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Breaking the Cycle: Die Another Day, Post-colonialism, and the James Bond Film Series

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“Breaking the Cycle”: *Die Another Day*, Post-Colonialism, and the James Bond Film Series
By Walter Metz
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As delighted to watch things blowing up as the next guy, I went to see the latest James Bond installment, *Die Another Day* (2002), with not much in the way of expectations beyond bombs. As long as the film delivered the usual Bond nonsense--exotic locales, witty one-liners, and explosions--I would be happy enough. On this level, the film does not disappoint: it begins with a stunt-filled sequence in which Bond (played by Pierce Brosnan) surfs twenty foot waves (more on this later) to land on a beach in North Korea. Bond, we learn, is investigating the trading of African conflict diamonds for hovercraft¹ that glide over the land mines (ironically labeled as “America’s cultural contribution”) in the demilitarized zone, to be used by Colonel Moon, the rebellious son of a top-ranking North Korean general. When Bond is exposed and captured, the film’s credit sequence begins, to the tune of Madonna’s latest synthesizer-driven attempt to stay current.

At the end of the credit sequence, which features a montage sequence in which North Korean soldiers torture Bond, Lee Tamahori is listed as director over a close-up of the face of a female North Korean dominatrix with a predilection for scorpions. For the next half hour, I sat perplexed: what was an international art director, famous for the beautiful *post-colonial* character study, *Once Were Warriors* (1994), doing directing an entry in the decidedly *pro-colonial* James Bond cycle?

Once Were Warriors depicts the social effects of post-colonialism in New Zealand on the Heke family, descended from Maori warriors, but who now live in the city. The family’s patriarch,

¹ As I will argue shortly, *Die Another Day* reworks the plot of *Diamonds are Forever* (Guy Hamilton, 1971). In the earlier Sean Connery film, Bond takes a hovercraft to cross the channel from Britain to the Netherlands in an attempt to expose Blofeld’s plan for using diamonds to create a satellite weapon to destroy the nuclear weapons of the superpowers. *Die Another Day*’s reworking of the hovercraft motif—now they are used to float over the mines in the demilitarized zone, as a mere precursor to the deployment of Graves’ satellite weapon to destroy the zone altogether—is an example of how this paper uses intertextuality to forward its argument that Tamahori’s film is a post-colonial reworking of the Bond films’ motifs while still keeping continuity with them.

Jake, has become an abusive alcoholic, self-destructively channeling his violent rage into bar fighting and against his family and himself. The film eloquently studies his wife Beth's attempts to keep the family together despite the hardships of poverty, culminating in a temporary escape to her impossibly green Maori village near the film's end. The scorpions used to torture Bond in a North Korean prison in *Die Another Day* also signify abusive violence in *Once Were Warriors*: Jake's tattoo of a scorpion on his arm is visible constantly during his bouts of domestic violence.

The James Bond movies do not have a good track record in post-colonial terrain. The montage opening of *Diamonds are Forever*, in which Bond (played by Sean Connery) beats up men and women from around the world while looking for Blofeld, culminates in a scene in which Bond rips off a woman's bikini top in order to strangle her with it. Such a scene as I've describe above seems a perfect match for Robert Stam's and Louise Spence's definition of colonialist cinema, in their article, "Colonialism, Racism, and Representation," although their example is a non-Bond Roger Moore vehicle, *The Wild Geese* (Andrew V. McLaglen, 1978):

The magic carpet provided by these apparatuses flies us around the globe and makes us, by virtue of our subject position, its audio-visual masters. It produces us as subjects, transforming us into armchair conquistadores, affirming our sense of power while making the inhabitants of the Third World objects of spectacle for the First World's voyeuristic gaze. (4)

High gloss, First Cinema Bond films celebrate the white spy's ability to make the world a better place for corporate capitalism, never questioning its culpability in Third World poverty. For example, *Diamonds are Forever* uses an ironic disjunction between sound (a British official stating how trustworthy the black workers in South Africa's diamond mines are) and image (black workers smuggling diamonds out of the mine) to argue that it is unreliable black people who are threatening the British economy by destabilizing the diamond market. If ever there existed a process of Otherization, this is it. While in reality, it is white Western capitalism which oppresses black Africans via the diamond trade, the film in essence blames black Africans for oppressing Britain!

