The Sexual Grammar of the Cold War

The James Bond Film Posters

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The Cold War began in 1945 and continued until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Having lasted for almost half of the twentieth century, it shaped political attitudes and social values, strongly demarcating the differences between the capitalist, free West, and the socialist, totalitarian East (Auerbach 2012, 172). The Soviet Union and the United States were the leaders of the opposed groups – the Eastern Bloc and the Western Bloc. In this ideological conflict, the West was a political and cultural Other for the East, and vice versa. The decades-long confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union has impacted the relationship between the two countries, not only during the Cold War years, but also after the "war" was over. Since 1991, the US and Russia have not yet been (close) friends or allies. The Cold War hence exercised its power beyond the actual years of the conflict, and its legacy continues to impact the two nations.[1]

Film was one of the tools used to fight the Cold War, promoting certain views and sustaining the Otherness of the enemy. The Cold War itself was a prevailing theme in film during the times of the conflict, because film "was (and still is) a tool through which to communicate ideology" (Prorokova-Konrad 2020, 12).

1 For a discussion of the Cold War tropes in the Trump-Putin era, see Tatiana Prorokova-Konrad's collection *Cold War II: Hollywood's Renewed Obsession with Russia* (2020).

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Cultural texts produced during the Cold War established and propagandised differences between capitalism and communism, reinforcing the ideological confrontation between the West and the East. The films about James Bond are some of the most recognisable cinematic examples from the Cold War era that construct the meaning of the war; they work as effective propaganda for the free world and the various capitalist comforts, stabilities, and successes that it grants.

The recently expanding scholarship on James Bond probes the novels and films from many perspectives and underscores the cultural value of these texts both during the Cold War and after it. It also emphasises the cultural value of the character James Bond. Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, for example, discuss "the specific nature of the position that Bond has occupied within contemporary popular culture", arguing that Bond "has been more than just the central protagonist in a number of novels and films derived from them" – he has always been a "popular hero" (1987, 13). By drawing on this important research, this article focuses on the Bond posters to illustrate how the Cold War was reflected in them.[2] This article focuses exclusively on the posters for the films that were released during the Cold War – in other words, all of the films from *Dr. No* (1962) to *License to Kill* (1989). Given the number of films (and posters) created during that time, the article provides an analysis of these selected posters only, recognising the unique value of the poster and the degree to which each is loaded with cultural and political messages. Because the issue of temporality plays an important role in the processes of encoding and decoding information in the posters, these messages tend to be more easily recognised by viewers. A poster is a cultural map that immediately draws the attention of viewers and, due to the characteristics of this medium, has very little time to convey the messages and meanings encoded within it. This article probes the cultural, political, and aesthetic potencies of the Bond posters as a powerful visual instruments in communicating Cold War concerns to their viewers.

This article's specific interest lies in the portrayals of masculinity, femininity, and sexuality in the Bond posters which largely define the principles of the capitalist ideology of the Cold War. Through the overt hypersexualisation of the female body and the emphasis placed on virile masculinity, these posters create what I term "the sexual grammar" of the James Bond films and of the Cold War itself. The article argues that these posters become a form of political propa-

2 There are many posters created as part of the films' publicity campaigns, including different versions for each of the geographical territories in which the films are released. Readers can view the James Bond posters examined in this article here: https://www.007.com/the-films/.

ganda that, on the one hand, strengthens the image of the West as a free world; yet, on the other, aptly communicates the problems that existed in countries like Great Britain and the United States during the Cold War: overt patriarchal ideologies, according to which the oppression of women, the assumed superiority of men, and hegemonic heterosexuality are presented as sociocultural norms. This, in turn, largely contradicts the West's image of itself as a *free* world, emphasising the Cold War era as a time defined and shaped largely by the white, heteronormative sexuality.

