
HOW IS RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM
REPRESENTED IN THE FILMS *FOUR
LIONS* AND *RED STATE*?

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Abstract: This thesis looks at the representation of religious extremism in film and the wider relationship with religion and the media. Key issues and debates addressed with this research and its findings are the limited research currently available regarding extremism in particular, despite the resurgence of interest in religious theology and film. In order to research this area a semiotic analysis was applied to the two films *Four Lions* and *Red State* to allow for a broader look at both Islamic and Christian extremism, analysing how shot size and composition as well as mise-en-scéné and iconography have been used to contradict or reinforce established representations by the media. These findings are referenced and explored in the theoretical framework of representation, religion in film and controversial and satirical films; I argue that these films deconstruct the myth of religious extremists.

Dedicated to my Nan and Grandad for their endless support

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INTRODUCTION: A REASON FOR RESEARCH

In July 2012 a fourteen minute video entitled *Innocence of Muslims* (Nakoula:2012) was uploaded to YouTube. The relatively low-budget film was poorly dubbed in Arabic with what were regarded as anti-Islamic slurs, causing a global controversy resulting in the death of 75 people. It also prompted a wide variety of responses from different governments; Pakistani minister Ghulam Ahmad Bilour offered a reward for the death of the film's producer and the American Government requested YouTube assess whether the video could be removed from their site. Critics noted that the video was constructed to be inflammatory that it emphasised that films are 'still associated with an idea- the idea of America's global power and prestige' (Guardian, 2010). Ironically, across the Atlantic the Westboro Baptist church continued to use the funerals (and subsequent news coverage) of soldiers that died fighting in wars against a religiously motivated force in the Middle East as a platform to promote homophobia and their fundamentalist beliefs. What I found interesting was it appeared that an ideological war was being waged using the media and it had a lot to do with religion.

The rebuttal to this cross media warfare came in the form of film. In particular *Four Lions* (Chris Morris, 2010) presented a refreshing break from the constant barrage of anti-Islamic rhetoric (Labidi,2010) this proved a controversial film because of its light-hearted approach to home grown terrorism and its aims of deconstructing fear. Kevin Smiths appeared to do the opposite, exploring the evolution of American Christian Fundamentalism to extremism in *Red State* (Kevin Smith, 2011). As social commentary these films express a need to engage

in discourse about religious extremism that might otherwise be left to the one dimensional news portrayal.

This thesis uses a semiotic analysis of the two afore mentioned films to argue that religious extremism is represented in film with relation to factual media representations and as such provides a varied portrayal.

The first chapter positions the research within the context of representation, religion in film and controversial film and satire, the reason for this is the lack of primary research done specifically in religious extremism and more so in direct representation of religious people (extreme or not) within in film.

The second chapter addresses methodological approach outlining the uses and limitations of a semiotic analysis and how the use of Barthes deconstruction of myth and the film language of Christian Metz has been utilized in this research. It indicates and explores previous research that has used a similar method to analyse film and highlights the uses and limitations of semiotic analysis.

After examining the background theory I present the findings of a semiotic analysis of *Four Lions*. It is broken down into three sub chapters regarding iconography, rhetorical devices and the deconstruction of otherness. Here the use of Barthes construction of myth table is used analyse the visual and audible association that link Muslims with terrorism; the following sections address how the director Morris challenges the rhetoric developed by news sensationalism in a social realist setting.

The forth chapter presents the findings of *RedState* using the analysis method outline above. It initially outlines the case for the films relation to the WestBoro Baptists church. Referring again to Barthes method, it assess the link between demographic and fundamentalism. It

concludes that Smith has used generic horror conventions and stereotypes to reinforce rural America and its practice of religious fundamentalism as an alien and backward practice that has the ability (as experienced in the film) to use the Bible as a foundation for exacting ‘justified’ murder. Again the research suggests these references are laced with intertextuality to real world representations portrayed in the news.

The fifth chapter is a comparison of the findings on the two films; comparing and contrasting the noted successes or failures. This chapter also expands on the other issues touched upon in the films. Namely that both films comment on wider socio-political issues suggesting that religious extremism is not a singular or isolated event in our society but part of a bigger chain of events.

To conclude, I suggest that religious extremism is an area that needs to be represented in film and in particular in satire. Outlined in the films I analysed, is not a black and white subject area and representations are complex. Furthermore the research in this area, although limited, is developing. A round up on the literature on religion in film and its practical uses and finally it addresses my own conclusive opinion.

LITERATURE REVIEW: THEORISING EXTREMISM

Covered in this literature review are multiple areas of theoretical research. Combined, these have served as the basis for my research into representation of religious extremism. Although the area is severely under researched, facets of surrounding study reinforced my research. In the following chapter I will cover the key theory on representation in film moving on to the representation of religious people in the media and film. The second section addresses religion in film, its iconography and ideology and the final chapter looks at the religious link between controversial film, censorship and satire.

1.1A THE ROLE OF REPRESENTATION IN FILM

Representation is a layered theoretical framework. Richard Dyer (2002:2) states 'representations are presentations, always and necessarily entailing the use of codes of conventions of the available cultural forms of presentation.' He further highlights the problems faced when trying to represent 'reality' noting 'what is presented as re-presented in representation is not reality itself, but other representations' (2002:2). Dyers paradoxical reflection on representation is similarly addressed by the work of Barthes. Roland Barthes (1972) addresses the deconstruction of representation. He concludes that representation is often mythical: 'Myth is a peculiar system, in that it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before' (p43). This semiological chain becomes a second- order semiological

system in that it requires the signifier to become a sign. Signs he suggests, operate on a continuum, varying in strength or recognition. I.e. from motivated to arbitrary.

Bill Nichols highlights the nature of representation and perception. Noting the ‘habitual or coded nature of perception obscures our own active role in perception’(1981:10). Similar to Barthes theory of myth he notes that images are signs depicting a social representation that carry within them the embodiment of an ideology. A post-structuralist view of ideology removed it from the confines of class, and looked at the wider relation to culture, race and gender (Kellner, 1995).

1.1B REPRESENTATION OF RACE AND CULTURE

Said’s theory of Orientalism suggests that the West views Asia and the Middle East as unchangeable otherness that is inferior to the west (Said: 1978, Said: 2003). He defined it as a ‘style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the Orient and ... the Occident’ (1978:2). This distinction made the west ‘a corporate institution for dealing with the Orient’ (1978:3). He suggests the constant reaffirmation of the East versus West ideology has enabled and justified many wars with the Middle East (Said, 2003).

Similarly Hall notes that the idea that Europeans are superior to non-Europeans is what made the ideology hegemonic to both cultures (Hall et al. 1997). He establishes that stereotypes or conceived ideas of race of culture act as a signifying practice. Television in particular upholds these signifying practises of groups or cultures we are unfamiliar with. Television and film construct an imagined unity between those that view the represented otherness and a segregation from the otherness represented (Hall et al 1997).

Alternately, negative representations could stem from audience demand rather than production. (Guerro: 1993) suggests that white audiences, in some instances, prefer and accept more readily a pre ordained set of presentations of black men (noticeably negative). More accurately, a representation that may adhere to internally held convictions regarding the status of other race and cultures in society; reaffirming that their view of social hierarchy is true. From this Tucker poses the question ‘How does one create and market a product to an audience [i.e., the White majority film audience] willing to pay only to see counterfeit representations of African Americans?’ (Tucker, 2007, p.103, drawing on Guerrero, 1993)

1.1C REPRESENTATION OF RELIGION IN THE MEDIA

A critical reference point for the analysis of *Four Lions* and *Red State* was the representation of religion in the media. Poole et.al notes ‘unlike race in the media, little empirical research has been conducted in Britain on the media location and representation of religion’ (2007:1). Poole relies heavily on previously mentioned theory of Orientalism. She uses this platform to address her concerns that ‘Islam is now a salient issue. Previously at the margins of coverage in British News ... it now has an uncomfortable familiarity’ which Poole notes could be ‘development’ however the knowledge produced only reinforces an Orientalist perspective’ (Poole: 2006:3)