This racist position of the Bond films is most egregiously flaunted in *Live and Let Die* (Guy Hamilton, 1973), about a Caribbean voodoo cult led by powerful, and therefore dangerous, black people. The film begins with a white spy in New Orleans being murdered by a group of African-Americans pretending to have a funeral in the French Quarter. After they murder the agent, they surreptitiously place his body in a coffin and begin a jazzy celebration, complete with viciously stereotypical wild dancing and riffs on brass instruments.

Not very far into *Die Another Day*, however, I began to see how the film was able to satisfy Bond fans with the usual genre conventions while at the same time subtly refusing their attachment to colonialist ideology. Bond chases Zao, one of the escaped North Korean rebels, to a gene therapy clinic in Cuba. The clinic, whose purpose is ostensibly to increase Fidel Castro's life expectancy, is revealed to actually be in the business of racial transformation. Bond discovers Zao half-way through the process of whitening his skin so that he will be morphed from an Asian soldier into a white-skinned German aristocrat. What is to be made of a film, purportedly endorsing colonialist ideology, which has its villains trying to become white like James Bond? Whereas *Live and Let Die* easily established black people as villains because they are black, *Die Another Day* presents a complex engagement with the politics of whiteness, in which whiteness is not monolithically presented as morally superior. This is perhaps best expressed after the torture sequence, in which a brutalized Bond emerges out of the North Korean prison as a caveman-like hairy ape. In no other Bond film is his idealized white body susceptible to such animalization.

This paper, then, proposes to see *Die Another Day* in another light, to produce what Stam and Spence label an "aberrant reading" of its racial and colonialist politics. Whereas the film is, like many of the recent entries in the James Bond film series, a post-modern pastiche of references to its predecessors, I believe it also represents a different sort of post-modernity, a coherent post-colonial

parody of the racial politics of these films.² I will argue this point by both demonstrating the film's continuities with the previous films in the Bond cycle, while simultaneously demonstrating a textual realignment of these motifs in the direction of a critique of colonial treatments of whiteness. The details of this argument involve seeing *Die Another Day* as a hybridization of two particular Bond films: it follows the plot of the last Broccoli-produced Sean Connery film,³ *Diamonds Are Forever*, but reworks the racial imagery of the very first entry in the series, *Dr. No* (Terence Young, 1962).

In "White," his ground-breaking study of the representation of whiteness in cinema, Richard Dyer suggests that we look for films--his examples are *Jezebel* (William Wyler, 1938), *Simba* (Brian Desmond Hurst, 1955), and *The Night of the Living Dead* (George Romero, 1968)--which render whiteness visible, and therefore analyzable as a category of racial identity. I believe *Die Another Day* is just such a film, one which uses whiteness as a metaphor to unhinge the generic conventions of James Bond movies from their colonialist moorings. The clearest example of this is the trajectory of the film's villain, Colonel Moon, who successfully completes the racially transformative gene therapy. He emerges from this process as the rich, white entrepreneur, Gustav Graves.

Significantly, as a white guy, he is running a mine in Iceland, which serves as a front for laundering African conflict diamonds. This is in direct contrast to his persona as the film opens. Colonel Moon, as an Asian soldier early in the film, critiques the First World. He first tells Bond that he studied at Oxford and Harvard, where "I majored in Western hypocrisy," and then angrily rants, "It's pathetic that you British still feel you have the right to police the world." However, as Graves, he gives the exploitation of the Third World an explicitly white face, as in reality the African diamond mines do funnel money into a white Western Europe. Even Gustav's name,

² I am using these terms from "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" in a slightly different way than originally done by Frederick Jameson.

³ As will become clear later, I certainly have not forgotten *Never Say Never Again* (Irvin Kershner, 1983) but it is a film made outside of the main-line of Albert Broccoli-produced films for MGM/UA.

Graves, resonates with whiteness studies: Dyer claims, sarcastically, in analyzing *The Night of the Living Dead*, that “If blacks have more ‘life’ than whites, then it must follow that whites have more ‘death’ than blacks” (59).

