

Truth, Power, and the Body: A Sociological Analysis of Heretic (2024)

Nuriye ÇELİK*

Abstract

This article offers a sociological analysis of *Heretic* (2024) by examining how the film reproduces relations of truth, belief, and power in the post-truth era. Drawing on Foucault's concepts of governmentality and truth regimes, Butler's idea of performativity, and Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality, the study analyzes the film's representational strategies. Using qualitative discourse analysis and scene-based thematic coding, the findings are organized around four axes: (1) religious discourses are constructed as technologies of power; (2) truth is suspended through simulation and layers of representation; (3) the female body is governed through disciplinary and control practices; and (4) ethical resistance emerges through collective subjectivity and orientation toward the Other. The study argues that *Heretic* is not merely a thriller but a cultural text that exposes the fragility of truth, the politics of the body, and the possibilities of ethical subjectivation in a post-truth context. The significance of the study lies in its theoretical and analytical contribution to the fields of cinema and media sociology.

Keywords: Post-Truth, Ideology, Religious Representation, Hyperreality, Power and Agency

Hakikat, İktidar ve Beden: Heretic (2024) Filminin Sosyolojik Bir Çözümlemesi

Öz

Bu makale *Heretic* (2024) filmini, post-truth çağda hakikat, inanç ve iktidar ilişkilerinin yeniden üretimi bağlamında sosyolojik olarak incelemektedir. Çalışmada Foucault'nun hükümet etme ve hakikat rejimleri yaklaşımı, Butler'ın toplumsal cinsiyetin performatifliği ve Baudrillard'ın hipergerçeklik kavramı bir araya getirilerek filmdeki temsil biçimleri çözümlenmiştir. Nitel söylem analizi ve sahne-temelli tematik kodlama yöntemi kullanılmış, bulgular dört eksende toplanmıştır: (1) dinsel söylemler bir iktidar teknolojisi olarak kurgulanmakta, (2) hakikat, simülasyon ve temsiller üzerinden askıya alınmakta, (3) kadın bedeni disiplin ve kontrol pratikleriyle yönetilmekte, (4) etik direniş ise kolektif özneleşme ve ötekine yönelim üzerinden şekillenmektedir. Sonuç olarak *Heretic*, yalnızca bir gerilim filmi değil, post-truth çağda hakikatin kırılganlığını, bedensel siyaseti ve etik özneleşmenin imkânlarını açığa çıkaran bir kültürel metin olarak değerlendirilmelidir. Çalışmanın önemi, sinema ile medya sosyolojisi alanlarına sağladığı kuramsal ve analitik katkıda ortaya çıkmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Söylem Analizi, İdeoloji, Dinsel Temsil, Hipergerçeklik, İktidar ve Özneleşme

CITATION: Çelik, N. (2025). Truth, power, and the body: A sociological analysis of *Heretic* (2024). *Medya ve Din Araştırmaları Dergisi (MEDİAD)*, 8(2), 499-521. <https://doi.org/10.47951/mediad.1789894>

* Assoc. Prof., Sinop University, e-mail: nuriyesenelcelik@gmail.com, orcid.org/0000-0001-6368-1956, Sinop, Türkiye

Introduction

Heretic (2024) is a psychological thriller produced by A24 and directed by Scott Beck and Bryan Woods. The leading roles are played by Hugh Grant, Sophie Thatcher, and Chloe East. The film opens an intense discussion on belief, power, and truth through the story of two young women who, while on a missionary visit, encounter a mysterious man (Mr. Reed). Taking place in a confined setting, this thriller questions the manipulation techniques of religious authority and the limits of individual resistance, while offering a powerful allegory of truth regimes in the post-truth era.

In English, the term heretic refers to “a person who departs from official or dominant religious doctrine, regarded as faithless or deviant” (“Heretic”, 2024). The word originates from the Greek *hairetikos*, carrying the sense of “choosing or following a different path” (Harper, 2024). However, the concept is not confined to unbelief; as Russell Kirk emphasized, “the heretic is not an unbeliever (far from it) but rather a man who emphasizes some point of doctrine too strongly and obsessively” as cited in Harper (2024). The choice of this title invites viewers to reflect not only on those who oppose authority but also on excesses within belief itself. Thus, from the very title, the film brings to the stage both the historical and contemporary tensions of deviating from faith and asserting an alternative claim to truth against authority.

The reason for selecting Heretic (2024) in this study lies in the film’s striking portrayal of how truth, belief, and authority are reproduced in today’s post-truth era. Centring on the tension between the manipulation techniques of religious discourse, individual subjectification processes, and competing truth claims, the film generates an allegorical response to the rise of religious conservatism and crises of truth in the current socio-political climate. As an A24 production that pushes the aesthetic and narrative boundaries of contemporary cinema, the film provides a valuable case not only in the context of cultural production but also for sociological theory and media research. The allegory constructed in the film does more than expand the scope of the present analysis; it also offers an analytical framework for future studies that aim to understand religious representations and processes of reality-making within power networks in countries such as Türkiye. In this way, the film allows for a reading of contemporary socio-cultural dynamics while simultaneously providing a conceptual starting point for future comparative research. These initial considerations highlight the need for a broader theoretical lens. For this reason, the following section outlines the conceptual framework that informs the analysis.

1. Theoretical Background

The theoretical foundation of this study lies at the intersection of Foucault’s concept of governmentality and Hjarvard’s theory of mediatization. This synthesis demonstrates how contemporary religious authorities seek legitimacy through processes of media staging. It also provides a critical framework for understanding how technology of belief management operates within the logic of media. Foucault’s notion of “governmentality” explains the operating logic of modern power: power is no longer merely prohibitive but functions through a productive logic that governs the behaviours and thought patterns of subjects (Foucault vd., 1991, p. 7-10). This perspective opens what Burchell, Gordon, and Miller in *The Foucault Effect* conceptualized as the “government of belief”: governmentality is not confined to economic and political domains but encompasses a broad repertoire of power technologies that extend to belief and identity formation (Burchell et al., 1991). This is due, undoubtedly, to the intricate relationships between

belief systems and structures of power. Belief systems hold significant power both in determining which forms of knowledge are valid and absolute, and in prescribing ideals for ways of life. As depicted in Émile Zola's novel *Vérité* (Truth) (Zola, 2021), throughout history belief systems and their representatives have frequently appeared as structures that define "truth" and wield knowledge as an instrument of social control. Dean systematically connects Foucault's concept of governmentality to contemporary power techniques, showing how liberal and neoliberal rationalities of governance operate (2010). Rose (1999) deepens this framework by analysing the complex articulation between governmentality, subjectivity, and regimes of freedom, revealing how modern power functions through the discourse of freedom (p. 1-40). This approach makes it possible to understand how religious authorities also develop governmental strategies through discourses of "free belief" and "personal choice." At this point, Butler's (1990, 1997) views which emphasize that gender is not merely a cognitive "consent" but rather a bodily sequence of repeated obedience and resistance, contribute to the analysis. According to Butler, gender is constructed performatively, that is, through reiterative bodily practices. Bartky (2015) explains this process in the case of the female body through internalized micro-disciplines and regimes of self-regulation. Within this framework, practices such as contraceptive implants, detention and confinement, enforced cold, starvation, restrictions on clothing, and spatial limitations appear in the film as bodily regimes through which consent is produced or withdrawn. In this way, technologies of belief intersect with technologies of the body; the discourse of governmentality operates through the body. This theoretical approach directly informs the film's scene analyses, which detail how the female body is positioned as the bearer of both "persuasion" and "resistance."

Hjarvard's (2008) theory of mediatization creates a critical intersection with the analysis of governmentality. Mediatization describes the processes through which religious practices are shaped by media logic. Here, media does not function merely as a passive channel but as an active agent that transforms religious experience. In this process, traditional religious authorities must adapt to media formats, timing, and aesthetic codes to gain visibility. In this sense, for example, the Vatican is positioned not only as a religious authority but also as an actor within the modern culture industry. Through mass media strategies, visual symbols, and global communication tools, belief circulates and is reproduced like a cultural product. Hoover's (2006) analysis in *Religion in the Media Age* shows the social dimensions of this transformation. In the media age, while religious identities and practices are being reshaped, traditional authorities seek legitimacy through media representations. This search, however, is certainly not unique to religious authorities. Political leaders who produce populist discourse also continually seek legitimacy through media tools, and at times, these sources of legitimacy shift around notions such as religion, nation, or national identity. Meyer's (2009) work on sensory-aesthetic formations reveals how belief is performatively reproduced through staging and sensory regimes within these processes of legitimation. In this study, elements such as visual composition, rhythm and repetition (*mise-en-scène*), the use of scent and light, and transitions between home and church are treated as sensory-aesthetic belief mechanisms. In the post-truth context, these mechanisms stage the miraculous as sensory intensities detached from verification criteria yet persuasive in effect, producing an effect of truth (Baudrillard, 1994). This approach provides theoretical grounding for analysing how the film's choreography of miracles and its repetitions generate hyperreality through the aesthetic logics of media.