THE COLD WAR MAN: JAMES BOND

The Cold War is identified by cultural studies scholars as "a conflict of ideas and images" (Shaw and Kudryashov 2016, 1). Cultural production of the Cold War era reflects this very well. From films and posters to literature and beyond, these narratives emphasised the differences between the US and the Soviet Union: capitalism and communism; freedom and oppression. Propaganda was employed by both sides of the conflict (Shaw and Youngblood 2014). The influential Cold War studies scholar Lori Maguire explains that the US had intended these culturally- and politically-loaded messages that celebrated capitalism and the free world for a number of different geopolitical audiences: for the West, Americans in particular; for those European countries who were opposed to the Soviet Union, oppressed as they were by communism; for developing counties; and for the Soviet Union itself (2016, 2). Similarly, the Soviet Union generated multiple cultural texts aiming to do exactly the same for their own political purposes: to prove that communist ideology was the only right and true ideology that would lead the nation to prosperity and stability.

The James Bond novels, posters, and films were one such means of ideological production employed by the West to encode specific political messages and communicate them to the masses. Identified by Susan Burgess as "the second most successful film series in history" (2015, 230), the James Bond films impacted audiences worldwide, shaping their views of the Cold War. While James Bond is a British secret agent, he has become an icon of US popular culture, catering for those ideological views largely supported and promoted by the US (ibid.). The Bond texts celebrated the endeavouring capitalist ideology of the free world and contributed to the notion that the Cold War was a conflict of ideologies (which it certainly was) between Western capitalism and Eastern socialism under Soviet oppression (Upton 2014, 8).

The James Bond films generated and reflected the cultural grammar of the Cold War. Most apparently, they were seen to emphasise the crucial role of espionage in the real-world conflict of the Cold War as well as constructions of cultural images surrounding the importance of spying and spycraft in that conflict.[3] Through the image of a spy, these films imagined the post-war man of the West. Gender as such, and masculinity in particular, conveyed through the character of James Bond, is thus prominently aestheticised in the Bond posters. Bond is foregrounded in every poster: he is depicted as larger and/or taller (or closer to the camera) than the female characters who flank him. James Bond, then, is the crucial element of every poster through which the ideals of the Cold War man-of-the-West is conveyed. In both the novels and films, Bond is constructed as a very specific type of a man. In their exhaustive study of the *Geographies, Genders and Geopolitics of James Bond*, Lisa Funnell and Klaus Dodds emphasise the issue of "privilege" which the Bond character projects: "[H]e is a white, cis-gender, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied, and British man who has enjoyed a private school education and attended Cambridge University. He can move, act, and perform; gain access to places, spaces, and resources; and use his intersectional and social capital in ways that most people cannot" (2017, 1). James Bond is not an average British or American man, then, but an ideal man; a hyperbolic character whose values as projected are crucial to the West's Cold War campaign. He is a spy (a dangerous yet rewarding occupation); he eliminates villains (largely from the Eastern bloc) to secure peace and protect the West's interests; and his heroics are very much contingent upon the values of the free (Western) world. Certainly, the film posters foreground this type of a Cold War man; often, Bond is shown to be clean-shaven, with hair that is styled and cut appropriately, and his clothes always fit him perfectly. With the exception of the posters for *Thunderball* (1965) and *Moonraker* (1979), in which he appears in a diving suit and a spacesuit respectively, Bond always wears a tuxedo. His tuxedos (but also the diving suit and the spacesuit) suggest that he is a man of fashion, taste, and manners

Despite the presence of (multiple) women in the posters, James Bond is the center of attention. He is portrayed in the foreground, as is the case with the posters for *Dr. No*, *From Russia with Love* (1963), *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1969), and *Octopussy* (1983). The character is even more effectively accentuated in the poster for *The Living Daylights* (1987): Bond is depicted in a circle against the white background, pointing his gun at the enemy (crucially, he does not look at the viewer but rather to the side, which suggests that the viewer is in alignment

3 For a discussion of espionage in Cold War cinema, including the James Bond films, see Bernard F. Dick's *The Screen Is Red: Hollywood, Communism, and the Cold War* (2016).