The engagement with a plot about African conflict diamonds best resonates in the Bond film series with *Diamonds are Forever*. In fact, the film’s plots are nearly identical. In the former film, Blofeld uses diamonds to construct a satellite capable of focusing the energy of the sun to destroy the superpowers’ nuclear arsenal. In *Die Another Day*, Graves uses the diamonds to finance the construction of a satellite capable of focusing the energy of the sun to destroy the American land mines protecting the Korean demilitarized zone.

Furthermore, both plots center on the plastic surgical transformation of the villains’ faces. Blofeld has a number of clones of himself constructed in order to protect himself from Bond the assassin. Colonel Moon has plastic surgery to become the white Westerner Gustav Graves. Yet in the case of *Diamonds Are Forever*, race is not a factor in the villain’s transformation, whereas in *Die Another Day* it most certainly is.

Graves’ white face is explicitly linked to the colonialist project of other James Bond movies. When Bond finally discovers that Graves and Colonel Moon are one in the same person, Graves/Moon argues, “I chose to model the disgusting Gustav Graves on you [Bond].” Thus, the film presents the villain as psychotic, not for wanting to rule the world as does Dr. No (another Asian troublemaker), but for wanting to look like James Bond! In a film cycle devoted as almost no other to ego identification in its audience (we watch Bond because we want to, but cannot be, him), this indictment of wanting to look like James Bond is quite an ideological turn.

Die Another Day’s other source text, *Dr. No*, is also a quintessentially colonialist film. Like *Live and Let Die*, it begins with the murder of a white agent by blacks. Its first image is a vicious, racist one: three black men, pretending to be blind (and “comically” accompanied by the song,

“Three Blind Mice”), walk through Kingston, Jamaica, entering the grounds of the Queen’s Club, where they proceed to murder Strangways, a British secret service operative. They then shoot his secretary in the chest, leaving a red blood stain on her white shirt. This opening first ridicules the black men with emasculating Stepin’ Fetchit racial stereotyping, but then reveals them to be dangerous murderers of white women. The moment thus contradictorily spans the gamut of colonialist treatment of black men—Coon and Buck--but coherently effects a vision of colonialism as an ordered, beneficent system threatened by the chaos perpetrated by its charges.

This is, of course, terrible history: Jamaica became independent on August 6, 1962, two months before *Dr. No*’s London premiere on October 5, 1962.⁴ In his cultural history of the Bond series, James Chapman aptly captures the absurdity of *Dr. No*’s plotline: “Bond’s intervention in Jamaica saves this colonial outpost from the potentially subversive threat of a sinister secret organization—a reaffirmation of white, British superiority at a time when, in reality, Britain was beating a hasty retreat from empire” (78).

Dr. No’s treatment of the black men on the side of the British is hardly any better. Felix Leiter, the CIA agent, has been working with Quarrel, a Jamaican fishing boat captain. He agrees to take Bond out to a radioactive island, Crab Key, to investigate. This is Dr. No’s lair: to protect it from local incursions, his men have been patrolling it with a flame-throwing tank, which Quarrel believes to be a dragon. Frightened to be on Crab Key, Quarrel drinks rum out of an enormous jug: the film makes fun of his drunkenness with comic music. After Quarrel has served his narrative purpose—getting Bond to Dr. No’s island--the film summarily dispatches him, having the dragon immolate him in a fiery death.⁵

It is in Bond’s encounter with Dr. No himself, however, that the colonialist politics of the film best contrast with the post-colonialism of *Die Another Day*. After Bond has been captured by

⁴ James Chapman, *Licence to Thrill*, pages 78 and 88.

⁵ For more on *Dr. No* and racism, see Cynthia Baron’s article, “*Doctor No*: Bonding Britishness to Racial Sovereignty.”

Dr. No's men, he is led to dinner with the mysterious terrorist. There, Dr. No tells Bond that, "I was the unwanted child of a German missionary and a Chinese girl of good family." Dr. No is thus established as a sort of extortionist tragic mulatto figure. His evil is driven by his unstable racial identity. However, in his own mind, Dr. No believes himself to have overcome this problem. He gloats, "And yet I became treasurer of the most powerful criminal society in China." Bond is surprised by this, again invoking fixed racial categories, "It's rare for the Tongo to trust anyone who isn't completely Chinese." Bond proves right, as Dr. No betrayed the Chinese and stole \$10 million in gold in order to finance his entry into global terrorism.

