Abstract: This paper develops a post-colonial reading of the latest James Bond series entry, Die Another Day (2002), a film directed by Lee Tamahori, the New Zealand artist most famous for his international art cinema hit, Once Were Warriors (1994). The paper argues that the film shifts away from the colonialist ideological position of the Cold War-era films in the Bond series. This argument is supported by two methodologies derived from critical theory. First, the film is read intertextually against Once Were Warriors, the Cold War Bond films, and the academic literature on these films. Second, since the film’s villain is a North Korean colonel who has become Caucasian through a radical surgical procedure, Richard Dyer’s approach to whiteness studies is used to assess the film’s surprising position on racial difference.

1. Introduction: The Post-Cold War James Bond

On the surface, the latest James Bond installment, Die Another Day (2002), delivers the expected for a film in this, the most popular film series in cinema history: exotic locales, witty one-liners, and explosions. The film begins with a stunt-filled sequence in which Bond (played by Pierce Brosnan) surfs on twenty-foot waves to land on a beach in North Korea. Bond, we learn, is investigating the trading of African conflict diamonds for hovercrafts. In a plan concocted by Colonel Moon, the rebellious son of a top-ranking North Korean general, the hovercrafts are to be used to glide over the land mines (“America’s cultural contribution,” as the villain labels them) in the demilitarized zone. When Bond is exposed as a British spy and captured, the film’s credit sequence begins, to the tune of a heavily synthesized Madonna song.

At the end of the credit sequence, which features a montage of North Korean soldiers torturing Bond, Lee Tamahori is listed as director over a close-up of the face of a female North Korean dominatrix with a predilection for scorpions. The credit comes unexpectedly: what was an international art director, famous for the beautiful post-colonial character study, Once Were Warriors (1994), doing by directing an entry in the decidedly pro-colonial James Bond cycle? While cynics might reply “selling out” and “making money,” Tamahori’s post-colonial influence on the Bond formula is discernible if we look at Die Another Day more closely.
Once Were Warriors depicts the social effects of post-colonialism in New Zealand on the Heke family, descended from Maori warriors, but who now live in the city. The family’s patriarch, Jake (played by Temuera Morrison), has become an abusive alcoholic, self-destructively channeling his violent rage into fighting in bars, and against his family and himself. The film eloquently studies the attempts of his wife Beth (played by Rena Owen) to keep the family together despite the hardships of poverty, culminating in a temporary escape to her impossibly green Maori village near the film’s end. The scorpions that torture Bond in a North Korean prison in Die Another Day also signify abusive violence in Once Were Warriors; Jake’s tattoo of a scorpion on his arm is visible constantly during his bouts of domestic violence.

This intertextual connection between Once Were Warriors and Die Another Day positions the latter film as a post-colonial reworking of the colonialist politics of the Bond series. To explore this idea this article uses a semiotic approach to intertextuality, derived from the work of Gerard Gennette. In New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics, Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne, and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis (1992, 203) review the development of intertextual criticism. The authors emphasize the way semiotics theorizes the function of art, seeing it as a discourse, not as a stable and discrete creative enterprise. As a discourse, semioticians argue, art works like films respond, “not to reality but to other discourses” (203). My present article sees the representation of colonialist discourses in Die Another Day in intertextual contact with current post-colonial cinematic practices, as well as with the previous colonialist discourses of the rest of the films in the Bond series.

