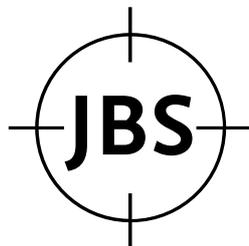


# The Portrayal of Continental Latin America in the James Bond Films

ANTTI KORPISAARI AND OUTI J. HAKOLA

This article stems from our long-term fascination with the James Bond films (and with Ian Fleming’s original Bond novels) and the British Secret Service agent’s adventurous travels around the globe in what have been labelled “exotic locales”. Scholarly discussions have recognised that Bond’s travels play a role in the making and shaping of popular geopolitics (Dodds 2003; Dodds 2005; Funnell and Dodds 2017; McMorrow 2011), film tourism (Chevrier and Huvet 2018; Kulcsár et al. 2017), and colonialism (McClure 2011; Metz 2004). These discussions reference continental Latin America while often refraining from in-depth analysis. Scholarly attention has mostly focused on the Bond franchise’s treatment of the Anglo-American connection and “the East”, ranging from the Soviet Union/Russia and Eastern Europe to Asia (Funnell and Dodds 2017, 45-134; see also Gehrig 2019; Lawless 2014). As for the Latin American context, studies have mostly focused on the Caribbean and the Bond franchise’s racial politics (Hallowran 2005; McClure 2011). In a way, this is only natural, as direct British colonial interests in continental Latin America were limited to Belize, Guyana, and the so-called Mosquito Coast of Honduras and Nicaragua. Still, in *Moonraker* (1979), *Licence to Kill* (1989), and *Quantum of Solace* (2008) Bond operates extensively in Brazil, Central America, and Bolivia, respectively.



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To fill a void we see in the literature on the representational politics of James Bond, this article discusses the portrayal of continental Latin American countries, places, spaces, and culture(s) in these Bond films. Our approach is founded in cultural studies, which emphasises that representations are never neutral. Rather, they create, reproduce, and sometimes challenge existing power structures, such as colonial legacies, and need to be critically studied (e.g. Hall 2013, 1-6). Furthermore, the representations of places and spaces, as with any cultural phenomena, need to be understood in multiple contexts (e.g. Grossberg 2010). Places as (geographical) locations and sites are defined by human experiences – such as national borders, city identities, or named rivers and mountains. In comparison, spaces are more abstract; they occur in time as part of human activities (Seamon and Sowers 2008). Merrifield (1993), among others, has emphasised the interconnectivity of place and space; geographical places gain different social, cultural, and political meanings across varying spatial and temporal dimensions. In the post-colonial world, for instance, political capitalism has helped maintain economic as well as sociocultural power relations between the so-called First and Third World countries. Waterman argues that the landscapes of the James Bond films “inform and represent both the overarching goals and the explicit practices and representations, initially of state capitalism and colonialism, and more recently, neoliberal capitalism” (2018, 186). Thus, while the meanings related to specific places in the James Bond films have evolved over the decades, the films maintain global representational hierarchies where such places as Latin America appear as “other” in comparison to the leading powers of “the West”.

In film, the relationship between place and space takes shape through the use of cinematic landscapes, where drama or action is enabled rather than simply taking place. In the James Bond films, landscape contributes to a sense of narrative realism when it is anchored in the filmic narrative to recognisable places and to Bond’s embodied experiences of such places. The films, therefore, invite the external world to be part of their internal narrative logic, and this representational power includes political, social, and cultural meanings (Andermann 2017; Lukinbeal 2005). Cinematic landscapes can serve in the role of spectacle, where they momentarily and visually entice the viewer (Lukinbeal 2005). In beautiful scenic shots, the focus is on excessive elements and on cinema’s tendency to show, not tell. Cinematic spectacles of this kind do not exclude narrative elements, however, and they are connected to the emotional, embodied, and interpretative aspects of films (Bordwell 2006). In the Bond franchise, the tropical scenery of the Caribbean, for example, carries with it

references to the history of European colonialism, slavery, and a troubled political and economic relationship with the US. Consequently, landscapes have metaphorical dimensions where representations of place become transformed into spaces that imbue the narrative with ideological meaning (Lukinbeal 2005). In this article, we argue that landscapes in the James Bond films serve as both cinematic spectacle and as a connection to the historical, external world: recognisable places and spaces of human action which add metaphorical meaning to the narratives.

