they recoil in stilted horror. Will in particular seems disturbed by Maya’s intimate execution of the cobra dance, and smug expression gives way to one of alarm as she moves too close for his comfort. Will’s reaction to her invasion mocks the voyeuristic gaze through which Western audiences typically consume translations of Bollywood. With the spectatorial distance between them quickly collapsing, the film suggests that Will must
relinquish his sense of superiority over Maya. It transforms into a clear look of discomfort, no doubt instigated by a reversal of roles as the Other confronts the voyeuristic spectator in his own space.

Maya’s embodiment of the snake-woman also alludes to the Orientalist stereotype of the exotic temptress, a type of secret, folkloric creature taken out and put on display for the benefit of Western (and Westernized) guests. Maya’s performance, however, unleashes this stereotype back onto audience, both literally and figuratively. Her dance, for example, mocks her own exotification: she is not revealing an indigenous or ancient secret, but instead ‘translating’ a popular dance from a Bollywood b-movie. While she studiously recreates many of the moves from Sridevi’s dance, her dance fails to produce the same seductive effect. Maya is all precision and no grace; her furrowed brow, intense gaze, and stiff comportment suggest that there is nothing seductive or exotic about her. The scene’s skewed camera angles and liberal use of rapid camera work add to her awkwardness. These visual devices, along with the 360-degree shot that tracks Maya as she spins into the final moments of her routine, all recall Sridevi’s enchanting dance in “Main Teri Dushman.” At the same time, they also add a sense of frivolity to the scene, taking the edge off Maya’s intensity by suggesting that her performance is intentionally over-the-top and humorous. The joke is not just at Maya’s expense, however. It mocks the audience as well, whose image of the Orientalist ingénue she has shattered. The Nagin dance scene as a whole speaks directly to the representation of racialized spectacle through which post-9/11 good citizenship is channeled. It mocks distant gaze used to
contain and aestheticize racial subjects, while at the same time highlights the disjuncture of those representations from reality.

The Orientalist stereotypes that the film mocks are held in place by a Eurocentric teleology of modernity. Niranjana argues that teleological models serve as modes of interpretation and containment institutionalized during colonial rule, normalizing imbalances of power between metropole and colony by presenting the latter as “distorted or immature versions of what can be found in ‘normal’ Western society” (“Translation, Colonialism …” 126). These models thus inspire a number of truth effects in the translation of South Asian texts and cultural practices, crafting subjects who appear morally, culturally, and politically inferior to their Western counterparts. Desai argues that films like Monsoon Wedding and Bend it propose a type of feminist teleology in which India cannot host the advance feminist subjects that they propose. The conclusion of these films – namely, the transfer of the cosmopolitan character to the U.S. – is a key strategy of racial containment. Constructed through post-9/11 racial logics, models of ‘good’ citizenship “properly deposits the modern woman in a teleological trajectory in the West where her feminist self belongs” (Beyond Bollywood 229). By engaging Austen through the contemporary feminist interpretations of her texts Bride and Prejudice reproduces a similar narrative teleological history of feminist progress. The film strives to master a singular, unified version of feminism that has already liberated its Western counterparts – namely the successful cinematic heroines of Pride and Prejudice, Emma, and Sense and Sensibility. It is a linear model of feminist development that allows the film to forward Lalita as a modern, feminist subject without disrupting the Western
mainstream audiences’ perception of their own female subjects (even those on film) as politically and ethnically advanced.

Gopinath argues that Western audiences’ perception of Bollywood reproduces a similar colonial teleology. The formal elements of Hindi cinema, including its emphasis on musical numbers, are perceived as traditions long since deserted by Hollywood and European cinema. Teleological narratives also inform stereotypes of Bollywood held by Western audiences, namely that its prohibition on kissing and explicit sexual contact is symptomatic of an unsophisticated and retrogressive take on women, sex, and cinema in general. This interpretation, she argues, imagines Bollywood as a less advanced film culture, one that is “temporally anterior to Western representational regimes” (“Bollywood Spectacles” 161). “No Life Without Wife,” with its retro feel and kitschy over-the-top fantasy sequences, mocks the teleological models that present Indian women and Bollywood as “temporally anterior” to their Western counterparts. At first, the song does seem to imagine Lalita and her sisters through an obsolete form of femininity. The particular intertextual world created by allusions to Hollywood ingénues like Doris Day and Annette Funicello, along with Grease’s Sandy Olson, equates Indian femininity with a type of wholesome but archaic American womanhood.

In the tradition of hybridity, however, “No Life” challenges these assumptions as it articulates them. The number is clearly tongue-in-cheek in its references to 1960’s teen culture, and the song’s exaggerated tone and over-the-top dance moves mock just how contrived this nostalgia for that decade’s version of American womanhood has become. “No Life” also recalls the campy pajama party parody of “Look at Me, I’m Sandra Dee”
in the 1972 musical *Grease*. The popularity of the 1978 film version of *Grease* disrupts the perception of Bollywood films as somehow aesthetically less advanced by highlighting the continued success of the musical film in Hollywood cinema. The song’s allusion to *Grease* implies that “No Life” is also a parody, invested in the critical re-presentation of the normative models of femininity forwarded by ingénues like Dee and Day. In “No Life,” these models of femininity mock how teleologies work as meaning-making mechanisms, especially in the post-9/11 racial logics that underscore representations of South Asian femininity.

The song also mocks the ways in which contemporary cultures rely on an idealized, imagined past in order to define the present, concluding with Lalita’s fantasy of an English countryside wedding to Johnny Wickham. While it is part of Lalita’s imagination, the shift to a distant locale is also a common convention of the Bollywood musical number. It is a fantasy, however, that returns Elizabeth Bennett to her rightful home in pastoral England – in a playful nod to the translated “Englishness” of the novel. The film’s choice of England as a stage for this fantasy also alludes to the growing prominence of the South Asian diaspora in the collective imagination of Bollywood; the sweeping shots of the hilltop village and country church in “No Life” recall 1997’s *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, one of the first (and most successful) Bollywood films about South Asian diasporan subjects. In *Bride and Prejudice*, the setting of the timeless country village also mocks the colonial teleologies embedded in its translation. Niranjana argues that teleological models of modernity erase the history of colonial space, making it appear fixed and “unchanged” (much like the visual representations of pastoral India
featured in the film) (“Translation, Colonialism …” 125). “No Life,” however, projects this ahistoricity back onto England through the conventions of the Bollywood film. The Bollywood-style slow motion shot of Lalita running through the village green, flanked by Morris dancers and children at a maypole, highlights the absurdity of the fantasy’s anachronistic setting. The ending of the song is, as Chadha suggests in the director’s commentary, “cheeky” – a good-natured joke about the sentimentality of Bollywood songs. The joke, however, is also on its Hollywood audience, whom the film confronts with their long-held assumptions about the relationship between ‘tradition,’ temporality, and geography.

The prominence of Bollywood-style conventions in Bride and Prejudice also subverts Western cinematic codes of realism that would proffer the film’s subjects as part of an ethnographic reality. Filmmakers participating in similar translation projects often face critique for the ways in which they use these codes in order to forward ethnographic truths about fictional depictions of South Asia and South Asian subjects. Mira Nair in particular has been accused of taking on the role of native informant in films like Monsoon Wedding or Salaam Bombay!, “promising non-South Asian viewers a kind of ethnographic realism that offers unmediated access to a heretofore hidden and unknowable world” (Gopinath, Impossible Desires 115). Nair’s filmmaking style, borrowing heavily from the techniques of cinema vérité and documentary film, helps to generate this particular set of truth-effects in her films. The role of the native informant has grown increasingly important in the post-9/11 era, as a figure deployed in the
institutionalization of racial logics and justification for military engagement with so-called civilizational enemies (Zine et al 272).

Unlike the images of female subjectivity in *Monsoon Wedding* or even *Bend it, Bride and Prejudice* does not always attempt to assert ethnographic truth about India or Indian femininity, other than their corresponding idioms in Bollywood Cinema. While the film does create subjects easily recognized and consumed by Western audiences, they exist in a highly stylized visual and narrative world that undermines their relationship to the ‘real.’ The film acknowledges and subverts the ethnographic assumptions made of its translation in the song “A Marriage Comes to Town.” During the second musical number of the film, Lalita and two friends sing and walk through a market in Amritsar, visiting various vendors and stores in preparing for a wedding. As they walk they gather a crowd of onlookers and well-wishers, celebrating financial and spiritual prosperity that a wedding brings to the town. The song takes on a didactic tone in its description of traditional Punjabi wedding practices. Local merchants, for example, describe the significance behind the garlands, henna, jewelry, music, and food they will supply for the wedding. Lalita and her friends double as cosmopolitan subjects and native informants that rotate through a cast of exotic figures associated with Indian weddings, including a group of hijras and an astrologer. The song, similar to scenes in *Bend it, Bollywood/Hollywood*, and *Monsoon Wedding* seemingly offers Western audience an ethnographic peek into the hidden world of traditional Indian marriage rituals.

In *Bride and Prejudice*, however, this translation is mediated through the visual conventions of Bollywood cinema, particularly the artificial mise-en-scene of its song-
and-dance numbers. The marketplace through which Lalita and her friends walk is a constructed set; quaint and rustic, it is clearly removed from the previous scene’s depiction of the very modern and busy streets of Amritsar. Adding to that visual display of artifice are the song’s townspeople, who wear coordinated, brightly colored costumes. In true Bollywood style, they break out dancing in the middle of the market street, locating Lalita and her friends in Bollywood-ified “imagined space” existing “outside the parameters of realism” (Kao and Do Rozario 313). Displacing the film’s translation of an ethnographic ‘reality,’ the contrived space of the Bollywood song-and-dance number also mediates the song’s description of Indian wedding rituals. Their reaction to the spectacle – a combination of shock, amusement, and a kind of half-hearted participation – suggests that Lalita and her friends are not native informants, but instead spectators in a rehashing of images that have made Bollywood films and their translations so popular. Finally, by mocking the role of the native informant in ‘translating’ South Asian culture for Western audiences, Chadha refuses to take up that position; instead, as I suggest below, her authorial role revolves around her own status as a fan of Bollywood films.

**Conclusion: Diasporic Authorship and New States of Affairs**

Chadha ultimately takes a risk in reproducing some of the codes and conventions of Bollywood cinema that similar translations have ignored. *Bride and Prejudice* refuses to deliver the combination of emotional realism and exotic otherness that have made films like *Monsoon Wedding* and *Slumdog Millionaire* so popular. As a result, the film does not just belong to this genre, but responds to the cadre of filmmakers who translate
Bollywood for Western audience by exposing the ways in which these films’ alignment with the conventions of realism and cinema verite (both include handheld camera work) enable distinct ideological projects. Chadha’s departure is enabled in part by adaptation: Austen provides a discursive grid for her exploration of Bollywood, offering viewers unfamiliar with Bollywood conventions a set of narrative and ideological cues. At the same time, the film’s alignment with Austen enables Chadha to mimic the truth-effects of translation – the native informant, Orientalist other, culturally superior spectator, the teleological model of feminism – in their re-presentations back to audiences. The various translations at work in Bride and Prejudice allow Chadha to dismantle strategies of post-9/11 racial containment as they are being constructed. These dueling processes help to convey an ambivalence toward the logics and ideologies that compose representations of South Asian femininity and corresponding models of citizenship, as well as an acknowledgement of ways in which the circulation of these images in post-9/11 American culture provided the social and economic impetus for this particular ‘translation’ of both Austen and Bollywood.

Bride and Prejudice relies on the intertextual effects of adaptation, generated through the transfer of seemingly ‘old’ sources through space and time in order to create a new state of affairs. The exchange of culture and capital in Austen to India that enable such a transfer presents scenarios, conventions, and characters easily recognizable and understood to Western audiences. Through Austen the film successfully creates post-9/11 cosmopolitan subjects in the tradition of other South Asian women diasporic filmmakers such as Mira Nair and Deepa Mehta (and Chadha’s other films). Chadha utilizes Austen
as a hook for audiences, while simultaneously placing Lalita in the tradition of other feminist interpretations of Austenian heroines. By aligning Lalita with the contemporary cinematic adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Emma*, Chadha crafts a subject familiar to Western audiences through the tenets of liberal feminism. Chadha also parleys Austen's vintage status and its place as ‘tradition’ in the English cannon onto the film’s subjects, shaping them through the opposing axioms of tradition and modernity. Mr. Kholi, Mrs. Bakshi, and Lakhi serve as part of its strategy of post-9/11 racial containment as failed cosmopolitan subjects, miscalculating the amount of modernity or tradition appropriate for the distinctly transnational world the film proposes. They act as a foil for Lalita who, in no small part due to the star power of Aishwarya Rai, embodies the perfect balance of modern feminist subjectivity and traditional Indian femininity. It is Lalita who brings East and West together, mediating the conflicts generated by each side’s failure to properly envision the role of Indian ‘tradition’ in the era of globalization. It is also Lalita who disseminates and normalizes post-9/11 racial logics, through alignment of ‘good’ citizenship and heterosexual romance with Westernization, liberal feminism, and multiculturalism.

*Bride and Prejudice* meets Desai and Gopinath’s expectations of the ‘translation’ film, transcribing South Asian subjects for a Western audience that reproduce and normalize post-9/11 racial logics. Translation also serves as a fitting description for the processes of adaptation in *Bride and Prejudice*, underscoring the multiple movements the film must make in order to shape subjects for a post-9/11 racial order. Acts of translation align the effects of racialization after 9/11 with the adaptive process. Adaptation thus
functions as a strategy of racial containment in this film by managing various idioms’ travel through space and time. The transnationalization of the feminist idiom already present in Austenian adaptations shapes the film’s cosmopolitan female subjects; on other hand, the transfer of Austenian ‘tradition’ onto contemporary India conflates temporal difference with spatial difference, generating subjects enmeshed in ‘tradition’ despite their contemporaneity. Together, these movements create subjects that easily bounce between models of the assimilated model minority and unthreatening but exotic other without disturbing the production of the alien terrorist as the hallmark of post-9/11 racial otherness in the U.S.

The simultaneous translations taking place in *Bride and Prejudice* often demand that the film manage several competing forces engaged in the transfer of information through media, time, and space. The film’s translation of Jane Austen to India, for example, seems to ignore colonial relations of power that made it possible; its translations of South Asian subjects, on the other hand, exploits those routes in order to create cosmopolitan subjects. Resolving tensions between these competing forces often rests in manipulating the genres and filmmaking traditions through which the translations take shape. The end result of these manipulations always exceeds their original forms. In *Bride and Prejudice*, this excess generates a series of hybrid objects that highlight translation as a project mediated through both medium and author. The film’s moments of hybridity ultimately undermine the film’s overall ideological project by demonstrating the ways in which subjects are never fully contained by a translated text.
Adaptation as translation also provides the foundation for *Bride and Prejudice*’s appeal as a crossover film, appealing to audiences in India, as well as heterogeneous audiences in the U.S. and Europe. Because Jane Austen is an author canonized in India and the West, the film’s connection to Austen calls the modern Indian family into a narrative familiar to many audiences. Like many ‘translation’ films aimed at multiple audiences (such as *Monsoon Wedding*), the drama of the film is limited in its critique of nation or ethnicity or political issues that would potentially alienate audiences. Instead, the film’s characteristic political neutrality drives its dramatic focus onto familial politics. The film is also filled with allusions to Bollywood films, referencing many of Bollywood’s most popular films both in India and abroad. Lalita’s wedding gown stroll through the English countryside in “No Life,” for example, is a direct reference to the romantic songs of *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*. In “Ho Gaya Hai” song’s fantasy sequence, Kajol – dressed in a Swiss-inspired white dress – and Shahrukh Khan reunite in the Swiss Alps; in “Tujhe Dekha To,” the two visit a quaint countryside European church in a fantasy wedding. The film’s songs offer a similar combination of anachronisms and modern Indian subjects. Its intertextual presence in *Bride and Prejudice* creates a system of signs for audiences familiar with the films of Bollywood. The reference to *DDLJ* in the film also seems to acknowledge the position of the author in such a translation: Chadha very clearly posits herself as a fan of Bollywood; however, the song’s continual references to *DDLJ* – itself about diasporan subjects – suggests her own position of identification is located not in India, but in the diaspora. The intertextual tapestry that helps constitutes *Bride and Prejudice*’s crossover appeal thus doubles as
framework through which Chadha exposes her own role as author in shaping the film’s various translations.
Chapter 3

Corporeality, Gendered Political Performances, and Self-Making in the Cinematic Adaptation of *Persepolis*

In June of 2005, Hollywood actor-director Sean Penn traveled to Tehran as a journalist for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, charged with reporting on Iran’s presidential elections. Known for his political activism, including his outspoken opposition to the war in Iraq, Penn acted as a type of goodwill ambassador to Iran, meeting with Iranian youth and attending an event in his honor at The Film Museum of Iran. His unprecedented 5-day expose in the *Chronicle* also offers American readers some insight into a country often demonized and misrepresented in mainstream Western media, especially in the years following 9/11. The piece itself, however, reads like a colonial travelogue: Penn details his detainment at the Tehran airport, complains about the primitive bathroom facilities, and intentionally echoes Laura Bush in describing Iran as “exotic.” While Penn challenges assumptions about Iran and its relationship to the West – he marvels at the popularity of his film *21 Grams*, a film that prominently features both sex and drug abuse – he also confirms much of the Orientalist mythology circulating in the American imaginary about the country’s politicized gender relations, including mandatory *hijab* as a site of acute oppression and the general powerlessness of women under the Islamic
regime. Most disturbing, however, is that in his roles as impromptu journalist and international liaison, Penn speaks over the Iranian voices he presumably sought to capture, at a moment in which the nation simmered with debate – vocal, and often violent – over the fate of its political future.

Penn returns to his role as go-between in the 2007 cinematic adaptation of Marjane Satrapi’s graphic memoir *Persepolis*. As the voice of Marjane’s father, Penn translates the film’s representations of Iranian leftist politics into a voice – and accompanying political persona – familiar to American audiences. Both novel and film trace Marjane’s life as a girl in Tehran through major events in contemporary Iranian political history, including the fall of the Shah, the revolution of 1979, and subsequent installation of the Islamic regime. In the second half of the film, originally published as *Persepolis 2*, Marjane is sent to Vienna in the midst of the Iran-Iraq war in order to flee the repressive regime, returning to Tehran as a young adult before leaving permanently for art school in France. Published in French in 1999 and translated into English in 2003, Satrapi’s novel won acclaim for its representation of Iranian life. Critics praised its unique format, its ability to transcend cultural and political divide through the novel’s seemingly ‘universal’ depiction of childhood, as well as the feminist undertones in Satrapi’s depiction of Marjane and the novel’s other female characters. The film met much of the same praise, winning a Special Jury Price at the 2007 Cannes film festival and an Academy Award nomination.

The praise for *Persepolis* is even more noteworthy in light of the daunting task both texts face: narrativizing Iranian political subjectivity for audiences unfamiliar with –
and often hostile to – the nation’s complex relationship with Islam and Islamic fundamentalism. It is a task complicated even more by the events of September 11, 2001. In the aftermath of 9/11, anti-Muslim civilizational rhetoric in the U.S. not only made Iranian identity an object of intense scrutiny in Western mainstream media, but it also exacerbated the already narrow understanding of Iran as an anti-modern, anti-American nation run by Islamic fundamentalists, brimming with radicalized youth or passive women. Civilizational thinking has always played a large role in framing the West’s relationship with Iran. Since 9/11, however, civilizational rhetoric has distorted Iran in time, fixing the image of its fundamentalist backwardness and barbarism against the progressive liberalism of Western modernity. In 2002 the naming of Iran as an “axis of evil” by former president George W. Bush translated that temporal distortion into spatial terms, dividing the West and Iran (and its off-again, on-again “allies” in the axis) into absolutist geographies of ‘good’ and ‘evil.’ These metaphors of space and time rely upon civilizational tropes already deeply embedded in American and European cultural imaginaries, but their intensification since 9/11 has precipitated the complete spatiotemporal foreclosure of Iran in the “discursive regimes” of the West (Moallem 28).

In this chapter, I argue that the spatiotemporal foreclosure of Iran in American public culture instigated a fundamental shift in the representation of Iranian subjectivity between Satrapi’s novel *Persepolis I* and *Persepolis II* and its eventual cinematic adaptation, as evidenced by the two texts’ distinct representations of political performance and self-making. This chapter speaks to the overall argument of my dissertation by examining the ways in which civilizational rhetoric guides the alignment
of a particular post-9/11 racial logic – the civilizational trope of ‘us vs. them’ – with the adaptive process. The representation of sound, time, and space in the film help generate the effect of an indeterminable and fundamental civilizational divide by creating distinct spatiotemporal divisions between East and West. Furthermore, the formal conventions of cinema normalize this shift in perspective, translating civilizational divisions into filmic language via continuity editing, generic conventions, and narrative condensation. Here the adaptive process merges the tropes of cinematic and civilizational rhetoric in order to create a ‘state of affairs’ in which Iran is closed off from, and antithetical to, the modern world of the West.

Civilizational Rhetoric and Muslim Femininity

Representations of female citizenship in the film version of *Persepolis*, in keeping with the overall argument of my dissertation, work to normalize and perpetuate these post-9/11 racial logics. As I argue in the Introduction, Muslim femininity helps facilitate the civilizational divide between liberal, free West and backward East: rendered passive “victims of a timeless patriarchy,” Muslim women’s bodies signify the ignorance, barbarism, and restrictive legal system incompatible with the modern nation-state (Moallem 161). Not only does civilization rhetoric juxtapose this image against the free, liberal woman of the West, but their role as the “main signifiers of Muslim backwardness and difference” precludes Muslim women – in this case women in Iran – as political actors (Moallem 43). The representation of Muslim women as passive and ignorant victims ultimately serves as a justification for Western civilizing missions in the Middle East, as well as implicitly girds the constitution of the Western political subject as free,
self-determining, and secular. Civilization tropes also circulate around women’s bodies in Iranian nationalist discourses, erasing women as political actors from within the pre- and post-revolutionary nation. Mandatory unveiling during the Pahlavi regime, for example, positioned women as victims of tradition in need of civilizing and modernization, while the rationale for re-veiling following the revolution emerged partly through a discourse that positioned women as in need of protection from corrupting Western influences.