Similarly Richardson (2004) looks at the representation of Islam in the British Media, he mirrors that of Poole’s quantitative and qualitative research methods. For example he looks for correlations in discourse: ‘Violence and/or acts of violence’ were in 68.1 per cent of international articles, rising to a remarkable 79.0 per cent of articles in which Islam was cited as having an influential role in the reported action’. (Richardson:2004:79) Stating that such reporting ‘may be involved in the production, reproduction and demolition of radicalised social inequalities’ (2004:XIX)

Hoover (2006) somewhat disagrees with the cause and affects suggested previously by Richardson. He addresses ideas that apart from representing religiosity, the media might also affect it. He states ‘A good deal of discourse in this direction has lamented potential negative impacts of an irreligious “secular” media on religious belief and behaviour.’ (2006:207) In his research of viewing behaviours, he found that there were correlation between religion and the media, dividing them into ‘essentialist, archetypal, formal, realist ,transformationist and other approaches.’ Hoovers research is useful in that by engaging viewers in discourse regarding their viewing habits; it acknowledges a negotiated reading that the aforementioned Richardson (2004) overlooks. He further adds; ‘it should be clear ... the paradigm here does not assume “function” of “effect”, but instead found evidence of how individuals use media to represent themselves and their lives.’ (2006:205)

Although contemporary research regarding representation of religious groups in the UK is largely focused on Islam, a Swiss report looked at both Islam and Christianity together. Dahindena et al (2011) based their research around narrative archetypes and framing.

“News are culturally determined stories, and not just when dealing with religious topics (Lünenborg 2005: 154). ‘Consciously or unconsciously, however, journalists take their place among the generations of storytellers who tell and retell the myths of humankind.’ (Dahindena et al.:2011:199)

Although their findings were limited to a time frame and location, the application of narrative archetypes to real world news stories proves a useful tool regarding representation. For example; ‘Christianity and its denominations are most often represented with the positive archetype of a “good mother”... for Judaism, the archetype of the “victim” remains key in the media’ (2011:203). These archetypes provide a more than adequate platform for representation research, expanding upon merely negative and positive representation.

1.2 RELIGION IN FILM

In this section I will be exploring the range of existing literature on religion in film. The previous research concluded in this area reveals a complex relationship between film and religion, one that is both a platform for promoting religious ideas and criticising them.

This literature generally falls into two sub categories; religious ideology within film whether acknowledged or not and the screening of religion including the depiction of religious groups and or religious figures, stories or myths. Kozlovic (2004) states that religion can be observed in film in the following three ways ‘(1) Bible-quoting and explicit scriptural references, (2) Christ-figures, and (3) sub textual biblical characters, props and references.’ Whilst I agree that film includes these aspects, I feel this does not include reference to the representation of people that practice religion and/or the depiction of religious culture.

1.2A REPRESENTATION OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Aside from ideology, religion finds its way onto screen in the means of physical representation of religious people, organisations, figures, iconography and scripture.

Wallis and Aston (2011) argue that religion in film highlights the ‘highly problematic understanding of the role of religion and particularly religious texts within society.’ Ramji (2005) agrees that ‘films, as a social form of religion, are considered powerful conveyors of ideology and ethics’ and that we often take for granted the depiction of religion on screen. However, Ramji argues people are learning about religious groups or rather ‘unlearning’ by believing films are based on ‘universal truths’ particularly the depiction of Islam in western

film which continues to 'link the Islamic faith with male supremacy, holy war, and acts of terror, depicting Arab Muslims as hostile alien intruders' (2005:1).

In contrast Keyser and Keyser (1984) analysis of the representation of Roman Catholics in Hollywood film concluded that there was no fixed portrayal. They also address the several manifestations in which Roman Catholics appear including Nuns, Gangsters and immigrants.

Walsh-Pasulka suggests that iconography and religious representation is more complicated. She comments that existing literature on film and religion relies on the notion that 'there is a clear distinction between film reality and the reality of everyday life'. However the suspension of belief systems that normally occur when watching films of a paranormal nature become blurred as stories and myths revolving around religion 'defies the assumption of the film as fantasy' due to people's belief in the stories. In turn the films 'often form communities of believers from diverse religious backgrounds' (2005:1).

1.2B RELIGIOUS THEOLOGY

Bandy and Monda look at rhetorical devices or narrative structure that mirrors or reinforces religious ideology. It is important to note that all of the films analysed within the book are referring to god in the Christian sense, or of a Christian denomination such as Catholicism.

Bandy and Monda (2003, p11) ask 'Is god, his presence or absence, the inmost theme of any story?' This is in relation to the hidden 'spiritual ideas' that can be found in many films.

Bandy and Monda argue that it may be because tackling religion is un-commercial. That is to say films with an overtly religious message or theme might be seen as imposing on the viewer and therefore disguised as morality tale. Kozlovic argues this suppression of outright religious affiliation allows for 'the dissemination of Christian holy stories, symbols and

characters within the secular media without generating viewer backlash from atheists' (2005: para 10).

Martin and Conrad (1986) agree that many popular Hollywood films have an underlying religious ideology. They apply a 'threefold framework' to religion in film, that being, theology, mythology and iconography that separates their analysis. Specifically they suggest that *Rocky* has engrained in it 'the ideology that sanctifies the United states as God's chosen nation-state' and the Christ like act of enduring pain to bring hope to the common people (1986:12) Contrary to Kozlovics belief that films expands religion Conrad and Martin argue that in some ways religion surpasses film and that it cannot wholly be captured on screen without distortion (1986:4) relating to the way Native American spiritual practises were often misrepresented in early Hollywood films.

Dodd (2009) argues that 'Messianic or saviour movies are a staple in today's theatre' and even so too are they at the core of 'religious myths'(2). Interestingly Dodd looks not only at Abrahamic religions (Christianity, Judaism and Islam) but also at the Hindu religion. He notes that 'Hindu mythology does not focus on perceived weaknesses of their heroes like Hebrew religions' relating it to the abundance of Christ like heroes who succeed in spite of their failures(2).

Oppositional to this, Kupfer see's the ideology in film as representative of philosophy and virtue. He states that films give the 'reader' a 'perspective on virtue and indicates why it is important' indicative of ancient philosophical ways of thought not religious (1999:2).

1.3 CONTROVERSIAL FILM, CENSORSHIP AND SATIRE

Addressed in this section is the existing relationship between film censorship and religion, initially exploring how it has its roots in the beginnings of the film industry. Extending on censorship, I will look specifically at how films have been deemed controversial for opposing reasons and finally address the uses and limitations of satire as social commentary on religion.

Jowatt states that censorship is ‘a symbol of the various strategies of social control’ and also ‘a direct contributor to the content and aesthetic arrangement seen on the movie screen.’ He argues that censorship is defined by the specific needs of a culture at ‘a particular socio-historical locus’ and in turn has ‘left us with many strange decisions’ (1991:164).

1.3A CENSORING RELIGION

Religion and film censorship have a long history, as Matthews notes ‘at the onset of Britain’s film censorship in 1912 the boards examiners were only issued with two rules to apply to the screen: no portrayal of Christ and no nudity’(1994:67). David Edgars work is crucial in that it culminates contemporary incidents of offense being taken from artistic forms. He argues it has become acceptable to widen restrictions on freedom of expression in art. His work is useful in that it looks at a variety of religious backlash and incidents specific to the UK. He counters what he calls the ‘current argument for censorship’ that draws upon ‘the idea that to represent is to enact’ (2006:63).

1.3B CENSORSHIP BY RELIGION

Religious censorship is the act of censorship by religious authority, and does not necessarily relate to the censoring of items specific to religion. Hagstrom notes that ‘Censorship is best understood in the context of community. The Church is one such community which has exercised censorship from its very beginnings’ (2004:147). She addresses the churches censorship both scripturally and also in modern society and its restraints on media.

Black argues that initially films as corporate products avoided any subjects that could offend ‘potential markets’ however his research into the Production Code of America uncovered censorship roots in religion. He explains ‘the industry censorship document, known as the Production Code, (was) written by a catholic priest...and adopted in 1930 as guidelines for Hollywood Studios’ (1991:169). The Roman Catholic Church is central in the analysis of the religious censor in America (Skinner 1993, Walsh 1996). Skinner adds to the research of Roman Catholic Organisations including The Legion of Defence and the National Catholic office of Motion Pictures (NCOMP) that held prowess over Hollywood. He states ‘The Legions ethical position was unequivocal’ and ‘based on the contention that morality is timeless and unchangeable’ and perhaps most prominently ‘based on the ten commandments’ (1993:181).

