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Assassins, Cigars, and Revolution:

James Bond's Cuba

Antti Korpisaari

Against all odds, the Cuban revolution[1] has managed to survive both its decades-long political confrontation with the U.S. and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, remaining the only former Eastern Bloc country not to have formally abandoned communism. During the Cold War and beyond, these historical peculiarities of Cuba have made it a frequent topic of spy fiction (e.g., Greene 1958; Scott 2020), including of James Bond stories. In what follows, I analyze the depiction of Cuba in both Ian Fleming's twelve Bond novels and nine short stories, and the twenty-five Eon-produced Bond films released to date. From *Live and Let Die*, Fleming's second Bond novel published in 1954, to *No Time to Die*, the latest Bond film released in 2021, the series offers a rich, almost seventy-year-long corpus to work with. After Fleming's beloved Jamaica and perhaps the Bahamas, Cuba receives the second- or third-most attention of any Latin American and Caribbean country in the Bond corpus.[2]

As the largest island in the Caribbean, Cuba has always had significant regional importance. When Fleming wrote his first Bond novels, Dictator Fulgencio Batista was still firmly in power, and the island was under heavy American political and economic influence, including by the Mafia. After Fidel Castro and his revolutionary forces toppled Batista, however, Cuba soon joined the Eastern Bloc. The country whose capital Havana had been a favorite gambling spot and holiday destination for well-off Americans became an ideological and political opponent, and travel to and from the island was severely restricted. Fictional depictions of Cuba changed accordingly and arguably gained more relative weight too, as much fewer non-Cuban people had a chance to experience the country

[1] The Cubans think of their revolution as an ongoing process rather than only the single act of toppling Dictator Fulgencio Batista at the turn of 1958–1959. I use the term similarly throughout this article.

[2] For the treatment of continental Latin America in the James Bond films, see Korpisaari and Hakola (2021).

firsthand. As I will show in this article, Fleming and the Bond films have certainly done their part in casting Cuba in the role of an "other" and an enemy of the Western capitalist world in the minds of hundreds of millions of people the world over. Significantly, too, the Brosnan era Bond films continued to reproduce such a problematic and even dehumanizing depiction of Cuba well after the Cold War had ended.

Cuba in Ian Fleming's Bond Novels and Short Stories

While Ian Fleming was captivated by the (British) Caribbean, he never travelled to Cuba, and neither did his character James Bond. The closest Bond gets to doing so is in Fleming's last novel, *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1965). Having unsuccessfully chased his target Francisco Scaramanga for six weeks in the Caribbean, Central America, and Venezuela, Bond is at Kingston Airport waiting for a flight to Havana—Scaramanga's "home ground … *with which Bond was barely familiar*" (Fleming [2006] 1965, 42; my emphasis).[3] Bond ends up cancelling his reservation, however, when he learns that Scaramanga is soon to arrive in Jamaica. Still, Cuba as a geographical place and geopolitical space factored largely in Fleming's thinking, as social and/or political issues related to the country are mentioned in six of his Bond novels and two of his Bond short stories. I see two main reasons for this relative richness of Cuba-related content in Fleming's prose. First, Fleming wintered—and wrote his Bond stories—in Jamaica (Parker 2014), whose nearest neighboring countries are Cuba and Haiti.[4] Second, the period in which Fleming produced his Bond texts, 1952–1964, encompasses the victory of the Cuban revolution and other key developments in Cuba. Fleming, whose background was in journalism and intelligence, likely followed these major historic events of

[3] Although the main point of this quote is to highlight Bond's unfamiliarity with Cuba, it is also important to note the negative connotations Cuba receives here and elsewhere in Fleming's works as the (paternal or, as here, adoptive) "home ground" of many evildoers.

[4] Haiti receives much less attention from Fleming, and when it does—almost exclusively in *Live and Let Die*—this is in the context of vodou / folk beliefs, not, say, politics.

the late 1950s and early 1960s with keen interest, and they also seeped into his fiction writing, framed and interpreted through a distinctly white male colonial lens.

For the first time, Fleming brings up Cuba in his second Bond novel, *Live and Let Die* (1954). We learn that Bond's first assignment in Jamaica just after World War II had links to Cuba as "the Communist headquarters in Cuba was trying to infiltrate the Jamaican labour unions" (Fleming [2003] 1954, 168; see also Black 2001, 14). In the book's present, the villain Mr. Big's yacht *Secatur* regularly sails from St. Petersburg, Florida to Jamaica via Cuba. The heroine Solitaire comments to Bond that Mr Big's business in Cuba is "[p]robably mixed up with Communism." She believes that "Cuba comes under Harlem [that is, Mr. Big's main theater of operations] and runs red agents all through the Caribbean" (Fleming [2003] 1954, 111). When Bond stops Mr. Big's operation to smuggle pirate gold and gemstones from Jamaica to the United States to finance the Soviet espionage system there, Bond, therefore, strikes a blow against Cuban communists too. The Cuban Popular Socialist Party (see Sweig 2012, 37–38) might conceivably have tried to spread its ideology to Jamaica in the 1940s and 1950s, but it is just as likely that Fleming's references to such prerevolution attempts are figments of his imagination, motivated by the general East-versus-West framework of his pre-SPECTRE-era Bond stories. Whether Fleming was historically accurate or not, however, is not the most important point here. What is imperative, rather, is that in the ideologically polarized times following the end of World War II and the onset of the Cold War, most of Fleming's contemporary readers first in Britain and later in the Western world more generally were prone to accept his depiction of Cuba as a place capable of considerable extraterritorial impact (see Goodman 2016).