The synthesis of governmentality and mediatization makes possible the concept of mediatized governmentality. This approach allows us to understand how religious authorities develop new techniques of governance through media and how belief is managed within processes of mediatized staging. Couldry & Hepp's (2017) analysis of mediated construction of reality deepens the epistemological dimensions of these processes. Truth effects are produced within mediating processes, and religious authorities participate in these truth-making practices as part of their ongoing search for legitimacy. Hall's (1993) encoding/decoding model reveals how religious messages are read through cultural codes and highlights the multilayered nature of audience reception of mediated representations. Under post-truth conditions, Harsin (2018, p. 1-15) analysis of the crisis of epistemic authority and McIntyre (2018, p. 1-25) discussions on regimes of truth help situate the contemporary context of religious authorities' mediatized legitimacy strategies. This theoretical framework enables an analysis of religious authorities' media stagings both as techniques of governmental power and as dynamics of mediatization. The empirical analysis of this study will be conducted using the conceptual tools produced at the intersection of these two theoretical lines. With this repertoire, the study undertakes a sociological analysis of a cinematic work.

Sociological analysis approaches cinema not only in terms of "what it tells" but also "how it tells" and "why it tells in this way now." Films are texts that reflect the cultural codes, normative assumptions, and hegemonic conflicts of the period in which they are produced. Hall (1997) defines representation not as a mirror-like relation but as a field of struggle in which meaning is socially constructed. From this perspective, cinema does not merely show how gender, race, class, or belief is represented; it also provides a means to examine the discourses through which these representations are legitimized. The literature includes significant studies that address the multilayered relationship between cinema, ideology, and social structures. For example, Cusack (2016) demonstrates how contemporary cinema critically redefines belief systems through fictional representations of religion. Similarly, Arin (2020) in his work *Ideology and the Paradox of Ideological Criticism in Cinema*, emphasizes that cinema should be studied in its social, economic, political, and ideological dimensions, pointing out that it is not only a tool serving dominant ideologies but also a platform where those ideologies can be questioned. Along the same lines, Aytekin (2018), in *Discourse and Ideology in Cinema: A Study on the Films of Samira Makhmalbaf*, analyses how cinema gives meaning to and reproduces social practices by examining how language is shaped by ideology and discourse. Yilmaz et al., (2008) in *On the Relationship Between Cinema and Ideology*, stresses that cinema has been connected to ideology since its beginnings and carries ideological significance. He notes that debates about whether cinema reflects reality or reproduces ideology intensified after the events of 1968. The idea that cinema not only tells individual stories but also reproduces or challenges historical memory, collective traumas, and social ideologies has gained growing acceptance in social sciences (Shohat & Stam, 2014; Wayne, 2001). Through cultural representations, cinema makes dominant ideologies visible while also carrying the potential to transform or subvert them (Comolli & Narboni, 2014). Many contemporary films that employ postmodern narrative forms contribute to struggles against ideological hegemony by making structural inequalities and historical codes underlying individual experiences visible (Elsaesser, 2001). Within this framework, pioneering works in feminist film theory underline the central role of gender perspectives: Kuhn (1994) situates representations of women in cinema within historical and cultural contexts, while Mulvey (2006) concept of the "male gaze" exposes power relations

embedded in cinematic narratives. Heise & Tudor (2016) discuss the reasons for the institutional distance between cinema and sociology, arguing that film should be considered not only as an art form but also as a sociological text. Similarly, Wejbert-Wąsiewicz (2020) examines the historical roots and contemporary orientations of the sociology of cinema, addressing production, consumption, and representation within an integrated framework. In addition, the critical tradition of the Frankfurt School, particularly Adorno & Horkheimer (2002) critique of the culture industry and Kracauer's (2019) reading of cinema as a mirror of social consciousness and reality, provides a strong theoretical basis for analysing the relationship between cinema and society. Therefore, the sociological analysis of cinema requires an interdisciplinary approach that intersects feminist theory, critiques of the culture industry, and the study of social representation.

Thus, cinema can function both as an ideological apparatus and as an alternative space where critical discourse is produced (Bordwell et al., 2004). The ways in which social categories such as gender, class, religion, and ethnicity are represented in film texts are not merely visual choices; they are discursive choices that reveal how power, cultural norms, and historical memory are constructed. For this reason, film analysis is not only an aesthetic or narrative practice but also a sociological activity situated at the intersection of cultural studies and ideological critique. Contemporary cinema functions not only as a carrier of social representations but also as a discursive space that makes visible the epistemological, ethical, and ideological fractures of the present age. The film *Heretic* offers a multilayered narrative on how truth regimes, religious discourses, and individual forms of belief are transformed in the post-truth era. This transformation erodes the traditional distinction between “true” and “false,” as belief, representation, and power are continually reproduced within a dynamic triangle. The theoretical grounding of this study is structured around power and discourse as well as body politics in the post-truth age, with Foucault and Butler serving as key reference points. The analysis focuses particularly on two dimensions: power and discourse, and body and gender politics. Within this framework, Michel Foucault's reflections on power and regimes of truth provide tools for analysing forms of authority and manipulation in the film, while Judith Butler's approach to gender and body politics serves as a central reference for explaining the control and representation of the female body. This framework allows the film to be read not only as an aesthetic or theological narrative but also as a social text situated at the intersection of belief, ethics, and power in the post-truth era.

The analysis of cinema as a site of ideological reproduction requires engagement with foundational work in media and communication studies. Hall's (1993) encoding/decoding model demonstrates that media texts are not transparently received but are actively decoded within specific cultural frameworks, shaped by power relations and social positioning. This approach reframes cinema not as a mirror of reality but as a contested terrain of representation (Hall, 1997). Building on this, Kellner & Share, (2021) argues that media culture functions as a primary site where ideological formations are circulated, negotiated, and contested through narrative and symbolic structures. In the context of *Heretic*, religious discourse operates as what Kellner terms a “diagnostic critique” of power, revealing how belief systems are staged, marketed, and naturalized. Similarly, Silverstone's (1999) work on the moral economy of media underscores that media texts do not merely inform but shape the symbolic and ethical order within which audiences make sense of truth and authority. Couldry's (2003, 2012) concept of media rituals extends this by showing how repeated media practices generate a sense of social centre, legitimizing certain truth claims while marginalizing others. In *Heretic*, Reed's staging of miracles functions as a ritualized performance,

what Couldry would identify as a "media-enabled myth" that suspends verification in favour of sensory persuasion. The mediatization of religious experience further necessitates attention to digital culture and epistemic fragility. Lister et al., (2009) argue that digital media fundamentally alter the relationship between representation and reality, creating layered, manipulable truth claims. Corner (2011) emphasizes that understanding media form is inseparable from understanding how subjectivity and belief are constructed within mediated environments. These insights are particularly relevant in the post-truth context, where the boundaries between authentic and simulated experience collapse (Waisbord, 2018). The theoretical discussion above also shapes the methodological choices of this study. The theoretical considerations above also guide the methodological choices of this study, which are detailed in the next section.

2. Methodology

Research design and approach: This study is a single-case design, text-centred, and critical-interpretive qualitative film analysis. The analytic strategy combines theoretically informed directed content analysis with thematic analysis and qualitative discourse analysis. Priority higher-order codes derived from the theoretical framework (governmentality/truth regimes, mediatization, performative body) were inductively expanded with new patterns emerging from the text, and the process advanced through abductive reasoning (theory ↔ data mutual feeding) ((Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fairclough, 1992, 1995; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Research questions and analytic propositions: The study is structured around the following research questions (RQ):

- RQ1. How does Heretic represent religious and cultural discourses in the post-truth context, and through which power/discourse strategies are these representations constructed?
- RQ2. Through which mechanisms of simulation and hyperreality is the relationship between truth and representation staged in the film?
- RQ3. Through which disciplinary, controlling, and performative practices are the female body and gender made visible in the film?
- RQ4. How do the characters' belief, resistance, and ethical choices problematize the individual's relationship to belief systems in the post-truth era?