In this chapter, I argue that civilizational rhetoric plays a different role in each version of *Persepolis*. Confronted with the erasure of women as political subjects from Iranian nationalism and Western Orientalism, the novel *Persepolis* redraws Iranian women’s bodies as active and dynamic sites of self-making and citizenship. In this version of *Persepolis*, the body serves as a site of gendered political performance and self-making through which women negotiate, resist, and comply with the various regimes of the post-revolutionary Iranian state. The representation of political subjectivity, however, is contingent upon a corporeality situated in specific registers of time and space; the transfer of *Persepolis*’ bodies from page to screen ultimately revises the political composition of these performances for a post-9/11 audience. Muslim women’s bodies, in the film version of *Persepolis*, tell an entirely different story about civilizational difference. Reshaped through post-9/11 racial logics, representations of Muslim femininity abandon civic self-making within the nation, and instead disseminate and normalize idealized citizenship through Western modes of subject making that emphasize freedom, autonomy, and disidentification with Iran.
The Civic Body as a Framework for Understanding Gendered Political Performance

The corporeal acts of resistance, submission, and negotiation in the novel versions of *Persepolis* are always mediated through an abstracted, idealized body of the nation-state, or what Minoo Moallem refers to as the “civic body.” An imagined body “that sustains the authority and power of the nation-state,” the civic body links individuals to the various corporeal regimes sanctioned and managed by the state, producing gendered and racialized citizens through a form of disciplinary power Foucault refers to as governmentality (Moallem 62). The civic body is a temporally and spatially specific effect of governmentality: regimes of the nation-state require localized subjects, and designates “specific spaces and relations” for those practices to take place (Ong, *Flexible Citizenship* 113). Although perpetually in flux, the civic body unifies individuals into legible and docile members of the nation-state. At the same time, the various “practices, gestures, and postures” of the civic body dictate categories of national belonging (Moallem 59) through historically specific formations of race, gender, and sexuality. The civic body is thus the site through which bodies marked by these categories become citizen bodies – or are abjected from the nation and marked as dangerous or deviant.

Created by geographically and historically specific disciplinary mechanisms, the civic body delineates the boundaries of the nation in and through the production of gendered bodies. Not only does the civic body designate an ‘outside’ by excluding certain bodies from belonging to the nation, but Moallem also argues that the borders drawn by the civic body work to “rationalize and normalize” gendered modes of citizenship inside the nation (79). In Iranian political culture, the idiom of the heteronormative family is key
to creating spatializing and temporalizing the civic body. Not only do expressions of mothering and paternalism naturalize gendered roles within the family, but they also legitimize the differentiated roles of female and male civic bodies in the service of creating the nation as a domestic and protected space. The male body, for example, takes on the role of defender and protector while the female body become the homeland itself, the ‘inside’ that requires both protection and discipline. In the novel version of *Persepolis*, the civic body is key to linking the subjectivity of its characters to the nation by guiding gendered performances of citizenship in and through the regimes of the nation-state.

One of the most visible and contested signifiers of the modern Iranian civic body is the veil. Mandatory unveiling and re-veiling, according to Moallem, literally wrote the state’s vision of modernity on women’s bodies through both the modernizing regimes of the Pahlavi dynasty\(^\text{18}\) and the anti-West focus of the Islamic state after the 1979 revolution. She argues that the forced unveiling under Reza Shah in 1932 marked a shift in the construction of the modern Iranian civic body, as women’s bodies became a site of exclusion explicitly linked to gendered models of citizenship. Made into others by “civic necessity,” women who wore the veil gained re-entry into the nation only with the modernizing regime of the state written on their bodies (Moallem 69). The idealized female civic body promoted by the Pahlavi regime not only unified women through corporeal markers of modernization and Westernization, but it also sanctioned those regimes through discourses of male authority. While women publically unveiled
themselves, the construction of the ‘modernized’ civic body erased these acts by positioning men as agents of unveiling.

Just as unveiling dictated the terms of citizenship for women through the state’s inscription on the female body, the veil in post-revolutionary Iran has determined the contours of women’s civic participation and national belonging. After the revolution in 1979, the image of the civic body shifted to include the veil, a symbol not only of women’s complicity to the state but also of distance from the Pahlavi regime’s emphasis on modernization and Westernization. The veil helped produce a post-revolutionary subjectivity for Iranian women through a female body that was spatially constricted and, without age or history, temporally ambiguous. Moallem argues that in the post-revolutionary regime, the veil “consolidates Muslim femininity,” erasing corporeal markers of class, age, ethnicity, and locality in its production of a universalized figure of Islamic womanhood (113). Women did take up forms of hijab (as well as other types of dress) as part of their revolutionary practice or protest, but the post-revolutionary female civic body in Iran was constructed as in need of both discipline and protection by masculine authority – after the revolution, remaining unveiled invited interpretation as both a sign of collusion with Western elitism and a betrayal of revolutionary ideals (76). Women’s bodies became sites upon which men created an indigenous national body, the drawing of borders of a territorial and ideological “inside” distinct from the West.

The veil also serves as a powerful trope in the civilizational discourses that constitute the Orientalist vision of Iran in the West. The veil remains a potent symbol of otherness in the Western imaginary: from representations in colonial postcards to the
figure of the Afghan woman in the *burqa*, the veil doubles as a sign of victimization and exotic Orientalism. The veil is also a key signifier in Western knowledge regimes that juxtapose a free, Western feminine subject against the image of a Muslim female body “imprisoned” by the veil. While the veil has served as a localized site of resistance to the global spread of Western hegemonic modernity in both colonial and postcolonial eras, women are rarely understood as agents in these historically specific formations of power, identity, and culture; instead, the veil has become an ahistorical and universal symbol of oppression (Naghibi and O’Mallley 223, Moallem 32). This powerful image of the veil in the Western imaginary emerges in its representations of Muslim women, according to Lopamudra Basu. Visual depictions of Muslim femininity are fraught images, haunted by the longstanding perception of the veil as both a source of oppression and eroticism (10). These are also the images, she argues, which ultimately form the representational context for Satrapi’s staging of a decidedly un-erotic and multifaceted Iranian female subjectivity (13).

In the opening pages of the novel, the veil serves as metonym for the modern Iranian state. It becomes a site through which Iranian women contest and negotiate the production of a post-revolutionary civic body. *Persepolis* opens upon a series of five block panels (divided into three horizontal sections) under a black box with the title “The Veil” and a segment of a woman’s face drawn in relief. In contrast to the ambiguity of title, however, the chapter quickly turns to exploring a distinctly Iranian production of a female civic body. The two panels together also serve to demonstrate the creation of a post-revolutionary civic body through the institutionalization of the veil, and
demonstrates the importance of sites of governmentality – including school – in disciplining bodies to create gendered citizen-subjects. The top panel reveals the narrator Marjane in a school photograph in 1980, after mandatory veiling was introduced in Iranian schools. The next panel continues with a class photograph, where Marjane and her girl classmates appear as a row of nearly identical figures, wear matching headscarves, white shirts, and uncomfortable frowns. The repetition of these similar bodies demonstrates the dual force of the idealized civic body: written onto the bodies of the individual girls, it both unifies and differentiates them into gendered subjects of the nation-state. While the two panels emphasize visual unity, drawing together Marjane’s individual photo with the class photo, the caption claims she is missing from the class photo, cut off on the far left. Her absence indicates a space that requires filling in, a body that needs to be recreated in relationship to both the state and her fellow citizen-subjects. Not only do those first two panels establish that the novel is the story of this ‘filling in,’ but they also specify the development of a subject in and through the post-revolutionary civic body.

The second set of panel steps back to 1979, historicizing the idealized femininity that Marjane and her classmates appear so reluctant to enact. The first panel places a different type of civic body on display: it depicts an unveiled, modernized, mixed gender-crowd of protestors. A caption under their bodies indicates that they are part of the previous year’s revolutionary movement. Much like the visual unity of the first panel offers a sense of the idealized Muslim femininity mandated through the female civic body, the homogenized bodies of the revolutionary protestors also depict an idealized
citizen-body, one unified through commitment to revolutionary political change. The panel of protestors suggests that the civic body, while reflecting corporeal regimes of state, is not necessarily complicit within those disciplinary mechanisms; in fact the clearly ‘modern’ bodies produced by the Pahlavi regime work to overthrow the dynasty. Together, the shift backward in time between the panels not only points out that the civic body is constantly changing, but historicizes the institutionalization of veiling and the shift in the civic body in post-revolutionary Iran. They highlight the ways in which the corporeal ideals of the civic body are not only written on individual bodies, but also taken up by individuals in public, politicized, and gendered performances of citizenship.

The fourth panel shifts back to Marjane's school in 1980, illustrating the onset of mandatory veiling in Iranian schools. In this panel, the school serves as a spatial metaphor for an interiorized national space that requires the performance of the idealized civic body. It depicts a teacher in a chador standing outside the brick gate of the school, handing out headscarves to female students as they enter the school’s courtyard. Two girls in pigtails, looking up at the teacher while veiled students—all faceless, except for Marjane, whose eyes peek over the brick wall—congregate inside. With the teacher literally holding the authority of the state, the division of the two groups of girls inside and exterior to the schoolyard points to the ways in which women’s bodies mark ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of nation through their performance of the civic body. The fifth and final panel of the series, however, suggests that the ‘inside’ of the school is not merely a site for disciplining individuals into the good citizen bodies of an Islamic nation. In this splash panel, Marjane and her classmates play with their headscarves in the school
courtyard. Their games revolve around reenacting the relationship between individuals and the state: one girl, wearing her veil, pretends to execute an uncovered classmate “in the name of freedom,” while another girl steals her friend’s veil to create a jump rope, demanding that her friend must “lick her feet” in order to get it back. As the girls exercise various forms of power using veils as props, the body clearly becomes a site of political performance in both reenacting and resisting the various corporal regimes of the state. The presence of the veil in these performances, however, suggests that acts of resistance and complicity are always mediated through the civic body championed by the post-revolutionary Islamic state.

The progression of the three panels acts as a spatiotemporal doorway for readers, drawing them ‘inside’ post-revolutionary Iran through the spatialization of the Iranian civic body. The panels first mark the performance of the civic body in the space of the nation-state, while the second panel situates the post-revolutionary civic body in historical time. The panels then link post-revolutionary regimes of governmentality and citizenship to a specific performance of idealized Muslim femininity, tracking Marjane and her classmates as they move into space of the school (and nation) through their adoption of the veil. By the third panel Marjane’s narrative voice clearly emerges from within the space and time marked by the post-revolutionary civic body. Not only does Marjane rely on the spatial metaphor of the school in order to stage a narrative voice from within the nation, but it also allows her to resist its regimes from ‘inside’ the nation. Veils in hand, the mandatory regimes of dress, comportment, and behavior implemented by the
post-revolutionary state become potential sites of oppositional political performances for Marjane and her friends.

Westernizing the Civic Body: Adapting Political Performances in Post-9/11

Persepolis

The opening of the film performs many of the same functions as the first five panels of the novel. It introduces Marjane to its audience, quickly establishing her as the narrator and as a subject of the post-revolutionary Iranian state. The film retains the novel’s emphasis on corporal inscriptions of citizenship and, true to form, the film opens upon Marjane resisting the veil. The cinematic adaptation of Persepolis, however, realigns the various spatiotemporal contexts of the film with post-9/11 civilizational discourse. Changes to both chronology and setting, for example, help conveys a distinct division between a backwards and repressive Iranian state and free, modern Western civilization. Unlike the book, the film opens upon Marjane as a young adult in the Paris-Orly airport, staring suspiciously at a list of departing flights. More than simply a narrative rearrangement, the shift in time and space (from Iran to Paris, and from 1979 to presumably present day) reenacts the spatiotemporal foreclosure of Iran after 9/11, collapsing the civic body – an effect of localized and historically specific relations of power – into a civilizational trope. In the film’s opening scene, a bustling and cosmopolitan world circulates around Marjane: planes take off in the distance, and a distinctly multi-ethnic crowd of travelers, one clad in an “I love New York” t-shirt, wander around the terminal. Marjane emerges from the crowd and approaches the list of
departs. Her eyes suddenly narrow, and a reverse shot reveals that she has found Tehran on the list of departures. Even in the transitional space of the airport, Marjane’s hostile attitude toward ‘departing’ for Tehran makes it clear that Iran is a source of contention and opposition in the forging of her identity.

Much like the beginning of the novel, the veil serves as a metonym for Iran in the opening scenes of the film. The film, however, severs its ties to the nation’s post-revolutionary civic body and rewrites the veil as a civilizational symbol of repression, immobility, and non-subjectivity. Unlike the novel, where the veil anchors gendered political performances in the production of a post-revolutionary civic body, Marjane treats the veil as oppressive and alien. Presumably preparing to return to Tehran, Marjane unhappily puts on her headscarf in the airport bathroom – under the watchful eyes of a European woman at the next sink. Her adoption of the veil seemingly erases her ability to act, or even speak, on her own behalf: asked at the counter for her ticket and passport after she emerges from the bathroom, she is rendered silent, bowing her head in defeat in front of a waiting ticket agent. At the center of Marjane’s reluctance to travel back to Tehran, the veil is a metonym for the oppressive regimes of the post-revolutionary Iranian state, particularly for women. It strips Marjane of agency and citizenship through her inability to produce the symbols and tools of national belonging.

Functioning much like the novel’s representation of the schoolyard, the airport bathroom mediates performances of femininity in the midst of transitioning modes of modernity. Unlike the novel, where the schoolyard manages a temporal transition in Iranian modernity (from the Pahlavi regime to post-revolutionary Islamic rule), the
performances of femininity in the airport bathroom reenact a civilizational divide, signifying \textit{spatially} distinct models of modernity. In the bathroom, Marjane and a European woman stand at the mirror, each attending to some detail of femininity: for Marjane it is her veil, and for the neighbor at the mirror, lipstick. In this scene, the gendered space of the bathroom becomes politicized through civilizational rhetoric. The visual juxtaposition of the two bodies in the film proposes a type of civilizational opposition: while the European woman stands in for a Western ‘modern’ self, Marjane transitions into an ahistorical and traditional idiom of a ‘backward’ Islamic society.

Much like the schoolyard, bathrooms are segregated by gender; in fact, the bathroom is a site where men are barred from entering altogether. As a result, the bathroom serves as a semi-private space where women negotiate various gender regimes, a presumably ‘safe’ space for the development and practice of gendered performances. In the film, however, it is clearly a safe space for only the European woman, and only her body remains available for negotiation. Applying a shade of deep red lipstick, the woman and her teased hair, and fitted, low-cut leopard print dress indicates a mediated, almost hyperbolic performance of Western-style femininity. Conversely, Marjane’s expression of abject defeat and discomfort in the film – coupled with the white woman’s disapproving stare – clearly foreclose the potential of her own body as a site of negotiated or mediated performance. Here the film’s focus on single-gender space works in service of marking women’s bodies as bearers of civilizational difference. Marjane is clearly out of place, and her passivity and despair over the gendered performance imposed upon her serves to exacerbate her oppression and apparent otherness. The woman’s hyperbolized
performance of femininity, on the other hand, functions as symbol of Western
superiority. Her outlandish attire and make-up suggest that Western women are free to
choose the means – and accessories – through which they express gender identity, even if
their choices seem questionable.

In the opening scenes of the film, the foreclosure of Iran is takes place not only
through politicization of space, but also of time. Marjane’s adoption of the veil in
anticipation of return to Iran does suggest that Iran – and the idealized civic body she
must perform– does exist. Instead of moving forward in space to Tehran, however, the
film travels back in time, bridging the spatial gap between Paris and Tehran with a
flashback to a pre-revolutionary Tehran airport. Chronological and narrative sequencing
ensures that post-revolutionary Iran remains separated from the present-day retelling of
Marjane’s childhood. The transition from current-day Paris to Tehran in the late 1970s
circumvents post-revolutionary Iran altogether: through the repeating image of the
airport, the film draws a parallel between the ‘modern’ Western world and a Westernized
and modernized Iran before the revolution. The narrative parallel of the two ‘modern’
spaces ensure that post-revolutionary Iran remains closed off, spatially and temporally
inaccessible. The opening scenes of the film also create a sense of spatial and temporal
disconnect from Iran that repositions Marjane’s narratorial presence ‘outside’ the nation.
Her point of view no longer emerges from the nuanced interaction between individual
citizens and the image of the civic body; instead, it surfaces in the familiar civilizational
tension between images of oppressed Muslim femininity and free, self-determining
subjects of the West. More importantly, in contrast to the novel, Marjane’s relationship to
the post-revolutionary civic body in these opening scenes ultimately suggests veiled woman cannot be citizens, nor subjects. The spatiotemporal foreclosure of Iran ensures that the only possibility for gendered political performance – and narratorial voice – is anchored in the west, wrought against the contemporary Iranian nation-state and the veil.

The novel takes up the civic body as a productive site of both performance of and resistance to regimes of the nation-state. In the film, the potential for self-expression via the civic body is negated through the spatiotemporal foreclosure of the post-revolutionary nation. As a result, representations of embodiment signify a different set of ideological and political allegiances, reinscribed as a site for the performance of Western-style liberalism. More than a simple shift in geography or narrative, the inscription of this ‘Westernization’ takes place in the translation of bodies from the novel to the screen, both in the condensation and addition of corporeal cues. Through this adaptive process, the film projects Western fantasies of political reconciliation and domination onto the bodies of Iranian citizens. Unlike the promise of subjectification offered by the civic body, however, the performances of these fantasies ensure that the Iranian body remains fixed as an civilizational ‘other.’

The film achieves one of these many projections through the condensation of the novel’s narratives of embodiment, particularly those that shape political performances written on the body. Both film and novel, for example, present a similar image of Marjane’s adolescent body: she wears the mandatory veil alongside a denim jacket (in the novel, the rebellious phrase ‘punk is not ded’ [sic] is emblazoned on the back), adorned by a Michael Jackson pin and Nikes sneakers – both precious cultural
commodities in 1980s-era Iran. The two texts, however, diverge in the ways in which they depict Marjane’s body as a system of signs. In the novel, Marjane’s parents smuggle her shoes and Michael Jackson pin back with them from Turkey. Sharing a border with Iran, Turkey not only offered illegal access to Western-style commodities and cultural products during the early days of the Islamic regime, but also retains a very different legacy of tension between Islam, the headscarf, and the state. By rerouting these commodities through Turkey, the novel displaces the primacy of West in acquiring and performing popular “Western” identity, while at the same time displacing the Orientalist vision of the veil as a fixed and universalized symbol of Islamic fundamentalism.

The film, however, presents Marjane’s adolescent body in the absence of the novel’s back-story. This erasure allows for a type of reductive transposition, where the film recomposes the distinctly transnational performance of Iranian girlhood into a display of American youth culture. The erasure of her outfit’s origins from the film is not simply an effect of its narrative condensation, but instead the result of the appropriation of the adaptive process by post-9/11 civilizational discourse. It reduces the complicated interplay between Muslim identity and transnational commerce into a marker of American modernity. Marjane’s performance of adolescence enacts a fantasy of liberation; her veil, pins, sneakers, and jacket, cut off from their distinctly transnational origins, symbolize the ‘freedoms’ afforded by Western liberalism, including freedom of consumer choice, freedom of dress and comportment, and freedom of expression. Literally staged over the veil, the projection of this fantasy forces Marjane into the

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position of civilizational other, defined by her lack in relationship to the ‘free’ Western subject.

The film’s addition of voice also facilitates the projection of Western political fantasies onto the bodies of Iranian citizens. Voice is an important quality of contemporary narrative cinema, with the capacity to render the “fantasmatic” body represented in film “organic” and whole (Doane 35). Based on the French-language novel and its English-language translation, the animation was dubbed – and distributed – in both French and English. Each version of the film assembles a popular cast of actors in order to voice the characters Marjane, her family, and her friends: real life mother-daughter duo Catherine Deneuve and Chiara Mastroianni provide the voices of Mrs. Satrapi and Marjane in both the French and English-language versions of the film, and the English dub also includes popular American icons Sean Penn, Iggy Pop, and Gena Rowlands (Danielle Darrieux and Simon Abkarian provide the voices of Marjane’s grandmother and father in the French dub). While the film takes place primarily in Iran, the accented voices of the characters are distinctly French, or French and American. This is not a unique phenomenon in Western cinema; it recalls the legacy of what Shohat and Stam call the “asymmetry in representational power” in mainstream Western cinema, while at the same time mirroring post-9/11 “Arab face,” a type of “racial masquerade” in which white, Western bodies perform an Orientalist version of Middle Eastern-ness, such as bellydancing, in the name of liberal multiculturalism and cross-cultural goodwill (189; Maira, “Belly Dancing” 334).
Performances of “Arab face” not only conceal ongoing imperial ties to the Middle East, but also allows its practitioners to “disavow anti-Arab racism” without relinquishing civilizational assumptions about the region and its inhabitants (337). In the cinematic adaptation of *Persepolis*, the addition of Western voices coupled with the elimination of the civic body presents a unique effect: the film’s one feature of corporeal verisimilitude – the voice – is provided not by Iranian actors, or even Iranian-accented voices, but by the unmistakable voices of American and French stars. In its representations of “Arab-face,” the film demands that Western voices speak for Iranian bodies, compressing Iranian subjects into two-dimensional drawings along with its foreclosure of time and space. Through his own voice in *Persepolis*, Penn reenacts his prior role as spokesperson, confirming the assumption that citizens of Iran, subjugated by their own government, are unable to speak for themselves.

At the same time the familiar voices of Penn, Pop, and Deneuve domesticate and familiarize Eastern ‘foreignness’ for Western audiences. The English language version of the film, for example, projects familiar voices of American leftist politics onto the bodies of Marjane’s father and her uncle Anoosh, voiced by Penn and Pop. In both book and film, Uncle Anoosh and Marjane’s father are figures of authority and political reason. Satrapi uses their experiences and political perspectives in order to present the dissident opinions of the elite, educated middle class in Tehran during both the Pahlavi regime and post-revolutionary Islamic state. Anoosh narrates, to Marjane, his story of imprisonment and exile during the Shah’s regime upon his release after the revolution; he is eventually re-incarcerated and executed by the post-revolutionary regime. While her father is not the
hero (according to his young daughter) that her uncle was, he still offers an ‘adult’ perspective of Iranian politics in places where Marjane’s young viewpoint remains incomplete. Given their personal political and cultural affiliations in American society, the film deputizes Pop and Penn to stand in for political leftism through the two characters. Penn, through his work as an activist and journalist, has become a vociferous liberal voice in the U.S., while Pop’s prodigious career as a rock musician has made him as an icon of American counterculture. Together they serve as a type of political proxy, channeling Iranian political dissent through American leftist politics. In his work on transnational practices of cinematic sub-titling and translation, Abe Mark Nornes notes that these moments of proxy always include a corporeal expression of power and geography: a voiceover actor literally embodies the on-screen image – just as the dubbed voice materializes through the exchange of culture and capital enabled by empire (34). The substitution of Penn and Pop for Iranian voices of political authority allow the film to maintain the corporeal continuity of dissent, but still ensure that it is an American voice – much like Penn’s earlier work – that speaks for justice in Iran.

**The Civic Body and Technologies of the Self**

While both texts describe the trials of girlhood under the repressive rule of the post-revolutionary Islamic Republic, Marjane and her peers are never simply docile, pliant subjects of the state. In becoming gendered citizen-subjects, they must take up, interpret, and respond to governing disciplinary mechanisms through a mode of conduct Foucault identifies as “technologies of the self.” More than just a prescription for corporeal habits
and behavior, technologies of the self are “the practices by which individuals…decipher, recognize, and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire” (Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* 5). They produce a self-knowing, normative, and desiring subject, constituted through the regulatory frameworks established by the regimes of governmentality established through the nation-state. Technologies of the self also produce subjects as autonomous actors, with the ability to choose among multiple modes of conduct and formulations of desire. Subjects, however, must choose from what Nikolas Rose identifies as the “tensions and choices inherent in a regulated freedom,” the contours of which emerge from within power relations and their corresponding fields of knowledges and norms (qtd. in White and Hunt 111). In *Persepolis*’ translation from page to screen, ‘freedom’ becomes a fraught term. The film and novel remain in conflict over the ways in which Marjane and her peers imagine autonomy, a conflict that ultimately dictates clashing terms of subjecthood and citizenship for Iranian women.