In *Dr. No* (1958), Fleming again alludes to (prerevolution) Cuba spreading communism in the Caribbean when Bond's chief M comments to him that the quiet routines of the Caribbean station include dealing with "an occasional communist trying to get into the island [i.e., Jamaica] from Cuba"

(Fleming [2006] 1958, 32). More important to the plot of the novel is that the villain's island, Crab Key, is located between Jamaica and Cuba, and that Dr. No hired people for his guano operation from both islands (Fleming [2006] 1958, 220). Furthermore, he has "established a watch on the intelligence services in Jamaica and Cuba" (Fleming [2006] 1958, 224) and mentions Havana (together with Kingston and Miami) as a possible future target for the American rockets, fired from Turks Island, that he is jamming (Fleming [2006] 1958, 236; see also Black 2001, 33). As Cuba and Jamaica are often treated together in this way, *Dr. No*'s depiction of Cuba could arguably be read as the least judgmental in Fleming's oeuvre. Another possible reading, however, is that both Cubans and Jamaicans are as culpable for having helped Dr. No build up and run his criminal operation. Nevertheless, following Dr. No's violent demise, the Jamaican police superintendent agrees with Bond in that "most of these Negro gangsters [i.e., Dr. No's surviving henchmen] will probably be in Cuba by now. Have to get in touch with my opposite number in Havana and catch up with them before they take to the hills or go underground" (Fleming [2006] 1958, 297). This indicates that "normal" channels of communication and at least some level of cooperation exist between Jamaica and Cuba, but also insinuates that it is relatively easy for criminals to escape capture in Cuba.

In his Bond stories, Fleming repeatedly mentions the strong control that American organized crime exerted over the Cuban casino and hotel sector in the Batista era (see Simons 1996, 262–63). *Live and Let Die*'s Mr. Big could perhaps be read as an early representative of this phenomenon. For the first time the theme comes up explicitly in *Goldfinger* (1959), as one of the gangster bosses whose services Auric Goldfinger requires for the taking of Fort Knox is "Mr. Jed Midnight of the Shadow Syndicate operating out of Miami and Havana" (Fleming [2006] 1959, 262). In the short story *For Your Eyes Only* (1960), Colonel Havelock regards Cuba as being "riddled with crooks and gangsters" (Fleming [2006] 1960, 42). A bit later in the story, M tells Bond that the FBI has "been interested in Havana ever since the big American gangster money started following the casinos there" (Fleming [2006] 1960, 57). Finally, *The Man with the Golden Gun* contains a reference to hoods of "the type

that had owned the Havana hotels and casinos in the old Batista days" (Fleming [2006] 1965, 83). All these cases allude to the shady, highly corrupt side of Batista's Cuba, where American (and other) criminal organizations were able to operate rather freely.

The short story collection *For Your Eyes Only* (1960) features the first mentions of (Fidel) Castro and his insurgency as well as some of the most nuanced Cuba-related content in the Fleming Bond corpus. The negative, and in many cases racist, framing of Cuba and the Cubans in the collection's second short story, *For Your Eyes Only*, is quite telling. The story is set in September–October 1958, with the Castro insurgency's victory over the Batista regime in Cuba only months away (Fleming [2006] 1960, 41, 52, 57). This has led to a situation in which many Cubans, wanting "to get their money out of Cuba and into something else quick" (Fleming [2006] 1960, 42), are buying up properties in Jamaica. For Fleming, himself a Brit of high-class background and the owner of the Goldeneye property in Jamaica, this was a horrific scenario. Alternatively, however, the situation could be read as one (welcome) facet of the rapidly advancing decolonization of Jamaica, or even as the "recolonization" of parts of the island by people of Spanish inheritance, as Jamaica was a Spanish colony for some 150 years prior to its takeover by the British in 1655.

For Your Eyes Only begins with the murder of the elderly Havelock couple in Jamaica because they refuse to sell their ancestral plantation to the "head of Batista's Counter Intelligence," ex-Gestapo-man von Hammerstein (Fleming [2006] 1960, 56). The Cuban Major Gonzales and his two gunmen commit the actual killing. Gonzales's accent is "the sham American of a Jamaican taxi-driver" (Fleming [2006] 1960, 45), and Mrs. Havelock thinks of him as "a common, greasy little man" (Fleming [2006] 1960, 48) and a "mangy Cuban crook" (Fleming [2006] 1960, 50). Later in the story, Bond, who sets out to avenge the Havelocks' deaths after von Hammerstein is sacked by Batista and, for the time being, settles on a ranch in Vermont (see Amis 1966, 26–29; Black 2001, 41–42), regards the three Cubans as "very small and dark" (Fleming [2006] 1960, 82). Gonzales's

two gunmen are "low peasant types" (Fleming [2006] 1960, 82) who have a shooting match to decide which one should get to spend a night with one of two Cuban women also present on the ranch. Bond thinks that these "swarthy brunettes" look like "cheap Cuban whores" and laugh and chatter "like pretty monkeys" (Fleming [2006] 1960, 82–83).

