

“Sneaking around exotic stuff”: The Evolution of
Fictional Heritage Colonialism in *Indiana Jones*



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Abstract

Indiana Jones is perhaps the most famous archaeologist in popular culture, and inspired dozens of other adventurer archeologist works of fiction. It is a franchise packed with nostalgia for times long gone, often times of colonialism. However, as a franchise that spans over four decades, Indiana Jones has had to adapt to many societal developments as well as audience reception to maintain its popularity. One theme that has challenged the franchise unlike any other has been colonialism, especially in regards to the (religious) heritage that Indiana Jones handles in his films. In this thesis, I show how the Indiana Jones films have adopted three different approaches to colonialism over time - colonial, anticolonial and uncolonial - in order to navigate societal developments regarding colonialism and heritage, while also maintaining the franchise's core factor of reactionary nostalgia. Reactionary nostalgia, which is inherently uncritical, casts a certain protection over its object, which is also why, I argue, the films have failed to ever be truly anticolonial: this franchise, and its genre in general, cannot be nostalgic and also make a radical break with its object of nostalgia.

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Chapter 1 - Fictional Heritage Colonialism: A History

Introduction

For decades, popular culture has been fascinated by heritage, artifacts, archaeologists and treasure hunters. In the adventure genre, heritage experts frequently search for mysterious heritage objects with supernatural powers, often hidden deep in Egyptian deserts or Indian jungles; the protagonist must keep this object from the antagonists at all costs, lest they destroy the world with it. Famous treasure hunters such as Rick O'Connell in *The Mummy*, Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider*, and Indiana Jones in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* have all been depicted as touching, looting, stealing, damaging or even destroying heritage objects for some kind of greater good. This trope, popularly known amongst moviegoers as the 'adventurer archaeologist' (TV Tropes n.d.), has been and remains immensely popular and financially successful in video games, films, TV shows, and books. However, real-life historians, anthropologists and archaeologists have long criticized these films for being unrealistic, damaging, and, significantly for this thesis, colonialist. The genre has been said to depict archaeology "as a colonial imposition by which cultural heritage is appropriated" (Hall 2004: 161), to show "a classic projection of a neo-colonial optic" (Jayyusi 2018: 359) and to promote "a problematic smash-and-grab mentality to irreplaceable artifacts and lives" (Gross 2018). Both scholars and general audiences have become more critical of these topics in recent years, as the field of postcolonialism has gained more traction and cultural sensitivity is expected from filmmakers. We live in a time where the colonial history of museums and heritage has become an important topic, not just for heritage professionals, but also for source communities, visitors, political parties and the general public. Colonial heritage is increasingly an urgent issue, which demands discussions and solutions. Popular culture, which in many ways informs and reflects people's opinions on this topic (and others), has to grapple with this reality; especially the adventure genre, which often incorporates both heritage objects and colonial time periods.

In this thesis, I will explore this topic through the case study of one long-running franchise that depicts perhaps the most famous adventurer archaeologist of all time: Indiana Jones. This franchise incorporates

themes of heritage as well as colonial contexts, and has received increased criticism over the years for how it approaches these topics. By examining the context and content of each of the four movies, tracing the reception of the films upon release, as well as the responses of creators and subsequent films to reception, I will explore the developments regarding heritage and colonialism in the franchise. The analysis of each film will be supported with theories from heritage studies and postcolonial studies. This thesis will specifically focus on the role of material heritage in this debate. I will argue that the franchise (and the genre of the adventurer archaeologist more generally) uses aspects of three approaches towards colonialism and heritage; a *colonial* approach, where the narrative more or less explicitly defends colonial and imperial acts, an *uncolonial* approach, which attempts to circumvent the issue by not addressing it directly but trying to neutralize the narrative, and an *anticolonial* approach, which addresses colonialism in its narrative and attempts to argue against it.

I hope to show that a central factor to these developments is *nostalgia*, which is crucial to the Indiana Jones franchise; it is known for paying homage to old Hollywood, being inspired by tales of colonial archaeologists, and providing an imagined and romanticized past (as I will demonstrate in each chapter with reviews). This nostalgia is challenged by societal developments and critical reception, specifically related to colonialism and heritage. Because it is a long-running franchise, the subsequent films could respond to these developments. This can be observed by analyzing the aforementioned approaches towards colonialism, specifically in relation to heritage, throughout the franchise: whereas the first two movies lean on a colonial approach, the third movie adopts a more uncolonial approach in response to criticism, and the fourth movie attempts an anticolonial approach but fails in the eyes of many academics and viewers, precisely because the film attempts to hold on to the genre's crucial nostalgia. Additionally, I will argue that an alternative approach is a *postcolonial* approach, which does not only denounce colonialism but instead radically reconstructs Eurocentric assumptions and attitudes; however, this approach might not be reconcilable with the adventurer archaeologist genre.

In Chapter One, key concepts will be discussed and defined and a brief outline of the history of heritage colonialism in fiction will be provided in relation to the history of archaeology and cinema. It will also introduce the case studies that are at the center of this thesis. Chapter Two will analyze the first case

study: the 1981 film *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the first film in the Indiana Jones franchise. In four subsections, the case study and its relevance will be described; the case study will be analyzed according to pre-existing literature; reception regarding the case study will be incorporated; roles of religion, heritage and colonialism will be analyzed; and finally my findings will be summarized. The remaining chapters follow the same structure, but for the subsequent *Indiana Jones* movies. Chapter Five will review the developments that the Indiana Jones franchise has undergone since its beginning in 1981. It will also succinctly describe some other works of fiction that could be useful for further research. Finally, the conclusion will return to the research question and summarize my findings, as well as reflect on potential shortcomings of the research and possibilities for future research.

Methodology & relevance

The methodology of this research takes a qualitative approach by combining literature review and content analysis on the one hand, and online discourse analysis on the other hand. The content analysis will concern the three aforementioned films as case studies, whereas the literature review will regard pre-existing studies in the fields of heritage studies, film theory and postcolonial studies. The discourse analysis will concern non-scholarly texts regarding the case studies which came out at the original time of release in the U.S., as well as in countries that were used as settings for the films where possible. In short, the case studies are my primary data; the literature study will help me incorporate my findings into a pre-existing theoretical framework; and the discourse analysis will connect my theoretical findings to public perception. Public perception is important in this context, since some of the discussed case studies directly respond to public criticism regarding colonial themes and/or attempt to gain public approval with their handling of these themes.

The topic of postcolonialism in relation to heritage is increasingly important both in the scholarly world and in society as a whole. For example, more museums are repatriating or considering repatriating heritage objects stolen in a colonial context or otherwise unrightfully taken from source communities (e.g. McClure 2022; Tremayne-Pengelly 2023), and heritage institutions are exploring their own colonial history (e.g. Kennicott 2023). General audiences have been more critical and aware of topics

such as colonialism and racism in the fiction that they consume; there have been more discussions regarding, for example, “whitewashing” (Hunt 2019) and Hollywood has been under pressure to increase diversity with the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite (Turner and Nilsen 2019: 2). However, at the same time, the ‘adventurer archaeologist’, although so often criticized for its colonial and racist roots by scholars and critics alike (for example, Sterritt 1984; Jones-Matrona 2020; Jayyusi 2018; Turner 2016), still flourishes; the most recent *Indiana Jones* film was released in 2008, and a fifth one is set for release in 2023; the popular game *Uncharted*, in which the protagonist is also a well-known looter, recently has been adapted to film; the most recent *Lara Croft* film, which involves the same themes, came out in 2018. How do we reconcile those two movements? Has the genre adjusted to an increasingly postcolonial world? These developments invite research.

There is much pre-existing literature on the subject of colonial themes in film; however, most of those focus on the critique of systematic, long-standing issues, and are less concerned with changes that may have occurred in recent time periods, in this case since the surge of adventurer archaeologist films in the 1980s. This is a gap that this thesis seeks to fill. I would also like to add the specific focus on the role of material heritage in these films. Most existing literature focuses on broader narrative themes of colonialism and the very important issue of how colonized people are portrayed, but has less emphasis on the role of (religious) heritage; however, these objects are often at the center of the adventurer archaeologist genre and warrant further exploration.

The Indiana Jones franchise was selected for this research because of its immense influence on the genre. Its massive success and huge influence still continue today, with an upcoming fifth film (Bergeson 2022) and potential Disney+ series (Otterson 2022). In 2021, it was 40 years since *Raiders* came out, leading to a new surge of reviews (see, for example, Tobias 2021). It has been named the “standard of adventure films” (Tobias 2021) and the movie that “resurrect[ed] the colonial adventure genre” (Shohat & Stam 2014: 124) and has undoubtedly inspired many other films in the genre. Not only that, but many archaeologists claim that Indiana Jones inspired them to pursue their studies, and in 2008 the American Institute of Archaeology gave Harrison Ford an award for public service to archaeology, stating that he “has played a significant role in stimulating the public’s interest in

archaeological exploration.” (Blouin 2017). Additionally, the first film came out at a complex time. In 1981, postcolonial theories were on the rise, but not yet mainstream. On the other hand, the sequels and the films that were inspired by *Raiders* afterwards appeared in an increasingly postcolonial and anticolonial western world.

Indiana Jones is one of the few franchises in the genre that has thrived over the course of multiple decades with a relatively stable creative team. These factors give us a rare opportunity to trace developments regarding colonialism, religion and heritage in one leading franchise in the genre. Additionally, crucially, the sequels gave the creators the chance to respond to earlier audience receptions, critiques, and societal developments over time. Although the films of course do not represent the entire genre, they do give us a solid basis for this discussion considering how many other films in the genre were inspired by the franchise. By analyzing them from the perspective of postcolonial theories with the (colonial) history of archaeology and heritage studies in mind, we can ask: How does the first film, which set the standard for the genre, compare to the stories that came afterwards? How did the later films respond to audience reception and societal developments regarding colonialism and heritage?

I am aware that the subject of colonialism in film is a sensitive and contested one. Viewers are divided on how popular culture meant as light entertainment should reflect on colonialism, or if it should even reflect on it at all. Where some viewers argue that “all indiana jones movies are racist” (@labuntaicho 2021) and “Indiana Jones belongs in a Peruvian jail” (Gurmendi 2022), others label this criticism as unnecessary censoring and “SJW-filled” nonsense (@mvgaea 2021) (SJW meaning Social Justice Warrior, a term often used in a pejorative way for left-wing individuals). When I describe audience reception and academic discourse surrounding this topic, I never mean to argue that these are universal or undivided, only to describe certain broad trends and developments that we can notice over time.

The idea is also sometimes expressed that popular culture is not meant to be taken seriously and that criticism of e.g. Indiana Jones pertaining to real-life political issues is therefore unnecessary or unfair, since audiences do not want a “politically charged Indiana Jones movie anyways.” (@evilscorpio420

2021). However, I would argue that there can be no clear-cut separation between popular culture and ‘real life’; popular culture is created by real people. It both reflects and influences reality, as well as people’s beliefs (Forbes & Mahan 2017) and identities, especially for younger generations (Boden 2006). When popular culture is so influential, it cannot be so easily separated from ‘real life’ or ‘real issues’, but instead deserves a place in important societal debates.

Finally, there is the question of discussing and studying colonialism from the privileged position of being a white, western scholar. In this thesis, I have at all times aimed to discuss these topics in a way sensitive and respectful to those dealing with (the consequences of) colonialism. Part of this approach has been to cite a range of academics from different backgrounds and to incorporate the opinions of viewers from the areas that the *Indiana Jones* films depict, such as Peru and India, when possible, in order to more accurately portray how they are affected by the films. Again, I must note that viewers from these locations are also of course not uniform in their opinions. It is entirely possible and even likely that I will miss aspects of the situation because of my background. Nonetheless, I hope to responsibly engage in a broader ongoing discussion in academia regarding the continuing and far-reaching effects of colonialism in every area of life.

Research questions & aims

The main research question for this thesis is, *How has the theme of heritage colonialism in fiction been depicted in Indiana Jones over the past four decades, and how has this depiction changed in dialogue with audience reception and societal developments?* The main aim of the research would firstly be to trace and describe developments related to this theme in the adventure film genre since its repopularization in the 1980s, and how this connects to real-life societal changes and public opinions regarding heritage and colonialism. These opinions and changes are complex and multifaceted, and therefore I would not attempt a complete description or analysis; rather, the research aims to begin investigating trends in this area. The objectives that contribute to this main aim are:

- To investigate recent developments and trends in popular film in the area of (religious) heritage and colonialism.
- To investigate how these recent developments may correspond to developments in academia and society, specifically in postcolonial studies.
- To integrate existing theories at the crossroads of postcolonial studies, heritage studies and film studies.
- To analyze the public perception of these films and its influence on filmmaking choices through discourse and content analysis.
- To begin to suggest a model or integrated theory of approaches in popular adventure film to heritage colonialism.

The knowledge produced in this research would mainly add to the fields of heritage studies and film theory. The research aligns well with heritage studies not just because of the focus on material heritage objects in fiction, but also because themes of colonialism and repatriation of heritage are becoming increasingly important in the field. By studying popular depictions and public perceptions of these themes, this research can add to a more complete understanding of the issue. In general, popular culture interacts with public opinion and society in a way that warrants our academic attention (see, for example, Lee & Bai 2016; Boden 2006; Thompson 2007). Additionally, this research can connect the field of heritage studies to film theory, which has also been increasingly interested in the concept of Eurocentrism and “the male, heterosexual, white gaze position” (Fuery 2000: 30). Therefore, the research does not only add to different academic fields; it also links them together in a multidisciplinary approach.

Concepts & definitions

In this thesis, there are a number of concepts that will be used regularly; I will briefly discuss them and define them here.

A number of key concepts in this research regard colonialism. Colonialism has multiple definitions; literally, it is meant to “describe the process by which one nation extends its sovereignty over another nation’s territory and establishes either settler colonies or administrative dependencies between the host nation and the colonial metropole” (Harrison & Hughes 2010: 235). In this thesis, I will describe literal colonial depictions (where the narrative is set in colonized regions, portrays colonized and colonizer, and/or directly refers to colonialism) but also broader ‘colonial discourse’: attitudes that result from, are based on, or intertwined with colonial history. In this meaning of the word, we can speak of colonial academia, colonial institutions, or colonial popular culture in the sense that we can link “events of the colonial past with a present movement that continues to perpetuate colonial discourses” (Shahjahan 2011: 197). Along the same lines, I am here at times not analyzing direct colonialism, but attitudes towards heritage, cultures and people that perpetuate and reaffirm colonial discourses. Anticolonialism, on the other hand, refers to any attitudes that oppose colonialism. This could look like opposing colonial logic, practices, or discourse, but it does not necessarily concern material or radical change (Patel 2014).

I would here like to introduce the term uncolonial, which in this research will refer to attempts to avoid and/or ignore themes of colonialism and anticolonialism, in this case specifically in film narratives. This term specifically refers to the *intention* not to address themes of colonialism, but does not mean that the result might not still carry colonial implications.

Finally, the term postcolonial can also refer to several things; chronologically, it refers to the period after colonies became officially independent (Moro-Abadía 2006). However, this use of the term is contested, because “if colonialism is a way of maintaining an unequal international relation of economic and political power (...), then no doubt we have not fully transcended the colonial. Perhaps this amounts to saying that we are not yet post-imperialist.” (Williams and Chrisman 2015: 4) When it refers to research, postcolonialism describes the field that “is concerned primarily with unveiling, contesting and changing the way that colonialism structured societies, and the ideologies associated with colonialism” (Harrison & Hughes 2010: 237). Postcolonialism in popular culture might look like active attempts to

“turn the power structures of the world upside down, refashion the world from below.” (Young 2012: 20)

These terms will be used to organize analyses of the Indiana Jones franchise according to their approach towards depicting colonialism and (religious) heritage: do the films take a colonial approach, an anticolonial approach, an uncolonial approach or a postcolonial approach? I will further specify these approaches and the ways in which they present in dialogue with the case studies.

Fictional heritage colonialism/theoretical framework

Colonialism, archaeology and heritage studies

When analyzing the adventurer archaeologist genre, one needs to start by looking at the history of archaeology itself; after all, fictional depictions are based on some perception of reality. Interestingly, the way that archaeology has described its own history has been named a prime example of colonial discourse. Moro-Abadía explains that during most of the 20th century, popular books regarding the history of archaeology adopted an internalist approach, meaning that they excluded socio-political context from the history of their field and instead focused on adventurous explorations and exciting discoveries. Books such as *Gods, Graves and Scholars* by C.W. Ceram captured the public’s interest, but were both factually inaccurate and morally dubious. They often left out scholars who contributed significantly to the theoretical side of the field and instead focused on rare archaeological discoveries, which meant that they “gave emphasis to the romantic stereotypes of archaeology (also promoted by literature and cinema) and they supported the image of the archaeologist as a sort of Indiana Jones searching for treasures in ruined places” (Moro-Abadía 2006: 9). This image was inaccurate in some ways, attempted to erase the field’s connections to colonialism, and excused colonial acts. In reality, the field of archaeology was made possible by colonial expeditions and archaeological theories perpetuated colonial and racist stereotypes. Take, for example, the myth of the mound-builders, which posited that Native Americans could not have been capable of building certain structures that were

found in the current United States, but instead they must have been built by some well-developed, lost civilization (Rubiera 2020). This undermined the capabilities of Native Americans themselves and perpetuated the stereotype that they had not evolved in quite some time. As Moro-Abadía states, ideas such as these were promoted in archaeological texts, but were also copied in popular fiction such as Indiana Jones.

There is no denying the connections between colonialism, archaeology and heritage studies more broadly. Despite the fact that colonial themes in the history of archaeology and the field of heritage studies have been increasingly recognized, challenges still continue to arise. One of those is connected to the Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD), an important term coined by Laurajane Smith. AHD is “a dominant way of thinking about, writing and talking about, and defining heritage,” (Smith & Waterton 2012: 156) which, amongst other things, “limits the rights to identify and champion heritage to specific groups of expertise” (Ibid: 155). AHD leads to several problems in the context of (post)colonialism. Most importantly, it privileges scholarly expertise over any other skill; archaeologists and other experts are labeled as caretakers of material heritage, which can lead to a lack of control and participation by the source community itself. Moreover, Smith and Waterton argue that AHD has become stifling to discussions surrounding heritage: it has become so accepted that alternative views are disregarded. The current AHD in most Western countries was born out of 19th-century English values and much of it has not changed significantly since then (Smith & Waterton 2012). The result has often been that indigenous people are not trusted to take care of their own heritage; instead, it is argued that what is most beneficial to heritage and its owners is to have an expert preserve it, in the way that the AHD sees fit, an attitude easily linked to colonialism.

An important recent development in the recognition of heritage studies’ colonial history is the rise of postcolonial studies in the 1980s and 1990s, which “is concerned primarily with unveiling, contesting and changing the way that colonialism structured societies, and the ideologies associated with colonialism” (Harrison & Hughes 2010: 237). Edward Said’s *Orientalism* was crucial to this development and is sometimes seen as the founding postcolonial text (Harrison & Hughes 2010). In the work he argued that power relations in a colonial context were based on the idea that the colonial subject

was 'the Other' to the West. This and other postcolonial arguments started to gain popularity, and currently it is well-established that the field of archaeology contributed to, perpetuated, and was made possible by colonialism (see, for example, Moro-Abadía 2006; Schneider & Hayes 2020; Nicholas & Hollowell 2007).

This context is crucial to explaining how 20th-century and 21st-century cinema which depicts archaeology and heritage includes colonial themes. Postcolonial critique only gained traction in the 1990s, and archaeology had previously attempted to present its history as one of romantic adventures and exciting discoveries. The public had been misinformed about the history of archaeology, heritage and colonialism, which inevitably led to popular culture perpetuating the same stereotypes. Additionally, the history of cinema itself is also intertwined with colonialism.

Cinema, colonialism & postcolonialism

The beginning of the 20th century was a time when cinema flourished, but it was also the peak of colonialism. The European and American public was encouraged to identify with the imperial project, and this shone through in cinema; popular film "adopted the popular fictions of colonialist writers like Kipling for India and Rider Haggard, Edgar Wallace and Edgar Rice Burroughs for Africa," (Shohat & Stam 2014: 100) and "combined narrative and spectacle to tell the story of colonialism from the colonizer's perspective." (Ibid: 109) Early filmmakers were sponsored by imperial institutions and helped the field of anthropology to gather visual evidence which was heavily colonial and racist in tone (see the third chapter in Shohat & Stam 2014, regarding the imperial imaginary).

In the 1930s, colonial films flourished, especially the British imperial epic, which depicted romanticized versions of Europe's imperial history. This genre was not just a result of the imaginations of filmmakers, but was in fact deeply intertwined with institutional colonialism; there were even laws and regulations instated throughout the British colonial empire which enforced the positive depiction of white characters compared to non-white characters, and rival native films were prevented by colonial powers so that they could keep a grip on the narratives being sold to colonized audiences (Shohat & Stam 2014: 112).

After the Second World War, areas were increasingly formally decolonized, but colonial themes did not disappear in film. In the 1980s there was a resurgence of the imperial narratives, visible in for example *Mountains of the Moon* (1989) which shows an explorer's search for the sources of the Nile. The Indiana Jones franchise also began in the 1980s and was partly inspired by the 1930s films which were so influenced by romanticizing colonialism. Additionally, this franchise played an important role in the revival of the colonial adventure genre and was immensely influential in this context; I will expand on this in Chapter Two. Conservative ideologies were on the rise at the time, especially in the UK, which has been connected to the popularity of that genre (Shohat & Stam 2014).

Films that were critical of colonialism also started to appear in the second half of the 20th century. An important example of this, as noted by Mark Hall, amongst others, was the 1969 Egyptian film *Al Mummia*. This film portrayed the problems that come along with looting of heritage, and recognized “that the protection and understanding of a nation's cultural heritage required the consent and involvement of that nation's people.” (Hall 2004: 166)

Since the development of postcolonial studies, adventurer archaeologist films are under increasing scrutiny by scholars and reviewers as well as by a broader public. Archaeologists often criticize the genre as inaccurate (Berlin 2015), colonial and racist (Gross 2018).

This, then, is the complicated and multifaceted context in which we must consider modern movies which include the adventurer archaeologist trope: on the one hand, archaeology as a field was made possible by colonialism and romanticized colonialism in popular texts; cinema has adopted these depictions along with other colonial attitudes since the 20th century. Currently, there is a situation in which new adventurer archaeologist films are often inspired by Indiana Jones, which in turn was inspired by 1930s films which in turn were influenced by colonial history, the romanticizing of colonialism and dehumanization of the colonized. This means that to the average viewer, the colonial roots of modern adventure films are not always visible or obvious, and yet the connections are there.

Nostalgia

A final important theme for the adventurer archaeologist genre which will reappear throughout the next chapters is nostalgia. Nostalgia is usually defined as some kind of longing for the past, where the past can be an individual's past but also a broader historical past of a particular social or cultural group. This past is not necessarily something directly remembered, but can be imagined, distorted and highly selective (Batcho and Jacobsen 2021).

As a whole, the franchise of Indiana Jones is steeped in nostalgia; as mentioned, the early films were partly inspired by 1930s films and serials that Lucas himself loved as a child, and which he describes as his favorite period (Maslin 1981). Reviews for all of the films note their nostalgic aspects, the manner in which they pay homage to all sorts of old movies and stories (e.g. Klain 1981; Sterritt 1984; Ebert 1989; French 2008). Additionally, the release of the first two Indiana Jones films in the 1980s occurred alongside a surge of nostalgia in cinema, which manifested in the Raj Revival genre and what was known as Reaganite entertainment. The Raj Revival films of the 1980s, set in the times of British occupation of India, can be described as “a nostalgic image of a pure, complete and stable national identity, which helped the audience flee from the social, political and economic uncertainties of the present” (Oliete-Adea 2015: 83); although some of these films show hints of criticism, these are overshadowed by glamor and romanticism in narrative and cinematography. In the same period, there was the so-called Reaganite entertainment, which provided American audiences with a renewed sense of national identity and traditions during challenging times (Aronstein 2005). Indiana Jones and more generally the films by Spielberg and Lucas have been connected to Reaganite entertainment because of their themes of nostalgia, innocence, Judeo-Christian ethics and American values (Pollock 2009). These movements of nostalgia are often viewed as “a symptomatic response to contemporary issues and events” (Symmons 2013: 25), where nostalgic fiction provides “a simplified and idealised historical context within which contemporary concerns lost much of their attendant complexity” (Ibid: 26). In other words, nostalgic films show the audience a past which possesses what modernity lacks, which can

be particular values or a general sense of innocence and simplicity; not only are these films nostalgic for a time period itself, but also for the films of a particular period (Higson 2014).

Some authors distinguish between reactionary and progressive nostalgia, where nostalgia *can* be used to focus on the present and use aspects of the past to actively move forward (Cashman 2006; Smith & Campbell 2017). Considering the way Indiana Jones is meant to pay homage to previous films, series, and stories, Indiana Jones definitely focuses more on reactionary nostalgia and reminiscence than on some kind of action forwards. Reactionary nostalgia romanticizes the past, presents it as some kind of ideal place; this process is by nature selective and uncritical, and involves a certain claim of innocence, of being ignorant of problems and of enjoying simple things (Higson 2014). However, in the case of the adventurer archaeologist genre, this claim of innocence becomes contested because of contemporary developments in relation to colonialism and heritage. Since the rise of postcolonialism and in a time where people are increasingly educated about colonial times, audiences are less tolerant of portraying colonial contexts in a romantic way and claims of innocent times or blissed ignorance. This creates a complicated situation for the adventurer archaeologist genre, which becomes a space of contested nostalgia in public discussion; nostalgia remains crucial to Indiana Jones and other adventurer archaeologist works such as *The Mummy*, but it becomes difficult to maintain under criticism.

In the following chapters, I will describe and analyze case studies while keeping this multifaceted and complex context in mind, starting with *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, one of the foundational films for the modern adventurer archaeologist genre.

Chapter 2- Raiders of the Lost Ark: No Questions Asked, As Usual

Case study description

In this chapter, the first Indiana Jones movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is the central case study. The structure of the chapter (as well as subsequent chapters describing other case studies) is as follows. The chapter begins with a summary of the film's narrative, as well as its critical reception at time of release; then, I will give some historical context for both the time of the film's release and the time period in which it is set. Next, I will discuss the general attitude of the film towards themes of colonialism: colonial, uncolonial or anticolonial (or a combination). Then I will describe the role of religion and heritage in this attitude, followed by a conclusion summarizing the findings of the chapter.

Raiders of the Lost Ark, which is the first of four movies in the Indiana Jones franchise, came out in 1981 and was directed by Steven Spielberg, while the story was written by Lawrence Kasdan, George Lucas and Philip Kaufman. The film is set in 1936 and follows Indiana Jones, played by Harrison Ford, an archaeology professor who is occasionally employed to find heritage objects abroad and bring them to a museum or university. In the first scenes of the film, Indiana is searching for a golden statue in a temple in Peru. After surviving multiple booby traps in a Peruvian temple and taking the statue, Indiana is cornered by his rival, René Belloq, who takes the prize. Indiana escapes and returns frustrated to the U.S., where he teaches at a university. He is approached by FBI agents to look into a mysterious message that they intercepted from the Nazis, which mentions Indiana's mentor, Professor Ravenwood, in connection with the mythical city of Tanis. Indiana and Marcus Brody, the curator of the university museum, deduce that the Nazis have a team of archaeologists looking for the biblical Ark of the Covenant, which might have supernatural powers that they could use as a weapon.

In order to find the Ark of the Covenant before the Germans do, Indiana visits Ravenwood's daughter, Marion. She possesses a part of the Staff of Ra, which is needed to find the Ark. Together, they go to Cairo, where the Ark is believed to be buried. They visit Sallah, a local digger who was employed by the Germans in their excavation project for the Ark; he reveals that Belloq is helping the Germans. After a number of fights and escapes, during which Marion is captured by the Nazis, Indiana infiltrates the dig site to find the Ark himself. When he does find it, however, it is taken from him by Belloq. Indiana and Marion are trapped in an underground chamber, which they destroy in order to escape. The Germans, led by Belloq, go to an island in the Aegean Sea in order to test if the Ark actually works, before they take it to Hitler. Indiana and Marion try to intervene but both end up captured; however, when the Ark is opened, mysterious ghostly forces explode from within and kill Belloq and everyone else present- except for Indiana and Marion, who had their eyes closed to never look inside the Ark.

They get the Ark to the U.S., where Indiana is paid handsomely by the FBI. He and Marcus Brody are not satisfied with the situation and demand that the Ark be studied by experts; the FBI tells him that it will be studied by their best people. The movie closes with the famous shot of a box, with the Ark inside, being put in a giant storage facility with hundreds of other similar objects.

Case study analysis

Reception

Raiders came out in 1981 and was a big box office success; it was the top film of the summer in the U.S. that year (Harmetz 1981). At the time, American top critic Vincent Canby called it one of the funniest and most stylish American adventure movies ever made (Canby 1981). It was also praised for its special effects, for its "swashbuckling adventure" (Ebert 1981) and for the sense of nostalgia it awakened in its viewers (Klain 1981). Criticisms that it did receive centered around its lack of depth and its emphasis on nostalgia over substance (Kauffman 1981). It received five Academy Awards in 1982 and a further four nominations, amongst which for Best Picture (Oscars n.d. (a)). Overall, the film

was a huge commercial success and generally well received by both American audiences and critics. It is unfortunately unclear to me whether the film was screened and/or reviewed in areas the film was set in, such as Egypt and Peru, at the time.

At the time, themes of colonialism, stereotypes or racism were not described in American reviews, but reviews did note that “[s]teeped in an exotic atmosphere of lost civilizations, mystical talismans, gritty mercenary adventurers, Nazi arch-villains and ingenious death at every turn, the film is largely patterned on the serials of the 1930s” (Klain 1981). “It is an homage to old-time movie serials and back-lot cheapies,” Canby noted too, saying that the film “evokes memories of movie-going of an earlier era” (1981). Already, we can see the aspect of nostalgia was noticed by audiences, and that the creators’ love for their own childhood stories (as described in e.g. Maslin 1981) came across clearly.

Context

Raiders is set in the 1930s, at a peak of imperialism; as noted in Chapter One, this was a period in which the imperial film was peaking in popularity. At the time, around 25% of people worldwide lived under British rule, while formal decolonization was also underway (Shohat & Stam 2014). Egypt, a main setting in the film, had technically been independent since 1922, but conflicts with the British government over the recognition of full sovereignty remained; Nepal, a second location, was a ‘protectorate’ of the British Empire and struggled economically in order to remain independent from colonial rule. Finally, Peru, in which the first scenes are set, has a history of Spanish colonization and a longstanding territorial conflict with Colombia which was ongoing in the 1930s. In short, the film’s three main locations outside of the U.S. have a history deeply intertwined with colonial rule which was ongoing in several important ways at the time of Indiana’s visits.

The *Indiana Jones* franchise as a whole is intertwined with real archaeological history. The original transcript of the brainstorm for the character, created by George Lucas, Steven Spielberg and Lawrence

Kasdan, has been made publicly available (Keefe 2013).¹ The document, which spans 125 pages, includes no names of real archaeologists but does mention that Indiana Jones is an “archaeologist and an anthropologist” (Lucas, Spielberg & Kasdan 1978: 4), who needs to be “realistic and believable”, “extremely good at what he does” and “a real professional,” (Ibid: 2) although he also became an “outlaw archaeologist” (Ibid: 4). This does indicate that the character of Indiana Jones should be rooted in reality according to the creators, at least as far as his profession is concerned. An exhibition about the franchise by the National Geographic Museum also claimed in 2015 that there were multiple real-life archaeologists which inspired the character (Berlin 2015). Since this exhibition was in cooperation with George Lucas’ company, Lucasfilm Ltd, this statement can be argued to hold some weight. One important archaeologist that is mentioned at the exhibition is Hiram Bingham. Bingham was a professor at Yale University in the early 20th century, and best known for rediscovering Machu Picchu in Peru. After his “discovery” – although the word discovery is questionable in this context, since he was led directly to the site by locals (Alfred 2000) – he exported hundreds of objects to the U.S., after which a decades-long argument arose between the two governments over who is the legal owner of those items (Brice & Shoichet 2010).