1.3 C CONTROVERSIAL FILM

The Passion of the Christ (Mel Gibson: 2004) drew contrasting responses. Not only did the film garner a spiritual following from some in America, it generated criticisms of Anti-Semitism. Gibson himself declared it ‘an act of God’ (Fredriksen:2004:53). In reference to

The Passion of the Christ Testa opines, ‘once the serrated edge of religious controversy softens, religion in cinema becomes a blur. Then about once every dozen years, some dispute flares up into hot debate’ (2006:75).

Hammer and Kelner (2005) argue that ‘Gibson’s film is part of the reactionary’ mechanism that is fuelling religious hatreds and violence today and that therefore ...deserves a close reading and political contextualization.’ Their general criticisms being that not only is the film unnecessarily visceral it is also anti-Semitic. Gibson’s own narrative additions (not found within the Gospels) further link Jews with Satan and evil. ‘Jews are largely shown as corrupt, decadent, and causing Christ’s death, or as ignorant masses calling for Christ’s Crucifixion, the Romans, by contrast, are shown ruled by noble leaders’(2005:76).

Anti-Semitic criticisms are shared by several theorists such as Fredriksen who believe it ‘risks more than religious offensiveness... [it stands in] the echo chamber of deeply traditional Christian anti-Judaism.’ A tradition that Fredriksen believes enables atrocities such as the holocaust (2005:44). Positive responses to the film largely if not wholly come from Christian and Catholic sources. Not only was the production apparently in receipt of miracles and divine acts, the film itself has become a tool for evangelism (Oakland and Tetlow: 2008).

The Life of Brian (Terry Jones:1979) is perhaps the antithesis to the *Passion of the Christ* with regards to the retelling of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, Ciaccio states ‘many people consider it the most offensive movie for religious people ever made’(2004:35). *The Life of Brian* is a spoof of the Jesus movie sub-genre: it is interestingly in this case the films protagonist is Brian of Nazareth, who is mistaken for the Messiah. Ciaccio believes that people are often offending by satire because they misplace its intentions. In particular *The Life of Brian* requires us to wear the ‘glasses of satire’ that highlights issues such as

If we wear the glasses of satire, we see that it unveils a dualistic attitude of many western Christians, who do not reflect deeply on the meaning of the visit of the Magi to Jesus. The Gospels tell us that they were led by a star —does that Christians believe in astrology?’(2004:35)

Lachs states ‘Closely analyzing the film’s principal utilization of non-realistic elements and scenes reveals that *The Life of Brian* approaches history artistically and satirizes religious foundations, without parodying the classic Biblical epic style’(2002:2).

1.3D SATIRE AS SOCIAL COMMENTARY

As highlighted by the previous theory on the *The Passion of the Christ* and *The Life of Brian* films have the ability to create a reaction or a following. Yet no other rhetorical device seems to have the ability to create response quite like satire.

Most people mistakenly consider satire as an entertaining performance that makes fun of something else, often in a silly way. So, some subjects should not be fodder for satire: for example, religion, and in some countries, politicians. On the contrary, to write or perform a satire is one of the most difficult and serious actions an intellectual may do (2004:34).

With the topic of my chosen research films, satire is often injected into film as means of social commentary. Jordan (2010) states:

‘Comedic irony often involves the author saying the opposite of what he really believes, deliberately making absurd and inflammatory assertions in order to provoke and elicit reaction for pedagogical purposes’ (2010:41).

In his exploration of the films *Borat :Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* (Larry Charles,2006) and *Saved!* (Brian Dannelly, 2004)

Jordan concludes that ‘satiric religious commentary may just be the most honest and candid

mode of religious commentary available.’ The strengths of *Borats* fictitious anti-semitism were that he highlights the absurdity of the characters bigoted views. Jordan however notes the unfortunate issue with satire stating ‘this form of didactic critique cannot be undertaken without intrinsic risk-namely, what happens if the audience doesn’t “get it”?’(2010:41)

LeBeouf further highlights the need for satire in regards social commentary, she states ‘messages that would be ignored or punished if overtly declared are reaching millions of people in satirical form, and making a real difference’ (2007:5) She looks at both historical and modern manifestations of satire, defining it as an ‘artistic form used to critique specific human behaviours’ (2007:6). Like Jordan, she has concerns over the use of the word satire, being that it’s being used too loosely, noting that to brand something satire because it mocks simply discredits the genre.

METHODOLOGY: DECONSTRUCTING REPRESENTATION

As highlighted by the literature review religion and film have a close relationship from affecting a film's production to the ideology at the core of its narrative.

Furthermore, film plays a large part in upholding beliefs and moral values that are ingrained in religion. It is fitting then that film should be the platform by which aspects of religion should or can be scrutinized. This chapter explores the methodology applied in order to further research religion and extremism in the films *Four Lions* and *Red State*.

Previous exploration into representation and the role of religion in film is vast however work on representation of religious extremism in film is sparse. Although quantitative data on representation of religion is becoming more frequent as seen in the works of Poole (2006) and Richardson (2004), fictitious representations are largely left unaddressed. With a lack of empirical research on extremism in film, despite the growth of interest in it in the news media it was interesting that the two films with extremist groups at its core were released within a year of each other and contained intertextual references to the media.

2.1 FILM CHOICE AND ANALYSIS METHOD

Firstly, I selected the films *Four Lions* and *Red State* because after a preliminary screening certain similarities were evident; the controversial response to the films and the satirical content. While I did view other potential films such as *Dun* (David Lynch:1984) and

Paradise Now (Hany Abu-Assad:2005) I found that *Four Lions* and *Red State* both provided something unique and their differences also add to the depth of research.

In particular I felt *Four Lions* offered a greater insight into representation with its use of religious extremists as protagonists and in a satirical way as comedic satire has proven effective for religious commentary (Jordon ,2010).

Red State was chosen because as an action-horror it gives variation and thereby a form of contrast in genre and was one of a minority of films that actually represents Christian extremism as opposed to fundamentalism. Also even though it is a horror it too has satirical elements. Both films contain a certain element of intertextuality and referencing towards news media and within their own geographical locations provide social commentary.

Semiotic analysis is ideal for the study of representation as ‘no discipline concerns itself with representation as strictly as semiotics does’ (Mick 1988:20). It also reaffirms there is nothing natural about our ideals and that they are ‘social constructs that... differ radically from culture to culture’ (Schroeder 1998:225)

I designed the structure of my research around the works Barthes and Metz, utilizing Barthes table of the constructs of myth (**See figure 1**) and his theory regarding the ‘second order Sign’ as developed in *Mythologies* (Barthes:1957) :in each of the two findings chapters I have used the table to highlight the initial ‘myth’ or stereotype being connoted within the scene regarding both visual and audible stimuli.

1. Signifier	1. Signified	
1. Sign →	II SIGNIFIER	II. SIGNIFIED
II. SIGN (Myth)		

Figure 1: Barthes table for deconstructing Myth

2.3 USES AND LIMITATIONS

Undoubtedly, semiotic analysis as a research method is not without its flaws, its biggest being ‘the text of a film is unattainable because it is an unquotable text’ and in relation to film , text, becomes ‘metaphorical’ and textual analysis of a film becomes paradoxical (Bellour and Penley :2000:22)

I was aware that by selecting particular scenes to analyse it increases the subjectivity of my research and had the risk of reinforcing any conscious or unconscious bias I may have. As Bellour and Penley (2000) suggest:

As soon as one studies a work, quotes a fragment of it, one has implicitly taken up a textual perspective. Even if in a restrictive and regressive fashion, even if one...continues to close the text back onto itself, although it is...the locus of unbounded openness. (pg 21)

Kuntzer highlights further limitations of semiology, noting semiotic analysis deals with the ‘filmic fact’ as suggested by Ferdinand de Saussure. ‘Semiotic analysis should restrict itself to the study of film considered as a language’ (Kuntzer: 1973:44). Furthermore Kuntzer believes that as filmic fact differs from that of the cinematic fact, it isolates the language of

the film from the experiences of the film and the world surrounding it. Cinematic fact in turn encapsulates a much wider semiotics. However Kuntzer believes that semiotics doesn't remove film from its wider 'socio-economic context' as this removes ideology from the object itself. Concluding that regarding the filmic fact we must study the 'ideological interplay within the filmic fact itself' (Hayward, 1972:44).