In line with qualitative research in film analysis, analytic propositions (AO) were used instead of hypotheses:

- AO1. Discourses of belief are represented as power technologies that structure/manage the individual's relationship to truth.
- AO2. In the post-truth era, religious representations were reconstructed through hyperreality/simulation; this process erodes individual ethical orientation.
- AO3. The female body is disciplined through biopolitical and performative practices; consent and resistance are staged through bodily performances.

Case, corpus, and unit of analysis: The case is the feature-length film Heretic (2024). The corpus is the entire film, with the primary data being the film text. For contextualization, pretext was

reviewed only secondarily and in a limited way; the scope of analysis is restricted to the film text. The unit of analysis is the scene/sub-scene level; when necessary, elements of shot/plan and mise-en-scène (lighting, framing, objects, spatial choreography), soundtrack (music, effects, silence), and dialogue were evaluated together (Krippendorff, 2013; G. Rose, 2016).

Transcription and segmentation: The film was auto transcribed with Otter.ai, (2024); the resulting transcript (approx. 01:51:18) was checked in two stages for accuracy (words/phrases), speaker distinction, and time stamps:

i. Initial transcription and timing: Scene changes and dramatic turning points were considered, and the text was divided into scene/sub-scene units, each assigned a [mm:ss]–[mm:ss] time stamp.

ii. Enrichment: Where necessary, audiovisual notes were added to accompany dialogues (lighting, camera movement, arrangement of objects/space, recurring motifs, rhythm of silence/music use).

Analytic procedure: The analysis proceeded in four steps:

i. Initial codes (a priori) were structured around three higher-order categories derived from the theoretical axes. First, the axis of governmentality and truth technologies was analyzed through indicators such as false choice, spatial choreography, and ritual timing. Second, mediatized sensory regimes were coded through combinations of smell, light, and music, along with grandeur–contrast effects and hyperreality markers. Finally, the axis of performative body and consent/resistance was evaluated through bodily systems, clothing, pose and distance arrangements, and practices of self-restraint. These three categories served as a starting point to build the analytic bridge between the theoretical framework and empirical data.

ii. Scene-by-scene open coding was used to capture new indicators; similar codes were clustered axially, and patterns were mapped within continuity–rupture relations (Miles et al., 2014).

iii. In theme mapping, a “evidence quotation → analytic claim → theoretical interpretation” chain was established, and theme diagrams linking to the RQ/AO were created (Nowell et al., 2017).

iv. Each theme was presented with at least one short quotation and evidence; relationships between themes (causality, function, opposition) were discussed (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fairclough, 1995).

Codebook and operationalization: In the coding process, each code was structured with its operational definition, inclusion/exclusion criteria, indicators, and sample quotations from scenes. Negative examples and decision notes were also included, thereby making the scope and boundaries of coding transparent. This approach was designed and reported in line with the transparency requirements emphasized under “Units of Study & Coding” in JARS-Qual (Levitt, 2018; Saldaña, 2021). The coding table is as follows:

Table 1. Coding Table

RQ	Analytic Propositions (AO)	Theme / Code	Code Definition	Scene Example (mm:ss)	Theoretical Reference
RQ1: How are religious discourses represented in the film?	AO1: Belief is constructed not as a transcendent realm of truth but as a technology of power.	Regimes of truth and governmentality	The functioning of religious discourse not as transcendent truth but as a strategy of power directing the subject	Reed's explanation of polygamy – "marketing strategy" (Heretic, 2024, 00:22:35–00:34:12)	Foucault (1977); Althusser (1971)
RQ2: How is the relationship between truth and representation structured?	AO2: Truth is suspended through representations; simulation replaces reality.	Simulation and hyperreality	The construction of truth through representations and false signs	Pie scene, smell coming from candle (Heretic, 2024, 00:20:45)	Baudrillard (1994); Hjarvard (2008)
RQ3: How are body and gender positioned in the film?	AO3: The female body is disciplined through biopolitical and performative practices.	Body politics and gender	The control of the female body by religious authority and its reproduction through performative norms	Female prophet kept in a cage (00:82:10–00:85:00); contraceptive implant (Heretic, 2024, 00:74:30–00:76:00)	Butler (1990); Bartky (2015); Foucault (1977)
RQ4: In what forms do resistance and ethical responsibility appear?	AO4: Ethical resistance is staged not through individual autonomy but through collective solidarity.	Ethical resistance and the Other	The redefinition of belief and emancipation through orientation to the Other and collective solidarity	Paxton's prayer (95:10–98:00); Nuns embracing (Heretic, 2024, 01:41:00–01:45:00)	(Freire, 1970; Gramsci, 1971; Levinas, 1998)

Source: Table created by the author.

Coding procedure and tools: Coding was carried out with time- and date-stamped analytic notes to ensure auditability; decision points (merging/splitting codes, renaming themes) were documented. Text and multimodal notes were first organized in spreadsheet format and then arranged in a format compatible with qualitative analysis software for final verification. In this way, the analysis was conducted in line with JARS-Qual's emphasis on auditability (Levitt, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Validity, reliability, and chain of evidence: Multiple strategies were applied to ensure the validity and reliability of the research. First, theory triangulation was used; themes were not reduced to a single theoretical approach but were tested across different axes to ensure variety. Next, the code-recode technique was employed: at least two weeks after the initial coding round, the same researcher conducted a second coding round, and discrepancies were recorded, leading to revisions in the codebook. Finally, the principles of thick description and auditability were observed: sample quotations were presented together with scene context and time stamps, and all decision processes and analytic steps were preserved within an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell vd., 2017; Tracy, 2010).

Methodological limitations: A single-text design provides transferable but not generalizable results. The interpretation of sensory-aesthetic indicators involves research subjectivity. Future studies may reduce this limitation by triangulating findings through multi-film comparisons and/or audience reception (focus groups/interviews). Since no human participant data were involved, ethics committee approval was not required. Short quotations from the film are reported strictly within fair use, solely for analytic evidence, and with time stamps. The full transcript has not been shared and is retained only for research purposes. Based on the methodological approach described, the main findings of the analysis are presented below in four thematic categories.

3. Findings

Plot summary: Two Mormon missionaries, Sister Paxton and Sister Barnes, are invited into the home of a man named Mr. Reed on a stormy afternoon. At first, Reed appears hospitable, engaging them in an intense discussion about religion and demonstrating his knowledge of various theological issues. Yet the wife he claims is at home never appears, and the smell of pie from the kitchen later turns out to be nothing more than a blueberry-scented candle, an illusion. When the missionaries try to leave, they realize the front door will not open, though Reed explains this away as a timed security system. The absence of cell phone signals further cuts off their communication. Reed then persuades them that they can exit through the basement, leading them downward into a narrative structure where the characters continuously descend. Reed illustrates the manipulation of religions through history with the example of how the true inventor of Monopoly has been forgotten, suggesting that religions are cultural products published in successive “editions.” He then forces the sisters to choose between two doors marked belief and unbelief. Choosing belief, the sisters descend a staircase into the basement. There they encounter a woman introduced as a “prophet,” who dies only to be proclaimed resurrected, drawing the missionaries deeper into an experimental setup orchestrated by Reed. Sister Barnes, refusing to believe in the resurrected prophet, argues with Reed and is killed. Sister Paxton discovers through a hidden passageway one level lower that the dead woman is still there, realizing that the entire spectacle has been an illusion. The film ends with Sister Paxton uncovering the falsity of this constructed world and resisting Reed’s ideological pressures around truth, free will, and belief.

3.1. Theme 1: Regimes of Truth and Governmentality

In the film’s early scenes, Reed explains the Mormon debate on polygamy not as a “revelation” but as a marketing strategy, comparing religious systems to fast-food restaurants. This frames religious discourse not as a realm representing transcendent truth but as part of power strategies. In this context, belief is staged less as an individual relation to freedom or metaphysical truth than as a technology of control that directs the subject. Reed’s rhetoric dismisses the divine origin of religion, reducing it to a discourse grounded in the reproduction of economic and political interests. These scenes directly align with Foucault’s (1977) concept of regimes of truth, in which truth is socially produced and bound to the operations of power structures. Reed’s pragmatic interpretation of polygamy and religious reform exemplifies this perspective: truth discourse emerges not from transcendence but from historical and social power relations.