Technologies of the self are key components of citizenship, whereby individuals ‘make’ themselves into citizens through the available practices and performances sanctioned and regulated by the nation-state. Regimes of governmentality also produce models of citizenship in conjunction with the normative regulation of gendered, racialized, and sexualized bodies. The intersection of self and state thus takes place through multiple fields of normativity, and technologies of the self produce subjects in and through categories of national (and transnational) belonging shaped by normative discourses of race, gender, and sexuality (Ong, “Citizenship” 262). Judith Butler argues that gender is actually an effect of self-making, a repeated performance of stylized acts
that generates the illusion of a coherent gendered self. She notes that gender is performative, constituted through a corporeal routine of comportment, behavior, and acts. This routine is compulsory – compelled by regulatory regimes and the threat of sanction – but as a technology of the self it is also productive, constituting male and female subjects through gendered acts and performances. Because the performance of gender must be constantly reiterated through acts, it is “an identity tenuously constituted in time” (Gender Trouble 179). Moreover, Butler argues that this “corporealization of time” not only requires a historically and socially specific context for its materialization, but gender is itself a “constituted social temporality” (179). Gender is thus an effect of self-making contingent upon, and an expression of, specific social temporalities, each with distinct modes of citizenship, freedom, and discipline.

If the gendered body materializes a particular social temporality, then the representation of gendered self-making is key to examining the divergent construction of Iranian women as citizen-subjects in the two texts. Both versions of Persepolis take place in the same historical time period, drawing from similar temporal cues in order to contextualize the fall of the Pahlavi regime and rise of the Islamic Republic in Iran. While the novel, however, anchors practices of the self in the nation’s post-revolutionary civic body, the spatiotemporal foreclosure of Islamic Iran in its cinematic adaptation circumvents this mode of subjectification. Much like Marjane’s re-placement beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries of the post-revolutionary nation, the representations of self-making in the film speak from a social temporality that eliminates the civic body as a site of subject-making, even as the film returns to post-revolutionary time and space. The
rest of the film matches Marjane’s new place in space and time by replacing the normative regulations and correlative freedoms of the civic body with technologies of the self aimed at producing an entirely new self ‘free’ from the Islamic regime.

In the novel, gendered acts of self-making are read and understood through the civic body. Marjane and her parents, for example, comment on their neighbor’s shift from miniskirts to the chador during the nation’s transition to Islamic rule, cheekily suggesting that the latter accommodates her “beefy thighs” with a bit more grace (75). Described by the narrator Marjane, her performance of Iranian womanhood becomes a site of shifting political affiliation in which subjects are remade in the style of the new civic body. Even after the institution of mandatory hijab, which effectively aimed at unifying Iranian women under a singular performance of Muslim femininity, the novel suggests that practices of covering work to signify various political and ideological alliances. In a panel illustrating the ways in which individual women take up the post-revolutionary civic body, Satrapi argues that the politicized performances of femininity fall under two categories: the “fundamentalist women,” drawn as an oblong, armless figure covered by a head-to-toe chador; and the “modern woman,” signified by her button-down manteau and headscarf. At first glance these practices of self-making represent two distinct social temporalities, a return to ‘tradition’ juxtaposed against a forward-looking modern body. The construction of Islamic fundamentalism as a “generic signifier” for the past – and a rejection of the modern world in order to reclaim tradition – is a common feature of civilizational rhetoric, according to Moallem (8). She argues however, that
fundamentalism is not a return to the past, but is itself is a “problematic of modernity” (30).

Satrapi circumvents the temporal problem of civilization rhetoric by positioning the figures side-by-side in the same panel, effectively creating two performances of the civic body in the same narrative space. Covered by one caption box, the figures’ similar black-and white shading and shared blank expression suggest that both representations of the civic body materialize versions of the same social temporality. Together, they suggest that the ‘modern’ or ‘fundamentalist’ interpretation of Iranian womanhood is performative, constituted through the acts and stylings of a corporeal self rooted in the post-revolutionary civic body. *Persepolis* offers a whole range of practices – a veritable “science” – devoted to producing various knowledges about one’s religious, political, and cultural affiliations (293). Marjane herself, upon returning to Tehran from Europe, is identified as a ‘beginner” because of the style of her veil; her new friends teach her the “special fold” required to expose hair only from the front of her headscarf – the mark of a young, secular college student (293). For Marjane and her college friends, these acts of self-making transform the civic body from a site of uniformity into a surface for gendered political performances and knowledge-production.

Noting that it is “the very condition leading to the formation of citizen-subjects,” Moallem argues that the civic body also provides the conditions for resisting normative regulations set in place by the nation-state and its regimes of governmentality (62). In the novel, the civic body becomes a powerful site of self-making due in part to the Iranian state’s strict regulation of women’s bodies. The Islamic regime’s institution of mandatory
veiling in 1983 created an idealized Muslim femininity that was both uniform and vigorously policed by the state. Presented with a set of mandatory corporeal practices in school, as they grow older and spend more time in public space, Marjane and her peers are constantly confronted by Guardians of the Republic, state-appointed (and occasionally informal) monitors charged with policing the clothing, comportment, and behavior of its citizen-bodies. While Marjane and her groups of friends devise numerous tactics for evading the control of the Guards, they do so under the threat of sanction, including fining, detainment, and violence at the hands of the state.

However, the novel does not depict the post-revolutionary state’s idealized female civic body as simply a source of hardship or oppression for Marjane and her friends. Instead, it becomes a productive site, in which the intensified policing they experience as they mature produces a proliferation of strategies for resisting and subverting the state. In the novel, acts of resistance and subversion depend on localized tensions between the normative regulations and freedoms embedded in the post-revolutionary civic body. This tension instigates a range of resistant practices, including a modified *hijab*, the use of lipstick, wearing a Walkman, and even loud laughter – comprehensible as corporeal acts of subversion only in the localized time and space of post-revolutionary Iran. Upon returning to Tehran after attending high school in Austria, Marjane herself fails to read the resistant codes embedded in performances of post-revolutionary femininity: she is shocked that her childhood friends “looked like the heroines of American TV series,” captivated by trendy Western fashions and beauty regimes. At first, Marjane is alienated by their seemingly superficial focus on European nightclubs, fashion, and men (259).
Marjane soon realizes that her friends’ affinity for clubbing and elaborate makeup, however, take up new meaning in the space and time of post-revolutionary Iran, as acts of self-making that defy the uniformity and strict codes of the post-revolutionary civic body. In a caption box that finalizes the exchange between Marjane and her old friends, she finally admits that “making themselves up and wanting to follow Western ways was an act of resistance on their part” (259). Situating their performances of femininity within a given set of “corporeal inscriptions” Satrapi uses the civic body to simultaneously localize her friends’ small subversions and distinguish them from simple acts of mimicry (Moallem 28). Furthermore, the civic body helps designate a different type of ‘outsider’: a cultural outsider who, lacking the proper knowledges and cues the civic body provides, misreads its performance by individual citizens. The panels exposes Marjane, and presumably the Western audiences she addresses, as outsiders, forcing them to re-envision acts of self-making from within the localized time and space of post-revolutionary Iran.

Adapting Self-Making in Persepolis

In the novel, practices of the self use the civic body as a surface for gendered performances and acts that resist the normative regulation of the nation-state. In the film, however, the civic body is repeatedly denied as site of self-making for women; instead, performances of gender seek to expose or uncover an underlying self ‘free’ from state control. As a result, the film substitutes projects of self-making that resist the state with technologies of the self aimed at escape and freedom from the state. These acts craft resistant subjects through the disavowal of the civic body, rejecting its corporeal
performances and ideological doctrines as oppressive, fundamentalist, and ultimately uninhabitable. Because disavowal hinges upon two competing goals of the psyche – a complete escape from reality, and an acceptance, if only tacit, of that reality – the characters’ aspirations for ‘freedom’ are destined to fail. In the film, technologies of the self that disavow the civic body also create a subject perpetually stuck in the social temporality of post-revolutionary Iran.

After its opening scene in modern-day Europe, the film takes a chronological approach to contemporary Iranian history, tracing Marjane’s childhood through the fall of the Shah, the 1979 revolution, and takeover by the Islamic regime. The veil, already introduced in the film, remains emblematic of the new regime’s vision of Islamic womanhood. The veil is re-introduced to the audience during a classroom lesson in 1983, in which a teacher lectures Marjane and her fellow students that the veiling practices are “synonymous with freedom.” The teacher’s promise of freedom, however, clearly rings false. While she urges her students to cover themselves in order to protect their own virtue, the film makes it clear from the consequences she offers for those that reveal themselves – hellfire and eternal damnation – that the veil only offers freedom from punishment. The uniform rows of girls in matching veils and chadors also suggest that the hijab is not party of a project of self-making for Marjane and her classmates, but an institutionally sanctioned dress code. The film, however, juxtaposes the gravity of teacher’s speech against a scene of educational mayhem: the shot pans away from front of classroom to reveal students tossing paper balls at each other, sleeping, and trading Bee Gees records, all ignoring the teacher’s threats. Although performed as a childlike
indifference to authority, the students disavow the mandates of the state through their classroom behavior. Their indifference toward apparent indoctrination into a fundamentalist Islamic ideology offers the possibility of ‘freedom’ from both the threats of teacher and the state; their uniforms are a tacit recognition that it will fail.

The teacher’s claims of virtuous freedom ring false in the film’s next scene, as the failure of this disavowal unfolds in the streets of Tehran. Instead of returning to Marjane and her classmates, however, the film highlights the disavowal of the post-revolutionary civic body by Marjane’s mother, raised and educated during the modernization of the Pahlavi regime. In the film, Marjane’s mother represents the quintessential ‘modern’ Iranian woman: educated, secular, elite, and urban, she participates in revolutionary protests and rejects the veil, allowing her daughter the freedoms she enjoyed as a child. She also becomes a body marked by norms and practices of a different era, with ‘modern’ modes of self-making irreconcilable with the Islamic regime. The scene begins as Marjane and her mother scour the market for groceries in the midst of a food shortage instigated by the Iran-Iraq war. While loading the car with cans of chili, Marjane’s mother is confronted by a fundamentalist man (marked by his beard and prayer beads) demanding that she fix her headscarf. At first she ignores him – a parallel to the scene before, where ‘modern’ subjects are produced through their indifference to fundamentalist ideology. The exchange continues until he finally explodes, yelling that “women like her” deserve to be raped and discarded. Complete with a spittle-laden delivery, the man’s graphic threat of violence contradicts the claims of Marjane’s teacher: the veil does not ensure freedom but instead intensifies, not relieves, women’s bodies as objects of men’s gazes. For Marjane’s
mother, her disavowal of the fundamentalist regime and its ‘proper’ performance of Islamic femininity ends in failure, and she is forcibly interpellated back into civic body. At the same time, this new narrative insinuates that elite, secular, educated Iranian women – that is, ‘women like’ Marjane’s mother – are out of place in post-revolutionary Iran, positioned by the film as modern bodies ‘stuck’ in a fundamentalist state.

Influenced by their own experiences with the regime and the generation of women before, Marjane and her friends participate in technologies of the self that continually disavow the civic body. The veil, much like the opening scenes of the film suggest, becomes the site through which the civic body is refused as a site of self-making. The novel’s elaborate depictions of the micropolitics of veiling – including the nuances of hair exposure, use of accessories and make-up, and style of scarf – are notably absent from the film. Instead, Marjane sheds the veil completely, asserting a universalized, humanist ethic of freedom in place of the localized practices of resistance outlined in the novel. In a brief scene added to the film, Marjane declares to her two art school friends that she will drive on the highway without a veil. Egged on by declarations that she “wouldn’t dare,” Marjane pulls off her scarf while driving. Like exposing strands of hair or wearing make up, Marjane participates in an act of self-making that clearly resists the idealized vision of Islamic femininity demanded by the post-revolutionary regime. In its conversion to film, however, cinematic convention overrides the nuances of the novel’s representation of resistance. The adaptive process guides the translation of Marjane’s defiance through the long history of woman as spectacle in Western cinema (De Lauretis 4). Her act of
disrobing becomes a filmic event, one that calls attention to her display of defiance for the pleasure of audience as much as for Marjane.

The conversion to cinematic spectacle also transforms the relations of looking that frame the girls’ rebellion. In the novel, their acts of defiance depend on the public display of a modified civil body – wearing a Walkman or laughing loudly in full purview of Tehran, including the Revolutionary Guard. In the film, however, the representation of rebellion via cinematic spectacle dictates a scopophilic relationship of looking, where the audience effectively functions as voyeur. Marjane’s joyride, taking place at night on a deserted street, becomes a private and emotive act that transforms the body from a site of political resistance into an object of a gendered cinematic gaze. Post-9/11 civilizational discourse guides the conversion of the body into the language of the cinema, and the joyride scene conflates sexualized spectacle with a literal unveiling. By collapsing civilizational rhetoric and conventions of Western cinema, the adaptation of Persepolis generates a new state of affairs in which self-expression doubles as a site of racial and gendered containment for Muslim women.

The film presents the disavowal of the veil as a necessary practice of Marjane’s freedom, part of a distinctly humanist ethos of choice and control over her expression of dress, individuality, and corporeality. When Marjane removes her headscarf to expose a ‘free’ subject underneath, the film poses the exercise of these freedoms in opposition to the civic body mandated by the state. Moving forward in both time and space, the car becomes a metaphor for the film’s pursuit of a free self. It allows Marjane and her friends to momentarily escape from the social temporality of post-revolutionary Iran, carrying its
passengers to a spatiotemporal ‘beyond’ that presumably offers the freedoms of expression and individuality that they desire. This too is a discursive turn mediated by cinematic convention. Their speedy departure in Marjane’s car invokes the trope of the getaway car. The getaway car is a popular filmic device in Western cinema, and its citation in *Persepolis* situates Marjane and her friends among characters who balk against (an often corrupt) authority.\(^2^2\) Speeding away from the center of town, the scene cites the 1967 film *Bonnie and Clyde*; Marjane and her friend’s euphoric screams also recall the laughter of Geena Davis in *Thelma and Louise*, while the long stretch of highway in front of them – and high-risk activity – nods to the chase film *Ronan*.\(^2^3\) The alignment of adaptation and racial logics ensure that this cinematic convention doubles as a civilizational trope. In the last frames of the scene, the animated image of the moving car is juxtaposed against a dark and silent Tehran. Not only are Marjane and her friends the only figures moving forward in the scene, but their route to freedom also requires a shift in time and space away from the stagnant, traditional, and anti-modern East. Speeding past the audience, the cinematic trope of the getaway car grounds Marjane’s pursuit of freedom in the forward movement of a singular, progressive modernity and the seemingly universal set of rights and rewards it offers.

**Self-Making and Knowing the Self**

Satrapi presents mandatory veiling as just one of many experiences that shape Marjane’s life: she endures the execution of her uncle Anoosh, the commencement of Iran-Iraq war, a transcontinental move to Europe as a teenager, and a period of depression
as a young adult that ends in a failed suicide attempt. Despite the breadth of experience it covers, the novel continually returns to the civic body as a site through which self-making transpires, including the ways in which Marjane and her peers ‘know’ themselves as citizen-subjects. Foucault argues that technologies of the self ultimately constitute a knowing subject, one that recognizes and acknowledges herself as a subject through “practices of self-constitution, recognition and reflection” aimed at producing truths about the self (Hall and Du Gay 13). For Marjane and her peers, truth-telling is an act of self-making that inevitably engages the civic body in order to respond to the state’s strict control over women’s bodies and behavior in public. Not only do they come to ‘know’ themselves through the normative regulations of the regime, but the post-revolutionary civic body itself – a uniform, pedantic, public model of Islamic femininity – also produces corresponding ‘private’ subjectivities that Marjane and her peers also recognize as selves. In an effort to demonstrate this division, Satrapi offers two corresponding illustrations of herself and her female friends, presented as a set of two horizontal panels on a single page. The first panel calls attention to the group of women in public, wearing matching chadors and blank expressions. The image itself works to highlight the unifying force of the civic body, creating a series of homogeneous figures through Satrapi’s simplistic black-on-white illustrations. As if to emphasize this stifling uniformity, a caption box that reads “our behavior in public and private were polar opposites” looms over the panel’s display of bodies (305).

In the panel directly under this ‘public’ display of state-sanctioned Iranian womanhood, Satrapi illustrates Marjane and her friends’ corresponding ‘private’
performances of femininity. The women in the second panel are clearly more at ease: they shed the stiff, awkward posture of their public bodies in order to lounge on the floor, arms and legs comfortably resting by their sides. Unlike the drab uniformity of the first panel, the varied comportment, dress, hairstyle, and facial features of the bodies below express individualized interpretations of femininity – all of which signify a type of modern, Westernized womanhood easily recognizable and understood by Western readers. Satrapi, however, stops short of confirming readers’ assumptions that the latter panel’s more familiar displays of femininity are somehow a more accurate depiction of the women’s ‘true’ self by describing the relationship between their public and private selves as “schizophrenic.” While Paul Smethurst suggests that the metaphor of schizophrenia invokes a problem of time – where a subject is unable to distinguish past from present – here it doubles as a spatial metaphor. The division of public and private in post-revolutionary Iran instigates a “secondary identity coexisting with and engaged with the first,” demanding distinct but incompatible selves (86). The visual similarities between the two panels prevent just one performance of femininity from emerging as the ‘true’ representation of young Iranian womanhood. Their complimentary black-on-white shading and minimalist mise-en-scène implies that truth-telling about a hidden self hinges upon mandated public performances of womanhood, as a generative effect of the civic body and the spatialized divisions it creates.

Satrapi organizes both groups of bodies as if deliberately on display: the similar affectation of the poses enables the varied comportment and style of the bodies in the second panel to function as a direct response to the uniformity of the first. Much like the
novel’s other representations of self-making, the civic body serves as the foundation for the ways in which Marjane and her peers both know and craft the various versions of their ‘selves.’ The deliberate and affected posture of the bodies – composed as if they were posing for a picture – highlights the performativity of both presentations of womanhood. While the performance of femininity in the top panel clearly calls upon the post-revolutionary civic body, the darkened lips, extended eyelashes, and cleavage lines on display below are also a “performative accomplishment” (Butler 179). The private body is not ‘uncovered’ so much as it becomes an alternative site of self-making, drawing from transnational beauty regimes that exist alongside the idealized Muslim body in post-revolutionary Iran.

Marjane and her peers’ affinity for lipstick and chest-baring tops is indicative not only of the hegemonic and pervasive power of these regimes, but also their own status as an elite, urban, and educated group of women with access to the exchanges of culture and capital that enable this performance of femininity. Despite the many normative regimes that may shape gender performance, Butler argues that its effect – the gendered body – relies upon an illusion of coherence in order to maintain its regulatory force (178). By claiming self-knowledge through the metaphor of schizophrenia, however, Marjane and her peers emerge through gendered subjectivities that are fractured and irreconcilable. For Marjane, truth-telling does not reveal a ‘core’ or ‘essential’ self, but instead implies a lack of a coherent gender identity that guides her (and her friends’) various performances of femininity; the fractured self produced through this metaphor necessarily possesses no ‘true’ or inner feminine self. While Marjane and her friends remain dissatisfied with the
division between their public and private selves, schizophrenia does not signal their illness or affliction, but instead their discontent with the normative regimes that dictate those performances. This representation of gender incoherence, critical in its understanding of both sets of norms, is what ultimately allows Satrapi to interrogate the corporal regimes of the post-revolutionary civic body – Lopamudra Basu argues that it “reiterates the desire for change and the continuing demands for reform” – without posing Western-style femininity as a more fitting or authentic alternative (16).

The appropriation of the adaptive process by post-9/11 civilizational discourse, however, replaces the metaphor of schizophrenia with one of liberation. The adaptation of *Persepolis* synthesizes civilizational discourse and cinematic conventions, including continuity editing and voiceover, to create a new state of affairs in which freedom and free choice require the disavowal of the civic body. The film, for example, takes up the two incoherent selves of the novel and reconciles them through the codes of continuity editing as spatially and temporally distinct parts of a single, coherent subjectivity – a subjectivity transformed in pursuit of freedom. In order to become ‘free,’ Marjane and her friends exchange the mandates of the civic body for individualized, Western-style femininity, literally changing into temporarily ‘liberated’ subjects in the passage from public to private space.

This metamorphosis occurs in a single shot that follows the group of women as they attend a private party in Tehran. The film mimics the novel’s dualistic depiction of Iranian femininity: Marjane and her two friends enter the building expressionless in chadors, only to undergo a sudden – but seamless – transformation into black cocktail...
dresses, happy smiles, and bouncing hair. The representations of the transition from public to private performances is unique to Persepolis’ adaptation to animated film, since the animation of continuity editing allows the conflicting representations of embodiment to merge into a single, seamless, and coherent transformation. The continuous shot also adds a sense of temporal progression to the change: as the women shift forward in space, they also move forward in filmic time.

Unlike the novel’s representation of a self fractured by the division between public and private performances of femininity, the film presents the civic body as an unnecessary and oppressive layer inevitably discarded in the journey toward a ‘free’ self. The voiceover narrative during the scene ensures that this progression works in the service of acquiring freedom. Marjane reveals that the party scene in Tehran helped her and her friends to “leave the world behind” in a “desperate quest for happiness.” These parties, and the Western-style performance of femininity they required, were so effective in producing a temporary sense of liberation from the oppressive post-revolutionary regime that Marjane and her peers “ended up forgetting that they were not free” (in other words, not stuck) – to the disappointment and danger of their transformed selves. Where technologies of the self produce fractured, divided, and incoherent selves for Marjane and her friends, acts and practices of self-making in the film work at producing ‘free’ subjects through an ethic of forgetting and selective disavowal of Iranian political life. Freedom, defined against the post-revolutionary Iranian civic body and its political ideologies, takes up a liberal discourse, where agentive subjectivity is defined by individualism, choice, and self-determination. Under this new mode of subjectification, the film’s performances of
femininity – both public and private – produce a self that longs for freedom but remains trapped in the social temporality of post-revolutionary Iran.

