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## Live and let live: The Black 007 in *No Time To Die*

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### ABSTRACT

*No Time To Die* (2021) saw the arrival of a Black British 007 as protagonist in the James Bond film franchise. The Black 007 Nomi was played by Black British actress Lashana Lynch with diasporic ethnic and cultural connections to Jamaica. These references are taken up in the film in the context of a late-modern postcolonial Britain. *No Time To Die* is an interesting case in the Bond film franchise and in scholarly studies of James Bond as it allows us to think through issues of race, gender, representation, and belonging vis-à-vis an ongoing debate amongst Bond mania in the British media around the idea of a Black James Bond. This article examines the representation of Nomi as the Black 007 in this film, focussing on the cultural politics of race, gender, and Black Britishness, alongside the postcolonial and diasporic qualities of her character that the film embraces.

### KEYWORDS

James Bond; Black 007; Black British; postcolonial; diaspora; gender representation

### James Bond and Black Britishness

What is at stake in thinking about James Bond and the cultural politics of race, gender, and Black Britishness in the 2020s? This question is raised in the context of a recent surge of interest in the Bond film franchise, helmed most recently by Daniel Craig, and by a debate that has been ongoing in the UK mass media related to Bond mania for more than a decade, as to whether a Black actor could play James Bond, or not. The latest offering in the film franchise, the 25th cinematic outing of Bond in *No Time To Die* (dir. Cary Jojo Fukunaga, 2021), answered the question almost unequivocally, that while James Bond was written by author Ian Fleming as a white character, the secret agent with the world-famous double-0 licence-to-kill tag does not always have to be assigned to a white person, nor awarded to a male recipient. The introduction of Nomi, played by Black British actress Lashana Lynch, with a Jamaican ethnic background, was a radical and fresh casting of 007; one that drew ire towards the actress on social media from trolls but proved very successful at the box office.<sup>1</sup> Prior to and even more so after the casting of Lynch as Nomi/007, speculation about the possibility of a Black male James Bond intensified in the British media. This was not least to do with the death of Daniel Craig's Bond at the end of *No Time To Die*, and with Black British actor Idris Elba's name constantly being mentioned as a favourite potential replacement.<sup>2</sup>

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For example, in a June 12, 2022 article in the popular British tabloid newspaper *The Sun*, entertainment reporter Simon Boyle (2002) commented that Idris Elba was “back in the running for James Bond’s role after secret market research by film bosses”. The claims made in this article were followed up the next day in a similar manner in another British tabloid, *Mail Online* (Tonks 2022). Reports and publications such as these have always been central to the media industry machinations of the Bond franchise, sometimes offering film reviews, generating interest ahead of any major release, and offering Bond trivia, gossip, and claims of news scoops. What exact market research was conducted by the Bond film bosses is never mentioned, nor the source revealed in full. One might guess that it could be audience-based industry research that the article is referring to, but this can never be ascertained for sure. The mystery generated by the article is perhaps deliberate, presenting ongoing intrigue in all things Bond and in terms of the issue of who the next James Bond might be. Owen Tonks (2022), the journalist, claims that Elba was being considered to play the Bond villain in the next film instalment. However, he continues: “talks surrounding him playing the lead have started again as producers realised how popular he would be after carrying out secret market research. He ranked highly among the diverse group of movie buffs invited to participate in it.” This report is backed up by a quote from Bond film producer Barbara Broccoli who confirms that earlier in January 2022 Idris Elba was under consideration for the role of Bond.

Ongoing speculations aside as to whether we will ever get to see a Black James Bond on screen or not, the introduction of the character of Nomi in the Bond film franchise actually happened. Lynch was cast as Nomi after being directly approached by the film’s producer Barbara Broccoli herself. Lynch and Broccoli had worked together earlier in a play, *Ear for Eye*, that Broccoli had produced at London’s Royal Court Theatre in 2018 (Austin 2021). Broccoli has been quoted on the official James Bond Facebook page as being impressed by Lynch’s presence on stage and this set her up for the role as Nomi: “I saw her on stage and I was completely blown away by her. She’s an incredible actress. She has such authority, integrity and power.”<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, considering Lynch as a Black 007 allows for the possibility to think through discussions of race and gender amongst existing studies of Bond, to consider a history of Bond women of colour and their action sequences – not least because Nomi is an action figure writ large in the film as 007, and marks the representational significance of being a Black woman who plays equally alongside Bond in a postcolonial world where Bond’s post-imperial heroism is qualitatively at its end (the death of Bond at the film’s climax is also marked as emotionally poignant).<sup>4</sup> Nomi’s cultural connections to a Black British diaspora routed via Jamaica and West Africa is also on display in the film in quite unusual ways that have not been represented in any previous Bond movies. For these reasons, it is interesting to consider Lashana Lynch’s Nomi as an intriguing diasporic character in a late-modern 2020s postcolonial Britain as a Black British female 007.