with Bond and not in the vantage position of Bond's enemy), whereas other characters, action set pieces, locations, and props are largely backgrounded. Some posters, including those for the films *Thunderball*, *Diamonds Are Forever* (1971), *Live and Let Die* (1973), and *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1974), depict James Bond surrounded by women, yet because he is in the centre and is often the only man, the viewers' attention is inevitably drawn to him. The only exception is the poster for the film *For Your Eyes Only* (1981), where the lower part of a woman's body dominates the image; yet unlike the woman, Bond is portrayed in full, from head to toe, and thus the audience can identify him as the primary character in the poster. The woman, it seems, is a mere assemblage of body parts: primarily, her buttocks and legs.

The posters depict James Bond as an educated, smart, resourceful, and financially stable man with powers, for he seems to know everyone and is capable of getting to any place he wants to. This is communicated in the posters via Bond's postures, his determined look, his clothes and guns, and, of course, the women, whose vulnerability reinforces Bond's heterosexual masculinity and power. Funnell and Dodds argue that his various missions are opportunities for Bond to reveal and sustain his masculinity; his physical and intellectual powers used to find, catch, fight, and defeat the enemy, along with his sexual activities with different women, are the crucial elements through which Bond's masculinity is ordered and defined (1).

Sexuality is the central aspect of every Bond poster, and Bond's sexuality is communicated as a normativising aspect of the gender relations portrayed in each image. According to the poster images, Bond's male sexuality dominates, whereas the women in these images are often submissive partners, ancillary to Bond. Bond's virulent (and violent) heterosexuality is conveyed most prominently through the positioning of his gun. An explicitly phallic object, the "gun as phallus is encoded in the textuality of Bond" (Miller 2003, 140). Bond's grasp of his gun is a comment not only on his exceptional professionalism but a rather blunt metaphor for his sexual potency. Indeed, the position of the gun is particularly curious to examine. In the posters for *Dr. No*, *From Russia with Love*, *Thunderball*, *Diamonds Are Forever*, *Live and Let Die*, *The Man with the Golden Gun*, *For Your Eyes Only*, *Octopussy*, and *A View to a Kill* (1985) the gun is overtly sexualised and clearly functions as an extension of Bond's penis. In these posters, Bond is surrounded by women who are either practically naked or are wearing revealing clothing, appearing relaxed and sexually inviting. The artwork for some of these posters are especially explicit in communicating Bond's heterosexual potency.

For example, the positioning of Bond and Honey Ryder on the poster for *Dr. No* clearly suggests that Bond's smoking gun – placed right between Honey's open legs – has recently been used; the disturbing implications of the poster's overlaying of heterosexual sex and violence against women all too clear for the viewer. Similarly, the post for *For Your Eyes Only* reconstructs a sex scene of sorts, too, with Bond positioned directly between the legs of the faceless woman, pointing his gun allegedly at the enemy but all too clearly towards the woman's genitalia. Combined with the film's provocative title, which connotes something of a private sex show, the poster image heightens Bond's virulence and reinforces the notion that the Cold War is construed as a sexual and not just an ideological battle. Other posters convey the idea of a sexual play between Bond and his women. For instance, in the poster for *Thunderball*, one woman is shown to unzip Bond's diving suit while Bond is shown to grasp tightly a lengthy and erect speargun. In the poster for *Diamonds Are Forever*, one of the women is shown to clasp a handful of diamonds, which are shown to be about level with Bond's genital area – no doubt a crass joke at the lustrousness of Bond's sexual member. Similarly, the posters for *Octopussy* and *A View to Kill* imitate this sexual play: the former presents the titular Octopussy as her namesake, with one of her arms suggestively stroking Bond's erect silenced pistol; while the latter depicts Grace Jones' character, May Day, lighting up and suggestively sucking on a long cigarette.

The emphasis on sexuality in these poster images helps to contrast Bond's masculinity with the ideals of the communist Cold War man. It through the references to sex, along with Bond's access to capitalist comforts, that the posters reconstruct the Cold War man from the West as a distinctly different from his Soviet counterpart. Timothy M. Hoxha claims that "the Bond character's eye-spy bravado glorifies male virility, extols casual sex, and highlights the importance of sexually conquering all women, especially those deemed as f*emme fatale*" (2011, 193). Jaime Hovey even argues that there is so much maleness, sex, and heterosexuality in the Bond texts that they go beyond heterosexuality and create an atmosphere of the queer (2005, 43). While Hovey's contention is plausible, this article views the excessive heterosexuality, male masculinity, and sex of the Bond posters as strategic instruments through which to communicate the differences between the free world and the communist world; the posters exaggerate and hyperbolise Bond's masculinity and sexual activity to immediately signal to Cold War viewers that James Bond is the product of the West: that he is the embodiment of the (sexually) free world. In the Soviet Union, James Bond was perceived as the Other. Funnell and Dodds explain this in detail:

> For the Soviet authorities, Bond was too Western, bourgeoisie, and physically and sexually attractive for local audiences. He was (and is) a man who has clearly enjoyed a good life, consuming champagne and fine food including Soviet caviar, in addition to possessing a plethora of consumer goods and mobilizing advanced technology. (4)

In the Cold War era, Bond's sexuality served as effective propaganda, and the posters summarized the main features of that propaganda, emphasizing fashion, production and consumption, free travel, and other comforts of capitalism, as well as sexual democracy. In other words, these posters accentuate the very aspects of life that was condemned in the Soviet Union. Even the posters' bright colours suggest that life in the West was much more adventurous, alluring, and promising than it was in the Red country.

THE COLD WAR WOMAN: BOND WOMEN

While the sexual grammar of the James Bond posters emphasise heterosexuality and glorify Bond's heteronormative heterosexuality in relation to the women shown around him, it is also true that these posters can be said to throw into relief the ideas of free sexuality. The posters suggest, on one hand, that female sexuality is legitimated and enjoyed; yet, on the other hand, the posters can be seen to compromise these ideas, as the women are often shown to function as veritable sex toys for the satiation of Bond's obvious phallic needs. Thus, while the posters attempted to convey the advantages of Western living under the Cold War, they also, arguably, work to undermine this. In his examination of the Bond posters, Dirk Fowler notes that the "Bond posters are pure sex" and adds that one reason why these posters look the way they do is to "sell" the films, to sell sex (2011, 4). Yet it is often female sexuality which charge these images, and which these films are selling.

Numerous scholars have written about the relationship between Bond and women;[4] and some of which have noted how dramatically dehumanised the female characters in Bond films are Nicole Baumgarten, for one, claims that the so-called "Bond Girls" "occur in a set of predictable characters which are enacted in a recurring set of scenes and situations which, over time, have come to have predictable significance within the course of narrative" (2005, 60). As such, "women" become recognisable "*aspects* of the plot" rather than legitimate charac-

4 Monica Germanà's *Bond Girls: Body, Fashion and Gender* (2019) provides an exhaustive analysis of feminism and gender in the Bond films.

ters (ibid., my italics). In addition, Baumgarten argues, because in most situations the man with whom these female characters interact is Bond himself, "the discourse on female gender in the films is [...] almost exclusively, subjectively constructed as a feature of the character '007'" (ibid.). Women predominantly function as a prosthesis to Bond's character development (limited though it has been before the Daniel Craig era). In their analysis of Bond's women, Robert Arp and Kevin S. Decker claim that the way James Bond behaves toward women is "a glaring case of objectification" (2006, 203). As Janet Woollacott notes, "[w]omen in the Bond films have always been conceived in terms of male desire and pleasure" (2003, 110). For the filmic Bond women, Robert A. Caplen argues that beauty and sexuality are "essential – if not exclusive – components" (2010, 23) of the Bond formula. An illustrative example of this is to be found in the poster for *Thunderball*. Bond is centred and flanked by an array of women in bathing suits; The women are posed artificially and arranged in such a way that the (male) viewer can appreciate from multiple angles the female body (or females' bodies). The poster overtly caters to heterosexual male appreciation of these women, the variety of which are almost akin to the images of women from erotic magazines. Indeed, sex with Bond is often presented in the films as a necessary step to safety for these women (Taliaferro and Le Gall 2006, 102); sex with Bond is presented as the "right" thing for these women.