This sequence's racial binary—Bond's racial purity versus Dr. No's mulattoism—serves as the solid foundation of racism which *Die Another Day* unhinges. Whereas the dinner scene works to establish Bond's difference from Dr. No, Tamahori's film works exquisitely to establish the connections between Bond and Graves. In Graves' first appearance, he is given a James Bond moment from a previous film. About to be knighted by the Queen, Graves produces a spectacular arrival, parachuting onto the front steps of Buckingham Palace. As he has a parachute made out of the British flag, this quotes almost directly James Bond's escape at the opening of *The Spy Who Loved Me* (Lewis Gilbert, 1977).⁶ The film announces Graves' arrival with irony—to the tune of punk band The Clash's "London Calling"—rather than the traditional Bond theme which accompanied Roger Moore, but nonetheless, it is remarkable in a Bond film when someone besides 007 gets to do the glitzy, celebratory stunts usually exclusively associated with the super spy.

The stability (or lack thereof) of the racial identification between Bond and the villain in *Dr. No* and *Die Another Day* can be traced through the films' differing treatment of the torture of the

⁶ Perversely, in *Licence to Thrill*, James Chapman reads this scene to excuse the Bond film's colonialism: "The sexist and patriotic values of the Bond films, therefore, rather than being criticized for their lack of political correctness, should be seen as the essential ingredients which make the Bond films so distinctive. Certainly the foregrounding of patriotic motifs—so brilliantly exemplified in the Union Jack parachute jump of *The Spy Who Loved Me*—has played an important role in the Bond series...." (273)

white body. In “The White Man’s Muscles” chapter in *White*, Richard Dyer analyzes films like *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (George P. Cosmatos, 1985) and *Conan the Barbarian* (John Milius, 1982), which use images of the naked, tortured white body in pain to emphasize the moral transcendence of whiteness. Fairly shocking for a Bond movie, *Die Another Day*’s credit sequence, normally devoted to Bond’s phallic gun torturing naked women’s bodies, is devoted to an Asian woman’s torture of Bond’s body. Compare this graphic depiction of torture—Bond’s head is thrust into ice water, he is stung repeatedly by scorpions—to that in *Dr. No*. In the film’s most complicated camera movement, we are spared the details of Bond’s torture at the hands of Dr. No’s men. We begin with a long shot of Dr. No standing above Bond, seated at the dinner table. As Dr. No tells his men, “Soften him up—I haven’t finished with him yet,” the camera pans left as we follow Dr. No walking away from the table. Once he arrives in the background of the image, Dr. No turns and begins walking right toward the door. As we follow him, in the foreground, we catch a brief glimpse of Dr. No’s men punching Bond. We suddenly dissolve to Bond in his cell, without any discernible bruises. The film is thus elaborately choreographed to protect the white heroic body from pain, despite the fact that the film’s sadism did not earlier spare us from watching Bond shoot Dr. No’s white spy, Professor Dent, in the back, after he was disarmed. Conversely, *Die Another Day* builds an equally elaborate montage sequence, but this time to emphasize the white heroic body in pain. Significantly, Tamahori’s scene stops short of stripping Bond and fetishizing his torture a la Rambo. In this way, I believe *Die Another Day* produces a critique of the two poles of the treatment of the white body in pain: it neither protects the white body magically, as does *Dr. No*, nor does it torment the white body so much that it transcends into the terrain of moral superiority, as happens in the films studied by Dyer.

Bond and Graves continue to be linked to one another as *Die Another Day* proceeds. As a trope of the Bond films, an important scene is always Bond’s initial battle with the villain early in

the film, where they test each other's powers out without lasting consequence. In this film's scene fulfilling this genre requirement, Graves and Bond are again revealed to be equally barbaric. At Graves' lover, Miranda Frost's fencing club, Bond's and Graves' swordfight devolves into caveman-like brawling, reminiscent of Jake's barroom scuffles in *Once Were Warriors*.