The 1980s themselves were a period of some imperialist nostalgia, as argued by for example Renato Rosaldo at the time. He names cinema as an example of how imperialism was seen with a mood of nostalgia, which made “racial domination appear innocent and pure.” (Rosaldo 1989: 107) There were many successful films in the 1980s and 1990s that directly depicted colonialism in a nostalgic and positive light, like *Indochine* (1992) and *L’Amant* (1992, based on the 1984 book) (Lorcin 2013).

¹ The transcript is still available for download online, for example on <https://maddogmovies.com/almost/archives/329>. Both the original photocopied document and an easier to read transcript are available online; in this thesis I will be citing the original photocopied document. The transcript has been confirmed as authentic by Lawrence Kasdan during an interview at the Writers Guild Foundation in 2016. The interviewer discusses the document during the conversation, saying, for example, “going back to *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and the story conference, which, people have seen the transcript of that, that was the first movie. (...) Looking at that discussion you had, everyone is referencing the things that are so important to them, and the things they love.” Kasdan says, “That’s exactly right.” (Writers Guild Foundation 2016)

In short, the historical setting of the film has a colonial context, the film was produced in a time of some nostalgia for a colonial context, and Indiana Jones as a character is also inspired by real archaeologists who operated in a colonial context and real archaeology which is rooted in colonial history.

Colonialism

As noted above, the film is set in a time of active colonialism, but also in a period of formal decolonization and anticolonial movements. However, as described by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam in their influential book *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, anticolonial sentiments are completely ignored in *Raiders*; in Indiana's Egypt, there is "no popular agitation against the British." (Shohat and Stam 2014: 124) Instead, the film assumes an unchallenged colonial empire, where colonized areas are "ontologically corrupt, awaiting Western salvation" (idem). The locations in which the film is set, most importantly Egypt, are generally portrayed stereotypically and without much depth. Egypt is often portrayed in popular culture as the Oriental Other, as "all things ritualized, sacrificed and sexual" (Hall 2004: 162), always involved with legends and superstitions. Only the Western protagonist with his scientific outlook is presented as having the knowledge and the tools to truly understand that history, to disarm any dangerous objects and to keep them safe. This is precisely the case in *Raiders*, where Egypt is little more than a romantic setting in which curses and the occult are around every corner. Similarly, in the first scenes, Peru is an 'exotic' jungle setting, with traps and venomous animals, and, notably, with native people who are not as brave, smart, or calm as the Western hero. In this sense, the film has a combination of uncolonial and colonial aspects: it is uncolonial in the sense that it completely avoids the topic of colonial history, anticolonial movements, etc., but colonial in its Eurocentric and stereotyping depictions of non-western people and locations. This also demonstrates the problem that arises when films in this genre adopt an uncolonial approach: since the genre favors colonial times and colonized regions, an uncolonial approach could be interpreted as accepting the status quo and therefore communicating a colonial message despite the film's attempt to avoid the issue.

This depiction is in line with the aforementioned brainstorm transcript. During one conversation, Lucas and Spielberg discuss the first scenes in Peru. It has to be in "South America, someplace. (...) Very

exotic mist-filled jungles and mountains.” There are “a couple native bearers, whatever, and sort of a couple of Mexican, well not Mexican... (...) They’re the third world local sleazos. Whether they’re Mexicans or Arabs or whatever.” (Lucas, Spielberg & Kasden 1978: 10) Additionally, the temple has to have “giant crazy traps that were set so long ago to keep people from getting in there.” (Ibid: 16) The main creators of the franchise clearly had a surface-level, stereotypical, and at times contemptuous idea of South America. The local religion they imagine as something not-Christian; either Buddhism or voodoo (neither of which had a significant presence in Peru in the 1930s), the people they describe as third-world “sleazos”. The stereotypes are clear, as is the imagined dichotomy between the West and the Other, imagined as less developed, less rational, overall inferior; similar to the way Edward Said described the perception of the colonial subject in colonial times (Harrison & Hughes 2010). Any religion present they see as ‘exotic’ - a word mentioned often in these brainstorm. Egypt is discussed as being “some exotic middle-east area” (Ibid: 21), where Indiana will be “sneaking around exotic stuff” (Ibid: 22). Interestingly, when it comes to the legend of the Ark, they suddenly note that they “should try to remain as consistent with the real legend as we can. (...) We shouldn’t deny what the legend of the Ark is.” (Ibid: 55) Another part of the transcript shows a conversation between Debbie Fine (director of Research and Archives at Lucasfilm Ltd), Lawrence Kasdan (screenwriter for *Raiders*) and Phil Kaufman (co-creator of the character), who discuss the research for the film. They focus almost exclusively on the biblical story of the Ark of the Covenant and what research has been done on that. They also discuss several options for how to explain the Ark being in Egypt, such as the theory that an Egyptian pharaoh took it from Jerusalem (Ibid: 118-125).

These snippets of the conversation and the transcript as a whole show very transparently what the thought process was in the depiction of non-Western areas. When it comes to Indiana’s character and his profession, he has to be believable, realistic, and likable; the Biblical legend of the Ark, too, is to be respected to some degree. However, the non-Western areas he works in are just there to be an ‘exotic’ and visually appealing backdrop that adds mystery and scares for the viewer; people are reduced to stereotypes, religion is Christianity’s generalized Other, heritage objects are interchangeable. It looks like the creators simply did not consider the Eurocentric and colonial perspectives that were ingrained

in their original ideas and in the final product, and therefore they reproduced them. This led to depictions of non-western cultures, people and environments that are unrealistic, romanticized, and stereotypical. Apart from the clear biases presented by the creators, perhaps the concept of nostalgia also plays a role here. Nostalgia is often related to childhood, innocence and light-heartedness (Niemeyer & Wentz 2014), which in turn implies a certain ignorance to violence and other serious issues. Criticizing or even acknowledging the violent realities of the colonial context clashes directly with the film's goal of nostalgia, but this leads to an acceptance of the colonial status-quo presented.

Heritage

The character of Indiana Jones has been criticized specifically for his heritage practices and for being a bad archaeologist. The colonial theme of the character is easy to spot: he is an American, white, male professor who makes use of his position, his expertise and his privilege in order to loot non-Western heritage objects from areas which often have a colonial history, occasionally manipulating local people into helping him, and then brings these objects to an American museum. In the first scenes, he battles with Belloq in Peru over a religious object that is located inside a temple which is, we can only assume, still in use; at least, the native tribe clearly recognizes the 'idol' when Belloq shows it to them. In fact, Belloq manipulates the local people with their own heritage object, only to take it for himself. The temple, of course, is all but destroyed when Indiana flees the scene. When Indiana returns to the United States, he gives Marcus Brody, curator of the university museum, a number of other artifacts, which Marcus says the museum will buy, "no questions asked, as usual." (Raiders: 00:15:05); in the same scene, it is implied that Indiana's methods violate international laws. The protagonist prevents the Ark of the Covenant from falling into Hitler's hands, but then proceeds instead to ship it off to America with the intention of adding it to Indiana's university museum- even though it is not only, as Indiana puts it, "a find of immense historical significance," (Raiders: 00:22:15), but it would be an object of immense importance to Jewish communities, and has no specific ties to their university or to the U.S. in general. Indiana's only criticism lies in the fact that he thinks the Ark should be studied (presumably by him), and instead it is confiscated by the American government. Although the film does seem to comment on the Jewish nature of this heritage object and the ironic and painful idea of the Nazis using Jewish

heritage for their own victory, as film critic Roger Ebert already noted in 2000, it does not seem to take issue with the idea of that same heritage ending up in some American museum which also has no particular ties to it.

Both protagonists and antagonists steal, loot, damage and destroy non-Western material heritage in *Raiders* with little regard for the source community. Some modern-day archaeologists criticize this for being an unrealistic representation of the field, depicting and romanticizing the “loot and scoot school of archaeology” (Berlin 2015). A facet that is less noted by these scholars is how in this film, heritage is separated from its source community, not only physically, but also culturally and historically.

The non-Western heritage objects that feature in *Raiders* are completely devoid of a background story—except in the case of the Ark, which is originally a non-Western item but has since been integrated into Western cultural history through Christianity. The ‘idol’, for example, from the first scenes, is completely devoid of meaning. The audience has absolutely no idea what this statue signifies to the local community, except for a vague notion that it is religious. What is their religion like? What does the statue mean to them? How is it intertwined with their history and their community? Why is it protected with traps? Nothing is said about it. The material heritage is completely separated from its cultural and historical context; the only thing that the audience needs to know is that *Western people and Western museums want it*, and that is why it is valuable. In a sense, the heritage is ‘disarmed’ by the story; it is reduced to its monetary value, stripped of its contextual power, its value and importance to the source community. This is significant because the ‘disarming’ of heritage was a frequent tactic by real-life colonizers through heritage management in order to strip away local identities and replace them with Western identities (Harrison & Hughes 2010). Another facet to this disarming tactic was the conceptual or temporal separation between the heritage and its source community, which also occurs in *Raiders*. The Peruvian temple was built long ago by some ancient civilization, who constructed elaborate and well-made traps and built an impressive structure; however, the current-day Peruvians are depicted as backwards, undeveloped and one-dimensional. This presumed split between ancient and modern is a reiteration of the aforementioned moundbuilder myth, separates the community from their

history and their heritage, and undermines their skills. The movie does the same in Egypt, where the film “assumes a disjuncture between contemporary and ancient Egypt which only the Western scientist can bridge, since he alone can grasp the full significance of the ancient archaeological objects.” (Shohat & Stam 2014: 151) The people are completely disconnected from their heritage objects; they just happen to be there. In these ways, *Raiders* separates its fictional heritage from its source community physically, historically and culturally, which reinforces colonial and Eurocentric views and stereotypes.

One final interesting aspect of the film’s treatment of heritage is the role of expertise and AHD. One important aspect to the AHD is its emphasis on a specific type of expertise. The current Anglophone (and, broadly speaking, Western) AHD poses the expert as the stewards of heritage; especially archaeology, architecture and art history. This emphasis “limits the rights to identify and champion heritage to specific groups of expertise” (Ibid: 155). In other words, archaeologists can interact with heritage and take on the responsibility of ‘protecting’ it according to their standards, and non-experts do not have that same privilege according to the AHD- including the source communities of heritage objects, who are sometimes criticized for the treatment of their own heritage. Although Indiana Jones as a character may be called unrealistic in certain respects (most archaeologists will not be fighting for their lives on a daily basis), his general behavior does fit into the AHD: he believes that objects belong in a museum, even when source communities may disagree. He believes himself to be the protector of heritage, and that heritage objects’ ultimate destination should be researched by heritage experts in a research institution, ideally a university or museum. This is the object that Indiana Jones and Marcus Brody, a curator, raise at the end of the film when the Ark is taken away by the government: the object should be studied instead. For every object in *Raiders*, its significance to the field is emphasized over any other significance it may have, culturally or personally.

Religion

Religion is a key aspect in *Raiders* in the sense that both objects that Indiana tracks down, the idol and the Ark of the Covenant, have a strong religious context. There are, however, differences between the

two objects that are significant in the discussion surrounding colonialism and heritage. These differences can partly be explained by the fact that the Ark plays a much larger role in the story, but they are interesting to note nevertheless.

Firstly, it is important to note that the Peruvian religious idol is, as mentioned before, decontextualized; we do not know its religious role or background or even in which religion it features. The same is the case for the staff of Ra; Ra was an Egyptian god, so was this staff a religious item? The viewers have no idea and receive extremely limited context. The staff is interchangeable with any other old heritage object, and its only value is to aid in the search for the actual object of importance: the Ark. The Peruvian idol is desirable only for its monetary value, the Staff is desirable only as an instrument, but the Ark is desirable to Indiana because of its historical significance. Indiana is not necessarily interested in religious or mystical beliefs surrounding the Ark - since he does not believe in “magic, a lot of superstitious hocus-pocus,” (*Raiders*, 00:22:15) - but he recognizes its immense importance to history. This might imply that what is important to general history is specifically Judeo-Christian history, while historical objects connected to other religions are apparently not historically significant. Additionally, while the idol is used by Indiana to manipulate the local community (he uses their respect for the idol to escape) and the Staff is used by Indiana to find the Ark, the Ark’s role in the narrative is to defeat the Nazis. It is not *used* to defeat the Nazis, the object *itself* defeats the Nazis. The Ark is the only object in the film to be ascribed agency; limited agency, since it resists the Nazis, but does not resist the American government, but agency nonetheless.

Overall, these differences show a tendency to ascribe historical and scientific relevance to Judaism and Christianity, to grant these religions the power of their context to some extent, but to commodify and stereotype any other religions and religious items. This does not mean that Judaism and Christianity are necessarily accurately depicted in *Raiders*, but it does portray the Eurocentric assumption that Judaism and Christianity are in some ways (historically, rationally) superior to other religions, without explicitly arguing for it.

Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, let us summarize the findings described above. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is a movie from 1981, a time of imperial nostalgia and right before the postcolonial movement took off /It is set in the 1930s, a peak in colonial history, and partly inspired by the creators' nostalgic fondness of media from that time. It becomes unclear what parts of the film might express nostalgia for the 1930s themselves, and what parts express nostalgia for the *media* of the 1930s. Either way, the film's avoidance of portraying anticolonial sentiments leads to an assumption of an unchallenged imperial status quo, where white heritage experts are free to navigate colonized regions and take control of their heritage objects without taking local opinions into account. Heritage objects are removed from their source community both physically, historically and culturally and in that way decontextualized and disarmed; local identities are portrayed superficially and, at times, incorrectly, Othering non-western characters and separating them from the Western protagonist.

In some ways, *Raiders* is not inaccurate in its portrayal of 1930s archaeology, since it confirms the AHD that was already in place; however, many real-life archaeologists, scholars and reviewers take issue with not just the aspects that are inaccurate, but also the nostalgic romanticization of colonial archaeology.

Raiders is colonial not only in its depiction of archaeology, where a Western male heritage expert takes advantage of his position in order to steal native heritage in colonized regions, but also because of its 'uncolonial' elements; the avoidance of anticolonial movements and of the topic of colonialism as a whole might be intended to keep the tone of the film light-hearted, but in reality leads to an acceptance of the status quo, which was a colonial situation. At the time of release, this aspect of the film was almost completely overlooked in the critical reception of the film, perhaps because the norm in cinema at the time *was* to assume a colonial perspective through 'uncolonialism'. This, then, is the point of departure for the *Indiana Jones* franchise: built on a nostalgia for 1930s media and influenced by a broader imperial nostalgia, which selectively imagines that past as adventurous, simple, romantic, and

innocent. This was received well by American critics at the time. However, as mentioned, *Raiders* and its sequels have later been criticized on these same grounds. In what ways have later films in the same genre reinstated *Raiders*' nostalgia and treatment of fictional heritage colonialism, and in what ways have they changed it? This question will be central in the next two chapters.

Chapter 3- Temple of Doom: “a beastly people with a beastly religion”

Case study description

The second film in the Indiana Jones series is *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984), directed again by Steven Spielberg, with George Lucas again functioning as story writer. The film is set in 1935, so even though it is the second installment in the series, it is actually a prequel to *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. The viewer first finds Indiana in a nightclub in Shanghai, where he delivers the remains of Emperor Nurhaci to the crime boss Lao Che. After Lao Che attempts to murder Indiana, he escapes together with a young orphan, Shorty, and a nightclub singer, Willie Scott. After their escape, they end up in a river and wash up in a village in northern India. The local people ask for Indiana's help, because their Shiva lingam, a sacred stone, has been stolen from them; additionally, multiple children have gone missing. They think that the nearby Pankot Palace is to blame. Indiana and his two sidekicks go to the palace where they are welcomed by the Maharajah and his Prime Minister, Roshan Seth. When they stay the night there, they find hidden tunnels filled with booby traps, leading to an underground temple. There, they see a local cult, the Thuggees,² worship the Hindu goddess Kali in a disturbing ritual which includes human sacrifice. Indiana finds out that the Thuggees have kidnapped and enslaved the children that disappeared from the village, and are looking for the so-called Sankara stones, given to humanity

² Spelling of this word varies; in academic literature the group is usually referred to as Thugee, but I am here following the spelling of the film's script.

by the Hindu gods to fight evil; they have already found three of them, one of them being the village's Shiva lingam. The Thuggee priest feeds Indiana a potion that leads to mind-control, but he is freed by Shorty. In turn, Indiana frees Willie and the children, and takes the stones. Together, they escape the temple through a mine cart, but they are chased by the Thuggees. Indiana invokes the name of Shiva, which causes two of the three stones to burn through their satchel and fall into a river; the third burns the priest's hand, who then falls into the river as well. Indiana retrieves the third stone and the trio is saved from Thuggees by the arrival of the British Indian Army, after which they return to the village. The stone and the children are safely delivered back to their people.

Case study analysis

Reception

Although *Temple of Doom* was financially successful, it was criticized more than *Raiders* had been. Some reviewers lauded the film for its “visual extravaganza” (Ebert 1984), “stunning display of design,” (McCarthy 1984), and for Harrison Ford's “exceptionally skillful comic performance” (Canby 1984). It is still noted for being inspired by “schlocky B-movie manners” (Canby 1984) and reviving the 1930s serials, but the film was also heavily criticized for a number of gruesome scenes and for its violence, which, at a time where the PG-13 rating had not yet been invented, was deemed too excessive for young children (e.g. Canby 1984). Lawrence Kasdan, the scriptwriter of the first Indiana Jones film, has said that he did not want to work on the movie because “it was horrible. It's so mean. There's nothing pleasant about it. (...) [T]he movie is very ugly and mean-spirited.” (Baxter 1999: 337)

The positive reviews like Eberts' make less note of nostalgia as a successful aspect of the film compared to *Raiders*; the negative reviews sometimes mention it as a criticism. David Sterritt, for example, notes that the film is not “just nostalgic”, but “downright backward”. He summarizes the message of *Temple* as follows, “White people are good, yellow people are shifty, brown people are weak or sinister. Some lesson for the 80's!” (Sterritt 1984) Sterritt argues that this was a broader trend in American cinema, as

a consequence of a misplaced general nostalgia for old Hollywood films which were based on racist and sexist ideas and regulations. This nostalgia, as described by Sterritt, had been a trend since the period known as New Hollywood (1967-1980) began and was “widely interpreted by contemporary commentators as a conservative ideological impulse, that functions to reassure audiences by providing a simplified and idealised historical context within which contemporary concerns lost much of their attendant complexity.” (Symmons 2013: 25-26) It seems that the more explicit themes in the film revealed to critics a huge issue that the franchise had to deal with: that a nostalgia for particular periods in (cinematic) history loses its claim to innocence when the dark sides of those periods are embraced and romanticized.

Several organizations, such as the Asian American Telecommunications Association and the Chinese Association for Affirmative Action, made statements condemning the film. The two aforementioned organizations did so by stating in *Variety* that *Temple of Doom*, amongst other films, is racist and that it “consciously or unconsciously determine[s] people’s attitudes towards Asians.” (Sterritt 1984) Additionally, the film was banned from Indian cinemas. Indian government officials had screened the script beforehand, when the filmmakers applied for permission to film in India, and had requested a number of changes, mostly regarding the religious sequences (Baxter 1999: 338). The filmmaking team refused and filmed in Sri Lanka instead (Cinerama 2022) which prompted the Indian government to ban the film upon release.

However, the movie was still a financial success in the U.S.; it set a record for the highest grossing film in its first six days (\$42.2 million) and was, at the time, one of the most commercially successful movies ever made (Harmetz 1989). It was nominated for two Oscars, Best Effects and Best Original Score, of which it won the former (Oscars n.d. (b)).

Context

The majority of the film takes place in colonial India, so I will focus mostly on that context; however, *Temple of Doom* also features a significant opening scene in Shanghai that I will discuss first.

The opening scene takes place in a Shanghai nightclub and starts with the introduction of Willie as a dancer/singer, surrounded by Asian backup dancers. She steps out of a huge paper dragon's head, wears Asian fashion, and sings in Chinese; the large group of backup dancers carry large fans and are wearing short, sparkly dresses in various fashions. This reminds us of a line in the original brainstorm transcript: "He'll go to the Orient with the crowded streets and dragon ladies." (Lucas, Spielberg & Kasden 1978: 21) This was first an idea for the first film, and it was noted that "[t]he only reason we're talking about the Orient is that it's exotic" (Ibid: 31). The women depicted are clearly an example of the sexualized Orient, as noted by e.g. Mukhopadhyay (2017), who also argues that Willie is an extension of a desire for Eastern women, wearing Eastern clothes and accessories. Another stereotype is instantly visible in the rest of the scene, where Indiana can be seen trying to negotiate with Chinese criminals who betray and attempt to kill him. This type, too, was mentioned in the original brainstorm; an Asian warlord, Lucas and Spielberg discussed, "who's desperately trying to become civilized, and he fails at every turn." (Lucas, Spielberg & Kasden: 37) Another note on the matter is, tellingly, "It's the crazy Oriental mind. How do we know how it works? They always wait until the last minute or something" (Ibidem: 43). The creators here again, just as with the quotes from the brainstorm showed in Chapter Two, clearly demonstrate their dichotomy between the West and the East, where the West is civilized and the East is uncivilized, the West is rational and the East is "crazy". As a final note, Shanghai was controlled by American and British enclaves at the time, so there was a colonial context; however, there is only one scene set there, so it is not too surprising that this context is not addressed.

The rest of the movie is set in India; not too surprising, considering the Raj revival genre in the 1980s mentioned before. The Raj revival genre was a wave of stories set in colonial India which positively depicted the colonizers. These films and books have been interpreted as an attempt to "refurbish the image of empire" (Shohat & Stam 2014: 123), romanticizing imperialism or "prettifying the English role" (idem). India has a long history of colonization; most relevant here is that the British government had increasing control over India from 1757, and from 1858, they directly governed India. The nation gained independence in 1947 (although a period of chaos and violence followed, partly due to the 1947

Partition of India), which means that at the time that *Temple of Doom* is set, India was still under direct British rule. The colonial period has had immense effects on Indian culture, society and identity-construction (see, for example, Chacko 2011). Even though India was not yet independent, anticolonial sentiments, protests, and independence movements were already long underway in the 1930s; most well-known is of course the work of Gandhi, who was active in civil rights campaigns in India from roughly 1915 until his death in 1948. Villages played an important role in especially Gandhi's independence ideas, as much of his thinking was centered around kinship and village politics (Dagupta 2017). The Mutiny of 1857, mentioned multiple times in *Temple of Doom*, did in fact take place and was an (unsuccessful) uprising against the British in which villages were also involved (Mukhopadhyay 2020). In *Temple of Doom*, villagers do feature but they are passive.

The Thuggee, who were known as a 19th-century Indian group of robbers, form the main villains in *Temple of Doom*. Although this group was definitely present in the minds of the colonial authorities at the time, it is unclear to what extent they actually existed and posed a threat to the British (Urban 2003: 178). The goddess Kali, central to the narrative of *Temple of Doom*, is an important deity in Indian religions, but it is unclear if the Thuggee were actually associated with her; I will go more in detail on this situation in the *religion* section of this chapter. Finally, the sacred stones ('shiva lingam') that Indiana aims to retrieve from the Thuggee also exist and are seen as abstract representations of Siva, but they are not rare as implied in the film; they exist in many temples and in a variety of forms (Johnson 2009).

Colonialism

As discussed above, *Temple of Doom* was already heavily criticized for its racist themes by American reviewers when it was released, and banned in India; the film remains under fire from Indian viewers, reviewers and archaeologists. They especially criticize its banquet scene, where the guests devour snakes, enormous insects, and monkey brains, to the horror of Indiana's sidekicks. In the words of Danika Parik, an Indian archaeologist working in Cambridge: "Churchill said Indians are "a beastly people with a beastly religion," and this is a movie about our imagined beastliness in how we eat, how

we worship and so on.” Roshan Seth, who played the prime minister, later claimed that the banquet “was a joke that went wrong”, and that the scene actually was meant to poke fun at Westerners who have stereotypical ideas of what Indians eat (Green 2012). However, considering how the rest of the film stereotypes Indian culture and nature, this does not seem very convincing. Consider, for example, how Indian nature is portrayed as lethal, scary and disgusting, with the use of inaccurate information. For instance, the giant vampire bats that are supposed to terrify the audience are not native to India, and the variant that does occur is basically harmless. How could the audience be expected to understand that the banquet scene is a parody of stereotypical depictions, when the rest of the film *is* a stereotypical depiction?

Specifically regarding colonial themes, Mukhopadhyay criticizes the fact that although the film is set in 1935, when the Indian Freedom Movement was well underway and villages played a vital role in the movement, the film shows no trace of this (Mukhopadhyay 2020: 78). Instead, the village that Indiana comes across is poor, bleak, and helpless against the threat of the Thuggees. This criticism is similar to Shohat and Stam’s criticism regarding *Raiders*’ omission of anticolonial movements, yet arguably *Temple of Doom* goes further. *Raiders* may be implicitly colonial in, for example, its depiction of Egypt, but the topic is never directly addressed. In *Temple of Doom*, however, colonialism *is* discussed during the banquet scene in *Temple of Doom*, when the captain of the British Indian troops, Philip Blumburtt, converses with the Maharajah’s prime minister, Chattar Lai. Chattar Lai criticizes Blumburtt and the British rule more broadly saying, “Captain Blumburtt and his troops are on a routine inspection tour. The British find it amusing to inspect us at their convenience.” Sarcastically, he adds, “The British worry so about their empire. Makes us all feel like well-cared-for children.”” (Temple of Doom: 00:39:50) The tension between them continues, with Blumburtt later claiming that the British Army “nicely did away” with the Thuggees. This hints at an anticolonial movement, but the implication changes completely once it becomes apparent that Chattar Lai is in fact a member of the Thuggee cult. Later, the cult’s priest says to Indiana, “The British in India will be slaughtered. Then we will overrun the Muslims. Then the Hebrew God will fall. And then the Christian God will be cast down and forgotten. Soon, Kali Ma will rule the world” (Temple: 1:15:45). Suddenly, the only depiction of an

Indian anticolonial movement is equated to a cult that worships an evil goddess with human sacrifices. More broadly their anticolonial sentiment is equated to limitless violence, revenge, and all-encompassing counter-imperialism which threatens to usurp the Western world.

The presence of the English in India is not criticized by any characters who are not antagonistic and thoroughly immoral. At the end of the film, our heroes are in fact saved by the British Indian army, which, just like the captain said they had done before, once again ‘does away’ with the Thuggees. The village is not portrayed as engaging in an anticolonial movement, but instead needs Indiana’s help to save them from the anticolonial cult. The film pits colonized people against each other in a story where the true danger is anticolonialism, and the solution is a white savior and colonial interference. In short, the movie portrays an anticolonial movement as evil and vengeful, the colonizers as heroes, white men as saviors, and colonized people as helpless.

Archaeologist Paul Duncan McGarrity has pointed out that *Temple of Doom* was probably more criticized because, as opposed to *Raiders*, the story needs to do more work to justify the villains’ evilness. In *Raiders*, Indiana can almost do no wrong because his enemies are Nazis, who (in the 1980s, but still today) live in the Western audience’s minds as the ultimate evil; “[P]unching Nazis in the face is an unambiguous good.” (Vanhooker 2020) In *Raiders*, the non-western characters are more sidelined; even though there are colonial themes in its story, they lie mostly in a surface-level, stereotypical understanding of history, cultures and people. This leads to a limited screen time for those aspects, which tends to hide the issues. In *Temple of Doom*, non-western people, religions and rituals play a far bigger role, which makes this same approach visible. The story involves both the presence of colonizers and the opinion of colonizer and colonized on the situation, but the writers do not appear to have a clear idea of the colonial situation, the anti-colonial movement, or how a misrepresentation of these issues comes across to contemporary audiences (especially audiences from those regions depicted). The fact that the filmmakers refused to change the story even when Indian authorities protested and instead settled to film in an area that, to them, seemed similar enough - Sri Lanka - betrays that there were little to no thoughts for the Indian people or audience. Like *Raiders*, this film was made purely for a Western

gaze, but unlike *Raiders*, issues were so visible that even Western reviewers commented on the situation.

Interesting to note is that Indiana himself is shielded from any discussion about colonialism by the script. During the argument between Chattar Lai and Blumburtt, when Indiana speaks he immediately redirects the conversation instead of choosing a side; in fact, he does not comment on the topic at all. Even when Mola Ram gives his hateful anti-colonial speech about usurping all world religions, Indiana is made literally mute by the narrative: he is being forced to drink the blood of Kali during this scene and cannot speak. Here, I would argue, are the first traces of an attempted ‘uncolonial’ approach in the Indiana Jones franchise; although *Temple of Doom* is colonial in its narratives and its depictions, its protagonist does not engage in conversation about the topic, which keeps his character relatively ‘clean’. Perhaps this is also an attempt to keep the claim of innocence inherent in nostalgia intact by protecting the figure that most embodies that nostalgia; Indiana, at least, can remain an embodiment of boyish adventure, of innocence and romance. This tendency, I will argue in the next chapter, continues in the third film.

Lucas himself said in 1989, right after the release of *The Last Crusader*, that he did not care much about the accusations of racism and colonialism. “There are so many special interest groups now that no matter what you make a film about someone is going to be offended.” (Woodward 1989) Partly because of the criticism, though, the writers revisited the Nazi villains from *Raiders* when making *The Last Crusade*; this will be revisited in Chapter Four.

Heritage

At first glance, the way that Indiana deals with religious heritage in this film could be called an improvement over the first film. During most of the movie, Indiana is risking his life partly in order to return a sacred stone to an Indian village instead of keeping it for himself. However, in contrast there is the white savior trope which is central to the film: only Indiana, a white Western man with authority, can save the village’s heritage object, whereas the source community is helpless.

The depiction of museums is interestingly different in *Temple of Doom* compared to *Raiders*. Willie questions Indiana about the returning of the Shiva stone at the end of the film. “You could have kept it,” she says. “What for? They’d just put it in a museum. It’d be another rock collecting dust,” Indiana says (Temple: 1:51:45). This is a departure from Indiana’s attitude in *Raiders*, where he argues that the Ark should be studied by scholars and wants it to be kept by the university museum, as well as from the description of his character in the original brainstorm, where it is emphasized that museums have a right to own objects (“We’d like to have [the artifact]. Actually it belongs to us. We’re the National Museum of Cairo or something.” (Lucas, Spielberg & Kasdan 1978: 3). The writers trade one stereotype, that of museums as stewards of heritage (as discussed earlier), for another, that of museums as dead places. In the process, they also repeat an idea from the previous film: that heritage objects which “belong in a museum” are, by definition, old and out of use, disconnected from currently active communities. Objects which are ‘of the past’ therefore belong in a museum, and objects ‘of the present’ do not. What is missing in both scenarios is the nuance of the position of museums: the questions of rights and obligations, of ownership, repatriation, conservation etc., that museum staff and heritage experts deal with on a daily basis.

In chapter two, I noted that material heritage is disarmed and decontextualized in *Raiders*; in *Temple of Doom*, however, the audience does receive some context for the Sankara Stones, which are at the center of Indiana’s quest. We know that the stones are sacred to village communities, that they are currently in use, and that the village despairs without them. Later, Indiana reveals to his sidekicks a myth of Sankara meeting Krishna and receiving five stones to combat evil. Much more information than that, however, is not given; we do not know the role that the stone plays in community life, what value they place on it, any rituals or rites surrounding it. An interesting note here is that only the Sankara Stone that belongs to this specific village survives the conflict between Indiana and the Thuggees; the other stones, which presumably have the same religious and cultural importance but belong to other communities that the viewer is unfamiliar with, are lost without another mention. Unintentionally, the narrative hereby confirms that when you contextualize heritage objects even slightly and place them in

a community context, the ‘this belongs in a museum’ attitude appears unreasonable and immoral. This would conflict with Indiana’s usual attitude and archaeological approach, which is solved in the story by the fact that there is no archaeological or any scholarly mission present in this film. Indiana and his sidekicks end up in India completely by accident; he has not been employed by any museum to collect the stones, and so his actions are not in conflict with heritage authorities or his usual approach.

