Teemu Taira

Reading Bond Films through the Lens of "Religion"

Discourse of "the West and the Rest"

ABSTRACT

"Religion" has been absent from the study of James Bond films. Similarly, James Bond has been absent from studies on religion and popular culture. This article aims to fill the gap by examining 25 Bond films through the lens of "religion". The analysis suggests that there are a number of references to "religion" in Bond films, although "religion" is typically not a main topic of the films. Furthermore, there is a detectable pattern in the films: "religion" belongs primarily to what is regarded as not belonging to "the West" and "the West" is considered modern, developed and rational as opposed to the backward, exotic and "religious" "Rest". When "religion" appears in "the West", it is seen positively if it is related to Christianity and confined to the private sphere and to the rites of passage. In this sense, representations of "religion" in Bond films contribute to what Stuart Hall named the discourse of "the West and the Rest", thus playing a role in the maintenance of the idea of "the West". This will be demonstrated by focusing on four thematic examples from the films: mythical villains, imperialist attitude to "religion" outside "the West", "religion" central in the plot (voodoo and tarot), Christianity in "the West". This article also provides grounds for suggesting that reading Bond films through the lens of "religion" contributes to both Bond studies and studies on religion and popular culture.

KEYWORDS

Religion, Film, James Bond, Popular Culture, the West, Discourse, Representation, Myth, Colonialism, Imperialism, Christianity, Secular, Rationality

BIOGRAPHY

Teemu Taira is Senior Lecturer in Study of Religion, University of Helsinki, and Docent in Study of Religion, University of Turku. He is co-author of *Media Portrayals of Religion and the Secular Sacred* (2013, with Kim Knott and Elizabeth Poole) and author of four monographs (in Finnish) and he has published several articles about religion, media, popular culture, atheism and methodology of religious studies in edited volumes and journals such as *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* and *Journal of Contemporary Religion* and *Religion*. See http://teemutaira.wordpress.com.

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THE DOUBLE ABSENCE

James Bond is one of the best-known fictional secret agents in the world. Therefore, it is not surprising that Bond films and novels have received a lot of attention from scholars. There are many interesting takes on the popular figure of Bond, focusing, for example, on narrative structures, imperial ideologies, sexism, Britishness and reading formations.[1] For some reason, "religion"[2] has not been much written about in Bond studies, although it is not completely absent.[3] Perhaps this is expected, because Bond films are not seen as "religious" or as commentaries on "religion".

The relative absence of "religion" in Bond scholarship is one thing; the other notable absence is the lack of Bond references in studies on religion and popular culture. There is a lively research industry in religion and popular culture, and scholars have been keen to study popular films whenever some "religious" and mythical themes occur, but Bond films, as far as I am aware, have not been addressed. They have not received as much attention as, for example, Star Wars (George Lukas, US 1977–2005; J. J. Abrams, US 2015; Rian Johnson, US 2017; J. J. Abrams, US 2019) or Star Trek (Gene Roddenberry, US 1966–69), to name just a few popular examples.[4]

1 The most famous earlier readings are Kingsley Amis's entertaining, less scholarly defence of Bond (Amis 1965), Umberto Eco's classic analysis of Bond novels (Eco 1992) and a co-authored study by Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott (Bennett/Woollacott 1987). Both Eco and Bennett and Woollacott aim to explain why Bond is popular. Eco's originality is in detecting a key semiotic structure that explains the popularity of Bond novels. Eco argues that the stories are organized in binary oppositions and repeat patterns common to myths and fairy tales. Eco's reading is complicated by Bennett and Woollacott, who carve out a theoretical space for thinking about Bond's popularity through the variety and complexity of "reading formations", focusing not only on the novels but also on the broader Bond phenomenon. These readings have become standard examples in popular culture and cultural studies textbooks (Strinati 1995; Harris 1996; Turner 2003). They describe the Bond world as right-of-centre, sexist, racist, imperialist, capitalist, individualist, escapist, nostalgic (for the lost British empire) and intertextual, but not reducible to any of these; it is capable of articulating many different and even contradictory values and discourses, and the constellation has changed over time. These classic studies are worth mentioning here to point out that they are a resource for thinking about the complexity of the Bond phenomenon (and avoiding reductive claims about Bond) and to emphasize that even critical analysis does not mean that the audience cannot (or should not) be entertained by Bond by making use of the variety of opportunities for flexible signification of the Bond phenomenon.

2 When I put "religion" in quotation marks it is to indicate the contested, constructed and heuristic nature of the category. When I write about discourse on religion, category of religion or study areas (religion and popular culture, religion and film), quotation marks are not needed.

3 See Black 2005; Daas 2011; Smith 2011.

4 Brode/Deyneka 2012; Gordon 1995; Jindra 2005; Kraemer/Cassidy/Schwartz 2003; McDowell 2007; Porter/McLaren 1999. When films attract dedicated followers who create activities around the film, they tend to get more attention from scholars of religion and popular culture. They are seen as expressions of popular or lived religiosity outside the typical institutional contexts (Clark 2007, 13–15). The lack of such dedicated followers distinguishes Bond films from films such as Star Wars and Star Trek, but it should be emphasized that such expressions do not mark out a boundary of what might be relevant objects of study in religion and popular culture.