In undertaking an analysis of Nomi vis-à-vis Bond and representations of race, gender, and Black Britishness, the landmark essay by the late Stuart Hall (1996) on the intellectual history of the term “postcolonial” is a useful starting point. In asking “when was ‘the postcolonial?’”, Hall invaluablely engaged in a critique and deconstruction of the notion of postcolonial time. In answering the question that he set, he constructively poses his response:

If postcolonial time is the time after colonialism, and colonialism is defined in terms of the binary division between the colonisers and the colonised, why is postcolonial time also a time of “difference”? What sort of “difference” is this and what are its implications for the forms of politics and for subject formation in this late-modern moment? (242)

Although Hall was writing this as a piece of social and cultural theory more fitting to the schools of theoretical cultural studies and the wider humanities, it is useful here to consider the kinds of postcolonial difference with its ensuing cultural politics that the Bond franchise has produced. Developing from this, and Bond’s latest outing in the 2021 film, this article will consider how Bond’s postcoloniality is managed by and in relation to the late-modern subject of Nomi as a Black British female 007. In order to undertake this examination, I analyse sequences from *No Time To Die* in relation to Lashana Lynch’s role as 007 Nomi, an innovative development in the Bond franchise which enables her to be viewed through a postcolonial and diasporic lens. The article proceeds by situating the Bond film franchise in the scholarly literature on Bond studies as a postcolonial text with a chequered history of representing non-white characters. This sets up a key issue at stake in relation to the “Black Bond” debate in connection with actor Idris Elba, namely why a Black actor apparently can or cannot play the Bond role, to then consider the depiction of Nomi as situated within a wider Bond history of the roles of women of colour that takes off in interesting and exciting ways. Although predominance is given to the representation of Nomi, the smaller and not insignificant role of the Cuban American agent Paloma (Ana De Armas) is also considered alongside Nomi’s action sequences in the film. Although Paloma’s on-screen time with Bond and then Nomi is brief, I argue that this is not an insignificant role as audiences see not one but two individual women of colour who stand up next to Bond and demonstrate their postcolonial and diasporic qualities, remarkably as a first in the movie franchise.

### Studies of Bond and the cultural politics of Black Britishness

Bond studies have charted the rise of the James Bond character as a cultural phenomenon, reaching far beyond the original Ian Fleming novels, subsequent film portrayals, and even an entertainment industry around Bond paraphernalia (Bennett and Woollacott 1987; Black 2001; Chapman 2007; Verheul 2020; Weiner, Whitfield, and Becker 2011). Daniel Craig’s latest interpretation of Bond ushered in a harder, cold, and ruthless British secret agent compared to his previous on-screen avatars, all of whom were played by white actors, including Craig himself. Craig’s entry as Bond in *Casino Royale* (2006) to Bond’s death in Craig’s fifth and final film, *No Time To Die*, sees him reprising a role that is steeped in the fallout of Britain’s status as a former colonial power to postcolonial readjustment in a changing global order, necessitating Bond dealing with a range of non-white characters. These issues begin in his first Bond film and are incrementally amplified by the time of his final outing. Non-white and Black characters in particular have always been part of the world of Bond from his inception in *Dr No* (1962), although these characters have invariably been placed in a subjugated position of deference to Bond as a post-imperial hero. For instance, in *Dr No*, Bond has various assistant-like figures in the film such as the Black Jamaican characters Quarrel (John Kitzmiller) and Puss Feller (Lester Pendergast). The Bond phenomenon up to Craig has also been claimed as illuminating aspects of a post-war British identity that emerged in opposition to the colonized Others who came to England to find a home. As Cynthia Baron (1994) puts it:

Bond's relationship to this "new" identity invites us to re-examine British strategies of self-definition in the "postcolonial" era, for 007's exploits remain steeped in the discourse of "Orientalism" which had positioned the East as mysterious, incomprehensible, and pathologized in order to justify Western imperialism. (69)

Other Bonds – played by Roger Moore, for instance – exposed "the concept of British geopolitical supremacy as something of a crude, kitsch joke" (Jones 2018, 23).<sup>5</sup> With Craig's Bond a subtle shift can be seen from a British imperialist to a more global icon, though one still defined by his home nation. The Craig films thus continue to wrestle with changing ideas around national cultural identity in 21st-century Britain (23). *Skyfall* (2012), for instance, has been described as playing up not only to Bond's Britishness, but more specifically to a Britishness rooted in nostalgia and unapologetic national pride (31–33).<sup>6</sup> The rise of Bond in the Craig era as a global icon has also been accredited to the box office challenges faced by the Bond franchise from other action blockbusters made around the same time, such as the film franchises of Jason Bourne and the Batman series (Dodds and Funnell 2018, 1).