For Your Eyes Only and the *Quantum of Solace* short story that immediately follows it, however, also feature startlingly positive treatment of the Castro insurgency. In the former story, Station C of the British Secret Service, looking into the Havelocks' deaths on M's request, "didn't get anywhere with the Batista people" but has "a good man with the other side" (Fleming [2006] 1960, 56). M continues: "Castro's Intelligence people seem to have the Government pretty well penetrated. I got the whole story a couple of weeks ago" (Fleming [2006] 1960, 56).[5] The Batista government is framed much less favorably as, among many other things, it "won't raise a finger" to help get the Havelocks' murderers on trial (Fleming [2006] 1960, 58). In *Quantum of Solace*, Castro's revolutionary fighting provides the reason for Bond being in Nassau, thus framing the narrative otherwise totally unrelated to Cuba (see Black 2001, 43). As the U.S. Coast Guard had seized two shipments of arms meant for the Cuban rebels, "the Castro supporters had turned to Jamaica and the Bahamas as possible bases" (Fleming [2006] 1960, 99). The British "government had a big export programme with [Batista's] Cuba …, and a minor condition of the deal was that Britain should not give aid or comfort to the Cuban rebels" (Fleming [2006] 1960, 99–100). Therefore, Bond had been sent to intervene and had used thermite bombs to destroy "the two big cabin cruisers that were being fitted out for the job" of running arms to Cuba (Fleming [2006] 1960, 100). What is of great interest here is that Bond had not wanted the job as, "if anything, his sympathies were with the rebels" (Fleming [2006] 1960, 99). This represents a rare case of Bond "taking sides" in a national conflict (that at the time was) quite unrelated to British geopolitical interests. For however briefly, then,

[5] The deceased Havelocks' daughter Judy, also seeking to—and ultimately managing to—kill von Hammerstein, had to come by this information in a very different way, "flirting" with the Cuban underworld and finally getting the whole story from a "sort of high-up policeman" in exchange for sex (Fleming [2006] 1960, 81).

Fleming apparently saw in the (victory of the) Castro insurgency the promise of a better Cuba. After some sixty years of largely negative geopolitical sentiments toward communist Cuba, this may seem strange, but prior to taking power in Cuba, Castro and his guerillas received sustained positive coverage in US (and other international) media (Anderson 1997). Furthermore, in 1958, the US administration first put an embargo on arms shipments to Cuba and then, on December 10, withdrew recognition of Batista's government (Black 2001, 44; Parker 2014, 250). That is, Fleming was far from alone in feeling that Castro could be a better ruler than Batista ever was.

After the *For Your Eyes Only* short story's von Hammerstein, *Thunderball* (1961) contains Fleming's second reference to fugitive Nazi war criminals residing in (prerevolution) Cuba: Ernst Stavro Blofeld lists "former SS Gruppenführer Sonntag, living under the name of Santos in Havana" as one of the SPECTRE criminal organization's successful blackmail victims (Fleming [2006] 1961, 66). In his prose, Fleming develops this ex-Nazi theme most fully in *Moonraker* (1955), set in England. In regards to Latin America, it is a well-established fact that many ex-Nazis, including Adolf Eichmann and Josef Mengele, sought refuge there after World War II. Because of its proximity to and close ties with the United States, however, prerevolution Cuba was probably not one of their most preferred destinations. Rather, as Black (2001, 43) puts it, "this linkage by a Conservative writer [i.e., Fleming] of ex-Nazis with right-wing Latin American regimes was designed to damn the latter."

Up to this point, most of the content we have covered has referenced pre-Castro Cuba. Fleming's last two Bond novels, however, reflect his clear disillusionment with the communist path revolutionary Cuba took in 1959–1960. Although the first of these works, *You Only Live Twice* (1964), is set almost totally in Japan, Fleming brings up Cuba on two occasions. The first is when M has lunch with the neurologist Sir James Molony at the exclusive gentlemen's club Blades. As cigars are offered to M's guest, Sir James, raising a quizzical eyebrow, comments: "I see the Havanas are still coming in" (Fleming [2006] 1964, 16). The first thing to note here is that Cuba is epitomized as

a product, the cigar, in a dehumanizing way. The second is that in a series of novels and short stories replete with descriptions of the characteristics of different kinds of cigarette brands (see Amis 1966, 30–31; Hartvelt 2022, 7–8), this is the only instance of any tobacco products specified as being Havanas/Cuban. This is surely no coincidence. Rather, Sir James's remark alludes to the nearly total embargo the United States imposed on trade with Cuba in the early 1960s (Sweig 2012, 88–89) and/or to the relocation of several well-known Cuban cigar and liquor brands elsewhere in the first years of the revolution. Arguably, this passage could be read more as criticism of US policy than of Cuba itself. In light of the following example from *You Only Live Twice*, however, I feel that it indeed is aimed at Cuba and Castro for having taken up communism, forcing the Western world and many private companies to resort to drastic countermeasures.