It may also fail to address how something came to be structured as opposed to its structure (Hayward: 1996). In a similar light, no matter how much semiotic methodology we apply it must always be regarded as an interpretive mode of analysis (Leiss et.al, 1990).

2.4 PREVIOUS CASE STUDIES

Bleakley analyses rape myths in three Hollywood films utilizing Barthes semiological chain system as found in *Mythologies* (1973). Of all the case studies examined, Bleakley had the strongest methodology. She first notes how choosing the films was a three step process of identifying films that contained rape scenes using a movie database that sorted films via indexical list pertaining to them and content etc. She then made brief notes on 27 films before finally choosing the films that directly contradicted the conclusions of previous theorists in order to develop a greater understanding of those myths (2000:11) Her application of both Metz and Barthes proved a useful reference for my own studies. She combines three particular methodological system including the aforementioned Barthes Method, Metz film language in order to deconstruct scenes and a 'formatting technique... to organise the data from each film' based upon the works of Dorothy Smith (2000:13) This formatting technique though demonstrably useful for Bleakly, felt too large in quantity to fit into the constraints of my own research.

Another useful methodological tool (again referring to Barthes) was her use of ‘cinematic code of framing’ she notes ‘reoccurring cinematic representations will be assessed in terms of how the primary signification is transformed at the level of secondary signification.’ (2000:14) Finally she individually analyses the films and concludes with a comparison of the three individual scenes.

D’Alfonso semiotic analysis of the representation of Italians in film he uses multiple and varied films as primary sources, noting that their combination is ‘is somewhat contrary to the practice of studying films grouped by dominant artistic canons.’(2012:3) However D’Alfonso acknowledges that outside of categories defined by film, his selections ‘form a single category that is more cultural than generic, more sociological than psychological, more communal than individualistic.’(2012:4)

The author is aware of the difficulties that arise from analysing film language. He states ‘film has neither moneme, nor phoneme; there is no langue (rule). Film is primarily a parole (a performance, an invention) the film image is an ‘ambiguous unit’ (2012: 8).

D’Alfonso applies elaborate semiotic tools developed by theorists Christian Metz and lending from Raymond Bellour. He divides film language into ‘shots, syntagmas, mega-sequences (or mega-syntagmas), which are grouped into larger narrative chapters (or macro-sequences).’(2012:23) In order to dissect these filmic elements D’Alfonso breaks the films down by chapter, in doing so he reveals ‘interconnected visual segments (or) and, these segments, in turn, yield their corresponding sound track variations.’

His approach creates ease and accuracy for analysis, breaking film down into readable segments and ensuring that semiotics remains ordered. Subsequently, he found proof of

generic traits and repetitive ideologies within the films semiotic breakdown. Although he does not specifically make note of the rhetoric nature of the film's production he touches upon geographical locations of production and ethnicity of the director as criteria that affects films content. The weakness of his approach is it relies too heavily on formulaic dissection, and not enough for the application of theory regarding his findings.

Willis (2008) looks at 'semiotic portrayal of girlhood in the film and the cultural implications of that representation on conceptualizations of young female sexuality' in the film *Juno* (Diablo: 2008). Her approach differs from D'Alfonso in that it is markedly without the semiotic data acquired by the previous methodology. Willis was useful to my own research in that she uses the semiotic analysis of one scene in particular to demonstrate and base her findings. Willis uses her findings to address 'implications' thus widening her research, noting it 'represents a visual characterization of newly emerging constructions of girls that fuse particular aspects of traditional "femininity" and "masculinity" (2008:243).

Willis uses the positioning and context of its creation as reference point to her findings, relating it to specific western ideologies of 'girlhood and 'traditional western discourses of femininity' (243). In this instance semiotics and deconstruction of images on screen are paramount to addressing one of her prominent arguments, being that 'visual and symbolic use of the body as the primary signifier of female identity is problematic; reproduces a narrative of young female sexuality that is overly simplified' (244). While Willis makes apt use theory and its applications, she makes no reference to the limitations of her analysis choice furthermore there is little use of semiotic frameworks so thoroughly used by D'Alfonso.

Lefebvre's bases his around the theory of 'memory-image' a concept designed around the 'active processes' of human memory and the imagination. His work refers to the semiotic theory by Charles Peirce 'What we commit to memory, in other words, must have an iconic dimension whose emergence requires the faculty of imagination' (2005:43).

Lefebvre's 'memory-image' which he denotes as a 'figure' extends upon the rhetorical trope. This framing adds differentiating levels to semiology and is useful in looking at representations acquired over time or through various mediums. 'Unlike the trope, which is fixed, the figure is a semiotic and mental construction that remains open and is subject to transformations as the mind (as well as culture) acquires new representations' (2005:44).

As previously mentioned Lefebvre concerns himself with the 'rhetorical network' surrounding cannibalism and further explores its ties to capitalism and 'how this network offers our imagination a topos for our memory-image of the serial killer.' A useful part of Lefebvre methodology is his reflections on why and how he selected his primary film sources 'I will take a look at two films that activate this topos in their representation of serial killing, even though they avoid any direct thematization of it; this avoidance is precisely the reason why both films are studied here' (2008:44). In doing so he both paradoxically eradicates the over emphasis on the cannibal, yet by removing the actual act of cannibalism from his selected film he must therefore strive to replace it with interpretation. It highlights the necessity of film choice in semiotic analysis, in that films are not merely the content to analyse, their selection contributes to the analysis.

He concludes that no set method can securely and definitively lead a researcher to the 'figural.' Emphasising a need to 'attend to the ways in which the components of a text reverberate within us and within our culture, to the ways our imagination and our memory create relations for them' (2005:59).

SACRED SATIRE: FOUR LIONS

“You have to quit confusing a madness with a mission.”

□ Flannery O'Connor (1972:100)

This chapter is broken down into five subsections. The first is a look at the media representation of Islam and the rise of Islamophobia, the purpose for this is to contextualise the findings of the semiotic analysis, this is followed by a synopsis and scene breakdown. The three remaining sections look at iconography as ideology, rhetorical devices and realism and the representation of ‘otherness’(Said,1973).

3.1 MEDIA MATTERS

According to an opinion poll compiled by the University of Essex (2008), fifty eight percent of British people associated Islam with extremism. Fifty two percent believe that Muslims ‘cause problems’ and fifty five percent would be concerned if a mosque was built in their area. Whilst these statistics may be open to scrutiny; it is at first glance a damning indictment of religious attitudes in Britain. The link between the rise of negative news coverage regarding ‘Islam’ and the findings of the survey could not be overlooked if we were to take a cause and affects reading (Richardson 2004).

Content analysis research of UK broadsheets undertaken in 2008 by Moore et. al, highlighted a bias semantic correlation regarding Muslims in the news media:

In recent years, however, we have seen the increasing importance of stories focusing on religious and cultural differences between Islam and British culture or the West in general (22% of stories overall) or Islamic extremism (11% overall). Indeed, 2008 was the first year in which the volume of stories about religious and cultural differences (32% of stories by 2008) overtook terrorism related stories (27% by 2008) (Moore et al: 2008:3).

What do these statistics mean and what if anything can be taken from them? Richardson believes that anti-Islam reporting falls under the banner of racism, he states ‘Racism, xenophobia and Semitism are still widespread in Britain, perpetuating discrimination and disadvantage for the groups whom these (racist) discourses deem inferior and subordinate.’ (2006: XV)

If racism is the precipice for such bias reporting then surely ethnicity must be the root cause. Yet, what we find is a much more complex manner in which Islam is scrutinised. Islam is a word that connotes much more than Arabic or Asian it connotes religion, ideology and culture.

‘Islamaphobia’ (a term coined by The Runnymede trust) transcends, more than skin colour and geographical origin; its vagueness and dual meaning has generated much discussion and debate. ‘The term was coined because there is a new reality which needs a name. This reality must be described and defined’ however it is never the less roundly criticized by some analysts/ academics due to its ‘ambiguity and the scant consensus over its definition’ (Lorente, 2010:4). As I will address in this chapter *Four Lions* is a product of this politicising of Islam and reoccurring discussion in the public sphere.