The argument here is not that "religion" is a forgotten but necessary or privileged lens for understanding Bond films compared to readings focusing on, for example, geopolitics, nationalism, or gender. Furthermore, the argument is not that Bond should be key material for studying religion and popular culture. The task here is much more modest: it is to explore what Bond films look like when "religion" is used as the lens for examining them. Thus, this article asks: Does reading Bond films through "religion" bring to the fore anything new, interesting and relevant to thinking about the Bond phenomenon, as well as to the study of religion and popular culture?[5]

The answer to both elements will be affirmative: there is something relevant "religion" brings to studying Bond and there is something scholars of religion and popular culture might learn from the Bond phenomenon. This article explores "religion" in Bond films in detail and argues that if there is anything that ties portrayals of "religion" in Bond films together, it is what Stuart Hall has called the discourse of "the West and the Rest".[6] "The West" is primarily a historical and conceptual, rather than a geographical construct, although its geographical anchors are in Europe (but not really in Eastern Europe) and in North America. "The West" refers to an imagined modern society that is developed, industrialized, urbanized, capitalist and, I would add, predominantly secular.[7] Discourse refers here to a particular way of representing and organizing knowledge of the West, the Rest and their relations through an interlinked group of statements. This discourse operates by dividing the world into two separate blocks and representing the other as inferior in all respects. It "became a very common and influential discourse, helping to shape public perceptions and attitudes down to the present".[8] In other words, the idea of "the West" has had real effects as it has produced and organized knowledge and power relations. While it is interesting to explore the variety of representations of "religion" in Bond films and to comment on them in detail, the analysis presented here sug-

5 Religion and popular culture as well as religion and film are broad and multifaceted areas of research. I therefore cannot claim that a single study of Bond films would be equally relevant for all possible approaches in the field. In religion and film, the field is often divided into two types, religious film and film as religion (Plate 2005, 3099–3101). Although Bond films contain "religious" images, representations and themes, I cannot think of anyone approaching them as "religious films" (Grace 2009) (or films where you find "God" [Detweiler and Taylor 2004]). Further, this article does not deal with "film as religion" approaches (Lyden 2003). If anything, I would like to challenge the relevance of such typology. Another typology divides the approaches into to theological, mythological and ideological (Martin 1995). This article does not follow approaches in which selected theological ideas are explored and sometimes developed (Johnston 2000; Marsh 2004); however, the relations between films and wider social discourses are explored, meaning that this study has some affinity with mythological and particularly ideological approaches.

6 Hall 1992.

7 Hall 1992, 277.

8 Hall 1992, 279.

gests that the portrayals come together to support and reproduce the existing discourse of "the West and the Rest".

This article proceeds by describing and justifying the data and clarifying how "religion" is operationalized for the purposes of this study. After that, four religion-related themes in Bond films will be analysed in detail. These themes highlight how representations of "religion" play an integral part in the discourse of "the West and the Rest". Finally, the concluding section ties the four themes together and reflects on why reading Bond through "religion" might matter for both Bond studies and studies concerning religion and popular culture.

DATA: 25 BOND FILMS

This article analyses James Bond films, not the James Bond novels, although the origin of the figure is in the novels. There are several reasons for this focus. First, the films have been more popular. There are plenty of people who have seen many Bond films but have not read a single Bond book, and the film series as a whole has been more profitable than any comparable series.[9] In fact, the books started to sell well only after the release of films, and many of us have read the books only after watching the films.[10] Popularity is an important criterion here, because in order to become popular, fictional forms have to relate to and connect with popular experience, and while the Bond phenomenon is "complexly ambiguous",[11] there are certain aspects pertaining to the typical plot structure, values and ideologies that make Bond's popularity understandable. Portrayals of "religion" are among these.

Secondly, although the first three Bond films "all bear a close enough resemblance to their literary originals",[12] On Her Majesty's Secret Service (Peter R. Hunt, GB 1969) being the closest of all Bond films to the original novel,[13] the majority of Bond movies "abandon any fidelity to Fleming's originals, opting instead for screen stories which used only Fleming's titles and character names".[14] One of the key differences is that "the films were deliberately de-politicised and detached from the Cold War background of the novels",[15] or at least they shifted more towards the climate of détente.[16] In addition, "Bondian" became the term used by the production team to mean "the spirit of James

9 Black 2005, xi.
10 Bennett/Woollacott 1987, 26–27; 31.
11 Bennett/Woollacott 1987, 4.
12 Chapman 2007, 49.
13 Chapman 2007, 113.
14 Chapman 2007, 124.
15 Chapman 2007, 60.
16 Bennett/Woollacott 1987, 33.

Bond" and a separate film genre, and the novels were seen as only one of the sources for the films.[17]

Thirdly, the films, but not the novels, offer quite a unique time frame for studying a popular phenomenon. The first Bond film was released in 1962. Since then Bond films have been produced at a regular pace, the longest break between releases being the six years between Licence to Kill (John Glen, GB/US 1989) and GoldenEye (Martin Campbell, GB/US 1995). The most recent, Spectre (Sam Mendes, GB/US 2015), makes for a total number of 25 films, if Never Say Never Again (Irvin Kershner, GB/US 1983), an "unofficial" Bond film because it was not produced by EON Productions, is counted. The series of films covers almost 55 years, from the Cold War to the present day.

I watched all the Bond films, including Never Say Never Again, a remake of Thunderball (Terence Young, GB 1965) that saw the return of Sean Connery as Bond. I also watched the spy comedy Casino Royale (Ken Hughes, GB/US 1967), starring David Niven as Bond, but as it is so different from the rest, I decided not to include it here. I made notes on every film whenever there was something that related to "religion". Then I grouped the notes into various classes and themes to see whether any patterns would emerge – as is common in qualitative and ethnographic content analysis of media materials.[18] This initial phase in organizing the material is followed by detailed discursive analysis of the patterns and the representations they include.[19] The analysis here gives an overview of selected typical patterns related to "religion" in Bond films and, on that basis, proceeds to examine the more theoretically driven question about the relation between "religion" in Bond films and the wider social context.

