Socio-Political Influence on the Ideologies of Daniel Craig's Bond Films: The Power That Lies Within

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Abstract

James Bond is arguably one of the widest-reaching, longest-standing and most influential film franchises of our time. In this sense it can also be seen as a source of great power, a medium by which certain ideologies can be conveyed to many people. When it comes to deciphering these ideologies and their origins, much as been written about the influence of the Cold War on the ideas and themes contained within the earlier Bond films. However, the socio-political backdrop for the Daniel Craig era has been rather different so how might this have effected its ideologies? Craig's films are interesting to look at in this regard as they have been particularly sensitive to socio-political shifts even within the actor's tenure. It can be argued that contextual factors such as the Anglo-American War on Terror and the London 2012 Olympics have contributed to a shift in the representation of Bond's national identity between *Casino Royale* and *Skyfall* and, most recently, *Spectre* represents another set of values and ideas that can be linked with the relinquished interest in Britain post-Olympics, and growing fears surrounding ISIS and public surveillance. This paper attempts to map some of the ideas and themes conveyed in Craig's Bond films to possible influences from their socio-political contexts, with a particular concentration on *Skyfall* and *Spectre*.

Introduction

Gramsci's concept of Hegemony, now a canon text for social theorists, argues that the public are 'living out Marxist thought' by engaging in cultural activities that reinforce dominant ideology (Gramsci, cited by Fiori, 1971, p. 112). Bringing this concept into a contemporary environment, scholars such as Todd Gitlin, argue that popular culture and media texts serve as important tools in conveying dominant ideology of the time:

> The artifacts are produced by professionals under the supervision of cultural elites themselves interlocked with corporate and, at times, state interests; meanings become encased in artifacts, consciously and not; then the artifacts are consumed. (Giltin, 1987, p. 240)

Gitlin goes onto explain that the media's role in promoting dominant ideology is a complicated one that involves acknowledging a small amount of 'watered-down' oppositional opinion in order to convince the public that their interests are being reflected: 'The hegemonic commercial cultural system routinely incorporates some aspects of alternative ideology and rejects the unassimilable.' (1979, p. 251)

In light of these theories, it seems important to look at the ideologies conveyed by the James Bond films, which have reached such a wide audience since they were first brought to the big screen over 50 years ago. While the ideas and themes in the earlier James Bond films can be linked to the influences of the Cold War, the Daniel Craig era presents us with a new set of ideologies derivative of a more contemporary socio-political environment. Shifts in the contextual factors within the Craig era itself can also be linked to differing ideas and themes between each of his films and *Skyfall* (Sam Mendes, 2012) and *Spectre* (Sam Mendes, 2015) present interesting case studies as the former indulged in the hype surrounding Britain during the London 2012 Olympics while the latter is placed in the aftermath of this British love affair: Scotland voting to leave Britain and a renewed fear of terrorism via ISIS.

This paper will attempt to map links between some of the ideas and themes in Daniel Craig's Bond films and socio-political factors of the time, with a particular concentration on *Skyfall* and *Spectre*. As part of this aim to establish links between Bond film ideology and contextual factors it is important to understand the enduring relationship that the franchise has with its socio-political environment.

The Bond franchise and political ideology

The Bond franchise is one that has grown out of socio-political influence. It began life as a series of spy novels written by Ian Fleming, a former naval intelligence officer, who used his experiences in the Second World War to influence his stories. In the 1960s the novels were translated to the big screen via North American producers Albert R. Broccoli and Harry Saltzman at a time when the Western news and political agenda was dominated by the Cold War: a state of political and military tension, following the Second World War, between powers in the Western Bloc (including the United Kingdom and the United States) and the Eastern Bloc (led by the Soviet Union). The influence of the cold war on the early Bond films is clear as they were aimed at Western audiences who watched the British spy hero single handedly save the day in a world constantly threatened by tensions with the Soviet Union. Many of the Bond villains were explicitly linked to the Eastern Bloc and the SPECTRE

organisation of villains provided an obvious reference to the real life Soviet counter-intelligence department SMERSH.

Writing about ideological influence on the early Bond films, cultural sociologist Tony Bennett considers the context for the 1960's Bond films: the Cold War and 'swinging Britain.' He argues that in planting the narrative in an ongoing battle between the Capitalist West and the Communist East, and regularly showing instances of Bond's free and independent sexuality as a Western citizen in a hierarchy-less society where anything is possible, 'Bond provided a mythic encapsulation of the then prominent ideological themes of classlessness and modernity' (1987, p.34). Bond was effectively promoting Western ideals. Tony Bennett summarises this interplay between Bond films, ideology and audience by arguing that political and cultural ideologies of the time infiltrate both the construction of the films and their reception as part of a three-way relationship in which the ideologies 'mediate the relations between texts and audiences' (1987, p.6)

The cold war influence on the Bond franchise endured throughout the 1970s and 1980s as the films continued to show our sexually free British hero, thwarting villains associated with the Eastern Bloc and maintaining a rivalry between the Security Services of the British (MI6) and the Soviet Union (KGB). This continued all the way up into Pierce Brosnan's tenure in the 1990s with the plot of *Goldeneye* (Martin Campbell, 1995) being particularly influenced by the history of British-Soviet relations.