Other Bond critics – notably Thomas Price (1992, 17), Jason Mulvihill (2001, 225), and Jeremy Black (2002/2003, 106) – have studied in detail the Cold War politics of the Bond series, and its subsequent destabilization in the post-Cold War era. However, none of the academic literature details the post-colonial implications of the loss of the Cold War as a stable representational grid for the action-adventure cinema. In his concluding remarks on Die Another Day, for example, Jeremy Black laments the film’s continuing post-Cold War sanitization of Bond, removing his sexism and his smoking and drinking: “All that is left is near-continuous violence, as the newest Bond release, Die Another Day, shows. Having once saved Bond, America is now in the process of making him into a stylish automaton – not quite yet on the order of a Schwartzeneggerian terminator, but then the series is not yet finished, is it?” (2002/2003, 112). Rather than lamenting the loss of the sexist, carnal, and I would add racist, components of the Cold War Bond, as Black does, this article proposes that the post-Cold War re-writing of the Bond discourse has had unnoticed effects on the series’ more basic representational parameters, in this case its engagement with issues of colonial liberation.
2. Colonialism and the James Bond Film Series

The Cold War films in the Bond series do not have a good track record in post-colonial terrain. The montage opening of *Diamonds Are Forever* (Guy Hamilton, 1971), in which Bond (played by Sean Connery) beats up men and women from around the world while looking for the criminal Blofeld (played by Charles Gray) culminates in a scene in which Bond rips off a woman’s bikini top in order to strangle her with it. Such a scene seems a perfect match for Robert Stam’s and Louise Spence’s definition of colonialist cinema, in their article, “Colonialism, Racism, and Representation”:

> The magic carpet provided by these apparatuses flies us around the globe and makes us, by virtue of our subject position, its audio-visual masters. It produces us as subjects, transforming us into armchair conquistadores, affirming our sense of power while making the inhabitants of the Third World objects of spectacle for the First World’s voyeuristic gaze. (1983: 4)

Although their example is a non-Bond Roger Moore vehicle, *The Wild Geese* (Andrew V. McLaglen, 1978), this analysis describes perfectly the *modus operandi* of not just *Diamonds Are Forever*, but every Bond film. High gloss, First Cinema Bond films celebrate the white spy’s ability to make the world a better place for corporate capitalism, and never question the West’s culpability in Third World poverty. As one example, *Diamonds Are Forever* uses an ironic disjunction between sound (a British official stating how trustworthy the black workers in South Africa’s diamond mines are) and image (black workers smuggling diamonds out of the mine) to argue that it is unreliable black people who are threatening the British economy by destabilizing the diamond market. If ever there existed a process of Otherization, this is it. While in reality, it is white Western capitalism that oppresses black Africans via the diamond trade, the film in essence blames black Africans for oppressing Britain!

Crucially, *Die Another Day* directly reworks the plot of *Diamonds Are Forever*. In the earlier film, Bond takes a hovercraft to cross the channel from Britain to the Netherlands in an attempt to expose Blofeld’s plan for using diamonds to create satellite weapons to destroy the nuclear arsenals of the superpowers. As I have already mentioned, *Die Another Day* returns to the hovercraft motif: now they are used to float over the mines in the Korean demilitarized zone, as a precursor to the deployment of the villain’s satellite weapon to destroy the zone altogether.

The racist position of the earlier Bond films is most egregiously flaunted in *Live and Let Die* (Guy Hamilton, 1973), about a Caribbean voodoo cult led by powerful (and within the sensibility of the film, therefore dangerous) black people. The film begins with a white spy in New Orleans being murdered by a group of African-Americans pretending to have a funeral in the French Quarter. After they murder the agent, they surreptitiously place his body in a coffin and begin a jazzy celebration, complete with viciously stereotypical wild dancing and riffs on brass instruments. It seemed inconceivable that Tamahori, known for his sensiti-
vity to post-colonial viewpoints, would continue such representations of minority peoples in directing a Bond film.

Not very far into *Die Another Day*, it becomes clear that the film is skillfully able to satisfy Bond fans with the usual genre conventions while at the same time subtly refusing their attachment to colonialist ideology. Bond chases Zao (played by Rick Yune), one of the escaped North Korean rebels, to a gene therapy clinic in Cuba. The clinic, whose purpose is ostensibly to increase Fidel Castro’s life expectancy, is revealed to actually be in the business of racial transformation. Bond discovers Zao halfway through the process of whitening his skin so that he will be morphed from an Asian soldier into a white-skinned European aristocrat.