Funnell and Dodds (2017; see also Dodds 2005), among others, have argued that the James Bond films help to create the spaces and places they portray in the minds of their viewers. Even when there is “a disjuncture between where filming is actually conducted and where the scene is set [...] artificial place images help constitute that place [...] and therefore become part of that place” (Dittmer and Dodds 2013, 79). This was even more the case prior to the advent of the Internet age and global mass tourism, when *Dr. No* (1962), *Thunderball* (1965), *Live and Let Die* (1973), *Moonraker*, and *Licence to Kill* undoubtedly contributed to the way many people saw (and continue to see) the Caribbean and continental Latin America.

When Latin America is understood in its broadest sense, including what Clawson calls the “Caribbean cultural fringe” (2006, 8-9), thirteen out of current twenty-five Eon-produced James Bond films see Bond operating in Latin America. While Caribbean settings are favoured,<sup>1</sup> only four films<sup>2</sup> situate Bond indisputably within continental Latin America – the “core” of this cultural and geographic entity (Clawson 2006, 7-8). Three of these films – *Moonraker*, *Licence to Kill*, and *Quantum of Solace* – are discussed in depth below; the fourth, *Spectre* (2015), involves a lengthy pre-title sequence set in Mexico City during the Day of the Dead celebrations. This sequence highlights the politics related to filming locations, the touristic gaze, and public relations: leaked emails revealed that the government of Mexico offered the production team some 20 million dollars in tax incentives to encourage them to film in Mexico City in order to ameliorate

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1 This is in large part due to Fleming having purchased and developed the Goldeneye estate in Jamaica right after World War II and subsequently spending time in the Caribbean every winter (Parker 2014). Furthermore, British colonial interests in this region were much stronger than in continental Latin America.

2 This article was written before the release of *No Time to Die* (2021). Based on the trailer and marketing material of the twenty-fifth Eon-produced film, *No Time to Die* seems to take Bond to continental Latin America for a fifth time. However, the film could not be included in this analysis.

potentially negative connotations of Mexico and Mexicans in film (Tuckman 2015). The end result is a dynamic and beautiful cinematic spectacle, where huge skeleton props, skeletal decorations, and face paintings colour a festive image of the annual celebration. The sequence helped to popularise the Day of the Dead so much that, to prevent tourist disappointment, Mexico City has begun to organise an annual parade similar to the one seen in the film. Many locals viewed such depictions of Mexico and the holiday as deliberate attempts to shift the world's critical gaze away from the country's rampant organised crime and drug-related violence (Agren 2016). In *Spectre*, certainly the pre-title sequence avoids any such alienating interpretations of Mexico, and, as such, it offers the potential for only fleeting social or cultural commentary on the country. Bond also visits certain unnamed Spanish-speaking countries – located either in the Caribbean or in continental Latin America – during the opening sequences of *Goldfinger* (1964), *Octopussy* (1983), and *Never Say Never Again* (1983). Of these films, the pre-title sequence from *Goldfinger* is particularly interesting, as Bond blows up an installation to prevent a “Mr. Ramirez” from “using heroin-flavoured bananas to finance revolutions”. The short sequence provides an early reference in the film series to Western fears of Latin American drug production (later encapsulated by the “War on Drugs” and the basic plotline of *Live and Let Die*) and the spread of the Cuban Revolution to other countries in the region. The larger corpus of Bond's adventures in Latin America suggests a repeated ideological pattern whereby these locales are represented as spaces of action and intrigue for the British spy who is rarely seen in the company of his American allies in a part of the world that was – and still partly is – considered to be the US's “back yard”.

Below, we analyse the depiction of continental Latin America in *Moonraker*, *Licence to Kill*, and *Quantum of Solace* in turn, examining those films' recognisable post-colonial, Cold War, and post-Cold War power relations in the context of Western colonial visual or narrative traditions and the socio-political history of continental Latin America. In particular, we acknowledge two sites wherein cultural, social, and political struggles for representation take place: the politics related to shooting locations within each film's production, and their use of cinematic landscapes.

### **MOONRAKER (1979)**

The first film to take James Bond to continental Latin America is arguably the most fantastical of the whole series, in which the Western billionaire industrial tycoon, Hugo Drax, is intent on wiping out humanity almost completely in order to start afresh, creating a new “super-race [...] of perfect physical specimens” in

outer space. Prior to the space sequences, a portion of the film's second half takes place in the Brazilian metropolis of Rio de Janeiro during Carnival. Immediately after Bond arrives there, an iconic shot of Rio follows, showing Sugarloaf Mountain, the neighbouring Morro da Urca, and some of Botafogo Beach. The viewing platform on top of Sugarloaf Mountain, with its spectacular views of Rio, as well as the cable cars that run there, provide central locations for the film's action. The types of establishing shots that rely on icons and stereotypes seen here utilise a representational legacy that is also recognisable to viewers without any personal connections to the real-world place, while at the same time the images reinforce archetypal visual landscapes (Chevrier and Huvet 2018; Lukinbeal 2005, 8). The world-famous Rio Carnival also serves as the backdrop for Bond's nighttime foray into Drax's local warehouse. Additionally, the huge Cristo Redentor statue, another central landmark of Rio, appears in the background of one shot shortly before the action moves away from the city. Happy, carefree people are shown to populate many of the film's shots of Rio, but the large Afro-Brazilian component of the population is given visibility only in the Carnival-related sequence; otherwise, the supporting characters and extras are mostly white. The only supposedly Brazilian character named in *Moonraker* is "Manuela" (no surname given), who works for Station VH. She has been assigned to assist Bond, but plays only a minor role in the story as a helper and temporary love interest. The dangers that Bond and Manuela (and later Dr. Holly Goodhead of the CIA) face in Rio are posed by the formidable henchman, Jaws, and Drax's other (not recognisably Brazilian) goons; Brazilian criminals and/or society are never directly implicated. No mention whatsoever is made of the fact that during filming, Brazil had a military dictatorship (1964-1985; see Keen and Haynes 2013, 512-520). Rather, parts of *Moonraker* feel like a travel advertisement for Rio (see Chapman 2007, 166-167), especially as both Air France and British Airways receive favourable attention. Consequently, this film emphasises the spectacle of exotic landscapes and their scope for staging thrilling action sequences.

Following the Rio sequences and the cable car escape from Jaws, Bond learns that the source of Drax's nerve gas is the *Orchidae Nigra*, the black orchid, which grows exclusively in the area of the Tapirapé River in the Brazilian Amazon. Subsequently, Bond finds his way (by boat and hang glider) to the remains of an ancient city, within which Drax's space shuttle launch centre is concealed. The use of the Amazon, a rainforest known for its biodiversity and as the figurative "lungs of the world", adds metaphorical layers to Drax's megalomaniac plans. In these sequences, *Moonraker* engages the audiences'

imaginary expectations of what the Amazon might look like, even when no actual footage of it is included in the film. The Iguazu Falls into which Bond's boat is drawn (Field and Chowdhury 2018, 329-330) are situated not in the Amazon but in south Brazil; the boat chase was filmed in the Florida Everglades (Field and Chowdhury 2018, 330), and several of the exterior shots of Drax's jungle base at Tikal, Guatemala (Barillas 2013, 15).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, a Mayan temple located in Tikal, many thousands of kilometres away, and replicas of Mayan stelae and other pre-Columbian artefacts from Guatemala and Mexico portray remnants of the ancient "great city". According to the film, this city was built by a people who later became sterile and extinct because they worshiped the black orchid. In reality, however, nothing resembling the stone temple shown in *Moonraker* has ever been discovered in the Amazon, as pre-Columbian Amazonian peoples primarily used wood and other organic material for their building projects (Erickson 2008).<sup>4</sup> Thus, *Moonraker's* spectacle of images uses recognisable landscapes, both those actually existing in Brazil and those which tap into the mythical imagination about the pre-Columbian civilisations of Latin America. Real and imagined locations, both of which are often used in the James Bond films, create recognisable yet stereotypical locations for the implementation and embodiment of Bond's adventures (Chevrier and Huvet 2018). In *Moonraker*, Brazil and its cultural heritage provide an appealing, exotic setting for the action in the same way as Colonial Mexico City and the celebrations of the Day of the Dead do in the pre-title sequence of *Spectre*. In this way, *Moonraker* fits into a particular timeline within the Bond franchise in which earlier films (certainly those up until the late 1980s) mixed both idyllic and realistic travel-related images (Chevrier and Huvet 2018).

Yet, while Latin America serves as an exotic, touristic landscape, the visual spectacles are not void of metaphorical meaning. In *Moonraker*, Latin American actors are almost invisible, and as such, they lack well-defined agency beyond passing love interests for Bond (in the case of Manuela), members of a joyous crowd, Q's lab assistants, or simply background. In contrast, principally European and American characters drive the film's action; they are seen to have goals and inspirations, whereas the Brazilians have their (failed) ancient civilisation. Still, Brazilians are shown to go merrily about with their lives and

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3 A little earlier, Tikal had been used for exterior shots of the Yavin-4 rebel base in *Star Wars* (1977).

4 The Amazonian stone pyramid is not the only building in the film that is out of place; however, in the case of Drax's Californian mansion, we are told that it was brought stone by stone from France.

carnivals without a clue as to what is happening in the underbelly of their country. This repeats a narrative logic similar to most Anglo-American films, whereby Latin America and its peoples are often simplified and stereotyped in a way that supports the “white-saviour myth” (Aldama and Gonzáles 2019, 141). Furthermore, as several Bond scholars have pointed out, a similar narrative logic can also be found in the Bond films of the 1960s set in Jamaica and the Bahamas: although Britain’s global position had declined, the Bond films continued to reintroduce colonial images wherein Western people are shown to act out their presumed rights in various global, post-colonial locations (Black 2017; Chapman 2007; Chapman 2018; McClure 2011). *Moonraker*’s “Brazilian” landscapes, then, merely frame Western activities without attributing agency to either the spaces in which they are set or the people who inhabit such spaces.

### **LICENCE TO KILL (1989)**

*Licence to Kill* is, perhaps, the Bond film that is darkest in tone; it is certainly the grittiest of Bond’s adventures prior to the Daniel Craig era. The portrayal of Latin America in the film – especially that of Central America and Colombia – is equally bleak. In *Licence to Kill*, Latin American spaces, represented by the fictitious Republic of Isthmus (in which the second half of the film is set), become meaningful through military dictatorship and drug trafficking, two themes that have influenced public imagery of Latin America since the rise of the Colombian drug cartels and the onset of the so-called “War on Drugs”. This violent and illegal side of Latin America is emphasised through the staging of drug lord Franz Sanchez’s base of operations: the Olympatec Meditation Institute, the cover apparatus of a vast drug empire which represents, on the surface, the serenity and past spiritual glory of Native Americans, but which conceals in its dark, cavernous underbelly the “truth” of this seemingly peaceful place.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the building is itself a metaphor for the popular imagination of Latin America in the 1980s, at large: at once a place of apparent ease and plenty but one that is plagued by strife and conflict, often connected to the drug trade. The negative metaphoric construction of Latin American spaces is also supported in the film’s narration: early in the movie, the derogatory term

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5 As with Drax’s jungle base in *Moonraker*, the Olympatec Meditation Institute references the rich pre-Columbian heritage of Latin America. According to Professor Joe Butcher, the televangelist who heads the institute, the compound is a Native American temple “rebuilt stone for stone and restored to all of its original glory”. In actuality, the “ancient temple” is a more or less modern “vast concrete construction near Toluca”, Mexico (Field and Chowdhury 2018, 455).

“banana republic” is used to compare Latin American countries quite unfavourably to the US; and the famous “plomo o plata” (lead or silver) metaphor is mentioned twice in connection with the widespread corruption afflicting Latin America (see Clawson 2006, 189-191; Goldstein and Drybread 2018). Moreover, the lamentable social reality in which many politicians and other people in positions of influence operate – in having to choose between taking bribes or living under constant threat of assassination (Simser 2011, 267) – is summarised in the following way by Sanchez, speaking to the visiting Asian drug lords with whom he is in league:

Everyone and his brother is on the payroll. So, you buy a mayor, a chief of police, a general ... a president. One day you wake up and own the whole goddamn country. Then you take what you want: a bank, a gambling casino, airline concession.

Indeed, Sanchez is shown to have the president of the Republic of Isthmus, Hector Lopez, in his pocket, who he retains by means of a monthly bribe. In addition to corruption, *Licence to Kill* also alludes to the less-than-ideal state of democracy in Latin America, as Sanchez tells Lopez that he is “only president for life”. On the one hand, this is a warning to Lopez that Sanchez could easily have him killed and replaced should he so desire; on the other, Sanchez’s remark alludes to the historic tendency of dictatorial or *caudillo* (strongman) rule in many Latin American countries (Clawson 2006, 116-117), often with US complicity. Not a single Latin American character is portrayed in a fully positive way in the film. This follows a general tendency of Western films in which stereotypical representations of Latin Americans have tended to focus on criminals, clowns, sexualised women, or unnamed side characters (Berg 2002; Serna 2017). Lupe Lamora, Sanchez’s girlfriend, helps Bond in various ways throughout the story, but mostly out of personal benefit; she seeks to free herself from the patriarchal Sanchez, and, when Sanchez dies, to profiteer from his drug money and start a relationship with President Lopez. Therefore, Lamora’s character departs from some traditional Latin American gender expectations – although she simultaneously reinforces others. Following the example set by the Virgin Mary, Latina women, it is claimed, should be family-oriented, virtuous, patient, and long-suffering. Latino men, on the other hand, are typically seen as public-oriented, self-confident, extroverted, virile, and often sexually promiscuous (Chant and Craske 2003, 9-17; Clawson 2006, 186-188). Bond bluntly alludes to (and reinforces) traditional Latin American gender stereotypes, too: after introducing Pam Bouvier,

an allied CIA agent, as his executive secretary at the Isthmus City hotel, she queries why Bond could not be *her* executive secretary instead. Bond retorts with the following: “[w]e’re south of the border. It’s a man’s world”. With two short sentences, he distinguishes the emancipated “First World” from what he sees as sexist, conservative Latin America. Still, Bouvier and Lamora both challenge traditional, sexist gender roles in their respective ways, even if the male characters often try to undermine these actions (see Funnell and Dodds 2017, 63-64).

Although violence is always present in the James Bond films, *Licence to Kill* is an uncharacteristically brutal entry in the series (see Black 2017, 138; Chapman 2007, 210, 251). At the beginning of the film, a garrote is used to kill a guard before Lamora’s lover’s heart is cut out of his chest (off-screen) while Sanchez whips Lamora viciously. When Sanchez begins to suspect his associates Milton Krest and, later, his head of security, Colonel Heller, of disloyalty, he kills both in brutal, unconventional ways (by blowing one’s head up in a decompression chamber and impaling the other on a forklift). In the final battle between Bond and Sanchez, the latter is not armed with a gun but with a vicious machete knife, again emphasising the up-close and personal nature of violence adopted by him and those in his organisation. The brutality of *Licence to Kill* was partly motivated by the ultra-violent practices of actual Latin American drug cartels (Field and Chowdhury 2018, 444), but it was also linked to the box-office success of such “tougher-edged action films like *Lethal Weapon* (1987) and *Die Hard* (1988)” (Field and Chowdhury 2018, 441).

One intriguing aspect of *Licence to Kill* is the way in which the film seemingly lays the blame for Latin America’s involvement in the global drug trade on many countries within the region, rather than on one specific country or a small conglomerate group of countries. During the film’s production, Latin America was indeed struggling with many issues; Chile and Paraguay were still under military dictatorships, and Argentina and Brazil had only recently returned to democracy (Keen and Haynes 2013). Colombia, although formally a democracy, was engulfed in social unrest and violence; its armed forces and right-wing paramilitary groups fought leftist guerrilla groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia and the Columbian National Liberation Army, while the economic and political influence of the Medellín and Cali drug cartels was significant (Keen and Haynes 2013, 487-490; LaRosa and Mejía 2017, 96-100). Central America fared even worse, as civil wars raged in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua (Keen and Haynes 2013, 450-452). Panama was led by the dictator Manuel Noriega, who was engaged in an ever-

escalating conflict with the US. Noriega, accused of and later convicted in the US of drug trafficking and money laundering, was overthrown shortly after the release of *Licence to Kill*, when the US invaded Panama in December 1989 (Conniff and Bigler 2019, 37-51; Keen and Haynes 2013, 600-601; see also Black 2017, 136-137). We agree with Black's argument that the Republic of Isthmus is a thinly-disguised representation of Panama in the late 1980s (2017, 136; see also Chapman 2007, 206; Field and Chowdhury 2018, 445); the country was ruled by a dictator involved in drug trafficking and who was engaged in open conflict with the US. Moreover, the "Isthmus of Panama" is a well-known, widely-used geographical term (thereby aligning the real-world country with the fictive location of much of the film's setting). Interestingly, however, the flag of the Republic of Isthmus, displayed prominently in several scenes throughout *Licence to Kill*, looks nothing like the red, white, and blue Panamanian flag, divided into four quarters. Rather, with its two light blue stripes and a white stripe displaying a coat of arms in the middle, the Isthmian flag greatly resembles the Guatemalan one. Therefore, the film would seem to suggest a conflation between Panama and Guatemala, thus implicating the latter – and the Central American region, more generally – in its representation of drug trafficking. In a similar vein, Sanchez's nationality is never explicitly revealed. This, we argue, is another way in which the film seeks to distil its representative image of Central America: rather than implicate any one country in Latin America's drug trade, the film suggests that such problems afflict the region on the whole – a decision that was taken, possibly, as a way to avoid alienating any potential distribution markets in specific Latin American countries. Furthermore, Mexico is neither mentioned by name throughout the film nor seemingly apportioned blame for the drug epidemic plaguing the US at the time, even though, as a country, it has been an important transshipment point for (Colombian) cocaine since the mid-1980s (Simser 2011, 269). The filmmakers' choice to "turn a blind eye" to Mexico's central role in the Latin American drug trade is almost certainly due to the fact that *Licence to Kill* was shot in Churubusco Studios in Mexico City and on location around Mexico (Field and Chowdhury 2018, 452-457). Conversely, both Colombia and Cuba are specifically named in *Licence to Kill*: cocaine is, on several occasions, referred to as "Colombian pure", and after Bond discovers his ally, the mangled Felix Leiter (whom Sanchez has fed to a shark), a US law-enforcement official suspects incorrectly that a chainsaw has probably been used as "Colombians love to use them on informers"; while Cuba is the country to which Sanchez tries to flee at the beginning of the film, before being captured by Bond

and Leiter, and through which he later apparently makes his escape from Florida to the Republic of Isthmus.

Perhaps surprisingly, the film levels some criticism at the US, too. When the leftist Sandinista Front of National Liberation succeeded in ousting the Nicaraguan dictator Antonio Somoza Debayle in July 1979, the US was complicit in financing the so-called “Contras” (counterrevolutionary) paramilitary groups, which fought against the Sandinistas from 1982 to 1988 (Walker 2003, 34-56; see also Chapman 2007, 201-202). In *Licence to Kill*, of course, Dario, who is one of Sanchez’s most trusted henchmen, “used to be with the Contras before they kicked him out”. Through Dario, Sanchez has managed to buy four Stinger missiles from the Contras and is threatening to shoot down an American airliner if the US Drug Enforcement Administration does not back off in their pursuit of him. Therefore, it may be said that the Reagan administration’s willingness to distribute powerful weapons to anti-leftist armed groups in Latin America is implicated in the threat Sanchez poses to the lives of innocent Westerners.

#### **QUANTUM OF SOLACE (2008)**

*Licence to Kill* is not the only film in the series in which criticism is levelled at US involvement in Latin America. In *Quantum of Solace*, Bond is on the trail of one Dominic Greene, who is conspiring with a deposed Bolivian dictator, General Medrano, as part of a plan to facilitate a *coup d’état* in Bolivia, and who is shown to be working alongside the CIA’s section chief for South America, Gregory Beam. Beam promises Greene that the US will do nothing to stop the *coup* being orchestrated by Greene and Medrano in exchange for “the lease to any oil found” in Bolivia. Direct US imperial involvement in Latin America had begun in earnest at the turn of the twentieth century. The so-called “Roosevelt Corollary” to the earlier “Monroe Doctrine” officially recognised this policy shift in 1904: “[t]he United States assumes right to intervene in Latin America to protect interests and act as a police power for the American continent” (Blouet and Blouet 2010, 99). In the early decades of the 1900s, the US primarily sought to protect American financial interests in Latin America (Keen and Haynes 2013, 582); this situation changed, however, after World War II and the Korean War, and even more pronouncedly after Fidel Castro took power in Cuba in January 1959. Shortly thereafter, Castro declared himself a Marxist-Leninist and allied Cuba with the Soviet Union (Keen and Haynes 2013, 403). For the next thirty years, Cold War power politics dictated US policy towards Latin America, with the goal being to prevent the creation of “new Cubas” at all costs (Keen and

Haynes 2013, 590-591). This led to a number of instances in which the US either officially or covertly supported bloody right-wing military coups and dictatorships (Keen and Haynes 2013, 591-600), preferring anti-Communist military leaders to even modestly leftist democratic governments. Finally, at the tail end of the Cold War and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the War on Drugs became one of the most important spearheads of US involvement in Latin America (Keen and Haynes 2013, 591, 603). Indeed, in *Quantum of Solace*, Bond directly refers to this complicated post-World War II history of US-Latin American relations when he remarks to the American Leiter: “You know, I was just wondering what South America would look like if nobody gave a damn about coke or communism. It’s always impressed me the way you boys carved this place up”.

*Quantum of Solace* is very much a film about frontier resources and nation states where national sovereignty is weakened by the influence of money, which is shown throughout to distort politics and legal checks and balances (Dittmer and Dodds 2013; Funnell and Dodds 2017, 153-160). In this way, the film is related to *Moonraker*, in which Drax is able to take advantage of the weak rule of law in the Brazilian Amazon to build his shuttle launch centre there. *Quantum of Solace* takes Bond to two actual Latin American countries: Bolivia and Haiti. Of the two, Haiti receives much less emphasis and is largely used to provide colourful, semi-exotic background visuals – though it should be noted that the “Haiti” sequences were actually shot in Colón, Panama (Field and Chowdhury 2018, 608). Port-au-Prince is presented in the film as a chaotic place through which Bond rampages without any fear of police or military. Greene uses Haiti as an example of his organisation Quantum’s power and influence, telling Medrano:

Well, look at what we did to this country. The Haitians elect a priest<sup>6</sup> who decides to raise the minimum wage from 38 cents to one dollar a day. It’s not a lot, but it’s enough to upset the corporations who were here making t-shirts and running shoes. So, they called us, and we facilitated a change.

This makes it clear to viewers that Haiti, one of the poorest and most underdeveloped countries in Latin America, by several indicators, has had its share of political turmoil, attracting the opportunism and radical action that might upset

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6 The priest referred to by Greene is probably Jean-Bernard Aristide, who won the unprecedentedly fair Haitian presidential election of 1990 but who only remained in office for less than eight months before the military toppled him (Keen and Haynes 2013, 598; Valtonen 2001, 431-432).

the interests of border-free rapacious capitalism. Similarly, Bolivia is shown to be a country plagued by widespread corruption and political instability (see Black 2017, 136).<sup>7</sup> This is in spite of the fact that, from 1982 until the late 2010s – in other words, during the film’s production – Bolivia was actually a democracy.<sup>8</sup> The “failed state” which is advocated in *Quantum of Solace*’s representation of Bolivia is very much visible in the cinematic portrayal of the country’s landscape throughout. According to Camille Montes, an agent in the Bolivian Secret Service with whom Bond works, Greene’s cover operation “Greene Planet” – an ostensibly environmentalist organisation – has bought up large tracts of land outside Potosí and has sold the logging rights to “a multinational corporation that cut down the forests”. In reality, most of the area of Potosí is situated at elevations of over 4000 metres above sea level; the area is extremely arid and hostile to plant life and lacks notable forests of any kind. Thus, by portraying the rugged Bolivian landscape as a product of man-made interference, the film suggests that the cause of its barrenness is connected with predatory capitalist endeavours which the corruption-afflicted Bolivian government allowed to take place.

Further political implications also concern the filming locations of *Quantum of Solace*: Panama City, Panama, which is located at sea level, doubled for La Paz, Bolivia, which, in actuality, is built in a canyon in the Andes mountains (Field and Chowdhury 2018, 608). “La Paz”, then, is always shown in closely framed shots, revealing little, if any, of the skyline; had any footage actually been taken in the real La Paz, the film would almost certainly have included stunning panoramic shots of the canyon city and the Illimani Mountain overlooking it. The aerial dogfight scenes between Bond and his pursuers, also

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7 In 2008, the year of the film’s release, Bolivia ranked 102 out of the 180 countries scored on Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index; Haiti fared much worse, occupying the fourth to last spot (“Corruption Perceptions Index” 2020).

8 In December 2005, the Indigenous leader Evo Morales became the first Bolivian president to receive his mandate directly from the people, winning over 50% of the votes in the presidential election. All other presidents before him had been voted to power by the newly-elected congress after no candidate had obtained a majority in the polls (Klein 2011, 243, 264). Furthermore, Morales was the first president ever to represent the historically repressed, majority indigenous population of the country. Unfortunately, later developments showed that he was in no way a perfect leader; he sought to over-extend his rule and finally had to flee Bolivia in November 2019, accused of having rigged the results of the October 2019 election. Still, at the beginning of his three presidential terms, Morales was indeed seen by many as a welcome breath of fresh air in Latin American politics.