Such a strong focus on sex is particularly interesting to examine in the context of Cold War ideological propaganda. In the Soviet Union, "there was no sex" (Jigoulov 2014, 35; Sperling 2015, 63). Of course, babies were conceived and people had sex for fun, too, but it was considered shameful to talk about let alone demonstrate the evidence of such activities. In 1951, Vera Sandomirsky wrote that in the mid-twentieth century,

> [s]ex, as a private matter, is looked upon with great suspicion by the rulers in the Kremlin. They believe that the intimate world of the individual, with its loves, hates, and fears must be carefully investigated and controlled by the collectivity, that is to say by the Party […] Preoccupation on the part of an individual with his own emotions is considered futile, obsolete, anti-social, and above all time-consuming. (206)

Nonetheless, motherhood was respected, and the state helped mothers in a variety of ways. Hence, the reproductive aspects of sex were valorised by the government, whereas having sex for fun was presented as being against communist ideals. In his book *A Record of Interesting Choices: Tales of Post-Soviet Man in the West*,

Vadim Jigoulov notes that: "[n]ewspapers, journals, and film never depicted any nudity, moreover people engaging in sexual activities" (2014, 35). Thus Soviet popular culture during the Cold War differed dramatically from what was produced by and available in the West, particular in so far as the Bond franchise was concerned. Sex was one of such issues on which the two confronting sides of the Cold War conflict obviously had very different stances, and the Bond posters-as-propaganda illustrate this: their depiction of sex served to demonstrate the relative freedoms of Western ideology; the ability to have, show, and talk about sex – and to avoid censure for it – was impossible during this period of the Soviet Union. While the situation regarding sex and matters related to it was far from ideal in Western countries (as can be perceived from those attitudes toward gender equality, reproductive rights, abortion), but the West certainly did not exercise the same kinds of sexual oppression which were to be found in the Soviet Eastern bloc. The sexist imagery of the Bond film posters nevertheless contributed to the West's own oppressive gender and sexuality discourses, strengthening patriarchal norms and furthering the cultural subjugation of women. While each poster may be said to be a product of its time, their collective role in shaping future British and American sexism and misogyny in the context of post-Cold War gender relations is undeniable. This is quite often found those ill-advised attempts (and often by women) to defend the inherent misogyny of the Bond universe, such as the peculiar interpretation of Bond's women offered by Erin Daily and Harry Elliot:

> A Bond movie without at least two Bond girls is simply not a Bond movie. The Bond girl is a special breed of beast that is specific only to the Bond Movie. They simply don't exist anywhere *but* the Bond universe. Really, where else could you come across a never-ending supply of women who are gorgeous, dangerous, possibly duplicitous, occasionally helpless, often expendable, and who have really nice racks?
>
> What? We're not being rude. Bond girls are hot. They're supposed to be hot. And they're supposed to have nice racks, we can say that. There is no political correctness in the Bond universe, thank you very much. So don't get all up in out kitchens and demand that we refer to the Bond girls as Bond Women. They're not women. They're girls. Chicks. Babes. Hussies. Hell, ninety percent of the Bond girls drop trou before you can even say "007," and that's hardly the behavior of a woman. That's the behavior of a girl who

> is a figment of the overactive imagination of men worldwide. And we're totally okay with that. (2006, 81-82, italics in original)

While Daily and Elliot recognise that Bond's women are portrayed in such a way as to satiate the erotic phantasies of heterosexual men, they also succeed in generating further the self-same sexism and misogyny that the films and their accompanying posters do. In their appreciation of political incorrectness and their infantilisation and diminishment of women as "girls", Daily and Elliot blatantly – and paradoxically – perpetuate sexism while, in fact, attempting to uncover the sexism in the Bond films' portrayal of women. This reading of the Bond women reveals the dangerous and long-lasting effects of the franchise's encoded misogynistic practices that continue to inform even supposedly critical readings of the films today.