3.2 Synopsis and scene breakdown

Four Lions was written and directed by satirist Chris Morris, whose other works include *Brass Eye*; a television program broadcast on Channel 4 that satirised in particular moral panics created by the news. *Four Lions* is a satirical comedy that follows five young men as they plan a terrorist attack on the London Marathon. The five protagonists make homemade incendiary bombs and some receive partial training in Pakistan. Throughout their mission they all have conflicting ideas about where, what or who to attack. They end up at the marathon dressed in fancy dress with bombs strapped to them; all but convert Barry lose heart yet through one accident or another they all end up blowing themselves up.

The scene selected for detailed semiotic analysis was done so for its use of intertextual elements and rhetorical tropes. It also establishes the modality in that it relates directly to realistic or 'real world' elements and thus juxtaposes familial real world media with fiction filmic representations.

The scene referred to is the first 2:40 minutes; it is the introductory scene in which we see protagonists Omar, Barry, Fiessel and Waj attempt to film their martyrdom video in the living room of their hideout. Waj is trying to film his introduction but instructed by an aggressive Barry that he is not doing it right. We then move from watching the filming to seeing Omar show his wife and son the rough cuts on a laptop in his marital home. Omar appears to be disheartened at the lack of progress and failure to produce the video "They're all bloopers" he says. His wife assures him that his take is good. We see Omar and Waj again on the laptop screen Omar begins his speech about the "Capitalist state of McDonalds" his political speech is interrupted by Waj who contends "You're all flipping idiots...Chicken Cottage...bargain bucket ...2.99).

3.3 Iconography as ideology

Both Barthes theory of visual semiotics (1957, 1977) and the study of iconography position us to ask what an image represents and how it does it (Leeuwen, 2001). The introductory scene from the film uses denotative iconography and semantics that correspond with a presupposed representation of Islam and applied context; extremism. Below is a table that breaks down the semiotic process that establishes the ‘myth’.

Figure 2: The construction of the myth of Islamic Terrorism in Four Lions based on Barthes (1957)

<p>1. Signifier</p> <p>Cinematic visual Verbal/audio</p>	<p>1 .Signified</p> <p>Asian/white men, Gun/ throw/ Cultural dress (Thaube etc) Empty room Regional accent, Arabic words Video camera</p>	
<p>1.Sign → II SIGNIFIER</p> <p>Muslim men with majority Northern accent film video with gun in empty location talk of Kufr (infidel)</p>		<p>II. SIGNIFIED</p> <p>Connotes religion (Islam) violent intolerant, threatening.</p>
<p>II. SIGN (Myth)</p> <p>Home grown terrorism is rife in the north (Yorkshire) Where Muslim men gather in secret locations to plan acts of terror against the unbelievers and record martyrdom videos. Extremist can be identified by appearance.</p>		

As we can see in the table above the **1.Signifier** is the medium by which we receive information and this instance relates to the cinematic visual and the audio (the dialogue). The **1.signified** describes what is denoted by the **1.signifier**. Listed here are what’s seen/heard without any initial interpretation, such as Asian/white men, regional accents, cultural dress. It

is when these are pieced together that they make a (first order) *sign*. In this instance we can interpret what we already know regarding Muslims to distinguish certain characteristics from cultural dress to mean Islamic dress or assign it to a particular geographic region. Also regional accents carry information and relate to our reading of the **1.signified**. This Northern accent triggers information stored regarding Muslims in say Yorkshire for example. So we establish the **1.sign** against the **11.SIGNIFIER**. The **II.SIGNIFIER** is information we bring to the assessment linking separate denotations to create one denotative sign. **The II SIGNIFIED** is what is connoted via this addition of the **II SIGNIFIER** in this instance the act of piecing together men in culturally Islamic dress posing with a gun connotes a violent religion. However we know much more regarding this connotation; it begins to embody a whole ideology and this is what Barthes calls ‘myth’. Barthes notes that myth requires “a certain knowledge of reality” (1957:19) As a conclusion we see this second order sign as conforming to a myth, the myth of home-grown, Islamic terrorism, that sounds and looks a particular way.

The use of iconography to support or reinforce myth can be changeable. As previously stated it requires knowledge external to that of just the external denotation. Regarding Islamic clothing this meaning of otherness and separation amplified in Britain after the July 2005 bombings creating an increase in tension between Muslims and non-Muslim community. Watson states ‘traditional dress was now deemed in some quarters to be symbolic of separation, as demonstrating allegiance to faith above all else’ (2008:53).

The scene referred to previously begins with a medium shot of a young man sat cross legged on the floor, the image and sound quality denotes a hand held camcorder or home video style video. The young Asian man (Waj) sits in front of a patterned throw, he has a bandana around his head on it there is a white sword and below it is Arabic lettering denoting Islamic

fundamentalism. Although not present on screen, diegetically a man's voice with a strong 'cockney' accent directs "sit properly like you mean it, no Waj don't muck about 'cause the battery's gonna' go." The man now identified as Waj, replies with a thick northern possibly Yorkshire accent "I ain't muckin' about." The camera pans out to reveal more men sat in the barely furnished room. Fiessal sits dressed in cultural Islamic dress, more specifically *furwah* an Arabic vest and a *thaube* (men's long dress).

In this instance iconography includes the use of culturally Islamic dress, Arabic lettering and use of Urdu including *kuffr* (meaning infidel, unbeliever). (See **Figure 3**) Arguably these items are symbolic of Islam, both in a cultural and religious sense and it is our interpretation and relation to these symbols of otherness.

However contextually in this instance, a driving force of extremism is often determined as religious. Ramji argues that increasingly for Muslims 'religion is treated as a problem' she continues:

The sustained focus on Islam as the definer of self-identity has the effect of ossifying religious identity and obscuring the gendered, structural and racial positioning of Muslim communities, all of which impact on the interpretation of religion (Ramji, 2005:3).

The recurrent issue of Islam as cultural verses religious is countered by the use of a white convert in Four Lions and more over an external threat is explored by the use of a White British convert, that belongs to the dominant demographic of the UK.



Figure 3: *Four Lions* Omar wears the *Keffiyeh*.

Omar, the main protagonist stands out in that he is less noticeably associated with any religious or cultural iconography. He wears momentarily in the first scene *Keffiyeh*; an Arabic scarf worn both around the head and neck that is commonly associated with the Palestinian movement (See **Figure 3**). The *Keffiyeh* however is also adopted by non-Muslims and is now part of fashionable attire (Swedenburg, 2010). Additionally he wears a tracksuit jacket and jeans and dresses the most akin to western dress, yet Omar is the most rational of the group and the most determined. Arguably the use of Omar as neutral, rational and devoid of outward representation of extremism is there to address ideology, create a sense of confliction in the viewer who favours a protagonist who appears outwardly to be intelligent and ‘normal’ even though his sole aim is to kill innocent people.

In the first scene we see the production of the *martyrdom video* using a low quality camera with low quality sound this is a direct intertextual reference to the videos that accompany news stories regarding ‘terrorism’ or ‘extremists’ and reinforces a sense of verisimilitude. In and of itself the martyrdom video has become symbolic of and unique too Islamic extremism. Regarding martyrdom videos Hafez states;

Jihadists simplify their message by relying on emotional narratives that seek to construct the image of the “heroic martyr.” Through online video clips and

biographies of suicide bombers, they play on prevailing themes of humiliation, collusion, and redemption to demonize their enemies and motivate their cadres to make “heroic” sacrifices. (2007:1)

The martyrdom video “production” is part of the paradigm that reinforces we are behind the scenes, looking behind a particular medium that constructs and reinforces the terrorist myth. Using differing camera qualities and moving from inside the martyrdom video (see **Figure 4:**) to the ‘behind the scenes’ shot (see **Figure 5**) gives the viewer a sense of a previously inaccessible view and aids in understanding the unconventional representation it also establishes the camcorder type footage as a second order sign.



Figure 4: Opening scene *Four Lions* camcorder shot.