What is it about Bond, then, as a hugely famous global character with a following of millions, that appears to cause controversy, not least in the British media as Bond news, whenever the idea that the next Bond after Craig might be played by a Black actor is a possibility? Might it have something to do with the representational and symbolic power that this fictional character has as one of the last bastions of a post-imperial white British and English hero? Klaus Dodds and Lisa Funnell (2018) outline the generic characteristics of Bond that give us a sense of what this on-screen power entails:

that Bond must exhibit and perform the sorts of qualities that his literary creator, Ian Fleming, imagined for him – namely, a fit, masculine, virile, heterosexual, (Cambridge) educated professional man who could manipulate and intimidate men and when needed charm and seduce women, whilst retaining a well-honed capacity to escape from mortal danger if need be. (2)

In the realm of leading spies on-screen, almost exclusively played by white men, and their representation in terms of what is at stake in fighting for the nation, the casting of Idris Elba – a Black man undertaking these actions in the name of king and country – could well be perceived as a threat to the business-as-usual approach where white heroes lead as a given, often endorsing a hegemonic order of things. Even though the Bond character and his on-screen cinematic adventures have been appreciated by audiences around the world in different ways,<sup>7</sup> marking him as what Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott (1987) in their landmark study on Bond term a "mobile signifier", Jaap Verheul (2020) notes that scholarship subsequently stresses the franchise's ability to adapt itself to continuously changing norms, values, ideologies, and practices. However, in spite of this malleability of signification, Bond's essentially white, male, heteronormative, and British identity continues to regulate the films' alternative and occasionally subversive articulations of otherness (12). The dismantling and reconfiguring of Bond's representational and symbolic power through the body of a Black actor-cum-action-hero might well, then, engender the postcolonial possibility of a new representation for on-screen pleasures and identifications amongst diverse audiences.

At the time of writing, whilst the casting for the next Bond is underway and with Elba's and other actors' names as possible hats in the ring still at the speculative level, Lynch's casting and performance as 007 sets into play an actual on-screen possibility. This entails not just race and blackness undertaking impossible feats according to Bond conventions, but also race and gender through Nomi's Black action-heroine figure. This is even more remarkable as previously Bond's relationship with women of colour has been haphazard at best and misogynistic-cum-racial othering at worse. Feminist scholars of Bond have shown how his relationships with women of colour have worked on-screen in unequal ways.

Anna Everett (2020), for instance, has examined the discourses of race and blackness across the Bond franchise up to *Skyfall*, outlining

“Negrophobic” themes in *Dr. No*; to post-Civil Rights, Blaxploitation sampling deployed in 1973's *Live and Let Die*; to a black Amazonian, hypersexual badass style on display in 1985's *A View to a Kill*; to a new millennial, colour-blind casting sensibility at work in 2012's *Skyfall*. (187)

Everett argues how Black womanhood predominantly exists through racist portrayal in these films, in which the depiction of aestheticized violence enables audiences to witness a spectacularized annihilation of bodies of colour.

Lorrie Palmer's (2020) analysis of the chase sequences in *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997) and in *Skyfall* argues that 007's varying relationships with women of colour may be seen through the otherness evoked by the eastern bazaar – as a site of visibility and mobility as well as a social space – where both hybrid identity and cultural tourism are made visible (171). Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of the carnival, in which hybridity and inversion challenge the sociocultural norms of the day, she argues that the earlier film (with Pierce Brosnan and Hong Kong action star Michelle Yeoh) can be seen to demonstrate progressive inverted roles which challenge social and cultural norms around race and gender, as both Brosnan and Yeoh work together to outsmart their deadly pursuers. In contrast, she reads the later Bond (with Daniel Craig and a new Black British Money Penny, Naomie Harris), as regressing to an orientalist expression of an east–west relationship predicated on the colonial exercise of power based on exclusion and domination. The Black Money Penny is never allowed to become an equal to Bond in the chase sequence.

Lynch's Nomi follows on from and departs in more innovative on-screen ways from Bond's previous relationships with women of colour. This is also expressed in terms of implicit postcolonial and diasporic ways, that are for the first time, perhaps, in keeping with a nuanced representation of Nomi's Black Britishness and not relegating it as peripheral or unremarked in relation to Bond's predominant white action-hero identity. How this ethnic and cultural distinctiveness is set up and played out in *No Time To Die* will now be examined through the film's opening credits, through select sequences and dialogues which feature Nomi and Bond together as they are introduced, and as they fight with and alongside each other. The smaller and not insignificant role of the Cuban American agent Paloma is also considered alongside Nomi's action sequences from the film, portraying two individual women of colour who stand up and next to Bond, remarkably as a first in the movie franchise.

## No Time To Die: Opening credits

Like the Bond movie itself, the theme song to each film is an eagerly awaited musical event. Part film score and part pop song, the song has opening credits that give it further life, adding to the film's drama. The credits for the theme song in *No Time To Die* reference from the outset a postcolonial Bond steeped in melancholia, loss, and adjustment, with more than a passing reference to technological developments in the late-modern 2020s. In this it follows conventionally in a line of prior Bond film openings, and with Craig's Bond it not only leads to a finale about his character, but also foreshadows key episodes in the film.

