**To be published in Jeremy Strong editor *James Bond Uncovered* (London, Palgrave 2018)**

**The Resilient Agent: James Bond, ‘nostalgic geopolitics’ and *Skyfall* (2012)**

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Released in October 2012, on the 50th anniversary of *Dr No* (1962) in Queen Elizabeth II’s 60th year as the British head of state, the Sam Mendes-directed production *Skyfall* was a critical and commercial success. It was positioned as the third element of a trilogy of films involving Daniel Craig as Bond and garnered positive reviews from critics and fans alike. The trilogy began with his initiation as a 00 secret agent (*Casino Royale,* 2006), then portrayed him enraged by the death of his lover Vesper and determined to exact revenge upon those responsible (*Quantum of Solace,* 2008), finally culminating in a story preoccupied with nostalgia and resurrection following an accidental shooting in Istanbul and painful recovery (*Skyfall)*.

*Skyfall* is unusual, in a strictly geographical sense, because much of the action is situated in the United Kingdom, specifically London and Bond’s ancestral home in Scotland. While London-based MI6 has borne the brunt of attack and mayhem before (*The World is Not Enough*,1999), then the political geographies of the Bond narrative trajectory remained largely formulaic (as recognised by Umberto Eco some decades ago through identification of ‘the journey’ and ‘the chase’) in the sense that Bond’s mission still involved overseas travel and exposure to danger and insecurity elsewhere, namely the former Soviet Union and Turkey. In the earlier film, after vanquishing his foe in Istanbul, Bond returned to a safe and secure London and a MI6 building restored to its former state. A fairly rigid division between a safe inside and an insecure outside contributed to Bond and Britain’s homeland security – Bond’s mission was to stop bad people and dangerous objects harming UK interests and close allies such as the United States. *Skyfall* marked something of a departure from that, exploring how MI6 and Bond struggle to address a rogue individual determined to expose the cyber-security defences of Britain’s spying organization as part of a private vendetta against Judi Dench’s M.

In this chapter, Bond’s resurrection and resilience occupies centre stage in an analysis that uncovers why that matters in the first place, and the implications that follow for the reproduction of a ‘nostalgic geopolitics’. A geopolitics, which through an assemblage of bodies, objects, practices and representations, is decidedly backward-looking, resolutely embodied and overtly nationalistic in its response to a security context. This appears to call into question what the lone field agent can do in a world defined by mass surveillance, network warfare, permeable boundaries and ubiquitous danger. Since his initiation as a 00, Craig’s Bond and his boss M have struggled to reconcile the growing public demands for public accountability and executive auditing with the diffuse nature of the threat facing MI6 and by extension the UK – transnational, digital, networked – and difficult to trace and respond to where embodied. In both *Casino Royale* and *Quantum of Solace*, M and Bond find themselves outwitted and even mocked by adversaries that are masters of the double-cross, high level infiltration and disguise. The gritty, morally ambivalent, and flawed character of Craig’s Bond is a far cry from the escapist, exotic, wise-cracking and laconic incarnations of earlier screen 007s.

The analysis builds on and extends a tranche of literature by James Bond scholars on *Skyfall* and Daniel Craig’s Bond more generally; which has addressed individual heroism, Bond’s body, the role of London, Bond’s relationship to Judi Dench’s M, Scottish and English identity politics, and the geopolitics of ubiquitous threat (see the essays in Funnell 2015 and Hasian 2014, Anderson 2016, Smith 2016). There are continuities such as the challenges posed by mass surveillance, the potential for the disaffected individual to cause havoc and the enduring threat posed by trans-national terror/financial networks, which prove capable of disrupting the business of liberal democratic states such as the UK.

**Daniel Craig’s Bond**

The Bond franchise changed the onscreen character and narrative format (more explicitly serial for example) of this long-running film series (1962-2015) with the introduction of Daniel Craig as Bond. The first film, the re-boot *Casino Royale,* introduced audiences to Craig’s Bond and his struggle to track down and destroy the financing and operation of the terror network, Quantum. The sequel, *Quantum of Solace,* addresses a more traditional subject, resource geopolitics, but emphasises as part of the storyline that Bond is fighting a secret and trans-national cartel that has infiltrated MI6 itself. This is an scenario that was almost unthinkable in an era when MI6 was run out of a shell company in central London (Universal Exports) and tasked with working with stable Cold War geopolitical coordinates.