What is to be made of a film, purportedly endorsing colonialist ideology, which has its villains trying to become white like James Bond? Whereas *Live and Let Die* used black skin as a marker of villainy, *Die Another Day* presents a complex engagement with the politics of whiteness. This is perhaps best expressed after the film’s opening torture sequence, in which a brutalized Bond emerges out of the North Korean prison as a caveman-like hairy ape. In no other Bond film is his idealized white body susceptible to such animalization. Both by showing Bond’s “animal” side and having the villains covet whiteness, *Die Another Day* parts with its Bond predecessors in refusing to present whiteness as a normative category of superiority.

### 3. The Whiteness of Bond

This essay, then, proposes to see *Die Another Day* in another light, to produce what Stam and Spence label an “aberrant reading” of its racial and colonialist politics. Whereas the film is (like many recent Bond films) a post-modern pastiche of references to its predecessors, I believe it also represents a different sort of post-modernity, a coherent post-colonial parody of the racial politics of these films. While I am deploying these terms from Frederic Jameson’s “Post-modernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism” in different ways than he originally did (1984), I will use them to demonstrate *Die Another Day*’s continuities with the previous films in the Bond cycle, while simultaneously demonstrating a textual realignment of these motifs in the direction of a critique of colonial treatments of whiteness. The details of this argument involve seeing *Die Another Day* as a hybridization of two particular Bond films: it follows the plot of the last Broccoli-produced Sean Connery film, *Diamonds Are Forever*, but reworks the racial imagery of the very first entry in the series, *Dr. No* (Terence Young, 1962).

In *White* (1991), his groundbreaking study of the representation of whiteness in cinema, Richard Dyer suggests that we look for films – his examples are *Jezebel* (William Wyler, 1938), *Simba* (Brian Desmond Hurst, 1955), and *The Night of the Living Dead* (George Romero, 1968) – which render whiteness visible, and therefore analyzable as a category of racial identity. I believe *Die Another Day* is
just such a film, one which uses whiteness as a metaphor to unhinge the generic conventions of Hollywood. In Tamahori’s film, the white privilege expressed in James Bond movies is unhinged from its colonialist moorings. The clearest example of this is the trajectory of the film’s villain, Colonel Moon (played by Asian actor Will Yun Lee), who successfully completes the racially transformative gene therapy to not just impersonate, but to actually become, the Caucasian Gustav Graves (played by white actor Toby Stevens).

Significantly, as a now white entrepreneur, Graves runs a mine in Iceland which serves as a front for laundering African conflict diamonds. He has not only changed race, but political sensibilities as well. As the Asian Colonel Moon early in the film, he critiques the First World for subjugating other peoples. He first tells Bond that he studied at Oxford and Harvard, where “I majored in Western hypocrisy,” and then angrily rants, “It’s pathetic that you British still feel you have the right to police the world.” Once transformed into the Western Graves, however, he presents a colonialist, capitalist worldview. He is not worried about the exploitation of African workers, but only interested in the power and money he will gain in selling diamonds. He gives the exploitation of the Third World an explicitly white face, as in reality the African diamond trade does funnel money into a white Western Europe.

Even Gustav’s name, Graves, resonates with whiteness studies: Dyer claims, sarcastically, in analyzing The Night of the Living Dead, that “If blacks have more ‘life’ than whites, then it must follow that whites have more ‘death’ than blacks” (1988: 59). Graves, like the zombies in Romero’s film, is not only a deathly white, but a deadly white.

The African conflict diamond plot in Die Another Day echoes the story trajectory of the earlier Bond film, Diamonds Are Forever. In this earlier film, Blofeld uses diamonds to construct a satellite for focusing the sun’s rays to destroy the superpowers’ nuclear arsenal. In Die Another Day, Graves uses the diamonds to finance the construction of a satellite capable of focusing the sun’s rays to destroy the American land mines protecting the Korean demilitarized zone.

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

Graves’ white face is explicitly linked to the colonialist project of other James Bond movies. When Bond finally discovers that Graves and Colonel Moon are one in the same person, Graves/Moon argues, “I chose to model the disgusting Gustav Graves on you [Bond].” Thus, the film presents the villain as psychotic, not for wanting to rule the world as does Dr. No (another Asian “troublemaker”), but for wanting to look like James Bond! In a film cycle devoted as almost no other to ego identification in its audience (we watch Bond because we fantasize about being Bond), this indictment of wanting to look like James Bond...
is quite an ideological turn. *Die Another Day* is also the first film in the series to explicitly suggest that Bond is hated not just because he is a spy who will put the villain out of business, but specifically because he is Western and white.

*Die Another Day*’s other source text, *Dr. No*, is also a quintessentially colonialist film. Like *Live and Let Die*, it begins with the murder of a white agent by black people. Its first image is a vicious, racist one: three black men, pretending to be blind (and “comically” accompanied by the song, “Three Blind Mice”), walk through Kingston, Jamaica, entering the grounds of the Queen’s Club, where they proceed to murder Strangways, a white British secret service operative. They then shoot his secretary in the chest, leaving a red blood stain on her white shirt. This opening first ridicules the black men with emasculating Stepin’ Fetchit racial stereotyping, but then reveals them to be dangerous murderers of white women. The moment thus contradictorily spans the gamut of colonialist treatments of black men – Coon and Buck – but coherently forwards a vision of colonialism as an ordered, beneficent system threatened by the chaos perpetrated by its charges.

This is, of course, inaccurate history: Jamaica became independent on August 6, 1962, two months before *Dr. No*’s London premiere on October 5, 1962 (Chapman: 2000, 78 and 88). In his cultural history of the Bond series, James Chapman aptly captures the absurdity of *Dr. No*’s plotline: “Bond’s intervention in Jamaica saves this colonial outpost from the potentially subversive threat of a sinister secret organization – a reaffirmation of white, British superiority at a time when, in reality, Britain was beating a hasty retreat from empire” (78).

As detailed in Cynthia Baron’s excellent essay (1994: 68), *Dr. No*’s treatment of the black men on the side of the British is hardly any better. Quarrel (played by John Kitzmiller), a Jamaican fishing boat captain, agrees to take Bond out to the radioactive island Crab Key to investigate. This is Dr. No’s lair: to protect it from local incursions, his men have been patrolling it with a flame-throwing tank, which Quarrel believes to be a dragon. Frightened to be on Crab Key, Quarrel drinks rum out of an enormous jug: the film makes fun of his drunkenness with comic music. After Quarrel has served his narrative purpose – getting Bond to Dr. No’s island – the film summarily dispatches him, having the dragon immolate him in a fiery death.

It is in Bond’s encounter with Dr. No himself, however, that the colonialist politics of the film best contrast with the post-colonialism of *Die Another Day*. After Bond has been captured by Dr. No’s men, he is led to dinner with the mysterious terrorist. There, Dr. No (played by the white actor Joseph Wiseman) tells Bond that, “I was the unwanted child of a German missionary and a Chinese girl of good family.” Dr. No is thus established as an extortionist tragic mulatto figure. His evil is driven by his unstable racial identity. In his own mind, however, Dr. No believes himself to have overcome this problem. He gloats, “And yet I became treasurer of the most powerful criminal society in China.” Bond is surprised by this, again invoking fixed racial categories, “It’s rare for the Tongo to trust anyone who isn’t completely Chinese.” The film confirms its support of
stereotyping, as the racial generalization Bond mentions proves to be right. Dr. No was not to be trusted, since he indeed betrayed the Chinese and stole $10 million in gold in order to finance his entry into global terrorism.

This sequence’s racial binary – Bond’s racial purity versus Dr. No’s mulattoism – serves as the solid foundation of the film series’ racism that Die Another Day unhinges. Whereas the dinner scene works to establish Bond’s difference from Dr. No, Tamahori’s film works to establish the connections between Bond and the villain Graves. In Graves’ first appearance, he is given a James Bond moment from a previous film.

About to be knighted by the Queen, Graves produces a spectacular arrival, parachuting onto the front steps of Buckingham Palace. Since he lands using a parachute made out of the British flag, this scene quotes almost directly James Bond’s escape at the opening of The Spy Who Loved Me (Lewis Gilbert, 1977). Perversely, Chapman reads this opening scene in The Spy Who Loved Me to excuse the film’s colonialism:

The sexist and patriotic values of the Bond films, therefore, rather than being criticized for their lack of political correctness, should be seen as the essential ingredients which make the Bond films so distinctive. Certainly the foregrounding of patriotic motifs – so brilliantly exemplified in the Union Jack parachute jump of The Spy Who Loved Me – has played an important role in the Bond series. (273)

While there is little evidence for such critical irony in the earlier film, Die Another Day’s intertextual reference of it is laced with it. For example, Graves arrives to the tune of punk band The Clash’s “London Calling” rather than the traditional Bond theme which accompanied Roger Moore. Whatever the politics of the moment, however, it is nonetheless remarkable in a Bond film when someone besides 007 gets to do the glitzy, celebratory stunts usually exclusively associated with the super spy.

The instability of the racial identification between Bond and the villain in Dr. No and in Die Another Day can be traced through the films’ differing treatment of the torture of the white body. In “The White Man’s Muscles” chapter in White, Richard Dyer analyzes films like Rambo: First Blood Part II (George P. Cosmatos, 1985) and Conan the Barbarian (John Milius, 1982), which use images of the naked, tortured white body in pain to emphasize the moral transcendence of whiteness. Fairly shocking for a Bond movie, Die Another Day’s credit sequence, normally devoted to Bond’s phallic gun pleasuring (or torturing, depending on your feminist position) naked women’s bodies, is devoted to an Asian woman’s torture of Bond’s body.

This graphic depiction of torture – Bond’s head is thrust into ice water, he is stung repeatedly by scorpions – contrasts to that in Dr. No. In the earlier film’s most complicated camera movement, we are spared the details of Bond’s torture at the hands of Dr. No’s men. We begin with a long shot of Dr. No standing above Bond, seated at the dinner table. As Dr. No tells his men, “Soften him up – I haven’t finished with him yet,” the camera pans left as we follow Dr. No walking away from the table. Once he arrives in the background of the image,
Dr. No turns and begins walking right toward the door. As we follow him, in the foreground, we catch a brief glimpse of Dr. No’s men punching Bond. We suddenly dissolve to Bond in his cell, without any discernible bruises.

The film is thus elaborately choreographed to protect the white heroic body from pain, despite the fact that the film’s sadism did not earlier spare us from watching Bond shoot Dr. No’s white spy, Professor Dent (Anthony Dawson), in the back, after he was disarmed. Conversely, *Die Another Day* builds an equally elaborate montage sequence, but this time to emphasize the white heroic body in pain. Significantly, Tamahori’s scene stops short of stripping Bond and fetishizing his torture *à la* Rambo. In this way, *Die Another Day* produces a critique of the two poles of the treatment of the white body in pain: it neither protects the white body magically, as *Dr. No* does, nor does it torment the white body so much that it transcends into the terrain of moral superiority, as happens in the films studied by Dyer.

The linkage between the Bond and Graves characters continues to be developed as *Die Another Day* proceeds. One trope of the Bond films is that the spy must have an inconclusive battle with the villain early in the film. Here they test each other’s powers without lasting consequence. In the scene fulfilling this genre requirement, Graves and Bond are revealed to be equally barbaric. Graves’ lover, Miranda Frost (played by Rosamond Pike), frequents a fencing club where Graves and Bond first come to blows. The at-first civilized fencing match between the two increases in brutality and finally devolves into caveman-like brawling, reminiscent of Jake’s barroom scuffles in *Once Were Warriors*.

The sequence begins with the veneers of civilization intact. Both men wear protective fencing outfits and are connected to electronic sensing equipment that judges their prowess with foils, without the risk of injury. Realizing that Bond and Graves are about to engage in a pre-pubescent battle over manhood, Frost’s fencing instructor, Verity (played by Madonna) leaves in a huff, exclaiming “I don’t like cockfights.” With that comment, Verity lives up to her name; the fencing match indeed gradually devolves into a street fight. The men complete a few half-hearted passes with the foils, then up the stakes by switching to heavier swords. Graves takes off the wires and his shirt to detach himself from the machinery of civilization, and soon the two are tumbling through the fencing club, destroying priceless artwork and furniture as they go. They then switch to fighting with medieval broadswords, crash out of the club, and finally come to fisticuffs in a fountain outside. A thin veneer of civilization returns only when Miranda angrily stops them. Bloodied and battered, they reluctantly shake hands to end their first encounter.

In other Bond films, this initial encounter between Bond and the villain is used to establish the psychosis of the villain and the civilized control of James Bond. For example, in *Never Say Never Again* (Irvin Kershner, 1983), the villain Largo (played by Klaus Maria Brandauer) challenges Bond to a computer game that simulates the economic and military control of the world. As the stakes of the game increase, greater electric shocks are delivered to the game players’ hand
controls. When the pain becomes unbearable, the loser of the game is forced to let go of the controls, lest he be seriously injured. Bond loses the first round of the game, but once he learns how to play, he coolly defeats the villain, forcing him to let go of his controls and fall to the floor, writhing in agony.

In the swordfight in Die Another Day, there is no distinguishing the behavior of the supposedly civilized Bond and the ostensibly psychotic Graves. At this point in the film, it has not been revealed to the audience that Graves is indeed Moon, who the film has clearly established as psychotic. In the opening North Korean sequence, we see Moon kicking a bag stuffed with a human being. When he stops, he tells his assistant Zao to “get [him] a new anger management therapist.” Thus, with the fencing club brawl, the connection between Bond and Graves has been made; when we learn later that Graves and Moon are one and the same, it becomes difficult to dismiss that Bond can be just as barbaric as the criminal he is trying to thwart.

The tension between criminal and hero that Tamahori draws out in Die Another Day is in keeping with the defensiveness of the recent Bond films about 007’s sexuality and his proclivity for violence. The newly female M (played by Judy Dench) finds Bond a dinosaur relic from a now passé Cold War machismo, and tells Bond after he’s been released from North Korean captivity: “You’re no use to anyone now.” This of course forces Bond to once again demonstrate his current and lasting potency.

As if to attenuate this total collapse between hero and villain, the film presents a black man with dreadlocks at the end of the swordfight to soften the effects of Bond’s destructive behavior. After Bond and Graves have destroyed the club, the concierge (played by Oliver Skeete) says to Bond, “The place needed re-decorating anyway.” While clearly meant to have us side with Bond, and against the fencing club’s (and by extension Graves’) phony civilized stuffiness, the comment by Skeete does not actually make a distinction between Graves’ and Bond’s barbaric behavior. The casting of Skeete in the role of wry commentator on the destruction of the exclusive club is particularly apt. A Rastafarian equestrian show jumper who has minor celebrity status in Britain, Skeete is very much a post-colonial figure.

Such is one among many of the deliberate post-colonial interventions in Die Another Day; here the film fills its subsidiary roles with an attention to racial difference. Certainly not all of these interventions are liberational: one of Graves’ henchmen, Mr. Kil (played by the Maori actor Lawrence Makoare) is as problematic a racial stereotype as Oddjob (played by Harold Sakata), the hat-throwing murderer from Goldfinger (Guy Hamilton, 1964). Mr. Kil comes to a vicious demise: the CIA spy Jinx (played by Halle Berry) cuts off his arm and uses his dead limb to open a handprint lock within Graves’ compound.

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

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

But it is Moon’s trajectory, from an Asian colonel to the white Gustav Graves, around which the film builds its strongest post-colonial critique. Not only does Moon transform into a successful white aristocrat, but toward the end of the film, he dons a cybernetic suit so that he may control Project Icarus, a satellite designed to harness the power of the sun as a weapon against the Earth. The cyborg motif is, of course, another return to Dr. No: in the earlier film, the madman’s arms were so badly burned during his experiments with radiation, he has replaced them with black iron mechanical ones, capable of squashing metal icons of Buddha, but not of lifting himself out of the vat of boiling coolant where he ends up during the climactic fight with Bond. Again, Graves and Dr. No are similar (both cyborgs) but different (Dr. No is forced to accept cybernetic limbs, while Graves dons the suit of Western technological dominance willingly).

As Bond fights Graves in the cybernetic suit, Moon has followed the full Western trajectory away from his originary Third World identity. Born in North Korea, a country broken in two due to no small part by the actions of Western ideologues, he leaves to attend university at Oxford and Harvard. Moon then begins a relationship with Miranda Frost, a blonde Olympic fencer. When neither of these gestures allows him acceptance in the West, he whitens his skin genetically. Now, after all that, he still needs to fully embrace Western technology, by enveloping himself in it.

On the 747 jetliner from which he controls Icarus, Graves/Moon confronts his father, General Moon (played by Kenneth Tsang), from whom he has taken control of the North Korean military. Shocked to see both his son’s white and cybernetic skins, the father responds to his son’s monstrousness: “My son. What have you done to yourself?” The general is appalled at the depths to which his son has fallen. The father taught his son pride in an Asian tradition: Moon quotes The Art of War for his father’s pleasure. Whereas Moon’s cultural reference is to Asian military power, Dr. No’s is to British power: as Bond enters Dr. No’s dining room, he passes Francisco Goya’s portrait of the Duke of Wellington, one of the long-standing jokes in the Bond series. At the time of the filming of Dr. No, the portrait had recently been stolen. The film’s joke was that Dr. No was the thief. The gag continued in later films. In Diamonds Are Forever, for example, the portrait appears in the penthouse apartment of Willard Whyte (a.k.a., Blofeld), another split villain motif which is racialized in Die Another Day.
Furthermore, in *Die Another Day*, the general sent his son to the West in the hopes of defeating the North Korean hardliners, of building “a bridge with the West.” The General laments bitterly that all the West did “was to corrupt him.” The temporality of the film is important here: if one traces back from the film’s release date in December 2002, back through the 14 months during which Bond was purportedly in captivity, his capture by the North Koreans would have taken place in October of 2001, during the crisis immediately following the terrorist attacks on September 11.

This timeline is certainly supported by M’s comments to Bond upon his return. In discussing his uselessness in an equally abandoned London Underground station, M tells Bond, “the world has changed while you’ve been away.” Clearly *Die Another Day* is a film concerned with the issues that surround 9/11. Tamahori has positioned General Moon as a hero for trying to build a meaningful relationship with the West, and yet also gives the character angry lines about the corruption that is found there. In a world where George W. Bush was saber-rattling against North Korea – Bush of course later moved on to bombing Afghanistan and invading Iraq – Tamahori has painted a portrait, not of straightforward imperialism, but of a complicated post-colonial understanding of international relations.

A return to the film’s opening offers another way of understanding its interest for post-colonial criticism. 007’s surfboard entrance in the film references several other Bond films. In *A View to a Kill* (John Glen, 1985), Bond rescues microfilm material from a compound in Siberia by skiing to freedom. Mid-way, as his skis are blown off his feet, he pulls the runner off a demolished snowmobile, and uses it as a snowboard accompanied by Beach Boys surfer music.

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

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

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

Both Heart of Darkness, and Coppola’s film version of it set in Vietnam, suffer from this imperialist vision: these texts do not take seriously the representation of African and Vietnamese people, respectively. Once focused on the complex representation of the racial identities of the villains in Die Another Day, the same cannot be said of Tamahorri’s film.

For example, the effects of white oppression on people of color is indicted directly by the film. During the sequence in Cuba, the ugliness of the white tourist is deliberately exposed. An obnoxious Australian violently threatens the Third World people who serve him at the hotel where he awaits passage to the gene therapy clinic (where we can only assume he’s not going to be changed into a person of color: the desire for racial change is not a two way street, alas). At one point, the Australian sticks a gun into a Cuban waiter’s crotch, threatening to turn him into “Fidel Castrato.” His white companions laugh hysterically at this “joke.”

Clued into the Australian’s nasty behavior by the African-American spy Jinx, James Bond the next day breaks into his hotel room, knocks him unconscious, and steals his ticket for passage to the clinic. Bond gently says hello to a Cuban prostitute in the Australian’s room. Knowing that the racist bully is not worth making a fuss over, she responds to Bond’s violence against her john with complete and utter indifference.

In the film’s most celebrated intertextual reference to the Bond film cycle, Jinx, as 007’s American CIA partner, emerges out of the ocean, bikini-clad with knife at her side, as an homage to Ursula Andress’ similar appearance in Dr. No, the first film in the Bond series. The original scene with Andress was recently voted the “Sexiest screen moment of all time” in November 2003 by a popular opinion poll conducted in Great Britain. This scene is Die Another Day’s most problematic “update” of the Bond sagas: it argues that while Bond’s partners in the early films always had to be white, the modern Bond is permitted a multicultural sampling of lovers. Bond can now use his sexual prowess to seduce all women, not just the white ones.

Bond, of course, has had sex with women of color before. Most significantly, he goes to bed with May Day (played by Grace Jones), the African-American villainess of A View to a Kill. Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott end their cultural studies book on the Bond series, Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero, with a study of this relationship in A View to a Kill, which was
the last Roger Moore Bond film. May Day, a muscular black woman, is both lover and partner-in-crime of the villain Zorin (played by Christopen Walken).

The sequence begins with May Day teaching Zorin karate. As they fight, they fall over, and Zorin thrusts himself on top of May Day. They begin to make love. They are interrupted by an intruder alert alarm as Bond infiltrates their compound. They go looking for him, only to find him naked in May Day’s bed. Zorin instructs May Day to take care of Bond. She enters the bedroom, strips, and gets into bed with him. As Bennett and Woollacott describe it: “When Bond leans over to her, however, she roughly thrusts him aside and – with his pliable acquiescence – places herself on top of him leaving the viewer with little doubt as to who is going to do the lovemaking to whom. In brief, Bond’s sexuality, like his Englishness, is little more than a damp squid” (1987: 292). Thus, *A View to a Kill* has Bond’s encounter with an African-American woman take place within the confines of a delicate ballet of power, where she is merely a surrogate for the white fascist’s (he’s a genetic superman created in a Nazi concentration camp) desire to dominate Bond.

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

Comparatively, the sex in *Monster’s Ball* is so desperate it cannot be said to be romantic or normalized. Berry’s character has been alone because her husband was executed, while Billy Bob Thornton’s racist prison-guard character pays a diffident prostitute to have sex in which their bodies hardly ever touch. In *Die Another Day*, on the other hand, Bond is presented as a distinctly non-racist lover, and the nature of Jinx’ racial identity is muted as much as possible. Unlike *A View to a Kill*, there are no diegetic differences in power to remind us of the inherent differences in cultural power that race is meant to signify in racist American culture.

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

4. Conclusion

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

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

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

Works Cited: