



# Analysis of the Moral Message in the Film "AGAK LAEN" Ferdinand De Saussure's Semiotic Theory

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## ABSTRACT

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Film is an audiovisual medium that plays an important role in conveying ideas, stories and messages effectively. Elements such as storyline, characters, dialogue, cinematography, and sound collaborate to create specific genres, such as drama, comedy, or horror, that serve not only as entertainment but also as informative, educational, and persuasive tools. Films have great ability to convey moral messages, propaganda, and guide public opinion regarding political, economic and cultural issues (Khairunnisa, 2020), influencing the character, attitudes and behavior of the audience through visual and auditory power (Mudjiono, 2011). This research focuses on the semiotic analysis of the film "Agak Laen," an Indonesian horror-comedy film which became the second best-selling film in 2024. Using Ferdinand De Saussure's semiotic approach, this research explores the signs (signifiers) and the meanings contained (signified) in the film. This film tells the story of the friendship of four characters who are trapped in a complex situation in a haunted house, which then goes viral on social media. The horror-comedy genre in Indonesia has a unique appeal because it combines local myths and legends with refreshing humor. The aim of this research is to reveal hidden meanings in the film "Agak Laen" using semiotic theory, as well as to contribute to the study of film semiotics through a descriptive qualitative approach.

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## 1. Introduction

Film is an audiovisual medium that can serve as an effective mechanism for expressing ideas and presenting stories to entertain, inspire, raise current issues, and convey implicit messages. The elements of a film consist of the plot, characters, dialogue, cinematography, and sound. A film often creates specific genres, such as drama, comedy, horror, or documentary, thereby presenting various types of stories and styles. In the study of Communication Science, films convey global messages that include moral messages, propaganda, and shaping public opinion regarding economics, politics, and culture. Films can also influence the character, attitudes, and behaviors of their audiences (Vidiyawati & Wibowo, 2023).

In films, we understand various visual elements; a film can also be defined as visual content that can be enjoyed and presented on the big screen (Çam & Behlil, 2023). Films are not only meant to be enjoyed as entertainment but also serve informative, educational, and persuasive functions. Films have value and power, especially in persuasion; they can strengthen attitudes, beliefs, and values (Luthfiasari & Fadillah, 2023). Films can also change someone's attitudes, beliefs, or values. Through films, individuals may be motivated to take action because fundamentally films are a medium of

communication that utilizes audiovisual elements as tools for delivering messages. Films are considered effective due to their audiovisual nature; in a relatively short time, they can convey complex meanings and purposes to their target audience (Hadit Prasetyo & Purnamasari, 2021).

There is a film that became one of the highest-grossing films in Indonesia in 2024. This film belongs to a genre that frequently appears in Indonesian cinemas and has an astonishing audience count of nearly 9 million viewers. It ranks as the second highest-grossing film of all time, placing "Agak Laen" just below "KKN Desa Penari." "Agak Laen" is an Indonesian horror-comedy film directed by Muhadkly Acho and produced by Imajinari; it was released on February 1, 2024. The film "Agak Laen" adopts characters reminiscent of Warkop DKI in its production. It features four main characters: Oki (Oki Rengga), Boris (Boris Bokir), Jegel (Indra Jegel), and Bene (Bene Dion). They are portrayed as members of the Indonesian community working at a Night Market attraction—a haunted house that is somewhat uninteresting and not particularly frightening.

The haunted house is eventually renovated using money from one of the characters, Oki. This renovation attracts many visitors; however, an incident occurs when a person with a history of heart disease enters the attraction and dies from shock and fear inside. In their panic, the four main characters decide to bury the body within the haunted house because they fear being accused if they report the incident to the police or hospital. This event leads to unexpected consequences: the haunted house becomes popular due to its newfound reputation for being scary after going viral on social media. However, there is another consequence: the deceased was an up-and-coming legislative candidate being sought by family members and police, putting them at risk of arrest for hiding a body.