The sequence begins with all the veneers of civilization intact. Both Bond and Graves wear protective fencing outfits, and they are connected to highly technological sensing equipment to judge prowess with foils without the risk of injury. Knowing that a pissing contest over masculinity is coming, Frost's teacher, Verity (played by Madonna) leaves in a huff, exclaiming "I don't like cockfights." Verity lives up to her name, as the fencing gradually devolves into a street fight. After the men complete a few passes with the foils, they up the stakes by switching to heavier swords. Graves takes off his shirt, dis-attaching himself from the machinery. They begin running through the fencing club, destroying priceless artwork and furniture as they go. After they destroy a display of Medieval armor, they follow suit and pick up heavy two-handed broadswords. Being too constrained inside, they continue fighting outside, finally coming to blows after falling into a fountain. When Miranda stops them, angrily, they shake hands, but only after they have been bloodied extensively.

In other Bond films, this initial encounter between Bond and the villain is used to establish the psychosis of the villain and the civilized control of James Bond. For example, in *Never Say Never Again*, the villain challenges Bond to a computer game which simulates the economic and military control of the world. As the stakes of the game increase, greater electric shocks are delivered to the game players' hand controls. When the pain becomes unbearable, the loser of the game is forced to let go of the controls, lest he be seriously injured. Bond loses the first round of the game, but once he learns how to play, he defeats the villain, forcing him to let go of his controls and fall to the floor, writhing in agony.

In the swordfight in *Die Another Day*, it is hard to distinguish between Bond as civilized and Graves as psychotic, even though it has clearly been established that Colonel Moon is a psychotic. In the opening North Korean sequence, we see Moon kicking a bag stuffed with a human being. When he stops, he tells his assistant Zao to “get me a new anger management therapist.” However, at this point, it has not been revealed to the audience that Graves is indeed Moon. In this way, Bond’s culpability in the barbarism is every bit as suspect as Graves’.

This fits with the defensiveness of the recent Bond films about 007’s sexuality and his proclivity for violence. The newly female M (played by Judy Densh) finds Bond a dinosaur relic from a now passé Cold War machismo, and tells Bond after he’s been released from North Korean captivity: “You’re no use to anyone now.” This of course forces Bond to once again demonstrate his current and lasting potency.

As if to attenuate this total collapse between hero and villain, the film presents a black man with dreadlocks at the end of the swordfight to side with Bond. After Bond and Graves have destroyed the club, the man, a letter courier, says to Bond, “The place needed re-decorating anyway.” While clearly meant to have us side with Bond, and against Graves’ (and by extension the fencing club’s) phony civilized stuffiness, the comment of the black man with dreadlocks again makes no distinction between Graves’ and Bond’s barbaric behavior. The fact that such violent behavior served to assault a bastion of white exclusivity is enough for the courier to celebrate.

Here we can see, I think, a very deliberate post-colonial intervention: *Die Another Day* fills its subsidiary roles with an attention to racial difference. While not all of these interventions are liberational—one of Graves’ henchmen, Mr. Kil (played by Maori actor, Lawrence Makoare) is as problematic a racial stereotype as Oddjob from *Goldfinger* (Guy Hamilton, 1964), especially as Mr. Kil comes to a vicious demise: in *Die Another Day*, Jinx cuts off his arm and uses his dead limb to open a handprint lock within Graves’ compound.

As is true of more dystopian fiction--the *Dracula* narrative, *Batman* (Tim Burton, 1988)--the villains of *Die Another Day* are associated directly with the heroes, muddying the usual distinctions between them. These villains have gadgets every bit as good as Bond's. For example, during the climactic car chase between Zao and Bond, Zao has a car that in another Bond movie, would only be driven by 007. This results in a stalemate: when Bond fires his car's rockets, Zao fires his, and the rockets blow each other up, harming neither person's car.

Even Bond's charming wit is matched by the villains. Earlier, as Moon and Zao capture Bond in Iceland, Bond quips to Zao, "I've missed your sparkling personality" (Bond's actions have resulted in an accident in which diamonds were blown up and implanted into the right side of Zao's face). Zao responds by punching Bond in the stomach, but is also given his own quip: "How's that for a punchline?"