Figure 5: *Four Lions* Inside the room shot

This is further exemplified by the use of cinema vérité styles; shaky hand held camera, naturalistic speech that isn't over rehearsed the inclusion of regional accents. It is important to note that almost no scriptural referencing is done by our protagonists; in fact our main protagonist Omar professes a dislike for his brother's strict accordance to the Quran. Religious affiliation is represented with little religious scripture at all and no use visual representation of the Quran. This reinforces the power of the icon to process large amounts of information typically in relation to confirming expectations (Leeuwen, 2001)

3.3 Rhetorical Devices

As previously mentioned juxtaposing is vital to the exploration of representation throughout *Four Lions*. Juxtaposing is the act of placing two images together and creating a third image or meaning (Shaw, 2004). *Four Lions* embodies this description in that it examines a serious theme with the use of comedy to comment on society thus generating a third meaning. The protagonists that represent a threat (in the real world) are in the filmic world; gaffe prone, more often than not idiotic and relatively harmless in character. This deconstruction of fear using the rhetorical trope of humour and parody is both entertaining and purposeful (Jordan 2010). This specifically highlighted in the scene analysed previously this instance the making of the martyrdom video, associated with terrorism, acts of evil and fanaticism is juxtapositioned with comedy. The protagonists that represent the threat are gaffe prone, in some cases idiotic and appear relatively harmless. For example Omar attempts to make a point about This deconstruction of fear using the rhetorical trope of humour and parody is both entertaining and arguably purposeful.

The use of ridicule in warfare is hardly a novel idea. Many a regime or leader has banned humour at its expense in the hope of quelling dissent, recognizing that being able to laugh at something or someone inherently diminishes the power of the ridiculed. (Goodall et.al :2012:2)

While ridicule can disarm, it can also divide and unite an audience, ‘not only by introducing negative responses that are themselves unstable and open to interpretation and change.’

(Goodall et.al :2012:7) The character of Barry in particular is a juxtaposition, he is in appearances a bald working class white male with a strong east London accent, yet he is dressed in an Arabic style tunic top a bomber jacket and has a *sunnah beard* (a traditionally Islamic beard).

The use of Barry is an interesting one in that he has all the markers that connote white masculinity yet his application of these traits is within a culturally and religiously different framework. He still acts upon elements of his stereotype such as perpetuating violence and exerting dominance, however he enacts it through other means. In this scene he is the one dictating the production, he controls the look of the Marydom video suggesting Waj is “not sitting right” , “the gun is too small”, he is the one holding the camera; the director so to speak (See **Figure 5: *Four Lions*** Inside the room shot) . His verbal rhetoric suggests he has a preconceived (or learned) notion of what it should look like and wants it to do the same suggesting his passion comes from appearances rather than from true beliefs, this is further exemplified by his idea to “bomb the mosque” in order to radicalise the Muslims which is received poorly by the others as a completely nonsensical idea.

Furthermore it contradicts the ‘them’ and ‘us’ profiling of extremism suggested by (Said 1978, Hall 1997) instead attesting to Keyser and Keyser (1984) who suggested religious representation in film varied. This is not to say the public is not aware of British converts more so White British. Yet the threat exists in the extreme and the extreme is often depicted as external to the UK or other Western countries. This generalisation of people and subsequent labelling creates what Said calls ‘supreme fictions’ (2003:18). These supreme fictions (such as ‘them vs. us’ and ‘east vs. west’) ‘lend themselves easily to manipulation and the organization of collective passion has never been more evident than in our time’. (Said, 2003:18)

3.4 Realism and the deconstruction of Otherness

To conclude, as outlined in the introduction there has been a shift in the past decade regarding attitudes towards Muslims. It was suggested that *Four Lions* deconstructed fear and by proxy, Islamophobia. From my findings I believe *Four Lions* does this in several ways.

Firstly using humour it breaks down the myth of terrorism being enacted by infallible villains trained by the al-Qaeda. Also variety of characters allows for a wider look at Islam its ideologies and interpretations; Islam is not an immovable ideological force. It suggests that extremism and more so terrorism can be a mix of half hearted ideological values, misplaced honour and herd mentality as typified by Waj.

Ultimately it deconstructs the myth that visually it appears to reinforce, it does so by way or contrast. For example regional accents can hold multiple meanings, especially in this context. They serve as both a rhetorical device and a generic convention of the genre of the film. For examples: Omar “our kid” Waj “ey up you unbelieving *Kufr* bastards”. In this they reinforce a myth that certain areas of the north have a high percentage of Muslims for example Bradford has become known as Bradfordstan. However it creates a familiarity and a sense of Englishness.

More so as *Four Lions* can be seen as adhering to the generic codes and conventions of the social realist genre, that relies upon our relation to everyday life. (Watson, 2008) Included in this is the use of non studio/ on location settings, regional identities and semi improvised scripts. Allen (2010) describes the film as a:

‘Terribly earnest kitchen sink feel-good Brit film...in which a group of poor down trodden outsiders from the North of England painstakingly overcome their doomed

predicament to finish in a crowd-pleasing blaze of glory and tears...Expect in this case of course, they're all suicide bombers.'

While I agree with the overall sentiment, I would disagree that its production as such is merely to aid comically. Yes, there is a dysphoric sense of confusion that relates to the genre as Omars wife and child look on supportively as he replays the martyrdom video bloopers with no sense of irony lost on his wife being a nurse. Yet aside from the few moments where the boundaries of realism and comedy are blurred it's arguable that other generic conventions would lose the insight into representation that social realism provides.

READING RED STATE

“People are never so completely and enthusiastically evil as when they act out of religious conviction.”

— *Umberto Eco*, (2004:24)

4.1 THE FUNDAMENTALIST FIGHT

America is the most religious country in comparison to other democratic countries with similar industrial development (Buddenbaum & Stout, 1996). Religion is part of their daily life and in particular Christianity and its principles are ingrained in and support the political decisions of its Government (Burton: 2008). Media and religion have a close relationship, from Biblical epics to ‘televangelists’. Even ideologically messianic/saviour movies with Christ like figures are central to the film industry (Dodd:2009). However films that look inwardly; that contradict or scrutinize are much fewer in number. That is not to say America is without its social commentary or satire. Kevin Smith’s satirical *Dogma* (Kevin Smith:1999) was targeted by the Catholic League in particular for its use of a character called Bethany who is the last relative of Jesus Christ and ironically (due to Catholicism’s strict anti-abortion stance) worked in an abortion clinic. In response, Smith’s film was protested in several counties, Miramax removed their name from production and Smith received death threats, mostly encouraged by The Catholic League who has long been a censor and moral overseer of Hollywood film (Skinner, 1993 & Dodd 2009). Despite the fact that Kevin Smith classes himself as a practicing Catholic, the film was seen as a direct attack on the Catholic Church. The protests only managed to delay the release of the film (Sieler, 2001).

More recent religious satire received mixed reviews, *Saved* (2009) was generally perceived as being an intelligent critique of fundamentalism exposing the hypocrisy of the evangelical church and satirising its extreme positions on homosexuality and abortion. The Catholic League however found it in bad taste stating ‘Christians are presented as good-natured but hopelessly narrow-minded persons who can’t negotiate life. On the other hand, the non-Christians are portrayed as tolerant and wise’ (The Catholic League, 2004).

Both *Dogma* and *Saved* can be classed as religious satire, the use of comedy as a rhetorical trope is obvious in both, yet *Saved* uses exaggerated satire as opposed to ironic satire used in *Dogma* or *Borat* for example. Effectively it ‘tends to exaggerate stereotypes to the point of caricature. The result is a sort of hyper-magnification of the specific traits the satirist intends to ridicule, critique, or comment upon’ (Jordan, 2010:44).

In Kevin Smith’s *Red State* a similar exaggerated method has been applied but not to the same effect. *Red State* explores how fundamentalism can develop into extremism. It is important to note here the difference between fundamentalism and extremism is most often noted as when belief crosses a threshold that causes harm to others (Pratt, 2007).

The characters in *Red State* are debatably based on the West Borough Baptist church, which is ran by Fred Phelps and made up mostly of the Phelps family. They are Christian fundamentalists who picket express homophobic and anti-semitic views via the picketing of funerals of homosexuals or people that have died in plane crashes (ADL, 2010).

They were made internationally known via the BBC documentary *Louis Theroux’ Most Hated Family in America* (2007). The Westboro Baptist church openly condemns homosexuality, other religions, divorce, abortion, remarriage. They are renowned for

celebrating tragedies such as 9/11 terrorist attacks for which they ‘thank God for Sept. 11 and 3,000 dead sodomite Americans in 2001’ (WBC, 2005). Their extremist views have led them to be considered as a hate group and therefore monitored by the Anti- Defamation league (ADL,2011).

4.2 SYNOPSIS AND SCENE

Red State is an action-horror that focuses on three young men who meet up with a woman they met on the internet for what they assume is casual sex. The meeting turns out to be a trap and they are drugged and kidnapped by the Five Points Trinity Church led by Abin Cooper, a character that bares many similarities to Fred Phelps. They are taken to the church where an apparently homosexual man has been tied to a cross and is executed; the three young men await the same fate. It is suggested earlier on in the film that the Cooper family have been carrying out these murders in order to have funerals to picket. When one of their hostages escapes a gun fight occurs and the police are called in. A siege occurs and a gun fight between the church and the ATF (Alcohol Tobacco and Fire Arm) agents are ordered to kill everyone inside after they accidentally shoot a hostage in order to cover up their mistake. The shoot out comes to a standstill as loud trumpets sound out into the skies, the Coopers believe it to be the coming of the Apocalypse and await the rapture. It turns out the trumpets were coming through a sound system wire up to an iPod: a trick played on them by their disgruntled neighbours unaware of the shootout undergoing. Abin is imprisoned.

The church is dimly lit, the creaks of the floorboard as Abin walks connote an old empty feelings combined with the sparsely filled pews and the blank walls it creates a feeling of being disconnected. The people in the pews are made up of men women and children all

smiling and laughing, a woman knits. These signify normality juxtaposed against Jared who is wheeled onto the church stage, covered in a cloth he is blind to his surrounds except for the singing of the church congregation. We cut back to Abin, he is dressed in a shirt and tie, his grey hair and glasses connotes age and wisdom. The shot is medium close up directly behind him is an archway through which a small coloured glass window can be seen, to his left is a large black wooden cross and below the cross is a statue or person covered in a white cloth. The clothed image is synonymous with horror and the supernatural. Abin delivers his sermon, full of Bible quoting and righteous rhetoric, he justifies the killing about to be undertaken as an act of god Jared pulls of the cloth covering him in time to see the man executed at point blank range.

4.3 MYTH AND ICONOGRAPHY

As mentioned in the previous chapter myth can be devised and understood using a methodology of understanding developed by Barthes. *Four Lions* represents not only religion but culture also and in that sense it makes it easy to determine myth being signified by a particular semiotic representation. Christian fundamentalism is not as easily typified as pertaining to myth or projecting one. However Burken states:

In the last quarter of a century, religion has emerged as something of a 'dark force' in human affairs. Its negative associations have come from two main sources. One is the prevalent stereotype about New Religious Movements, under the rubric of 'cults', and the other is the perceived threat posed by 'fundamentalism'(2003:54).

This dark force translates more from a myth into an opinion regarding religion as a secondary ideology now within the state apparatus and not fundamental to our everyday beliefs.

Figure 6 The Myth of fundamentalism and demographic

<p>1. Signifier</p> <p>Cinematic Visual</p> <p>Audio (Verbal)</p>	<p>1 .Signified</p> <p>Large wooden cross</p> <p>Pews/ congregation</p> <p>Homophobic Bible quotes</p> <p>Preying (amen, hallelujah)</p> <p>Man tied to cross/gagged.</p> <p>Old Male Pastor</p> <p>White people old/young</p> <p>Middle American</p> <p>Run down church</p>
<p>1.Sign→ II SIGNIFIER</p> <p>Strong Christian belief in church associated with violence</p>	<p>II. SIGNIFIED</p> <p>Christian Extremism, homophobic rhetoric, Reinforced by bible</p> <p>White middle American conservatism.</p>
<p>II. SIGN (Myth)</p> <p>Christian fundamentalism/ extremism is associated with a demographic, of white conservative middle American. Is backwards and hypocritical.</p>	

As explored in the table, one of the rhetorical devices used in *Red State* is the connotations and of rural and middle America (see figure 6). The **II SIGN** (read myth) is developed by various associations made both religiously and culturally. The first as I have mentioned is the link between otherness and Middle (rural) America, Preston (2012) states;

‘In the Murder/Suspense genre the rural backdrop becomes an isolated location in which to terrorize victims. The rural law enforcement officer turned detective is another cliché.’

This rural setting has become a staple for horror films and symbolic of a backward society. This separation from the forward contemporary metropolitan and urban America signals not only a difference in social economic climate but a difference in ideology. Therefore *Red*

State's setting seems more than conventional for the characters and pertains to preconceived ideas.

However, to jump from conservative Middle American to murdering religious extremist relies on the use of Christian iconography, bible quoting and the unnatural responses from both pastor and congregation. In the particular scene examine the young man is bound to the cross; Abin appears to address his congregation in a way representing a sacrificial ritual. His repetition of bible quotes and the congregation that is made up of men women and children young and old seemingly continue to smile and agree amidst the muffled cries of the man about to be executed.

Reinhartz notes 'Biblical utterances require us to adjust our views of these characters' later noting 'at times it serves as a commentary on the action' (2003:185). Indeed this is true in the scene analysed. This is not just a homophobic murder it is one that the pastor and the surrounding people justify with the use of scripture. The autonomy of principles generates a more sinister feel to the Five Point Church and its members as no amount of pleading from their victims can ever undo the word (and commands) of god written in the Bible. This removes an element of humanism from them; although they show humanistic traits and kindness to one another. Referring back to Reinhartz second quote, how does the bible quoting reinforce the action, firstly let's address two of the bible passages quoted.

The first bible passage quoted is: 'This *is* the day *which* the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.' KJV (Psalm.118.24) followed shortly by:

'If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.' KJV (Lev.20.13)

The initial passage strengthens the idea that the actions and there in the acts they are about to do are blessed by god and they should be happy about it. The passage from Leviticus is utilized by fundamentalists and biblical literalists alike as backing for their homophobic views despite the general consensus being it is out of context and a mistranslation (Isler, 2009). Here we see Abin deliver it with an eerily understated righteousness greeted by the replies of the congregation “Preach it daddy” and “granddaddy” which all connote a patriarch and the colloquialism reflects a youthful affection towards the preacher.

Grant (2007:12) describes icons as:

‘Second order symbols in that their symbolic meaning is not necessarily a connection established within the individual text but is already symbolic because of their use across a number of previous texts.’

Religious icons are well established, for example the crucifix is now iconic of Christianity. It is a singular image that not only denotes Christianity as a faith but connotes the ideologies of a whole religion. In the sermon scene iconography is rife; the actual congregation, their actions, words and idiosyncrasies connote spirituality, faith and can be deemed iconic or symbolic in themselves. Yet more importantly are the iconic artefacts such as the bible and the cross.

The crosses use in the vampire film expressed the notion that ‘the traditional values it embodied’ were stronger than ‘the values assigned to the monster’ or vampire. It transcends just Christian values; further representing Western culture (Grant, 2007:12).

As Pastor Abin delivers his sermon, the cross serves as both visual and psychological prop that gives authority to his words. This can be interpreted in two ways; the first is to reinforce the Christian ideology, a prop that enhances the scriptural references. The second and most

likely interpretation is to highlight the hypocrisy, the absurdity of committing murder and preaching hatred in front of a sacrilegious symbol.



Figure 7: *Red State* Low Angle Preacher

The low camera angle (see figure 7) gives the pastor the feeling of dominance and importance. Positioned to his left is a large cross. This cohesion of his words and the cross give his words a power, an association. Similarly the Bibles use is iconic. The use of the ‘Bible’ in a filmic sense can incorporate both its contents and its aesthetic acting as an icon in and of itself. Within the horror genre the Bible is utilized in several different ways including the power to drive away evil and banish fear. It can also be the source or inspiration for evil, obsession and insanity Beavis (2003). She expands upon the latter as referring to:

‘Mentally unstable characters ... [that]are obsessed by a distorted view of scripture. In such films, the authority and basic goodness of the scriptures are not questioned; it is human error or psychosis that makes the Bible dangerous’(2003)

Indeed the film does not appear to critique religion in its entirety nor condemn or ridicule religion; instead it highlights the concerns of a literalist approach to scripture. Or as the T.F.A officer describes after the final showdown “people do strange things when they believe they’re entitled. People do even stranger things when they plain believe.” The Bible in this instance is the solid source of this “entitlement.”



Figure 8: *Red State* Bible Close Up



Figure 9: *Red State* Gun in Bible

The use of the Bible acts as a visual metaphor (see **Figures 8 & 9**), the gun that is encased in a bible with the pages cut out to fit the shape of the weapon can suggest much about the ideologically about their actions. Firstly the Bible as the foundation of religion represents it in its entirety, the gun being hidden inside it can connote the violence hidden inside the church, disguising their actions as sanctimonious. It also suggests that by the pages being cut or damaged in order to do this that this very act damages the church the faith and literally the Bible in order to accommodate this violence. On the other hand it suggests that the Bible holds the power to bless the weapon with the powers to do gods bidding, akin to that of a sacrificial knife.

At the climax of the scene, a young man is executed at point blank range while tied with cling film to a large wooden cross. The camera orbits around the cross and we cut between the congregation preying the cuts are repetitive and frequent creating a sense of dysphoria. The man who delivers the gunshot to the head informs the man tied to the cross to “rot in hell

faggot” and after his execution he is kicked into a trapdoor beneath the church stage descending into a darkness representative of hell. This reinforces the Coopers as earthly being undertaking the work of god as it enacts Christian mythology.



Figure 10: *Red State* Reveal



Figure 11: *Red State* Congregation pray



Figure 12: *Red State* Execution

The cinematic device of close up camera shots combined with shaky hand held camera and quick shots connote a claustrophobic and anxious atmosphere and creates a sense of urgency. The combination of this with the church singing and the church mise-en- scené creates an alien and unfamiliar feeling, giving the ‘extremists’ a sinister and overwhelming sense of power and evil.

4.4 Ideology

To conclude, there is a sense of filtering that must be done regarding *Red State* in that there is an exploitative and exaggerated element to its narrative and representations. It is clear this is not a direct representation of the Phelps and Smith even attests to that in the film with the T.F.A officer directly referring to the Phelps of the Westboro Baptist church noting they were not yet the murderous type. Smith unlike Morris appears to be suggesting that religious ideology is the root cause of such extremism.

Again extremism is linked with both ignorance and idiocy, comments such as “watch he don’t get any of that gay saliva on ya’ it’ll turn ya!” as shouted by Abin, suggest that extremism is linked to a general ignorance or the belief in unsubstantiated claims. However

what is clear is an ideology is present and it is contained with those depicted on screen.

Nichols calls this link or aspects of symbolic ideology 'ideological elements,' that we need to identify 'to discover the aspects of representation that embody them, to understand the place set out for us within such processes' (1981:3) In this it is religious iconography and demographic that embody them. Religious iconography alone does not offer one ideology; it may offer one first order sign however context must always be applied. 'The utilization of iconic representation in film would justify by itself examining how our perception of film and reality correspond' Nicholls (1981:3) While the representation of religion may sometimes be fixed, its practitioners are varied (Keyser and Keyser, 1984). This variation however, must give way to context in order to comment socially on religious extremism.

FINAL THOUGHTS

During the research so many consistencies and comparisons arose between the two films that it felt pertinent that a separate chapter were dedicated to the findings.

Firstly while both films clearly seek to undermine religious extremism and point out its dangers and its flaws, they both comment on other issues on a socio-political level.

Throughout *Four Lions* there is reference to the surveillance methods employed by the police in order to counter terrorism. In many of the scenes Barry instructs the group to utilize his methods of avoiding being detected. Including eating your sim card and rapidly shaking your head to distort your image on the CCTV. While comical some of these instances are it was clear that Morris was commenting on its successes and failures implicit in the fact that from all the surveillance type footage we see through the film it is in the end Omars brothers house that is raided: who follows scripture to the letter yet tries to ward Omar off whatever it is that he is planning.

The latter half of *Red State* refers in part to the Patriot Act of 2001, produced in the wake of September 2001 terror attacks in New York. The act was seen as giving ‘too much power to Law enforcement’ (Rosen, 2011) as such the Five Point church are deemed terrorists and executed outright by the police involved in the shootout. It suggests extremism no matter what the religion is interlaced, connected and embedded in all matter and acts of a government it is not an isolated incident.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Both use representation as a narrative device, meaning that who they are drives their story, their actions although in the scenes analysed are concurrent with who they are or the ideology they embody as icons of that ideology (Nichols, 1981).

Also both highlight issues that would be viable for further research including religious extremism as a masculine trait (Labidi: 2010). The lack of female representation within these films limits the current findings as they are restricted by the one-sided representation.

CONCLUSION

When I first developed my research question I was concerned that I would find a one dimensional answer that would offer very little insight into the representation of religious extremism in film. I felt certain that outside of the catacomb of religious fundamentalist propaganda, religious extremism will be represented negatively in main stream film.

However, the more I researched the films *Four Lions* and *Red State* the more it became apparent the films were suggesting that religious extremism is more than just a black and white subject. Although, religion in film was a relatively new research area for me as soon as I became aware of its presence religion became entangled in film everywhere I looked. Whether ideologically or ironically, its spans genres both subconsciously and stylistically engaging in theological discourse in the most unlikely of places.

A semiotic analysis has a wide and layered theoretical background with the like of Barthes, Metz and Hall all combining the methodology in order to understand representation.

Therefore in light of my research I felt from an interpretive point of view it has been ideal for film analysis. However to take this further I would use qualitative audience research as I feel just from the general virtual ethnographic research undertaken regarding these films during their selection process that there are multiple ways that they have been viewed from an audiences perspective. In particular as they are satirical there is as highlighted by Jordon (2010) and Ciacco (2004) a misreading that can mean an audience is not aware of the duality of the texts reading.

In relation, *Four Lions* could be seen as a blatantly exploitative film done in bad taste with little regard for the victim of the 7/7 bombings in London: that however is not what the

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analysis suggests. It suggests that *Four Lions* opens up a dialogue that the news media seem reluctant to have. Home-grown terrorism is hard for us to understand because we cannot easily identify 'the enemy', the news continues to reinforce its links with al-Qaeda and a grander scheme yet as Said suggests this only reinforces this 'supreme narrative' and does not address the reality that 'terrorist' does not automatically eradicate the 'human'. Humanising should not be confused with agreeing with or making light of yet a deconstruction of fear makes way for answers. This is what *Four Lions* attempts and in my opinion succeeds at doing, it humanises extremism so that we might better understand it, critique it and fight it as film increasing has the power to make a difference (LeBeouf, 2007).

Red State takes on a wholly different approach than *Four Lions*. Yet again my research suggests it is done so as to have purpose. The films exaggeration of a type of fundamentalism that occurs in America seeks to highlight the possibilities of what people can do when their actions are backed by the infallible word of god and a charismatic patriarch, a risk seen all too often to come to fruition such as Waco, Heaven's Gate and Jones Town.

Theorists suggest that film has replaced religion (Walsh-Pasulka, 2005) and that it embodies its virtues while disregarding its legends to make it marketable (Koslovic, 2005). They also suggest it skews the perception of its practitioners with representative falsehoods (Ramji, 2005) or develop our understanding of scriptures role within society (Wallis&Aston, 2011).

While all of these aspects are evident in research I would argue that further to this, these film attempt to answer the 'why' and the 'how' asked by the public after religious extremism leaves its many causalities.

While writing up my findings, a 'terrorist act' occurred in America that closely mirrored the plot of *Four Lions*; two bombs went off at the Boston Marathon. I contemplated its integration in this work and initially felt it would hold little purpose, however in the days that

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followed the attacks the news media was inundated with stories regarding who these two people were. Despite their Cheyenne origins from all the first hand reports they appeared so American so 'us' and not 'other'. It was this desperation to comprehend how an 'extremist' or a 'terrorist' didn't fit an assumed representation that exemplified the deconstruction of *the* myth. It became evident that within the public sphere extremism has to have a face, a religion, an accent, a way of life and it must fit in order for us to feel comfortable, in order to uphold the supreme narrative. That is what these films undo, they undo previously held representations and suggest that extremism is not a predictable, or conventional representation of previously held assertions that are maintained in part by a continuing rhetoric of segregation perpetuated by the news media. They are flexible, current and constantly shaped by real world situations and events.

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