Reed’s portrayal of religions as editions of music, games, or texts is a postmodern argument that sacred narratives are not based on historical continuity but on reproducible representations. Labelling Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Mormonism as “original,” “popular,” “new edition,” and “local spin-off” suggests that religion’s social validity stems not from its truth but from its marketing success. This approach connects directly to Baudrillard’s (1994) notion of simulacra: as a narrative is repeated, it loses originality and is replaced by a hyperreal version. Reed’s use of music -comparing Radiohead’s Creep and Lana Del Rey’s Get Free- illustrates the same logic: each new religion is another variation on a previous narrative. As Jameson (1991) argues in his critique of postmodernism, depth disappears, replaced by surface-level codes in repetition. Reed’s discourse thus rests on the claim that religion operates not through originality but through versioning.

Similarly, the dilemma presented to the nuns, “belief or unbelief” is constructed as a free choice but is, in essence, a pre-structured discursive field. Althusser’s notion of ideological interpellation is illuminating here: individuals, while thinking they are making a choice, are in fact being hailed into the ideological order and constituted as subjects (Althusser, 1971). Reed’s imposed options operate not as products of free will but of the linguistic and symbolic codes of power. In this sense, the film makes visible the crisis of epistemic authority in the post-truth era. Religious representation functions less as access to transcendent truth than as a production of governance strategies and as a mechanism disciplining the subject. Heretic thus questions not only the historical practices of Mormonism but also how religious discourse becomes a technology of power in modern societies. This theme is summarized in the following table.

Table 2. Analysis of the Theme Regimes of Truth and Governmentality

Scene Evidence (mm:ss)	Analytic Claim	Theoretical Connection	Sociological Interpretation
Reed explaining Mormon polygamy as “not revelation but a marketing strategy”; comparing religions to fast-food restaurants [Heretic, 2024, 00:22:35–00:34:12]	Religious discourse does not represent transcendent truth; it becomes a technology of power governing the subject.	Foucault’s regimes of truth: truth is socially produced and operates within power structures (Foucault, 1977).	In the post-truth era, belief ceases to be a sphere of individual freedom and instead becomes an instrument of governmental strategies.
The dilemma presented to the nuns, “belief or unbelief”, is seemingly a free choice but in fact a pre-scripted discursive field set by Reed [Heretic, 2024, 00:46:10–00:48:00]	Freedom of choice is an illusion; the subject is subordinated to an ideological framework.	Althusser’s concept of interpellation (Althusser, 1971).	In the post-truth era, the crisis of epistemic authority emerges apparent choice functions as a mechanism for the reproduction of power.

Source: Table created by the author.

These findings resonate with (Kellner & Share, 2021) argument that media culture operates as a pedagogical force, teaching audiences how to interpret reality, authority, and selfhood. Reed’s reframing of religious history as “versioning” can be read through Barthes’ (1972) notion of myth: by naturalizing religion as a cultural product, Reed simultaneously demystifies and re-mystifies belief, creating a new mythology centred on control rather than transcendence. This dual movement, demystification as re-enchantment, illustrates the post-truth condition where critique itself becomes a form of manipulation.

3.2. Theme 2: Simulation and Hyperreality

The illusion of reality intensifies in the middle of the film, revealed most clearly in the blueberry pie scene. What the guests perceive through scent is later discovered to come from a candle, marking a rupture where representation takes the place of reality. This moment can be explained through Baudrillard’s concept of hyperreality: representation no longer points to reality but functions as if it were reality itself. The house designed to resemble a church, constant references to the absent wife figure who never appears, and the lack of phone signal together create a dispositive that suspends reality. This scene resonates with Hjarvard’s theory of mediatization: religious experience is not simply transmitted but reshaped through the aesthetic codes of mediating structures.

Meanwhile, Reed's staging of two doors demonstrates that the illusion of free will is itself a theatrical simulation. As Žižek, (1989) argues in his analysis of ideology, individuals may believe they are choosing, but all options function within an order already predetermined by ideology. In the film, both doors open into the same corridor, making the illusion visible. Ultimately, the film exposes how belief and truth are produced through representations, aesthetic codes, and simulation in the post-truth era. The audience comes to realize that not only the characters, but their own experience is part of the simulation.

Table 3. Analysis of the Theme “Simulation and Hyperreality”

Scene Evidence (mm:ss)	Analytic Claim	Theoretical Connection	Sociological Interpretation
Revelation that the smell of “pie” actually comes from a scented candle [Heretic, 2024, 00:20:45]	Reality slips into a false representation; truth gives way to simulation.	Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality: reality is staged through signs, and representation replaces truth (Baudrillard, 1994).	In the post-truth era, individuals relate not to truth directly but to mediated and constructed representations.
The house built like a church, the unseen wife figure, loss of phone signal [Heretic, 2024, 00:22:35–00:34:12]	Spatial and sensory arrangements construct a hyperreal universe that stages belief.	Hjarvard's theory of mediatization: media becomes an active agent transforming religious experience (Hjarvard, 2008).	Religious practices adapt to the aesthetic codes of media representations; “truth” is performatively produced through sensory regimes.
Reed's “two doors” scene: offering a choice between belief/unbelief, but both doors lead to the same corridor [Heretic, 2024, 00:46:10–00:48:00]	The appearance of freedom of choice is in fact part of a pre-scripted simulation.	Žižek's understanding of the unconscious structure of ideology: the subject believes in emancipation but remains bound to the ideological order (Žižek, 1989).	In modern society, individual freedom of choice is constrained through representations and simulations; choice functions only as an ideological illusion.

Source: Table created by the author.

3.3. Theme 3: Body Politics and Gender

The representations of the female body in the film make visible the intersection of belief and power. The figure of the female prophet held in a cage by Reed illustrates how religious authority maintains control over the female body through both physical and symbolic confinement. This can be explained through Bartky's (2015) concept of internalized discipline: women are not only subjected to external pressures but also regulate their own bodies through norms they have internalized. In doing so, they consciously or unconsciously contribute to the reproduction of power and the continuity of the system. Sister Barnes's contraceptive implant opens the way for a biopolitical reading, as the attempt to control female fertility is portrayed as an obstacle to a miracle. In Foucault's (1977) understanding of biopolitics, power holds the authority to regulate the life processes of the body. In the film, the implant becomes a modern symbol of the historical domination of women's bodies by religion. Moreover, the individual act of decision-making over sanctified or controlled fertility is depicted as undermining female sacredness, effectively marginalizing the woman.

At the same time, Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity is clearly visible in the behaviour of Sister Barnes and Sister Paxton. The female characters stage the “acceptable woman” image expected of them within the faith community through clothing, gestures, and silences. These bodily performances serve to produce consent as if it were voluntary. Thus, the film shows the audience that the female body functions as a central site of disciplinary and controlling strategies

within belief systems. Belief is not only a theological category, but a power technology reproduced through femininity and gender norms.

Equally important in the film is the transformation of the nuns. Sister Paxton undergoes a mental shift up to the moment she openly criticizes the staged prophet experience. At the beginning, she moves from fear of being deemed strange or worthless by society to more emotional reactions when faced with Reed's intellectual challenges to her faith. However, the killing of her companion Sister Barnes -under the claim that she would be resurrected- brings her transformation to its peak. Paxton fearlessly constructs an intellectual resistance by bringing rational evidence together. When Reed insists that Sister Barnes cannot be resurrected because of the implant in her arm, Paxton identifies it as a contraceptive implant, offering a powerful representation of the historical control practices over women's bodies. Reed interprets this "component" as an external interference preventing the miracle, while in fact it reflects a matter of bodily autonomy and the right to privacy. As Butler, (1990) notes, Barnes had concealed this information to sustain the image of the "acceptable woman" within the belief system. Bartky's (2015) notion of internalized discipline also becomes visible here: women regulate their bodies not only through external pressures but also through internalized norms. Reed's "female prophet" in the cage represents a dramatic version of voluntary submission.

When Paxton discovers that Reed has also kept other women locked in cages, the film's most critical dialogues take place. By the end of these events, Paxton finds her answer to Reed's persistent question of what the true religion is: "The one true religion is control."