The second time Cuba is referenced in *You Only Live Twice* is when, prior to his fatal fight with Bond, Blofeld seeks to justify SPECTRE's stealing of two atomic weapons in the earlier *Thunderball* story (Fleming [2006] 1964, 248; my emphasis):

> These were dangerous toys which, in the poor boy's hands, or let us say, to discard the allegory, in the hands of *a Castro*, could lead to the wanton extinction of mankind. … If I had been successful …, might not the threat of a recurrence of my attempt have led to serious disarmament talks, to an abandonment of these dangerous toys that might so easily get into the wrong hands?

Blofeld's arguments clearly carry echoes of the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, which brought the world closer to the brink of nuclear war than it has perhaps ever been (Black 2001, 49–50; 2017, 21; Chapman 2007, 70–71; Sweig 2012, 84–87).[6] Furthermore, Fleming employs Castro as short hand for a particular understanding of Cuba in a problematic manner.

[6] Fleming actually makes a (fictional) connection between nuclear weapons and Cuba in *Thunderball*: SPECTRE tells Giuseppe Petacchi, who highjacks a British military airplane carrying two atomic weapons, that "a Cuban

Of Fleming's Bond stories, *The Man with the Golden Gun*, published posthumously in 1965, contains by far the most Cuba-related content. Bond is sent to kill Francisco Scaramanga, "the greatest pro gunman in the world" (Fleming [2006] 1965, 177). After working in organized crime in the United States and then briefly as a kind of real estate agent in the Caribbean area, Scaramanga settled in Havana in 1959, obtaining "an influential post as foreign 'enforcer' for … the Cuban Secret Police" (Fleming [2006] 1965, 30–31). In this capacity, Scaramanga has undertaken numerous assassinations, including of several British agents, in Latin America. He carries a Cuban diplomatic passport and "appears to have no difficulty in obtaining foreign currency from *the slim resources of Cuba* when he needs it" (Fleming [2006] 1965, 31–32; my emphasis). Therefore, Scaramanga is further vilified through his association with and being part of a system of oversight and oppression in revolutionary Cuba. It is noteworthy, however, that he is not Cuban per se but of Catalan origins (Fleming [2006] 1965, 30). That is, like the ex-Nazi von Hammerstein in *For Your Eyes Only*, he is a foreigner that has found a lucrative niche befitting of his unique "skills" in Cuba (see Halloran 2005, 173–74).

In *The Man with the Golden Gun*, Scaramanga, the KGB's Resident Director for the Caribbean Mr. Hendriks, and five American gangster bosses have formed the "Group." Fleming, therefore, highlights Cuban-Russian relations, adding American criminal organizations into the conspiracy to vilify Cuba further. Besides developing the Thunderbird Hotel in western Jamaica, the Group is engaged in various illegal activities that serve the Soviets' (and, by extension, the Cubans') interests of creating social and political unrest in Jamaica and the Caribbean. In the novel, the burning of the West Indies Sugar Company's Jamaican sugarcane crops receives special attention. Its estates were "run by expatriate British and white Jamaicans" (Parker 2014, 31), so Bond is once again fighting to protect British economic interests in the Caribbean. We learn that in its previous meeting in Havana, the Group, against Hendriks's (that is, the Soviet Union's) minority vote, had decided, "in exchange for certain favours, to come to the aid of Fidel Castro and assist in maintaining and indeed

revolutionary group who wanted to call attention to its existence and aims by a dramatic piece of self-advertisement" (Fleming [2006] 1961, 111) commissioned the undertaking.

increasing the world price of sugar to offset the damage caused by Hurricane Flora" (Fleming [2006] 1965, 106). As Bond's former secretary Mary Goodnight tells him, Castro is trying to keep the price of sugar up to get more in exchange for it from the Soviets. Jamaica is Cuba's main rival in sugar production, so one way to accomplish this is to burn and otherwise sabotage Jamaican sugarcane crops (Fleming [2006] 1965, 52–54). Fleming's portrayal of Cuba's dependency on sugar is accurate: Despite Castro's initial dreams of industrializing the country, it actually had little choice but to continue producing and exporting as much sugar as possible. Instead of the United States, however, this sugar now mostly went to the Eastern Bloc countries. The part about sabotaging competing production in Jamaica, however, is in all likelihood only figment of Fleming's imagination, inserted in the story to discredit revolutionary Cuba.

At the tail end of a private meeting between Scaramanga and Mr. Hendriks, the former expresses the following views regarding Fidel Castro and his thinking (Fleming [2006] 1965, 147–48; see also Black 2001, 77–78):

> My Mister C is not expecting great results in the States. Even the Mafia can't buck the anti-Cuban feeling there. … As for Mister C, he seems to be going along all right. Flora was a body-blow but, largely thanks to the Americans leaning on Cuba the way they do, he's kept the country together. If the Americans once let up on their propaganda and needling and so forth, perhaps even make a friendly gesture or two, all the steam'll go out of the little man.