**Conclusion: Muslim Femininity and the Liberal Subject**

The cinematic adaptation of *Persepolis* produces a representation of Iranian subjecthood more in line with Sean Penn’s vision of Iran than the film’s actual textual referent. In the novel, the civic body becomes a source of play, a stage for acts and practices of political subversion. In the film, juxtaposed against a Westernized humanist subject, it is repeatedly rejected in order for a ‘free’ self to emerge. That self emerges with help from cinematic conventions, which pull divergent and nuanced threads of the graphic novel into a more cohesive, and yet divisive, narrative. The differences in the novel and the film’s modes of subjectification are certainly an effect of the adaptive process, and the reformatting of the novel into formal codes and generic conventions of the cinematic medium. These codes and conventions shore up filmic time and space in the service of particular ideological goal, namely the foreclosure of Iran as a site of subject-making. The adaptation of *Persepolis* engages the visual and aural effects of the cinema as well: cinematic relations of looking render Marjane’s veil (and unveiling) part of a pleasurable spectacle for the audience; the voices of American actors reinforce the civilizational perception of a reality in which Iranians have no voice, while the device of the voiceover confirms Marjane’s inner desire for freedom. Post-9/11 civilizational logics appropriate the adaptive process, guiding the translation of Satrapi’s story into the
spatiotemporal language of the cinema in order to generate a ‘state of affairs’ in which the lines between ‘us’ and ‘them’ are clearly and deliberately drawn.

This chapter’s analysis of post-9/11 civilizational rhetoric reflects the larger argument of my dissertation by suggesting that it is the representation of Muslim femininity most affected by these shifts. Because the female post-revolutionary civic body engages the corporeal norms of an idealized Islamic womanhood, the film effectively closes off Muslim femininity as a site of subjectivity. Not only do Marjane, her peers, and her family disavow the civic body for a secularized and ‘modernized’ self, but women in the film who do not aspire to this model of secular womanhood in the film are portrayed as sinister and heartless – as guardians of the Islamic state – or as helpless and passive victims of long-standing and oppressive traditions. The Satrapi’s housekeeper, Mrs. Nasrine, embodies one of the film’s few representations of ‘traditional’ femininity. Marked religious by her desire to cover in front of men not in her family (a gesture criticized by Marjane’s mother), Mrs. Nasrine’s class status and ‘traditional’ religious practice stand in opposition to the film’s overwhelming depiction of Iranian womanhood as educated, elitist, and Westernized. When her son is recruited to enlist in the Iran-Iraq war by state-produced religious rhetoric, however, Mrs. Nasrine turns to Marjane’s mother in order to “talk some sense” into the boy. The film suggests that she lacks both power and prerogative and must find a ‘modern’ authority figure to act on her behalf.

Marjane, her mother, and their peers avoid the fate of Mrs. Nasrine as subjects clearly stuck in a time and space in which they do not belong. Much like the film
recreates spatiotemporal foreclosure of post-revolutionary Iran, it also relies on metaphors of time and space in order to demonstrate desire of these secular, Westernized women to become ‘free’ subjects. The film locates the necessary conditions for this liberation beyond the social temporality of post-revolutionary Iran, creating subjects willing but unable to experience the freedoms afforded to their Western counterparts. The repeating image of subjects caught in this spatiotemporal trap ultimately recalls the familiar rhetoric of the civilizing mission, in which Iranian women require rescuing from the repressive regime in order become ‘free.’ The trope of freedom is an equally important cue for Western audiences, who see themselves in relationship to these competing representations of Muslim femininity. Not only do Western and Westernized women to understand themselves as ‘free’ subjects against the specter of their oppressed Muslim counterparts who desire that same freedom, but the repeated images of Marjane’s desire for freedom legitimates these civilizational assumptions and its rendering of Muslim womanhood.

The Pursuit of Freedom in Space and Time

In both versions of Persepolis Marjane briefly experiences the ‘freedom’ of the West when she leave Iran as a teenager in order to attend school in Vienna. Marjane’s time in Austria, however, is a failure and she ends up returning to Tehran heartbroken and ill. Vienna holds little of the promise of freedoms and commodities of Western living. Instead, life as an immigrant for Marjane includes racial discrimination, poverty, and loneliness. Marjane’s experiences in Vienna do not prevent the film, however, from transforming her moment of return into a comment on the veil. The film’s first scene,
including Marjane’s sullen reaction to her headscarf in the bathroom mirror, is adapted from the middle of the novel as she prepares to return home from Austria. In the book, she is more defeated and disappointed in her failed relationship with Austrian boyfriend Marcus than unhappy about her trip back to the Islamic regime. By substituting the hardship of Iranian citizenship for apparent heartbreak, the film ensures that, while Marjane’s first experiment with ‘freedom’ in Austria might have failed, Iran is not truly available for return.

The film’s added scenes in the Paris airport pose an alternative subjectivity, a type of ‘thirddspace’ identity forged in the liminal space of the airport. The in-between-ness of the airport allows Marjane to mediate competing sets of normative regulations, rooting her political performances and self-making in the transition between East and West. Moallem, however, warns that although the “in-between location” is a “potentially desubjectifying space,” it fails to dislodge the “coercive practices of nation states nor their surveillance apparatuses” – underscored by Marjane’s experience of surveillance and scrutiny in the airport bathroom (6). The airport as a site of subject-making also highlights the relative elitism of Marjane’s, and by extension Satrapi’s, narrative. Marjane is a child of privilege (literally Quajar royalty), and growing up in Tehran she enjoys the privileges of a French-language education both in Iran and abroad. In Persepolis, crafting national narratives of subjectivity falls to the postcolonial, cosmopolitan elite. In its depiction of universal girlhood, Persepolis also begs the question: despite its unifying force, who does the post-revolutionary civic body serve as a site of political performance and self-making?
In the film, the repeating image of the airport also suggests that Marjane must complete the spatiotemporal foreclosure proposed by the film. In fact, it is unclear whether or not the ‘present-day’ Marjane of the airport ever returns to Tehran; she is still waiting in the lounge at the onset of the film’s last flash-forward to the airport. As the film concludes, however, Marjane completes her final disavowal of post-revolutionary civic body. Untying her headscarf, Marjane steps into the street and hails a cab. When the taxi driver asks her where she’s from she responds, with hesitation, “Iran.” This final exchange outlines the stakes in representing Iranian citizenship in a post-9/11 world: it serves as Marjane’s last act of self-making, finally positioning her cosmopolitan, hybrid subjectivity within the contours of a national identity. But much like the beginning of the film, it is clearly a claim on the nation made from the outside. Driving along the streets of Paris, Marjane’s silhouette in the Taxi completes the joyride she takes in the middle of the film, her ‘freedom’ finally attained. It is only now that she can claim her Iranian-ness, after fully repudiating Iran in space and time.

In 2007, Indian-American actor Kal Penn starred in a 4-episode arc on the hit Fox television show *24* as Ahmed Amar, an all-American teenager turned terrorist collaborator. In the show his character inadvertently takes his white suburban neighbors hostage while arranging an important delivery for his boss, the mastermind terrorist Fayed. The underlying message of Ahmed Amar’s storyline is quite clear: neighbors, friends, and classmates are all potential terrorists, particularly young, Arab-looking men with foreign-sounding names (at one point Amar berates his neighbor for failing to pronounce his name correctly). While racist caricatures on *24* are nothing new – the show is frequently criticized for its depiction of Arab characters as terrorists – Penn is an Indian-American actor with mainstream Hollywood appeal. Best known for his role as Kumar Patel in *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle* (2004) and *Harold and Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay* (2008), Penn’s arc on *24* calls attention to the ways in which the South Asian American body itself is often figured as deviant, criminal, and alien within the post-9/11 American cultural imaginary. The conflation of Arab or Middle Eastern-looking people with terrorists after the events of September 11, 2001 made many ethnic groups targets of an intense national gaze, including South Asian Americans; as
visible minorities they faced exposure to racial profiling, heightened scrutiny in airports and borders, and violence and destruction fueled by hate crimes.

Much like the ethnically ambiguous character of Ahmed Amar, the creation of a national enemy erased the specificity of the ethnic, national, and religious identities held by the people it targeted. When not homogenized as ‘terrorists’ and pitted discursively against the American citizen, categories of national belonging after 9/11 cornered ethnic minorities into a type of apolitical, ahistorical, and racially ambiguous citizenship. Gita Rajan and Sharma argue that they effectively erased the specificity of South Asian American-ness, as both a historical formation and a cultural identity (“Introduction” 27). Once neatly bound by the category of ‘model minority,’ after 9/11 South Asian American identity was made suspect by the state, or aligned with a whitened nation at the expense of its historical and cultural specificity. The terms of national belonging after 9/11 for South Asian Americans took shape through a vague and depoliticized discourse around ethnic identity, one in which the clichés of multiculturalism and melting pot nationalism stood in for the specific socioeconomic and historical conditions that helped form the South Asian diaspora in the U.S.

Penn later renounced his role on 24 during an interview with New York Magazine, calling it “repulsive” and a “form of racial profiling.” The character of Ahmed Amar did represent a drastic turn for Penn, who starred the year before in a more nuanced representation of immigrant family life as Gogol Ganguli in Mira Nair’s film The Namesake. Adapted from Jhumpa Lahiri’s 2003 novel, it describes the journey of a young Bengali graduate student and his wife to the U.S., and the growth and maturation
of their son Gogol, informally named after the Russian author Nikolai Gogol. While Gogol’s life as a teenager and young man eventually dominates the plots of the novel and the film, the story of his parents’ immigration to the U.S. in the 1960s (and in the film, the 1970s) speaks back to the crisis over citizenship and national belonging for South Asian Americans after 9/11. Laying claim to a history hidden by the tropes of the ‘model minority,’ ‘multiculturalism,’ and ‘terrorist,’ the narrative of their journey offers a template upon which both Lahiri and Nair rename the terms of citizenship effectively erased by the racialization of South Asian Americans after 9/11.

In the following chapter, I address the representations of South Asian American citizenship in both the novel and film version of The Namesake. I turn my attention from the appropriation of the adaptive process by post-9/11 logics to the critique of those logics through cinematic adaptation. I argue that, while both texts speak to the racialization of South Asian Americans in the wake of 9/11, Nair’s version of The Namesake is critical toward post-9/11 racial logics and their effect on South Asian American citizenship, particularly for South Asian American women. Nair reworks the spatiotemporal contexts of Lahiri’s immigration narrative in order to deliver this critique. I argue that the cinematic adaptation of The Namesake generates a new spatiotemporal ‘state of affairs’ – one that enables Nair to defy many of the truth-effects of post-9/11 racial logics that have shaped the contours of citizenship for immigrant subjects, including the primacy of assimilation, the mythology of the multicultural nation, and the hegemonic force of liberal feminism. By restructuring the narrative’s spatial and temporal
contexts, Nair replaces these truth-effects with models of flexible citizenship that subvert the racial logics at work in the post-9/11 nation.

**Space, Time, and the Story of South Asian American Citizenship**

Both Nair and Lahiri turn to the past to recreate a history of South Asian American citizenship, mapping the production of immigrant citizen-subjects through the sociopolitical landscapes of Boston, New York, and Calcutta in the 1960s and 1970s. Consequently, both authors rely upon spatiotemporal cues in order to dictate the gendered modes through which South Asian immigrants enter in and belong to the nation, or are prohibited from doing so. The texts’ arrangement of space and time bears out the two authors’ very distinct stories about South Asian American citizenship. In addition, their strategies for identifying the terms of that citizenship for South Asian American immigrants reflect the rapidly changing sociopolitical landscape in the years after 9/11.

Edited, marketed, and consumed in a milieu still reeling from its effects, the novel makes claims on South Asian American identity at the height of the nation’s xenophobic, racist backlash against visible minorities from South Asia and the Middle East. Lahiri’s novel, foregrounding the nation itself in producing racialized citizenship, works from familiar models of national belonging and assimilation as a way to challenge the nation’s discourses of exclusion. She turns to the role of the nation in forming gendered subject positions for immigrant bodies, underscoring the ways in which time is written on and through the various disciplinary mechanisms of American institutions. The novel’s attention to institutionalized time emphasizes the continuity and control of the state in
determining the contours of citizenship, foregrounding the ways in which subjects emerge through technologies of the state.

While the novel version of *The Namesake* emerged on the heels of widespread racial profiling, detention, and deportation of South Asians, Arabs, and Muslims living in the U.S., the year of *The Namesake*’s cinematic release – 2006 – witnessed the continued institutionalization of xenophobic and anti-immigrant sentiment by the state. Faced with a national environment skeptical of both immigrants and the government Nair sidesteps the novel’s emphasis on assimilation, offering a point of view suspicious of the sense of security and upward mobility promised by integration into the nation. She instead foregrounds the development of transnational ties, practices, and communities as alternative modes of South Asian American citizenship. As a result, Nair conveys movement and transit in the representation of space and time: trains, airports, and cosmopolitan urban space are all reoccurring motifs in the film. The historical specificity of South Asian American identity thus emerges in the film through the ways citizenship exceeds the rubric of the nation, informed by transnational exchanges of culture and capital that necessarily supplement the state in the formation of immigrant citizen-subjects.

No longer relegated to reverent memorials and documentaries, by the time *The Namesake* premiered three years later 9/11 had emerged as a popular topic for fictional films and television shows. The film version of *The Namesake* debuted onto a cultural stage where 9/11 existed (and still exists) in the vernacular, signified by a set of iconic referents like “Ground Zero,” the “Twin Towers,” and “Osama Bin Laden.” The fictional
proliferation of the 9/11 narrative is not lost on Nair; while neither version of *The Namesake* make reference to 9/11, the film’s setting, chronology, and subtle citations of 9/11 iconography all work to incorporate the event as a type of extradiegetic presence—one that not only secures the film to the milieu in which it was produced but also ultimately legitimizes its claim on South Asian American citizenship by alluding to the circumstances of its erasure.

**Narrative and Form: Taking Up Space – and Time – in the Immigrant Body**

Throughout the two versions of *The Namesake* the chronotope— or the representation of time (historical, narrative, and formal) in space—ensure that those cues work in the service of legitimating and specifying South Asian American citizenship. Developed by Mikhail Bakhtin as a literary term, Robert Stam describes the chronotope as “the means of understanding the ways in which spatiotemporal structures in the novel evoke the existence of a life-world independent of the text and its representations” (*Subversive Pleasures* 11). The chronotope marries time and space in a text through the spatial materialization of historically specific temporality; chronotopes determine the social and political world through which the events of the text transpire, as well as shape options for narrative and character expression. Similarly, the narrative and formal relationship between time and space help shape representations of history through the particular chronotopic motifs taken up by a text. I argue that Lahiri and Nair redraw South Asian American citizenship through motifs that revolve around male-dominated spaces, including the American institution and the cosmopolitan city, in an effort to
expose the ways in which strategies of citizenship often exclude and marginalized women immigrants.

The chronotopic expression of space and time unfolds at three levels within a text: first, through the text’s formal characteristics engagement with space and time; second, through the representation of the relationship between time and space in a text as it is manifested through objects, persons, or places; and finally, through the ways in which those relationships denote, illustrate, and constitute history (Vice 201). The formal organization of space and time in each version of *The Namesake* determines its engagement with a historically and socially specific life-world in which the events of the text transpire, creating a distinct ‘state of affairs’ in each text. The novel, for example, begins in 1967 and ends in 2000, while the film begins in 1977 and ends in 2004. This shift in time relocates the historical and social contexts in which the story of Gogol’s parents, Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli, unfold; in the novel, for example, Gogol’s birth takes place in 1968, an iconic year in American history that locates the growth of Ashoke and Ashima’s family amidst major institutional shifts in both immigration policy and civil rights in the U.S. By advancing the timeframe of the narrative, Nair effectively disrupts that relationship, displacing the primacy of the nation in the representation of the film’s cultural and social milieu. The novel and film also take place in two different spaces, shifting from Boston to suburban New York City. In Boston, Ashoke and Ashima’s early life in the U.S. revolves around the city’s extensive university system and the processes of assimilative immigrant identity associated with model minority-hood; the shift to the iconic setting of New York, however, reroutes the focus of the text to the
development and growth of immigrant communities in the city. The formal changes from novel to film consequently change the ways in which the texts represent the various national – and transnational – life-worlds that their characters inhabit and constitute gendered strategies of mobility and agency.

The effects of the shifting relationship between time and space in the two versions of *The Namesake* resonate throughout the opening scenes of the novel and the film. The formal arrangement of time in the opening of the texts calls upon two distinct spatiotemporal arrangements, as time takes up space in and through the immigrant body. In the novel, Gogol’s birth in the U.S. serves as the first narrative event, and the story flashes back in the midst of Ashima’s labor to recall the development of Ashoke and Ashima’s relationship. Ashoke, after escaping death in a horrific train accident, decides to travel to the U.S. in order to pursue a graduate education at MIT. He returns to his hometown of Calcutta in order to wed Ashima, who then returns to the U.S. with him and gives birth to Gogol eighteen months later. The film, however, takes a more straightforward approach to narration by beginning in Calcutta with the representation of Ashoke’s fateful train ride. The rearrangement of narrative time from novel to film literally changes the place in which Lahiri and Nair begin to redraw the history of South Asian American identity, not only altering the location of the opening scene but also the gendered modes of citizenship through which Ashoke and Ashima become immigrant-subjects.

The opening chapter of the novel begins with Ashima in labor with Gogol, which leads her out of her home and into the institutional space of the hospital. The technologies
of childbirth housed in the hospital play a dual role in the novel: they produce a child and facilitate Ashima’s assimilation into the national body. Lauren Berlant refers to the ‘national body’ as a form of citizenship mediated by “nationalist politics of the body,” including the corporeal regimes of the state, family, and civic institutions (114). Accordingly, the novel begins with a distinctly gendered mode of subject formation, because it is through the embodiment of motherhood that Ashima joins – and is recognized by – the nation. Before Gogol’s birth Ashima is frustrated and bored in her husband’s small Boston apartment, faced with days that “dragged” (35). The lack of meaning in her everyday life stands in stark contrast to her husband’s busy teaching and research schedule. Expected instead to reproduce a Bengali household for Ashoke in the absence of the extended kinship networks that shaped her home in Calcutta, Ashima refuses. Literally wasting time, she spends “hours in the apartment, napping, sulking, rereading her same five Bengali novels on the bed” in order to protest her isolation and boredom (35). Lahiri expresses Ashima’s dissatisfaction in temporal terms; her inability (and unwillingness) to make time meaningful is a response to her exclusion from the institutions that give husband’s life meaning, and distance from the people with whom she is most familiar. Pregnancy and the possibility of motherhood, however, force Ashima to treat time as a productive form of measurement. In fact, when Ashima begins to track the months of separation from her family in Calcutta through her growing body, the temporal and spatial dimensions of pregnancy together serve as a barometer of her loneliness – “unmonitored and unobserved by those she loved” (6). The prolonged “discomfort” of pregnancy, along with the recurrent intense pain of labor and childbirth,
suggest that time writes this trauma directly onto the space of the body; it also yields an embodied link to the common experiences of assimilation for women immigrating to the U.S. after the repeal of national origin quotas in 1965 (heralded by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, it enabled mostly educated, professional men and their families from non-European countries to emigrate to the U.S.), including hospitalized childbirth, the isolation of homemaking, and separation from kinship networks long before the advent of the Internet or inexpensive long distance rates (6).

Ashima’s labor ushers her into a Boston hospital, an institution where both time and pain are carefully controlled. Cornerstones of the American healthcare system, hospitals also function as biopolitical spaces in which the management of life through technologies of reproduction, health, disease, and death function to produce subjects of the state (such as “mother” and “son”). As a result, the American hospital also serves as a site of cultural assimilation where individuals are subjected to disciplinary regimes aimed at producing ‘healthy’ and self-sufficient citizens of the nation. In the novel version of *The Namesake*, the hospital provides a chronotopic motif focused on the creation of productive spaces via the division, classification, and arrangement of time. Accordingly, the novel’s hospital is an institution marked by time: it has an “accelerated day,” including scheduled meal times and a regular flow of doctors and nurses (5). Ashima’s entrance into the space of the hospital not only subjects her to these temporal regimes, but actually forces her to participate in her own subjection when charged by the doctor with timing her contractions as her labor progresses. She tracks her contractions with a watch her parents gave her, a bon voyage gift “slipped over her wrist the last time she saw them,
amid confusion and tears” (4). The watch not only makes time and herself useful, but its role in Ashima’s transformation into a productive subject is part of a distinctly assimilative project – as “American seconds tick on top of [Ashima’s] pulse point” (4). At the same time, the watch remains attached to a history that exceeds her new place in the nation, linking the labor of assimilation to Ashima’s home in Calcutta. When she looks at the watch to track her progression into motherhood, she recalls the vast space between her and her family; charged with raising a “child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little” it also reminds her of her marginalized status in her new home (6). Assimilation, for Ashima, is not a matter of shedding old practices and norms for the regime of American motherhood. Instead, it is the embodied reiteration of distance and difference that ultimately thrusts her into the subject position of ‘immigrant.’

Beginning *The Namesake* with Ashima’s labor, Lahiri presents childbirth as a gendered technology of citizenship – a mode of subjection that generates subjects easily understood and managed by the nation. Ashima herself is more than aware of this proposition, in that the “consequence” of her labor is “motherhood in a foreign land” (6). The contractual conditions of her citizenship become even more apparent when she and Ashoke prepare to leave the hospital with Gogol. Prior to his birth, Ashoke and Ashima agree to allow Ashima’s grandmother in Calcutta to name their son. However, the letter containing his name does not arrive before he is born, and Gogol remains nameless. Ashima and Ashoke are “not terribly concerned”; in Bengali culture, parents often assign formal names for their children later in a child’s life in order to pick the “best possible
name” (25). This naming practice takes on a new significance for Ashoke and Ashima, who are far from West Bengal: designated by his grandmother, their son’s name sustains their connection to the customs, languages, and rituals of family life in Calcutta. As one of their child’s first subject-making experiences they anticipate that his naming will interpellate him into Bengali culture, affording him a tangible, permanent link to his ethnic identity and familial history.

While Gogol and Ashima are waiting to be discharged, however, a hospital administrator urges the new parents to choose their own name, since “in America, a baby cannot be released from the hospital without a birth certificate. And that a birth certificate needs a name” (27). Panicked over the prospect of naming their son without warning, Ashima and Ashoke pick Gogol for the birth certificate, figuring the informal name would suffice until his formal name arrived. Gogol, of course, becomes a permanent name when the letter with his official name does not arrive before his grandmother passes away. While motherhood may offer Ashima a place and purpose in her new home, it is not without consequence. She forges that space through her son, whose very identity bears the marks of disconnect that shape Ashima’s life as an immigrant. Gogol’s name also recalls the regulation of the nation-state in producing her and her son as legible, normalized, and assimilated citizen-subjects. The haphazard and forced circumstances of his naming, however, seem to suggest that the specificities of racialized citizenship for South Asian American immigrants are not erased or displaced by the process of assimilation, but actually produced by the tension between new regimes of the nation-state and the customs, norms, and practices of one’s homeland. Gogol’s own skepticism
toward his name – that it is a complete anomaly in his American world, being neither Bengali nor English – indicates that the effects of this tension remain with him as a second-generation Bengali American.

In the cinematic adaptation of The Namesake, Nair also opens the film with a single, key subject-making experience in an effort to specify the terms of South Asian American citizenship after 1965. She, however, displaces the primacy of the nation in the opening narrative, foregrounding the role of transnational migratory flows in the development of South Asian immigrant subjectivity. Unlike Ashima’s prolonged labor, the immigrant body is not traumatized by time but by space, and many of the signs of immigrant life stabilized by institutions in Lahiri’s text – migration, home, and nation – are fraught with unpredictability and violence at the beginning of the film. Nair refocuses the theme and tone of the film through chronotopic shifts on several levels. Formally, Nair’s adaptation does not change the events that precede Ashoke and Ashima’s life together in the U.S. It does modify the sequence in which they are told, adopting a chronological telling that begins with Ashoke’s near-death experience on a train traveling to visit his grandfather in Jamshedpur.

