

Salvaging Patriarchy in the 2018 Film Adaptation of *Tomb Raider*

Andrei Nae
Universitatea din București, România

Abstract This article focuses on the recent film adaptation of the 2013 *Tomb Raider* video game. Its main goal is to show that, despite the significant changes that the plot undergoes when transitioning from video game to feature film, the adaptation remains faithful to the conservative gender politics of its ludic source text, in the sense that in both the game and the film Lara must struggle to maintain patriarchal order. While in the game the female protagonist has to fulfil her late father's unfinished archaeological (in fact colonial) project and redeem his name, in the film she has to compensate for her father's masculinity crisis. The resolution of the plot coincides with a resolution of the crisis of masculinity, which reinstates the gender power relations privileging masculinity. Furthermore, this article shows that Lara's struggle to re-establish patriarchy in the film's storyworld coerces her to adopt a colonial attitude with respect to otherness. By performing phallic masculinity, Lara Croft acts as an agent of colonialism whose intervention in foreign territories and cultures is rendered by the film providential for the emancipation of the native populations.

Keywords Masculinity in crisis. Filmic adaptation of video games. Patriarchy. Colonialism.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 The Visual Representation of Lara Croft. – 3 Lara Croft as an Agent of Patriarchy. – 4 Lara Croft as an Agent of Colonialism. – 5 Conclusion.



Peer review

Submitted	2019-10-27
Accepted	2019-11-21
Published	2020-03-09

Open access

© 2020 | Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Public License



Citation Nae, Andrei (2019). "Salvaging Patriarchy in the 2018 Film Adaptation of *Tomb Raider*". *English Literature*, 6, 127-140.

1 Introduction

The *Tomb Raider* video games are a hallmark series of the action-adventure genre which has spanned into a transmedia franchise including films and comics. The release of Core Design's 1996 *Tomb Raider* for Sega Saturn, PlayStation, PC, and other platforms, represents a milestone in gaming history that not only set the standard for future action-adventure games, but was also one of the first games to feature a female protagonist which defies the traditional roles of passive victim or a ludic reward which until that point had dominated the representation of women in video games.¹ In the 1996 *Tomb Raider* and its sequels, Lara Croft, the female protagonist of the games, is a strong, confident and playable character who has the ability to overcome the obstacles ahead, and prevail against all adversities without the providential help of a masculine figure. The cinematic incarnation of Lara Croft in the films *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (Simon West, 2001) and *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider - The Cradle of Life* (Jan de Bont, 2003) maintains the agency of the video game character who is capable of single-handedly saving the day.

Despite the agentic role fulfilled by Lara Croft in both the games and the films, her visual representation and her actions in the films' and games' storyworlds have been criticised for reinforcing patriarchal and colonial ideologies (Breger 2008; du Preez 2000; Kennedy 2002; Mikula 2003). As a response to this criticism, the new *Tomb Raider* video game series, entitled "Survivor", which debuted with the eponymous release by Crystal Dynamics in 2013 and continued with the sequels *Rise of the Tomb Raider* (2015) and *Shadow of the Tomb Raider* (2018), provides a version of Lara Croft which tones down the oversexualisation characteristic of previous games and films and evinces an attitude towards cultural otherness that is allegedly less Eurocentric. The 2018 film adaptation, *Tomb Raider*, based on the 2013 video game release, is also a reboot of the film series that attempts to recalibrate its approach to gender and racial otherness along the coordinates set up by the video game it adapts.

Notwithstanding that attempt, the present article argues that the film adaptation maintains the patriarchal and colonial ideologies of the previous films and games and highlights the means by which these two ideologies are reinforced. In order to reveal the ideologies

This paper was co-financed by the Human Capital Operational Program 2014-2020, project number POCU / 380/6/13/125245 no. 36482 / 23.05.2019 *Excellence in Interdisciplinary PhD and post-PhD Research, Career Alternatives Through Entrepreneurial Initiative (EXCIA)*, coordinator The Bucharest University of Economic Studies.

1 I am referring to single player action-adventure video games that feature a female protagonist. As Esther MacCallum Stewart (2008) argues, female characters had already become common in beat'em up two-player games.

embedded in the film, my argument will be structured as follows. First I elaborate on the representation of femininity in visual media and how the specific representation of Lara Croft relates to this broader context. My next step is to investigate the gender politics of the film adaptation in relation to that of the source. My analysis then focuses on the issue of masculinity in crisis and how the unfolding of the plot is tantamount to a resolution of the identity crisis experienced by Lara Croft's father. By drawing on Kaja Silverman's work on (alternative) masculinities, in this section I argue that Lara has to stand in for her father and fight Trinity, the antagonist organisation of the film, until her father eventually overcomes his own crisis and becomes the main narrative agent dictating the course of action in the storyworld. This sequence of events renders Lara's position as main narrative agent unnatural and reinforces masculinity as the standard. Finally, I show that Lara's attempt to restore patriarchal order dovetails with a colonial attitude towards racial otherness. In a manner similar to the storyworld of the "Survivor" series, the film stages a conflict between modern imperialism, represented by Lara Croft, and neo-imperialism, represented by the antagonist organisation, Trinity. Lara's triumph over Trinity, as well as her moral superiority (as constructed in the film), suggests that modern imperialism is an ethical form of colonialism that is providential for the emancipation of the racial other. Taking all this into consideration, the present article concludes that, like the rebooted video game series, the 2018 film adaptation fails to adequately respond to the criticism of the film series's previous instalment and, in fact, finds new ways to reinforce patriarchy and colonialism.

2 The Visual Representation of Lara Croft

In the past thirty years, video games and cinema have developed a strong intermedial bond. While in the nineteen-eighties and especially the nineteen-nineties video games were very keen on imitating the form and aesthetics of film, the last two decades have witnessed a growing number of films that reshape video games (Larsen 2017). The evolution of the relation between the two media applies not only to the way their aesthetics have changed over the past years, but also to the diegetic content of the two. If earlier video games borrowed their narrative content from film, now it is films that rely on video games in the construction of their storyworlds. Given the relation between the two media, before investigating the representation of Lara Croft in the 2018 *Tomb Raider* film, a brief insight into the history of representing women in video games and film is necessary.

Before the nineteen-eighties, often the representation of women in cinema had been structured by very rigid patriarchal norms. Female

characters were constructed in binary opposition to male ones. Women were usually passive characters and objects of male desire who, should they attempt to reject the gender roles assigned to them, were correspondingly punished. The action films of the nineteen-eighties saw a change in the standards regulating the representation of women on the cinematic screen. Ellen Ripley, the protagonist of the first four *Alien* films, played by Sigourney Weaver, is regarded by many as a milestone in the new agency that female characters were beginning to enact in action films (Carr 2002, 172-3; Clover 1992-2015, 40, 51-2; Tasker 1993, 15). The showcase example was the 1986 film *Aliens*, a sequel to the film *Alien* released in 1979 and directed by Ridley Scott. While in *Alien* Ripley is still vulnerable, though not a passive victim, in *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986) she becomes an agentive self-reliant character who is pro-active in fighting off the alien threat (Tasker 1993, 15). A similar influential character that challenged more traditional standards of filmic representations of women was Sarah Connor, played by Linda Hamilton, in James Cameron's 1991 film *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*, the sequel to *The Terminator* (James Cameron, 1984). In a manner similar to Ellen Ripley in the first two *Alien* films, Sarah Connor undergoes a transition from a weak and helpless female character in need of masculine protection in *The Terminator* to a strong independent self-trained fighter in *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*. Although the two female characters play an important part in reshaping the roles of women in film, these agentive roles are still framed within patriarchal discourse. Both Ripley and Connor adopt a tomboy look and feature a Ramboesque body (Tasker 1993, 15) which enable them "[to perform] masculinity through their use of muscles and weapons" (Brown 2011, 13).

However, not all action-film heroines have to adopt a masculine appearance in order to be granted narrative agency. Another strategy by means of which patriarchal discourse regulates female agency in action films is oversexualisation. In other words, cinema, and visual media in general, seem to be driven by a logic of compensation whereby women can enjoy narrative agency only inasmuch as they offer visual pleasure for the male audience in return. This is the case with the digital Lara Croft of the first two *Tomb Raider* video game series and the Lara Croft played by Angelina Jolie in *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* and *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider - The Cradle of Life*. Drawing on Carol J. Clover (1992-2015), Jeffrey A. Brown claims that, rather than questioning traditional gender roles, overeroticised action heroines such as Lara Croft trigger "an easy oscillation between identifying with Lara Croft's masculine characteristics and objectifying her feminine form" (2011, 111). Brown further elaborates on the issue, claiming that patriarchal discourse is so deeply entrenched in our culture that adventure (fighting, jumping, puzzle solving, etc.) is always rendered masculine, while erotic form is rendered feminine.

While the pleasures of looking at Lara in the first *Tomb Raider* films are afforded by the linearity of cinema and the safe position of spectator as voyeur engulfed in the darkness of the theatre (Metz 2009, 704-5), the video games problematise Lara's role as the object of male erotic phantasies, despite the obvious intention of the game designers to provide a female character offering a wide range of visual pleasure to the player. Firstly, the early *Tomb Raider* games lacked the rendering capacities to simulate a 3D Lara Croft that would match the realism of Angelina Jolie's body on the cinema screen (Carr 2002, 175). By way of consequence, her polygonal over-the-top bodily proportions not only reflected patriarchal fantasies concerning the female body, but also flaunted the artificiality of such fantasies. Moreover, even the character in the games seems to be reluctant towards the player's scopophilia.² For instance, the ending cut-scene of *Tomb Raider II* (Core Design 1997) features Lara Croft about to enter the shower. Before undressing, she turns to the camera and asks the player "Don't you think you've seen enough?" after which she points her gun at the camera and shoots (du Preez 21). However, such moments of visual frustration would soon disappear with the release of further instalments in the two-thousands that offer a more realistic 3D simulation of a Lara that no longer raises awareness with respect to the artificiality of her representation/simulation.

Because of the criticism that the games and films have come under as a result of Lara's oversexualisation, as well as the current drive of mainstream games to adopt traits associated with high art, the rebooted *Tomb Raider* video games series features a Lara Croft whose eroticism is toned down. Instead of the infamous tank top-short trousers outfit that highlight the unnatural size of her breasts and waist, the protagonist's body in the new games has more natural proportions, while the protagonist's standard outfit is less revealing and more appropriate for the types of physical challenges she encounters throughout the games. The cover of the video game *Tomb Raider* (2013), the main source text for the film adaptation, features Lara Croft wearing a sleeveless shirt reminiscent of the earlier cropped tank top, but instead of the short trousers, she now wears cargo pants and mountain boots, and is armed with a climbing axe, a gun and her new signature weapon, the bow. Furthermore, Lara finds herself wounded before a cave entrance whose shadow partially obscures her body. While previous covers focused principally on Lara's overeroticised body, which dominated the picture, now more attention is given to the background which offers important diegetic

² Scopophilia, which literally means pleasure in looking, refers to the visual rhetoric of Hollywood films which imposes upon viewers a male gaze that obtains erotic visual pleasure from looking at the women represented as passive objects of desire (Mulvey 2009).

information about the storyworld of the game. Behind the wounded Lara there is a series of wreckages, which suggest that Lara's experience in *Tomb Raider* is similar to Robinson Crusoe – she is stranded on an island where she must fight for survival.

The theatrical poster of the 2018 *Tomb Raider* film maintains the themes and motifs of the video game cover, but adapts them to the norms of cinema. Since many film viewers choose to see a movie basing on its cast, theatrical posters usually make sure that the identity of the actor playing the leading role is highlighted. Consequently, the poster of *Tomb Raider* disregards the background in order to provide a close shot of Alicia Vikander, the actress playing Lara Croft. In keeping with its source, the visual representation of Lara Croft is far from the one of the previous two films featuring Angelina Jolie in the leading role. The new poster is no longer keen on turning the lead actress's body into an object of fetish, but merely conveys, instead, that the film belongs to the action genre. As in the game, Lara Croft in the film adaptation wears a sleeveless shirt, is wounded and patched, and carries a bow. If the previous two posters showed the entire body of Angelina Jolie in an attempt to capitalise on her status as a sex symbol of the early new millennium, the 2018 film frames only the upper part of Alicia Vikander's body.

Although the new game and film series seem to have renounced the oversexualisation of Lara Croft, the visual representation of the character is still regulated by patriarchal discourse. As already pointed out, typically the representation of action heroines has vacillated between the Ramboesque tomboy and the oversexualised action girl. The new Lara Croft does not challenge or break away from these patriarchal stereotypes, but combines the two: on the one hand, her portrayal links her to the Rambo type (like Rambo, she uses stealth to single-handedly take down entire enemy squads and her standard weapon is the bow, whose main quality is that it is silent), on the other, she is different from Ellen Ripley who, in order to save herself, denies her femininity. At the same time, the visual representation of Lara Croft strays from her earlier ones that can be seen as an embodiment of male fantasies and unnatural patriarchal beauty standards.

The fact Lara Croft is neither a tomboy nor an object of fetish does not prevent patriarchy from being a structuring element of her representation. The protagonist of the rebooted *Tomb Raider* series may not neatly fit into cinematic feminine stereotypes (which have also been borrowed by video games), but these stereotypes are the coordinates in accordance to which the new Lara Croft is shaped. Albeit in a less evident form, the visual representation of the protagonist still pays tribute to patriarchal discourse. In what follows, I try to show that, by the same token, patriarchy frames the diegetic evolution of Lara Croft in the film adaptation of the games too.

3 Lara Croft as an Agent of Patriarchy

Despite her feminine identity, in the third and most recent video game series, *Tomb Raider*, *Rise of Tomb Raider*, and *Shadow of the Tomb Raider*, Lara Croft acts as an agent of patriarchy in the sense that her role is that of a narrative substitute for her late father, Richard Croft. Her trajectory as a character from the beginning of *Tomb Raider* to the end of *Shadow of the Tomb Raider* is tantamount to a gradual submission to her father's will. Although at first she dismisses her father's findings as a myth, Lara eventually concedes that she was wrong and sets out on a quest to prove the validity of his research. This implies travelling all over the world in order to explore virgin territories and find the secret artefacts whose existence had been documented by her father. Lara's narrative agency in the storyworld of the video games' third series is determined by her father's will who, had he not been killed, would have carried on his work. This means that Lara's exploration is, in fact, a form of colonialism in the sense that her experience of otherness is mediated by the colonial knowledge that her father had produced.

In a manner similar to other film adaptations of video games, the events of *Tomb Raider* are only loosely based on those of the video games, yet the film maintains Lara Croft's role as a colonial agent of patriarchy. The fidelity criterion which characterised the adaptation of literary texts into feature films for a long time does not seem to enjoy a similar status when video games are adapted for the cinema. One of the main reasons for this difference is that early popular video games did not feature a strong narrative component, so the writer of the film adaptation had to flesh out a film from a minimal plot line provided by the source. For example, fighting games such as *Mortal Kombat* (Midway Games, 1992) or *Street Fighter II* (Capcom, 1991) were primarily focused on their gameplay and offered little diegetic context for the battles they simulated. Since action films need narrative motivation for their characters, the films *Mortal Kombat* (Paul W.S. Anderson, 1995) and *Street Fighter* (Steven E. de Souza, 1994) made significant additions to the minimal storyworlds of the video games so as to meet the demands of narrative cinema.

If deviation from their sources was a mandatory condition of the adaptation of games with low degrees of narrativity, the adaptation of later games that have a strong narrative component calls for another account that also considers the particularity of each video game that is turned into a feature film. It would seem that the freedom to improvise in adapting the narrative content of video games in these latter cases can be explained by the dominant position that gameplay and game mechanics enjoy to the detriment of narrative. The writers and directors of film adaptations of video games seem to focus on faithfully reproducing the spectacle of gameplay first and foremost,

and only to a lesser extent are they interested in staying true to the narrative of games. For example, the film adaptation of id Software's 2004 first person shooter *Doom 3*, which was simply entitled *Doom* (Andrzej Bartkowiak, 2005), shows little regard for the events of the game, but is consistent with its source's visual aesthetics. The film's climax, featuring the protagonist's fight against the demons that invade the space, is rendered by means of a subjective long shot that shows the diegetic world of the film through the eyes of the protagonist. In this way, the film's visuals imitate the first person perspective of the game.³

In the case of the rebooted *Tomb Raider* franchise, the film maintains the setting of the game, i.e. most of the events take place on the fictional island of Yamatai where Lara seeks the tomb of Himiko, dubbed the Sun Queen, but the main antagonists differ. In the game, the main antagonist is Father Mathias, a former teacher now a castaway on the island. After a failed attempt to leave the island, Father Mathias is contacted by the spirit of Himiko who is trapped in a decaying body and demands that he provide her with a new one in return for his safe passage off the island. When Lara and her team shipwreck on an island, Mathias seizes one of the members, the Japanese-Portuguese Samantha Nishimura, in an attempt to use her body as a vessel for Queen Himiko. The game ends with Lara defeating Mathias and rescuing Samantha before Himiko can take full possession of her body.

In constructing the antagonist of the film adaptation, the screenwriter borrowed elements from the games *Rise of the Tomb Raider* and *Shadow of the Tomb Raider*. In fact, the heroine's antagonist in the film, Mathias Vogel, is now connected to the transnational paramilitary organisation Trinity, which appears in the *Tomb Raider*'s two sequels. Moreover, the film makes it clear that Trinity is responsible for the apparent death of Richard Croft who had managed to hide his findings on Himiko before his demise, lest they should fall in the hands of Trinity. However, the most important difference between the film adaptation and the game is that, while the games are constructed on the assumption that Richard Croft is dead, in the film adaptation Lara's father eventually turns out to have been alive all along. In a plot twist, Richard Croft reveals himself to Lara telling her that he had lived on the island of Yamatai in complete isolation, and

3 The remediation of the first person perspective by the feature film is not unproblematic from the point of view of visual rhetoric (Mizsei Ward 2018). While players of video games are used to seeing the game world through the eyes of the protagonist, filmmakers have often used the subjective long shot for characters who represent deviant subjectivities, such as cyborgs, aliens, or serial killers (Black 2015, 16-17). This makes it difficult for the viewer to have the same positive identification with the protagonist of the film as the player has.

scolding her for disobeying him and refusing to destroy his research, which ended up in Trinity's possession. Lara tries to compel her father to fight Trinity in order to prevent them from reaching Himiko's tomb. Richard Croft refuses by claiming that what had defined him as a man is no longer valid. Frustrated with her father's lack of will to act, Lara decides to leave and face Trinity on her own.

The manner in which Richard Croft's diegetic disability is translated from the game into the film is indicative of how a potential rebellion against male supremacy can be reframed and appropriated to suit patriarchal standards. In opposition to the games that stress how, in exploring foreign territories, Lara obeys her father's will, the film presents Lara's adventures as an act of disobedience. When Lara discovers her father's secret office, she comes across a digital camera which contains a recording of Richard Croft instructing her to burn all his research on the Himiko project. Instead of destroying his research, Lara decides to use his findings to get to the island of Yamatai. What may have been construed as a form of narrative agency based on a defiance of patriarchy is annulled as a result of the scene described in the above paragraph where Lara's father refuses to take arms against Trinity.

In the film, Richard Croft presents himself as a case of masculinity in crisis similar to the ones documented by Kaja Silverman in her book *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (1992). Silverman claims that our dominant visual culture produces images of artificial white heterosexual masculinity with which men entertain a relation of misrecognition, in a manner similar to the subject of ideology or the child at the mirror stage.⁴ In doing so, western visual culture (which Silverman calls dominant fiction) naturalises the social construct of white heterosexual masculinity and establishes it as the norm. In her comment on the films discussed in Silverman's book, Shohini Chaudhuri claims that the films representing men who fail to embody the dominant social construct of masculinity

depict 'ideal' female subjects who collude in the dominant fiction and refuse to recognize male lack, investing their belief in patently artificial images of male adequacy or the phallus as a signifier of desire. But Silverman also finds other films, both from Hollywood

⁴ Silverman's use of the term misrecognition is indebted to Louis Althusser and Jacques Lacan. The former claims that subjectivity is formed by means of interpellation. "A person on the street who instantly turns around upon hearing the police call, 'Hey you there!' (mis)recognises that the hail is 'really' addressed to him and is thereby 'sutured' into ideology" (Chaudhuri 2006, 108). In the Lacanian sense of the term, misrecognition refers to formation of the ego by means of identifying itself with the image in the mirror. Although the image is not the self, it is perceived as such by the subject (Chaudhuri 2006, 108).

and elsewhere, that depict 'deviant' masculinities which both acknowledge and embrace castration, alterity, and specularity. Some of these 'deviant' masculinities say 'no' to power – a stance that implies reconciliation with the terms and conditions of all subjectivity, and therefore also with what has traditionally been designated as 'feminine'. (Chaudhuri 2006, 110)

The behaviour of both Lara and Richard Croft in the *Tomb Raider* film adaptation corresponds to the types of film characters presented in the quotation. Richard Croft represents a case of deviant masculinity which rejects the potency, agency, and privilege of standard masculinity. As Richard Croft's presence on the island is progressively revealed, we see short shots of his body obscured by darkness, hiding behind the trees, observing from a distance, but not interfering with the ongoing events. When Lara finally encounters him in the cave where he had found refuge, he looks weak and delusional, an image contrasting with that provided by Lara's memories and the video recording described above. Confronted with a case of masculinity in crisis, Lara refuses to accept her father's inability to adequately perform his role as an agentive male (or phallic male, to use Silverman's term – 1992, 44). She consequently assumes the phallus herself and compensates for her father's vulnerability by going off to fight Trinity on her own, lest patriarchy should crumble. Lara Croft's disobedience towards her father is, therefore, not a defiance of patriarchy but, rather, a rejection of alternative, i.e. non-phallic, versions of masculinity, such as the one represented by Richard Croft himself.

By the end of the film, Lara's endeavour to reinstate patriarchal order will have succeeded. After a period of hesitation, Richard Croft decides to accept his gender role as agent and protector and sets out to help Lara in her fight against Trinity, but he is quickly caught by Mathias Vogel and his mercenaries. With Richard Croft at the mercy of Vogel, Lara is forced to lay down her weapons and cooperate with Trinity to find Himiko's tomb. After discovering it, they soon realise that Himiko's corpse is infected by a highly contagious virus that turns humans into zombies. In order not to be contaminated, Vogel tries to collect a sample from the corpse that he would send back to Trinity. While the team of mercenaries is concentrated on Vogel's attempt to take the sample, Lara and Richard assault the team. In the ensuing conflict, the two manage to kill all the mercenaries with the exception of Vogel, but Richard Croft is infected with the virus after a struggle with a mercenary-turned-zombie. Given his impending doom, Richard offers to destroy Himiko's tomb with the fire grenades they have taken away from the mercenaries, sacrificing himself in the action. Although Lara tries to dissuade him, he remains steadfast and convinces her to abandon him and to prevent Mathias Vogel from escaping with the virus sample. The tomb scene coincides with the

restoration of the patriarchal norm whereby Richard becomes the phallic male who has the authority to dictate her daughter what to do. From this point onward, Lara's struggle against Trinity is no longer an act of disobedience but, on the contrary, one of obedience, in which her agency is determined and limited by patriarchal authority.

The unequal gender power relations featured in the film are naturalised by its narrative structure. One prototypical trait of this kind of narratives is the sudden appearance of rupture in the equilibrium of the storyworld, which must be resolved by the characters (Herman 2009, 9). In the film, the imbalance is caused by Richard Croft's masculinity crisis, hence the need to bring the storyworld to a 'normal' state of affairs in which Richard Croft returns to be a phallic male. By means of this narrative structure, phallic masculinity, alongside Lara's implicit submission to it, is rendered 'natural'. Conversely, the transitionary state of the storyworld, in which Lara has to adopt the phallus, is rendered 'abnormal' and calls for immediate action so that the *status quo antea* can be reinstated.

4 Lara Croft as an Agent of Colonialism

As already mentioned in the previous section, the "Survivor" series of the *Tomb Raider* games projects Lara Croft's colonial encounter with otherness as an enactment of a patriarchal role. Yet what is interesting about the storyworld of the three most recent games is not only that they are colonial, but that they also present a struggle between contending forms of colonialism. The conflict between Lara Croft and the transnational paramilitary organisation Trinity amounts to a conflict between two versions of colonialism: modern imperialism and neo-imperialism.

According to Hardt and Negri, globalisation has engendered forms of colonialism that differ from the colonialism of the 19th century. The structure of colonial empires such as the British Empire rested on a colonial centre which was a nation-state exerting colonial authority. The *de jure* dismantling of colonial empires in the aftermath of the Second World War paved the way for more insidious forms of colonialism, in which colonial authority no longer has a stable territorial locus but is deterritorialised and functions under the guise of transnational organisations (Hardt, Negri 2000, xii), such as the IMF, the World Bank, Structural Adjustment Programs, and so forth (Lazarus 2011, 8-9). Hardt and other authors call the former modern imperialism and the latter neo-imperialism.

In the third video game series, Lara Croft embodies modern imperialism since she is a character whose English ancestry is stressed throughout the games and whose intervention in foreign territories and cultures is transformed into a kind of civilising

mission. She is the providential explorer-coloniser, whose help is not only accepted but also sought after by the native populations she encounters. At the opposite pole lies Trinity, a transnational organisation, whose intervention is rejected by the native populations who then call for Lara's help to repel the paramilitary organisation. The ethical interpretation of the storyworld cued by the game favours Lara and, indirectly, the modern imperialism she represents, to the detriment of Trinity and neo-imperialism.

In adapting the storyworld of the video games to the screen, the film *Tomb Raider* maintains the conflict between modern imperialism and neo-imperialism. Like the games, the film lays emphasis on Lara Croft's Britishness, which stands in opposition to the multiple ethnicities and ancestries of Trinity's employed mercenaries. The film highlights the antagonistic status of that organisation by depicting how Trinity uses Asians of low income for forced labour in its archaeological search for Himiko's tomb. In this diegetic context, the rebellion of the exploited natives can only occur once Lara Croft, the modern coloniser, has intervened. By stressing the native people's dependence on Lara, the film turns resistance against neo-colonialism into a product of modern colonial discourse.

Taking this into consideration, it is safe to claim that Lara's attempt to restore patriarchy coerces her to adopt a colonial phallus that reinforces the supremacy of *white* heterosexual masculinity. Her attempt to substitute her father and thus contribute to the resolution of his masculinity crisis turns her into a coloniser, a role which seems to be inherent in the dominant western notion of patriarchy. In other words, by saving her father, Lara also saves colonial power relations.

5 Conclusion

In what has by now become a popular formulation concerning the importance of the representation of cultural identities in the media, Adrienne Shaw claims that "[m]edia texts provide us with source material for what might be possible, how identities might be constructed, and what worlds we might live in" (2014, 13). Although video games have been investigated in relation to cinema, game and adaptation studies have been chiefly concerned with the manner in which games borrow from films, while relatively little attention has been paid to the transmedial practice of cinematic adaptations of video games.⁵ If Shaw is right in pointing out the political relevance of media in general for the way in which identity is constructed and

⁵ Although the topic of video game film adaptations is subsidiary to other research interests in game studies and adaptation studies, important studies on the topic can

some identities are rendered normal to the detriment of others, then the field of video game cultural studies, which has been gaining momentum in the past years, should pay more attention to video game film adaptations and how they reshape the aesthetics and politics of their sources. This article has been an attempt to investigate the manner in which the 2018 *Tomb Raider* film reinforces white masculinity as the norm in relation to its source texts, the rebooted *Tomb Raider* video game trilogy. Similar inquiries can and should address the representation of a wide spectrum of cultural identities in other mainstream video game franchises that include film adaptations.

Bibliography

- Black, Daniel (2015). "Why Can I See My Avatar? Embodied Visual Engagement in the Third-Person Video Game". *Games and Culture*, 12(2), 1-21. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412015589175>.
- Breger, Claudia (2008). "Digital Digs, or Lara Croft Replaying Indiana Jones: Archaeological Tropes and 'Colonial Loops' in New Media Narrative". *Aether. The Journal of Media Geography*, 11, 41-66.
- Brown, Jeffrey A. (2011). *Dangerous Curves: Action Heroines, Gender, Fetishism, and Popular Culture*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. DOI <https://doi.org/10.14325/mississippi/9781604737141.001.0001>.
- Carr, Diane (2002). "Playing with Lara". King, Geoff; Krzywinska, Tanya (eds), *ScreenPlay: Cinema/videogames/interfaces*. London; New York: Wallflower Press, 171-80.
- Chaudhuri, Shohini (2006). *Feminist Film Theorists*. London; New York: Routledge. DOI <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203357026>.
- Clover, J. Carol (1992-2015). *Men, Women, and Chainsaws. Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- du Preez, Amanda (2000). "Virtual Babes: Gender, Archetypes and Computer Games". *Communication*, 26(2), 18-27. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1080/02500160008537909>.
- Farghaly, Nadine (ed.) (2014). *Unraveling Resident Evil. Essays on the Complex Universe of the Games and Films*. Jefferson; London: McFarland
- Hardt, Michael; Negri, Antonio (2000). *Empire*. Cambridge (MA); London: Harvard University Press.
- Herman, David (2009). *Basic Elements of Narrative*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444305920.ch3>.
- Kennedy, H.W. (2002). "Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or Cyberbimbo? On the Limits of Textual Analysis". *Game Studies*, 2(2). URL <http://www.gamestudies.org/0202/kennedy/> (2019-10-27).

be found in books such as Papazian and Sommers 2013, Farghaly 2014, and Stobbart 2018, among others.

- Larsen, Lasse Juel (2017). "Play and Gameful Movies: The Ludification of Modern Cinema". *Games and Culture*, 14(5), 455-77. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412017700601>.
- Lazarus, Neil (2011). *The Postcolonial Unconscious*. New York: Cambridge University Press. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1017/CB09780511902628>.
- MacCallum-Stewart, Esther (2008). "Real Boys Carry Girly Epics: Normalising Gender Bending in Online Games". *Eludamos. Journal for Computer Game Culture*, 2(1), 27-40. URL <https://www.eludamos.org/index.php/eludamos/article/view/vol2no1-5/51> (2019-12-07).
- Metz, Christian (2009). "From The Imaginary Signifier". Braudy, Leo; Cohen, Marshall, *Film Theory and Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 694-710.
- Mikula, Maja (2003). "Gender and Videogames: The Political Valency of Lara Croft". *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 17(1), 79-87. DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1030431022000049038>.
- Mizsei Ward, Rachel (2018). "Was the 2005 Doom Film 'Doomed from the Beginning?': First-Person Shooters, Subjective Cameras and Intertextuality in the Critical Reception of the Film Adaptation Doom (2005)". *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance*, 11(1), 57-70. DOI 10.1386/jafp.11.1.57_1.
- Mulvey, Laura (2009). "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". Braudy, Leo; Cohen, Marshall (eds), *Film Theory and Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 711-22.
- Papazian, Gretchen; Sommers, Joseph Michael (eds) (2013). *Game On, Hollywood! Essay on the Intersection of Video Games and Cinema*. Jefferson-London: McFarland.
- Shaw, Adrienne (2014). *Gaming at the Edge. Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gamer Culture*. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Silverman, Kaja (1992). *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*. London; New York: Routledge. DOI <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203699676>.
- Stobart, Dawn (2018). "Adaptation and New Media: Establishing the Videogame as an Adaptive Medium". Cutchins, Dennis; Krebs, Katja; Voigts, Eckart (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*. London-New York: Routledge, 382-9.
- Tasker, Yvonne (1993). *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema*. London; New York: Routledge. DOI <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203221846>.