Scaramanga's ideas are more sensible than the tongue-in-cheek "advice" Fleming reportedly gave to future President John F. Kennedy over dinner in March 1960 on how to topple Castro[7] and

[7] "Advice" such as dropping "leaflets saying that the fallout from American nuclear tests provoked a strange reaction in men with facial hair, reducing them to sexual impotence. All the famous 'bearded ones' of the uprising would immediately shave off their beards, and the revolution would be over" (Parker 2014, 261).

which, quite incredibly, the CIA still took rather seriously (see Moran 2011; Parker 2014, 260–61; Willman 2005).

Cuba in the Bond Films

Fleming's discussion of Cuba was strongly influenced by events of the 1950s and early 1960s, as well as how they would affect Britain and (de)colonial Jamaica. In other words, it was never about Cuba per se but instead what it meant for Bond and the UK and its colony of Jamaica. Furthermore, as Fleming did not set any of his stories in Cuba, it is no wonder that very little of his commentary on Cuba made it to the movie versions of his stories, released from 1962 onwards.[8] Still, starting with 1995's *GoldenEye*, three Bond movies, their stories totally unrelated to Fleming's oeuvre, have had 007 operate in Cuba, and four others reference the country in their dialogue.

The first Bond films to mention Cuba—*Goldfinger* (1964), *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1974), and *For Your Eyes Only* (1981)—are (mostly rather unfaithful) adaptations of Fleming's stories. In *Goldfinger*, after the eponymous villain's Operation Grand Slam fails, Bond boards a private jet that is to take him to the White House to meet the US president. Goldfinger has highjacked this plane, however, and holding Bond at gunpoint, tells him: "In two hours, I shall be in Cuba." Goldfinger's plot was backed up by China, so in light of the Sino-Soviet split of 1960 (Black 2001, 95, 182) this is a bit surprising. Goldfinger's attempt to escape to Cuba is perhaps a carryover from the Fleming novel in which, when Goldfinger and his top gangster allies initially evade capture, Felix Leiter tells Bond: "[f]or my money, that Jed Midnight [a gangster boss operating in Miami and Havana] has somehow got them out to Cuba" (Fleming [2006] 1959, 328). Nevertheless, the movie depicts Cuba as a rogue place where Western law enforcement could not touch Goldfinger.

[8] According to Funnell and Dodds (2017, 47), however, the first version of *Dr. No*'s (1962) screenplay would have had Bond encounter Cuban agents working in Jamaica.

If *Goldfinger* depicts Cuba as the would-be refuge for an evil genius, in *The Man with the Golden Gun* and *For Your Eyes Only*, the focus is on the country's links to transnational criminal networks. Besides some of the assassin Francisco Scaramanga's early life events and personal attributes, the former film bears little resemblance to Fleming's last Bond novel (see Chapman 2007, 144–48). Whereas in the book Scaramanga is a foreigner working for the Cubans, in the film his father is "possibly Cuban," but he was trained by the KGB and "went independent in the late '50s," that is, around the time Castro assumed power in Cuba. Scaramanga's possible Cuban roots are never brought to the fore with the sole exception of his use of the Spanish term mano a mano (face-to-face) shortly prior to his fateful duel with Bond.

For Your Eyes Only features another assassin whose Cuban nationality is in no doubt. At the beginning of the film, this "Cuban hit man, Hector Gonzales," guns down the marine archeologist Sir Timothy Havelock and his wife. Gonzales acts under orders from the Greek villain Aris Kristatos, hired to acquire the sunken British electronic surveillance ship *St. Georges*'s automatic targeting attack communicator (ATAC) transmitter for the Soviets. Shortly thereafter, the Havelocks' daughter Melina kills Gonzales at a villa near Madrid. The assassin gets little screen time and speaks only once (in English to Bond). Besides his profession and nationality, we only learn that he seems to enjoy both killing and the company of beautiful women (see also Black 2001, 141–42). Gonzales's surname and Cuban nationality are the only elements the film retains from the *For Your Eyes Only* short story's ample Caribbean content. However, Cuba also comes up on two occasions toward the end of the film, most notably when Kristatos tells his not-at-all-pleased protégée, figure skater Bibi Dahl, that "we are going to live in Cuba for a few months." Whereas Fleming's short story highlights the ruthless and violent nature of the Batista administration and its supporters, the film takes place over twenty years later in a more "mature" Cold War atmosphere. Accordingly, it depicts Cuba as working in close tandem with the Soviet Union—as it certainly did at the time. Cuba provides Kristatos both an efficient killer and the promise of a safe haven in which to lay low after the ATAC affair is over.

As for Bond's first actual visit to Cuba, Black (2001, 43; 2017, 127) argues that this would take place in the pre-title sequence of *Octopussy* (1983). It is set in an unnamed Spanish-speaking country, where Bond destroys a military airplane hangar. The sequence indeed highlights a cigar-smoking military officer greatly resembling Fidel Castro (see Figure 5.1). In light of the hostile depiction of Cuba in the preceding *For Your Eyes Only* and the intensification of the Cold War in the early 1980s (see Black 2001, 143–44; 2017, 125–26), Black's interpretation certainly has its merits. However, it has its problems, too: Making his escape, Bond flies over a rather loosely guarded land border crossing point. Furthermore, the Castroesque character, played by Brian Coburn, is listed in the end credits as a "South American V.I.P." Although Cuba has a (very heavily guarded) land border of a kind with the US Naval Station Guantanamo Bay, the island is not part of South America. Therefore, I am hesitant to qualify *Octopussy* as the first movie in which Bond actually operates in Cuba. Still, a great many people who saw *Octopussy* around the time of its release probably associated its pre-title sequence with Cuba, a geopolitical hotspot close to US shores: Bond does not need to go to Cuba for the film to reference notable Cuban imagery.