BOND AND "RELIGION"

One of the first problems to resolve is the question of what counts as a reference to "religion". Solely for the heuristic purposes of this study, I utilize Benson Saler's suggestion that "religion" can be conceived on the basis of Wittgensteinian "family resemblance", combined with the prototype theory, when used as a concept to select relevant data for a study.[20] This means that there is no essence of "religion", but our prototype of the category provides a starting point for deciding how close or far particular examples are from it. The prototype of "religion" we have is based on Judeo-Christian heritage, but "religion" is not confined to any single, commonly shared criterion. When the material is

17 Bennett/Woollacott 1987, 8; 174; 179.
18 Altheide/Schneider 2013, 23–39; Bryman 2004, 392–393.
19 Taira 2013a; see also Hall 1992.
20 Saler 2000.

relatively close to the prototype, as in the case of myths and rituals that include references to supernatural forces, it is likely to be included; when the material is far enough from the prototype, such as nationalism, it is more likely to be left out. The benefit of this approach is that it guides the selection but leaves it up to scholarly judgement to decide where exactly the line of relevance lies for the purposes of the analysis. As a result, the material that gets selected for detailed analysis is very close to what usually gets called "religion" in academic contexts, although it may be a bit wider – Saler lists 15 typical features – than the everyday (predominantly Western) understanding of what counts as "religion".[21] For instance, the themes highlighted in this article utilizing Saler's ideas are often about ritual practices, worship, buildings, "religious" language or traditions referring to supernatural agents and powers, but this approach allows the inclusion of mythical narratives or characters that can also be recognized as being close to the prototype of "religion".

With this starting point that guides the viewing of the films, we can examine how "religion" is part of the production of meaning, thereby tapping into wider (particularly, but not exclusively, British) discourses of what it means to be modern. Bond films and their representations are seen as articulated within the wider modern discourse of religion and within what Stuart Hall calls the discourse of "the West and the Rest". It may well be that the ways in which films circulate stereotypes and, in some cases, play with them are at least partly intentional. However, particularly when "religion" and "religious" imagery are not central to plots or part of the most important characters in Bond films, it is likely that the wider cultural discourses are a source of meaning making in a not-so-well-reflected form. Although "religion" is rarely central to Bond films, there are so many references to "religion" that this article cannot provide a detailed analysis of all of them. Rather, I have selected themes that highlight most clearly how "religion" relates to what it means to be modern in the imagery of Bond films.

21 Saler 2008, 222. In some of my studies I have used an approach that analyses the discourse on "religion" rather than seeks to define it. This approach focuses on how various parties negotiate what counts as "religion" and how societies in general and various institutions and groups in particular organize themselves through such debates (e. g., Taira 2013a; 2013b; 2016). In this approach, "religion" is not defined because the aim is to study how others define and use it. Sometimes this has been seen to support views that suggest dropping the category of religion altogether from our analytical vocabulary, but I am not suggesting that scholars should never use "religion" for heuristic purposes in their research if they find it useful. On the contrary, I have used "religion" analytically for heuristic purposes previously (see Knott/Poole/Taira 2013), but I would argue that there is a need for greater reflexivity in using the category of religion.

MEGALOMANIAC VILLAINS IN A COSMIC DRAMA

Villains are a good place to start, partly because they receive a great deal of attention in Bond scholarship and fandom in general and partly because they are defined as what threatens the world that Bond defends. The villains are typically, depending on the point of view, God-like or Satanic figures who play a part in a mythical, cosmic battle between good and evil.[22]

When Dr. No, the villain in the first Bond film (Dr. No, Terence Young, GB 1962), talks about his plan, Bond comments that his dream of world domination is the "same old", that asylums are full of such people who dream of being Napoleon or God. Likewise, in Tomorrow Never Dies (Roger Spottiswoode, GB 1997) the media mogul Elliot Carver claims that he "will reach an influence bigger than any human on this planet, save God himself", after which Bond comments that Carver is totally crazy. These are examples of a typical pattern in the Bond world: people who pretend to be God-like in changing the status quo and bringing about the order s/he has designed can only be irrational. They are players in a cosmic drama in which the rational, modern world ("the West") is under threat.

Although there are references to cosmic drama typical of myths in several films, including Dr. No and Tomorrow Never Dies, many villains have more mundane goals: money and power. However, there are two villains whose aims are not reducible to material self-interest. While they would get all the riches imaginable if they succeeded in their plans, their motivation is different, as they plan to destroy the known civilization and start a new one. These are Hugo Drax in Moonraker (Lewis Gilbert, GB/FR/US 1979) and Karl Stromberg in The Spy Who Loved Me (Lewis Gilbert, GB 1977).

The aim of Drax is "to create a master race in space based on his space station and to destroy the rest of the species by firing nerve gas back at the earth".[23] In the words of Drax, the future will see "a rebirth, a new world" with "a new super race, a race of perfect physical specimens". The mythical dimension of the project is made obvious, as there is an explicit reference to Noah's Ark when Bond realizes that there are selected couples chosen for the spaceship. Furthermore, Drax compares the physically perfect couples chosen for the spaceship to gods whose descendants will return to earth after the world's population has been wiped out. In the novel Bond describes Drax as "almighty – the man in the padded cell who is God", and in the same context he uses words and expressions such as "paranoia", "delusion of grandeur" and "maniac" in reference to Drax.[24]

22 For instance, Max Zorin, the villain in A View to a Kill (John Glen, GB 1985), has been labelled a Satanic figure (Black 2005, 172–173).