Indeed, many contemporary Bond scholars discuss "the continued sexualization, marginalization, and disposability of women within Bond films" (Neuendorf et al. 2010, 758); others emphasise the way in which Bond women are still, in contemporary Bond outings, "the objects of an unmistakably male gaze" (Hines 2018, 123). One could speculate that the oversexualised portrayals of women by and large (and not just within the Bond franchise) might signal the emergence of "the newly liberated single woman, free from some of the negative social and sexual constraints imposed by traditional roles and norms" (Hines 2018, 12), although such interpretations are problematic in many ways. While there is a certain validity in claiming that representations of women as sexually free are progressive, the images offered by the Bond films and their accompanying posters are too make-oriented to argue for a total revolutionising of the perception of women in Western cinema. It is important to note, however, that while the Bond texts are indeed gender-discriminating, they are not the only ones. James Bond, in words of Neuendorf et al., certainly "promotes stereotypical, sex-typed male attitudes, especially when interacting with women" (759). However, the action-movie genre beyond Bond is very problematic on the whole, with gender inequality, objectification of women, sexism, and misogyny rife (Funnell 2015, 89; Arp and Decker 2006, 203). While I put this forward certainly not as an endorsement of the sexism of the Bond texts, it does help to contextualise the Bond posters as products of their time *and* genre. Understanding the portrayals of women in the Bond posters as both explicitly Western (read: non-communist) and non gender-liberatory is important to fully grasp the sexual grammar of those Bond posters produced during the Cold War.

CONCLUSION

Gender is one of the most prominent issues in the James Bond texts (Hovey, 43). Probing the ways in which the Bond posters of the Cold War era tackle the war and gender is an effective approach to understanding the cultural politics of the Cold War. The confrontation between the West and the East, between capitalism and communism was at the core of the twentieth-century relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union (and the respective allies of these superpowers). Popular Culture proved a potent instrument in communication ideological meanings during the Cold War period, thus impacting existing ideas of national and cultural identity, and helping to forge new ones (Falk 2010, 9). Both sides of the Cold War conflict employed cultural propaganda to achieve specific goals. The James Bond films and their accompanying posters are some of the most ubiquitous examples from the Cold War era that reconstruct the image of the West as dramatically different from its communist counterpart. The Bond posters examined in this article very precisely and acutely communicate the Western ideology of the Cold War; they portray the West as a free, adventurous, and comfortable world with an abundance of technology and sexuality. In doing so, they can be said to function as stark criticisms the communist way of life that was characterised at the time by deprivation, oppression, surveillance, and fear. Emphasising Bond's masculinity through his sexuality, the posters suggest that sex was a way to define freedom in the Cold War era, and that the West celebrated sex as a means to express individuality and identity. Attempting to draw such contrasts, however, the posters focus on a free, white, heterosexual, middle-class/upper-class man, while largely promoting, among other issues, gender inequality. As the posters suggest, the Bond women function as a means to convey Bond's sexuality; they are there to please Bond and his warm-blooded, heterosexual male audiences – and, as such, they are deliberately blinded to (indeed celebratory of) the gender inequality that existed (exists) in the West. Thus, understanding the sexual grammar of the Bond posters, by looking both at Bond's sexuality and the sexualities of the many women presented, enables us to survey the cultural and political pro-Western propaganda as well as some of the sources of women's oppression.

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