However, following the end of the Cold War and the change in the socio-political landscape throughout the 1990s and 2000s it is useful to consider Tony Bennett's model when looking at Daniel Craig's revised version of Bond. Leading up to Craig's first Bond film, *Casino Royale* (Martin Campbell, 2006), the socio-political landscape was dominated by the Anglo-American war on terror and it can be argued that this had an effect on the downplaying of Bond's Britishness and Craig's portrayal of a more Anglo-American hero, representing Western values in the face of terrorism. The plot of *Casino Royale* concerns Bond's mission to bring down a financier of terrorism, he even thwarts a terrorist plot to blow up a plane, and Craig's interpretation of a more vulnerable hero, both emotionally and physically through the sight of his injured body, signals a move for the British hero to adopt traits of a more American one, thus becoming a representative for the West. As Lisa Funnell explains, Casino Royale took Bond in a new direction towards a physical body focus, reminiscent of the American action film stars of the 1980s and also in line with an 'emerging trend in Hollywood… to integrate the moral dilemmas of the new man with the visual iconography of the hard body' (2011, p.461).

In Craig's second film, *Quantum of Solace* (Marc Forster, 2008), any trace of Bond as a British hero seems almost eradicated as a combination of corrupt government and service officials, an organisation of evil insiders and a personal vendetta lead Bond to relinquish clear national allegiances. Writing about this in 2011, Georgia Christinidis also discusses this shift in Bond's national identity and states that 'the process that has, over time, turned him into an international hero has been completed' (2011, p.87).

However, in *Skyfall*, there is a rather dramatic shift to a patriotic, British Bond and this is a theme that was made explicit before its release through promotional material, thus it represents an important ideology for the film. It is interesting to look more closely at this theme and to consider the socio-political context that may have influenced its inclusion.

Skyfall

The sense of British nationalism is rather overwhelming when looking at the preview literature and marketing materials that were released in the build-up to *Skyfall*. Several of the film posters and sponsor products use the flag of Britain, the Union Jack, or Big Ben to establish a firm affiliation with Britain. The images released to film magazines such as *Empire* for their preview article on *Skyfall* (entitled 'In Defence of the Realm') also evoke patriotism as Bond looks out over London, one can see Big Ben and a Union Jack flying in the background, thus making his Britishness explicit. This particular *Empire* article also refers to the rather large selection of well-known British cast and crew members hired for Skyfall: the director Sam Mendes, Judi Dench, Albert Finny and Ralph Fiennes. It certainly feels like the producers were trying to strengthen Bond's affiliation with Britain. Leading up to Skyfall's release it was also confirmed that Adele would perform the theme song for the film, the first recognisably British act to do so since Duran Duran with *A View To A Kill* in 1985. (Garbage, who performed *The World Is Not Enough* in 1999, were a Scottish-American rock band and thus not distinctly British.)

The first teaser trailer released for *Skyfall* also begins with Bond standing on a rooftop looking out over a recognisable London backdrop as we hear a voice say 'country' and Bond responds with 'England'. The British references continue as the audience is presented with images of Union Jack adorned coffins and the crashing of an iconic London underground train.

Perhaps the most obvious indication of *Skyfall*'s British nationalist ideology was the James Bond sketch Daniel Craig filmed for the London Olympics opening ceremony in July 2012. In this short sequence, Bond is taken out of his fictional world and portrayed as if he really is working for the British Queen as he reports to her at Buckingham Palace. In an attempt to further cement James Bond's association with British nationalism in the run up to *Skyfall*'s release, the producers also allowed images of Bond to be used in a VisitBritain campaign for the British Tourist Authority.

With such dominant themes of British patriotism, especially after two films that had downplayed Bond's British national identity, it is interesting to consider the socio-political context for *Skyfall*, which may have influenced this shift in ideology.

Worldwide interest in Britain began to grow in late 2010 with the royal engagement of Prince William and Princess Katherine. A media frenzy ensued and the Wedding was broadcast live worldwide with people travelling from other countries to catch a glimpse of the couple going into Westminster Abbey. This event demonstrated that traditional British ceremonies, such as a Royal Wedding, are highly valued by a global audience. At this point, international audiences were also looking to Britain as

it prepared for both the Olympic Games and the Queen's Jubilee in 2012. *Skyfall* seemed to capitalise on this global interest in Britain and ideas of Britishness.