Figure 5.1. A Castroesque military officer shows more interest in Bond's helper Bianca than in show jumping in *Octopussy*.

Source: EON Productions et al., 1983. Screenshot by author.

In *Licence to Kill*'s (1989) pre-title sequence, the villain, Latin American drug lord Franz Sanchez, attempts to avoid arrest by the Americans by flying toward Cuban airspace, just as Goldfinger did twenty-five years earlier. A bit later in the story, he escapes and travels by mini-submarine and fast boat to Cuba on his way home to the fictional Republic of Isthmus. Whereas the writers of this original screenplay chose to invent the Republic of Isthmus as a substitute for actual Panama (see Korpisaari and Hakola 2021), they did not feel the need to resort to similar measures in their negative depiction of Cuba. As Black (2001, 152) nicely puts it, this situation "focuses two central features of American demonology: drugs and Cuba." In 1989, the year of *Licence to Kill*'s release, several Cuban military and government officials were indeed convicted (in Cuba) of having aided the Colombian Medellín cartel to ship several tons of cocaine through the island into the United States. Furthermore, "according to [Cuban] defectors' accounts, the Castro regime was actively manipulating the drug trade … to earn hard currency for the revolution and *to demoralize and destabilize U.S. society*" (Lee 1997, 51; my emphasis). It is hard to evaluate the validity of such charges, but they do uncannily resemble some of the Soviets' plans in Fleming's *The Man with the Golden Gun*. Nevertheless, writing a bit later, Rodríguez Beruff and Cordero (2005, 308) state that "U.S. officials' comments on Cuban antidrug efforts have generally been positive."

1995's *GoldenEye* is an important film in many ways. Bond returned after a six-year hiatus, played by a new actor, Pierce Brosnan. Even more importantly, the Cold War had ended, the Soviet Union had dissolved, and, as a result, geopolitical boundaries had experienced dramatic shifts. Still, in many ways, *GoldenEye*'s plot taps into past technology and alliances, including the former Soviet Union–Cuba partnership. It is in this context that Bond's first unequivocal visit to Cuba takes place.

GoldenEye's villain, Alec Trevelyan, needs a satellite dish built by the Soviets in Cuba to launch a powerful electromagnetic pulse over London. Cuba, then, remains a dangerous geopolitical hot spot even in the post–Cold War era. Bond and the heroine Natalya Simonova use a plane provided

by the CIA's Jack Wade to follow Trevelyan into an apparently uninhabited corner of Cuba. They encounter no interference from Cuban authorities and, according to Bond, "there's no one within 25 miles." Russians still operate the satellite dish's underground control facility, and no characters readily recognizable as Cuban/Latin American appear on-screen during the whole twenty-six-plus-minute Cuba sequence. Only English and Russian are spoken and a single "*PERSONAL AUTORIZADO SOLAMENTE*" sign is the only indication that the action takes place in a Spanish-speaking country. Furthermore, no actual filming was done in Cuba, but the on-location shooting for the film's "Cuba" took place in Puerto Rico (Field and Chowdhury 2018, 485). Therefore, Cuba and the Cubans are symbolically annihilated in *GoldenEye*. The Cuban people are not even important enough to appear on-screen, while Russian criminals and soldiers, a British secret agent with his Russian helper, and, at the very end of the film, the U.S. Marines seem to have the run of the place. As Wade boasts to Bond, "You can't light a cigar in Cuba without us [the Americans] seeing it" (see Black 2001, 165). No mention is made of the severe socioeconomic hardships caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union, especially the end of its $4–5 billion annual subsidy to Cuba, or the (limited) economic reforms implemented in Cuba to overcome these (see Sweig 2012, 126–38). In *GoldenEye*, therefore, Cuba, the only ex-Soviet bloc country still clinging to its old regime and mode of governance, is just an anomalous relic, comparable to the "cemetery" of old communist statues shown earlier in the film and, in Judi Dench's new M's words, to Bond himself.

Brosnan's last Bond film, *Die Another Day* (2002), links Cuba with North Korea, a rising geopolitical menace arguably even "more evil" (and certainly more enigmatic) than the Soviet Union/Russia ever was. Bond flies commercially to and from Cuba and can move around it at will, with no Cuban "tail." The first 3.5 minutes of the Cuba sequence are set in Havana although, again, no actual footage shot in Cuba is included in the film.[9] The establishing shot, filmed in Cádiz, Spain (Field and Chowdhury 2018, 556), shows some of "Havana's" waterfront populated by carefree

[9] According to Field and Chowdhury (2018, 556), key members of the *Die Another Day* production team actually visited Havana "but were prohibited under US law from shooting there."

people and the famous prerevolution American cars, kept running for decades through creative engineering (see Hill 2011). In the next shot, Bond walks past a wall onto which posters of the revolutionary hero Camilo Cienfuegos have been plastered. Inside the Raoul cigar factory, female employers roll tobacco leaves into cigars using their hands and thighs, while a man reads a newspaper to them. *Die Another Day*'s Havana is certainly no mere relic, but a living, breathing entity, although quite rustic, stereotypical, and nostalgic in character (see Figure 5.2).