This sentence forms the epistemological centre of the film. It points to the power of religion, or ideology more broadly, to direct individual behaviour. Reed employs religion here as a metaphor: control, like a religion, contains obedience, belief, and ritual. This argument aligns with Althusser's (1971) theory of ideological state apparatuses: individuals see themselves as subjects, yet they are in fact constituted within ideological structures. Even Paxton's ability to step outside this structure is made possible through Reed's manipulative guidance. Choice itself is revealed as an illusion. Reed then shares another key observation with Paxton (Heretic, 2024,01:38:37):

"You are here because the ideas of others have influenced every single decision you've made since the day you were born..."

This statement questions the illusion of individual autonomy. According to Reed's claim, people believe they are making choices, but in reality, their decisions are shaped by the ideas of others. Such a perspective is central to post-structuralist thought, especially in Foucault's analyses of the relationship between subject and power. Reed's character becomes, in this sense, a Foucauldian figure: he exercises power not only through repression but also through knowledge, guidance, and the production of subjectivity. When Paxton questions the poisoning of the woman kept captive, Reed responds (Heretic, 2024, 01:37:49) :

"I disagree. She chose to eat a poisoned pie because of her profound faith. It is called drinking the anyone Kool Aid. It is true that I keep these ladies a little chilly and a little peckish, for which I'm very sorry. Sorry, ladies, but only for the same reason that your church goes to Haiti to give out Bibles after a hurricane, it's easier to control someone who has lost everything."

This reference alludes to the Jonestown massacre. In 1978, hundreds of followers of Jim Jones’s cult died after collectively consuming poisoned drinks. The event symbolizes the deadly fusion of fanatic faith and blind submission. By invoking this, Reed stresses that faith can drive individuals to self-destruction, but what is striking here is his refusal to assume responsibility for controlling the process. At the same time, Reed critiques the hegemonic strategies behind religious aid: charity becomes a form of domination. His logic is simple, deprive people, and you can control them. This idea resonates with Gramsci’s notion of hegemony: a form of power established less through coercion and more through intellectual and cultural leadership. As with many such structures, this power is particularly articulated through women. Reed presents women’s passivity as their own choice. Paxton, however, challenges this claim. Their exchange opens onto the consent debate frequently addressed in contemporary feminism: the appearance of agreement does not necessarily mean that the process is grounded in free will. The irony of the scene is that while Reed exposes the heretical and hypocritical nature of existing religious structures, he presents his own system as a new “single truth.” Paxton, by the end, emerges as the only figure with the potential to break this cycle, striving to become a subject outside the system. Yet even her freedom is achieved by moving through a path orchestrated by Reed. In this sense, the film suggests that modern secular ideologies, too, may transform into new religions, and that being “heretical” does not always equate to being against the system.

Table 4. Analysis of the Theme “Body Politics and Gender”

Scene Evidence (mm:ss)	Analytic Claim	Theoretical Connection	Sociological Interpretation
Reed keeping the “female prophet” in a cage [Heretic 2024, 01:22:10–01:25:00]	The control of the female body becomes a dramatic representation of voluntary submission.	Bartky’s concept of internalized discipline: women regulate their bodies not only through external pressures but also through norms they have internalized (Bartky, 2015).	Religious authority sustains power by confining the female body both metaphorically and physically.
The scene with Sister Barnes’s implant [Heretic 2024, 01:14:30–01:16:00]	Historical control over the female body is represented as a biopolitical instrument.	Foucault’s notion of biopolitics: fertility is an area regulated by power (Foucault, 1977).	Birth control technology is framed not as freedom but as an “external interference” causing the failure of faith.
Paxton questioning the resurrection scene involving the women [Heretic 2024, 01:28:00–01:32:00]	In the relationship between belief and womanhood, consent is produced through bodily performance.	Butler’s concept of gender performativity: femininity is reproduced through norms enacted by the body (Butler, 1990).	Female characters discipline their bodies within the belief system to maintain the image of the “acceptable woman.”

Source: Table created by the author.

The disciplining of the female body in Heretic also reflects broader patterns identified in feminist media scholarship. Van Zoonen (1994) argues that media representations of women consistently position femininity as spectacle, vulnerability, and moral testing. Gill (2007) extends this by showing how postfeminist media culture stages female agency as a disciplinary practice, women are “free” to choose, yet their choices are constrained by gendered norms. Sister Barnes’s concealment of her contraceptive implant exemplifies this paradox: her bodily autonomy is simultaneously a site of resistance and self-regulation, navigating the expectations of both religious authority and internalized femininity.

3.4. Theme 4: Ethical Resistance and the Other

In the final part of the film, despite Reed's intellectual and rhetorical manipulations, Paxton's prayer scene redefines faith as an ethical orientation independent of the truth regimes imposed by power. Levinas's notion of the Other is decisive here (Levinas, 1998): Paxton's belief gains meaning not through Reed's authority but through a responsibility toward the absolute Other. Barnes's rejection of Reed's imposed dilemma demonstrates that resistance is not limited to saying "no" but also requires constructing a new space of meaning. This scene can also be linked to Gramsci's understanding of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971): counter-hegemonic practices dismantle existing discourse and establish an alternative regime of meaning. At the film's climax, when the nuns show solidarity by "embracing one another" in defiance of Reed, it indicates that ethical resistance is built not on individual heroism but on collective subjectivity. Freire's (1970) concept of critical consciousness is illuminating here: oppressed subjects generate awareness and resistance through their shared experiences.

Table 5. Analysis of the Theme "Ethical Resistance and the Other"

Scene Evidence (mm:ss)	Analytic Claim	Theoretical Connection	Sociological Interpretation
Paxton continuing her "faith" through prayer despite Reed's manipulation [Heretic 2024, 01:35:10–01:38:00]	Faith becomes an ethical orientation beyond the regimes imposed by power.	Levinas's understanding of ethical responsibility toward the Other: faith gains meaning through the subject's orientation to the absolute Other (Levinas, 1998).	Faith is redefined not through institutional dogma but through the individual's ethical subjectivity.
Barnes rejecting Reed's forced dilemma and searching for a "third path" [Heretic 2024, 01:28:00–01:32:00]	Resistance is not only disobedience but also the practice of constructing new spaces of meaning.	Gramsci's concept of hegemony: counter-hegemonic practices dismantle existing discourse to construct a new regime of meaning (Gramsci, 1971).	In the post-truth era, ethical resistance functions through the capacity to produce alternative truth frameworks.
The nuns "embracing one another" to find salvation despite Reed's intellectual rhetoric [Heretic 2024, 01:41:00–01:45:00]	Collective solidarity produces a stronger ethical alternative than individual resistance.	Freire's concept of critical consciousness (<i>conscientização</i>): the oppressed generate awareness and transformation together (Freire, 1970).	Ethical resistance becomes possible not through individual heroism but through collective subjectivity and solidarity.

Source: Table created by the author.

The analysis of Heretic crystallizes around four main themes: regimes of truth and governmentality, simulation and hyperreality, body politics and gender, and ethical resistance and the other. Taken together, these themes show that the film does more than address religious representations or individual belief; it reveals how truth, power, and subject formation are reconstructed in the post-truth era.

First, in relation to regimes of truth and governmentality, the film demonstrates that belief does not function as a transcendent realm of truth but as a strategy of power technologies that govern the subject. Second, the scenes of simulation and hyperreality show how truth is suspended through representations and transformed into a mediated aesthetic. Third, in the realm of body politics, the female body emerges as the central site of the disciplinary and controlling strategies of belief systems, serving the reproduction of power through biopolitical and performative mechanisms. Finally, in the theme of ethical resistance and the Other, the film highlights alternative forms of subjectivation that go beyond discourses of individual emancipation, emphasizing ethical responsibility toward the Other and collective solidarity.

Thus, the findings suggest that *Heretic* is not only a religious or cultural text but also an ideological one that interrogates the epistemic crises of the post-truth era, gender relations, and the possibilities of ethical resistance. This interim conclusion provides a foundation for the discussion section, where the analysis of the film will be connected to its broader contemporary sociological implications.

Discussion

The findings of this study are directly related to the fragility of epistemic authority emphasized in the post-truth literature. As McIntyre (2018) argues, in the post-truth era truth is no longer the product of objective facts but of discursive strategies and power relations. In *Heretic*, Reed's framing of belief as a "marketing strategy" and the false choices offered to the nuns represent a cinematographic reflection of this epistemic crisis. In this respect, the film provides a contemporary example of Foucault (1977) concept of "regimes of truth" developed in his analyses of knowledge–power relations. The findings also support Hjarvard's (2008) theory of mediatization: religious experience is no longer merely a transmitted form of belief but is reconstructed through the aesthetic codes of mediating structures. Baudrillard's (1994) notion of hyperreality further offers a useful perspective for explaining how truth is suspended through representations, as illustrated in the pie scene and the "two doors" sequence.

