Geopolitics, Gender, and Genre: The Work of Pre-Title/Title Sequences in James Bond Films

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Introduction

Almost since the inception of the Bond series, one of the most recognizable features of the films has been the opening sequences. From the now iconic images of a male figure (Bond) seen through the barrel of a gun to undulating female bodies, the pre-title/title sequences mark the screen in ways that are both familiar and enticing to viewers. The pre-title sequence of the Cold War classic From Russia with Love (1963), for example, the second film in the James Bond series and the first to deploy the pre-title/title formula, opens with a shot of Bond seen through a gun barrel that then gives way to the figure of 007 walking guardedly through a formal garden in the dead of night. A man sneaks up on Bond and strangles him to death with a thin wire. At this moment, exterior lights illuminate the garden to reveal a large mansion with many people standing around. The agent is congratulated for his rapid kill, and then a mask is peeled from the dead body to reveal that it is not Bond who has been slain—the exercise was simply a practice session for the agent. The scene then cuts to the title sequence, where credits are projected onto the shimmying bodies of women in belly dancer costumes. In almost every subsequent Bond film, the sequences function similarly, introducing the film’s hero and its broader gender politics as well as the security threat that Bond will thwart. In each new installment of the series, these high-impact, fast-moving pre-title/title sequences refer back to previous Bond films, forging intertextual linkages. At the same time, the pre-title/title sequences serve both diegetic and metonymic functions, re-presenting “real” international politics and global security threats within a normalizing male hegemony.

Despite their obvious relevance to the Bond series viability, curiously little has been written on the pre-titles and titles. This article seeks to fill this gap, exploring the multiple functions of the sequences in three of the most recent Bond films, Die Another Day (2002), Casino Royale (2006), and Quantum of Solace (2008). These particular films are interesting because they mark the (at the time much-publicized) shift from Pierce Brosnan to Daniel Craig in the role of James Bond and because they also signal the changing risks presented by a turbulent international security situation. Taken together, these films not only provide a window into the ways in which pre-title/title sequences anchor the Bond series, they also offer a template for understanding the power of genre in structuring filmic articulations of contemporary geopolitics and gender politics and discourses. After a brief discussion of title and pre-title sequences and the role of genre in the Bond films, we turn to an examination of geopolitics and diegetic contemporaneity as found in Die Another Day,
Casino Royale, and Quantum of Solace. We then look more particularly at the pre-title/title sequences and their generic, diegetic, and metonymic functions, arguing that the sequences, like the films as a whole, telescope contemporary geopolitics and gender politics.

Pre-Titles, Titles, and Generic Imaginings

In “Reading the Title Sequence,” Georg Stanitzek points to the complexity and multiple functions of title sequences. These functions are economic and legal (i.e., production and distribution credits), aesthetic (49), and spatial, facilitating the transition from “outside” to “inside” and thus allowing viewers to engage the film. This opening then is both integral and “semi-autonomous” (45) because of its structure and because of the extra-diegetic information that it provides. As Stanitzek writes, “the title sequences come into being as an eminent space of cinematic intermediality” (45). The title sequence of the first Bond film, Dr. No (1962), acts as Stanitzek’s article suggests, allowing the audience to leave the mundane everyday and enter the world of Bond. However, beginning with the second film in the series (From Russia with Love) the title sequence is preceded by an action sequence that is integral not only to the “threshold” experience of viewing but also to establishing the diegesis. Stanitzek argues that the title transition allows “division and integration” (45) of narrative meaning; the audience is expected to be watching the text while eating popcorn or chatting with a neighbor (44–45). From this perspective, the Bond pre-title sequences accrue equal or even greater currency because the audience must be fully immersed in the viewing experience from the outset lest they lose information critical to understanding the remainder of the film. Juxtaposing the intense and information-rich pre-title sequences against the more generic titles not only affects the transitional experience of the viewer, it also suggests the importance of these sequences to the overall filmic project.