The more recent films, animated and informed by a war on terror and the digital era, have undermined those Cold War geopolitical imaginaries and posited a world where threat, danger and foes are less assuredly rooted in particular places and regions. Bond’s relationship to technology is very different now. In the Cold War setting of South East Europe and the Middle East, the film *From Russia with Love* (1963) witnessed Bond travelling to Istanbul in order to steal a special piece of Soviet technology (the Lektor). Fifty years later, in *Skyfall,* Bond is back in the same city but this time confronted with the horrific discovery that a secret disk containing details of NATO secret agents has been lost from an MI6 laptop. With the overriding fear of mass exposure of British and NATO agents, Daniel Craig’s Bond’s frantic search and recovery mission echoes the freneticism and physicality of the American amnesiac assassin Jason Bourne (Funnell and Dodds 2017). Both the Bond and Bourne films reflect and engage with a world where one mistake, one mishap, one missed connection could lead to rapid and terminal damage to national security and the organizations charged with upholding it. As with the Bourne movies, the more recent Bond films have also sought to capitalise on cultural engagement with the war on terror and in particular with its representation in critically acclaimed American and British serial television series such as *Homeland* (2011 -) and the earlier *Spooks* (2002 – 2011).. Both explore and exploit storylines around surveillance, security and the professional lives of individuals including, intelligence officials, military veterans and security officers (Erickson 2008, Pears 2016) .

The Bond presented in *Casino Royale* and later *Quantum of Solace* is more flawed, unrefined and even vulnerable when compared to the earlier cinematic incarnations played by Sean Connery (1962-1971) and Roger Moore (1973-1985) where an unflappable ‘cool’ coupled, respectively, with physical competence and a semi-comic, quipping, persona often helped to neutralise dangerous situations. Right from the start Craig’s Bond makes mistakes, breaks rules and acts intemperately. In his pursuit of a terror suspect in Madagascar, in *Casino Royale*, he breaks into an embassy and eventually ends up shooting his captive after being detained by the security forces at the embassy building. His boss M, played by Judi Dench, chides her new agent and expresses her frustration at his blunt and unsubtle approach to his mission. But her unhappiness with Bond’s *modus operandi* is not as straightforward as might appear. She, like him, is frustrated with the intersection of the administrative and the geopolitical. Bond and M are both hampered by constraints; M insists that Bond has a GPS tracker fitted to his body while complaining herself about the oversight to which she and her organization are subjected. In a world where threats and dangers do not neatly align with the territorial boundaries of sovereign nation-states, and where adversaries appear capable of infiltrating the UK security services, such strictures are figured as unwelcome and unnecessary.

All of which appears harder for Bond to endure in *Quantum of Solace* as a consequence of his anger and sadness over the loss of his beloved Vesper and ongoing fractious relationship with M. What complicates things further is the discovery in *Skyfall* that the new adversary is a disgruntled former British secret agent, Raoul Silva. This is a creative decision that scholars such as James Smith have characterised as coinciding neatly with the Edward Snowden revelations about the mass surveillance activities of the US-administered National Security Agency and the 2010 leak of scores of US Department of State diplomatic cables (Smith 2016). Envious of Bond’s relationship with M and angered over his treatment by MI6, Silva is determined to wreak cyber-terrorist havoc on London and specifically MI6. He hacks safety protocols in the MI6 building and causes a gas explosion. Unlike *Quantum of Solace*, there is no resource to secure, no secret weapon to capture and no dangerous foreign location to explore, survey and overrun. The threat facing Bond and MI6 is net-centric and geographically close to home. Silva is able to cause havoc thousands of miles away. Bond’s physical, even intimate, encounters with Silva help to redress a technological imbalance. The technical skill-sets of younger colleagues such as Q are critical, as Bond is not able to crack computer code, recover lost encrypted information or hack into Silva’s computer network.

Bond and MI6’s recovery and rehabilitation in *Skyfall* is decidedly nostalgic. There are visual and material references to Winston Churchill and the Second World War, and this has significance for a narrative arc predicated on Bond and MI6 recovering from a devastating attack. A ravaged MI6 building is left abandoned and Bond’s colleague Tanner informs him that the organization has had to find ‘new digs’ in an underground complex last used in the 1940s. M’s desk in her temporary office has a figurine of the bulldog on it – an animal widely associated with the ‘bulldog personality and spirit’ of Churchill himself. In the midst of the carnage, no other film in the Bond franchise is quite so preoccupied with Bond’s state of mind and body and its relationship to the wider resilience of MI6. His well-being becomes critical to his and Britain’s long-term future as epitomised by MI6. Informed by a post 7/7 geopolitical aesthetic, Bond scurries through the London Underground and scuttles along the streets of London in pursuit of his footloose enemy. As with the Blitz of the 1940s, London is under attack again. A crucial gun battle in a government building is unprecedented in the Bond franchise, as is the scale of that terrorist attack on MI6. In *Skyfall* viewers’ sense of the events of 7/7 - in which four near-simultaneous suicide attacks on the London transport system resulted in the death of over 50 people in 2005 – prompts both –chronological and spatial memories , highlighting the emotive and material consequences of such planned destruction..

Bond’s adversary, Raoul Silva, shows a stunning capacity to rain havoc on London. Its subterranean infrastructure provides a startling backdrop to what is possible, as Silva interferes with gas supplies, train scheduling, car-tracking devices, tunnel openings and cyber-security. Proving that he is not just a cyber-terrorist, Silva also demonstrates commendable skills as a field agent, using disguise and speed to flummox Bond and his allies. London’s subterranean ecologies provides ample opportunities for such mischief. For much of the London-based elements of the film, Bond is consistently playing catch-up; running and driving at great speed in his endeavours to engage with and/or evade Silva. Bond’s decision to escape with M to Scotland is a deliberate attempt on his part to ‘go back in time’, shorthand for a description of an environment with which he can plan and choreograph events– spatially distinct, off-the-grid, and where he can activate the embodied knowledge of his childhood including knowledge of Skyfall’s subterranean worlds. Bond’s endurance and even rejuvenation as field agent coincides with further change in MI6 as a consequence of M’s death. ‘Going back in time’ takes on a difference resonance when he returns to London. There is a return to a more traditional division of labour. He learns that he has a new male boss (Mallory) and discovers that the young female field agent (Moneypenny) has been reassigned to office duties.

The initial gender and geopolitical experimentation of the earlier Craig films shifts decisively in favour of something rather more conservative and even retrogressive. If so, then it owes greatly to *Skyfall*’s focus on Bond’s body, fitness and temperament. At the end of the film, just before he goes to the new M’s office, he is shown standing on top of a government building with a view of central London dominated by large Union flags. The lingering shots of the cityscape seem to further emphasise Bond’s resurrection and his renewed status as a field agent, ready again to serve his country despite the threats facing MI6 being geographically footloose and asymmetrical rather than rooted in place and identifiable.

*Skyfall* is perhaps the most explicit and sustained engagement with Bond’s aging and damaged body as part of a sustained interrogation of whether Bond is ‘up to the job’. This is not to say that the performances of Roger Moore (*A View to a Kill* 1985) and Sean Connery (*Never Say Never Again* 1983) did not provoke critics and audiences to reflect on how Bond was ‘ageing’. But Craig’s Bond is damaged rather than simply ageing per se. Earlier in the film, however, Bond’s interaction with Q hints at Bond’s obsolescent frame of reference – as field agent. Even though physically fit, Q raises the possibility that Bond might now be a ‘technological dinosaur’. So his continued relevance as a field agent has to come from his bodily encounters. Bond’s relationship with his body needs to be understood in relation to his engagement with other *dramatis personae* namely M, Moneypenny, Q, Silva and Mallory. Bond’s ‘body work’ should not be isolated from the bodily labour of others, most notably M’s.. Played by Judi Dench for seventeen years, this female M has been a stable feature of Bond films since *GoldenEye* (1995). From her cinematic introduction, where she is shown sitting behind a large desk in an office very different in form and content to her male predecessor, M showed a willingness to travel beyond the office and enter into the field, sometimes causing new security anxieties for Bond (*The World is Not Enough,* 1999). But unlike her predecessors, Bond’s relationship with this M was arguably more intimate and predicated on her being highly tolerant and loyal to her favourite agent. She not only covers for him but also comforts him over the loss of his beloved Vesper. While their relationship in *Skyfall* was initially strained by her fateful decision to encourage another British agent (Moneypenny) to take a difficult shot (which resulted in Bond being badly injured in Istanbul), her affection and commitment to Bond is obvious following his return to active duty. She lied to her Mallory about his fitness and insisted that Bond be allowed to report back following an imperfect physical and psychological evaluation. Even before *Skyfall*, she supported Bond when others counselled against such gestures leading to accusations that she was ‘soft’ on Bond. This ‘softness’ manifests itself in a different manner in *Skyfall,* namely through her body. While Bond’s resilience appears to be strengthening, M’s vulnerability and its trajectory toward her ultimate sacrifice seems heightened. Her body is understood as maternal (both Bond and Silva address her or think of her as ‘mummy’; they also hug her), and her death results from being shot in the womb.

**Bond and the Testing of Resilience**

The aging of Bond has never before been part of the actual narrative arc in a Bond films. An aging Roger Moore, in *A View to a Kill* was ‘saved’ embarrassment when the physically dominant May Day committed suicide so that Bond could go on and confront Max Zorin. And an aging Sean Connery in *Never Say Never Again* (Kershner, 1983) made a re-appearance in a rebooted *Thunderball* and somehow manages to survive various assaults on his body thanks in part to Q branch gadgets including an explosive pen. In *Casino Royale*, by way of contrast, an insouciant and highly muscled Bond wades out of the water towards the beach and the camera lingers on his body in a way that used to be the preserve of so-called ‘Bond Girls’ (Funnell 2011, Cox 2014). Even Sean Connery’s Bond in his prime was never quite so insouciant and never quite so muscled in a way that was increasingly normalised in action cinema in the 1970s and 1980s with the rise of stars such as Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger (Tasker 2012). But after being accidentally shot in Turkey, the new Bond’s body and mind appear to be rather more fragile than fortitudinous. His slumped posture, even after energetic love making with an unnamed female, is not reminiscent of the post-coital satisfaction with his lover, Vesper. Rather it smacks of depression, desperation and loneliness. Drinking and betting ‘dares’ dominate his evenings, and his drunken torpor is only shaken by the news that MI6 has been attacked. This aging hero appears unable to continue as a field agent.

How will a damaged, unshaven (as if to suggest ‘ageing’) and yet physically robust Bond repair his full capabilities in the wake of such a brazen attack? Restoring Bond and his body will require a series of bodily and spatial encounters, most of them informed by axes of difference including age, gender and sexuality – Bond will be given opportunities to prove himself against not only a strong of potential assassins but also by his seduction of a femme fatale . All of these encounters are important if Bond is to prove that he is resilient rather than fragile.. Bond’s re-emergence from a seeming non-existence as he decides to return to London is thus indicative of a more personal turn towards a resilient rather than vulnerable attitude.

Shortly after his return to London, he is driven to the new headquarters and shown MI6 employees carrying on with their jobs. For Bond to go underground is not only reminiscent of a Cold War era – in which British and American governments prepared themselves for a possible subterranean existence after a massive nuclear attack – but inverts aspects of the Bond genre in which it is usually the adversaries who possess impressive underground or otherwise ‘hidden’ headquarters (e.g. Dr No’s secret lair); albeit that these are frequently marked by very different architectural and design qualities to MI6’s makeshift home. But times have changed. So when we see Bond undergoing a new training regime to assess the state of his body and mind, we are witnessing a further test – can Bond now show sufficient resolve? The odds appear to be stacked against him. He may not have the necessary physical and mental reserves despite his anger at the attack on MI6. Having earlier broken into M’s apartment, their awkward conversation quickly turns to age and whether both are too old for their respective roles. Although younger than M, Bond’s recognition of his ageing is partly rebuffed by M’s dismissal of his ‘ageing’ and she tells him to go, get washed, and report for duty. Later, through separate conversations with Mallory, the chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee, both are asked to consider their positions – M is offered a prestigious award in return for accepting early retirement and Bond is advised that being a field agent is a ‘young man’s game’. While Bond had of course been working with a young female agent in Istanbul, Moneypenny eventually discovers as well that fieldwork might be framed as a ‘young man’s [rather than woman’s] game’.

Neither Bond nor M will contemplate retirement – their relationship appears

less hierarchical in the sense that both are being scrutinised by a senior intelligence officer. M still wants to ‘get the job done’ and Bond, despite his injuries, forces himself, however awkwardly, through a series of physical and psychological tests carried out by colleagues in MI6. But things do not go well – Bond cannot shoot straight and he offers several wilfully antagonistic answers in the psychometric testing; M is equated with ‘bitch’ and ‘Skyfall’ occasions no answer. His most animated response is when asked about ‘murder’ and ‘country’, which elicit ‘occupation’ and ‘England’ respectively. Gone is the cheery Roger Moore delivery of ‘England needs me’ in *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977) in favour of something far more menacing and unglamorous. These answers might even suggest that all those taunts in the past from villains were right; that Bond is a state-sanctioned murderer, a well-dressed thug. Yet his responses are not convincing, at least not to the watching Mallory and M.

How does he show a greater level of resilience rather than continued fragility? Three things prove critical, at least initially: he is able to laugh at his trauma; he changes his physical appearance; and he remembers that his body might be unwittingly transporting a vital piece of evidence. First, Bond’s sense humour returns and we suspect that if Bond is able to quip about his predicament then it is likely that he will bounce back. On being reunited with the young colleague who accidentally shot him in Istanbul, Bond teases her about her marksmanship[[1]](#footnote-1). , Bond’s weak performance on the shooting range, however, suggests that his own capacity to ‘take the shot’ is not (yet) assured. Unsettled by his bodily failure, his attire changes radically after the testing has finished. Sensing that his performance has been less than impressive, he shaves and he dresses in a suit in order, to cultivate a sense of renewed purpose. Bond’s couture has always mattered – the buttoning up of the suit before or sometimes after an encounter has always been a trademark sign of his willingness to act but also to signal a certain confidence in terms of handling difficult tasks; as if wearing a suit, in particular, displayed personal resilience and associated capabilities more readily than any alternative attire. In a slightly different context, Bond’s impeccable appearance in a dinner jacket has been another long-standing trademark of his gambling prowess.

The final element in this transformation is Bond’s willingness to excavate some bullet fragments, acquired when he was shot by the killer Patrice, from his chest. In a highly poignant moment, Bond takes the knife to his body (without any kind of pain relief) and digs them out before casually handing the washed fragments in an evidence bag to a colleague for analysis.

Such a moment is critical in the film’s narrative arc but also to understanding this underlying logic of resilience. Bond and his body have endured a shock and now we have proof of his willingness to restore himself. His professional training and sense of service has recovered so much so that he is able to ‘move on’ from the Istanbul incident. Resilience is now internalized. But this dramatic intervention has implications for the future as well. Bond’s performance allows not only the hunt to continue for those who might have targeted MI6 but also give an opportunity for M to pass him fit for field service. He may have failed the conventional tests but when it really mattered Bond was prepared to act for the sake of MI6 and national security albeit by a private act of bodily excavation. His chest, the locus of heroic masculinity, stands in contrast to other bodily vulnerabilities; the most notable of which is M’s body. Throughout the film, M’s frailty is a meaningful counterpoint to Bond’s resilience. In *Skyfall* aspects of M’s identity are increasingly linked to her domestic environment (she is seen to be answering the phone in her bedroom) and her maternal femininity (frequent references to her children and husband). Most strikingly, M is shot in the womb towards the very end of the film in the chapel on the Skyfall estate. Bond kills Silva but cannot save M. Having been taunted by Silva about his relationship with M (or ‘Mummy’) it seems doubly resonant that M as a maternal figure rather than a professional woman dies in Bond’s arms. The death of his ‘professional mother’ touchingly recalls the very reason why he became a professional agent in the first place; as a way of coping with the death of his own mother and father. And unlike his father’s old double-barrelled heavy rifle (and globe in his study), there is no apparent material trace of his mother in *Skyfall* itself. What this ultimately suggests is that while M’s body and personal/professional identity have been transformed, Bond women in general are disposable and replaceable.

**Redemption and Resilience**

Bond’s body is redeemable – he has passed those initial tests – some formal and some informal. But, as the film suggests, this reformation might not be entirely straightforward. His body does threaten to let him down. In Shanghai, for example, his restricted upper body strength means that he is unable to hold on to the assassin Patrice resulting in his adversary falling from a high building; the implication being that he might be too fragile and too old for the job despite his best intentions. Despite his death, Patrice successfully completed his mission. Bond’s failure to apprehend Patrice alive is mitigated by a chance discovery of a gambling chip, which takes him to Macau. Once on location, his former colleague (whom we later learn is Miss Moneypenny) from Istanbul joins him, and it is she who promises to ‘watch his back’ in the casino and later saves him from almost certain death at the hand of several henchmen in Macau. But before she does so, she very carefully shaves him before he dresses in his dinner suit. The shaving incident is not only a display of trust on Bond’s behalf (she is holding a cut-throat razor) but it is also an opportunity to rejuvenate; a younger and fresher-looking Bond duly appears (a throwback to his appearance in a dinner jacket in *Casino Royale*).

He proves that his new resilient self is no proverbial flash-in-the-pan by returning to his former self. And this resilience is as much embodied in practice as it is manifested sartorially and through his grooming. It finds expression in his dealing with women – merging, as so often for Bond, the erotic and the professional - but also later when dealing with his arch-enemy, later to be named as Silva. In Macau, he encounters Severine ,Silva’s reluctant lover . Puffing nervously on a cigarette, she explains to Bond that he is unlikely to leave the casino alive while he parries the warning with an astute analysis of a tattoo on her arm (signifying that she was a trafficked sex-worker). Recalling his old skills, he manages to convince her, up to a point, that he can ‘protect’ her, a promise he has made many times to countless other women with varying degrees of success. Bond’s subsequent sexual encounter is critical to his in-field redemption. It is, like other aspects of this film, deliberately reminiscent of earlier Bond films (e.g. *From Russia with Love* and *Thunderball,* 1965) in the opportunities it presents for Bond to prove he still has his sexual mojo. His steamy shower encounter with Severine firmly roots this Bond in a wider 007 tradition of sleeping with his enemy’s lover. Unlike Lynd in *Casino Royale*, there is no sense of love or affection. Rather, it is done, as Bond has done on multiple occasions, to ‘turn her’ in favour of his mission and like other beautiful women (such as Andrea Anders’ character Maud Adams in *The Man with the Golden Gun,* 1974) she is later shot by his disgruntled adversary. His adversary tests his in-field resilience. Tied to a chair, Silva taunts him about his heterosexuality. The defiant ‘How do you know it is my first time’ has a more desperate quality to it compared to when a naked Bond was tied to a chair and tortured by Le Chiffre in *Casino Royale*. Silva’s challenge to Bond is unsettling; he does not threaten him with extreme violence. He does something worse; he challenges his resilience by probing his heterosexuality.

Can Bond endure a hetero-normative challenge; one in which he is caressed

by Silva where his restrained body cannot ‘protect’ him? This is made worse, perhaps, by a context in which he cannot demonstrate a bodily capacity to endure physical pain (as in *Casino Royale*). The scene in question reinforces a well-established tradition within the James Bond series of vilifying homosexuality and the homosexual body notably in *Diamonds are Forever* (1971). In *From Russia with Love*, Colonel Klebb’s caressing of the young Russian female colleague is framed as entirely predatory and unwanted, whereas Bond’s sexual advances are rarely rebuffed. They are usually depicted as either encouraged and/or accepted after an element of reluctance (most notably involving ‘lesbian’ Pussy Galore in Goldfinger). Silva’s caressing of Bond’s chest is all the more invasive because we know, as viewers, what that chest has recently endured, and indeed, revealed. Bond’s heterosexual credibility (and on-going resilience) is later restored, or so it appears, when he not only escapes his bondage but also reveals to Silva that a secret tracking device has enabled British military helicopters to rendezvous with him for the express purpose of capturing and detaining Silva. While we may wonder where these helicopters came from (given Bond’s location somewhere off an island in Chinese waters), Bond has not been distracted from the job in hand but unbeknown to him the capture of Silva proves rather pyrrhic. What we have before the film shifts decisively to London is, therefore, a series of staged encounters involving physical trauma, tentative recovery and highly sexualised encounters.

**Ostracising Resilience**

As an audience, it is not until that we learn of ‘station H’ that it becomes clearer why Silva has deliberately targeted M and MI6. He is barely able to speak of Hong Kong by name. This former British colony/dependent territory was handed over to China in 1997. Within the Bond series, Hong Kong has served as a prominent setting in *You Only Live Twice* (1967) and *The Man with the Golden Gun* as well as more fleetingly in *Die Another Day* (2002).

Silva’s experiences in Hong Kong and M’s grudging recognition of her complicity are pivotal in the narrative arc and, as this paper suggests, contending views of resilience. Silva has, ostensibly, has exhibited an impressive ‘bounce back’, having endured a considerable trauma. As M summarizes, ‘He was operating beyond his brief, hacking the Chinese. The handover was coming up and they were on to him, so I gave him up. I got six agents in return and a peaceful transition’. Clearly M had not given a second thought to Silva and his fate. He was simply ’collateral damage’. As she warned Bond, in *GoldenEye*, ‘I’ve no compunction about sending you to your death, but I won’t do it on a whim’. M had no compunction in ‘giving up’ Silva in return for other British agents (plural). Strikingly, Silva is punished for something that Bond is frequently guilty of: namely, going beyond his ‘brief’.

Their face-to-face encounter in London forces her to re-assess her role in his

incarceration and his unwelcome resilience. She refuses to apologise to Silva or even acknowledge his real name. Frustrated at her apparent intransigence, Silva reveals his hideously injured face (he has to remove a supportive device that effectively concealed his disfigurement) the result of an ill-fated attempt to commit suicide by ingesting poison. Unlike Bond’s injured chest, Silva’s distorted face invites an expression of horror and distaste on the part of M. His self-mutilation is rather different to Bond’s scarring – as M and by extension the audience are invited to register disgust at the facial damage done by Silva’s failed attempt to commit suicide. M’s decision to wipe Silva’s name from the memorial wall in MI6 is thus a double erasure – both dismissive of Silva and his sufferings but also of her own complicity with the handover of Hong Kong and a secret deal made with the Chinese authorities to trade agents .

While Bond’s scars reinforce his heroism (they are often indicative of the lone hero in particular) and sense of duty, Silva is positioned within the film as physically and sexually grotesque. When captured he is placed in something akin to a specimen jar as if to suggest that he invites freakish inspection. This scene is crucial in pointing out two competing senses of resilience amongst Britain’s secret agents. Bond’s resilience is to be welcomed because he has not only survived torture and alienation but also remained physically and sexually desirable in the sense of his physical robustness and obvious heterosexuality. Over the Bond series more generally, Bond has been sent to health spas to ensure that his body remains physically resilient and attractive to women (e.g. *Thunderball*). All of this is to suggest that some resilient citizen-subjects are to be valued more highly. As Puar and Rai note in another, but related, context gender and sexuality are central to the war on terrorism. For these two authors, the enrolment of aggressive heterosexual patriotism on the one hand and on the other the invocation of a queer monstrosity is strongly linked to expressions of sexual deviancy. In their judgement, the monster-terrorist is posited as a form of ‘failed heterosexuality’ and a ‘marker of the non-civilized’ (Puar and Rai 2002: 139-140). Silva is positioned as both a failed heterosexual (somebody who sleeps with women such as Severine but who appears a little too eager to caress Bond) and non-civilized in the sense of his body and behaviour being positioned as not white, not British and exhibiting the wrong kind of resilience; a resilience tinged with political critique.

**Preparing for the Looming Attack**

Resilience is all about preparing for a disastrous future. As Mark Neocleous notes, ‘The state now assumes that one of its key tasks is to imagine the worst case scenario, the coming catastrophe, the crisis-to-come, the looming attack, the emergency that could happen, might happen, and probably will happen, in order to be better prepared’ (Neocleous 2013:2). There are two interesting aspects to this. First, there is the question of how the home has shaped Bond’s geopolitical imaginary – as an orphan traumatised by the death of his parents – and thus helped prepare him for the ‘looming attack’. He knows that Silva and his henchmen are likely to come after him and M. Kincaid explains to M that the secret tunnel under the house was where Bond retreated to for two days after hearing of his parents’ death. According to Kincaid, he emerged as a ‘man’ as opposed to a ‘boy’. M had earlier noted, as Vesper knew too, that orphans made the best field agents precisely because they were likely to be more resilient and less vulnerable to fears about leaving a family behind. Bond later shows no hesitation when blowing up Skyfall, a place that has never been show-cased before in the Bond franchise, while his ‘beloved’ DB5 being systematically destroyed by Silva invokes instant anger. It is as if Silva knew that Bond’s feelings for this particular object would be piqued by such an action precisely because he had no family member to threaten or take hostage – nor, as it turns out, a Bond Girl. In this instance, the car replaces the Bond girl, and he is not able to save the former. There may be something else at stake when the film’s narrative and spatial arc descends on Skyfall – the isolated family seat far removed from computers, mobile phones and public transport systems. What is interesting about the final scene involving Skyfall is its physical isolation – it is a sprawling house with a tunnel that only the owners and trusted staff members know about.

Although Bond is tracked, this is a place removed from those cyber-and-

transport networks that Silva has disrupted and terrorised. Here, at last, is a space where an ageing agent can use his resilient skills – be innovative, enterprising and flexible (O’Malley 2010). Bond as a resilient citizen-subject puts his training to good use by devising a strategy designed to inflict maximum carnage on Silva’s assault force. There is an underlying politics of anticipation writ large; Bond appears to thrive on the impending chaos. His decision to blow up the house suggests a man with a renewed sense of purpose. Bond knows where the tunnel leads armed as he is with ‘home field advantage’. Defeating technologically sophisticated evil geniuses does not require one to ‘play their game’, but – conversely - to confront them in a more primeval environment of heather, ice-covered lake and mist. The final confrontation with Silva in a small family-owned chapel again gestures to what Kincaid calls ‘the old ways’, ways shaped by experience that only older men would appreciate. Bond throws a knife into Silva’s back as if to reinforce the idea that this middle-aged agent may be battered and bruised, but he can still hurl a knife, use a traditional double-barrelled rifle, and improvise when it comes to bomb-making equipment. Cyber-terrorism only gets you so far when faced with a rejuvenated field agent able to adapt to new shocks and utilize a substantial period of field experience.

**Resilience and Flag-Waving Nostalgia**

The film’s denouement is geopolitically nostalgic – Bond’s bodily resilience was critical in addressing the mounting threat posed by Silva. M is dead, however. A suited Bond is later shown standing on the roof of a Whitehall building in the heart of London. Union flags are fluttering in the wind in tribute, we suspect, to the late M. Earlier in the film, Silva had sent M a mocking image of her face embossed on the Union flag; this time the fluttering flag is used un-ironically to signify a more assertive nationalism. M has also left Bond her bulldog figurine in her will. An object invested with geopolitical and historical resonances, the bulldog is a signifier of Bond and Britain’s spirit to ‘strive and not yield’ and to do so without relying on the help of allies, including the United States.

Geopolitical nostalgia in that sense works in two ways. First, as a series of places and routes that field agents such as Bond can return to because of an attachment to the past. Bond and M’s route to Scotland played a critical role in not only affirming his resilience (rather than fragility in M’s case) but also facilitated his return to London where he started his career as an 00 agent. But some agents appear more resilient than others. The ending of the film rehearses another form of nostalgic conservatism; a gendered variety. After their first formal introduction, Bond discovers that the agent who accidentally shot him in Istanbul was Eve Moneypenny. More surprisingly, she has decided to take Bond’s subsequent advice about the ‘field’. She has decided to become the personal assistant to the new M, Mallory. And Mallory who proved his resilience to Bond (and the audience with the news that he had endured torture by the IRA in Northern Ireland) finds himself in an office that looks reminiscent of the pre-Judi Dench M. A highly masculinised office with a picture of the old MI6 building and another depicting a naval battle at Trafalgar is what greets Bond on his arrival into the office. Mallory hands Bond a well-worn file marked ‘top secret’ and ask him if he is ready to return to the field. The surviving three characters have been put in their place and a middle-aged field agent is shown that he does not need to learn ‘new tricks’ ; rather, he is (still) the lone resilient agent. The ‘old [gendered, aged and resilient of sorts] ways’ can still work even if the location of the threats and the scope and scale of the villains change. Bond has learnt to conceal his injuries and his aging. As an older Q once advised him, ‘never let them see you bleed in the field’.

**Conclusion**

*Skyfall* is a geopolitically nostalgic and highly gendered text concerned in large part with the ageing process. It is also a telling commentary on the dominant discourse and practice associated with resilience. Silva is right that Bond’s sense of loyalty to MI6 and Britain might well appear to be ‘so old fashioned’ in some senses. Silva suggests that both are not worthy of such loyalty. MI6 has shown a ruthless capacity to treat at least some of their agents with contempt. But unbeknown to Silva, old-fashioned behaviour manifests itself in other ways. Miss Moneypenny, gives up being a field agent in order to become a personal assistant to a late-middle-aged man. The field is left to a middle-aged man who had to prove that he could battle against both aching body parts and a personal journey back to an earlier childhood trauma. And M, played by Judi Dench for seven films, is no more. Bond’s loss of a mother figure is crucial but also opportune; a moment to prove to himself and the audience that he is able to move beyond the troubling loss of Vesper (which clearly encouraged a more vigilante element to his character) and focus again on what M would have wanted, a renewed appreciation of the mission and duty more generally. A new, younger, Miss Moneypenny, with her limited field agent experience and intimate rapport with Bond will provide fresh possibilities for exploring Bond’s character development (Garland 2009, Funnell 2015).

Geopolitically, the film invokes an imaginary, which stresses the roles of networks and villainous individuals but does so in a way that continues to depict Bond and Britain as increasingly isolated (and thus needing to generate a wider systemic resilience which prepares for a future in which the United States is not there to support the UK) from the wider world. Compared to *Casino Royale* and *Quantum of Solace*, the locations are decidedly east of Suez, especially in the former British colony of Hong Kong and earlier in China. The United States is nowhere to be seen apart from the briefest reference to US-led intelligence support in terms of tracking Patrice. There is no sign of Felix Leiter, the sidekick of James Bond on many former missions. For much of the film, in a complete break with the Bond series, the action concentrates on London and then later Scotland. This reinforcing the fact that the old division between domestic tranquillity and external bedlam is something reminiscent of the Cold War era. Bond may have had to deal with the spectre of global annihilation but until recently London was relatively safe from such geopolitical unpleasantness.

There is another altogether more bio-political imaginary informed by the logic of resilience that needs to be flagged up. What *Skyfall* ends up suggesting is that in order for Britain to be safe in these disquieting times, it needs middle- to late-middle-aged men (wearing well-cut suits) in charge of the office and the field. Young men and women, in this nostalgic division of labour, can either be part of the technological avant-garde (as Q demonstrates in the latest film *Spectre* 2015) or personal assistants (Miss Moneypenny). Earlier evidence of gender ambiguity, as noted in *Casino Royale* for example, appears to have been jettisoned in favour of lionising the aging male character and his embodied knowledge and bodily practice.

While the monstrous and sexually ambivalent Silva has been put in his place, – Bond and Britain no longer have to listen to him complaining about complicities and torture. He no longer has to endure Silva’s caressing of his scarred chest. Bond’s particular brand of heterosexual patriotism is foregrounded once more just as he stands, confidently, atop MI6’s old office building. Bond will unquestionably be back but he will just be a little bit older. And as *Spectre* reminded audiences, he will endure using his old tricks – sexual seduction, physical violence, limited gadgetry and an aversion to computer technology.

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1. His interaction with another younger colleague, Q, at the National Portrait Gallery provides Bond with another opportunity to confront his aging (via a well-known, at least to British viewers, J M W Turner 19th-century painting, *The Fighting Temeraire*) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)