But it is Moon's trajectory, from an Asian colonel to the white Gustav Graves, around which the film builds a post-colonial critique. Not only does Moon transform into a successful white aristocrat, but towards the end of the film, he dons a cybernetic suit so that he may control Project Icarus, a satellite designed to harness the power of the sun as a weapon against the Earth.⁷ In the film's climax, Graves/Moon deploys the weapon to clear land mines in the Korean DMZ as a prelude to the North's invasion of the South.

As Bond fights Graves in the cybernetic suit, Moon has followed the full Western trajectory away from his originary Third World identity. Lamenting his country's backwardness, foisted upon it by Western imperialism, Moon studies at Oxford and Harvard. He then begins a relationship with Miranda Frost, a blonde Olympic fencer. When neither of these gestures allows him acceptance in

⁷ And here we have, of course, another return to *Dr. No*: the madman's arms were so badly burned during his experiments with radiation, he has replaced them with black iron mechanical ones, capable of squashing metal icons of Buddha, but not of lifting himself out of the vat of boiling coolant where he ends up during the climactic fight with Bond. Again, Graves and Dr. No are similar (both cyborgs) but different (Dr. No is forced to accept cybernetic limbs, while Graves dons the suit of Western technological dominance willingly).

the West, he whitens his skin genetically. Now, after all that, he still needs to fully embrace Western technology, by enveloping himself in it. On the 747 jetliner from which he controls Icarus, Graves/Moon confronts his father, General Moon, from whom he has taken control of the North Korean military. Shocked to see both his son's white and cybernetic skins, the father responds to his son's monstrosity: "My son. What have you done to yourself?" The general is shocked at the depths to which his son has fallen. Whereas he taught him pride in an Asian tradition (Moon quotes *The Art of War* for his father's pleasure⁸), he sent his son to the West in the hopes of defeating the North Korean hardliners, of building "a bridge with the West." The General laments bitterly that all the West did "was to corrupt him."

The temporality of the film is important here: if you trace from the film's release date of December 2002, back through the 14 months during which Bond was purportedly in captivity, his capture by the North Koreans would have taken place in September 2001, that is during the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Furthermore, when discussing his uselessness in the abandoned London Underground station, M tells Bond, "the world has changed while you've been away." Crucially for a film concerned with 9/11, in a world where George Bush is saber-rattling against North Korea, to position General Moon as one of the film's heroes, and yet to give him such anti-Western lines as an endorsement of the West's corruption, we are in the terrain not of straightforward imperialism, but a more complicated post-colonial understanding of the situation.

A return to the film's opening offers another way of understanding its interest for post-colonial criticism. 007's surfboard entrance in the film references several other Bond films. In *A View to a Kill* (John Glen, 1985), Bond rescues microfilm from a compound in Siberia by skiing to

⁸ Whereas Moon's cultural reference is to Asian military power, Dr. No's is to British: as Bond enters Dr. No's dining room, he passes Francisco Goya's portrait of the Duke of Wellington, one of the most long-standing jokes in the Bond series. At the time of the filming of Dr. No, the portrait had recently been stolen. The film's joke was that Dr. No was the thief. The gag continued in later films. In *Diamonds are Forever*, for example, the portrait appears in Willard Whyte/Blofeld's penthouse apartment.

freedom. Mid-way, as his skis are blown off his feet, he pulls the runner off a demolished snowmobile, and uses it as a snowboard accompanied by Beach Boys surfer music.

More similar in tone to the opening of *Die Another Day*, however, is the opening of *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (Peter Hunt, 1969), which also begins with geopolitical conflict played out on the beach; while Bond (played by George Lazenby) does not surf in this film, he does knock out one of his opponents with a surfboard. The use of surfboards gives these films a further inflection, perhaps to *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979), where Western arrogance against the people of a different Asian peninsula was also signified by the incongruity of a tourist activity—surfing—in the midst of a war.

Films which represent the conversion of warfare into tourism, including *Apocalypse Now* and the more recent, *The Beach* (Danny Boyle, 2000), made by Westerners, tend not to critique colonialist uses of post-colonial locales. The conversion of warfare into post-colonial tourism allows for an intertextual comparison which distinguishes between *Apocalypse Now* as a colonialist text and *Die Another Day* as a post-colonialist one. For despite its Vietnam-as-madness motifs, *Apocalypse Now* suffers from Chinua Achebe's critique of Western liberal modernism as exemplified by Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Achebe argues that whatever the white European's feelings about colonialism, one cannot build a critique of its madness without the representation of people living directly under the heels of its project. In his speech on Conrad, delivered in 1975 at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Achebe argues:

The point of my observations should be quite clear by now, namely, that Conrad was a bloody racist.... A Conrad student told me in Scotland last year that Africa is merely a setting for the disintegration of the mind of Mr. Kurtz. Which is partly the point: Africa as setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human factor. Africa as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril.... And the question is whether a novel which celebrates this dehumanization, which depersonalizes a portion of the human race, can be called a great work of art. My answer is: No, it cannot. (788)

Both *Heart of Darkness*, and Coppola's film version of it set in Vietnam, suffer from this imperialist vision: these texts do not take seriously the representation of African and Vietnamese people, respectively. By focusing on the complex representation of the racial identities of the villains in *Die Another Day*, I am arguing that the same cannot be argued for Lee Tamahori's film.

For example, the effects of white oppression on people of color is indicted directly by the film. During the sequence in Cuba, the ugliness of the white tourist is deliberately exposed. An obnoxious Australian violently threatens the Third World people who serve him at the hotel where he awaits passage to the gene therapy clinic (where we can only assume he's *not* going to be changed into a person of color: the desire for racial change is not a two way street, alas). At one point, the Australian sticks a gun into a Cuban waiter's crotch, threatening to turn him into "Fidel Castrato." His white companions laugh hysterically at this "joke." Clued into the Australian's nasty behavior by the African-American spy Jinx (played by Halle Berry), James Bond the next day breaks into his hotel room, knocks him unconscious, and steals his ticket for passage to the clinic. Bond gently says hello to a Cuban prostitute in the Australian's room. Knowing that the racist bully is not worth making a fuss over, she responds to Bond's violence against her john with complete and utter indifference.

In the film's most celebrated intertextual reference to the Bond film cycle, 007's American CIA partner, Jinx, emerges out of the ocean, bikini-clad with knife at her side, in a way that resonates with Ursula Andress' similar appearance in *Dr. No*, the first film in the Bond series. This is the film's most problematic change: it argues that while Bond's partners in the 1960s films always had to be white, now he is permitted a multicultural sampling of lovers.

Bond, of course, has had sex with women of color before. Most significantly, he goes to bed with May Day (played by Grace Jones), the African-American villainess of *A View to a Kill*. Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott end their cultural studies book on the Bond series, *Bond and Beyond*:

The Political Career of a Popular Hero, with a study of this relationship in *A View to a Kill*, which was the last Roger Moore Bond film. May Day, a muscular black woman, is both the villain Zorin's lover and partner in crime. The sequence begins with May Day teaching Zorin karate. As they fight, they fall over, and Zorin thrusts himself on top of May Day. They begin to make love. They are interrupted by an intruder alert alarm as Bond infiltrates their compound. They go looking for him, only to find him naked in May Day's bed. Zorin instructs May Day to take care of Bond. She enters the bedroom, strips, and gets into bed with him. As Bennett and Woollacott describe it: "When Bond leans over to her, however, she roughly thrusts him aside and—with his pliable acquiescence—places herself on top of him leaving the viewer with little doubt as to who is going to do the lovemaking to whom. In brief, Bond's sexuality, like his Englishness, is little more than a damp squid" (292). Thus, *A View to a Kill* has Bond's encounter with an African-American woman take place within the confines of a delicate ballet of power, where she is merely a surrogate for the white fascist's (he's a genetic superman created in a Nazi concentration camp) desire to dominate Bond.

The casting of Halle Berry as the African-American Jinx in *Die Another Day*, on the heels of her Oscar-winning performance in *Monster's Ball* (Marc Forster, 2001), is crucial for interpreting Tamahori's film's differing representation of race in terms of Bond's sexuality. In both the Berry films, she is drawn into a relationship which includes rough, animalistic sex with the white protagonist. Whereas *Die Another Day* is interested in post-colonial complexity for its male characters, this cannot be said of its female ones. Compared with her character in *Monster's Ball* (and with Grace Jones' in *A View to a Kill*), Berry's character's sex with Bond is romanticized and normalized. In the midst of their hyper-passionate embraces, she asks coyly, "Are you always this frisky?," to which the recently imprisoned Bond replies, "I've missed the touch of a good woman," referring of course to the bad touch of the North Korean scorpion woman from the credit sequence.

Comparatively, the sex in *Monster's Ball* is so desperate, it cannot be said to be romantic or normalized. Berry's character has been alone because her husband was executed, while Billy Bob Thornton's character pays a diffident prostitute to have sex in which their bodies hardly ever touch. Furthermore, the relationship that develops between the black woman and the white man steeped in racism is rendered problematic to the very end of the film. In the fascinating last shot of *Monster's Ball*, Berry and Thornton share chocolate ice cream, but Thornton insists on eating it with a white plastic spoon, an image layered with the emotional distance between the races, and within one's sexuality, that the rest of the film has explored unflinchingly. In *Die Another Day*, on the other hand, Bond is presented as a distinctly non-racist lover, and the nature of Jinx' racial identity is muted as much as possible. Unlike *A View to a Kill*, there are no diegetic differences in power to remind us of the inherent differences in cultural power that race is meant to signify in racist American culture.

This does not change, however, the latent meanings of race in the images that the film deploys. In perhaps the film's most resonant scene in this regard, the African-American Jinx fights the icily white Miranda Frost with samurai swords. Frost's white skin is emphasized by her costume: black spandex exercise bra and trunks. Jinx wins the battle by sticking a knife through *The Art of War* and into Frost's heart. In this way, the film deploys tensions between white, black, and Asian identities, but only to paper them over. It suggests that Jinx won the battle because of her loyalty to truth and justice, and therefore whiteness, whereas Frost lost because she betrayed her racial heritage and sided with villainous Asians.

This again recalls *A View to a Kill*, in which May Day comes to her senses about allying herself with the Nazi superman. Bennett and Woollacott analyze the scene thus:

The day is saved not by an English male hero but by an American black woman as May Day, putting her extraordinary strength in Bond's service, lowers him into the pit containing the explosive device that is to trigger off the flooding of Silicon Valley, hoists him out again and, sacrificing her life in the process, ensures that the

device is removed to a place where its detonation will be harmless. Bond's task remains merely to tidy up the pieces. (291)

As the Bond/Jinx romantic subplot indicates, in forwarding this argument about the post-colonial engagements in *Die Another Day*, I am by no means suggesting that Tamahori's is a monolithically progressive film. Its villains are still Third World lunatics while Bond and the Americans still win the day.

However, the tonalities of the film are much more nuanced than the other films in the Bond series, and I can only surmise that this is how the film and *Once Were Warriors* cohere as projects chosen by Lee Tamahori, a very talented director. As a post-colonial subject himself (his father is Maori and his mother is British), Tamahori has complexly negotiated a career which encompasses both traditional success in Western media (as a commercial photographer, as a director of television commercials, and as the Hollywood film director of 1996's *Mulholland Falls*, 1997's *The Edge*, and 2001's *Along Came a Spider*) as well as in counter-ideological post-colonial cinema of liberation (of which *Once Were Warriors* is an excellent example).

Die Another Day takes established Bond conventions and tweaks them in the direction of a more compelling political complexity. Colonel Moon is at once the film's villain, but his villainy is not exclusively carried by his Asian identity: it is also conveyed by his affinity for Western hyper-technological whiteness. The Madonna song's lyrics best capture, perhaps, Tamahori's film's methods: "I'm gonna break the cycle... I'm gonna shake up the system... I'm gonna avoid the cliché." This engagement with *Die Another Day* has argued that, in terms of the colonialist project of the James Bond film cycle, Tamahori has accomplished just such a cycle-breaking, system-shaking, cliché-avoiding project, and action cinema is much the better for it.

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