The pre-title/title sequences thus work in concert within the broader generic apparatus of the Bond series, which is itself part of the action/spionage genre. On the one hand, the sequences occupy a space of reminiscence and reflection on other Bond films—the fast-paced title sequence, the omnipresent gun barrel shot, and the knowable “title” (the undulating figures, the hip music, the credits). On the other hand, they operate in the space of diegetic contemporaneity, where the germ of the plot is given over and is constitutive of real-world security threats the hero will face. Thus, coupled, the pre-title/title sequences not only serve as a transition to the body of the film; they also anchor the specific films within the Bond series and provide a template for understanding and interpreting the series’ ability to continue to articulate and address new international security threats. That is, like most films in the contemporary spy genre, Bond films and their pre-title sequences frequently engage in narrativizing the defense of the state and the global capitalist world order from serious threats that are increasingly transnational in scope. And more often than not, as in other films in this genre, men and masculinity are overtly aligned with international and national security or global order. Despite this necessary predictability, however, the Bond films have managed to captivate moviegoers with innovative action sequences and novel, sometimes even prescient, plotlines.

The Bond films, including their pre-title/title sequences, also illustrate Christine Gledhill’s observation that genres are not fixed, stagnant, and anachronistic, but rather, they respond to contemporary audience expectations, preoccupations, and experiences. As she states, “genres provide fictional worlds as sites for symbolic actions, but the combination of generic and cultural verisimilitude ensures a fluidity not only between the boundaries that divide one genre from another but also between fictional and social imaginaries” (240). In the case of Bond films, the geopolitics that inform contemporary social imaginaries also traverse the fictional imaginaries of the filmic
narratives. As such, the audience’s generic repertoires for encountering moving-image texts are necessarily flexible. Across the series, then, the films’ vitality is dependent on both generic continuity and adaptability: that is, the global security threat that 007 must confront occurs within a dynamic restructuring of known Bondian conventions.

Diegetic Contemporaneity and Global (In)Security

During the Cold War, the Bond films made explicit narrative references to phenomena such as surveillance and spy technology (*From Russia with Love*), communist proxy states or states controlled by dictators (*Octopussy*, 1983), and nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction (*Diamonds Are Forever*, 1971). In the more recent Bond films, we find MI-6’s top agent confronting a techno-terrorist mastermind bent on destroying Britain and the world’s financial systems (*GoldenEye*, 1995); global arms dealers willing to sell any actor conventional, biological, or nuclear weapons (*Casino Royale*); and international conglomerates manipulating the international environment for profit (*Quantum of Solace*). The diegetic shift from a stagnant recycling of SPECTRE as the threat to a threat that is politically relevant to the fin de siècle and post-9/11 era signals a concurrent shift in the symbolic order of geopolitical realities: megalomaniacal actors and non-state organizations that cause global havoc while the security and intelligence agencies of states fitfully cooperate in an attempt to stem their destruction. So although at the height of the Cold War, the United States and its European allies were depicted as vulnerable to SPECTRE as a proxy for the USSR, the post–Cold War, post-9/11 West is portrayed as being held hostage to attacks by rogue states (e.g., the so-called axis of evil) and terrorist non-state actors (e.g., al Qaeda) (see Kupchan).

Scholars of film and international relations have noted that the imperative driving the Bond films’ success is rooted in a diegetic contemporaneity. As Jeremy Black, Steven W. Thomas, and others have pointed out, in the Cold War era, Bond stories reflected and spoke to the United States’ or West’s relationship with the Soviet Union or communist block, particularly as acted out in the third world (see Thomas 34). However, international relations researchers David C. Earnest and James N. Rosenau argue that the James Bond franchise was ahead of scholarship in recognizing the tensions inherent in a world of globalization and insecurity. According to them, Ian Fleming’s novels and the Bond films of that era took place in a world in which “tensions between sovereignty-bound governments and [a] sovereignty-free rival threaten dire consequences for all mankind” (88). In the post–Cold War and post-9/11 eras, with terrorism, weak and failing states, and economic dislocation at the forefront of analysts’ minds, Bond may be even more relevant than when he was first written in the 1950s and first filmically depicted in the 1960s. In this world where non-state actors are supported by hidden international networks and are feared more than traditional state actors, where knowledge and skill are seen as perhaps even more critical than raw firepower to international security, spies such as Bond remain the chief means to defeat the shadowy threats faced by the West. As Thomas argues, the latest Bond films, as well as other action-adventure movies, “confirm the ideology of maverick exceptionalism that has always driven the Anglo-American style of global capitalism and has always been Bond’s signature ethos” (34). In addition, Thomas goes on to say that the new films break ground in shifting from an international (nation-state-focused) paradigm to a globalist or transnationalist perspective.