Figure 5.2. Bustling city life in "Havana" featured in *Die Another Day*.

Source: EON Productions et al., 2002. Screenshot by author.

Asking for Delectado cigars and proving his knowledge of their characteristics, Bond enlists the help of the factory manager Raoul, a British sleeper agent. He provides Bond with information, a revolver, and a beautifully kept old American car. In his conversation with Bond, Raoul alludes, among other things, to corruption ("favors called in, some dollars spread about") and the longing many Cubans have for the "decadent," prerevolution times. Through his "friends in high places," Raoul learns that the North Korean terrorist Zao whom Bond is pursuing is on the island of Los Organos, where

> there is a strange clinic run by Dr. Alvarez. He leads the field in gene therapy, increasing the life expectancy of our beloved leaders. And, of course, the richest Westerners. We may have lost our freedom in the revolution, but we have a health system second to none.

Raoul uses the words "beloved leaders" ironically and refers to the Cubans' significant loss of individual freedoms under communism, but also praises his country's achievements in medical care. The Castro regime's significant investments into education and public health indeed quickly turned Cuba into one of the Latin American leaders in these areas (Simons 1996, 25–32). This excellence in medical sciences also created an avenue for earning foreign currency and/or political goodwill, with Cuba exporting "doctors, drugs and other medical facilities … to Africa, Asia and the Americas" (Simons 1996, 31; see also Sweig 2012, 51, 143–46) and welcoming "medical tourists" into the country (Hill 2011, 10). Dr. Alvarez, who receives very limited screen time, is an "evil genius," harvesting DNA from "orphans, runaways, people that won't be missed" and charging huge sums for DNA transplants. The extensive gene-therapy work he has done on Zao and—especially—*Die Another Day*'s North Korean villain Tan-Sun Moon/Gustav Graves, is pure science fiction, of course (see Field and Chowdhury 2018, 546; Metz 2004, 66–67). Such highly unethical and racist treatments would surely be prohibited in Western democracies, but the Cuban state fully sanctions and supports Dr. Alvarez's work: the Policía Nacional Revolucionaria and the Cuban military provide security for the Alvarez Clinic, and the entrance to its "inner sanctum" is through a wall covered in images of revolutionary heroes and Cuban flags (see Figure 5.3). Despite these heavily negative connotations, however, Dr. Alvarez's scientific excellence arguably also alludes to a modern, cutting-edge side of Cuba, very different from the film's depiction of Havana.



Figure 5.3. Hidden entryway covered in nationalistic and revolutionary imagery in *Die Another Day*. *Source*: EON Productions et al., 2002. Screenshot by author.

Both Bond's mode of travel to and from Havana and the scenes set in the El Gran Palacio seaside hotel where Dr. Alvarez's patients[10] await boat transportation onto Los Organos Island hint at how, after the fall of the Soviet Union, international tourism was quickly developed into an important avenue for Cuba to earn much-needed foreign currency. Since the late 1990s, Canada has been the leading source of international tourists, followed by the UK, Germany, France, and Italy (Salinas, Mundet, and Salinas 2018). In *Die Another Day*, we also see Bond smoking (a cigar) for the first time since the 1980s, which caused controversy because of supposedly endorsing tobacco-product use (e.g., Rogers 2002). However, this (and other) cigar-smoking in the film actually helps make its depiction of Cuba more accurate, as most foreigners visiting the island either want to taste real Cuban cigars themselves or buy these to take home as presents.

In January 2002, President George W. Bush introduced the phrase "Axis of Evil" to group Iran, Iraq, and North Korea, countries that, in his view, supported terrorism and sought weapons of

[10] One prospective international patient of Dr. Alvarez first calls a Cuban waiter "Fidel" and then threatens to turn him into "Fidel Castrato" (see Metz 2004, 78). These are the only mentions of the longtime Cuban leader's name in the Bond films.

mass destruction. Some months later, Under Secretary of State John Bolton added Cuba, Libya, and Syria to the list (Chapman 2007, 234; Van Der Borght and Strawson 2002, 66). This political rhetoric, grouping Cuba together with North Korea as some of the world's most dangerous countries (Field and Chowdhury 2018, 545), certainly made *Die Another Day* very topical upon its release. However, it also opens cigar-factory-manager Raoul's comment that "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" for several new readings, including criticism of the then-US government's warmongering.[11]

To date, Bond's last visit to Cuba occurs in *No Time to Die* (2021). He is retired and living "under the radar" in Jamaica, surely as a kind of an homage to his creator Fleming, who wintered on the island from 1947 until his death. Bond breaks his retirement, however, when Felix Leiter asks him to "pick up" the missing scientist Valdo Obrutšev from Santiago de Cuba.[12] Bond arrives there by boat as dusk is beginning to settle, and most of the thirteen-plus-minute Cuba sequence takes place at night. This clearly differentiates *No Time to Die*'s depiction of Cuba from that of the above-treated movies, in which almost all action takes place in daytime. Furthermore, *No Time to Die*'s color palette emphasizes blues and other cool tones, marking a clear departure from the yellow filter and palette more typical of filmic representations of the Global South. In part, all this may also owe to the revisionist nature of the last two Craig-era films, which make Bond face his past in several ways (see Funnell and Dodds 2017).