Essentially, horror-comedy films have their own appeal in Indonesia because this genre successfully combines two elements that are very popular due to Indonesia's rich culture filled with myths, legends, and mystical stories serving as a strong foundation for horror elements. The comedy genre plays a refreshing role amid tense situations. This combination provides audiences with a break to relax and enjoy the film more fully.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Semiotics

According to Little John, semiotics is the effort to discover signs, including hidden elements behind a sign. Semiotics is a term derived from the Greek word "semeion," meaning "sign," or "sign" in English; it refers to "the study of sign systems" such as language, codes, signals, etc.

According to Umberto Eco, semiotics is the study of the truth or essence of a sign. This sign is also considered a "lie." Behind a sign, there is something hidden that is not the sign itself (Sobur, 2006:87).

According to Ferdinand De Saussure, semiotics is our perception and view of reality, constructed by words and other signs used within the social context of society. This means that the signs formed are representations of human perception, more than merely reflecting existing reality (Sobur, 2006:87).

According to Roland Barthes, semiotics is also a science or method of analysis that examines signs. Signs are tools used in the quest for understanding in this world, among and with humans. In Barthes' terminology, semiotics is referred to as semiology. Essentially, as humans, we must learn how humanity uses things. To signify means that all can be mixed with communication. In interpreting something, it implies that objects intend to communicate while also constituting a structured system of signs (Sobur, 2009:15).

### 2.2. Film

According to the Indonesian Dictionary, a film is a thin layer made of celluloid that holds negative or positive images.

Film is also a series of images that create an illusion of movement, making it appear alive within frames projected through a projector and produced mechanically for viewing and listening (Darojah, 2011). Film can also be used as a tool to meet general needs by communicating an idea, message, or reality (Raimukti, 2013). The use of film media also provides learning experiences and new atmospheres that can be enjoyable for students.

According to Law No. 8 of 1992, film is a work of art and culture that serves as mass communication media created based on cinematographic principles and recorded on celluloid tape. Films can then be shown and screened using mechanical projection systems, electronic systems, or other systems.

### 2.3. Film Semiotics

According to Sardar & Loon, film and television have their own languages with different syntax and grammar. Essentially, films may involve both visual forms and symbols as well as linguistic elements to convey coded messages intended for communication. Generally, films are constructed with many signs. These signs include various sign systems that work well together in an effort to achieve the desired effect. The most important elements in images and sounds are the spoken words complemented by simultaneous sounds accompanying those images and then the film's music (Sobur, 2009:128). In terms of cinematic semiotic thought today, Christian Metz from the École des Hautes Études et Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris stands out. According to him, the signifier in cinematography has a motivated or reasoned relationship with the signified that is clearly evident through the relationship between the signifier and the nature being referenced. The signifier in cinematography is always somewhat reasoned and never arbitrary.

### 3. Method

This research methodology aims to be utilized as a method or guideline for systematically gathering and obtaining reliable data during research, ultimately contributing to further knowledge acquisition. In the semiotic analysis of film by Ferdinand De Saussure, emphasis is placed on the Signifier (penanda) and Signified (petanda). Ferdinand De Saussure employs concepts such as synchronic and diachronic, where language studied over a specified duration continues to evolve as long as the same language remains in use. Syntagmatic explains regular relationships between linguistic concepts, whereas paradigmatic describes irregular connections. Additionally, this analysis focuses on contextual meaning assignment in films resulting from interpreters' interpretations of the researched objects analyzed using Ferdinand De Saussure's semiotic analysis model (Amalia et al., 2019).