The artist Billie Eilish sings the title track "There's Just No Time To Die," which has been described as inflecting the signature Bond film song for Gen-Z, lacing it with modern angst through searching lyrics and an atmospheric orchestral musical score (Hunt 2022). The lyrics closely follow the plot of Bond's alleged personal romantic betrayal prior to the credits, and these words are just as fitting for a postcolonial state steeped in a history of colonial violence and state power that is fading on the global stage; but not before a moment of reckoning, a moment of retribution:

I should've known  
I'd leave alone  
Just goes to show  
That the blood you bleed  
Is just the blood you owe.

The Britannia statue is covered in a growing bacterium forewarning of the germ warfare narrative that is yet to come in the film, and the image's flaking skin exterior with blood-red patches, a result of infection, marks her violent colonial history and its repercussions. This is a 2021 Bond opening that also takes us back to the earlier Bond movies in the franchise like *Dr No* with its explicit colonial themes, as colourful polka-dot circles appear over other images giving a retro feel to these credits. The use of the violence of Bond's colonial yesteryear, marked famously by his loaded pistol the Walther PPK, carried under a licence to kill, is arranged in a never-ending DNA helix chain of armed warfare where each pistol fires at the other one, looped in an ongoing and unescapable relationship. The wars of the past, fought out largely through gun battles, are imbricated in a helix of technological advance where biological and germ warfare are an increasing threat in the real world in the 2020s. The DNA helix chain is foretelling the deadly Heracles virus plot in the film. If ever there was a Bond opening credit that was equally scathing of Britain as a waning empire and of the Secret Services' role in it, *No Time To Die* is it. Not only is time literally running out on screen for Bond (shifting sands of time are also enclosed in an hourglass), but his whole world – with its synchronicity and chronological order, with watch pieces disassembled – comes crashing down.

The representation of Bond as having to come to terms with a changing post-colonial, technological, and more diverse modern Britain was set in motion with Craig's handling of the role since *Casino Royale* (2006). Five films and 15 years later, *No Time To Die* has also become the dramatic finale for a number of unresolved personal matters for Craig's Bond; including, amongst other issues, whether Bond can actually live and remain monogamous with one woman; parent a child or not; whether he should retire from the 007 role (voluntarily or forced out through

death) and make way for a new iteration of the coveted double-0 assignation and what he/she might represent.

Stating “he/she” when writing about the 007 character might appear odd, fanciful even; it certainly raised more than a few eyebrows, and heated words were exchanged over online fan media when the announcement was made that 007 would be played by the Black British actress Lashana Lynch when the film’s details were formally made public. Lynch was even trolled online with racist and sexist comments.<sup>8</sup> It appeared that for some, breaking away from the mould of a white male character playing the secret agent’s role was a step too far. Might it be that a fictional role, perhaps that of the most famous secret spy in the world, written by a white heterosexual author, previously played by white male actors, representing and fighting for the British establishment and the power that entails, given to non-white actors, and that too to a non-white actress, represented too great a relinquishing and transfer of power? Some of the online comments certainly suggest that this was the case for certain audiences of the Bond franchise.<sup>9</sup> The on-screen introduction of Lashana Lynch’s character Nomi as 007 and her interactions with Bond also confirm and reveal this tussle over representational power that operates in the context of a late-modern postcolonial and diasporic Britain. The first time they meet on-screen is telling, indicative of this playing out of power relations between them.

### Bond and Nomi’s introduction

Bond notices Nomi for the first time while he is driving into town in Jamaica, unaware at the time, like the audience, of her real identity as a spy. Nomi is at a roadside with reggae music playing in the background signifying her as possibly Jamaican, though this is later revealed as a cover to draw Bond closer to her. Bond is en route to meet Felix Leiter (Jeffrey Wright) at a nightclub. In the club, Nomi deliberately walks past Bond, causing them to gently rub against each other. They turn and look at each other. Nomi says “Hi” in a clear Jamaican accent, partly flirting.<sup>10</sup> She is glammed up for the venue, looking like a conventional Bond Girl who might be there to double-cross Bond as previous femme fatale Bond Girls have done, or even to initiate a sexual liaison.

They next meet outside the club when Bond’s car has been deliberately damaged by Nomi to stage another opportunity for them to meet: “Nomi: Need a ride?” There is more than a whiff of sexual tension here that plays on the mystery of this new character’s identity and taps into audience memories of the encounters by earlier Bonds with beautiful women as sexual conquests. While Nomi gives Bond a ride home on her motorcycle their conversation becomes more intriguing, playing on the idea of a redundant or ageing Bond, and the stark revelation of who Nomi actually is:

Bond: What do you dive for?

Nomi: I have a thing for old wrecks.

Bond [chuckles]: Well, then you’ve come to the right place.

[Nomi chuckles]



Arriving at Bond's beach-side apartment, Nomi takes charge and without wasting time leads the way to the bedroom. She takes off her wig in the dark, with her back to Bond, and as the wig comes off, she turns and looks towards him, almost seductively. Bond switches on the light, revealing who she really is. Bond is quickly on form here, in keeping with his womanizing, comic one-liners: Bond: "Well, that's not the first thing I thought you'd take off, but ..."