*Die Another Day*, *Casino Royale*, and *Quantum of Solace* are especially germane to appreciating the role of inter-state tensions and transnational non-state actors in global insecurity. In *Die Another Day*, Bond discovers that a North Korean colonel (Moon, played by Will Yun Lee) presumed dead is actually alive and thriving as a businessman in London, thanks to breakthrough genetic techniques that allowed him to alter his appearance. Moon, now known
as Gustav Graves (Toby Stephens), has developed a solar-powered satellite that he intends to use to cut a path through the demilitarized zone, enabling North Korea to overtake South Korea. He is stopped, of course, by Bond and his main partner in crime-solving, Jinx (played by Halle Berry), a gorgeous, vivacious, and talented NSA agent. The North Korea angle in the film echoes that country’s renewed importance in international affairs. In late spring of 2000, two years before the film’s release, North and South Korea signed a peace accord that made possible the reunification of Korean families and the reopening of border liaison offices in the demilitarized zone later that year. These moves were supported by the European Union and by the United States: in 2001, a high-level EU delegation visited North Korea, and President Bush authorized talks with Pyongyang on its missile program. Of course, these positive steps were soon negated when Bush demonized North Korea as a member of the “axis of evil” in his January 2002 State of the Union speech. Relations between the two Koreas deteriorated to the point where a gun battle took place in the Yellow Sea in June. Finally, in January 2003, North Korea withdrew from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.5

Casino Royale depicts James’s first mission as 007. LeChiffre (played by Mads Mikkelson), a banker to terrorists and illicit arms dealers, has lost his clients’ money in some risky business maneuvers and intends to earn it back at a high-stakes poker game in Montenegro at the Casino Royale. Bond, accompanied by Vesper Lynd (Eva Greene), is sent to stop LeChiffre from winning. Bond’s success at the table endangers himself and Vesper but ultimately enables Bond to realize that a larger organization (Quantum) is at work behind the scenes. Although one of that organization’s principles, Mr. White (Jesper Cristensen), is captured, Quantum is not defeated and thus becomes the subject of the next Bond film, Quantum of Solace. Casino Royale’s opening takes place in Prague, evoking the Cold War legacy of the Bond series. The effect is to attenuate the real politics of the Czech Republic between 2000 and 2005, the major event of which was accession to the European Union, and to reassert the “security” of the bipolar Cold War system. The evocation of the past and the deflection of contemporary reality stand in sharp contrast to the main action of the film, which takes place in various sites. In particular, the geographical leap between the Eastern European and third-world locations is striking because it situates global insecurity in the economically impoverished and politically unstable periphery (e.g., in Madagascar and Uganda). As such, the film as a whole addresses the debate in the international relations literature about whether poverty is a chief cause of guerilla and terrorist movements, coming down on the side that supports a clear relationship between relative deprivation and terrorist activity.6

Quantum of Solace picks up where Casino leaves off. Out to avenge the death of Vesper Lynd, 007 tracks down a leader of the Quantum organization, Dominic Greene (Mathieu Amalric), who is also the CEO of Greene Planet, a company with ostensible environmental concerns. Acting as a rogue agent, Bond discovers that Greene is colluding with Bolivian general Medrano to execute a coup in order to secure barren land holding water resources that Greene seeks to control. Bond and his female sidekick, Camille Montes (Olga Kurylenko), track down Greene at a desert resort, burn down the resort, kill Medrano, and abandon Greene with a can of oil in the middle of the desert. After parting from Camille, 007 flies to Moscow to confront Yusuf Kabira (Simon Kassianides), Vesper’s former love interest. There, he is restored to 007 status by M (Judi Dench). Geographically, the film moves from continental Europe and Britain to one of the world’s most impoverished countries, Haiti, then to Bolivia, and finally to Moscow. Politically, it echoes studies in contemporary international insecurity, particularly the human security literature, pointing to linkages between terrorist activity and “legitimate” business and state interests, articulating new security threats such as water shortages and continuing concerns
about oil shortages and suggesting tension between the haves and have-nots (in terms of financial, military, and natural resources), while reinforcing old Bondian notions about the Eastern Bloc and Russia.