In this research, a qualitative destructive method is employed, focusing on film analysis utilizing theoretical frameworks from Ferdinand De Saussure's semiotics emphasizing Signifiers and Signifieds appearing in the film 'Agak Laen.' Here, the subject is the film 'Agak Laen,' while the object of study is the signs present within it. During this study, authors will utilize Ferdinand De Saussure's analytical framework examining Signifiers and Signifieds along with realizing signs contained therein and determining the meaning embedded within the film via his semiotic analysis. According to Mukhtar (2013:10), descriptive qualitative research methods are used by researchers to uncover knowledge or theories concerning specific instances."

### 4. Result and Discussion

In the film "Agak Laen" (2024), there are several clips that depict the struggles of four individuals: Oki (Oki Rengga), Boris (Boris Bokir), Jegel (Indra Jegel), and Bene (Bene Dion). These film clips will be described and analyzed using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic analysis, which includes the signifier or sign (the signs present in the clips) and the signified or meaning (the messages conveyed by these clips). Below is an outline of the film clips along with a semiotic analysis based on Ferdinand de Saussure:

#### 1. In the movie clip between minutes (6.00 – 6.42)

The first scene, lasting from minutes (6.00 – 6.42), depicts Bene meeting his prospective father-in-law. During their encounter, the prospective father-in-law wears striped box-patterned clothes and demands strict requirements like having the wedding held in a building and attended by no fewer than 1000 guests.



**Signifier:** The facial expression of Naomi's father, who is wearing a checkered shirt and glasses, challenges Bene regarding the marriage dowry by saying, "There are still those who are capable and willing to propose to my daughter." Additionally, Naomi's anxious face is evident from her flat eyelashes and pale lips concerning the dowry demanded by her father.

**Signified:** This confusion and anxiety are experienced by Bene but remain hidden. As such, meeting a prospective father-in-law is inherently difficult, making it hard to reject the father-in-law's wishes, even though it should be discussed to avoid burdening each other.

## 2. In the movie clip from minutes (7.20 – 8.00)

In this clip, Jegel is being choked by Debtcollectors because he was hiding in the mosque while performing Zuhr prayer, despite having been awaited for a long time by the Debtcollectors outside the mosque.



**Signifier:** Jegel, wearing a cap and a white shirt, is unable to breathe as he is being choked by two men in black clothing at the mosque's pillar using a prayer mat found inside the mosque.

**Signified:** Jegel is experiencing physical violence from the debt collectors. This is evident from his facial expression of pain and inability to fight back, as he is indeed guilty of having debts and hiding in the mosque. The meaning also reflects that many people, when feeling guilty or afraid, tend to return to their respective gods, even using religious excuses to cover up their shortcomings.

## 3. In the movie clip from minutes (21.40 – 22.40)

This clip shows Pak Basuki, a potential council member, meeting with his mistress and enjoying the night market while flirting with her because Pak Basuki is late for their rendezvous.



**Signifier:** From the dialogue and scenes, it is shown that Intan is very affectionate with Pak Basuki, as seen from her arm around him.

**Signified:** Intan feels happy when she is with Pak Basuki, despite being his mistress, evident from her wide smile when together with him and their childlike, spoiled behavior towards each other. This signifies that people who engage in affairs generally lack shame and are reluctant to take responsibility; even if caught, they tend to hide it. When they are alone together, they perceive the world as belonging solely to them, which is characteristic of someone who is unfaithful.

#### 4. In the movie clip from minutes (32.20 – 33.40)

In this clip, Intan, Pak Basuki's mistress, tries to find Pak Basuki at the haunted house and ends up encountering Oki, Jegel, Bene, and Bokir who are hiding Pak Basuki's body.



**Signifier:** Intan, who appears confused and asks Oki, Jegel, Bokir, Bene while their movements are evident from gripping hands and slumping shoulders. When they speak, they stutter and wear dirty clothes like ghosts.

**Signified:** Fear and panic during wrong actions are common behaviors seen in the clip; however, honesty should also be present. It would have been better if Oki, Jegel, Bokir, and Bene had initially told Intan truthfully about not intentionally causing Pak Basuki's heart attack. Instead, lying becomes deeply ingrained in daily life, making problems worse due to dishonesty.