This, in turn, means that although there is a trace of repatriation of heritage instead of museumification, the Authorized Heritage Discourse is again not significantly challenged. The AHD is somewhat flexible in the franchise, which builds on it and at times changes or develops its own perspectives, but never really takes a stance against it. In fact, Indiana is the only one to use the stones successfully, with his knowledge of their history. As AHD suggests, heritage experts are the only ones who can correctly interpret indigenous heritage and knowledge through their scholarly skills and knowledge. Additionally, it is only through Indiana’s grace that the village is allowed to receive their stones: it is clear that he could have easily taken them, but he decides not to. He is in control of whether or not the village can use their own heritage, once again confirming the AHD.

Religion

In *Temple of Doom*, just like *Raiders*, the main objects of interest are religious items. What sets this film apart from the previous installment, however, is that it is not just the objects that have a religious context; the antagonists have religious motivations, and therefore religious stories and practices are more central in *Temple of Doom* than in any other Indiana Jones film. In fact, this plot point of a murderous Hindu cult led to a lot of backlash from India and eventually to a national ban on the film, because of disagreements with the portrayal of the religion. The Indian government took issue with the fact that the film portrayed “a religion that combined the most repellent elements of Thuggee with Polynesian volcano-sacrifice and South American cardiectomy. Lucas refused to change the script, so Watts abandoned the Jaipur locations and shot only in Sri Lanka” (Mythmaker page 338). Kali is a deity in real Indian religions, but is portrayed in *Temple of Doom* as a goddess of death who deals in human sacrifice, which is offered by the Thuggees. The Thuggees were also probably a real historical group in

19th-century India, but there is no evidence that they engaged in human sacrifice or that they were specifically a religious cult; they were more likely professional robbers, interpreted by colonizers as a direct threat to their authority (Urban 2003). Additionally, aspects from different religious traditions were also combined in the film in order to make the plot as grisly as possible (Baxter 1999). This paints a violent and gruesome picture for all religions involved, and perpetuates a stereotype that all non-Christian religions are more or less the same.

The religious aspect of the village also plays an interesting part in the colonial narrative. When Indiana arrives in the village, the shaman tells him that Shiva has brought him there in answer to their prayers to get the stone back. A local religion is therefore used to support and legitimize the white savior narrative; the native religion marks Indiana as a 'chosen one' instead of someone from the village itself. Indiana is also the one who is able to invoke the name of Shiva later in order to use the stones to fight the Thuggees, which we do not see anyone else do. It is his knowledge of the stone's history and mythology that allows him to use it; only through his western archaeological knowledge can the native religion be truly understood. This sentiment is a Eurocentric one and often present in the Authorized Heritage Discourse (Smith & Waterton, 2012).

The goddess Kali embodies chaos and disorder, the interconnectedness of creation and destruction, and since the 18th century she is also revered as a mother goddess (Kinsley 2003). Most relevant here is that Kali played a fascinating role in the period of British colonial rule over India. The Brits feared the goddess, because "she was believed to be closely associated with criminal and subversive groups, such as the infamous robber gangs, the Thuggee; and these fears would grow all the more intense with the rise of the revolutionary nationalist movement in Bengal, which was commonly thought to be led by mysterious secret societies under the patronage of the "terrible Goddess.'" (Urban 2003: 170) The Victorian British were horrified not just by the goddess' violent tendencies, but also by the depictions of her standing on her husband's corpse or dominating him. Moreover, the British imagined the West as a masculine power and often stereotyped Indians as feminine; therefore, the image of a strong and violent female goddess was terrifying to them (Urban 2003). Eventually, she even became associated

with a potential nationwide organization who performed blood sacrifices, a ‘murder cult’ which planned to overthrow British rule.

The Indian independence movements subsequently adopted Kali for their nationalistic and anticolonial purposes; she became a symbol of Mother India, fighting back against the British. In fact, this is a prime example of what is called a dialectical image, a “fusion of ancient religious myth and present historical and political context.” (Urban 2003: 182) This did partly backfire in the sense that the British felt supported in their earlier stereotyping ideas regarding Kali and Indian culture, but simultaneously this tactic returned a sense of agency and control to the colonized people who sorely needed it. Not only does *Temple of Doom* misrepresent a complex situation and overlook the painful realities of a colonial situation, as authors such as Mukhopadhyay have noted (Mukhopadyay 2017), its narrative of *Temple of Doom* can also be interpreted as British colonial fears come true: Kali is connected to the Thuggee, who are a murderous cult and who do want to overthrow British rule and subsequently take over the world. In other words, the story of the film is based on a version of events where the colonizers were entirely correct in their suspicions and also correct to violently suppress anticolonial movements.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Temple of Doom* follows in *Raiders*’ footsteps in the sense that it came out in a time of nostalgia for the colonial period; not only did the Reagan administration contribute to a conservative nostalgic attitude in the 1980s, as mentioned in Chapter One, the Raj Revival genre becomes more visible now. In this sense, both films are clearly a product of their time. In both films, religious heritage is central to the narrative and intentionally the filmmakers chose locations that they saw as ‘exotic’ (in their own words); in both cases, the cultures of these locations were misrepresented and stereotyped. However, where *Raiders* reasserts colonial attitudes mostly by refraining from comment and erasing the historical context of its colonized regions, characters and objects, *Temple of Doom*’s narrative actively interacts with the theme, which leads to a more visible colonial story. *Temple of Doom* presents the colonial situation in such a way that anticolonialism is equated to intentions of violence, murder,

and even world domination; additionally, anticolonial movements are portrayed as being a danger to local communities, a situation in which the colonizers become the saviors and protectors of the native population. The fact that the Thuggee/Kali narrative was a historically attested fear on the colonizers' part which has come to life in this film only adds to this. Finally, there is the fact that native religious elements are used to support and legitimize the colonial white savior narrative. However, *Temple of Doom* also includes an uncolonial element: its shielding of Indiana from conversation regarding the topic. In this respect, the film is similar to *Raiders*: in both films, the main character(s) simply accept the status quo and refrain from comment.

Temple of Doom has been called nostalgic by critics, but its nostalgia is far less successful than in *Raiders*. I would argue that this is at least partly because of the film's overt violence and explicit mentioning of colonialism, which pops the bubble of nostalgia and challenges nostalgia's typical innocence, despite the attempts to shield Indiana from this; the explicit depiction of colonial themes does not allow the viewer space to claim innocence in this regard. More critics start to contest the series' nostalgia as potentially unethical.

This active engagement with colonialism as well as the visibility of the Indian villains, as opposed to them being background characters as in *Raiders*, in combination with the Indian government banning the film, led to *Temple of Doom* receiving far more criticism from both Indians and Americans. This response was crucial to Lucas' and Spielberg's subsequent approach to *The Last Crusade*, which will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 4- *The Last Crusade*: Atoning for Past Sins

Case study description

The third film in the Indiana Jones franchise, *The Last Crusade*, was released in 1989 and was once more directed by Steven Spielberg, while the story again was under major influence of George Lucas. *The Last Crusade* takes place in 1938 and thus is set after both *Raiders* and *Temple of Doom*. At the time, this was meant to be the ending of the original Indiana Jones trilogy, until the fourth film came out twenty years later.

The Last Crusade starts in 1912, showing a teenage Indiana Jones who discovers grave robbers stealing the crucifix of Francisco Vázquez de Coronado in a cave. Indiana escapes with the cross, with the aim to give it to a museum, but the local sheriff forces him to return the cross to the robbers. Twenty-six years later, in 1938, Indiana fights the same men for the same cross on a ship near Portugal, and this time he escapes with the cross and donates it to the university museum. When he returns to the U.S., it is revealed to him by Walter Donovan, a collector of antiquities, that Indiana's father, who is a scholar of medieval literature, has disappeared in Venice during a project to search for the Holy Grail. Indiana travels to Venice together with the university museum's director, Marcus Brody. There, they meet Dr Elsa Schneider, an Austrian archaeologist who Henry Jones Sr. had been working with. After decoding Jones Sr.'s notes, they find the tomb of a knight of the first crusade, with an engraving on his shield which gives directions to the Holy Grail; they need to go to the ancient city of Alexandretta. However, Elsa and Indiana are followed by a mysterious group of men; after a chase scene and subsequent escape, one of them reveals that the group is part of the 'Brotherhood of the Cruciform Sword', who protect the secrets of the Grail. He also reveals that Indiana's father is in a castle on the German-Austrian border.

Elsa and Indiana travel to the castle, where they discover a group of Nazis. Indiana finds his father, but also discovers that both Elsa and Donovan have been working with the Nazis; the two take his father's

diary from him, which has all the information about the Grail that Jones Sr. had collected through years of research. After escaping the castle, Indiana and Jones Sr. team up for the rest of their journey.

The diary is taken to Berlin to be presented to Hitler, but the father-son duo intercepts it and they escape on a Zeppelin to continue their journey to Alexandretta, located in modern-day Turkey. They travel to Hatay, where they find the cave which houses the Grail; however, Donovan and a group of Nazis had arrived first. They mortally wound Indiana's father to force him to solve the puzzles that lead to the Grail, in order to heal his father with the Grail's power. After facing three faith-related challenges, Indiana finds an ancient knight of the first crusade, who has guarded the Grail for centuries. The final challenge is to pick the real Grail, which holds powers of healing, out of hundreds of cups; choosing the wrong Grail would result in death. When Donovan follows Indiana into this room, he picks a richly decorated cup and drinks from it, which kills him. Indiana, however, deduces that the Grail had to be a simple, humble 'Carpenter's Cup' and is allowed to leave with his prize. The knight warns him that the Grail cannot cross the cave's seals.

After Indiana's father is healed with the Grail, Elsa accidentally crosses a threshold with the Grail; since this breaks the rule of the Grail never leaving the cave, the entire structure starts to collapse. In the ensuing chaos, she falls to her death in a chasm, while Indiana, Marcus and Jones Sr. escape- without the Grail, which has been lost.

Case study analysis

Reception

Reviews for *The Last Crusade* were generally favorable at the time of release, and certainly more positive than those for *Temple of Doom*. It was often compared to *Raiders*: "The Holy Grail reminds us of the Ark of the Covenant in the first film, and in both cases the chase is joined by Nazi villains." (Ebert 1989) Even positive reviewers noted that this installment lends its success from copying the first

film; Roger Ebert said that “what [Spielberg] has done is to take many of the same elements [of *Raiders*], and apply all of his craft and sense of fun to make them work yet once again,” (Ebert 1989) and *The New York Times* reviewer Caryn James noted that “Though it cannot regain the brash originality of “*Raiders of the Lost Ark*,” in its own way “*The Last Crusade*” is nearly as good.” (James 1989). The centrality of Indiana’s relationship with his father was appreciated by some reviewers, who called the duo “a sensational team” with “genuine feeling” (Travers 1989) and “unexpected emotional depth” (James 1989). These reviewers also noted that the film was an ode to 1940s pulp movies (Ebert 1989), that *The Last Crusade* might become “the sentimental favorite” (James 1989), and that the film “restored something that's been missing from movie escapism for too long” (Travers 1989), all pointing towards an appreciation for the nostalgia aspect of the film. However, the type of nostalgia becomes more muddled with this installment; partly, there is nostalgia for a certain time period, but at this point, there is also already nostalgic sentiment towards the earlier installments of Indiana Jones.

The critique that it did receive generally was centered around being too superficial and overdone: *Los Angeles Times* stated that “what used to be thrilling is beginning to feel mechanical, and it’s a shock to find the usually watchful Spielberg and Co. making careless mistakes.” (Benson 1989) *The Washington Post* furthermore criticized the attempt to round out Indiana’s past, which were labeled “bland elaborations on the Indiana mythology” (Hinson 1989).

Prior to release, Spielberg said that he wanted to make another Indiana Jones film to “atone for the perceived sins of their second installment” (Hinson 1989), leading some to interpret *The Last Crusade* as lacking passionate direction. Lucas said in an interview at the time that the creative team returned to the Nazi-villains from the first film because they “tried to make a film with other villains and we got attacked from every which side. (...) [O]nce you reach a certain level of success, the standards are raised and you have to right all the wrongs of the world. I don’t see that as my job.” (Woodward 1989)

The film was undoubtedly a financial success, surpassing its predecessor and setting a new record, grossing \$46.9 million in its first six days in theaters. At the time, it was the seventh most financially

successful film ever made (Harmetz 1989). *The Last Crusade* also received three Oscar nominations, for Best Sound, Best Original Score, and Best Effects, of which it won the latter.

Context

Regarding the film's settings, *The Last Crusade* takes a different approach from its predecessors: it takes place in the U.S., Venice, and modern-day Turkey, none of which were colonized areas in the 1930s. Interesting to note is the particular choice of the Republic of Hatay in the film, a part of modern-day Turkey so unknown that it has even erroneously been referred to as fictional in some papers about *The Last Crusade*. The Republic of Hatay does not exist anymore, but it did exist in 1938, the year the film is set in. In fact, it *only* existed in 1938 and 1939, since Hatay was a transitional entity that lasted for less than a year before the area became a Province of Turkey. However, Hatay did not, in fact, have a sultan as it does in the film (Hardy 2020).

Central to the film is the Holy Grail and the nazis' obsession with this mythical item. Historically, Nazis *did* have somewhat of a fascination for the Grail. Otto Rahn, for example, who worked with Heinrich Himmler, wrote a book on the Holy Grail in which he spins multiple mythologies into an antisemitic idea that before Christianity, there was "an ancient untainted religion pitted against the Judaic god of the Old Testament." (Wood 2012: 76) After Rahn's death, rumors started that Rahn was tasked with finding the Grail for Himmler or for Hitler. Generally, the Grail was a part of a larger trend amongst some Nazis to prove that "a secret key to ancient pagan culture could be found in the present", and that this ancient culture would prove to be a longstanding Germanic tradition which had always been opposite to Judaism (Goodrick-Clarke 1985: 189).

When it comes to the time of release, though, there is more to discuss. *The Last Crusade* is set in the same period as the franchise's first two films, with only a three-year difference, but it was released nearly ten years after *Raiders*. In the late 1980s and early 1990s there were a number of societal developments in the West which are relevant to the film's topics.

Firstly, in the late 1980s, there was an increasing interest in New Age movements and mysticism. Not only had this interest emerged, it had also been commercialized; for example, popular actress Shirley MacLaine publicly spoke about her New Age spirituality (Lewis and Kemp 2007: 29). This development might partly explain the public's interest in mythical objects such as the Holy Grail, and particularly the fact that *The Last Crusade* goes in more detail regarding its main heritage object than the previous two installments.

Secondly, this period was an important time for postcolonialism, as briefly mentioned in Chapter One. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, postcolonialism reached a peak: a number of postcolonial East-Asian nations were rapidly developing, postcolonial theories gained traction, and with the fall of communism, former Soviet areas underwent their own period of postcolonialism (Robotham 2000: 127). Although *Raiders* and *The Last Crusade* may not have gained much criticism in American reviews, in the second half of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, some criticism did start to appear in an academic context. In 1985, Moïse Postone and Elizabeth Traube noted that *Temple of Doom* featured colonial forces but “remains significantly silent” on the exploitative and violent sides of colonialism (Postone and Traube 1985). In 1987, Brian Yapko briefly noted in a paper on heritage plundering that Indiana Jones is a romanticism of imperialistic processes that, in reality, are problematic, unethical, and at times violent (Yapko 1986). In 1990, a year after *The Last Crusade*'s release, Ella Shohat wrote an essay which argued that Indiana Jones is a Western rescue fantasy, an “indirect apologia for colonial domination”. In this paper, she criticized the films for reasserting “the colonial vision in which Western ‘knowledge’ of ancient civilizations ‘rescues’ the past from oblivion. This masculine rescue legitimizes denuding Egyptians of their heritage and confining it within Western metropolitan museums.” (Shohat 1990: 40-41) After the severe criticism of the obvious racism in *Temple of Doom*, the more obscured colonial notes of *Indiana Jones* were slowly starting to come under fire as well in a period where postcolonialism was starting to gain traction.