As opposed to *Die Another Day*, *No Time to Die* contains no spoken commentary on Cuban politics and/or society. For any references to these, one needs to be able to decode sporadic visual clues: two murals celebrating revolutionary heroes, an old American car, and the Soviet Ladas driven

[11] In total, the Cuba sequence of *Die Another Day* lasts for eighteen-plus minutes. Following his visit to Los Organos, Bond briefly returns to Raoul's office, where it turns out that the Cuban is, quite implausibly, also an expert in the chemical composition of diamonds.

[12] Before Leiter and Bond actually meet in *No Time to Die*, the former has visited the latter's home, leaving behind the stub of a Cuban Delectado cigar—an intertextual reference to *Die Another Day*.

by Cuban police officers. Cuba only provides a (semi-)exotic Caribbean location for the Spectre "*bunga bunga*" (sex) party. Otherwise, the country receives surprisingly little negative (or positive) framing. At the Spectre party, however, there are a number of exotic dancers and (probable) escorts, alluding to the resurgence of prostitution in Cuba alongside the growth of tourism (see Salinas, Mundet, and Salinas 2018, 224). The fact that dozens of Spectre agents are able to convene in Cuba might also be interpreted as negative framing. Still, recalling earlier Spectre board meetings in Paris in *Thunderball* (1965) and Rome in *Spectre* (2015), Santiago de Cuba is in illustrious company. Moreover, if one was very bold, one could perhaps see in Leiter's death and the sinking of the Americans' vessel in the Caribbean after Bond has flown in with Obrutšev an allegory of the failure of US Cuban policy, which, despite over sixty years in effect, has failed to force a regime change in Cuba. Be that as it may, *No Time to Die* has to be lauded for featuring the first Cuban (American) supporting character, Bond's efficient CIA helper Paloma, actually played by a Cuban-born person (Ana de Armas). Although Paloma is introduced in a rather comic light, making her seem unprofessional and nervous, she actually proves to be a competent operative and highly skilled in various modes of combat. Very refreshingly, therefore, her character strongly departs from traditional Latin American gender expectations (see Korpisaari and Hakola 2021, 8–9).

Overall, *No Time to Die's* depiction of Cuba differs quite substantially from that we see elsewhere in the Bond corpus. One possible way to read this is that with the passing of first Fidel Castro's and then also his brother Raúl's leadership, Cuba's revolutionary agency is no longer as threatening as before. It is at least as likely, however, that due to the drawn-out, rather "chaotic" production process of the film (as well as the possible late addition of the Cuba sequence) the filmmakers just did not have time to contextualize and vilify Cuba in a more "traditional" manner.

Conclusion

With small exceptions, the above-treated James Bond texts, published between 1954 and 2021, depict Cuba in a very hostile, even dehumanizing way. Fleming was keen to criticize the Batista administration, having no good things to say about it. In the *For Your Eyes Only* short story collection, he depicted the Castro insurgency in a rather favorable light, but his political conservatism clearly shows in how fast this optimism faded after the Castro-led Cuba allied with the Soviet Union. In this regard, it may be noteworthy that Fleming never alluded to the Bay of Pigs invasion (1961) that aimed to overthrow Castro and, through its catastrophic failure, gave revolutionary Cuba a great propaganda boost. Conversely, in his last two Bond novels, Fleming referred to the Cuban missile crisis, which, arguably, resulted in a "victory" for the United States and its allies. More importantly, however, in his Bond prose, Fleming was never actually interested in Cuba per se, but in its influence on Jamaica and British/Western geopolitical interests more generally.

The first Bond film was released some years after the victory of the revolution, and all references in the series are to communist Cuba. In the 1960s and 1970s, the country received little attention from the franchise, and the relative thawing of the Cold War in the 1970s may have contributed somewhat to the decision to eliminate nearly all links to Cuba from the movie version of *The Man with the Golden Gun*. As the Cold War reintensified in the early 1980s, the narrative use of Cuba in the Bond films clearly increased. Thereafter, although the world had changed, the Brosnan-era Bonds carried on depicting Cuba in a hostile way, first, in *GoldenEye*, as a dangerous relic of the Cold War past and later, in *Die Another Day*, as North Korea's "partner in crime." Refreshingly, *No Time to Die* treats Cuba somewhat more humanely. Still, although Bond has operated in Cuba several times and spent close to an hour of total screen time there, no footage actually shot in Cuba is included in any Bond film. Ultimately, the Bond franchise has shown little interest in the actual country and the fortunes of its inhabitants. Rather, it has repeatedly used Cuba as a convenient geopolitical tool,

sufficiently well known to most members of any given audience to eliminate the need to provide any real context. In so doing, the Bond stories have both drawn from and helped reinforce the depiction of Cuba as a geopolitical troublemaker, both spawning and harboring international criminals and willing to endorse any endeavor to strike a blow against Western hegemony.

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