23 Black 2005, 139.

24 Fleming 2012, 104.

In The Spy Who Loved Me the villain is Karl Stromberg, whose ocean research laboratory, which rises from beneath the sea on spider-like legs, is called Atlantis. "Atlantis" refers to a mythical, pre-historic submerged island. It is an allegory for the hubris of nations in Plato's works and, in later retellings, the inhabitants of Atlantis survive to found new civilizations. In fact, Atlantis has been a constant utopian resource for the mythical imagination in European history, referring to an ideal lost world and also to a forthcoming world (including the Americas and other unknown areas) where desires and fantasies are to be fulfilled.[25] Although the myth of Atlantis has not been part of any established "religious" cosmography as Ellis argues,[26] it has certainly been a myth that has been utilized in many "religious" formations. For instance, the Theosophists, Helena Petrova Blavatsky in particular, considered Atlanteans as cultural heroes who preceded Blavatsky's own Aryan race,[27] and one of the great New Age figures, Edgar Cayce, suggested that Atlantis was the centre of human civilization and that one of the five key races – the red race – was developed there.[28]

To name the tanker Atlantis is not simply a superficial reference to add a sense of significance; the myth of Atlantis fits perfectly with the villain's plan to start a new civilization by making doomsday happen to the human race. Stromberg hijacks both British and Russian ballistic missile submarines and plans to trigger mutual nuclear annihilation between the superpowers. The reason for this is that the villain considers modern civilization corrupt and decadent. City-like Atlantis has the capacity to support life above and below water, and it is meant to be the cradle of a new civilization, indifferent to human idiosyncrasies of the contemporary social order. The mythical and cosmic nature of Stromberg's mission is emphasized when he calls nuclear weapons "instruments of Armageddon", a biblical reference to the location of the final battle between good and evil.

The apocalyptic theme that downplays the role of ordinary humans on earth is heightened by repeatedly showing how human beings are "dwarfed by the physical environment around them".[29] This is evident in shooting locations such as the Pyramids, the Temple of Karnak and the Valley of Kings. Such locations also emphasize how civilization moves from Ancient Egypt's crumbling edifices to the metallic future of Atlantis.[30]

25 Sprague de Camp 1970.

26 Ellis 1999, 5.

27 Ellis 1999, 58.

28 Hanegraaff 1998, 309–312. There are more references to (mainly Greek) mythology in Bond films. For instance, the Greek woman Melina, whose parents have been killed, in For Your Eyes Only (John Glen, GB/US 1981) is compared with Elektra: "Greek women, like Elektra, always avenge their loved ones" (Chapman 2007, 177). Only some of them, such as the reference to Atlantis, are relevant to my study.

29 Chapman 2007, 153.

30 Chapman 2007, 153.

Although it has been suggested that "the villain is usually motivated by a compound of avarice and a utopian altruism",[31] most Bond villains do not fit this description. For instance, the purpose of SPECTRE – the main enemy of Bond throughout the series – has always been extortion and blackmail.[32] I find it relevant for my reading that Drax and Stromberg are not members of SPECTRE; they are megalomaniac players in a cosmic drama trying to create a new civilization, not just criminals attempting to get more money. The right to use the SPECTRE acronym was legally disputed.[33] This complication may explain why some villains do not belong to SPECTRE, and it shows how meanings can be produced rather accidentally.

Drax and Stromberg qualify as mythical, near-god characters who are about to bring something new into existence.[34] Their activities are supposed to be the mythic origin of the new civilization, but in the end Bond thwarts them.[35] In that sense, their activities are located in "the fabled time of the 'beginnings'".[36] Further, what is typical of myths is that they are considered separate from *logos*. The West has imagined itself as belonging to *logos*, rather than *mythos*. Myths, like Atlantis, refer to "the Rest". It is not that "the West" is really devoid of myths, but that myths are not part of its self-conceptualization; they belong to others. In this sense, Bond is the guardian of an empire who tries to ensure that the myths of others – and the aims of mythical villains – will not take place.

This reading gets further support when the ethnicities and nationalities of the main villains of the films are explored. Most of them are not British or American, although many are European. Not all villains originate outside "the West" in geographical terms, but the rarity of purely British (or even American) villains is notable. Francisco Scaramanga is Cuban/British, Elektra King is English, although the most villainesque character in The World is Not Enough (Michael Apted, GB 1999) is the Russian Renard. Brad Whitaker – one of the two main villains in The Living Daylights (John Glen, GB 1987) – is American, and Auric

31 Bennett/Woollacott 1987, 289.

32 Chapman 2007, 156, 191.

33 Bennett/Woollacott 1987, 192.

34 The narrow academic definition of myth is that it is a creation story, a sacred story of origins with gods, semidivine beings or culture heroes as key actors (Eliade 1968, 5–6; 1987, 95). Myth does not have to be defined so (Segal 2004, 5), but even with that definition some Bond villains can be called mythical.

35 By focusing on selected villains I demonstrate the construction of difference between a certain kind of West and a certain kind of Rest. It does not rule out the possibility of seeing Bond as a mythical character as well. For example, he might qualify as an example of one of the Jungian archetypes, *puer aeternus* – the eternal child in psychology and child-god in Greek mythology – who fails to secure a partnership (Bond's relationships are doomed to fail) or a job (Bond's job status is often under threat). A classic examination of such a figure is von Franz (2000). This, however, is not a very relevant route for my analysis.