#### 5. In the movie clip from minute (43.00 – 44.00)

In this clip, Bokir is involved in a conversation with Jegel and Bene because Bokir is receiving a call from his parents, pretending that he has already joined TNI (Indonesia National Armed Forces).





**Signifier:** Bokir's joyful expression with raised eyebrows, wide smile, right hand holding the black phone, and wearing short pants.

**Signified:** Bokir's apparent anxiety while hiding his true failure to join TNI from his parents. He feels ashamed and fearful of disappointing them due to his decision to travel for this purpose. The meaning is that children inherently want to please their parents and avoid disappointing them; however, they should also be honest about their conditions, especially towards their parents, rather than lying.

#### 6. In the movie clip from minutes (1:25:20 – 1:27:10)

After Oki learns that his wrongdoing with his friends will be revealed, he goes to meet his mother and talks with her.



**Signifier:** Oki's mother appears with pale white lips, furrowed brows, droopy eyes, black hair, and wearing a dress, while Oki, who is bald, is wearing a red shirt and is crying, as seen from his tears.

**Signified:** Oki's sense of sadness as he listens to his mother's words, where she consistently supports him, accompanied by her hopeful gaze towards him. This means that parents, particularly mothers, will always support their children regardless of whether they do something right or wrong. Despite varying actions, no parent remains indifferent to their child. Therefore, children must strive to make their parents proud.

#### 7. In the movie clip from minutes (1:50:30 – 1:51:00)

Oki, Jegel, Bokir, and Bene, after being discovered attempting to move Pak Basuki's corpse to a cemetery, were arrested and sentenced to 2 years and 4 months in prison.



**Signifier:** Bene, Bokir, Jegel, and Oki appear sad because they have been arrested, as indicated by their furrowed brows, downcast faces, handcuffed wrists, and their presence in a police car wearing orange prison uniforms.

**Signified:** The sense of resignation experienced by Bene, Bokir, Jegel, and Oki is a result of their actions and dishonesty regarding their crimes, prioritizing their own interests first. They are now too late to regret their choices since they are already in prison. This signifies that everyone who commits a crime ultimately feels remorse in the end; however, whether they can rise again depends on their attitudes and whether they are willing to change.

#### 8. In the movie clip from minutes (1:51:01 – 1:51:30)

After being released from prison, Oki, Jegel, Bene, and Bokir feel calm and happy because they are free from their problems and want to start a new life.



**Signifier:** After being released from prison, Oki, Jegel, Bokir, and Bene are seen, with Oki wearing a red checkered shirt, Bokir in a dark green shirt, Jegel in a white and orange shirt, and Bene in a blue shirt, all holding plastic bags containing their clothes from prison.

**Signified:** The happiness and joy are evident among the four of them as they laugh together. After Oki and Bokir reunite with their families, they express regret, reflected in their lowered intonation and future hopes. This signifies that everyone has a troubled past, but it ultimately depends on their individual personalities whether they choose to change or not. As friends or family, we should continue to support them and avoid hindering or mocking them.

## 5. Conclusion

"The film 'Agak Laen,' released in 2024, successfully uncovers hidden meanings through a profound semiotic analysis focusing on the struggles of its main characters: Oki, Boris, Jegel, and Bene. Using Ferdinand de Saussure's approach, this analysis highlights how visual and narrative elements within the film function as signs (signifiers) and meanings (signifieds). Each scene portrays both internal and external conflicts faced by these characters, ranging from social pressures to meet familial expectations to the consequences of dishonest actions. Through various situations, the film demonstrates that although every individual has a troubled past, transformation and regret are possible if there is a desire to be accountable. Additionally, it emphasizes the significance of parental and peer

support in personal growth. With a combination of horror and comedy elements, 'Agak Laen' entertains while conveying morally relevant messages about honesty, responsibility, and hope for a better future."

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