The study also intersects with the literature on gender. Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity and Bartky's (2015) concept of internalized discipline help illuminate how the female body is disciplined by the belief system in the film. The caged female prophet and the contraceptive implant framed as a biopolitical device make visible the historical forms of domination in the relationship between belief and the body. At the same time, Levinas's (1998) notion of ethical responsibility and Freire's (1970) concept of critical consciousness provide a productive theoretical framework for understanding the resistance manifested in the scenes of Paxton and Barnes. The film stages belief and truth not only in relation to regimes of power but also as an ethical alternative grounded in orientation toward the Other and in collective solidarity.

The study's engagement with mediatization theory (Hjarvard, 2008) and governmentality (Foucault, 1977) must also be situated within the broader media sociology tradition. Thompson, (1995) emphasizes that media fundamentally reconfigure the spatial and temporal organization of social life, enabling new forms of authority that operate at a distance. Silverstone (1999) adds that this reconfiguration carries a moral dimension: media shape not only what we know but how we relate to others and to truth itself. In *Heretic*, Reed's mediated staging of miracles exemplifies what Couldry (2012) calls the "myth of the mediated centre" a symbolic construction that privileges certain voices and silences others, thereby naturalizing asymmetrical power relations. Moreover, the film's engagement with post-truth must be understood through Corner's (2011) emphasis on media form as epistemology. The aesthetic choices in *Heretic* lighting, spatial choreography, the manipulation of scent and sound, are not mere stylistic flourishes but constitute the material conditions through which truth claims are validated or suspended. As Lister et al., (2009) argue, in digital and post-digital culture, authenticity becomes a technical effect rather than an ontological given. The film dramatizes this shift, showing how belief operates less through revelation than through engineered sensory regimes.

The first contribution of this article is the integration of film analysis with sociological theory. While most studies treat cinema primarily as a cultural medium of representation, *Heretic* is examined here through Foucault's concept of regimes of truth, Butler's understanding of gender performativity, Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality, and Levinas's perspective on ethical responsibility. This approach creates a dialogue among different theoretical traditions, offering new ways of thinking about the relationships between belief, truth, and subjectivation in the post-truth era.

The second contribution is the addition of cinema as an original case to the post-truth literature. Existing scholarship has largely addressed the epistemic crisis through politics, media, and everyday practices (McIntyre, 2018). This study conceptualizes cinema itself as a representational domain of post-truth, showing how truth is suspended through representations and how belief systems are intertwined with strategies of power, thereby introducing a novel methodological pathway to the field.

The third contribution is the reopening of the discussion on gender within the nexus of belief and power. The disciplining of the female body through biopolitical and performative mechanisms provides a contemporary representation of the historical domination exercised by religious authority. In this regard, the study develops an original analytical framework that bridges feminist theory and the sociology of religion (Bartky, 2015; Butler, 1990).

Finally, this article highlights the collective dimension of ethical resistance. In the post-truth era, the fragmentation of truth can be addressed not solely through individual emancipation but through collective solidarity and ethical responsibility toward the Other. The final scene of *Heretic*, where the nuns resist in solidarity, provides, when read alongside Levinas, (1998) and Freire, (1970), a powerful example for understanding alternative forms of subjectivity in modern societies. This analysis forms the basis for the concluding reflections presented in the next section.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that *Heretic* (2024) functions as a sociologically rich text that engages directly with the cultural dynamics of the post-truth era. Rather than offering a simple narrative of belief or deception, the film constructs a multilayered interplay between power, subjectivity, and embodied vulnerability. The analysis shows that religious discourse operates not as an expression of transcendence but as a strategic mode of governing behaviour; that truth becomes contingent on simulation and performative staging; and that the female body is positioned at the intersection of disciplinary expectations and prophetic fantasies.

At the same time, the film gestures toward forms of ethical resistance grounded in relationality and mutual recognition, possibilities that emerge not from certainty, but from shared fragility. Through these dynamics, *Heretic* invites a reconsideration of how contemporary societies negotiate truth, authority, and the conditions of becoming a subject under late modern forms of power. By situating the film within discussions in media and cinema sociology, the study highlights how cinematic texts can illuminate broader epistemic and political tensions of the present moment. This contribution underscores the value of film analysis as a means of understanding the shifting landscapes of truth, belief, and ethical agency in post-truth culture.

Nevertheless, this study has certain limitations. First, it was conducted using secondary sources and the film text rather than empirical data collection, which restricts the findings to contextual interpretations. Second, the technical operations of algorithms and media technologies (e.g., recommendation systems, data flows) were not directly analysed. As a result, the findings reflect the sociological dimensions of technological infrastructures only indirectly. Future research could deepen such intersections between film analysis and sociological theory. Comparative analyses of films from different cultural contexts may show how representations of belief and truth vary. In addition, studies enriched with digital media data, user comments, or discourse analyses could make the production and circulation of truth in the post-truth era more visible. Such research would provide original contributions both to media sociology and to the sociology of religion and culture.

References

- Adorno, T. W., & Horkheimer, M. (2002). *Dialectic of enlightenment: Philosophical fragments*. Stanford University Press.
- Althusser, L. (1971). Ideology and ideological state apparatuses. In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (pp. 85-126). Monthly Review Press.
- Arın, E. K. (2020). İdeoloji ve ideolojik eleştiri paradoksunda sinema. *Ege Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi Medya ve İletişim Araştırmaları Hakemli E-Dergisi*, 6, 70-90.
- Aytekin, M. (2018). Sinemada söylem ve ideoloji: Samira Makhmalbaf filmleri üzerine bir inceleme. *Akdeniz Kadın Çalışmaları ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet Dergisi*, 1(1), 59-76.
- Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies*. Hill and Wang.
- Bartky, S. L. (2015). *Femininity and domination: Studies in the phenomenology of oppression*. Routledge.
- Baudrillard, J. (1994). *Simulacra and simulation*. University of Michigan Press.
- Beck, S., & Woods, B. (Direktörler). (2024). *Heretic* [Video recording]. A24.
- Bordwell, D., Thompson, K., & Smith, J. (2004). *Film art: An introduction* (C. 7, s. 479). McGraw-Hill.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Burchell, G., Gordon, C., & Miller, P. (1991). Introduction. In G. Burchell, C. Gordon, & P. Miller (Eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (pp. ix-xxix). University of Chicago Press.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1997). *The psychic life of power: Theories in subjection*. Stanford University Press.
- Comolli, J. L., & Narboni, J. (2014). Cinema/Ideology/Criticism. In *Contemporary Film Theory* (pp. 43-52). Routledge.
- Corner, J. (2011). *Theoretical frameworks in media research*. Manchester University Press.
- Couldry, N. (2003). *Media rituals: A critical approach*. Routledge.

- Couldry, N. (2012). *Media, society, world: Social theory and digital media practice*. Polity.
- Couldry, N., & Hepp, A. (2017). *The mediated construction of reality*. Polity Press.
- Cusack, C. M. (2016). *Invented religions: Imagination, fiction and faith*. Ashgate Publishing.
- Dean, M. (2010). *Governmentality: Power and rule in modern society* (2. bs). Sage Publications.
- Elsaesser, T. (2001). Postmodernism as mourning work. *Screen*, 42(2).
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Polity.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. Longman.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M., Burchell, G., Gordon, C., & Miller, P. (1991). Governmentality. In *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (pp. 87-104). University of Chicago Press.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.
- Gill, R. (2007). *Gender and the media*. Polity Press.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks*. International Publishers.
- Hall, S. (1993). Encoding/decoding. In *The Cultural Studies Reader* (pp. 90-103). Routledge.
- Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Sage.
- Harper, D. (2024). *Heretic*. <https://www.etymonline.com>
- Harsin, J. (2018). Post-truth and critical communication studies. İçinde *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.757>
- Heise, T. S., & Tudor, A. (2016). For a sociology of the cinema. İçinde *The SAGE handbook of cultural sociology* (pp. 321-333). Sage.
- Heretic. (2024). İçinde *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press.
- Hjarvard, S. (2008). The mediatization of religion: A theory of the media as agents of religious change. *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies Yearbook*, 6(1), 9-26.
- Hoover, S. M. (2006). *Religion in the Media Age*. Routledge.
- Hsieh, H.-F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277-1288.
- Jameson, F. (1991). *Postmodernism, or, the cultural logic of late capitalism*. Duke University Press.
- Kellner, D., & Share, j. (2021). *Critical media studies: An introduction* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Kracauer, S. (2019). *From Caligari to Hitler: A psychological history of the German film*. Princeton University Press.
- Krippendorff, K. (2013). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (3. bs). Sage.
- Kuhn, A. (1994). *Women's pictures: Feminism and cinema* (2. bs). Verso.
- Levinas, E. (1998). *Otherwise than being or beyond essence*. Duquesne University Press.