supposedly set in Bolivia, were filmed in Mexico (Field and Chowdhury 2018, 609); but perhaps the single biggest geopolitical concern of the film is that many of the scenes set in Bolivia were actually filmed in neighbouring Chile (Field and Chowdhury 2018, 609). Chile's victory in the War of the Pacific resulted in the eventual landlocking of Bolivia in 1879 (Klein 2011, 140-142); because of this defeat, Bolivian nationalism is fervent in its opposition to Chile and Chileans. Indeed, in April 2008, some seven months prior to the release of *Quantum of Solace*, Bolivian Vice Minister of Development and Culture, Pablo Groux, sent a letter to the producers and director of the film voicing his strong disapproval of the use of Chilean locations to depict Bolivia (Schipani 2008); furthermore, Groux was worried that the film's "stigmatising" portrayal of Bolivia would affect the way millions of people imagine his country. That said, the film's plotline – concerning Quantum's attempts to control and profit from Bolivia's water supply – is inspired by actual events in Bolivian history (Field and Chowdhury 2018, 597). At the turn of the millennium, the government sold the Cochabamba region's public and communal waterworks to the North American multinational Bechtel (Klein 2011, 262); this led to the so-called "Water War", a three-month period of massive mobilisations and strikes that finally forced the Bolivian government to abandon its privatisation efforts. Quantum's scheme to profit on Bolivia's impoverished, drought-afflicted indigenous highlanders – several shots of whom appear in the film – thus casts global capitalism in an unfavourable historical light (see Dittmer and Dodds 2013, 82-85; Funnell and Dodds 2017, 156-158). Indeed, *Quantum of Solace* is laden with criticism aimed at the self-interest-driven Latin American policies of the US and Britain: both the CIA and leading British politicians are shown as willing to support Greene and Medrano's *coup* in order to secure access to Bolivia's potential oil reserves. Furthermore, although the portrayal of Bolivia in *Quantum of Solace* works (unfairly) to maintain negative stereotypes of the country and its people, the film is refreshingly honest in its depiction of the ways in which relatively small Latin American countries become pawns in the geopolitical gamification of major world power relations.

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

So, what kind of a continental Latin America do the three Bond films analysed above forge in the minds of their viewers? *Moonraker*'s Brazil is, above all, an exotic location: Rio de Janeiro's recognisable landmarks entice the viewer, while freely constructed images of the Amazon rainforest allude to the lush nature and rich pre-Columbian heritage of Latin America – even if only in passing and

through a *mélange* of Guatemalan and Mexican imagery. Furthermore, there are no recognisably Brazilian goons, and *Moonraker* includes little to no commentary on Brazilian society, itself. Instead, Brazil becomes a backdrop for Western agency, by and through which a colonial point of view is implied. *Licence to Kill* and *Quantum of Solace* offer somewhat dystopian though, sadly, somewhat more realistic portrayals of Central America and Bolivia, respectively; the widespread corruption, traditional gender stereotypes, and aggressive capitalisation of natural resources referenced by these films continue to be significant issues in Latin America, where drug production and trafficking have, indeed, caused much social unrest and violence. Whereas *Moonraker* undoubtedly fuelled many people's desires to visit Brazil, spatial meaning-making in *Licence to Kill* and *Quantum of Solace* suggests that Latin America is a place to be avoided (see Dittmer and Dodds 2013, 86, 88). Laudably, however, these films also implicate the US (and/or the West, more generally) as being partly responsible for the troubles currently faced by Central and South American countries. In *Quantum of Solace*, in particular, US officials are presented as actively unwilling to intervene on behalf of the Bolivians' suffering; conversely, in its anti-American framing, *Quantum of Solace* is the only film of the three to consider the Latin American people as victims of imperial exploitation (see Funnell & Dodds 2017, 158-159). On the other hand, in *Licence to Kill*, once Bond exacts his revenge against Sanchez, he seems largely unconcerned with the fact that Lamora inherits Sanchez's vast wealth, most of which will have been accrued through illegal means; he equally shows no interest in seeing these assets redistributed to the state, to the people of the Republic of Isthmus, or to Sanchez's many victims. Finally, one striking similarity between *Moonraker*, *Licence to Kill*, and *Quantum of Solace* is that Bond is always forced to operate in continental Latin America either completely or at least partially as a rogue agent, with little to no official support from MI6, suggesting that these are spaces (as opposed to places) that the institutional arm of Britain's imperial government is unable to reach.

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