Nair’s revision departs from Lahri’s story of origin that takes place within the nation. She also begins her version of The Namesake with a traumatic event, one that references 9/11 in its visual rendering and its effect on the film’s characters. This shift allows Nair to highlight the ways in which the narratives of loss circulating around 9/11 frame – or fail to frame – contemporary South Asian American subjects. The film starts as Ashoke boards a train in the Howrah train station. As the trip proceeds Ashoke and his
seatmate Ghosh talk casually about travel. When Ashoke admits he has never considered traveling abroad, Ghosh implores him to “pack a blanket and a suitcase and go see the world.” Suddenly the scene turns chaotic as the sound of screeching metal fills the air. After a shot of minutia and people from the car flying through the air, the film abruptly cuts to the opening credits. This train journey, although brief, is a life-changing experience for Ashoke. Much like the staging of Ashima’s pregnancy it provides him with an embodied link (a limp that lasts until his death) to the catalyst for his own migration to the U.S.: Ghosh’s last words.

While the novel deploys the chronotope of the hospital in order to convey a sense of temporal rigidity and structure associated with American institutionalism, the film engages the train chronotope in order to underscore patterns of violence instigated by transnational exchanges of capital and culture, including colonialism, globalization, and human migration. Paula Massood, in her work on representations of African American urban history in Spike Lee’s film Clockers, suggests that the train chronotope is an important feature in representing specific historical patterns of migration and mobility. Concerned with the film’s representation of African American communities in Brooklyn, she argues that the train in particular signals multiple temporal characteristics, from the history of Pullman porters to the development of African American middle-class neighborhoods in the boroughs of New York City. A type of “spatiotemporal unity,” the train “fuses the history of migration, growth of the black city, and the ghettoization of the black city all into one sign” (273). Much in same way, the representation of the train in
the opening scene of *The Namesake* provides a spatial and temporal bridge between the historical past, present, and future of transnational movement in and out of South Asia. The train chronotope in *The Namesake*, however, seems to focus less on linking communities together as it does in Massood’s analysis. Instead, the train highlights the movement of capital and people between places, accelerated and intensified in the era of globalization. It recalls the colonial influence upon these flows, citing the construction of the Indian railways as a project of the empire. In the train station scene, a shot of an English-language bank sign recalls the British colonial legacy in India while linking that legacy (via banking) to contemporary economic neocolonialism. Ashoke, traveling by himself, represents the flow of young men traveling away from the continent in pursuit of education and work from the colonial period on.

For Nair, these movements in and out of South Asia are ambivalent forces; they do not, as Ashoke’s seatmate Ghosh would seem to suggest, offer a type of celebratory, cosmopolitan citizenship in which travel is simply a rite of passage for Indian men. While Ghosh’s last words to Ashoke implore him to visit the West, Nair’s interpretation of the two men’s conversation just before the collision undermines his optimism toward its host countries. During this last exchange, Ghosh confesses that he longs to live abroad again. He, however, offers Ashoke the same platitudes about life in the West that Lahiri articulates in the novel. He encourages Ashoke to simply pack a pillow to see the world while he’s still young and unattached, singing the praises of the clean sidewalks in London. Unlike the novel, where the superficiality of his comments allow Ashoke to dismiss Ghosh and return to his book, his advice takes on an ominous tone in the film.
The slight skew of the shots and the motion of the rocking train make the world of the train seem unbalanced and moody, undermining Ghosh’s romantic ideas of unfettered migration and cosmopolitan citizenship. While Ghosh’s face is friendly as he implores Ashoke to visit both England and America, a medium close-up shot from a low angle gives Ghosh an overall sinister appearance and dim lighting casts deep shadows across his eyes and nose. The foreboding tone of the scene hints at a more ambivalent reality of migration for would-be immigrants like Gosh and Ashoke: it is capitalist regimes that fuel the movement of people across the globe, converting the immigrant body into useful – and often disposable – capital.

In Nair’s imagination of these flows, bodies are constantly in motion and intersect with unpredictable and often violent results. The mounting tension in the scene during Ghosh’s speech allows the ensuing chaos during the train’s derailment to function as a critique, an allegory for violent and destructive global conflict including 9/11. Read in a contemporary context, the film’s skepticism toward Ghosh’s wanderlust might suggest that migration as a rite of passage was corrupted, in part, through the image of hijackers posing as students and tourists, as well as immigrant students and citizens detained, arrested, and killed in the U.S. in the months after 9/11. The train chronotope also unites multiple temporal contexts in which transit serves as a site of violence and unpredictability in a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape: it cites the history of train violence in South Asia, including rail violence during the migration of Hindu and Muslim groups in the 1947 partition of India, the Godhra train burning in 2002, and the 2003 bus and train bomb blasts that took place in Mumbai – as well as a more recent history of
train bombings in 2005, 2006, and 2007 (Sengupta, Waldman). The representation of the train also recalls train violence outside the province of South Asia, such as rail bombings in London, Paris, and Madrid and the role of the German rail system in the engineering of the Holocaust. The film’s emphasis on the spatiotemporal connection between violence and travel ultimately reverses the gendered focus of the novel’s original opening scene. Instead of Ashima’s labor towards producing a child and a subject position, it revolves around a scene of loss and trauma, forging a direct link to the masculinist discourses of loss and trauma circulating after 9/11.  

Admittedly, the train crash is a device that originates with the novel version of The Namesake. The filmic adaptation of this scene, however – including its placement at the beginning of the film’s narrative – ensures that the “spatiotemporal unity” of the train calls upon the events of 9/11 as another site of transit-inspired terrorism. The scene concludes with a shot of Ashoke flying through the air, trying to avoid the rush of books, trinkets, and personal belonging unsettled by the impact. Mikita Brottman notes that a fascination exists in American society with the display of death and bodily destruction associated with the attacks on 9/11, and the representation of Ashoke’s body in mid-soar certainly alludes to the image of bodies falling from the Twin Towers. Part of the fascination with these images, she argues, is rooted in their absence from the public archive. Most news organizations censored images of the bodies, erasing the footage in their subsequent converge of the day’s events. Staging the crash scene around bodies in trauma, Nair makes reference to 9/11 by directly addressing the erasures in the nation’s collective memory. Moreover, she positions South Asian bodies as the subject of this
erasure (and reinstatement), suggesting that the absent images of traumatized bodies include those doubly erased by exclusionary practices and racialization after 9/11. By placing Ashoke at the center of this mimetic gesture, Nair identifies South Asian migratory flows, the events of 9/11, and the subsequent erasure of South Asian American citizenship in the U.S. as phenomena born out of the unpredictable and often violent movement of capital and people across the globe. The uniting feature of these three circumstances – the train chronotope – offers a spatiotemporal schema in which the path toward reclaiming South Asian American citizenship focuses less on the assimilation of immigrants within the nation, and more on the routes and forces that brought them there. Restaging the opening of *The Namesake* in narrative time and space allows Nair to offer a critique of the masculinist discourse of loss that emerged after 9/11 (one not present in Lahiri’s novel), and its role in the racialization of immigrant bodies.

**The Politics of ‘Model’ Behavior: Crafting Citizenship Through the Motif of Social Change**

Prior to 9/11, the racialization of South Asian American bodies often revolved around the trope of the model minority. Model minority-hood is most commonly understood in the U.S. as the successful economic and social assimilation of certain ethnic minority groups into mainstream American culture. Kamala Visweswaran notes that the successful integration of model minorities into the nation is often attributed to their “essential cultural traits” and “ethnic characteristics of thrift and hard work,” contributing to the image of model minorities as disciplined and industrious individuals.
determined to reach the middle class through education and diligence (14, 22).

Accordingly, the popular narrative of South Asian immigration to the U.S. has emphasized the assimilation of immigrants from the Indian subcontinent into America after the passing of the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965. Primarily young, educated, middle-class men seeking employment and education, the wave of South Asian immigrants after 1965 is often depicted as exempt from exclusionary practices or overt racialization, “unmarked except as stereotypically quiet academics and professionals” (Rajan 127).27 Visweswaran, however, emphasizes the role of class in negotiating the racialization of South Asian Americans, arguing that the “colonial history of class formation in the subcontinent” – and the particular role of the middle class in South Asia as mediator between British power structures and the less affluent indigenous classes – shaped postcolonial migration to the U.S., as well as the strategies through which South Asians immigrants have accessed and organized capital (9).

For Visweswaran, South Asian American migration is not a mythology but “histories of capital” actively negotiated by the state and by immigrants themselves (11). In The Namesake these specific socio-historical and economic formations are defined, in part, through the historical life-world of each text. Included in the life-world are historical contexts – not only do they take place in different locations, but the two versions of The Namesake also take place ten years apart – that establish a social and political backdrop for dictating the terms of South Asian American citizenship. Both texts open upon a distinct motif of social change: the novel begins just after the riots at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, while the film stages one of its opening
scenes amidst a Communist protest in 1977 Calcutta. Each scenario certainly dictates a unique relationship between the state and ‘model’ citizenship reflected in the text; Lahiri harnesses model minority-hood as vehicle of assimilated and apolitical citizenship, while Nair turns away from nation-based forms of citizenship in crafting subjects that respond to opportunistically to political and social change.

The novel opens upon a definitive moment in U.S. history – the year 1968, which doubles as the year of Gogol’s birth. Many of the year’s notable events revolve around the nation’s changing milieu, particularly the ways its institutions struggle to accommodate changing definitions of the national body. 1968 saw the beginning of women’s movement, the effective dissolution of a cohesive civil rights movement, and massive public protests against the war in Vietnam, as well as the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy. The year’s events serve as a kind of collective national response to institutional shifts made in the decade before, including the implementation of the Civil Rights Act, the creation of a ‘pink collar’ service sector, and the escalation of U.S. military presence in Vietnam. Lahiri’s strategic use of that year in the novel serves as a means of materializing history in and through American institutions, highlighting their role in mediating terms of identity and belonging within the nation. For Ashoke and Ashima, historical time also dictates legal and social modes of belonging: 1968 marked the year in which the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 became law. Because the passage of the Act enabled non-Western educated, middle class professional men to pursue education and employment in the U.S., this drastic shift in immigration law helped to produce the category of ‘model minority’ – a classification, Visweswaran
emphasizes, that reflects the “racialization of capital” in U.S. during the last half of the 20th century (22). In the year of Gogol’s birth it completes its journey in the legal system to become law, a definitive shift in how the nation must envision citizenship, race, and wealth in relation to this new wave of immigrants.

The creation of The Namesake’s life-world in the shadow of this newly ratified legislation allows Lahiri to craft the history of South Asian American citizenship around the development of model minority-hood. Within this arrangement, she poses Ashoke and Ashima as model citizens and subjects of the nation-state. For example, the political upheaval of 1968 itself remains far removed from the daily lives of Ashoke and Ashima. It is only while Ashima is in the midst of labor and Ashoke picks up a discarded Boston Globe in the waiting room that the tumultuous national environment comes into view. Already a month old, it chronicles the “riots that took place during the Democratic National Convention in Chicago” (11). The particular character of time materialized in space – arbitrated by the media, almost a month late – speaks to the contemporary understanding of the assimilated ‘model minority’ as politically inactive, and necessarily absent from rights movements and civil unrest of the late 20th century in the U.S. 28 Gita Rajan argues that Lahiri often draws from similar assumptions about South Asians as model minorities in her fiction. She notes that Interpreter of Maladies, Lahiri’s first book of short stories, takes up “collective memory and common or populist models of wisdom” in order to shape characters and their experiences in American society (126); in The Namesake, Lahiri use the tropes of the ‘model minority’ and willing assimilant as a foundation for the development of her fictional characters. While they begin as
“acceptable stereotypes,” the novel’s emphasis on historical time locates the novel’s characters within the specific sociopolitical and economic changes in the U.S. that made the creation of the model minority category possible (127). Lahiri thus stages the development of Ashoke and Ashima’s immigrant identity from within the nation, speaking back to the exclusion of South Asian Americans from the national body after 9/11. The historicized trope of the model minority offers South Asian American identity a historical specificity that ties it directly to the nation while noting its capacity to encompass – and institutionalize – social change.

While 1968 might serve as an iconic year in American history, the film version of *The Namesake* takes advantage of a change in location and time in order to draw the life-world of the text away from the nation. The distance produced by the temporal shift (from 1968 to 1977) unravels immigrant identity from Western-based institutions and legal proceedings, offering an extended view of the transnational flows of capital and culture that draw immigrants to and from the U.S. – and a critique of post-9/11 politics in the U.S. In the film, historical time claims a different geographic space: the film proceeds chronologically, depicting Ashoke’s accident in Calcutta and then his first meeting with Ashima. In both novel and film, organized political protests helps represent historical time. Unlike the novel, however, where the institutional setting shelters both characters and readers from civic unrest, it is the urban chronotope that registers the political environment in which Ashima and Ashoke being their migration to the U.S., drawing from the city’s legacy of revolutionary politics and civil protest in order to recontextualize the journey of its characters.
Just after the opening credits the film cuts to a series of shots of the city in east India, the first one with the title “Calcutta, 1977” in the lower left portion of the frame. The dated screen title appears over the proceedings of a protest led by young men and women in the streets of Calcutta. While both temporal and spatial distance characterized the representation of the DNC protest-turned-riots, the demonstrators in the film mingle with vendors and pedestrians in Calcutta’s streets, and onlookers appear unaffected by their presence. As they march through the streets, the ubiquitous sign of scythe and sickle reveals that the protest is a Communist-led event – in fact, 1977 marks the first year the Communist Party India (Marxist) held political office in West Bengal (Duyker 153). The representation of a Communist demonstration also recalls the rise of the Naxalite movement in Calcutta. Formed in 1967 after a violent uprising in a small village in West Bengal, the Naxalite movement spread to Calcutta in April of 1970 (Dasgupta 68). Their success in organizing students, shutting down schools and other civil bodies, and eliciting support in Calcutta “brought unprecedented publicity” to the movement in a city riddled with poverty, failing infrastructure, and unemployment (Dasgupta 69). Unlike the novel, where institutions both manage and mediate the changing terms of citizenship, the film’s allusion to the Naxalite movement in Calcutta notes that institutional spaces and subjects also have a revolutionary potential: the movement relied heavily on students (reflected by the age of the marchers in the film), and universities became sites of both political mobilization and violent protest (Dasgupta 68). Nair’s representation of the Communist protest directly challenges Lahiri’s assertion of the politically neutral immigrant-citizen by citing political movements of interest to immigrants beyond the rubric of American
politics. Not only does she invert the politicized position of student – from idealized immigrant to revolutionary protestor – but, much like Lahiri, suggests the neutrality of the ‘model minority’ emerges from a localized intersection of political, economic, and social concerns, and not “essential cultural traits.”

The film’s depiction of the political protest also directly references the civil unrest in India over Indira Gandhi’s first term as prime minister. Criticized for running an authoritarian state, Gandhi was accused of exercising excessive and unchecked political power, and in the mid 1970s the imposition of curfews, rampant censorship, and the indefinite detention of citizens created discontent in many parts of India. The year 1977 marks the last months of the emergency, and the commencement of public elections in India after two years. Nair’s decision to restage the novel’s overture to a pivotal year in American political life in an important year in Indian political history upstages the sway of the former in marking time in the life of immigrant-citizens. Much like the representation of Ashoke’s tragic train ride, Nair suggests that the specificity of South Asian immigrant subjectivity is forged equally through the political and social conditions that facilitate migration – not just assimilation – to a new host nation. In the shadow of Indira Gandhi’s police state, the protest also alludes to the more contemporary episodes of public demonstrations in the U.S. over post-9/11 politics and the subsequent invasion of Iraq. Instead of a far-away event watched by the ideal citizen-spectator, the representations of a protest over Indira Gandhi’s administration recalls public outcry over the loss of civil liberties in the U.S. after 9/11 through legal measures like the PATRIOT Act. The “Down with Fascism” posters held by demonstrators also mirror accusations of
fascism and authoritarianism leveled against the government in the wake of the American invasion of Iraq. Furthermore, Nair questions the guise of post-9/11 American exceptionalism by drawing a parallel between state policies in the U.S. after 9/11 and Indira Gandhi’s reign over India in the 1970s; staging the protest scene in Calcutta, Nair poses practices like detention, censorship, and loss of civil liberties not as exceptional measures by a government faced with a unique crisis, but instead a scene repeatedly played out on the world stage.

Nair also situates Ashima’s immigrant narrative in the midst of Calcutta’s vibrant political and intellectual traditions. Just prior to the introduction of this political context, the film unfolds to reveal Ashima performing Hindustani classical music for an audience of students. Juxtaposed against the Communist demonstration, Ashima’s performance at first seems oppositional and out of place. The scene poses Hindustani classical music, distinct from the modern protest or Western context of the rest of the film, as a seemingly timeless and pure practice far removed from timely, chaotic protest happening just outside. Notably, it relies on Ashima as the bearer of its difference. In the next scene Ashima meets the protest on her way home, on her way to meet Ashoke for the first time. Ashima’s distance from the protest recalls the representation of Ashoke’s political neutrality in the novel; weaving in and out of the “Down with Fascism” posters Ashima does not participate in the protest, ignoring it as she continues on her way home as if she, too, remains disengaged from the tumultuous world around her. Unlike Ashoke, however, her indifference to the demonstration suggests that idealized citizenship for Bengali women prohibits sustained engagement with the political sphere, and highlights middle-
class womanhood as “a primary marker of an essential, inviolable communal identity or tradition” (Gopinath, “Nostalgia, Desire, Diaspora” 262).

Much like Lahiri parleys the cliché of the ‘model minority’ into a claim on South Asian American identity, Nair takes up this trope of ‘woman-as-culture’ in order to call attention to the ways in which human engagement with global flows of culture and capital always takes shape through gendered norms and logics, in what Ong identifies as “flexible citizenship” (Flexible Citizenship 4). Ong argues that globalization requires new modes of cultural practice and identity that are mobile, flexible, and ultimately enable individuals to “respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions” (Flexible Citizenship 6). More than just a nod to globalization or migratory ‘cosmopolitan’ subjects, Ong argues that regimes of culture and capital – including the family, state, and nation – always require a subject shaped by norms of a localized space and time. Flexible citizenship is the subjectivities, strategies, and configurations that enable individuals to negotiate between these local regimes and transnational movement of capital. In the film, Ashima’s role as the emblem of Bengali womanhood quickly reveals itself as a mode of flexible citizenship. For example, the vehicle for her purity – Hindustani music – is itself a hybrid of several different music forms, including Vedic devotional songs, ancient Persian music, and North Indian folk music traditions. Furthermore, practices and traditions of Hindustani music have not remained static but have changed over time, including its instrumentation and mode of performance (Ruckert 14). Much like the music, the idea of pure and timeless womanhood that Ashima so effortlessly embodies does not exist in opposition to the more cosmopolitan and modern
world around her, but instead is a composite of “situated cultural practices” shaped by history, nation, class, and gender (Ong, *Flexible Citizenship* 17). She too can exploit those cultural logics in order to respond strategically to the shifting terms of global capital and transnational exchange.

It is a strategy exercised by Ashima upon her return to her family home in Calcutta, where Ashoke and his parents are waiting to meet her for the first time. Asked to recite a poem as both an example of her pedigree and proficiency in English, she chooses Wordsworth’s “The Daffodils.” One the one hand, her recitation of Wordsworth affirms idealized Indian womanhood as both timeless and middle-class: whimsical, romantic, and one of the most famous poems in the English language, “The Daffodils” is the quintessential example of canonical Western poetry and is appropriately feminine and bourgeois to demonstrate Ashima’s ‘proper’ womanhood. “The Daffodils,” however, appears in the film (as well as the book) through a set of cultural and political conditions determined in part by the long history of prolonged exchange between South Asian and the West. Taught in middle school classrooms throughout South Asia, the poem highlights the legacy of British colonial rule in South Asia, including the institutionalization of English in Indian educational systems. The demonstration of Ashima’s schooling within this educational system not only establishes her familial class status and access to educational and cultural resources; it also speaks to the growth of this middle class as middlemen through that same system during colonial rule. Ashima’s recitation thus signals the “historical and structural determinants” in terms of class, education, and social status at play in facilitating her migration to the U.S. (Visweswaran
Finally it is Ashima’s adeptness at negotiating these two subject positions – as both idealized woman-figure and a woman shaped by historically specific networks of capital, culture, and education – that presumably convinces Ashoke and his parents of their compatibility. Ashima’s strategic displays of idealized womanhood also suggests that similar performances – including those that engage the ideologies of liberal feminism – serve as strategies of mobility and visibility for female subjects and filmmakers.

Framed by the backdrop of Indira Gandhi’s reign and civil unrest in Calcutta, Ashima’s practice of ‘flexible citizenship’ fully materializes through this specific set of spatiotemporal structures. The scene, coupled with the allusion to protests in the U.S. over national security after 9/11 and the Iraq war, responds to gendered and racialized models of idealized citizenship behavior articulated in the novel and post-9/11 representations of South Asian femininity. Her critique of post-9/11 racial logics seems to inspire Nair to abandon the detached, apolitical stance generated by the mythology of the model minority or idealized middle-class womanhood in order to explore strategies of transnational negotiation and movement made through the practice of ‘flexible’ citizenship. This is an exploration enabled by a chronotopic motif rooted in global flows of culture and capital: the demonstration of protestors draw from Communist movements gaining popularity in West Bengal (and throughout the globe) in the 1970s in order to make claims against the state, while Ashima’s recitation of “The Daffodils” cites a specific history of exchange and class formation enabled by empire. Formally, the 10-year shift from novel to film renders Nair’s rendition of The Namesake’s opening scenes remarkably different from Lahiri’s original telling in the novel. Nair, however, cultivates
what’s at stake in Lahiri’s depiction of South Asian American citizenship as told from 1968 – namely, a rewriting of historical time to include South Asian American as citizens – and reroutes that urgency for national belonging into an eagerness to bypass the feminist, economic, and political regimes of the nation-state for solutions rooted in a transnational worldview.

**Mapping the Multicultural Nation in the Shadow of 9/11**

Nair’s changes to the story of Ashoke and Ashima’s migration to the U.S. also include a shift in setting; originally set in Boston, the cinematic adaptation takes place in metropolitan New York. While Boston and New York are geographically similar, their distinct histories and socio-cultural landscapes materialize two distinct ‘life-worlds’ in which the unfolding of each text’s events takes place. Consequently, location helps shape Lahiri and Nair’s distinct approaches to specifying the terms of South Asian American citizenship, particularly in relationship to the mythology of the model minority. The novel’s setting in Boston, for example, lends itself to a preoccupation with institutionalized citizenship and assimilation through the city’s extensive university system. The film’s visual imagery of New York, on the other hand, emphasizes its role as a cosmopolitan city, drawing the focus of the film to the often unspoken role of immigrant groups in sustaining the vitality of the city – and nation. Bringing the events of the film into the same space as the events of 9/11 also re-territorializes the life-world of the text in the same space as the 9/11 catastrophe. While Lahiri comments on the post-9/11 erasure of South Asian American citizenship by writing the nuances of
institutionalized assimilation into a pre-9/11 world, Nair’s statement is much more bold: she stages the trials of citizenship, although years before, at the site of erasure. This restaging serves as critique of racialization after 9/11, and a reminder of the role racial logics played in negating the history of South Asian American citizenship in the post-9/11 nation.

In the novel, suburban Boston provides the context for Ashoke and Ashima’s ‘model minority’ existence. Ashoke attends MIT, bringing Ashima to Cambridge after they marry in Calcutta. They eventually settle in a suburb where, despite being “the only Bengali residents,” they develop a network of Bengali friends across metropolitan Boston (41). Notably, Boston is a city full of colleges and universities. In this setting, educational institutions mediate the terms of the Ganguli’s life-world. They mark time, as Ashoke completes his education at MIT and joins the faculty of another university. Time spent within the university offers the promise of upward mobility, opportunity, and authority for Ashoke. His relationship to education reflects the larger role of American educational institutions in the process of assimilation for Indian immigrants in the last half of the 20th century. In the 1960s and 1970s, American universities not only offered educational and employment advantages for middle-class students willing to travel to the U.S., but also a space for the development of immigrant networks; both men and women sought opportunity, community, and legitimacy within the educational system (Bahri and Vasudeva 5). Furthermore, the university serves as a location through which biopolitical modes of control discipline the body. Much like the hospital, it literally ‘schools’ students in the social, corporeal, and intellectual practices required for inclusion within the nation.
(and thus a primary site for the production of the ‘model minority’). These gendered and racialized regimes of power, produce “disciplinary effects that condition our sense of self and our everyday practices,” making the subject position of ‘student’ one that resonates beyond the walls of the university (Ong, *Flexible Citizenship* 6). A fine-tuned combination of opportunity, community, and social control, the American university is a key site of assimilation for immigrants posed to take up the myth of the ‘model minority,’ ultimately offering a set of social, economic, and political strategies for navigating the changing contours of citizenship, and thus an ideal setting for exploring the intricacies of South Asian American history.

For Ashoke, then, the university chronotope represents a meritocratic ideal: despite the legal, historical, or political imbalances of power that might exclude racialized subjects from citizenship, he has endured his time as a student, acquired the necessarily skill sets, and has emerged at the other end as a professor of electrical engineering, a proper and productive subject of the nation. The authorizing effect of this journey emerges through Ashoke’s awe over his own accomplishments. Not only is his job as a faculty member “everything Ashoke has ever dreamed of,” but it is his secure position of authority within the institution that makes him especially proud – the “joy” over hearing the departmental secretary address him as “Professor” and the “thrill” of “lecturing before a roomful of American students” (49). The perfunctory passing of time thus is written through the romance of the university, a convention of the chronotope expressed through Ashoke’s pleasure at hearing “the melody of bells chiming from the campus clock tower” from his office (49).
While the university chronotope constructs a seemingly national life-world through which Ashoke forges toward assimilation, it also gives him access to global current events and news. Each Friday Ashoke “visits the library, to read international newspapers on long wooden poles. He reads about U.S. planes bombing Vietcong supply routes in Cambodia, Naxalites being murdered on the streets of Calcutta, India and Pakistan going to war” (49). The university offers Ashoke relatively timely accounts of the expanded life-world he still feels connected to, but it is a “materialized history” mediated through the space of the nation and its institutionalized regimes of knowledge that determine what events become newsworthy (Bakhtin 247). The library’s collection of international newspapers also highlights the role of a host nation in mediating ideas around nostalgia, home, and politics for immigrant subjects. Lahiri calls upon the library as a protective space, similar to the role of the hospital earlier in then novel. Much like in the hospital, reading the newspaper in the library positions Ashoke as a national spectator to world events, distanced by both time and space from the actual incidents. Protected – or possibly put off – by this distance, Ashoke prefers to wander in the literature aisles in pursuit of the ‘timeless’ classics of his favorite Russian writers.

For Ashima, however, the university chronotope is not an effective means of marking time or of assimilation into a national life-world. The disjunction between her and Ashoke’s experience points to ways in which models of citizenship are composed through gendered relations of power – an argument echoed by Ashima’s relationship to the city in Nair’s adaptation. If the university chronotope (enabled in The Namesake through the geographic space of Boston) materializes the history of assimilation for South
Asian immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s, it is clear that women are relegated to its margins as figures of reproductive labor and bearers of cultural norms. Lahiri’s attention to Ashima’s role within this space serves as an attempt to specify the gendered limitations of the modes of citizenship offered by the mythology of the model minority. Miserable and lost in her new home, Ashima struggles to manage her time upon arriving in Cambridge. After the birth of her son, she eventually learns to structure her day around the city’s various universities, taking Gogol “out, wandering up and down the streets….to sit in Harvard Yard, sometimes meeting up with Ashoke on the bench on the MIT campus” (35). Later in the novel, after she and her young family have moved to a small university town where Ashoke works, the space of the university structures the arc of Ashima’s days:

Her forays out of the apartment, while her husband is at work, are limited to the university within which they live, and to the historic district that flanks the campus on one edge. She wanders around with Gogol, letting him run across the quadrangle, or sitting with him on rainy days to watch television in the student lounge. Once a week she makes thirty samosas to sell at the international coffeehouse, for twenty-five cents each, next to the linzer squares baked by Mrs. Etzold, and baklava by Mrs. Cassolís. On Fridays she takes Gogol to the public library for Children’s story hour. 50

Despite Ashima’s newfound motivation for campus-based activities, her relationship to the space designates her exclusion from it – she is a visitor, roaming public areas and open buildings. She has no access to the amenities and privileges of the institution that her husband revels in; she and Gogol sit in the student union and visit the community library instead of the university library. Ashima’s status as a permanent guest is only exacerbated by her college education in Calcutta, ultimately cut short by marriage. The university in the U.S. instead serves as a site of reproductive labor for Ashima, as she
baby-sits Gogol and prepares samosas. Lahiri’s Eurocentric version of ‘international’ cuisine clearly resonates with irony, and the tongue-in-cheek juxtaposition of the three food items refuses to subsume racial difference through nationalist discourses of multiculturalism and pluralism. Indeed, the distinctly European spread at the ‘international’ café – samosas, German cookies and a popular (and Americanized) Turkish dessert – serves as an allusion to the ways in which the multicultural rhetoric in higher education “levels the important differences and contradictions within and among racial and ethnic minority groups according to the discourse of pluralism, which assert that American culture is a democratic terrain in which every variety of constituency has equal access in and which all are represented” (Lowe 86). Beyond the university, these discourses of pluralism move to ensure that the history of the nation’s immigrants foreground European ethnic groups, erasing the “important differences” generated by factors like race, geography, class, and gender.

While Lahiri’s allusion to multiculturalism within the academy speaks to the erasure of the specific structural and historical conditions enabling South Asian immigration in popular understandings of model minority mythology, it also cites the pervasiveness of multiculturalist rhetoric after 9/11. The reformulation of citizenship and belonging after 9/11 relied upon multiculturalist discourses as a racist tool to create categories of exclusion and national belonging. The idea of the melting pot – that the national body subsumed racial or ethnic difference through the identification of all citizens as simply ‘American’ – helped to sustain a divisive ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ mentality that effectively pitted ‘Americans’ against the “the putative terrorist who ‘looks Middle
Eastern” (Volpp 151). For ethnic groups already subject to racial profiling and scrutiny after 9/11, inclusion in the national body is contingent upon taking up the ahistorical, universalizing gestures of the multicultural nation – or face exclusion and even violence as a potential alien ‘terrorist.’ Significantly, it is Ashima’s story that levels this critique of multiculturalism’s relativist (and eventually racist) aim. Her marginalization within the university chronotope, read here as critical revision to masculinist histories of South Asian-American assimilation and citizenship, exposes the gendered and racialized imbalances of power through which American institutions like the university simultaneously reinforce and conceal. Furthermore, Ashima’s regular participation in what amounts to ‘wives of faculty’ bake sale highlights the ways in which the institutionalization of multiculturalism is not compatible with the meritocratic vision of the university held by Ashoke. These multiculturalist discourses simply reinforce exclusionary practices after 9/11 and thus part of the ‘problem’ of citizenship for South Asian Americans. Lahiri’s ironic allusion to the Eurocentricism of the ‘international’ bake sale highlights the ineffectiveness, and danger, of multiculturalism as both an academic discourse and a mode of national belonging for South Asian Americans.

While Lahiri redraws the masculinist history of South Asian American citizenship and national assimilation through the chronotope of the institution, Nair uses from the space of the city in order to forge strategies for flexible citizenship in which the host nation offers just one of many modes of belonging. In the film, Ashoke and Ashima immigrate to Queens instead of Boston, where Ashima spends her early days in the U.S. navigating the 3 train in pursuit of the Fulton St. Fish Market, and later the roads of a
nameless Long Island suburb. This shift in setting to metropolitan New York engenders a chronotopic schema that highlights modes of transnationalism, exchange, and migration indispensable to flexible citizenship; if Boston’s association with elite institutions of high learning situate “materialized” immigrant history through gendered strategies of assimilation in the university, then it is New York’s reputation as a locus for immigrant communities that guides the cinematic translation of time through space. Nair also uses urban space to respond to Lahiri’s rendering of South Asian American citizenship, underscoring the ways in which mythologies of the American dream and the model minority fall short for immigrants. In the film, the nation fails to keep its promise of upward mobility and provide effective modes of belonging. Much like the novel, however, Ashoke and Ashima’s relationship to the nation emerges through the writing of time in space, especially Ashima’s ambivalence to her new surroundings. This change in location also ‘materializes’ the history of the Ganguli family in the same area as the attacks on September 11. The story of an immigrant family that takes place in and around New York City speaks back to/critiques the exclusionary practices of its aftermath — including the whitening of the national body against the specter of the racialized ‘terrorist.’

Unlike the novel’s focus on individual assimilation as a path toward citizenship, the life-world of the film emphasizes the role of ethnic communities in defining the nation. Boston does have a significant South Asian American population, reflected in Ashoke and Ashima’s extensive network of Bengali friends and relatives present in the novel. Metropolitan New York, however, is home to the largest and one of the oldest
South Asian diasporic communities in the nation. As one of the most diverse counties in the U.S., Queens itself hosted a substantial population of post-65 South Asian immigrants, and still serves as an important center of South Asian American cultural and social life (Khandelwal 179). The film’s change in location thus does more than just modify the demographic makeup of the setting; the shift from Boston to New York reconfigures the history that ‘materializes’ through the text. Nair’s deliberate delivery of Ashoke and Ashima to New York anchors their story in a larger community narrative around migration, home, and the development of one of the most extensive immigrants networks in the nation. Retold from within the center of the South Asian diaspora in the eastern U.S, The Namesake’s immigrant narrative attends to the material, social, and emotional economies developed within immigrant communities through the process of forging ties between host countries and homelands. The film’s focus on the transnational character of immigrant groups and communities not only departs from Lahiri’s emphasis on assimilation and national belonging, but also works against the assimilative push toward the ‘Americanization’ of immigrant-citizens after 9/11. The urban chronotope plays an important role in materializing the specific practices of South Asian American immigrants in developing these ties; in the film, the trials of marriage, childbirth, education, and death all play out in and between New York and Calcutta. As a result, transit, travel, and migration between cities function as a type of currency through which immigrants like Ashoke and Ashima sustain connections with various versions of home. Stating with the opening scene, reoccurring signifiers of travel and transport – airports,
highways, railways, pedestrian walkways, train stations – help connect the film’s two urban settings.

In this motif, the bridge becomes a powerful symbol of the economic, social, and emotional ties between Calcutta and New York. The reoccurring images of the bridge also becomes a reminder of the ways in which the modes of travel, migration, and movement used to forge such ties are always inflected with the gendered regimes of family and nation. One of the first images of a bridge appears outside of Ashoke’s family home in Calcutta. Immobilized after his accident, Ashoke lays in bed and gazes longingly out of his bedroom at the Howrah Bridge, presumably captivated by the promise of exciting and adventurous overseas travel his seatmate spoke of just before his death. Within his natal home, however, Ashoke remains trapped. Resting in what is presumably his childhood room, Ashoke looks out of place and oversized in a small, child-sized twin bed. He is both infantilized and feminized, his symbolic castration suggested by his broken leg suspended over the bed. Even before the extent of his injuries is revealed, Ashoke’s containment is obvious: the first image of the Howrah Bridge comes into view through a small window with a heavy metal lattice. Interestingly, however, that shot pulls back to reveal not Ashoke at the window, but his mother. Because it is her point of view that offers viewers the image of the bridge, his sense of entrapment is mediated through this female figure. The relay of feeling suggests that familial obligation and caretaking serve as gendered constraints on women’s mobility; the modes of travel proposed by Ashoke’s seatmate – carefree, without family – are available mostly to men. Because this type of containment is a distinctly gendered experience, Ashoke is clearly out of place.
trapped within his home, while his mother, although contemplative, is not. The barriers that limited Ashoke’s mobility are ultimately temporary and the Howrah Bridge comes to represent the possibilities in travel and migration, framing his easy movement between two continents and cultures.

The film draws a parallel between the role of the Howrah Bridge in Calcutta – linking the cites of Calcutta and Howrah, it is one of the busiest bridges in the world – with the bridges leading in and out of the island of Manhattan, particularly the Queensboro Bridge. While the first shot of New York in the film is of the entrance to the Triboro Bridge, shots of the skyline of Manhattan in the film continually include the Queensboro Bridge. The film stages a similar scene of containment in relationship to the bridge, exploring Ashima’s feelings of confinement. Much like her husband several years before, Ashima looks out to the bridge from her hospital bed while in labor with Gogol. Ashima’s gaze does not represent a desire to ‘see the world’ as it did for her husband; instead, she longs for contact from her extended family and the comfort of the familiar in a time of crisis, a longing reiterated in the scene by the intercut shots of her parents and siblings in Calcutta waiting for the news of Gogol’s birth. Like Lahiri notes in her description of Ashima’s labor, the consequences of her containment is interpellation into the nation as gendered subject-citizen – and the restrictions (and erasures) that accompany such a subject position. Nair, however, takes up Lahiri’s description and transcribes it within the rubric of flexible citizenship, underscoring the gendered terms and conditions of travel inspired by transnational flows of capital and culture. While it is a transnational economy that allows Ashoke accesses to freedom and mobility he desires,
that same exchange ultimately threatens to contain Ashima as a mother-subject within a hostile and unfamiliar space. Through the bridge Ashima seeks a connection with a home outside of the nation that would undermine her containment.

Linking midtown Manhattan to Queens, the presence of the Queensboro Bridge is made more significant by its place in the film’s version of the Manhattan skyline. It serves as an alternative urban motif, replacing the iconic image of the lower Manhattan skyline – made famous by the lofty presence of the Twin Towers – with a literal and figurative reminder of the role immigrant communities living in Queens have played in the development of New York City. Juan A. Suarez argues that the towers themselves represented the “spectacle of modernity,” a phallocentric symbol of Western economic and cultural power (101). Suarez notes that the Twin Towers epitomized a society (and urban landscape) informed by modernist logics, including rationality and objectivity (101). Embedded in that logic, however, is an ethnocentric regime of control in which “modernity’s others” are abjected from the organization of urban space (101). For Suarez, the collapse of the WTC marks the violent return of those abjected identities to “haunt a center that had at once created them and turned them into its absolute others” (101).

Much like the novel, however, the film resists the categorization of immigrant and ethnic groups as ‘others’ altogether, claiming the history of South Asian migration to New York through the steady traffic to and from Queens. Nair avoids recreating both the racist spectacle of modernity and its demise by exchanging the image (or lack thereof) of the Twin Towers for the Queensboro Bridge. By featuring the Queensboro Bridge within the iconic space of the Manhattan skyline, the film attempts to reverse the exclusionary
logic that created categories of abjection symbolized by the World Trade Center.

Rerouting the symbolic value of the Manhattan skyline through the Queensboro Bridge demands that viewers envision the city not as a space of absolute and fixed categories, of white phallocentric stasis and abjected others, but instead as a site of transition, exchange, and flow between spaces and people. The sustained exchange between groups like South Asian immigrants and the city space symbolized by the Queensboro Bridge suggests that they are not part of that violent haunting, but instead members of the urban citizenry potentially affected by the events on 9/11.

Similar to the novel, where the space of university plays out the drama of the ‘American dream,’ the city literally represents a masculinity fantasy of upward mobility and opportunity. The illustration of space and time in the urban chronotope, however, ultimately serves as a site of ambivalence, particularly for Ashima. While it does offer gendered access to the staging of transnational ties that enable Ashoke practice of flexible citizenship, Nair’s depiction of Ashima’s containment and isolation within the same space also expresses a critical view toward that mobility and belonging promised by the nation. Cinematically, the urban chronotope often functions to demystify American mythologies of progress. For example, Vivian Sobchack argues that the urban chronotope – the seedy, dimly lit streets and dark interiors – of film noir signify anxiety and alienation over the reorganization of political, social, and economic roles in the U.S after World War II. The city emerges as ambivalent space, where the “insecurity and unsettledness” of the landscape help to shape the action and response of characters (Sobchack 147). Writing about the representation of urban African American history by
black filmmakers, Paula Massood also recognizes this ambivalence, suggesting that the dilapidated neighborhoods and tightly contained spaces of the ghetto often characterize ‘hood’ films. Massood argues that the city stands for “freedom and mobility on a persona, political, and economic level,” but these are promises that often fail its racialized populations (204). As a result, black filmmakers deploy urban chronotopes in order to explore “mobility, progress, and stasis” in African American urban communities (204). Much like Massood notes, the gendered expression of ambivalence in *The Namesake* works to debunk the mythology of the model minority, directed at the role the city plays in recruiting capital from immigrants. The film draws from the urban chronotope in order to examine the ways in which the strategies for mobility and freedom indispensable to the newly emigrated Ashoke depend upon the conversion of the immigrant body into capital useful to the nation. A formation that necessarily excludes Ashima, this gendered contrast is realized through the representations of the two character’s bodies in filmic space.

A brief scene depicting Ashoke as he leaves work underscores the ways in which the gendered contours of citizenship offers a type of mobility driven by capital. The scene begins with a series of shots that write the city’s allure of upward mobility and the mythology of the American ‘better life’ onto the urban landscape. A long shot captures a sloping residential street’s row of houses and parallel-parked cars in Queens. Already at the top of the hill, this perspective signifies the promise of amenities like a home, as both a material possession and state of mind. A clearly marked Dodge Intrepid in the foreground, however, betrays the film’s temporal claim. An anachronism that nods to the
modern-day urgency of narrativizing the history of New York’s immigrant and ethnic communities, the out-of-place car serves as allusion to 9/11 and draws viewers back into the present crisis over South Asian American citizenship. An image of a snow-covered tree, the corner of a slanted roof, and a television antenna composes the next shot, again pointing to the promise of growth both technological and organic. Interestingly these two opening shots are static, despite their allusion to growth. The juxtaposition of stasis and progress suggests that city’s promises of home, advancement, and stability are a simple façade. Much like the stasis of the opening shots, urban space fails to offer true growth or belonging, but instead it operates as artificial incentive for new immigrants to participate in the nation’s cultural and capitalist regimes.

Immediately following, Ashoke leaves his apartment and departs for the city. Subway brakes screech in the distance as he ascends a large flight of stairs to the stop above. The scene then reveals that it is Ashima’s point of view through which we watch Ashoke leave: as he turns around and waves toward the camera, the shot cuts to Ashima, who stands at the window waving back with uncertainty. For Ashoke, the stairs represent the promise of his upward mobility. Through his labor (in the form of walking up the stairs) he literally ascends to even greater forms of mobility (the subway), an upward spiral of freedom and opportunity within space of city. Much like the novel, Nair challenges Ashoke’s belief in the meritocratic mythology of upward mobility and freedom through Ashima. Her location in the apartment highlights the city’s gendered division of public and private space that relegate women to the home. The shot of Ashima waving to Ashoke replays the gendered division of space forecasted in the shot of an
immobilized Ashoke in Calcutta: the windowpane next to Ashima, along with fire escape next door, form a series of horizontal bands that separate her from the urban landscape. These lines intersect with Ashima’s profile in the right corner of the shot, where she is clearly contained by the maze-like layers of metal bars. The stairs themselves run horizontal across the same space and thus operate for Ashima as part of this barrier. Due to the scene’s shallow depth of field, only one spatial field remains in focus at a time, a visual effect that intensifies this isolation and containment. An over-the-shoulder shot focuses on the stairs while Ashima’s out-of-focus hand and head fill the foreground. As she waves to Ashoke, her reluctant gesture appears as if she is reaching out towards the stairs. The focus quickly shifts, however, from the stairs to her hand, completely obscuring the stairway in front of her. The blurry stairs suggest that Ashima’s world is quickly closing in, and she is cut off from the city through her containment in the private sphere. The same world that offers Ashoke freedom traps Ashima, pointing to the ways in which the city’s promise of sovereignty is contingent upon gendered strategies of mobility that exclude women. Much like her containment in the hospital, it is the domestic sphere that traps Ashima and shapes the modalities through which she accesses modes of belonging within the nation. Here Nair emphasizes the role of institutions and social structures in shaping subject-making for immigrant women, departing from the post-9/11 models of South Asian female subjectivity that emphasize autonomy and individualism.

Ashima and Ashoke eventually leave Queens, raising Gogol and his sister in a nameless Long Island suburb. As a young adult, however, Gogol returns to the city,
living and working in Manhattan. Gogol’s experience in New York, however, is significantly different than that of his parents; for Gogol Manhattan is an urban playground, full of swank bars, galleries, and gentrified townhomes. New York also provides the background for his short marriage to Moshumi Mazoomdar, another second generation Bengali American. Together, they embody a type of cultural capital and social mobility that the film explicitly links to urban space, a subtle reminder that the cosmopolitan chic Gogol and Moshumi both seem to embrace stems directly from the economic, social, and cultural networks forged by immigrant communities living in the city generations before. Nair locates the specificity of South Asian American citizenship in the spatial configuration of these networks, using geographic and filmic space in order to detail the historical, political and economic conditions that facilitate the gendered terms of ‘flexible’ citizenship. Unlike Lahiri, who contextualizes Ashoke and Ashima’s migration to the U.S. in terms of its temporal significance, Nair relies on chronotopic cues embedded in the urban landscape that situate their migration as part of a growing South Asian diaspora in the U.S. The distinct positions of Ashoke and Ashima within the filmic space itself allow Nair to identify the socioeconomic terms through which they access citizenship: much like Visweswaran notes, it is the specific combination of class status, education, and labor – a veritable “history of capital” – that simultaneously offers Ashoke mobility and contains Ashima. For Nair, however, the urban chronotope also allows her to embed the narrative of *The Namesake* into the fabric of metropolitan New York, weaving South Asian American identity into the space of the city long before the events of 9/11. It is from this place that Nair delivers her critique of post-9/11 racial
logics, exposing the role of narratives of loss and mourning in the erasure of South Asian American identity from the post-9/11 nation.

After their distinct expository assertions, both novel and film follow the same narrative path: Gogol navigates a bifurcated world as a child, juggling expectations of his immigrant parents with the demands of American culture. Not simply a matter of an intercultural generation gap, the sparse narration and melancholy tone of both novel and film convey a type of aimlessness that follows Gogol throughout his life, preventing him from feeling comfortable anywhere. As a child, this angst is symbolized by his name. As a teenager and young adult, the world of his parents, characterized by countless large Bengali gatherings and summer trips to Calcutta, seems inaccessible and foreign; he struggles against the Bengali traditions and customs they follow, only to feel clumsy and alienated in the Anglo-centric world of his friends, and later girlfriends. He legally changes his name to Nikhil when he enters Yale as a undergraduate student and resists walking in his father’s footsteps by going to MIT, instead attending Columbia for architectural school. Upon his father’s death Gogol, in his late 20s, revisits the Bengali traditions and practices of his parents. He dumps shallow white girlfriend Maxine and eventually weds a Bengali friend of his family. Unlike the ‘happily married’ paradigm of the bildungsroman, however, their marriage is short-lived: unhappy with the fantasy of the ideal young Bengali-American couple, his wife cheats on him and their union dissolves. At the end of the novel and the film Gogol is alone, having neither fully replicated nor abandoned the expectations of his family. Ashima, after Ashoke’s death,
decides to return to India, and both texts close with her return to her family in Calcutta and Gogol’s rediscovery of his father’s favorite author.

The spatiotemporal and narrative shifts between texts, however, resonate throughout the narrative, and the film and novel ultimately tell different versions of the same story. This is a sentiment echoed by the authors themselves; negating the primacy of fidelity in the cinematic adaptation, Lahiri herself (the rightful ‘owner’ of the narrative) describes *The Namesake* in the companion book to the film as a story that “lives and breathes in two different spheres” (9). What the two authors do share, as evidenced by their texts, is a mutual understanding of South Asian American identity as one in crisis after 9/11, and the urgency of articulating a claim to citizenship based on the specific historical, social, and economic terms of South Asian migration to the U.S. Nair and Lahiri approach the problem of citizenship through distinctive modes of belonging, subjectification, and authorship; Lahiri ultimately affirms citizenship and authorship from within the nation, while Nair maintains her signature interstitial filmmaking. Read together, the texts speak to shifts in the ways in which 9/11, nationalism, and racialized citizenship have been taken up in American consciousness in the years following 9/11. Lahiri, writing from a place in which the wounds of 9/11 were still fresh, focuses on reinscription into the national body as a strategy for articulating South Asian American identity. Nair, on the other hand, expresses a more explicit understanding – and critique – of the events of 9/11, as well as the growing awareness of the ways in which transnational flows and exchanges can shape national identities. Nair takes up Lahiri’s immigrant narrative and changes it, creating a new ‘state of affairs’ that calls post-9/11
racial logics into question, and the role of South Asian women – through both her authorial position and her portrayal of Ashima – in their dissemination. Nair also adapts Lahiri’s description of gendered exclusions inherent in the mythology of the model minority to fit forms of flexible citizenship. As a result, in both novel and film Ashima emerges as an ambivalent figure, pointing toward the ways in which post-9/11 racial logics have shaped representations of South Asian femininity. The film’s depiction of migration, travel, labor, and marriage as gendered experiences of subject-making, however, also replace the model of liberal feminism forwarded by these other images of South Asian femininity with practices of flexible citizenship.

Unlike the novel, the film revisits the scene of Ashoke’s accident in its final act. Ashoke reveals the story of his accident to an adult Gogol – and thus the genesis of his name – at their last meeting together, a few months before his sudden death by heart attack. The film actually flashes back to the scene of the accident, a voiceover by Ashoke describing his conversation with Ghosh as the camera pans over charred bodies and wreckage. Much like the opening scene, a mangled train car standing on one of its ends evokes the iconic image of the wreckage at Ground Zero. After that meeting, Ashoke travels to Cleveland to teach as a visiting professor at a local college, where he has a sudden heart attack and dies; Ashima stays behind in Long Island and Gogol carries on with his life, living in a Lower East Side townhome with his girlfriend Maxine and her parents.

The representation of Ashoke’s death changes from the novel to the film, particularly in relationship to the retelling of his traumatic accident. In the novel, Ashoke
reveals his accident to Gogol when he is still in college, and the detailed recollection of the event is contained within the first 30 pages of the book. The film, however, strings the two events together by linking the carnage at the crash, via flashback, to Ashoke’s untimely death. The film’s temporal, spatial, and narrative shifts all converge at Ashoke’s death, allowing it to serve as a proxy for the events on 9/11. Narratively, Nair’s decision to wait and portray the aftermath of the train accident makes it seem as if the carnage from the wreck years before is part of Ashoke’s death. Because the film’s narrative advances the historical timeline, the temporal world of the film intersects with 9/11; presumably born in 1978, Gogol is 23 in 2001 and a young adult at the time of his father’s death, suggesting that both events take place around the same time. Although he actually dies away from home in Cleveland, Ashoke’s family mourns his death in New York, bearing the effects of his passing in the same space as the events, and victims, of 9/11. Collectively, these shifts enable Nair to allude to the devastating effects of 9/11 without betraying Lahiri’s original narrative. Ashoke’s death also writes the South Asian American body into the narrative of loss that frames the popular understanding of the 9/11. Recreating the story of loss, mourning, and recovery with South Asian American identity at its center, the film version of The Namesake is not simply an analogy for 9/11, but instead a product of an adaptive process responding to crisis over citizenship created in its aftermath.
Chapter 5

Conclusion: Fidelity Regimes and Female Authorship in Cinematic Adaptation after 9/11

Throughout my dissertation, I have attempted to demonstrate the dual roles of cinematic adaptation and post-9/11 racial logics in the articulation of contemporary representations of South Asian and Muslim female subjectivity. While taking shape through unique sociocultural, political, and economic circumstances, the subjects produced in each adaptation reflect an urgency to speak about racial identity and national identity in a post-9/11 world. They not only disseminate and normalize assumptions about ‘good’ categories of citizenship, but also are themselves products of this urgency, arising from the cultural and economic viability of seeing and consuming particular types of subjects – and spectacles – in the cinema. Racial logics clearly guide those images onto the screen. They provide an ideological guide to their ‘translation’ through space and time, helping to determine the spatiotemporal formats best suited to reflect a post-9/11 world. From the cosmopolitan Aishwarya Rai as a modern-day Elizabeth Bennett, to the replacement of the civic body in Persepolis, to the chronotopic motifs that seems to resist gendered subject positions dictated by assimilation in The Namesake – the films respond to these logics. They also reflect the urgency in creating modes of citizenship acceptable to a viewing audience wary of racial otherness, and hungry for images of
inclusiveness and cultural harmony that stabilize new categories of national belonging and racial identity.

The role of the author – especially the filmmaker – in shaping adaptation has remained relatively latent in my analysis, functioning as a passive coordinator of the ideologies and images that pass through the adaptive process. In this concluding chapter, I offer a more complicated image of authorship in relationship to both adaptation and racial logics. I examine how particular forms of authorship allow Chadha, Satrapi, and Nair to subvert one of the foundational evaluative frameworks of adaptation studies, namely that of fidelity. The assessment of an adaptation’s ‘faithfulness’ to a source text structures the relationship between author and adaptation in a number of ways. It is an implicitly gendered relationship that excludes women as authors, and feminizes adapted texts through the discourses of faithfulness and loss. The epistemological, psychic, and cultural primacy of the original source text (always assumed as literature in the fidelity relationship) also upholds teleological narratives of progress and knowledge, usually through the figures of the author and filmmaker. Finally, the evaluative framework through which fidelity takes shape holds failures of faithfulness and loyalty at the hands of the filmmaker. In this chapter I argue that the group of filmmakers I examine in my dissertation subvert the codes of fidelity in adaptation, undermining the discourses of gender, place, and psyche that link authorship in adaptation to regimes of loyalty and faithfulness. I argue that their resistance is derived from the distinctive authorial positions through which they engage in the adaptive process: as women, paired through adaptation with other women authors, and as interstitial authors that work between cinematic
cultures and conventions. After examining the ways in which this unique authorial role emerges textually, I then turn my attention back to the relationship between adaptation and racialization after 9/11, reconsidering authorship in the implications of my project.

**Authorship and Gendered Regimes of Fidelity**

An adapted film’s ‘faithfulness’ to original source material remains an important evaluative framework in both scholarly and popular conceptions of adaptation. Under such an analytical rubric, films are subject to a moralistic system of evaluation in which they emerge as betrayals, bastardizations, or faithful replicas of essential and fixed literary sources. Some scholars have attempted to quantify fidelity, replacing discourses of value with distributional and intergrational narrative units in order to determine which components of a literary narrative are essential for a ‘faithful’ translation onto the screen (McFarlane 5). The regime of fidelity in adaptation, nonetheless, defers to source material – often the works of a Westernized, male-dominated literary cannon – in determining narrative and artistic value. Fueled in part by the juxtaposition of literature’s supposed ‘high’ artistic value with the relatively ‘low’ status of mass-produced popular film, Robert Stam argues that the fixation on fidelity in adaptation studies highlights an “elegiac discourse of loss” in which visual media threatens to defy the patriarchal symbolic order established by “the power of the literary fathers, patriarchal narrators, and consecrated arts” (“Introduction: The Theory and Practice” 3,5).

Fidelity regimes, structuring the relationship between texts, institutionalize a hierarchy of mediums and artistic forms, and negate intertextual exchanges between and
among texts that may contribute to an adaptation. Authorship plays a key role in
establishing the terms of fidelity. For Judith Mayne, it is the literary author whose voice
travels through the reproduction of characters in an adaptation, creating an “imaginary
figure of coherence” between page and screen (114). She argues that the re-presentation
of a cohesive literary authorial voice in an adaptation naturalizes the link between
literature and film. The perception, and persistence, of this figure initiates evaluative
framework in which adapted films either successfully, or fail to, recreate their source and
its authorial voice (114). Marcus, on the other hand, argues that filmmakers take on the
role of coordinator and mastermind. The filmmaker acting as adaptor, she argues, must
manage differences between clashing signifying systems and incompatible mediums,
authorial work that is always defined “in relationship to that of a literary precursor” (X).
Like Mayne suggests, the authorial position of both writer and filmmaker is traditionally
reserved for men – a social exclusion, as I argue next, supported by the regime of fidelity
in cinematic adaptation.

Despite its clearly gendered imagery (of “fidelity,” “loss,” and “bastardization”),
scholarly studies of adaptation give little consideration to the ways in which it engages
gender. Fidelity regimes, however, engage gendered discourses of loyalty, lineage, and
the psyche. The word fidelity, for example, is derived from the Latin word for ‘brother.’
Fidelity dictates a relationship between men, one that excludes women filmmakers and
writers altogether. In this agreement among brothers, gendered terms also dictate the
relationship between literary and filmic texts. Fidelity regimes maintain the primacy of
literature and the written word, relegating film to the status of ‘copy’ or ‘facsimile.’ The
adapted film as copy of a true or original text recalls Judeo-Christian myths of origin that posit woman as copy. In regimes of fidelity, the copy itself is further de-legitimized through a gendered discourse. A ‘bastardized’ text, for example, is one that is inferior in relationship to the original; it is a valuation that calls upon the gendered imagery of illegitimacy through birth, namely the lack of a proper father – and the shame of a scorned mother.

The difference between the original and adapted text is often described through another set of terms that implicitly engage gender: that of lack and loss. Stam identifies this as part of a larger psychoanalytic discourse in which film threatens the symbolic order established by the various male-dominated cannons of Western arts and literatures. This discourse, however, also feminizes the adapted text, as the ‘lack’ through which the original text is rendered whole. It implicitly assumes a male author, to whom feminization serves as a site of policing and social demotion. The rendering of the adapted film as either ‘lack’ or ‘copy’ highlights the ways in which adaptation serves as a site of social reproduction. In regimes of fidelity, the relationship between the two texts relies upon, and consequently reproduces, a series of phallogocentric hierarchies that maintain a male-dominated social order while simultaneously devaluing women and adapted films through their status as copy, illegitimate, or simply absent.

For women filmmakers, adaptation under the regime of fidelity is an ambivalent act. It threatens to confirm a phallogocentric social order, erasing women’s claims on cultural production through the same processes that authorize them to speak. Chadha, Satrapi, and Nair, however, subvert some of the gender regimes embedded in the adaptive
process by adapting texts written by women. These female-female pairings – Nair and Lahiri, Chadha and Austen, and Satrapi adapting her own graphic novel – not only disrupt the originary power of the traditionally male-dominated literary canon, but also resist the social and psychic demands of the fidelity relationship. Fidelity regimes assume and value an original that is, at best, copied, and is often lost by the adaptive process – a valuation that presumes a male author and adaptor for whom loss would signify a social denigration. Female-female authorial pairings, however, complicate this valuation through authorial subjects who are already understood in terms of their social status as both lack and copy.

Without the force of a masculinist literary cannon or male figure of ‘original’ authorship that typically fuels its hierarchies of medium, artistry, and psyche, the gendered terms through which regimes of fidelity take shape lose their power to police female filmmakers and their adaptations. Both ‘lack’ and copy themselves, female authors defy the terms of loss essential to the fidelity framework. Furthermore, female-female authorial relationships negate the primacy of origin in the fidelity regime by coupling two authors already degraded to the status of ‘copy.’ In this relationship, the gendered authorial position (author of the ‘original’ text) that authorizes the imbalance of power between original and copy is absent. This new pairing, without the demands of origins, highlights adaptation as a phenomenon of citation and appropriation, a continual overlay of copied texts onto one another. Female-female authorial pairings are a hallmark of the group of filmmakers I examine in my dissertation. Chadha’s citation of Jane Austen in *Bride and Prejudice*, however, while subverting many of the gendered
limitations of fidelity, does not necessarily circumvent Austen’s canonized status, especially as author of the classic *Pride and Prejudice*. Chadha does displace the primacy of the original text by referencing the cinematic adaptation of Austen’s works – and script writers like Emma Thompson – in her feminist, individualist, and distinctly modern female characters. This adaptive detour underscores the ways in which the audience’s perception of the ‘original’ novel is a product of its continual citation.

The fatherless connotation behind a ‘bastardized’ novel also takes on new meaning in pairings between women writers and filmmakers. The label of bastardization should serve to punish and degrade the adapted text and its author; it is a mark of illegitimacy that derives its power by placing the object outside patriarchal lines of lineage, whether they are of literature or of birth. Without the constraints of this patriarchal lineage, women take on the role of authors and creators; to bastardize a text – to appropriate in defiance of the patriarchal codes – is to negate the gender regimes that conflate male and authorial subject positions. ‘Bastardization,’ for women filmmakers and authors, does not serve to make a text inferior through adaptation, but instead signals a mode of authorship that underscores women as creators, authorizers, and subjects. Nair’s adaptation of Lahiri’s *The Namesake* is a pairing that benefits from so-called bastardization. Difference, in this female-female pairing, is productive and not destructive. Unlike the ‘faithful’ adaptation, where Mayne argues that the original authorial voice ‘travels’ through both novel and film, Nair’s appropriation of the novel, including shifting of spatiotemporal contexts to establish her more interstitial perspective, ensures that each author of *The Namesake* retains her distinctive voice in their rendering
of the novel. The two authors and texts, however, do not work against each other, or are “secretly hostile” like George Bluestone suggests (qtd. in Welehan 7). Instead, the adaptation of Lahiri’s novel enables Nair to canonize the up-and-coming author as part of a new American literary tradition, while Lahiri’s status as an American writer authorizes Nair’s ‘take’ on American immigration. This mutual support allows Nair and Lahiri to reestablish the story of South Asian American citizenship erased by 9/11, placing female authorship at its center.

Bastardization implies that an adapted text is unfaithful to the narrative, tone, or intent of its source text. Female-female pairings complicate this core tenet of fidelity, however, in a number of ways. Acts of unfaithfulness in adaptation can defy the patriarchal social order upon which fidelity rests. Infidelity can be read as a claim of female authorship in defiance of this order, a statement against a male-dominated cultural cannon and the patriarchal regime that does not acknowledge women as authors. From this perspective, Nair’s seeming ‘infidelity’ to the details of Lahiri’s story – including the representations of time and space within the nation – could be read as a critique of the male-dominated narratives of loss, heroics, and hostilities popularized in the wake of 9/11. Nair engages in an ‘unfaithful’ telling of Lahiri’s novel, one that replaces the novel’s opening story of Gogol’s birth with a narrative of trauma and loss. The change in the chronology of the story reorients the film’s initial narrative around Ashoke and his near fatal accident in Bengal, long before he meets Ashima. This shift highlights the ways in which loss is coded and understood as masculine, both in relationship to the regime of fidelity and the events on 9/11. By performing intentional acts of infidelity, Nair harness
the masculinist discourses of psychic loss embedded in the adaptive process to speak about social loss, namely erasure of South Asian American citizenship after 9/11. The sense of shaped authorship between her and Lahiri, however, ensures that it emerges from a woman’s voice.

**Interstitality, Temporality, and Authorship in a Fidelity Relationship**

Film scholars, writing about the primacy of the fidelity relationship between novel and film, have attempted to explain why this regime is so compelling in evaluating cinematic adaptation. Stam argues that fidelity is an affective response: it is a feeling about a text in relationship to a feeling about another text, expressed through a discourse of value. Audiences and scholars alike assess adaptations, he argues, in relation to “whether or not [they] loved it as much as the book” (“Introduction: The Theory and Practice” 14). Tied to memory and sentiment, this response is emotionally charged and deeply personal, and reroutes the ethical terms of fidelity into ones of loyalty and affiliation. Loyalty, however, sets the same authorial trap as a fidelity regime: it requires affiliation, adherence to, and affectivities with a particular text. This relationship mirrors the affective ties to similarly abstract entities, including the nation. The ties between textual and national affinities becomes important for Chadha, Nair, and Satrapi, who, in their position as filmmakers contend with issues of loyalty to both nation and text, often negotiating gendered ties to the nation (or nations) through the adaptive process. Nair, for example, distances herself from the nation by transforming the spatiotemporal contexts of
Lahiri’s text; her ‘disloyalty’ to the text reflects her ‘disloyalty’ to hegemonic modes of assimilation for South Asian immigrants.

The set of filmmakers I examine in my dissertation, however, interrupt the regimes of loyalty that shadow those of fidelity in adapting texts for the cinema. They act as what Hamid Naficy calls “interstitial authors,” fluctuating between multiple localities, identifications, and representational techniques in order to forge specifically transnational strategies for cultural production (282). Interstitial authors work “within and astride the cracks of the system, benefiting from its contradictions, anomalies, and heterogeneity” in terms of both industry and nation (Naficy 46). This mode of authorship defies loyalty regimes: filmmakers, by virtue of working between nations, mediums, and industries, do not inspire confidence in their willingness to remain loyal. For Satrapi, interstitial authorship in conjunction with the adaptive process enables her to redraw what it means to be a member of the nation, as well as an author writing about national belonging. By adapting her own text, she performs a type of loyalty to herself that subverts modes of subject-making and national identity made popular by Azar Nafisi in her popular English-language memoir *Reading Lolita in Tehran*.

As both author of the graphic novels upon which the film *Persepolis* is based, and the co-writer, director, and subject of the film *Persepolis*, Satrapi practices a form of what Naficy calls “self-inscription,” authorizing herself as writer and Iranian citizen by participating in multiple roles in the filmmaking process (48). Naficy argues that an interstitial filmmaker who also takes on roles in his or her film “tends to implicate the author as actor, thus collectivizing the film’s enunciation” (48). In the case of adapting
Persepolis, the film possesses a similar collective utterance, but effected instead from the doubling of the novelist and filmmaker’s voice through the process of cinematic adaptation. Satrapi’s dual role gives the impression of a singular authorial vision – an impression reinforced by the nearly identical visual images in the novels and film, which were originally drawn by the author. Satrapi uses the stabilization of her authorial subjectivity, however, to displace the regimes of loyalty and fidelity that attempt to tie her to the text and to the nation. Throughout the adaptive process Satrapi functions as a copy of herself: she uses her citational authority to cite herself, authorizing and legitimizing her own memories, practices of political performance, and self-making – all of which function as a critique of Iran’s post-revolutionary Islamic regime. While Satrapi’s self-inscription validates her role as both author and authority, she ultimately tells two distinct stories about subject-making and political performance in Iran. Under the rubric of fidelity these discrepancies would typically be taken up as a matter of faithfulness or loyalty to the source text. Satrapi’s acts of self-inscription, however, help circumvent this logic, since she is her own source, telling a story about herself, her memories, and affective ties to Iran. Her unique authorial position suggests that memories are unstable, subjective, and never complete; the self-inscriptive adaptive process does not reveal a ‘true’ authorial self, but versions of a self based on the conventions and codes of each medium.

This authorial mode defies the representations of Iranian womanhood in another popular exilic memoir written by an Iranian woman, Reading Lolita in Tehran. Nafisi’s memoir takes place in the same general historical and geographic timeframe as
Persepolis, although distinct in its tone and content. It recounts her and her female students’ struggle against the Islamic regime during her time as a professor of literature at University of Tehran and Allameh Tabatabaii University. In this memoir, the authorial voice is firmly rooted in the place of exile in the West. Nafisi speaks back to the Islamic regime by reinforcing what Mitra Rastegar calls an “Orientalist binary,” forwarding the West as modern and advanced, and vilifying Iran and Islam for remaining “static, irrational, and antimodern” (108). She performs this binaristic juxtaposition through citation: she chronicles the struggles of seven of her students to reconcile their personal and political lives with the Islamic regime through the works of famous authors, including Jane Austen, Vladimir Nabokov, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Henry James. Scholars like Rastegar and Tatemeh Keshavarz argue that Nafisi draws from an exclusively Western cannon, erasing Persian literary tradition as a source of identification and inspiration for the women she writes about.

While Nafisi, in Reading Lolita in Tehran, authorizes Western literary sources in crafting the subjectivities of her female characters, the similar referent in the cinematic adaptation of Persepolis is Satrapi herself: she speaks out against the Islamic regime by legitimating her own forms of self-making, using her authorial voice to cite and reference herself. Certainly the film betrays an affiliation with Western modes of subject making, but Satrapi’s loyalty to herself – and herself only in crafting representations of self-making – does avoid recreating Nafisi’s problematic affiliation. Nafisi has born much of the brunt of that attack herself, often accused of being complicit with an American neoconservative agenda. She is also accused of betraying Iran and Iranians by aligning
ideologically with the West (Dabashi 276). Satrapi avoids the trappings of loyalty by performing her authorial self-inscription from various margins. She is in exile from Iran and at best ambivalent to the West; in addition, both the graphic novel and adult-themed animated film are relatively marginal genres of their respective mediums. Her artistic and geographic interstitiality performs a type of authorship unattached to nation, place, or even medium, one that allows her to defy the Islamic regime in Iran without aligning herself with another state or political regime.

Gender difference is one of several epistemological regimes that fortify the hierarchy of original/copy, good/bad, and high/low embedded in regimes of fidelity. Fidelity also takes shape through a teleological narrative of textuality in which a text functions as an independent, contained event that occupies an assigned place in space and time. Under this regime, the transformation from novel to film in an adaptation is linear, one-way, and seemingly transparent. The adapted text follows the original text as a product of its progress through space and time – not unlike the teleological models of modernity and feminism that forward a singular, unified version of history and progress. Much like these teleologies, the original text serves as the authoritative voice and site through which meaning is produced. In fact, the citation of literature in cinematic adaptation institutionalizes and authorizes its status as canonical (Sanders 9). Cinematic adaptation upholds the primacy of an English-language literary cannon, as both the progenitor and inspiration for cinema; under the rubric of fidelity, film is the copy and appropriation of this source whose very presence legitimates the superiority of literature. Because the fidelity relationship relies upon models of textuality and appropriation that
preface the primacy of origins and linearity, it helps uphold the linear models of progress that frame the Eurocentric teleologies of modernity, feminism, and cultural production I identify in Chapter 2. For filmmakers working between film industries, nations, and cultures, unfaithfulness to a source text may signal resistance to these narratives of progress and development, especially the primacy of Western epistemological and cultural regimes in determining the meaning and value of appropriation.

This mode of resistance, unique to cinematic translation, is especially present in the ‘translation’ of both Austen and Bollywood in Chadha’s *Bride and Prejudice*. Her seeming unfaithfulness to the texts she cites signals her infidelity to the knowledge regimes they help enforce. Chadha’s appropriation of two canonized sites – Bollywood and Jane Austen – not only dismantle hierarchies of gender, geography, and cultural production, but at same time legitimize herself as an author. Like I argue in Chapter 2, Chadha takes up the conventions of the Bollywood musical in order to mock several teleological models, including those present in Indian women and Bollywood, as less evolved than or as Gopinath argues, “temporally anterior to” their Western counterparts (161 “Bollywood Spectacles”). In the song “No Life Without Wife,” the appropriation of Bollywood works in conjunction with a number of Western pop cultural forms, including the ‘60s teen movie and its reimaging in the 1972 film *Grease*, as well as the contemporary musical styles of reggae and SKA. Chadha’s translation of Austen through this pastiche of styles, forms, and genres resists the notion of linearity in adaptation. The song has no clear temporal or geographic origins, no ‘master’ or ‘original’ text or textual style through which it channels meaning. In *Bride and Prejudice*, Chadha combines this
over-the-top, playful style with the work of Jane Austen, who has long been revered as one of the few female authors canonized in British literature. *Bride and Prejudice,* however, subverts the reverence reserved for Austen and this cannon. Its playful, kitschy tone is certainly a departure from the period films that serve as previous adaptations of Austen’s work. Instead of working within fidelity regimes in order to transmit an attitude of reverence toward Austen, Chadha treats *Pride and Prejudice* as a text primed for appropriation and a loose ‘translation.’

Chadha’s filmmaking style also undercuts her obligation to ‘honor’ the Austen legacy through faithfulness to the text, or to the relations of power usually embedded in translation. Chadha’s reference to various musical and film genres exposes mutual avenues of appropriation, including the long legacy in Bollywood of appropriating Western films. The pairing between Austen and Chadha, as a result, works differently than the other authorial relationships I examine in my dissertation. While Lahiri and Satrapi are authorized as up-and-coming artists by the adaptation of their work, Chadha cites Jane Austen, an author long since canonized and cited in film. In this instance, Chadha uses Austen to legitimate herself as an author. She makes a claim on the Austenian legacy, using the latter’s well-known novel to authorize unusual hybrid filmmaking style and point of view, but still provide a recognizable narrative and set of characters for her film. The adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* under the conditions of interstitiality – between film cultures, geographies, and cultures – allows Chadha to use Austen in order to make a claim on authorship without succumbing to the regimes of fidelity, and progress, affiliated with the Western literary cannon.
Implications and Conclusions

I conclude my dissertation by examining some of the ways in which cinematic adaptation, including the unique forms of authorship it inspires, serves as a dynamic force in the creation and normalization of a post-9/11 social world. While scholars of adaptation like Stam, Casetti, and Welehan argue that meaning-making in adaptation hinges on the historical and social context in which the source text is re-interpreted, my study of adaptation seeks to emphasize the adaptive process as an active participant in the shaping of post-9/11 racial logics, offering up images that synthesize newness and oldness into easily consumable and pleasurable spectacles of gender and racial identity. The two contradictory processes brought together in adaptation are key to the ways in which it works as a social force: it creates a new state of affairs through distinct and separate textual utterances, but at the same time retains the ability to repeat ‘old’ narratives in these new discursive contexts. The popularity and pervasiveness of cinematic adaptation during the post-9/11 era is no coincidence. The dual forces of racialization after 9/11 require a mechanism of dissemination willing to forward well-established images and racial tropes, and at the same time render them relevant under a new set of spatiotemporal constraints. Adaptation offers a rationale to revisit prior texts, histories, and subjects that might contain these narratives. It also creates new spectacles from ‘old’ texts that reproduce and reflect post-9/11 racial logics and their corresponding truth effects.
I propose that the transformative power of the adaptive process rests in the ways in which it couples the new and the old through the articulation of time in space. A text’s spatiotemporal context links adaptation to the social world, particularly as it shapes modes of citizenship and belonging. Nair, for example, shifts the chronology and historical timeline of The Namesake’s narrative, extracting different stories from the film’s various spaces. While the core narrative and set of characters remain the same in both film and novel, Nair relocates the former in a new transnational political and social context – one that ultimately reshapes the film’s story of citizenship. Chadha, on the other hand, drastically shifts the spatiotemporal context of Austen’s novel. It is the palimpsestic overlay between the ‘new’ context of contemporary India and the ‘old’ social world of Regency England in Bride and Prejudice however, that enable Chadha to forge alliances between the clashing terms of South Asian cosmopolitan subjectivity for Lalita and her sisters, including the juxtaposition of modernity and tradition, liberal feminism and gender conservatism, and national identity and transnational longing. Chadha, by bringing these two particular social and historical contexts together, also exposes the relations of power embedded in cultural artifacts as they travel across time and space. Finally, Satrapi closes off Iran by manipulating the representation of time and space at start of the film Persepolis. The film, for example, begins in the present day Paris-Orly airport, and not in Iran; as a result, Marjane is already in exile and the film must travel backward in time to Iran – both socially and chronologically – through a series of flashbacks. These shifts allow the film up to signify spatially distinct models of modernity, as opposed to temporal transition in Iranian modernity (from the Pahlavi
regime to post-revolutionary Islamic rule) outlined in the novel. The changes to
spatiotemporal contexts in the adaptation of the novel also inspire different modes of
subjectivity in the film, where the Iranian civic body is excluded as a site of self-making
and replaced with a Westernized and humanist vision of political subjecthood.
Citizenship, in adaptation, serves as the hinge through which adaptation and the social
world meet; the representation of time in space further shapes this interaction,
determining the sociopolitical terms through which each film’s subjects belong to and
identify with the nation.

The dual forces that shape cinematic adaptation play a unique role in the post-
9/11 moment, since the cultural narratives shaping racial discourse after 9/11 mirror the
contradictory meaning-making mechanisms in adaptation. The adaptive process aligns
with these racial narratives, ensuring that the transformative power of adaptation works to
distribute and normalize effects of power specific to post-9/11 racial logics. The new
‘state of affairs’ created by the adaptation of *The Namesake*, *Persepolis*, and *Pride and
Prejudice* enable spatiotemporal shifts from novel to film to signify their place in the
post-9/11 world, even when the narrative events of the film take place before 2001. The
alignment between racial logics and the adaptive process also allow the filmmakers to
situate their authorial voices in a post-9/11 context. Nair, for example, reshapes the
spatiotemporal contexts of *The Namesake* so that space, place, and time in the film all
reference the iconography of 9/11. Not only do these shifts allow her to stage South
Asian American citizenship in the space of erasure, but the film’s emphasis on
transnational flows and connections also rejects the primacy of immigrant assimilation in
post-9/11 nation building. Satrapi and Chadha also exercise their authorial voices in a post-9/11 context. They draw from the medium itself to create a new state of affairs, using the codes and conventions of cinema to signal the spatiotemporal foreclosure of Iran or the terms of ‘good’ cosmopolitan citizenship.

Post-9/11 racial logics and adaptation align through the palimpsestic nature of their meaning making processes. The multiple, overlapping layers of a palimpsest acknowledge the distinctiveness of one layer, historical or textual, without displacing the meanings, images, and histories underneath. For Satrapi, the palimpsestic relationship between texts is ideological, linking novel and film through civilizational rhetoric; in Nair’s adaptation *The Namesake*, it occurs spatially through the overlapping stories taking place in New York City. Chadha takes advantage of palimpsestic textuality through her citation of Jane Austen, whose texts have been subject to various forms of adaptation and appropriation in the cinema, including recent attempts to ‘modernize’ the Austenian social landscape through the rhetoric of liberal feminism. Chadha situates *Bride and Prejudice* within the legacy of feminist-inspired themes and characters in Austenian adaptation.

In a post-9/11 context, this strategy has a unique effect: it ensures that characteristics of liberal feminism, such as sexual autonomy, personal responsibility, and an emphasis on choice and individuality, help mark Lalita as a ‘good’ citizen through a mode of subjectivity easily recognizable to Western audiences. Ultimately, my dissertation contributes to a larger understanding of the post-9/11 world through an examination of cultural technologies and their corresponding logics. I see cultural
formations as key to theorizing about the effects of 9/11, particularly the ways in which discourses embedded in images and texts attempt to manage the conduct of individuals through the invocation of ideas about citizenship and national belonging.

*Transnationality and the Adaptive Process*

I propose that cinematic adaptation is a significant and timely site of inquiry because of the ways in which it ‘translates’ non-Western images and cultural practices for a Western audience. Cinematic adaptation creates a unique stage for cultural transcription. Film, for example, is a medium easily distributed and consumed. Film styles and genres offer a set of institutionalized interpretive practices in their shared codes and conventions. Audiences, as a result, are prompted to ‘learn’ about a foreign text through the familiar language of another medium. In *Persepolis*, the representation of Marjane’s joy ride – a cinematic cliché referencing films from *Easy Rider* to *Thelma and Louise* – signifies her longing for individual freedoms erased by the post-revolutionary regime; Nair’s restaging of *The Namesake*’s immigrant narrative in Queens recalls films like *Five Corners* and *Clockers* and the Eddie Murphy comedy *Coming to America*, all of which turn to the neighborhoods outside of Manhattan to foreground the flows of capital and culture that shape forms of modern, but male-dominated, racialized citizenship.

Chadha, on the other hand, uses the familiarity of Austen (especially on film) to introduce Bollywood to a Western audience. Audiences come to know Lalita, as well as her desire for independence, through prior iterations of Elizabeth Bennett. Through the adaptive process, filmmakers filter unknown images through film in order to create subjects and
narratives that resonate with audiences familiar with the archetypes of Hollywood cinema.

The analysis in my dissertation seeks to expose how the adaptive process maintains global imbalances of power, particularly through ways in which it brings together various cannons, conventions, and cultural assumptions. In *Persepolis*, cinematic conventions drive the narrative away from the Iranian civic body, reshaping modes of subject-making to fit with Westernized models of subjectivity; similarly, the translation of Austen’s world to India, especially the transposition of Elizabeth Bennett onto the character of Lalita, stabilizes categories of ‘good’ global citizenship by reproducing liberal feminist subjects familiar to Western audiences. The ‘contact zones’ generated through the global exchange of culture and capital seamlessly harbor imbalances of power, including those that frame the terms of transnational authorship. For example, filmmakers like Nair and Chadha have faced criticism for the ways in which they take up the Western cinematic conventions of verisimilitude and realism in order to present fictional depictions of South Asia and South Asian subjects as ethnographic truths. In this transnational ‘translation,’ the filmmaker serves as native informant, offering the audience an insider view of a foreign and exotic culture.

While I do identify how these conventions create this perspective, my dissertation also examines the ways in which the filmmakers use the adaptive process to undermine the role of the ‘native informant.’ Nair steps back from this role, for example, just by taking up the multiple points of view Lahiri writes from in *The Namesake* (the novel shifts from Ashima, to Ashoke, and then to Gogol as it progresses). Satrapi defies the
regime of ethnographic realism through the art of animation, ignoring the ‘real’ through the film’s sparse, black-and-white motif and the exaggerated corporeality of her animated characters. *Bride and Prejudice*, in its over-the-top music numbers, replaces verisimilitude with the artifice of Bollywood, and as a result undermines the native informant authorial position. Chadha, Satrapi, and Nair often appear tied to the racial logics that incite the particular images of South Asian and Muslim femininity they help reproduce. However, they also use the adaptive process to trouble this attachment, and claim an authorial voice distinct from the ideological content of their films.

Throughout my dissertation, I am concerned with the ways in which these textual variations in voice and style, and ultimately variations in medium, affect representations of citizenship and national identity. Citizenship is a core analytical category in each chapter of my dissertation, and I ultimately see my work here as part of a “contested citizenship project.” Mohanty argues that the analytical aim of such a project is to expose the regimes of gender and race used by state power in order to create categories of belonging and exclusion – both within the nation and around the world. I argue that post-9/11 racial narratives – instigated and encouraged by the state – emerge through the representation of citizenship, and adaptation is a key technology in normalizing and perpetuating these images. Following Mohanty’s cues, I highlight the roles of particular images of racialized femininity in that process, arguing that they reproduce modes of national and transnational belonging that stabilize the divide between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ While the films I examine are funded in the West and made primarily for European and American audiences, I do highlight the role of the transnational in forming both
normative and alternative categories of citizenship in post-9/11 world. I see citizenship formations as effects of power, whether articulated in the national narratives of racism instigated by 9/11, or, as Mohanty suggests, the global flows of culture and capital that secure the dominance of American empire in various parts of the world.

The marriage of citizenship and adaptation in *Bride and Prejudice*, *Persepolis*, and *The Namesake* occurs through gendered regimes of subject making, political performance, and national belonging. As a result, not only does gender occupy another core analytical category in my dissertation, but my project itself rests on the analytical frameworks of feminist thought, and is indebted to the work of feminist scholars of citizenship and critical race studies such as Aihwa Ong, Lisa Lowe, Sunaina Maira, Gargi Bhattacharyya, Minoo Moallem, Nadine Naber, and Chandra Mohanty. Liberal feminism, both as a part of the history of Women’s Studies and now as a critical site of inquiry, also serves as the ideological foundation for female citizenship in all three adaptations. The neoliberal moment through which post-9/11 racial logics emerged in the U.S. makes liberal feminism, with its emphasis on individual responsibility and autonomy, an ideological formation primed for the perpetuation and normalization of post-9/11 racial logics. Throughout my dissertation I argue that the emphasis on liberal feminism is a truth effect of post-9/11 racial logics, in which modernity and familiarity are signified through a feminist sensibility – one that allows racial otherness to be read as male, backward, and alien. While this division enables the construction of a collective national identity based on the hegemonic status of liberal feminism in the U.S. and its role in the procurement and promotion of women’s rights, its representation in cinematic adaptation
ensures that the films’ autonomous and independent female protagonists resonate with Western viewers familiar with these models of subjectification.

Women are at the center of my dissertation, both as authors and as subjects. Images of women disseminate racial logics and cultural spectacle, at the same time as female-female authorial pairings defy the gendered limitations of fidelity relationships in adaptation. Therefore, the feminist ethical and epistemological frameworks offered by the field of Women’s Studies are key to my analysis of cinematic adaptation as a technology of citizenship, and its role in perpetuating the effects of racialization after 9/11. The role of both women and liberal feminism in the articulation of post-9/11 racial logics highlights the ways in which the field of Women’s Studies, and feminist thought, offer analytical frameworks that are useful and necessary to scholarly examinations of the relationship between race and citizenship. I do not provide a comprehensive view of women’s authorial roles or gender citizenship formation, nor is my catalogue of the ways in which representation of South Asian and Muslim femininity have circulated in American culture since 9/11 comprehensive. Instead, my dissertation is a reflection of the analytical and ethical strengths of Women’s Studies as an academic field: it is an interdisciplinary examination of a social technology that seeks to identify the ways in which formations of race, nation, and gender are central to the organization of cultural and political regimes. In the era after 9/11, attention to these formations is of vital importance in retaining and protecting the rights of marginalized groups both within and beyond the state.
Notes

1 It reunites Bollywood stars Shahrukh Khan and Kajol, and continues director Karan Johar’s thematic exploration of the Indian diaspora in Bollywood film. The Shiv Sena (a right-wing conservative political party in India) also protested the release of the film in India because of comments Khan made about the lack of Pakistani cricket players in the 2010 season of the Indian Premier League tournament. Johar’s other two films about the South Asian diaspora include Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge and Kal Ho Naa Ho.

2 Naber attributes the development of the phrase “racial logics” to Andrea Smith, and her work on white supremacy (177).

3 Foucault refers to this particular form of governmentality as biopower (History of Sexuality 139).

4 “You’re with us, or against us” was an imperative issued by Bush to the global community to join the U.S. in the war against terror during a November 2001 press conference.

5 Notably, those states are allied only via metaphor; Iran, Iraq, and North Korea do not share or coordinate foreign policy, and in the case of Iran and Iraq, have fought each other in past wars.

6 Edward Said first wrote about the concepts in Orientalism in 1979, identifying Orientalism as a particular form of colonial discourse rooted in its fixation on cultures in North Africa and the Middle East. Perpetuated by travel writing, literature, and academic scholarship, he argued that Orientalism captures and rationalizes Western anxiety over Islamic culture. Many of these assumptions rest on set of binaries – good/evil, colony/nation, feminine/masculine, primitive/advance – aimed at retaining a whole, inherently superior Western self and its epistemological mastery over that ‘other,’ particularly in the face of territorial expansion and illicit cultural hybridity.

7 Here I draw from Foucault, who argues that the “steady proliferation of discourses” operates through a series of institutionalized mechanisms (such as the confession) that distribute rules, norms, and knowledge in a society (History of Sexuality 18). Not only does the proliferation and penetration of discourse into a social world have a generative effect, instigating more opportunity to speak and avenues through which to speak (as is the case in representations of South Asian and Muslim femininity), but it also allows relations of power informing these discourses to permeate and discipline a society.

8 Submission is the controversial film by Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh and Hirsi Ali that critiques Islam by depicting victimized Muslim women. A 2009 episode of Private Practice featured a Muslim woman seeking a hymenoplasty after claiming to have been raped; Army Wives included a story arc featuring a young Iraqi girl injured in war, while an episode of Law and Order: SVU revolved around the honor killing of an Afghan diplomat’s daughter.
These ‘crossover’ films also draw upon the popularity of Hindi cinema in the South Asian diaspora. They are most notable, however, for widespread commercial and critical success, often beyond diasporic audiences.


Satrapi is one a handful of Iranian women writing in French. Her novel, however, was translated into English in 2003 and 2005, and distributed by Pantheon in the U.S.


Here, prompted by the scholarship of Desai and Gopinath, I take up citizenship as a cosmopolitan formation, focusing on the way in which individuals negotiate transnational and national affiliations in order to forge a sense of belonging and identity in the post-9/11 era – often to more than one place.

She also notes that this juxtaposition is equally important in crafting female subjects in contemporary Bollywood cinema.

The song also mirrors the excessive displays of American multiculturalism in the song “Pretty Woman” from the Bollywood film *Kal Ho Naa Ho*.

The sexually explicit content of Nair’s film *Kama Sutra* prompted its banning in India, which Nair challenged in a protracted court battle with the Indian government, while Mehta’s controversial film *Fire* attracted negative attention from conservative Hindu organizations in India.

This display of hybridity is directly related to the authorial power of Jane Austen: Bhabha argues that the representation of English literature in colonial space signifies the ambivalence of colonial power, in that it is taxed with the re-present power of the colonial state. In turn, texts must disavow the violence of its placement, and signify difference from the colonized. Displays of hybridity take advantage of the tension between a disavowal of the violence of colonialism and the difference in reproductions of colonial power (153).

The Pahlavi Regime includes the reign of Reza Khan Pahlavi from 1925 to 1941, and the rule of his son from 1941 to the revolution in 1979.

In English speaking countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States, both versions of the film were distributed and shown in theaters, and both versions appear on the DVD.

Satrapi herself confirmed that their political and cultural notability influenced her decision to cast the two stars, noting that Penn and Pop were each chosen for their unique presence (“‘Persepolis’ Creator…”).

The civic body, she argues, served as a site of “revolutionary hermeneutic practice” during the 1979 revolution (62).
Deborah Paes de Barros argues that representations of women on the road in American film and literature often invoke the trope of the nomad, in that women desire to move, as opposed to reach a destination (7).

*Bonnie and Clyde* itself broke many of the taboos around sex and violence in Hollywood cinema.

In fact, he argues that foundation of subjectification rests in the “injunction to know one’s self” – an imperative aimed at discovering and naming ‘truths’ about the self (Hunt and White 98). These truths, however, are always composed through relations of power and their corresponding fields of knowledge, just as knowing one’s self relies upon truths, practices, and restrictions dictated by a given set of normative regulations.

Naficy argues that a “thirdspace chronotope,” is a spatiotemporal zone where “transitional and transnational sites” serve as staging grounds for exploration and struggle over identity (*An Accented Cinema* 154).

Elaine Tyler May notes that both the heroes and perpetrators of 9/11 are always depicted as men in media coverage, despite women’s roles as officers, rescue workers, and political leaders. Consequently, representations of loss after 9/11 emerged after 9/11 as a distinctly masculinist discourse, from crises over masculinity on the television show *Rescue Me* to the revenge narrative of *Collateral Damage.*

The erasure of South Asian American identity after 9/11 often revolves around the disruption of this model minority status; during a forum in 2002 held by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Gautam Dutta, the Vice President of the South Asian Bar Association at the time, argued that despite episodes of racial prejudice and violence before 9/11, the overtly racist tone and open hostility sanctioned by the attacks ultimately disturb the status of South Asian Americans as assimilated ‘model minorities’: “The community experienced many violent attacks even before September 11, but a lot of South Asians believed that as long as they work hard and contribute to society, no one will harm them. Suddenly, people are realizing that they are vulnerable” (“Chapter Six”).

In addition to arguments around the racialization of South Asian American as a model minority (Bahri and Vasudeva, Koshy), I draw from Sunaina Maira’s argument that South Asian identity not was popularly linked to civil right movement, but instead to identity politics of 1990s (*Desis in the House* 19). In addition, the legal push to reformulate South Asian American identity as “Asian” and not “Caucasian” took effect in 1977 (Visweswaran 18).

Nair faced criticism for her unrealistic portrayal of racial relations and immigrant life in the film *Mississippi Masala.*
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