Nomi code-switches to her British accent (the DVD subtitles also emphasize this): "Yeah. You seem like a man who's gagging for some action Mr Bond." Nomi sits on the edge of the bed, the familiar place in Bond novels and films for sexual play, power politics, and intimate relationships; often, these moments do, though not always, end in Bond's favour. Bond's pent-up sexual tension can almost be felt. Nomi has read him well and used this to her advantage. While luring Bond back to his place, she extinguishes any possibility of a sexual liaison before Bond's hopes (imagined and actual) rise any further. The fraught sexual chemistry is brought to an abrupt end and formal business commences.<sup>11</sup> Far from being courteous this is a curt introduction and as Bond asks to "cut to the chase" they are quickly abrasive and direct with each other.

B: It's Commander Bond, you know that . . . Double-0?

N: Two years.

B: Very young.

N: High achiever.

B: Oh, Jesus Christ.

N: The world has moved on since you retired Commander Bond. Perhaps you didn't notice.

Bond: No, can't say I have and in my humble opinion the world very rarely moves on.

N: You would say that. This must seem like heaven, this little bubble or whatever. But it's so obvious you're a man who only has time to kill, nothing to live for.

As Nomi gets up and prepares to leave, she and Bond come back-to-back. At this point they are diametrically opposed in the frame. Bond is placed on the right-hand side and physically and proportionally is given more prominence visually, appearing bigger than Nomi while she, on the left, is positioned as shorter and smaller as she has stepped below him on a small staircase in his apartment (Figure 1). Despite appearing larger in the frame, however, Bond seems exposed and vulnerable as Nomi delivers her formal professional introduction:

Nomi: By the way, I'm not just any old double-0. I'm 007. You probably thought they'd retire it.

Bond: It's just a number

Nomi: Huh, yeah.

The signature James Bond theme music plays lightly yet ominously. This iconic theme tune of the Bond movies is interlaced through two competing 007s. But although



**Figure 1.** Nomi and James Bond's power relations at play in *No Time To Die*. DVD image still. Credit: Universal Pictures.

unsettled by the news of his professional identity being formally given to another, and despite his attempted rebuttal of Nomi's prodding, Bond appears calm.

This scene is telling of Nomi's real intentions towards Bond: that is, to goad him out of his self-imposed retirement (she tosses a mobile phone directly at him to communicate with M: "Tell him yourself"), and to warn him to stay out of her way as she operates as the new 007. The scene also reveals how diaspora and blackness are marked in shifting and more progressive ways than in previous Bond films, not least for a woman of colour. Nomi's code-switching is a key aspect of modern diasporic life where some non-white Britons are able to switch and play between cultural practices from places of origin and those of places of settlement.<sup>12</sup> Nomi's diasporic cultural roots and routes to the Caribbean via Africa are on display as she blends in like a local Jamaican through her costume and speech. These are complemented by and coexist with her predominantly urban British self, as she switches to her southern and well-spoken British accent, with a demeanour and swagger that stand up to Bond's confronting facade of bravado.

### **Nomi and Bond fight with and for each other: Enter Paloma**

Nomi and Bond's second major confrontation takes place in Cuba when they are independently out to capture the same target, Valdo Obruchev (David Dencik). This leads to a two-part action sequence where Bond is joined initially by Paloma, an ally working for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and together Paloma and Bond take on an entourage of gun-toting extras. In the second part of this sequence, Bond has to face a gun-carrying Nomi as they compete to capture Obruchev alive, separately. Bond is only able to win this contest with the help of Paloma. Paloma's role is relatively brief (approximately five minutes) and throughout this time and when Bond first meets her, she is dressed in a stunning black backless cocktail dress, speaks nervously, and comes

across as almost too inexperienced and innocent to be an ally in arms for Bond. She even admits she has had only three weeks of field training. This initial impression is very quickly dispelled as Paloma fights vigorously as an equal alongside Bond in their action scene together. In fact, at the end of the action sequence (and almost as quickly as we meet her on-screen and she is ready to leave us), Paloma's exit is far from any conventional representation of a Bond Girl. Bond himself acknowledges this with sincere admiration. Like the casting of Nomi as 007, this is another first in the Bond movie franchise for another woman of colour:

Paloma: This is my stop. Goodbye.

Bond: [Bond extends his arm as a gesture of a genuine professional handshake] You were excellent.

Paloma: [They shake hands] You too. Next time stay longer.

Bond: I will.

The lead up to and presentation of the action scenes at this point in the film can be read as on-screen interventions in light of post-#MeToo and Time's Up sociopolitical contexts: where both Paloma and Nomi are able to take care both of themselves, and of Bond, and attend to the job at hand on an equal footing to the men around them.<sup>13</sup> Any hint of a sexual possibility between Bond and either of them is firmly controlled and averted by the women themselves too.<sup>14</sup> Like Nomi, Paloma also appears to be diasporic, although her identity is ambiguous – that is, could she be an American citizen working on an assignment for the CIA overseas? Paloma is certainly fluent and comfortable in her Latin American ethnic and cultural background and this point is heightened in the performance by the Cuban Spanish actress Ana De Armas.

As the film moves towards its action blockbuster climax, and in keeping with previous Bond movie convention, spectacularly fought out at the villain's exotic lair – this time at Safin's (Rami Malek) Poison Island – Bond's own demise is set up, making way for Nomi's 007 to play an even more important role as a key woman of colour and a celebrated postcolonial and diasporic character in Bond history.

The mission objective of going to Poison Island is laid out by M (Ralph Fiennes) over a video call, and it is Nomi as 007 who requests that Bond be officially reinstated with his double-0 licence-to-kill:

Nomi: Sir. Permission for Commander Bond to be redesignated as 007. [She looks to Bond] It's just a number.

M: Very well. Agreed.

Nomi and Bond fly a stealth plane that doubles as an underwater submarine towards the island. Notably, it is Nomi who is at the controls operating the machine; Bond is in the back seat as a passenger. Once on the island they initially fight together to ward off Safin's small army, after which they separate. Bond goes after Safin to rescue his lover Madeleine (Lea Seydoux) and young daughter Mathilde (Lisa-Dorah Sonnet), and Nomi to apprehend Obruchev and to shut down the island's lethal chemical-making plant.

The film's punchline is retained here for Nomi in her dramatic machine-gun fight, fending off Safin's guards, but also to act out an extraordinary anti-racist moment, not

seen before in the Bond franchise. An explicit racist remark is made by Obruchev who has been acting as the lead chemist concocting Safin's deadly virus to target and wipe out individuals and populations, targeting their DNA as a precise way to zone in on victims. Obruchev's racist taunt to Nomi is met with a direct and pre-emptive form of self-defence for herself and a wider West African diaspora:

Obruchev: Hey. I have a good vial for your people, good for West African diaspora. It can be a good thing. [Gunfire continues. Nomi shoots at the guards. One falls in a pool of poison and disintegrates.] You know, I don't need a laboratory to exterminate your entire race from the face of the earth.

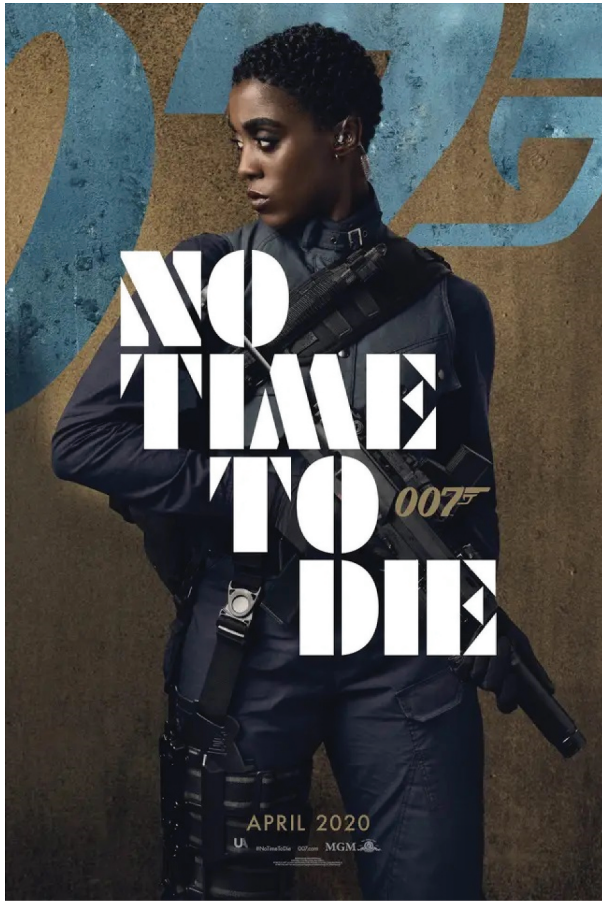
Nomi: Do you know what time it is?

Obruchev: What?

Nomi: Time to die.

Nomi kicks Obruchev in the chest, forcing him to fall off a raised platform and into the pool of his own poisonous product where he meets a gruesome death. Nomi's fight sequences, together with Bond and on her own (also similar to Paloma's lone fighting previously), demonstrate her abilities. Not only does Nomi benefit a superspy status, honouring the famous on-screen double-0 licence to kill, but she also amalgamates this with excellent marks(wo)manship, martial arts prowess, sassiness, and Black action-heroine finesse (Figure 2). There is an implicit intertextual reference to earlier on-screen Blaxploitation action heroines in the way Nomi conducts herself and dresses fashionably. Previous such filmic characters here include Coffy (Pam Grier) and Cleopatra Jones (Tamara Dobson). This is one secret agent, therefore, and a Black British female agent, who takes no nonsense from her adversaries and gives it to the Man when he characterizes racist abhorrence.