The three films point to the interplay of constraints on state actors and the ability of non-state actors to exploit those constraints, but they also suggest the importance of transnational flows (especially arms and capital) beyond the workings of individual or collective actors. As Thomas argues so well, such globalization produces new politics on the ground and on screen. If the films are prescient in reflecting contemporary global politics, the pre-title/title sequences are particularly interesting to examine because they function metonymically to telescope this diegetic contemporaneity. That is, engaging the complex work of genre by providing cues both for the positioned spectator and for the “real” viewer, the pre-title/title sequences not only encapsulate filmic diegesis and foreground the narrativization of the security threat to come for the spectator; they also interpret contemporary global politics and gender politics for the viewer.

The Pre-Title/Title Sequences

The action in the pre-title sequence of Die Another Day opens spectacularly with an international incursion into North Korea by surfboard. A series of long and medium shots shows James Bond and two other surfers bravely infiltrating a fortified beachhead where two armed North Korean soldiers, shot midrange, are patrolling. The blue and black hues of night heighten the furtiveness of the surfers’ mission and compound the sense of immediate danger. The first close-up shot is of James Bond’s face, establishing a connection to the series and reinforcing 007’s pivotal role in the action to come. After a series of jump cuts, the scene centers on Bond and the other surfers, who quickly install signaling equipment that miscues an incoming helicopter so that it lands near them. The team captures the arms dealer aboard the aircraft, and Bond takes his place, planting plastic explosives inside the dealer’s briefcase, which holds trays of diamonds. Bond boards the helicopter and commandeers it to its original destination, a military outpost overseen by the cruel, young Colonel Moon and his right-hand man, Zao (Rick Yune). Again, the sequence moves from medium shots to medium close-ups and close-ups of Bond and the other characters in the field. The narrative intent is soon made clear. Operating in the demilitarized zone and using sophisticated military hovercraft to move his wares across minefields, Colonel Moon intends to trade illicit arms for the African conflict diamonds that Bond is carrying. When Zao discovers that their partner is in fact an MI6 agent, Colonel Moon destroys Bond’s helicopter and threatens to kill Bond.

At this moment, Moon gets a call that his father and the actual commander of the post, General Moon (Kenneth Tsang), is returning and is only a short distance from the camp. As Moon orders a cleanup operation to hide the evidence of his illicit activities, Bond sees his chance and uses a detonation device in his wristwatch to set off the C4 in the deployment of visual and spoken rhetorics particular to the genre.

For example, in ever-durable and predictable Bondian fashion, the pre-title sequence of Die Another Day opens spectacularly with an international incursion into North Korea by surfboard. A series of long and medium shots shows James Bond and two other surfers bravely infiltrating a fortified beachhead where two armed North Korean soldiers, shot midrange, are patrolling. The blue and black hues of night heighten the furtiveness of the surfers’ mission and compound the sense of immediate danger. The first close-up shot is of James Bond’s face, establishing a connection to the series and reinforcing 007’s pivotal role in the action to come. After a series of jump cuts, the scene centers on Bond and the other surfers, who quickly install signaling equipment that miscues an incoming helicopter so that it lands near them. The team captures the arms dealer aboard the aircraft, and Bond takes his place, planting plastic explosives inside the dealer’s briefcase, which holds trays of diamonds. Bond boards the helicopter and commandeers it to its original destination, a military outpost overseen by the cruel, young Colonel Moon and his right-hand man, Zao (Rick Yune). Again, the sequence moves from medium shots to medium close-ups and close-ups of Bond and the other characters in the field. The narrative intent is soon made clear. Operating in the demilitarized zone and using sophisticated military hovercraft to move his wares across minefields, Colonel Moon intends to trade illicit arms for the African conflict diamonds that Bond is carrying. When Zao discovers that their partner is in fact an MI6 agent, Colonel Moon destroys Bond’s helicopter and threatens to kill Bond.

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diamond-laden briefcase. The camera pans back as the explosion disrupts the camp and then focuses sharply as diamonds are sprayed into the face of Zao (where they remain for the rest of the film). Bond commandeers a hovercraft and chases after Colonel Moon into the demilitarized zone. A fast-paced chase scene, reminiscent of previous Bond films, then positions the viewer adjacent to the action. Eventually, Bond is able to jump onto Moon’s vehicle, where they struggle until Moon, pinned by suction to a giant fan on the hovercraft, is smashed face-first into a gate. The hovercraft careens off a cliff into a waterfall; Moon is killed. The camera cuts to a temple bell slowly ringing. As the shot closes in, we see Bond hanging, alive, from the clapper. He is arrested by General Moon, who has just arrived on the scene to find his camp in disarray and his son dead. Moon has Bond taken back into the camp, where he is shown submerged in a vat of water.

In stark contrast to 
Die Another Day
, the pre-title sequence of 
Casino Royale
 defamiliarizes the generic expectations of the audience. Both in look and in dialogue, the diegetic world of 
Casino Royale
, as envisaged in the pre-title sequence, differs from 
Die Another Day
 in significant ways. First, the sequence serves as the prologue to a film that is in effect a prequel to the rest of the Bond series. That is, 
Casino Royale
 provides the background, the genesis, of James Bond as 007.

Second, 
Casino’s
 pre-title sequence is stylistically distinctive from previous Bond films in that its onscreen violence deviates from other pre-title sequences in order of degree and magnitude. In the 
Casino Royale
 pre-title sequence, violence is intensified, intimate, and immediate. Shot prominently in black and white, evoking Cold War–era espionage films of the late 1940s and 50s, the sequence allows the viewer to witness the two kills necessary for 00 status through a series of intercuts. It opens in black and wide, in medias res, with Bond ambushing a double agent in his office in Prague. Bond’s soon-to-be victim confidently confronts Bond, saying, “If M were so sure I was bent, she would have sent a 00. . . . Your file shows no kills. It takes . . .”

“One,” says Bond. A jump cut takes us back to Bond’s first kill, a gruesome hand-to-hand struggle in a grimy public restroom. Another quick cut returns us to the office in Prague.

“How did he die?”

“Your contact? Not well.” We then see Bond drowning his first kill in a lavatory basin.

“Made you feel it, did he? Well, you needn’t worry. The second . . .”

Bond shoots the double agent and says, “Yes, considerably.”

This noirish hue is complemented by close-up tight shots and shot reverse shots, further reminiscent of classical Hollywood cinema. The opening mise-en-scène is restricted, constrained, highlighting Bond as the rational, calculating agent that audiences have come to know. The pacing of the action in the Prague office is calm, and the onscreen violence as Bond kills the double agent is aligned with previous 007 missions. Although the mise-en-scène in the bathroom where Bond’s first kill occurred might be seen as claustrophobic, the action is chaotic, and the violence visceral: Bond reacts instinctively and brutally to stay alive as he completes his mission. The stylistic intercutting of these two narrative threads heightens the tension between past and present both in terms of security threats to be faced and in terms of the changing character of James Bond.

Despite the fact that its plot builds directly from the ending of 
Casino Royale
, the title and pre-title sequences in 
Quantum of Solace
 move away from the innovation found in 
Casino Royale
, although not all the way back to the earlier formulas. As previously noted, the movie begins with a classic Bond high-speed chase: Bond’s favored Aston Martin, with the criminal from 
Casino Royale
 locked in its trunk, is being pursued by an Alfa Romeo. The camera work is frenetic and fast-paced. Multiple cuts, blurred views, close-ups and extreme close-ups alternated with long shots, and brilliant sunshine washing through the drive contribute to the sense of excitement and urgency. Bond is able to end the chase when he finds a machine gun in his glove compartment and kills the Alfa driver. His dilapidated Aston rolls into the nar-
row streets of Siena, Italy, where (after the title sequence) his captive will be questioned by both M and Bond in a dingy, poorly lit room. If aspects of the grittiness of the *Casino Royale* pre-title sequence are echoed, the cruel intimacy of it is not.

Importantly, in each of these films, the pre-title sequence gives way to a title sequence that both ruptures and extends diegetic contemporaneity. The title sequence of *Die Another Day*, one of the most narratively rich in the Bond series, demonstrates this. Following chronologically from the pre-title action, the sequence opens with Bond being interrogated by a female North Korean officer. A medium close-up frames both the officer and Bond and then gives way to a medium shot of Bond, the officer, and another underling, revealing the water trough into which Bond’s face is submerged. The sequence proper begins with a quick cut to a close-up of Bond’s face in the water, overwritten with production titles. Bond’s physical agony is effectively transferred to the individual viewer and effectively gestures to the vulnerability of the body as it stands in for the post–Cold War West and the international system more generally. Immediately inscribed on the screen image are silhouettes of female forms that appear throughout the sequence and signal generic continuity with the rest of the Bond series. *Die Another Day*, these female forms also make an important narrative point, indexically linking torture to the feminine, and introduce a key visual technique that runs through the entire title sequence: the superimposition of the title credits and threatening images (of scorpions, fire, lava, and ice) onto the physical torture of Bond. The remainder of the sequence relies on a series of medium to medium close-up and close-up shots that capture images of the torture, sometimes foregrounded and sometimes recessed, all of which heighten the sense of bodily harm that 007 is suffering.

The *Casino Royale* titles stand in stark contrast not only to those of *Die Another Day* but also to most previous title sequences, in that they are retro yet highly stylized and entirely graphic. The pre-title seamlessly segues into this graphic world of the title sequence, as we see Bond through the gun barrel turning to kill his adversary. Daniel Craig’s silhouette stands on a playing card motif, loads his gun with an icon of one of the suits, and shoots. As suggested by the film’s name, the title sequence emphasizes the game of international politics that Bond must master if Britain and the West are to remain secure. The sequence is dominated by floating images of roulette wheels and cards that become ammunition for guns and that pierce graphic figures of men. Unlike other Bond title sequences that privilege women’s bodies as sex objects, threats, or victims of violence, *Casino Royale*’s title sequence is populated almost exclusively by male images. We get only a glimpse of Vesper’s face superimposed on the Queen of Hearts playing card. The erasure of the female form has the effect of extending the already hypermasculinized diegetic world of Bond because it reinforces the notion that international security is the purview of men: men are both the chief threats to the global capitalist system and its chief protectors and defenders.

The title sequence of *Quantum of Solace* continues the focus on Bond, beginning with his silhouette firing a bullet that glides through an eerie, darkly illuminated desert terrain that morphs into women’s naked bodies. The Bond figure continues walking, gun held ready to fire, as sand blows from the dunes, revealing more figures. These images phase out, replaced by graphics that resemble navigational lines onto which naked women’s figures are imposed. Occasionally, a male form appears to be falling through the atmosphere. The sequence ends with Bond shooting another bullet that traverses a desert landscape and writhing women’s bodies. The MK12-created title sequence is noteworthy for its adept combination of *Casino*’s focus on Bond and the male form with the more usual naked women motif. It suggests a continuing interest in recognizing and representing the primacy of men in the world of Bondian international security: the trope of the male body seems to be a new generic element that nonetheless requires no serious rethinking.
of Bondian gender politics or of male-dominated international security.

**Gender and Global (In)Security**

These pre-title and title sequences’ metonymic function is, then, intimately bound up with generic Bondian gender politics. That is, these sequences’ articulations of global insecurity—articulations keyed to the broader narratives of *Die Another Day*, *Casino Royale*, and *Quantum of Solace*—are made possible by a particular understanding of the proper relations between and roles for men and women in the international arena. In the substantial body of extant scholarship on gender in the series, such relations and inscriptions are consistently marked as binary: women exist within diegetic space as subordinates (whether helpmates or sex partners) to men (whether heroes or villains). For example, in her seminal work on the Bond films, Janet Woollacott demonstrates how women are specularized and made objects of the male gaze. She writes,

> Women in the Bond films have always been conceived in terms of male desire and pleasure. . . . [A] particular regime of pleasure is established through the “looks” of the hero and the audience. While women are represented as erotic spectacle, the audience is led to identify with the male hero, the active performer. (110)

Elisabeth Ladenson notes a similar if more nuanced gender politics in her discussion of one particular Bondian woman, the infamous Pussy Galore. For Ladenson, Pussy Galore represents “both the rule and its exception” (224): she is beautiful and Barbie-like, yet as an accomplished pilot and (initially) an accomplice of Bond’s archenemy, Goldfinger, Pussy is crucial to the plot. More recently, scholars such as Vivian Halloran have noted that even when complicated through intentional reversals or threaded strands of sexual or racial politics, gender binaries remain firmly fixed. That conclusion is largely confirmed by Neuendorf et al.’s 2010 content analysis of twenty Bond films and 195 female characters. Despite differences across the series in female characters’ racial depictions or size of role, the authors find that Bond women remain sexualized, often targets of male aggression. As a result, “the Bond films glorify the androcentric and sometimes chauvinistic persona of Bond” (Neuendorf et al. 758).

Consequently, gender politics remain a fulcrum of the transnational security politics on display in the pre-title/title sequences and more generally in the films. Indeed, virtually every pre-title sequence in the Bond series foregrounds males as central to affairs of international security and to the narrative to come. A brief examination of the last Brosnan film and the first Craig is illustrative. In *Die Another Day*, as in many other Bond films, scantily clad, beautiful women move through the title sequences and the movie as a whole, eroticizing women’s bodies and signaling 007’s interest in the opposite sex. Bond’s main partner in crime-solving in *Die Another Day*, his “Bond girl,” is Jinx (Halle Berry), an NSA agent who, despite her exceptional abilities, nonetheless is second to Bond in skill and narrative power. Her counterpart is Miranda Frost (Rosamund Pike), an MI-6 double agent and Gustav Grave’s cold-blooded sidekick. In *Casino Royale*, Bondian gender politics are in evidence even more emphatically. The pre-title and title sequences are almost exclusively concerned with male characters and the consequences of their action. Yet beautiful women, dressed to kill in bikinis and evening gowns, populate the world of Casino Royale; the male gaze, as Laura Mulvey would say, is preserved. The title sequence in *Casino Royale* breaks with previous and subsequent films in the series in that sexy women’s bodies are entirely absent, reinforcing the salience of men and male bodies in international power structures.

This masculinist move not only complicates Bondian gender norms, it also reinforces the notion that Bond’s body is the battleground on which Western insecurity is fought. On the
one hand, the specularization of 007 in Die Another Day and Casino Royale reminds us of shots of Sean Connery (or even GoldenEye-era Brosnan) shirtless and relaxing in a swimsuit: Bond’s body is pleasing to the eye, captivating viewers in ways similar to the Bond girls. But in the post-9/11 films, the specularization has a different purpose. In Die Another Day’s title sequence, Brosnan’s body endures prolonged torture and anguish, yet he never bows or yields any information to his tormentors. This gritty specularization is extended in Casino Royale, where Bond’s body is relentlessly and continually assaulted (see Tremonte and Racioppi). In the now famous scene where Bond is tortured by LeChiffre, the specularization of Daniel Craig’s desirable naked body is tempered by the gruesome reality of the possibility of genital disfigurement, sterilization, and even death. In classic voyeuristic manner, the viewer is both attracted to and repulsed by the image on the screen. This attraction/repulsion dynamic parallels responses to contemporary British, European, or Western security threats wherein citizens are simultaneously obsessed with and traumatized by global terror and the possibility of torture by terrorists. In true Bondian fashion, the national anxiety is overcome because Bond’s body is able to withstand, for Britain and the world order, any kind of attack. Of course, at the same time that this focus on the body of Bond reinforces the ability of the West to repel terrorism and other threats, it has the effect of reinscribing the traditional gender order wherein men, specifically Bond, are the masters of international politics.

“Once More into the Breach”? 

The pre-title and title sequences of Die Another Day, Casino Royale, and Quantum of Solace illustrate the resilience of the Bondian generic formula to respond to evolving gender and security politics; they also speak to the films’ power to construct and reconstruct metonymically our imaginative understandings of international and gender politics and the nexus between the two. On the one hand, they place 007 in a diegetic world in which Western domination of the international system and the subordination of women remain the norm. On the other hand, the sequences show remarkable flexibility within the generic formula. For example, the grimace-inducing torture scenes in Die Another Day highlight the turn to a new, gritty, and immediate physicality that centers on the vulnerability of the body of Bond in subsequent films. At the same time, the title sequence in Die Another Day retains the expected construction of an evil Bond villainess. Casino Royale breaks with this latter expectation in nearly excluding women from its title sequence while ratcheting up the intensity of the bodily harm in its title sequence (and the remainder of the film). What is highlighted in the latest Bond films and their pre-title/title sequences is the increasing reliance on the male body to underscore the severity of the risk to Western security. Metonymically, the sequences are able to assert the hyperreality of Bond and his body within a field of gendered international politics in which the old certainties of the Cold War are ruptured and replaced by the darker and less stable narrative of deterritorialized security threats. Thus, the sequences not only introduce James Bond; they also “naturalize” the idea that only a superior man can protect and defend national and international security.

NOTES

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1. See Emily King for a discussion of the title sequence in From Russia with Love.

2. The dearth of scholarship on these sequences is all the more startling given the substantial amount of work on Bond. See, for example, Bennett and Woollacott; Black; Chapman; Comentale, Watt, and Willman; Lindner; and Winder. Recent exceptions are Robert P. Arnett’s “Casino Royale and Franchise Remix: James Bond as Superhero,” which does take up these aspects of the films as it argues for Casino Royale’s significance in retooling the series, and Jim Leach’s “The World Has Changed,” which includes pre-title sequences as part of an analysis of Bond films in the
1990s. As noted previously, King provides examination of the title sequence in *From Russia with Love*.

3. *Skyfall* had not been released when this article was submitted for review.

4. This perspective is not universally held. Popular culture scholar Leach writes, "The future of the Bond phenomenon must be in some doubt after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001" (301). See also Black for a discussion of Bond's continuing relevance.

5. The BBC’s time line of the Koreas provides a useful outline of key events of the period (see “North Korea Profile: Timeline”).

6. See, for example, Abadie; Keefer and Loayza; Krueger and Malečková; and Mitra.

7. It might therefore be seen as what Arnett calls a remix of the franchise.

8. Women espionage agents outside the Bond film series may be less constrained by the gender binary. For instance, in an examination of the television show *The Avengers*, Moya Luckett argues that the lead female character Emma Peel may point to an active, powerful feminine subjectivity that is even the equal of her male partner Steed. Luckett suggests the relevance of Peel for Bond girls, but it is hard to imagine how a series about a male spy could be revised to include the kind of equal partner that Luckett argues is true for *The Avengers*. Women agents figure prominently in video games as well, and one might guess that they would provide a new model, given the inherently aggressive stance of most games. The literature, however, suggests that although female characters’ activities may be important, female characters continue to be sexualized and, albeit with some exceptions (e.g., Lara Croft), secondary to male lead characters. See, for example, Burgess, Stermer, and Burgess on video game covers; Downs and Smith on hypersexuality; and Miller and Summers on characters’ roles and appearances as depicted in gaming magazines. The work of Jansz and Martin on “The Lara Phenomenon” found that female characters are often powerful but nonetheless sexualized.

REFERENCES


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