36 Eliade 1968, 5.

Goldfinger, from Goldfinger (Guy Hamilton, GB 1964), has British citizenship, but he is played by a German actor and in the novel he is Latvian. Elliot Carver, from Tomorrow Never Dies, has an English name and he is played by a British actor, but he is from Hong Kong and he is also the illegitimate son of a German woman. Other villains are less related to Britain and the United States. The nationalities and ethnicities of the remaining principal villains are other than British or North American.[37] Kingsley Amis noted in the 1960s that "throughout Bond's adventures, no Englishman does anything bad".[38] Some commentators have also noted that many villains are physically disfigured in addition to having names and ethnicities that largely diverge from "the West", and from Britain in particular, suggesting that a certain racism is at play in Bond films.[39]

In sum, the examination of villains suggests that "religion" in the Bond world is part of how the difference between rational (Anglo-American) modernity and that which lies beyond modernity is constructed. This is further evidenced in the examination of the location of "religion" in Bond films, to which this analysis turns next.

IMPERIALIST ATTITUDE TO THE EXOTIC

A conscious marketing strategy for Bond films, deployed into order to reach an international audience, has been to use locations (almost) throughout the world, both by shooting in tourist attractions and by including exotic ceremonies and events.[40] For instance, when Bond is in Turkey, the Blue Mosque and Hagia Sophia are seen on the screen, and for India the Taj Mahal appears, although it has no role in the plot. In many films, rituals and celebrations are part of the story, such as the Junkanoo parade (Thunderball), the Sumo wrestling ritual (You Only Live Twice, Lewis Gilbert, GB/JP 1967), bull fighting (On Her Majesty's Secret Service) and the Day of the Dead (Spectre).

In many ways "religion" is an unhelpful category. For instance, Bond chases a villain in Mexico on the Day of the Dead, but the film does not deal with the event itself, which entails honouring the deceased, creating altars for them and visiting their graves. It is a syncretic pagan-Catholic celebration, but none of

37 Le Chiffre (Albanian, Jewish background), Rosa Kleb (Russian), Dr. No (Chinese-German), Ernesto Stavro Blofeld (Slav), Hugo Drax (German, although strong connections to France in the film), Karl Stromberg (Swedish in the novel), Alec Trevelyan (Russo-Austrian descent), Dominic Greene (French), Raoul Silva (presumably Hispanic), Gustav Graves / Tan-Sun Moon (North Korean), Franz Sanchez (Mexican), Kamal Khan (Afghan), Dr. Kananga / Mr. Big (Caribbean, fictive San Monique), Emilio Largo (Italian), Aris Kristatos (Greek) and Max Zorin (German).

38 Amis 1965, 86.

39 Black 2005, 19. On the basis of physically disfigured villains, it could be argued that disability is part of "the Rest", differentiated from the nearly perfect physique of Bond himself.

40 Bennett/Woollacott 1987, 206–207.

that is made explicit to the viewer. It is rather just another example of exotic events taking place in the world, usually outside "the West".

"Religion" is more explicit, however, in many other shots. What is typical for Bond films is that "religion" is more prominent when the events in the film take place outside "the West". There are plenty of passing (predominantly non-Christian) "religious" references in the films in non-Western locations. In Beirut, a belly dancer has a golden bullet in her belly button as a charm (The Man with the Golden Gun, Guy Hamilton, GB 1974). In Bangkok, a group of Buddhist monks walk in the background in a village where Bond chases Scaramanga, and there is a statue of Buddha in a temple (The Man with the Golden Gun). Islamic minarets and calls to prayer are visible and audible on many occasions, in Egypt, Turkey and Morocco, particularly in establishing shots or when one shot changes into another (The Spy Who Loved Me, From Russia with Love [Terence Young, GB 1963], The World is Not Enough, Skyfall [Sam Mendes, GB/US 2012] and The Living Daylights). In Azerbaijan, an Orthodox priest takes part in a demonstration against the construction of an oil pipeline, and he receives guarantees that the church building will not be demolished because of the pipeline (The World is Not Enough). In You only Live Twice, to protect his cover Bond even goes through a Shinto wedding ceremony in which the married couple drink sake. Soon after we see a procession which, we are told, is part of the funeral tradition. The same film contains long shots in which Shinto temples can be seen.

Michael Denning has argued that imperialist and racist ideologies in the Bond phenomenon are constructed through a narrative code of tourism.[41] He does not deal with "religion", but it plays a role in this. Namely, it is not simply that "religion" happens to be more prominent outside "the West"; "religion" is there to constitute the qualitative difference between "the West and the Rest". For the most part, "religion" is something that "the West" is not, although there are exceptions to this when "religion" is seen as compatible with the (presumably) rational "West", as will be shown later. For instance, the very first Bond movie, Dr. No, associates "religion" with irrational black superstition. The boatman Quarrel hesitates when Bond wants to be taken to Crab Key and comments, because of the dragon, that one should not test providence, to which Felix Leiter responds: "native superstition". When Bond realizes that "the dragon" is a tank with a flamethrower, he says: "You can forget the spooks, Quarrel". James Chapman suggests that the film is explicitly racist and colonialist as it aims to reaffirm white and British superiority in the time of a declining empire.[42] This agenda is epitomized by the film's characters, including Quarrel. If so, then Quarrel's

41 Denning 2015, 102.

42 Chapman 2007, 62.

"religiosity" is part of the production of such discourse, in which whiteness, rationality and "the West" are articulated as different from the black superstition of "the Rest". Black superstition is even more prominent in Live and Let Die (Guy Hamilton, GB 1973), a film I will deal with later in this article. Despite these examples, what is typical for Bond films is that "religion" is not highlighted: the films mostly avoid repeating and utilizing explicit negative stereotypes of Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Islam and indigenous religions, but they do not avoid having "imperial attitudes to the exotic".[43]

An imperial attitude to the exotic is perhaps most prominent in Octopussy (John Glen, GB 1983). It provides a tourist's view of India, with colourful bazaars and luxurious hotels but no indication of the poverty or social disharmony, of ethnic or "religious" conflicts. The same gaze is applied for "religion". In Udaipur, where Octopussy's palace is located, one can see Hindu temples in the background, Hindu processions, people walking on hot coals, holy men (saddhus) sitting on spiked mats, holy cows walking in the street and people swallowing swords. This is the Indian "religious" heritage Bond films offer, something that Bond is amused by but not attracted to. Octopussy is also the only Bond film with a significant Sikh character: Gobinda, a henchman of one of the main villains, Kamal Khan. Gobinda is a quiet, strong and tall man with fierce eyes, a dark beard and a turban. His Sikh identity is not mentioned in the film, but the turban and his character contribute to the overall othering and exoticism of "religion" and India, thus placing them as markedly different from "the West". The film utilizes at least one more stereotype about India: Octopussy tells Bond that she has revived the old octopus cult – a sort of by-product of her main business, which is the smuggling of diamonds – and the adherents, her loyal female warriors, are women throughout South East Asia who are looking for a guru or spiritual discipline. This is a modern version of the orientalist stereotype of deeply "religious" India, "the mystic east", where alienated people can find spiritual peace.[44]

While part of the landscape in many locations, Islam does not play a big role in Bond films, although two examples are worth mentioning. In Never Say Never Again, the SPECTRE operation is called "The Tears of Allah". After the villain, Largo, gives a necklace with the same name as the operation to his girlfriend, he explains that the name refers to the myth in which the Prophet Muhammad cried so much that an oasis was formed. It also refers to the location where the final fight between Bond's team and Largo's men takes place. In The Living Daylights, Bond teams up in Afghanistan with mujaheddin and their leader, Kamran Shah, who turns out to have been educated at Oxford. When we first

43 Black 2005, 205.
44 King 1999.

see Shah, he is being held in a Russian prison. He is unshaven and his hair is untrimmed, and when he claims that he has stolen nothing, the jailer responds: "You can tell Allah. When you see him." At this point Shah is depicted as a rather mentally unstable Muslim, but when he escapes from the prison and teams up with Bond, he changes into a civilized (Muslim) leader of the Afghan resistance movement. When Bond visits Shah's village, there are veiled women. Because Shah's people fight alongside Bond, the film takes the side of the Afghan resistance against the Red Army, but at the same time the film presents Afghans as a "mounted horde" who fight with horses against the Russians, although in reality the CIA was distributing missiles to the fighters at that time.[45] Furthermore, by portraying Afghan Muslim fighters dealing drugs, the film offers a morally ambivalent image, but it does not portray raging the Islamic fundamentalists so common in representations of Islam in Western popular culture. More than anything else, Islam is represented as exotic.

Although many Bond films have followed, and sometimes anticipated, political conflicts, Islam has not been in focus since 9/11. Many other global political trends have been referred to, as in the case of North Korea in Die Another Day (Lee Tamahori, GB/US 2002) – North Korea was defined as a rogue state and part of the "axis of evil" by George W. Bush. So while terrorist networks have been part of the plot of several films, Islamic terrorism has not.

In sum, for the most part, "religion" in Bond films belongs to the exotic "Rest" and not to the modern, rational "West". "Religion" is not usually an overtly negative issue but happens not to be part of "our" world. This strengthens the plausibility of racist and imperialist interpretations of Bond films, partially those constructed through "religion", but more significantly, this pattern highlights what "the West", in its own imagination, is not.

VOODOO AND TAROT

Live and Let Die is the only Bond film in which "religion" plays a more central role. The plot revolves around heroin farming and selling controlled by Dr. Kananga, the president of the fictive Caribbean state of San Monique and known as Mr. Big in New York. Bond's early visit to Harlem gives a taster of what is to come. Bond goes to a voodoo shop run by Mr. Big's gang. On the shelf are skulls on sale "for rituals" and Bond buys a fake snake, a hint that snakes will have a role to play in the film. The signs of the occult in the shops in Harlem mark the difference between rational white civilization and Harlem's black superstition, although the geographical location is in the United States.[46]

45 Black 2005, 151; Chapman 2007, 200.

46 See Black 2005, 13.

In San Monique, where the heroin is farmed, those who practise voodoo are black. Voodoo is depicted in scenes of ritual sacrifice, led by Mr. Big's voodoo priest Baron Samedi. The villains use voodoo to ensure that people do not go into the poppy fields. Thus voodoo is simply a tool of manipulation.

Mr. Big gets help from a virgin tarot card reader, Solitaire,[47] who is able to see future events in the cards and who is said to have the power of the Obeah.[48] The power of tarot cards and Solitaire's clairvoyance are undermined when Bond ensures the pack is composed of "The Lovers" cards only, thus deceiving Solitaire into having sex with him. As a consequence of losing her virginity, Solitaire loses her supernatural powers and becomes useless to Mr. Big. This marks her positional change from "religious" villain to part of Western rationality. In other words, Bond strips Solitaire of all that is not appropriate for "the West" and as a result she is able to be on his side. While I am not interested in whether this is Bond's intent,[49] the event fits very well with my general argument about the relevance of (particularly non-Christian) "religion" in constructing what does not belong to "the West".

When Solitaire has become useless to him, Mr. Big leaves her to be sacrificed in a voodoo ritual. Bond saves her at the last minute and throws the voodoo priest Baron Samedi into a coffin full of poisonous snakes. Many of those who are under the influence of Mr. Big are voodoo believers, whereas Bond, representative of the West, is not. This setting supports the racist and imperialist interpretations we have noted in which the other is seen as something that threatens us and therefore needs to be controlled. As Jeremy Black argues, the film "linked black power in the cities with crime and implied that a failure to control both black neighbourhoods and small Caribbean islands could undermine America. Dr Kananga is a harsh depiction of Caribbean independence."[50]

The final scene of the film is arguably the only supernatural moment in the whole Bond series. Bond and Solitaire are on a train and a laughing Samedi is perched on the front of the train. Yet by the standards of the Bond world, Samedi should be dead. This, however, has no bearing on the plot.[51] For the most

47 Solitaire is without doubt the main religion-related female figure in the Bond film series. Octopussy's women are living in a spiritual retreat and the character played by Hale Berry in Die Another Day is named Jinx, but these references play a minor role in the plot. This raises the question of why women do not have a more prominent representation among "the Rest". The answer could be that women are generally not conceptualized as threatening in Bond films, especially in early ones, and "the Rest" should be threatening to a certain extent to mark its difference from "the West".

48 "Obeah" refers to a system of sorcery in the West Indies and the Caribbean. The term is mentioned in the film but not explained.

49 See Daas 2011, 165.

50 Black 2005, 134.

51 Chapman 2007, 138–141.

part Bond films have sequences and plots that are implausible, but in them everything takes place in the natural world. In addition to the Samedi episode, perhaps the closest moment to a break with realism appears when Bond is able to feign a cardiac arrest in Die Another Day – something that is left unexplained in the film. In comparison with relatively similar adventure films such as the Indiana Jones series (Steven Spielberg, US 1981–2008), Bond films take place in a much more naturalized framework.[52] Voodoo, tarot and other supernatural settings are reserved for the villains and/or superstitious non-moderns located outside "the West", thus contributing to the construction of the difference between rational (predominantly white) moderns and non-rational "religious" others.[53] The exception to this rule is a certain kind of Christianity.

WRONG AND RIGHT KINDS OF "RELIGIOSITY" IN THE WEST: EVANGELICALISM AND CONFINED CHRISTIANITY

I have suggested that "religion" is much more prominent in Bond films when the events take place outside "the West". Thus in Goldfinger, which takes place in Europe and the United States, "religion" is reduced to Bond's comment made after Goldfinger has died that the villain is playing his golden harp. However, "religion" is not fully absent from the West: it is present in both "wrong" and "right" ways.

In Licence to Kill "religion" is present in the United States, but in the "wrong" way. The villain sets the prices for drugs through his employee Professor Joe Butcher, who operates as a televangelist preacher. While seeking pledges on television, he also sets prices for drugs. His preaching is largely a front for the illegal drug business. The portrayal of fake "religiosity" is enhanced by Butcher's running the Olympatec Meditation Institute as a cover for the drug trade. In addition, in one scene Professor Joe shows his own private meditation chamber, constructed from the sacred rocks, to a woman; it is clearly a place of seduction.[54] Through these depictions, the film frames evangelical Christianity as hypocritical and laughable and strips it of all sincerity. This is the only substantial description of evangelicalism in the history of Bond films, and it suggests that there is little to appreciate in this kind of "religiosity". It is the wrong kind of Christianity as it emphasizes intense emotions and experiences (as opposed to rational reflection), requires personal conversion (as opposed to taking "reli-

52 Black 2005, 177.

53 There is a long history of juxtaposing "our" approved lifestyle with voodoo in American cinema (Weisenfeld 2007). The key difference is that the elevated side of the binary used to be explicitly Christianity, rather than "our" modern and rational lifestyle (that can be Christian at least implicitly), but racial difference applies to both binaries.

54 See Black 2005, 155.

gion" as part of the cultural heritage) and does not confine itself to the private sphere (but is visible in public life).

There is also a "right" kind of Christianity portrayed in Bond films. It is present in the background of the Western lifestyle, in the landscape and in rites of passage. In many films church buildings can be seen and church bells heard, both in Britain and elsewhere in Europe, such as in Venice, Italy (Moonraker) and in France (Thunderball), indicating that Christianity is part of the ordinary cultural landscape.

More importantly, Christian rites of passage are common in Bond films. Funerals and church weddings are repeatedly depicted. Christian funerals are held in London (Skyfall), Scotland (The World is Not Enough), Rome (Spectre) and France (Thunderball). A church wedding can be seen in Live and Let Die, in which a boat chase that takes place in the United States involves one of the boats returning to the river across dry land where a wedding ceremony is taking place, adding a comic aspect to the chase. In For Your Eyes Only, Bond attends a wedding party in Greece where the viewer sees a Greek Orthodox chapel and Bond meets Q in a confessional box. Soon after the opening scene in The Living Daylights, Felix Leiter's church wedding ceremony takes place in the United States.

On the basis of these recurrent depictions I would argue that the proper place of "religion" in "the West" as portrayed in Bond films is exemplified by Casino Royale (Martin Campbell, GB/US/CZ/DE 2006), where Vesper Lynd says that because of her family's strict Catholic background, she cannot share a suite with Bond. Bond replies: "I do hate it when religion comes between us." "Religion" is subordinate to Bond's preferences and values, but it is not viewed negatively. In general, when Christianity is confined to its proper place, subordinate to public life – separate from politics, the law and science – it is accepted as part of what it is to be modern. This is what Talal Asad regards as part of a strategy of confinement by secular liberals and the defence of "religion" by liberal Christians, both emblematic of modernity.[55] Crossing the boundary between public and private, as exemplified by the evangelical Christianity of Professor Joe Butcher, turns the right kind of Christianity into the wrong kind of Christianity.

So far I have avoided the question of the "religiosity" of James Bond's character. There are references in some films. For example, when Bond gets married in On Her Majesty's Secret Service, the ceremony takes place in a church. At the beginning of For Your Eyes Only, Bond visits his wife's grave in a Christian cemetery, where a priest or monk makes the sign of the cross and delivers information about the forthcoming mission. In Bond's fake funeral in You Only Live Twice, he receives a military funeral and speeches include Christian refer-

55 Asad 1993, 28.

ences to, for example, the Resurrection. This suggests that Bond is at least a cultural Christian – someone who does not reject the tradition. There is further evidence that a certain kind of Christianity has been part of Bond's upbringing. At Bond's family estate in Scotland, Skyfall (also the name of the 2012 film), there is a "priest hole" from the time of the Reformation, a hiding place with a tunnel leading to the moors. M and Kincaide use it and head to the chapel. The tombstone for Bond's foster parents stands next to the chapel. These details do not tell us anything substantial about Bond's personal convictions, about which the films say very little. In Spectre, however, Bond responds to Dr. Madeleine Swann's question about his becoming an assassin by saying that he had two options: that or priesthood. The film contains no further explanation; whether this is a serious comment is perhaps deliberately left unclear.

Finally, while some authors have speculated about Bond's "religiosity", no consensus has been reached. Some label him a nonconformist Protestant; some state that he had a Calvinist upbringing; and some suggest that Bond is modelled after real-life Catholics.[56] Frank Smith sees Bond as a carrier of Christian culture and morality, but it has also been suggested that a reading of Bond novels "reveals no obvious religious belief".[57] These speculations take us relatively far from the films and are best noted but not given great weight. Suffice it to say that while Bond does not comment on his "religious" or "non-religious" standpoint in any explicit manner, he is content with Christian culture and its rites of passage as long as they are compatible with the (presumably) rational modern life of "the West".

WHY READING BOND FILMS THROUGH THE LENS OF "RELIGION" MATTERS

This article provides an overview of religion-related issues in Bond films but with some deliberate omissions. For instance, this analysis has not addressed the unintentional or metaphorical "religious" language that exists in Bond films as in mediated public discourse in general.[58] Rather, the discussion has principally focussed on a key pattern identified in Bond films: portrayals of "religion" in Bond films are strongly supportive of what has been called the discourse of "the West and the Rest". Stuart Hall's conceptualization of this discourse does not pay much attention to "religion", but I have argued here that on the basis of Bond films at least, "religion" is an integral part of it. For the most part, "religion" is placed on the side of "the Rest", as something exotic and/or irrational

56 Chattaway 2012.

57 Contessa 2010; Smith 2011.

58 For an analysis of metaphorical and unintentional "religious" language and "religious" expressions in British media, see Knott/Poole/Taira 2013.

that needs to be overcome by the rational West, or must be put in its proper place if it is part of "the West". Acceptable "religion" is found in "the West", portrayed as a familiar part of life. It is contained within the private sphere, taking a supportive role in rites of passage (particularly marriages and funerals) but not interfering with the relatively secular public sphere of politics and the economy. If it does play a public role, it is portrayed negatively, as in the case of evangelical Christianity. This pattern connects Bond films to the hegemonic discourse about the proper place of "religion" in Western modernity.

Reading Bond through the lens of "religion" adds to existing Bond studies – "religion" has not previously been examined extensively in Bond studies – and, more importantly, it shows the significant contribution made by "religion" to the discourse of "the West and the Rest" that is prominent in Bond films generally. Reading Bond through "religion" does not replace other readings, but it offers support for some aspects highlighted earlier. For example, Michael Denning argues that British spy thrillers, including Bond, provide a "compensatory myth of the crisis of imperialism",[59] and my analysis supports that interpretation in recognizing that portrayals of "religion" in Bond films associate exotic "religion" with "the Rest", distinct from the rational, imperial and modern West. Taking "religion" into account does not fundamentally alter existing interpretations of Bond, but it does give due prominence to an important dimension of the construction of the Bond world.

It is not only Bond studies that matter. The task was also to explore whether reading Bond through "religion" might contribute to the study of religion and popular culture more generally. When my students present their research ideas about religion and popular culture, often with the aim of examining "religious" figures, narratives and representations in a particular film or television series, I usually ask the "So what?" question: What do we know when we know it? Is it a more general example of something? For me, one of the reasons for reading Bond through "religion" is to suggest that popular films in which "religion" is not a dominant theme may offer insight into how we think about the aims of religion and popular culture studies in general and may challenge some typical focuses of the field. The analysis shows how portrayals of "religion" can contribute to the more general functioning of popular products; they maintain, reproduce, circulate and rearticulate powerful, often hegemonic cultural discourses. Bond films do many things, one of which is to contribute to the powerful discourse of "the West and the Rest", and "religion" is an integral part of that discourse. In other words, popular representations of "religion" play an important role in the maintenance of the idea of "the West" and what it is to be modern.

59 Denning 2015, 148.

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