Taken together, Paloma and Nomi stand tall as secret agents working with and alongside Bond. Their on-screen roles and action sequences are departures from previous Bond women of colour accomplices where earlier Bonds have held the upper hand in the action, literally and symbolically. Palmer (2020), in her analysis of women of colour in the recent Bond movies, has argued that the chase sequences of Bond (Pierce Brosnan) and Wai Lin (Michelle Yeoh), and Bond (Craig) and Moneypenny (Naomie Harris), in *Tomorrow Never Dies* and in *Skyfall* respectively, demonstrate how race and gender are performed differently by these two women but eventually in the service of Bond as the ultimate action protagonist. In *Tomorrow Never Dies*, although Wai Lin "offers a new image of Asian femininity, based on physical abilities and achievements rather than (oriental) sexuality" alongside Brosnan's Bond (Funnell 2012, quoted in Palmer 2020, 180), it is still Bond who saves her from drowning underwater at the film's climax with mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and then a Hollywood-style romantic kiss as explosions-cum-fireworks go off spectacularly. In *Skyfall*, Harris's Black British Moneypenny, while supporting Bond as a field agent earlier in the film and partaking in thrilling action sequences, takes a misfire that hits Bond for which she is subsequently relegated to office duties.<sup>15</sup> In this way, and building on Kristen Shaw's (2015) work in this area, Palmer argues that although women and people of colour are not necessarily barred from the action sphere of Bond, they are fundamentally conceptualized as "out of place" and must be restored to the margins of any action scene dominance. Unfortunately, it appears that



**Figure 2.** Publicity image of *No Time To Die* featuring Nomi/007 as action figure with intertextual references to earlier Blaxploitation characters. Credit: Universal Pictures.

the assertive representation of women of colour in action scenes has regressed from Wai Lin in *Tomorrow Never Dies* (as interesting and progressive) to Moneypenny in *Skyfall* (as steps backward) within a period of 15 years. However, in 2021, *No Time To Die* appears to have redeemed this somewhat, not least because of the influence of #MeToo and Time’s Up. Paloma’s and more so Nomi’s representations as Bond’s partners in action do not rely on him leading exclusively, nor require him to fulfil any romantic or sexual expectations as happened with previous Bond Girls. Nomi’s representation makes this point more saliently as she is also a 007 and the first Black British and female secret agent to take on this mantle, keeping pace with Bond himself throughout the film.

Lynch’s performance as Nomi is also revealing of the sense of on-screen agency that she is able to create and maintain next to Craig’s Bond. This is no mean feat given the history of Bond and his female companions, and not least in relation to his non-white women partners. Lynch was able to carefully craft her role and on-screen presence as Nomi after negotiations with the film’s producer, director, and screenplay writers. As Lynch makes clear in a *Harper’s Bazaar* interview, she wanted “to use her voice for good and represent her race and sex with pride”:

Initially, when the Bond opportunity came about, Lynch had reservations about joining another franchise – about getting lost “behind the man”, as she puts it – but on speaking with the producer Barbara Broccoli and the director Cary Joji Fukunaga, she understood that their intentions ran alongside hers. Before filming began, she sat down with Phoebe Waller-Bridge, who was there to infuse the script with a fresh female perspective. Lynch wanted to ensure Nomi was subtly drawn, believable, perhaps even a little awkward. She set out to portray the truth of being a Black woman – someone she might know; someone in her family – avoiding the two-dimensional view that can be so easily conveyed on screen or written in scripts. (Daley-Ward 2021)

## Conclusion: A new time to live

The casting of Lashana Lynch as Nomi/007 and her arrival in the Bond franchise in *No Time To Die* is an interesting case in point in Bond studies, enabling ongoing issues of race, gender, nation, and Black Britishness to be thought through further. While Bond was written by Ian Fleming as white and with Bond’s Britishness an important part of that make-up, the ongoing speculation around whether a Black Bond is possible, or not, takes us to the heart of what it means to be British. In the 2020s, it seems that the debate around race, nation, representation, and belonging is far from over. Through Lynch playing 007 in exciting ways, not least when considered in relation to portrayals of previous Bond women of colour, not only do we see Bond and his on-screen actions as of personal and geopolitical importance, but also that through the bodies and actions of women of colour, a claim is being staked in the world of Bond which by extension changes it. The fact that it is also an increasingly postcolonial and reflexive world, and one where diasporic identities and practices are engaged with, creates the sense of a new beginning where representational possibilities around Bond and his leading non-white characters are not as problematic as they once were.

Thus, a sense of a new time is signalled in the following ways: in the film’s title, with the timeliness in which Nomi and Paloma as women of colour undertake their actions in the context of post-#MeToo and Time’s Up on-screen, and in the ending of Daniel Craig’s Bond. Bond’s death allows for another actor to play the character in the forthcoming 26th franchise instalment and for a Bond who can build on the representational progressions made in *No Time To Die*, thereby further modernizing the realms of 007. If *No Time To Die* marks the death of James Bond, it also allows for the resurrection of a new kind of 007. This would certainly be in keeping with calls made by Stuart Hall outlined earlier in this article, where in postcolonial and related diasporic times, roles and relationships of the colonizers and the colonized can be critically assessed, and a time for difference can set into motion a late-modern Britain where race, gender, and Black Britishness can take shape on-screen in meaningful ways. The Black 007 in *No Time to Die* in her idiosyncratic and innovative ways has set this possibility into motion.

## Notes

1. The global box office takings for *No Time To Die* were \$708 million worldwide, making it the fourth-biggest worldwide grosser of 2020/21. These figures make it the third-biggest 007 movie ever in raw worldwide grosses, behind only *Spectre* (\$881 million) and *Skyfall* (\$1.108 billion). See Scott Mendelson (2021) for a fuller box office analysis of the film.

2. Even though there has been speculation about other Black actors for the role of the next James Bond, Idris Elba's name is often the bookies' favourite and comes up repeatedly amongst Bond mania. Other Black British actors have included, for example, Colin Salmon, Regé-Jean Page, John Boyega, and Chiwetel Ejiofor.
3. See the comments on the James Bond official Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JamesBond007/photos/a.314165885264996/545513351450151/?type=3>, accessed April 25, 2023.
4. See, for instance, Brunella Tedesco-Barlocco (2022) for a reading of the death of James Bond in terms of feelings of loss and pathos in the reboot of the Bond franchise led by Daniel Craig.
5. Roger Moore's Bond can also be considered as a parodied "global idol". British power and the British Empire are referenced in the Moore Bond films, but parodically; for instance, one of his famous lines as 007 was often "Keeping the British end up, sir." Moreover, in the film *Octopussy* (dir. John Glen, 1983) the representation of India operates as a sort of imperial cultural imaginary, where the remnants of the British Empire seem to be alive and well.
6. See also Llewella Chapman's (2021) study on costume, gender, and identity in the world of 007 and how Bond's attire plays an important role in defining masculinity and whiteness.
7. Ajay Gehlawat (2020), for instance, has outlined a history of Bond adaptations in Bollywood cinema with their idiosyncratic appeal for Indian and South Asian audiences. Huw D. Jones and Andrew Higson (2020) have used industry and audience research to show that European audiences do not automatically associate Bond with "Britishness" as the films have started to resemble the formal qualities of the contemporary Hollywood action blockbuster.
8. See, for example, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/no-time-to-die-lashana-lynch-007-b1909717.html>, accessed April 25, 2023.
9. See, for example, the comments thread on Quora.com: "Lashana Lynch is the next James Bond. Is that a good thing?", <https://www.quora.com/Lashana-Lynch-is-the-next-James-Bond-Is-that-a-good-thing>, accessed April 25, 2023. See also, for instance, Ellie Harrison (2021) and Zack Sharf (2020) as media reports about the online racist and sexist trolling Lashana Lynch received when the news was made public of her casting as 007 and her response to the awful experience.
10. The DVD's English subtitles also emphasize Nomi's Jamaican accent when she speaks with Bond here.
11. Nomi taking off her wig and ending any sexual possibility between Bond and herself also acts as a visual reference to an earlier Black American CIA secret agent Rosie Carver, played by Gloria Hendry in the 1973 film *Live and Let Die* (dir. Guy Hamilton). Carver is depicted as an inexperienced junior agent to Roger Moore's Bond and one who succumbs easily to his sexual advances. Carver also turns out to be in the service of the villain. Bond's seduction of her plays out Bennett and Woollacott's (1987) notion of ideological repositioning and also seals her death. Interestingly, both the Black Bond Girl (Carver) and the white Bond Girl (Solitaire) are working for the villain, but both are seduced by Bond – white imperial masculinity overcomes the ideological conviction of both women.
12. On the social value of and skills involved in cultural and language code-switching, see, for instance, Peter Auer (2002), Christian Mair (2003), and Lena Zipp (2017).
13. Both #MeToo and Time's Up are anti-sexual assault and women's empowerment movements which gained visibility and acted as effective responses to sexual violence and abuse in the global media industries and beyond, starting with Hollywood. In Hollywood these movements gained momentum post-2017 with the allegations brought by women about historical sexual abuse by high-profile producers and celebrities. On the history of these two movements and their similarities and differences, see Ali Langone (2018).
14. Earlier in the sequence when Paloma takes Bond inside a wine cellar to get dressed in his tuxedo, she begins to quickly undress him to hurry them along. In this brief comical scene,

Bond mistakes this as a possible sexual invitation and is immediately corrected by Paloma. She laughs it off as a funny assumption on the part of Bond.

15. Interestingly, Money Penny's ethnicity or her gender are never explicitly brought up in any way in *Skyfall* nor the other two Bond films that Harris appears in, and certainly nowhere near to the way Nomi's gender and ethnicity are represented on-screen in *No Time To Die*.

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