Colonialism

Lucas' and Spielberg's approach to avoiding criticism has a number of implications for this research. The writing team intentionally avoided themes of colonialism in favor of a 'safer' approach, where successful elements of *Raiders* are mimicked, and controversial elements of *Temple of Doom* abandoned. Although this approach means that there is rather less (obvious) content to analyze when it comes to colonialism, the *absence* of certain themes can be just as significant as their presence; at least, in cases where this is confirmed to be an intentional decision. The filmmakers themselves attest that this film intentionally maneuvered around these topics to avoid controversy (Woodward 1989), even though they are relevant to the franchise's genre and main themes.

This approach involved changes in characters, locations and plot: Nazis were reinstated as the antagonists and non-western characters were avoided to circumvent the previous film's accusations of negative stereotyping; colonized locations were avoided; and the protagonist's behavior was made more passive with regards to heritage, to shield him from potential immoral behavior. I will go into more detail on the first two points in this section; the third is discussed in the section on heritage.

As noted in the *Reception* section of this chapter, Lucas confirmed that the Nazis returned as villains because of the backlash that *Temple of Doom* received (Woodward 1989). This strategy to avoid criticism was successful; *The Last Crusade* indeed did not garner the same criticism for its depiction of Nazis as *Temple of Doom* did for its depiction of Hindus and Indians. Since there was (and still largely is) "no societal taboo against stereotyping or vilifying" Nazis (Sullivan 2015: 162), the writers did not need to convince the public of their evilness, did not need to nuance them or even go into much depth about their role in the film. The Nazis' historical connection to the Grail is not even referred to in *The Last Crusade*. They are simply a placeholder, with the role of being vaguely and generally evil.

Regarding the film's locations, the absence of colonized regions (in fact, it is the first film in the franchise which did not feature recently colonized regions) is not the only notable fact. Interesting is

the selection of the Republic of Hatay. The historical obscurity of Hatay gave the filmmakers their much-desired flexibility with regards to historical accuracy; by far most audience members and reviewers, even those from modern-day Turkey, would know nothing about Hatay. Therefore, most audiences would not note any historical errors or feel personally affronted by them, making criticisms far less likely. The writers still proceeded to impose stereotypes on Hatay, as argued by e.g. Mat Hardy, who names it an “Orientalist fantasy”: “[A] sultan is *expected* by the audience. It is the default terminology for any imaginary Middle Eastern leader. Naturally, the Sultan (played by an Anglo-Lithuanian actor) is dressed in Ruritanian finery, has an opulent palace full of toadies, is greedy for Western industrial marvels (...) and has surplus military equipment to lend out.” (Hardy 2020: 70) Furthermore, Hardy notes that the shooting locations corroborate the superficial depiction of the area, as the Hatay scenes are filmed in Jordan and Spain; “As long as there is sand, markets and arid terrain, the audience needs little else to sustain their belief.” (Hardy 2020: 70)

An important scene in Hatay is the point where Donovan (the American collector who sides with the Nazis) negotiates access to the Grail’s location with Hatay’s sultan: “Your Highness, we would not think of crossing your soil without your permission, nor of removing the Grail from your borders without suitable compensation,” says Donovan (*The Last Crusade*: 1:21:30). However, the sultan is easily swayed when he discovers that the Nazis are in possession of Rolls Royces, and a deal is immediately struck. This scene has two sides when it comes to portraying colonialism and/or Eurocentric behavior; on the one hand, Donovan is respectful of Hatay’s borders, and does not access a heritage site without permission. On the other hand, Donovan assumes that the Grail can be bought; he will not remove the Grail “without suitable compensation”, but he *is* intent on removing the Grail in some way. The sultan is easily seduced, trading a car for an ancient and invaluable heritage item, which communicates that he does not understand the value of what is in front of him, which is surely worth more than a car. This could be interpreted as another instance of Western knowledge being the ‘key’ to heritage; the local people do not understand their own heritage fully, but Westerners do (Shohat 1990).

There is also the question of the crusader himself, who, according to *The Last Crusade*, was a knight in the 11th-century First Crusade; the bravest and most worthy knight, he even claims in the film. Whether the First Crusade can be considered proto-colonialism is a debated topic within crusade studies (MacEvitt 2019), but there is certainly some romanticizing in *The Last Crusade*, which is certainly more inspired by Arthurian legend than by historical events. However, the choice for this character and context does fit in with a broader “nostalgia for the days of clear-cut morals and benevolent patriarchy” (Aronstein 1995: 5-6); by choosing Arthurian legend as inspiration, a genre that calls “for a return to lost values, to an innocent world” (Ibid: 16) Spielberg and Lucas return to their attempt to reassert their nostalgic claim to innocence. It does also demonstrate again that their nostalgia for these simpler times, whatever they may be, does not allow for a more complex or critical understanding of the authorities, whether those are Crusader knights and Arthurian tales, or the British Authorities in colonial India- their nostalgia is uncritical.

The rest of *The Last Crusade*, however, strikes a mostly *uncolonial* note- because there are barely any scenes with non-Western characters or locations. The filmmakers do not correct their criticized approach of the second film by adjusting their treatment of non-Western characters and areas, but by avoiding them altogether so that they cannot make any mistakes.

Heritage

The central heritage object in *The Last Crusade* is, of course, the Holy Grail, imagined here as in many other films and books as ‘the cup of Christ’, from which Christ drank at the Last Supper and which caught his blood at the crucifixion. The idea that the Grail gives eternal life had also been used in stories before *The Last Crusade*, but the so-called ‘Carpenter’s Cup’ idea, with a dull exterior to reflect its owner’s humility, as well as the story of a knight protecting the cup, are untraditional (Sullivan 2015).

In *The Last Crusade*, the Grail’s lore is described as follows: the Grail was the Cup of Christ, entrusted to Joseph of Arimathea after Christ’s death; soon after, it vanished for a thousand years until three brothers, crusaders, found the Grail and disappeared along with it. Two of them appeared 150 years

later, blessed by the Grail with long life, and one of them entrusted the entire tale to a Franciscan friar, who wrote everything down in a manuscript.

When it comes to archaeology, *The Last Crusade* returns to the first film's formula of seeing Indiana teach a university class before he dives into his adventure. In this class, he claims that "archaeology is the search for fact... not truth. If it's truth you're interested in, Dr. Tyree's philosophy class is right down the hall." He proceeds to tell his students to "forget any ideas you've got about lost cities, exotic travel, and digging up the world. We do not follow maps to buried treasure, and X never, ever, marks the spot. Seventy percent of all archaeology is done in the library. Research. Reading. We cannot afford to take mythology at face value." (*Crusade*: 00:14:20) The entirety of what Indiana says here, the rest of the film disproves: Indiana does have to believe in mythology, he has traveled to lost cities, and in Venice, an X even literally marks the spot. Indiana's statement that archaeology is all about fact is of double interest: firstly, finding the Grail *does* prove to be about something more than finding facts - namely, it is about relationships, faith and family - and secondly, this remark echoes the notion mentioned in Chapter One that archaeology is isolated from its context and only searches for fact. As Indiana says, we can leave notions of truth, morality, et cetera, to other people. Unfortunately, as discussed in Chapter One, this idea has colonial connections since it served to shield archaeology from the unethical sides of colonialism.

Most significant for this research is the tendency of *The Last Crusade* to create a more passive protagonist in order to avoid involving him in 'heritage colonialism'. The quest for the Grail is pushed by the fact that Indiana's father might be in danger, and not by Indiana's personal interest in the Grail's value, in contrast with *Raiders*, where Indiana wanted the Ark specifically for its historical significance. Once Indiana is at the heritage site in Hatay, he is forced by the antagonists to interfere with the site: because they have mortally wounded his father, who can only be healed with the Grail, Indiana has a solid ethical defense for interacting with, and potentially damaging, the heritage site. This scenario where a parent in danger becomes an ethical defense for the protagonist has become somewhat of a trope in more recent 'adventurer archaeologist' movies, such as *National Treasure* (2004), *Book of*

Secrets (2007), and *Tomb Raider* (2018). In *National Treasure*, the main character, a historian named Ben, is forced to navigate underground passages to find an ancient Knights Templar treasure because his father is taken hostage by the antagonist. The sequel, *Book of Secrets* (2007), features an antagonist kidnapping Ben's mother, after which he is made to lead them through a boobytrapped cave to find the so-called City of Gold. In the 2018 remake of *Tomb Raider*, the entire story hinges on threats to the father of the protagonist, Lara Croft, who is an archaeologist in the original *Lara Croft* games, but appears in this film as more of an amateur enthusiast. She, like Indiana, is forced by the antagonist to solve puzzles at an ancient heritage site because her father is threatened by the antagonist. In all cases the protagonist only damages or destroys heritage, or interacts with a potentially dangerous heritage item, when they are forced to do so in order to save a parent's life. In all examples the protagonist also interacts with heritage objects without being directly forced, but not in a destructive way; for example, in *National Treasure*, Ben does steal a heritage object but return it safely later on. In contrast, the antagonists, in all cases, do not hesitate to engage in destructive behaviors.

A final example lies near the ending of *Last Crusade*, where the Grail is lost during the collapse of the cave. Although Indiana tries to retrieve it and almost dies doing so, his father stops him and saves his life, after which the Grail is definitively lost. What would Indiana have done with the Grail, had he retrieved it? Would he have taken it with him, and gifted it to the university museum he is always so keen to supply? His character and actions in earlier films would support this inference, but because the Grail is lost, the narrative shields him from having to make a potentially immoral decision. The film maintains the excitement of having an implicated morally ambiguous character, but takes away any opportunities for him to display this immorality and thereby prevents criticism. Even when Indiana destroys part of the floor in the church of San Barnaba in Venice, the film has made San Barnaba into a *former* church but *current* library (whereas, in reality, it is still a church in use), protecting him from the allegation of damaging a religious heritage site in active use. *The Last Crusade* seems to have drawn the line at Indiana damaging or destroying non-Western, religious, and/or active heritage, and attempts to become a more *uncolonial* narrative.

Religion

All Indiana Jones films feature religious items and people; but the *Last Crusade* is the film in the original trilogy that not only expands most on its item's lore, but also on themes of religion and faith. Especially scenes near the end of the film, when Indiana has to face three religious trials, have been the subject of discussion amongst viewers and academics. The three trials are explained as follows: "First is the Path of God: only the penitent man shall pass. Second is the Word of God: only in the footsteps of God shall he proceed. Third is the Breath of God: only in a leap from the lion's head shall he prove his worth." (*Crusade*: 1:15:30) During the first trial, Indiana must kneel to avoid decapitation; during the second, he has to step on tiles that spell out 'Jehovah' to safely pass; during the third, he has to take a literal leap of faith onto a hidden path across a canyon. This has been interpreted by some critics, such as Chris Yogerst, as the pinnacle of a Christian conversion for Indiana who "eventually becomes a believer in God" (Yogerst 2014: 27), which reunites him with his father, "faith in God bringing them together." (Yogerst 2014: 25) Indiana's character arc, in this interpretation, across three films, has been one from atheism to a Christian believer. With his leap of faith, one author argues, "Indiana abandons himself to God, steps off the ledge, and becomes the final Grail knight." (Aronstein 2005: 133)

The theme of faith in *The Last Crusade* is undeniable, but I would nuance this interpretation; faith and religious heritage are not used for a Christian conversion tale in my view, but are instead part of a cyclical clash in Indiana's character between science and religion. As Yogerst (2014) himself observes, Indiana starts off as an atheist in *Raiders*, but learns to accept the Ark's supernatural aspect; he is skeptical of the Sankara stones in *Temple of Doom*, but learns to respect their powers; he is skeptical of the Holy Grail in *The Last Crusade*, but learns to believe in God. Yogerst interprets this as a conversion, but does this teetering between science and faith not show that the two cannot be combined in Indiana, and that he always falls back on his scientific perspective regardless of his experiences? The cycle of skepticism begins anew in every film, including *Crystal Skull*, and shows that Indiana is unable to fully expand his academic point of view; more specifically, his Eurocentric academic point of view,

which does not include other knowledge systems but simply assumes the superiority of modern Western science.

Additionally, the role of Christianity is complicated in this film. There is Christian heritage and mythology there, but it does not involve many particular institutional Christian messages; instead, the film is an example of 'banal religion', a term introduced by Stig Hjarvard in relation to the way that popular media portray religion as a general backdrop, "comprized of a bricolage of representations and practices without any necessary connection to specific, organized forms of religion." (Hjarvard 2016: 5-6) Indiana Jones, just like other adventurer archaeologist films, "blend and recontextualize all sorts of religious, pagan and secular symbols in new and unexpected ways," combining traditional religious elements with non-institutional elements which capture the audience's fascination. (Hjarvard 2008: 11) After all, the Holy Grail is not exactly central in institutionalized religion or even recognized by religious institutions as real, but it *is* an item that can be connected to faith in a broader sense in *The Last Crusade*: a belief in self-sacrifice, in loyalty, in goodness, or in yourself, themes which are typical for Lucas' films (Pollock 2009). In short, Christian heritage is utilized in *The Last Crusade* not for its specific religious values, but for both its connections to mysticism and its broad appeal to traditional American values. What the film, and indeed the entire trilogy, wrestles with is how to combine this use of religious heritage for nostalgia with the fact that the historical periods this nostalgia longs for are soaked in colonialism and similar complex issues- and therefore, *Last Crusade* ignores these topics, instead playing on simple, uncomplicated sentimentality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *The Last Crusade* moves towards a more uncolonial narrative compared to the previous two Indiana Jones films; it avoids colonial geographical context and mostly avoids non-Western characters, and instead places its titular character in a narrative where he is shielded from making immoral decisions regarding non-Western religious heritage. The film abandons *Temple of Doom*'s violence and darker themes, and instead adopts Arthurian inspiration to return to the franchise's lighter,

more romantic nostalgia, and to restore its claim to innocence. The film's depiction of religious heritage is additionally used as a tool of nostalgia specifically for American traditions and history while the film maneuvers around the darker sides of the time periods it longs for. Where *Raiders* became colonial mostly because of its stereotyping of locations and characters and because it ignores colonialism in contexts that historically *were* colonial, and where *Temple of Doom* does depict colonial characters and storylines but in an apologetic manner, *The Last Crusade* decides to completely avoid modern colonial contexts. It instead focuses more on Western locations and Christian heritage, and shifts towards mysticism and conspiracy theories to maintain the audience's interest.

Chapter 5- *The Crystal Skull*: They Were Archaeologists

Case study description

Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull is the fourth installment of the Indiana Jones franchise. It was released in 2008, almost twenty years after *The Last Crusade*, and was still directed by Steven Spielberg and written partly by George Lucas; Harrison Ford also returned as Indiana Jones.

The Crystal Skull is set in 1957, around twenty years after the events of *The Last Crusade*. The film starts by showing that Indiana and his partner, Mac, have been kidnapped by KGB agents led by a researcher named Irina Spalko. They break into Area 51 in the hopes of locating an alien corpse with Indiana's help. Under threat, he helps them find the body but tries to steal it when Mac reveals that he is a double agent. Indiana is unsuccessful, but does escape and is rescued by the FBI. Shortly after, Indiana is approached by a teenager named Mutt, who tells him that his mother, Marion, was kidnapped along with Professor Oxley, an old friend of Indiana, after having found a crystal skull in Peru. Indiana and Mutt team up in order to find them by following clues and riddles left by Oxley. These lead them to the grave of the Conquistador de Orellana, who died during a search for Akator, a mythical city where, according to legend, the crystal skulls resided. At the grave, they find the skull that Oxley had

left there, but are kidnapped and imprisoned by the KGB. At the KGB's camp, Indiana and Mutt find Oxley, who appears incoherent. Marion and Mac are also at the camp; Marion is revealed to be Marion Ravenwood, Indiana's girlfriend in *Raiders*, and she reveals that Mutt is Indiana's son.

Spalko shares her theory that the crystal skull belongs to an alien with psychic powers; if they find the other skulls in Akator, she thinks the Soviet Union could control the world through mind control. She explains that Oxley had looked too long into the skull's eyes, which has driven him insane, but if Indiana does the same he might be able to communicate with Oxley. Indiana does, since the KGB threaten Marion's life. He maintains his sanity, but does understand Oxley's incoherent clues, and figures out the route to Akator. Later, Indiana, along with Marion, Mutt, Oxley and Mac (who claims to be a double agent for the CIA) escape the KGB and go to Akator themselves. After escaping a local aggressive tribe and solving a riddle, they find Akator, which is filled with artifacts from every ancient civilization. Indiana reasons that the aliens were archaeologists and were studying human societies. They find a chamber with thirteen crystal skeletons, one of which is missing a skull. Before they can act, the KGB also arrives: Mac is *actually* an agent for the Russians ("So what are you, a triple agent?" Indiana asks, irritated) and has led them there. Spalko replaces the skull, and the aliens awaken and offer a reward to the group. Spalko demands to know everything they know; the aliens concede, but the transfer of the knowledge kills her. The aliens open a portal to their world, sucking in the KGB agents, but Indiana and the rest of the group escape.

Case study analysis

Reception

This film was highly anticipated by Indiana Jones fans for, of course, nostalgic reasons. *Crystal Skull* is inspired by 1950s sci-fi, which I will go into later, but reviews focused far more on the nostalgia aspect of earlier Indiana Jones films. The aging Indiana Jones, the fact that he now has a son to deal with as opposed to a father, the references in the film to earlier characters, as well as the 1980s nostalgia

of the 2000s, all contributed to audiences associating the new film with their own good old experiences with Indiana Jones. “The film is old-fashioned, self-referential fun,” one reviewer states (French 2008); another says the soundtrack “manages to rekindle fond memories of the original trilogy that hit theatres more than two decades ago.” (Tong 2008).

However, despite strong sentimental experiences for some viewers, the reception after *Crystal Skull* was released was mixed at best, and ruthless at worst. Despite “one blinding flash of the old genius, this new Indy film looks like it’s going through the motions,” *The Guardian* reviewer Peter Bradshaw (2008) noted. “*Crystal Skull* is hit-and-miss like the clunky 1984 sequel *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*,” said Rolling Stone’s Peter Travers (2008). “Whatever story there is (...) gets swamped in a sea of stunts and CGI that are relentless as the scenes and character relationships are charmless,” judged *The Hollywood Reporter* (Honeycutt 2008). Roger Ebert continued being a fan of the series, being of the opinion that fans *wanted* more of the same, and therefore that criticizing repetition would be unfair (Ebert 2008). Although the film did get nominated for a number of BAFTA awards, it was the only film in the series that received no Oscar nominations, and instead got unwanted attention at the so-called Razzie Awards, a parody of the Oscars that ‘awards’ the worst films every year, winning their category of Worst Prequel, Remake, Rip-off or Sequel in 2008. Although it did not receive the level of accusations of sexism and racism that plagued *Temple of Doom*, *Crystal Skull* is certainly not the most popular part of the series.

Peruvian audiences, specifically, had negative reactions to the film. Multiple Peruvian bloggers gave their opinions online after the film came out. One notes that the film “shows Peru as a miserable place in which to live”, another that the movie is racist, yet another that Peruvian audiences were disappointed by the film’s stereotypical depictions (Arellano 2008).

Context

The context of both the time of release and the time the film is set in is very different from the previous films; *Crystal Skull* came out 20 years after *Last Crusade*, and is set accordingly in the 1950s instead

of the 1930s. The genre of the adventurer archaeologist was still very popular, and new franchises had started to appear. In the late 1990s, the 1932 film *The Mummy* received a remake that became a modern classic, in the early 2000s the popular *Lara Croft* games received movie adaptations, and Dan Brown's novels became bestsellers. However, the genre started to receive more criticism in between Indiana Jones installments. *The Mummy* and its sequel *The Mummy Returns*, which came out in 1999 and 2001 respectively, received criticism for being "casually racist" (Hunter 1999) with "hideous stereotypes" (Shareen 2001). Mark Hall's previously cited article "Romancing the Stones" was published in 2004, and criticizes *The Mummy*, *Lara Croft* and *Indiana Jones* for their colonial themes. In 2008, *Science Daily* published a story about Indiana Jones in relation to an ongoing study regarding heritage and ownership (Dalhousie University 2008). Slowly but surely, reviewers and audiences started paying more attention to the depiction of minorities in cinema; additionally, technology had advanced so much that technical feats alone would not impress audiences in the same way that *Raiders* had in the 1980s.

The setting of *Crystal Skull* is the 1950s, and where the previous installments take inspiration from 1920s adventure matinees, this film is inspired by 1950s sci-fi. These films were generally interested in "space travel, alien civilizations far more advanced than our own, extinction of grand alien cultures, and the potential for those alien civilizations to endanger our own" (Hiscock 2012: 168). Many 1950s sci-fi films focused on the danger of these alien invasions, (Etherden 2005) whereas *Crystal Skull's* aliens might be frightening, but they are not evil. Geographically, the film's main location is Peru, returning there for the first time since *Raiders*. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Peru was not colonized at the time but did still carry the reminders of a territorial dispute with Colombia. As previously stated, some Peruvian viewers protested against the film's portrayal of their country.

The titular crystal skull is based on a number of artifacts that have been found since the 19th century, which are skulls bejeweled with crystals and gems. They were presented in several museums and private collections, often as pre-Columbian, Aztec artifacts. However, scholars agree that they are almost certainly not pre-Columbian; more likely is that they were made in 19th-century Germany (Jones-Matrona 2020). There were some beliefs and stories surrounding the skulls, most importantly the idea

that you could access some sort of power if you interacted with the skull, and that the skull was a sort of database of ancient knowledge; this is similar to Spalko's belief that the skull is the key to both some sort of telepathy, and to a treasure of knowledge (Jones-Matrona 2020).

Colonialism

Crystal Skull received criticism for its portrayal of non-western characters, but it did make some changes in this regard compared to previous installments. In *Crystal Skull*, Indiana notably presents more knowledge about non-western cultures and languages than in the previous films: he speaks Quechua, an Incan dialect, with some locals at a market in Peru and with a nun. This is in stark contrast with the Peruvian scene in *Raiders*, where Indiana is unable to communicate with the locals while the antagonist does speak the language. Indiana also discusses Koihoma (a pre-Columbian language), as well as Nazca lines and Mesoamerican deity carvings, to name a few examples. Knowledge of these elements are key to the advancement of the plot. Indigenous and South-American people and culture do, therefore, receive a somewhat bigger role compared to previous installments, and there are also non-Western characters that are depicted in a positive light, such as locals giving directions; potentially an aspect that leans more towards an anticolonial stance, although there are no *named* characters from the visited locations and the aforementioned information is quite surface-level.

There are negative portrayals of Peruvian communities present as well. Their encounter with a South American 'warrior tribe' has been described as an especially offensive example, as the indigenous people "climb and scale the trees in an animal-like fashion", "yelp indistinguishably as they try to blow poison darts", and one of them "wears a skull over his own face" (Jones-Matrona 2020: 104). They are depicted as violent, animalistic, terrifying, and possessing no language. Additionally, the film "blends aspects of Mayan, Incan and Aztec history, culture and identity" (Jones-Matrona 2020: 105) without any regard for their differences; they are all the same in the film's view. However, the centrally depicted Ugha tribe is fictional, which could be seen as an uncolonial element: the film avoids criticism of specific historical inaccuracy because of this choice. I would argue that *Crystal Skull* suffers from its nostalgia for its own predecessors; for example, there are many fond references to characters in previous

films, such as Marcus Brody and Indiana's father. Once more, this nostalgia necessarily protects its object from criticism. However, this time, it is not just a time period the nostalgia has to cloak in innocence, but the past of its own franchise. This precludes any sort of radical break from or heavy criticism on previous installments and necessarily means that *Crystal Skull* would never become fully anticolonial; the most it can do is make subtle changes while still including romantic elements from previous films. Future installments will suffer the same problem if they continue to lean on this nostalgia for their own past.

A new element is *Crystal Skull*'s depiction of the so-called Ancient Astronaut myth, or the idea that "alien beings came to Earth in prehistoric times" and influenced humanity, after which they "were revered as gods by their creation." (Richter 2012: 223) The film's version of this is that aliens came to ancient Peru and "taught the Ugha farming, irrigation," (*Crystal Skull*, 1:32:50) at which point the Ugha interpreted them as gods and worshiped them, even binding their infants' heads in order to elongate the skull to mimic the aliens' appearance. Since the Ancient Astronaut trope is usually not applied to ancient European innovations, but only to non-European prehistoric people, it has been tied to the real-life Moundbuilder Myth (mentioned in this thesis in Chapter One) by David and Michelle Turner. They argue that the Ancient Astronaut erases the accomplishments of native peoples (Turner and Turner 2021). *Crystal Skull* similarly argues that the Ugha tribe could not have developed their own ideas of farming and irrigation, but that another, more developed civilization - in this case, an alien one - simply gave them the knowledge. In reality, South American communities certainly developed their own agricultural techniques. Inhabitants of Peru, specifically, "developed sophisticated, flexible systems of agriculture to manage "catastrophic" flooding", and adapted to an environment also sensitive to water shortages and earthquakes (Nesbitt 2020). Even though *Crystal Skull* is, of course, fiction, that does not necessarily separate it from "a long history of denying the abilities of non-Europeans" (Turner and Turner 2021: 16).

Heritage

With regards to heritage, there are a number of interesting developments in *Crystal Skull*. Firstly, the film seems to lean more into Indiana's archaeological and historical knowledge compared to the previous installments, which focus more on physical skills and bravery. Additionally, we receive some extra time at Indiana's university. In a scene near the beginning of the film, Indiana and Mutt are chased around campus by KGB agents, and crash into the library on a motorcycle. A student asks Indiana a question about the normative culture model, a theory significant in archaeology which argues that archaeology can contribute to knowledge about a culture's values because these can be found in material remains (Johnson 2019). Indiana replies, "Forget Hargrove. Read Vere Gordon Childe on diffusionism. He spent most of his life in the field. If you want to be a good archaeologist, you got to get out of the library." (*Crystal Skull*, 00:36:50) Childe was a real archaeologist, but in an ironic turn of events, he both adhered to this normative culture model (Johnson 2019: 19) and actually hated fieldwork, (Green 1990), instead preferring meticulous documentation and prolifically writing publications. Although Childe likely contributed more to archaeology with his theoretical work, he is perhaps remembered most for an excavation he did in Skara Brae, mentioned by Indiana in a lecture. This again proves the point that although a large part of archaeology consists of documentation and theory, the field was popularized by a tradition of emphasizing excavations; a tradition which is rooted in the romanticization of *colonial* excavations.

The main heritage object in this film is the titular crystal skull. Interestingly, the plot centralizes the *return* of this object, rather than the *retrieval* of the object for monetary or academic gain. Oxley, who found the skull, initially wants to return the skull because he found out that the KGB were looking to harness its powers, which he wants to prevent. It is implied that when Oxley looks into the skull's eyes, it also commands him to return it; it wants to go back. Repatriation of heritage objects is often seen as contributing to the decolonizing of museums, especially when those objects were first taken in a colonial context (see e.g. Atalay 2019). *Crystal Skull*, therefore, has an interesting anticolonial aspect to it. Although *Temple of Doom* also featured a repatriation story, in that film the heritage object was being

actively used by the community that Indiana returned it to. *Crystal Skull*, in contrast, portrays the importance of returning artifacts even when their original users may not be alive anymore. The fact that the skull *wants* to return itself is fascinating; although this might be explained by the revelation that the skull belongs to a living (though sleeping) alien being, ascribing agency to the heritage object could be seen as another anticolonial detail.

However, *Crystal Skull* might also be perceived to be part of a larger colonial theory. Not only does the film depict a colonial Ancient Astronaut myth, it continues a tradition of colonial theories specifically about crystal skulls. Preceding the film, books such as *Mysteries of the Crystal Skulls Revealed* had already appeared. These books claimed that the skulls were involved with healing, that they had certain psychic abilities, that they were brought to earth by aliens, or came from Atlantis (e.g. Bowen, Nocerino and Shapiro 1989). After *Crystal Skull* came out, discussions intensified; for example, the documentary “Mystery of the Crystal Skulls” was made by the SciFi Channel, and the television show *Ancient Aliens* produced an episode about theories including crystal skulls and extraterrestrials. Noteworthy is also that Native American writer and poet Paula Gunn Allen wrote a book in 1992, named *Grandmother of the Light*, which includes a short story about the ‘Crystal Woman’, a shaman whose remains leave behind a crystal skull. Whereas her story lends some agency to local native communities (and, specifically, Native American women) in the sense that the source of the skull *is* a native woman, many of the alien theories take this agency *away* from native communities; they were simply given the skulls, by aliens or by lost ancient civilizations, and are certainly not credited with making them. This includes *Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, which places the crystal skull in prehistoric Colombia, while at the same time taking agency away from the communities that the skull impacted; they did not craft the skull, they only received it along with the technical knowledge the aliens brought to them, and even misinterpreted the aliens as gods.

Additionally, *Crystal Skull* brings the same ancient-modern divide to South America that Raiders brought to Egypt, as addressed in Chapter Two; ancient artifacts represent a ‘dead’ community, which has barely any ties to modern communities. This artificial dichotomy creates a split in history that

separates modern communities from their heritage, and assumes that only Western science (specifically, archaeology) can bridge this gap. Finally, we might note that *Crystal Skull* takes the same approach when it comes to the protagonist's motivations for retrieving the main artifact: Indiana never wanted the skull for himself from a professional or monetary perspective, but is only after it to help his friend Oxley. Therefore, there is no real conflict between his potential wish as a heritage expert to bring the skull to the museum and the quest to repatriate the object instead, and the film does not significantly challenge the AHD as it could have done.

Religion

As in the previous Indiana Jones films, the main heritage object in *Crystal Skull* is an object related to religion; or at least, the main characters think it to be a religious object. However, the characters realize that the skull is *not* a man-made religious object, but an actual alien skull, and that the aliens are the gods in the Ugha's religion. Near the beginning of the film, Indiana says, "The Ugha tribe were chosen by the gods 7000 years ago to build a giant city out of solid gold"; however, it turns out that the city of gold is a city of 'knowledge', and that not gods, but aliens visited the Ugha. When Indiana tells Mutt that Ugha bound their infants' heads to lengthen the skulls in order to "honor the gods", Mutt says, "God's head is not like that, man," to which Indiana replies, "depends on who your god is." (*Crystal Skull*, 00:49:00) Indiana discovers that the Ugha were wrong: the creatures they thought were gods, were actually aliens, and not only that, "They were archaeologists." (*Crystal Skull*, 1:41:30)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, some scholars have interpreted the Indiana Jones films as a story of conversion, where Indiana slowly has to accept the mystical and religious stories that he at first denies. In *Crystal Skull* it becomes very clear that Indiana does *not* accept religious explanations. Although his skepticism is partly proved wrong, Indiana corrects the Ugha's religion with simple observations, along with Oxley, who adds that the aliens are "interdimensional beings," opening "a pathway to another dimension" (*Crystal Skull*, 1:57:50). Indiana is able to incorporate his findings into his scientific framework without resorting to religion. This is a typical example of secularization theory, which posits that "modernizing forces will cause the general marginalization, decline and eventual

disappearance of religion.” (Schewel and Wilson 2019: 1) This theory is intertwined with the idea that scientific explanations will replace religious explanations; religion only serves to explain things we do not understand yet. This is exactly what happens in *Crystal Skull*: the Ugha did not understand the creatures they saw, and therefore resorted to religious explanations. However, Indiana and Oxley find the true explanation through a modern, scientific, Eurocentric lens. This can be interpreted as Eurocentric because this type of secularization theory typically presents “Western European culture as the natural telos of modernization,” (Schewel and Wilson 2019: 36) while it rejects non-European religions and indigenous knowledge systems.

Conclusion

Contrary to *Last Crusade*, *Crystal Skull* does not avoid colonial contexts entirely, since it returns to Peru and the depiction of non-Western characters. Additionally, *Crystal Skull* has a number of anticolonial aspects compared to earlier installments of the franchise. For example, there are positive portrayals of non-Western characters; knowledge of non-Western cultures is more important to the plot; and the story hinges on the repatriation of a heritage object, instead of on the acquisition of one. However, the film heavily leans on nostalgia again- this time, not just the nostalgia for a particular historical time period, but for the franchise’s own past was crucial to the marketing of *Crystal Skull*. This cloaks the previous installments in innocence and necessarily protects them from heavy criticism, which in turn prevents any radical break with the film’s own past. Additionally, in the process of potentially attempting a more anti-colonial narrative, the filmmakers adopted new colonial stereotypes: most notably, a combination of the Ancient Astronaut theory, the Moundbuilder Myth and Eurocentric secularization theory involved in the plot. At the same time, some colonial elements from the previous films are repeated (perhaps, again, for nostalgia’s sake?), such as the negative portrayal of Native American tribes and the idea that science holds the key to indigenous histories and cultures, while indigenous people themselves do not understand the heritage in front of them.

Chapter 6- Conclusions: colonial, anticolonial, uncolonial?

An overview

In this section, I summarize the discussions and findings in the previous chapters into a coherent chronological overview.

The first Indiana Jones film came out in 1981, is set in 1936, and features locations with a colonial context and/or history, such as Peru and Egypt. Non-western characters are extremely limited and stereotyped, but at the time Western reviewers rarely if ever commented on this. The film does not address the topic of colonialism and can in that sense be considered as leaning towards an uncolonial storyline. However, because Egypt in 1936 was colonized and going through anticolonial movements, this ignoring of colonialism can also be interpreted as an acceptance of the colonial status-quo in the area, therefore being more implicitly colonial than successfully uncolonial. Although religious heritage objects are central to the story, they are decontextualized historically and culturally. There seems to be no moral condemnation of Indiana's treatment of heritage items, although he frequently steals or damages them, or brings them to museums without caring for the source communities' rights, ownership, or opinions on the matter. The film is rooted both in imperialist nostalgia and in a nostalgia for the popular media of the 1930s, which contributed to a romanticization of the past and precludes the film from criticizing the object of that nostalgia.

The second film, *Temple of Doom*, came out in 1984 and is set one year *before* the first film, effectively being a prequel. It features locations in a colonial context, most notably India which was under British colonial rule at the time. The film features more non-western characters with important roles, which made their stereotyped and racist depictions more noticeable to viewers; this led to a significant increase in criticism regarding racism and colonialism in the franchise. *Temple of Doom* is more explicitly

colonial in its storyline than *Raiders*; colonialist representatives save Indiana and his sidekicks, whereas members of an anticolonial movement are depicted as dangerous, power-hungry, violent cultists. However, the character of *Indiana* has an uncolonial element in that he is shielded from the topic of colonialism in dialogue. Religion plays a large role in this film, but once more its prominence increases the visibility of the filmmakers' superficial and stereotypical attitude towards the theme. Although Indiana *does* repatriate a religious heritage object in this film, I have argued that this is because the limited context the object is given makes clear how immoral it would be to ignore the source community's wishes. Additionally, Indiana had no selfish motivations to retrieve the objects prior to the repatriation quest and his power over the village's access to the object is shown, meaning that there is no significant challenge of a Eurocentric AHD. This film came out in a period of Raj nostalgia as well as a period of nostalgia for old Hollywood, but criticisms started to arise amongst reviewers as to the completely uncritical nature of that nostalgia.

The Last Crusade, the third film in the franchise, came out in 1989 and is set in 1938, which makes it a sequel to both previous films. I have argued that, partly because of the outrage that followed *Temple of Doom*, this film chooses to become far more uncolonial than the previous installments. The film does not feature any colonized regions, and its only non-western location, Hatay, is a highly fictionalized version of a republic that only existed for a year, minimizing the risk of criticism. This also removes the implicitly colonial element we found in *Raiders*, because there is no quiet acceptance of a colonial status quo. Non-western characters are far more limited than in previous installments, which again limits criticism regarding stereotyping. Additionally, when it comes to the treatment of religious heritage, Indiana's character is made more passive: interactions he has with heritage objects are all more or less forced by the antagonists, removing any potential immorality from his actions. The film takes the same approach to the AHD as *Temple of Doom* in the sense that Indiana does not chase the heritage items for selfish reasons and therefore does not need to challenge the AHD. Religion switches from being a dangerous enemy in *Temple of Doom* to positively supporting an American message of self-sacrifice and hard work; but the film focuses on Christianity instead of *Temple's* Hinduism, confirming a Eurocentric view that privileges religions in a Western context. Additionally, even Western religion

cannot truly be incorporated into Indiana's secular academic point of view, which does not fully allow religious knowledge systems. The film adopts elements from Arthurian legend to return to its romantic nostalgia, but this time mostly evades imperial nostalgia.

Finally, *Crystal Skull* came out in 2008 and is set in 1957, and after 20 years we see some differences in this film compared to the previous installments; the narrative includes anticolonial elements. In contrast with *Last Crusade*, *Crystal Skull* does not avoid non-western locations or characters; there are, in fact, some more positive roles for indigenous and South-American characters. Significant is the choice for a repatriation storyline. The film also leans more into the importance of Indiana's knowledge, instead of his physical skills, and emphasizes his comprehension of non-western cultures and history in order to solve mysteries. However, in other characters, the stereotyping remains, and the repatriation storyline becomes a science-fiction version of the colonial Moundbuilder Myth. Indigenous religions are portrayed as based on fundamental misunderstandings of reality that can only be solved through Western scientific knowledge; therefore, the franchise is unable to truly break away from Eurocentrism or colonialism, although the filmmakers did seem to attempt making changes regarding these themes. The nostalgia has become more layered, as this film portrays nostalgia for earlier films in the franchise and for the time those films came out, as well nostalgia for classic 1950s sci-fi films; especially the nostalgia for the earlier installments and for the 1980s was noted by viewers and critics.

In short, there are some consistent elements across the films, and some changing elements. The consistent elements are 1) the Eurocentric AHD that Indiana fits into is never significantly challenged, 2) Western scientific knowledge is shown as the key to understanding non-Western religious heritage, 3) religion in a Western context is privileged over non-Western religion, 4) non-Western cultures are separated from their history in a traditionally colonial manner, 5) Indiana never speaks out against colonial situations or attitudes, but instead silently accepts or is shielded from them, and 6) a strong sense of nostalgia for particular historical time periods, periods of cinema, and/or the franchise's own past. Elements that fluctuate are 1) the explicitness of colonial contexts, 2) how active Indiana's character is in interacting with religious heritage, 3) the use of colonized locations, 3) how positive or

negative non-Western characters are depicted, and 4) the priority of repatriating heritage versus retrieving it for a museum or academic institution. The fluctuating elements lead to a change in balance between colonial, uncolonial and anticolonial, but the consistent elements mean that none of the films become fully anticolonial. The consistency of reactionary nostalgia, which is inherently uncritical and carries a claim of innocence, also precludes any radical anti-colonial nature, since the romanticization and longing inherent in this nostalgia cannot coexist with intense criticism of its object.

Three approaches to colonialism, and the viability of a fourth

The Indiana Jones franchise, having four films so far and spanning four decades, forms a great case study and example of a number of different ways filmmakers engage with themes of heritage and colonialism. In the adventurer archaeologist genre, (religious) heritage objects often play a central role and they are frequently the main or only representation of non-western cultures, histories and religions in these films. Therefore, analyzing those objects in case studies can give us a better insight into the interconnected themes of religion, heritage and colonialism in this genre, how they have changed over the years and continue to change. From the analyses in the previous chapters, we can infer the beginning of a model for this purpose, through three different approaches. To be clear, these approaches do not always have to be completely intentional; they may stem from a number of contextual, historical or cultural factors, but they *can* be intentional as well.

The first option is a colonial approach, which can be more explicit or implicit. The colonial approach *condones historical colonialism or its consequences through positive depictions of colonial behavior, through the erasure of anticolonial sentiments or negative consequences of colonialism, or through the adoption of a Eurocentric lens in another way.* This can manifest itself through, for example, the selection of geographical locations with a stereotypical approach without taking colonial context or history into account, the racist stereotyping or demonizing of non-western characters, cultures and religions, or the Eurocentric idealizing of modern western science and characters. Specifically regarding (religious) heritage, this can manifest itself in the stealing, damaging or destroying non-western heritage

by a western main character, from a Eurocentric scientific perspective, while separating this heritage from its historical and cultural context and disregarding any potential opinions by the source community.

The second option is an uncolonial approach, which is characterized by the *avoidance of colonial themes, conversations, characters, locations and behaviors*. This can manifest itself through intentional selecting of only or mostly colonizing instead of colonized countries as locations, avoiding the inclusion of non-western characters, histories or cultures in the storyline. With regards to (religious) heritage, this can look like the avoidance of non-western heritage, and/or increasing the protagonist's passivity in interactions with heritage. This approach is difficult to confirm in standalone films, books, or games, since the selection of western locations, for example, does not necessarily mean that the creators are actively avoiding colonialism. It could be argued, for example, that the newest *Lara Croft* film takes an uncolonial approach by selecting a fictional, uninhabited island as its only non-western location, since this avoids the problem of source community's opinions and criticism of cultural inaccuracies. However, it could also be argued that this decision is simply based on the appeal of ancient myths and lost civilizations.

The third approach is the *anticolonial* approach. This approach focuses on *denouncing or criticizing colonial practices, portraying consequences of colonialism negatively, or showing positive depictions of anticolonial movements or non-western people and cultures*. This can manifest itself in the accurate and positive portrayal of non-western locations, giving non-western characters central and empowering roles, negatively portraying imperialist characters, or giving space to indigenous knowledge systems. Specifically for (religious) heritage, this approach can be shown by a repatriation storyline, the integrating of heritage objects with their cultural and historical context and the prioritization of source communities.

As previously discussed, *Raiders* would fall into the implicitly colonial category with uncolonial elements, *Temple of Doom* would fall into the explicitly colonial category, *Last Crusade* would fall mostly in the uncolonial category, and *Crystal Skull* returns to the implicitly colonial category; although

it has anticolonial elements and perhaps intentions, the film fails to be anticolonial. Of course, this could be partly ascribed to deeply-rooted colonial ideas in the film industry or to a lack of knowledge (and a lack of diversity) amongst the creators. However, I hope to have shown that a crucial part of the issue is also the aspect of nostalgia. Nostalgia shields its object from criticism by selecting and romanticizing elements that evoke warmth, innocence, and safety; it necessarily excludes any serious criticism of its object. Filmmakers like Lucas and Spielberg, who are known for relying on nostalgia and escapism in many of their films, could never combine that reactionary nostalgia with radical progress- it is simply not possible.

This might explain why there is a fourth option that goes unutilized by Indiana Jones, while it becoming more prevalent in fiction: a *postcolonial approach*. Postcolonial in this sense does not refer only to the period after colonialism, but instead to “a wide range of issues connected to the exploitative master discourses of imperial Europe and the responses to them by the peoples of the Americas, Asia, Africa, Australasia, and some regions of Europe itself.” (Mukherjee 2017: 4) Central in postcolonial fiction is the perspective of the colonized instead of the colonizer, “the impacts of colonialism on people and culture” (Poray-Wybranowska 2021: 34) and aims “to reconstruct Western knowledge formations, reorient ethical norms, turn the power structures of the world upside down, refashion the world from below.” (Young 2012: 20) In other words, postcolonialism does not simply denounce colonialism as a more superficial anticolonial approach might do, but it interrogates colonialism; it offers alternatives and different perspectives. The anticolonial elements present in Indiana Jones pale in comparison to this approach: *Crystal Skull* portrays the antagonists as willing to murder indigenous people and chooses repatriation over the theft of non-western heritage, both of which are fairly safe criticisms of violently colonial behaviors, but does not explore why colonialism is immoral, how it impacted and continues to impact people, or how to progress from here.

If we compare this to a postcolonial work of fiction, such as the 2014 independent video game *Never Alone*, the differences are stark. *Never Alone* is the outcome of a cultural outreach project which involved Native Alaskans, and it focuses on the understanding of intergenerational trauma as a result

of colonialism, as well as on educating the player on Iñupiaq heritage, language and culture. Cultural heritage was key to this game; the game developers did not want to limit heritage to artifacts of a ‘dead culture’. Instead they incorporated traditional Iñupiaq art styles, indigenous knowledge and indigenous heritage items into the storyline (Schlag 2018). Works of fiction such as *Never Alone* are impactful, and can truly begin to achieve the refashioning and reorienting that postcolonialism aims for. At the moment, there are barely any Hollywood films that take the same approach, and postcolonial fiction can almost only be found at the margins of popular culture, but there is an increase in interest; *Never Alone*, meant to be an indie game, achieved considerable success. The incorporation of more postcolonial approaches to heritage in mainstream fiction such as the Indiana Jones films would bring enormous opportunities: it could bring discussions and education to audiences in an accessible way, could offer more job opportunities to indigenous artists and artists of color, and could be a tool for healing, as *Never Alone* was to the Iñupiaq.

The question, however, is whether Indiana Jones (and the adventurer archaeologist genre in general) could ever truly be postcolonial, considering not only its history and its romanticization of archaeology in colonial times, but also its ties to nostalgia as discussed above. Postcolonialism is inherently a radical change from the past that these films are nostalgic for. More recent films in the adventurer archaeology genre, such as the most recent *Lara Croft* film (2018) or the most recent adaptation of *The Mummy* (2017), are not set in colonial time periods and might therefore hold more potential for postcolonial or anticolonial approaches; however, these films might still carry a nostalgia for the genre classics like Indiana Jones, and so far, more often adopt colonial or uncolonial elements than anticolonial or postcolonial elements. Additionally, of course, there is the question of marketability; undoubtedly, many big budget films make the consideration to avoid sensitive topics as much as possible for financial gain and would therefore never adopt a postcolonial approach.

However, does this mean the entire genre is incapable of change? Let us once again consider a video game, this one named *Heaven's Vault*. It is an archaeological futuristic game, where the main character is a female archaeologist adventuring through space. The game breaks away from many stereotypes of

the genre; “There’s no pith helmet or fedora. No whip. No sidearm. (...) The physics are real. None of the artifacts are magical,” one reviewer notes (Reinhard 2019). The same reviewer also notes that there is a moon the player can visit which has a strong anti-colonial sentiment, and the player’s presence there is not appreciated; reconciling with them is possible but difficult. The game’s creators researched 20th-century archaeology, and found it entirely unappealing; instead, they were inspired by modern archaeologists, female archaeologists, archaeologists who worked to prevent looting (MCV 2019). As a result, the game has become known as “an archaeology video game actually about archaeology” (Chan 2019). *Heaven’s Gate* may not be as action-packed or financially successful as the blockbuster films in the adventurer archaeology genre, but it certainly has a new approach with interesting potential for the future.

Sidenotes/Future research

The Indiana Jones franchise has been so enormously influential for the past four decades that more research always remains to be done. For example, little research has been conducted into the reception of the films in non-Western countries which are depicted in the franchise, apart from the infamous rejection of *Temple of Doom* in India. Additionally, a new film is set to be released in June 2023: *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny*. Reportedly, *Dial of Destiny* will once again depict Nazis as the main antagonists, and the film is to be set in the late 1960s, during the Space Race. It will be interesting to analyze this latest (and potentially last) installment, released 15 years after *Crystal Skull*, and to compare its themes, reception, locations, themes and treatment of heritage objects to the previous films. Issues of colonialism, racism and diversity have become even more important in the film industry in the meantime, but it is also clear that this film counts on the audience’s nostalgia for previous installments—and by now, we realize, nostalgia for the past does not bode well for breaking away from it. For now, we must look towards smaller, independent works of fiction such as *Never Alone* or *Heaven’s Vault* for postcolonial and anticolonial approaches to heritage. However, perhaps the adventurer archaeologist genre will present us a new Indiana Jones in the future, one that breaks away from the genre’s past.

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