Looking more closely at the film itself one can analyse how these themes of British nationalism are represented in order gain an understanding of the particular ideas that are being conveyed.

Skyfall makes its ideological shift from *Quantum of Solace* explicit through the 'reincarnation' of Bond. In the opening sequence, Bond appears to be killed, and is presumed dead by his employers at MI6. Following this, a terrorist attack at MI6 kills several of Bond's colleagues and M (played by Judi Dench) looks over their Union Jack adorned coffins in one of the strongest nationalist moments of the film. Linking Great Britain's flag with death in this way is to emphasise that the murder of British subjects has taken place: an attack on people who serve British society and therefore an attack on British-ness itself. This is what provokes Bond to 'resurrect' himself by coming out of hiding and 'reporting for duty'. The patriotic Bond of old seems to have been reborn. This is made even more explicit when the villain of the film, Da Silva, later asks Bond what his hobby is to which he replies 'resurrection'.

Skyfall includes an unprecedented use of British settings for a Bond film and this emphasises Bond's 'home turf' and the foreign terrorist, Da Silva, from which he is defending it. An action sequence set on the London underground sees Bond chasing Da Silva through the iconic train carriages and out onto the streets of Westminster. Later, in the film's climax, comes the literal depiction of Bond and M defending the country as they turn Bond's Scottish estate into a fortress and British actor Albert Finney joins in the fight against Da Silva. There is real sense of patriotism here - of a 'coming together' to fight for Great Britain - a country that's worth fighting for. In this sense the producers have made a distinct decision to move away from the premise of *Casino Royale* and *Quantum of Solace* whereby the villains were working within the trusted organizations of the West. In the case of *Skyfall* the threat is from the outside coming into Britain to wreak terror and it is up to Bond to save the day. This plays on the idea of British pride, already prevalent thanks to the Royal Wedding and the Olympics mentioned earlier. This also taps into Western audiences' continuing anxieties over terrorism following the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent war on terror.

Skyfall was a huge success making $1 billion internationally by the end of 2012. However, since then the global hype surrounding Britain has well and truly died down and it can be argued that the British public itself have become somewhat disillusioned with its own country. This makes for an interesting shift in the socio-political backdrop for Craig's next outing as Bond: *Spectre*.

Spectre

In 2013 British comedian Russell Brand became a champion for the British public's growing frustration with its political establishment. Public anger and unrest had previously been expressed through the nationwide riots in 2011 and in public outcry at the MP expenses scandal: the revelation that members of British parliament had been over-claiming their expenses and thus using tax payer's money to fund things such as their second homes. However, Russell Brand, being a public figure, personified this anger and was able to infiltrate the 'home turf' of politicians by

challenging them on news and political television shows such as the BBC's Question Time. In July 2013 Brand was even interviewed by political commentator, Jeremy Paxman, on Newsnight, at which point Brand called for a revolution. Since this Britain has seen a Scottish independence referendum, in which Scottish residents very nearly voted to separate Scotland from Britain and this event has since sparked conversations about Wales holding their own independence referendum. The general election of 2015 also presented further evidence of the public's disillusionment with British government as much of the lead-up coverage predicted a hung parliament in which no party gains enough votes for an overall majority. When the results came in the Conservative party won with a very slender majority. Certainly these events demonstrate that the former sense of British pride and patriotism that was rife leading up to the release of *Skyfall* has disintegrated somewhat, but what other ideas can one deduce about the socio-political context for *Spectre* on a wider scale?

Terrorism continues to dominate Western political and public agendas and the emergence of terrorist organisation ISIS has been a big part of this. The last few years have seen online propaganda videos created by ISIS aimed at Western countries and footage showing the beheadings of captured American and British civilians. ISIS initiated attacks have also included the shooting of European holiday makers in Tunisia in 2014 and the attacks in Paris in November 2015 that have resulted in the deaths of 130 civilians. This has added fuel to the Anglo-American war on terror as British and American military presence in Iraq and Syria has been increased to fight against ISIS.

The use of media and technology by terrorists has been a factor in the increase of public surveillance through laws such as America's Patriot Act and the UK's Investigatory Powers Bill, which is currently being drafted. However, this has, arguably, created its own form of fear as the loss of information privacy has become an issue of much debate and concern. In 2013, Edward Snowden, a former CIA employee, claimed that a number of global surveillance programs were being run by America's National Security Agency with the cooperation of European governments. The most controversial of these programs has been PRISM, which was described by Glenn Greenwald of the Guardian newspaper as allowing officials, 'to obtain targeted communications [including internet search history, emails, file transfers and live online chats] without having to request them from the service providers and without having to obtain individual court orders.' (June 2013) Snowden's revelations have fueled many concerns about government surveillance.

With all of these socio-political factors in mind how might they have had an influence on the ideology of *Spectre*? When looking at the marketing and publicity material for the film one can identify some emerging themes in line with the relinquished interest in Britain and British pride after *Skyfall*.

As soon as the film's title, *Spectre*, and the cast and characters were announced, back in December 2014, there was much speculation about whether the film was going to delve deeper into Bond's dark past. This is not only because the title indicated the return of the organization SPECTRE that had given Bond his most formidable enemies in the earlier films, but also because Christoph Waltz had been cast as Oberhauser, who, in the original novels, acted as a father figure to a young Bond and was later shot, leading Bond to seek revenge. The first publicity shot of Craig for

Spectre is very simple and serious, perhaps an indication of this delve into Bond's dark roots and certainly a far cry from the image of a suited and booted Craig in front of a London backdrop, which was the dominant image from the *Skyfall* publicity material. *Spectre*'s move away from such British nationalist themes can be seen to reflect the drop in interest in Britain after *Skyfall*.

Looking at the teaser trailer for *Spectre*, the first shot used seems to visually depict and thus confirm this breakdown of British patriotism as we see the bombed wreckage of the iconic MI6 building in London. The trailer goes onto include the villainous Mr White from Craig's first two films and also shows us what looks like a meeting of a secret organisation. This indicates a return to the ideas set up in *Casino Royale* and *Quantum of Solace* whereby a secret organization of villains dispatched members to infiltrate the trusted political and security organizations of the West, including MI6. This had Bond not knowing who to trust and brought British organisations' integrity into question - a far cry from the distinctly good British versus the evil foreign terrorist in *Skyfall*.

This trailer also indicates that Bond himself has something dark to hide as he holds a photograph and Moneypenny tells him 'you've got a secret, something you can't tell anyone.'
The first full trailer for *Spectre* expands on this when it seems this secret is causing Bond to act behind the back of MI6 as his boss, M scolds 'you had no authority…none!' and Bond later asks Q to make him disappear. It is also later suggested that he has a link with the SPECTRE organization. All in all this suggests a far cry from the patriotic, country-serving Bond of *Skyfall*.

In the film itself, it is indeed Bond's personal, unauthorised journey to find out about a dark element of his past, which drives the narrative. However, a subplot also sees Bond and MI6 dealing with the repercussions of terrorist attacks. The socio-political influence here is made particularly explicit when Bond is informed of a bombing in Tunisia, thus tapping into the audience's memories and fears surrounding the shootings there in 2014 and reinforcing the 'war on terror' agenda. As *Spectre* moves along we learn that it is terrorist attacks like this that have led to the development of Central Network Surveillance (CNS) an organisation led by the sinister 'C', who wants total public surveillance and regards James Bond and MI6 as obsolete in today's world of terrorism. The film then sets out to prove 'C' wrong, of course, by showing the negatives of surveillance and with Bond and MI6 ultimately saving the day. One can argue that this taps into the debates surrounding information privacy and maintains the interests of the audience in this way. However, in this surveillance subplot, it is also interesting that so much onus is placed on 'C' as a bad guy. Firstly, the actor playing C, Andrew Scott, is recognisable to Western audiences as the evil Moriarty from the BBC's recent adaptation of *Sherlock*. His character is also placed in direct opposition with well-known good character M, and they repeatedly engage in a war of words. In general, 'C' is not a nice character – to add any more to this at this point may spoil the plot for those who have not yet seen *Spectre*. All of this is important because it means that the negative aspects of surveillance are directly attributed to 'C' – a bad individual. As M says in the film with regards to surveillance 'it's important who is controlling it.' Thus *Spectre* reflects an issue relevant to the audience – fears around public surveillance - but it is careful not to completely dismiss the idea of surveillance by suggesting that any negative impacts it might have

are down to who is controlling it rather than the technology itself. This idea is reinforced by the fact that the heroes of *Spectre* are working for MI6, which is a security service that essentially surveys certain people, and Bond's ally, Q, uses surveillance technology for good in the film.

Returning to the theories about ideology introduced at the beginning of this paper, one can argue that *Spectre*'s surveillance sub plot, provides an example of Todd Gitlin's idea of the complicated role that media texts can play in promoting dominant ideology. In this case the public's concerns regarding surveillance appear to have been voiced, however, *Spectre* plays out this concern in a way that keeps it in-line with dominant political ideology: the Western political agenda to maintain some form of surveillance in the fight against terrorism.

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