- Levitt, H. M. (2018). Journal article reporting standards for qualitative research. *American Psychologist*, 73(1), 26-46.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.
- Lister, M., Dovey, J., Giddings, S., Grant, I., & Kelly, K. (2009). *New media: A critical introduction* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- McIntyre, L. (2018). *Post-truth*. MIT Press.
- Meyer, B. (2009). *Aesthetic Formations: Media, Religion, and the Senses*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3. bs). Sage.
- Mulvey, L. (2006). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. *İçinde Media and cultural studies: Keywords* (pp. 342-352).
- Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16, 1-13.
- Otter.ai. (2024). *Otter.ai (Version 3.0) [Computer software] [Software]*. Otter.ai. <https://otter.ai>
- Rose, G. (2016). *Visual methodologies* (4. bs). Sage.
- Rose, N. (1999). *Powers of freedom: Reframing political thought* (s. 40). Cambridge University Press.
- Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4. bs). Sage.
- Shohat, E., & Stam, R. (2014). *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the media*. Routledge.
- Silverstone, R. (1999). *Why study the media?* Sage.
- Thompson, J. B. (1995). *The media and modernity: A social theory of the media*. Polity Press.
- Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight “big-tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837-851.
- Van Zoonen, L. (1994). *Feminist media studies*. Sage.
- Waisbord, S. (2018). Truth is what happens to news: On journalism, fake news, and post-truth. *Journalism Studies*, 19(13), 1866-1878. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2018.1492881>
- Wayne, M. (2001). *Political film: The dialectics of third cinema*. Pluto Press.
- Wejbert-Wąsiewicz, E. (2020). Film and cinema as a subject of sociological study. Between tradition and the present. *Acta Universitatis Lodzensis. Folia Sociologica*, 73, 89-110.
- Yılmaz, E., Bakır, B., Ünal, Y., & Saliji, S. (2008). Sinema ve ideoloji ilişkileri üzerine. *İçinde Sinema İdeoloji Politika*. Nirengi Kitap.
- Žižek, S. (1989). *The sublime object of ideology*. Verso.
- Zola, É. (2021). *Vérité (Truth)*. Everest Yayınları.

Hakikat, İktidar ve Beden: Heretic (2024) Filminin Sosyolojik Bir Çözümlemesi

Nuriye ÇELİK*

Genişletilmiş Özet

Giriş

Bu çalışma, 2024 yılında gösterime giren *Heretic* filmini post-truth çağın epistemik kırılmaları ve dinsel söylemlerin yeniden üretimi bağlamında sosyolojik olarak incelemektedir. Filmin seçilmesinin nedeni, inanç, hakikat ve otorite arasındaki gerilimleri estetik ve anlatısal düzeyde görünür kılmasıdır. A24 yapımı olan film, iki genç rahibenin (Sister Paxton ve Sister Barnes) bir adamın evinde yaşadığı deneyimler üzerinden, dinsel otoritenin manipülasyon tekniklerini ve bireysel direnişin sınırlarını tartışmaya açmaktadır. Çalışmanın önemi, sinemayı yalnızca temsilin bir aracı değil, aynı zamanda iktidar teknolojilerinin ve etik direniş pratiklerinin kesişim noktası olarak ele almasıdır.

Araştırmının teorik temeli Foucault'nun hükümet etme kavramı ve Stig Hjarvard'ın medyatikleşme kuramı etrafında kurulmuştur. Foucault'ya göre modern iktidar, yasaklayıcı olmaktan çok üretici bir mantıkla işleyerek öznenin davranış ve düşüncelerini yönlendirir. Bu bağlamda dinsel söylemler, ekonomik ya da politik alanla sınırlı olmayan, inanç ve kimlik inşasını da kapsayan iktidar teknolojilerine dönüşmektedir. *The Foucault Effect*'te Burchell, Gordon ve Miller'in vurguladığı “inancın hükümeti” fikri bu yaklaşımı desteklemektedir. Aynı doğrultuda, Dean (2010) hükümet etmenin liberal ve neoliberal rasyonalitelere nasıl uyarlanarak işlediğini, Rose (1999) ise özgürlük söylemleri üzerinden özneleşmeyi nasıl yönlendirdiğini ortaya koyar. Judith Butler'ın toplumsal cinsiyetin performatifliği yaklaşımı, filmde kadın bedeninin iktidar stratejilerinde nasıl konumlandırıldığını anlamak açısından kritik bir katkı sunar. Butler'a göre toplumsal cinsiyet, yinelenen bedensel pratikler yoluyla inşa edilir; Bartky'nin içselleştirilmiş disiplin kavramı da kadın bedeninin hem dışsal baskılar hem de içselleştirilmiş normlarla denetlendiğini gösterir. Baudrillard'ın hipergerçeklik kavramı ise filmde hakikatin temsiller aracılığıyla askıya alınmasını açıklamada kullanılmıştır. Hjarvard'ın medyatikleşme kuramı ile düşünüldüğünde, dinsel deneyimlerin medya estetiği aracılığıyla yeniden kurulduğu, hakikatin ise sahneleme ve simülasyonla üretildiği görülmektedir. Böylelikle “medyatikleştirilmiş hükümet etme” kavramı, inancın çağdaş iktidar stratejileriyle kesiştiği noktayı görünür kılar.

* Doç. Dr., Sinop Üniversitesi, e-mail: nuriyesenelcelik@gmail.com, orcid.org/0000-0001-6368-1956, Sinop, Türkiye

Yöntem

Araştırma tasarımı, tek vaka üzerinden ilerleyen nitel, eleştirel-yorumlayıcı bir film analizi olarak kurgulanmıştır. Veri kaynağı filmin tam metnidir; sahne ve alt-sahne düzeyinde transkripsiyon yapılmış, görsel-işitsel notlarla desteklenmiştir. Kodlama sürecinde önce kuramsal eksenlerden (hükümet etme, medyatikleşme, bedenin performatifliği) türetilen üst kodlar oluşturulmuş, ardından sahne bazında açık kodlama ile yeni göstergeler eklenmiştir. Kodlar, dahil etme/dışlama ölçütleriyle tanımlanmış; karar noktaları, olumsuz örnekler ve analitik notlarla birlikte raporlanmıştır. Süreç JARS-Qual standartlarına uygun olarak şeffaflık ve denetlenebilirlik ilkeleriyle yürütülmüştür. Güvenirlik için kod-tekrar kod tekniği uygulanmış, bulgular yoğun betimleme ve kanıt zinciriyle desteklenmiştir.

Araştırma dört temel araştırma sorusu etrafında şekillendirilmiştir:

1. *Heretic*, post-truth bağlamında dinsel ve kültürel söylemleri nasıl temsil etmektedir?
2. Hakikat ve temsil ilişkisi hangi simülasyon ve hipergerçeklik mekanizmalarıyla sahnelenmektedir?
3. Kadın bedeni filmde hangi disiplinler ve performatif pratiklerle görünür kılınmaktadır?
4. Karakterlerin inanç, direniş ve etik seçimleri, post-truth çağda bireyin inanç sistemleriyle ilişkisini nasıl tartışmaya açmaktadır?

Bulgular

1. Hakikat Rejimleri ve Hükümet Etme

Filmde Reed'in Mormon çok eşliliğini "vahiy" değil bir "pazarlama stratejisi" olarak açıklaması, dinsel söylemin aşkın hakikat alanı değil, özneyi yöneten bir iktidar teknolojisi olduğunu gösterir. "İnanma/inkâr" seçenekleri de özgür iradenin yanılması olarak kurgulanır. Bu bulgu, Foucault'nun hakikat rejimleri kavramı ve Althusser'in ideolojik çağrı anlayışıyla örtüşmektedir.

2. Simülasyon ve Hipergerçeklik

Mavi yemişi turtanın kokusunun mumdan gelmesi sahnesi, temsillerin hakikatin yerini aldığı bir kırılma anıdır. Ev mekânının kiliseye benzetilmesi, görünmeyen eş figürü, telefon sinyalinin yokluğu gibi unsurlar Baudrillard'ın hipergerçeklik kavramı ile açıklanır. Reed'in iki kapı sahnesi ise özgür seçimin bir simülasyon olduğunu gösterir; tüm seçenekler önceden ideolojik olarak belirlenmiştir.

3. Beden Politikaları ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet

Kadın peygamberin kafeste tutulması, Sister Barnes'ın doğum kontrol implantı gibi unsurlar, kadın bedeninin disiplinler ve biyopolitik mekanizmalarla denetlendiğini gösterir. Butler'ın toplumsal cinsiyetin performatifliği ve Bartky'nin içselleştirilmiş disiplin yaklaşımı, bu temsilleri açıklayıcıdır. Kadın karakterler "kabul edilebilir kadın" imgesini bedensel performanslarıyla yeniden üretir.

4. Etik Direniş ve Öteki

Filmin finalinde Sister Paxton'ın Reed'in manipülasyonlarına rağmen dua etmesi, Levinas'ın Öteki'ne yönelim kavramı ile anlam kazanır. Sister Paxton ve Sister Barnes'ın birbirine sarılması sahnesi, bireysel kahramanlıktan çok kolektif özneleşmenin direniş imkânını gösterir. Bu bağlamda

Gramsci'nin hegemonya ve Freire'nin eleştirel bilinç (conscientização) kavramları, etik alternatiflerin inşasını açıklamada önemlidir.

Tartışma

Bulgular, post-truth çağda epistemik otoritenin kırılganlığını ortaya koymaktadır. Reed'in dini bir "pazarlama stratejisi" olarak sunması, hakikatin nesnel olgulara değil, söylemsel stratejilere dayalı üretildiğini göstermektedir. Bu durum, Foucault'nun hakikat rejimleri kavramı ve Hjarvard'ın medyatikleşme teorisiyle doğrudan ilişkilidir. Film aynı zamanda toplumsal cinsiyetin disiplinler pratiklerle nasıl yeniden üretildiğini göstermektedir. Kadın bedeni hem biyopolitik kontrolün hem de performatif normların taşıyıcısıdır. Bu bağlamda Butler ve Bartky'nin feminist yaklaşımları açıklayıcıdır. Öte yandan Levinas ve Freire'nin yaklaşımları, etik direnişin bireysel özerklikten çok kolektif dayanışma ve Öteki'ne yönelimle mümkün olabileceğini vurgular. *Heretic* bu yönüyle yalnızca dinsel temsilin değil, etik özneleşme imkanlarının da sinemasal bir laboratuvarıdır.

Sonuç

Bu çalışma, *Heretic* (2024) filmini post-truth çağın epistemik kırılganlıklarını, iktidar ilişkilerini ve özneleşme süreçlerini görünür kılan bir kültürel metin olarak ele almıştır. Analiz, dört temel eksen etrafında yapılandırılmıştır: hakikat rejimleri ve hükümet etme; simülasyon ve hipergerçeklik, beden politikaları ve toplumsal cinsiyet; etik direniş ve Öteki. Bulguların ortak paydası, filmin yalnızca bir gerilim anlatısı sunmadığı, aynı zamanda günümüz toplumlarının inanç, hakikat ve iktidar ilişkilerini sinemasal bir laboratuvar içinde yeniden ürettiği ve tartışmaya açtığıdır.

İlk olarak, hakikat rejimleri ve hükümet etme bağlamında film, dinsel söylemlerin aşkın bir hakikat alanı olarak değil, özneyi yöneten iktidar teknolojileri olarak işlev gördüğünü ortaya koymuştur. Reed'in dini "pazarlama stratejisi" olarak sunması, Foucault'nun "hakikat rejimleri" ve Althusser'in "çağrı" kavramlarıyla uyumlu biçimde, inancın yönetimsellik ekseninde yeniden üretildiğini göstermektedir. Bu bulgu, günümüz toplumlarında hakikatin rasyonel bilgi yerine söylemsel stratejilerle dolaşıma girdiğini vurgular. İkinci olarak, simülasyon ve hipergerçeklik teması, hakikatin temsiller aracılığıyla askıya alındığını göstermektedir. Mavi yemişli turtanın kokusunun aslında bir mumdan gelmesi ya da inanç/inkâr seçeneklerinin ideolojik bir simülasyona indirgenmesi, Baudrillard'ın hipergerçeklik kavramını somutlaştırır. Bu bağlamda film, hakikatin deneyimlenme biçimlerinin estetik kodlar ve sahnelemeler üzerinden kurulduğunu, özgür seçimin ise çoğu zaman ideolojik yanılsama olduğunu açığa çıkarır. Üçüncü olarak, beden politikaları ve toplumsal cinsiyetin çözümlemesi, kadın bedeninin hem biyopolitik hem de performatif mekanizmalarla denetlendiğini göstermiştir. Kadın peygamberin kafeste tutulması, doğum kontrol implantı veya "kabul edilebilir kadın" imgesinin bedensel performanslarla yeniden üretilmesi, Butler'ın toplumsal cinsiyetin performatifliği ve Bartky'nin içselleştirilmiş disiplin kavramlarıyla açıklanabilir. Bu bulgu, dinsel söylemlerin tarihsel olarak kadın bedenini iktidar stratejilerinin merkezine yerleştirdiğini güncel bir anlatıyla gözler önüne sermektedir.

Dördüncü olarak, etik direniş ve Öteki ekseninde film, bireysel özerklikten ziyade kolektif özneleşme ve dayanışma pratiklerinin önemini vurgulamaktadır. Sister Paxton'ın dua sahnesi, Levinas'ın Öteki'ne yönelim anlayışıyla; karakterlerin birbirine sarılması ise Freire'nin eleştirel bilinç ve Gramsci'nin karşı-hegemonya kavramlarıyla okunabilir. Bu çerçevede, etik özneleşmenin yalnızca bireysel bir direniş değil, aynı zamanda kolektif bir sorumluluk ve dayanışma pratiği olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Sonuç olarak, *Heretic* filmi, post-truth çağın epistemik krizlerini, iktidar teknolojilerini

ve toplumsal cinsiyet rejimlerini sahneleyen bir metin olarak okunmalıdır. Bu makale, filmi yalnızca kültürel bir ürün olarak değil, aynı zamanda sosyolojik bir vaka olarak konumlandırmış; Foucault, Butler, Baudrillard ve Levinas'ın teorik katkılarını bir araya getirerek disiplinler arası bir çerçeve sunmuştur. Çalışma, sinema analizini sosyolojik teoriyle bütünleştirerek post-truth literatürüne özgün bir katkı sağlamış; özellikle inanç, beden ve etik özneleşme tartışmalarını yeni bir bağlama taşımıştır. Bununla birlikte, çalışmanın sınırlılıkları da göz ardı edilmemelidir. Tek bir film üzerinden yürütülen analiz, bağlamsal ve yorumsal derinlik sağlamasına rağmen genelleştirilebilirlik açısından sınırlıdır. Gelecek araştırmalar, farklı kültürel bağlamlardan filmlerle karşılaştırmalı analizler yaparak bulguları genişletebilir. Ayrıca izleyici alımlaması çalışmaları, post-truth çağda sinemasal temsillerin toplumsal etkilerini anlamada daha zengin veriler sunabilir. Dijital medya verilerinin (ör. kullanıcı yorumları, sosyal medya tartışmaları) analize dahil edilmesi, hakikatin dolaşımına dair daha bütüncül bir resim ortaya koyacaktır.

Araştırmacıların Katkı Oranı Beyanı/ Contribution of Authors

Araştırma tek bir yazar tarafından yürütülmüştür.

The research was conducted by a single author.

Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı / Conflict of Interest

Çalışma kapsamında herhangi bir kurum veya kişi ile çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of the study.

İntihal Politikası Beyanı / Plagiarism Policy

Bu makale intihal.net yazılımıyla taranmıştır. İlgili dergi kurallarına uygundur.

This article has been scanned using the intihal.net software and adheres to the relevant journal's guidelines.

Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Beyanı / Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Statement

Bu çalışmada "Yükseköğretim Kurumları Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Yönergesi"

kapsamında uyulması belirtilen kurallara uyulmuştur.

This study adheres to the rules specified under the "Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive."