


# The Connotation Meaning of Social Problems in the Movie “Agak Laen”?

 <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v10i4.1012>

\*Rizal Priadi, Ridar Hendri, Noor Efni Salam, Rosi Pratiwi 

<sup>1234</sup>Universitas Islam Sultan Syarif Kasim, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: : [rizalday88@gmail.com](mailto:rizalday88@gmail.com)

## A B S T R A C T

This study aims to analyze the representation of social issues in the Indonesian horror-comedy film *Agak Laen* using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. The research employs a qualitative descriptive method to examine the meanings conveyed through visual and narrative signs in selected scenes of the film. Data were obtained through observation of the film scenes and supported by relevant documentation. The analysis focuses on three levels of meaning proposed by Barthes: denotation, connotation, and myth. The results reveal that the film represents several social issues, including poverty, social inequality, gratification, infidelity, and crime. These issues are constructed through cinematic techniques such as camera angles, shot types, dialogue, costumes, and settings that produce deeper connotative meanings. Furthermore, the film illustrates how humor and horror elements are used simultaneously to critique social realities within Indonesian society. This study contributes to understanding how films function as cultural texts that reflect and construct social meanings through visual representation.

**Keywords:** *Semiotics, Roland Barthes, Social Issues, Film Analysis, Agak Laen*

### Article History:

Received 15<sup>th</sup> April 2025

Accepted 20<sup>th</sup> May 2025

Published 30<sup>th</sup> May 2025



## INTRODUCTION

Film has become one of the most influential forms of mass communication in modern society. As an audiovisual medium, film does not merely function as entertainment but also as a medium for delivering messages, ideas, and social values to audiences. Through visual narratives, dialogue, and cinematic techniques, films are capable of reflecting various social realities that occur within society. According to Alex Sobur, film represents a communication medium that is able to portray social realities and present them to the audience through visual representation, while simultaneously containing meaningful messages related to social, moral, religious, and ideological aspects (Sobur, 2003). Therefore, films are not only artistic expressions but also cultural texts that reflect the dynamics of social life.

Social problems themselves are inseparable from human life and social interaction. In a sociological perspective, social problems arise when there is a mismatch between elements within society that disrupts social harmony. Soerjono Soekanto explains that social problems occur when there is a lack of compatibility between cultural elements or social structures that endanger the life of a social group or hinder the fulfillment of the community's basic needs (Soekanto, 2012). These problems may include poverty, inequality, crime, moral conflict, and other forms of social deviation that influence the stability of social relationships within a community. As a reflection of society, films often portray these social issues as part of their narrative structure.

In this context, film can function as a powerful tool for social representation and social criticism. Through storytelling and character development, films are able to bring audiences closer to the experiences of others and encourage them to understand different social realities. According to Faizah and Tjahjani (2021), films have the ability to raise awareness about social

issues by presenting stories that allow audiences to feel empathy toward the experiences of others. Furthermore, films can stimulate public discussions and debates regarding social issues that may previously receive little attention. In some cases, films may even influence public opinion and encourage social change by highlighting problems that require attention from policymakers and society.

Indonesian cinema has increasingly explored social issues through various genres, including drama, comedy, and horror. One of the films that has recently attracted significant public attention is *Agak Laen*, directed by Muhadkly Acho. Released in 2024, the film combines elements of horror and comedy while portraying the story of four friends who manage a haunted house attraction in order to improve their economic conditions. Although the film is presented in a humorous and entertaining way, it implicitly portrays several social realities faced by the characters, including economic hardship, social pressure, and moral dilemmas within society.

Beyond its comedic narrative, *Agak Laen* also contains deeper social messages related to the lives of lower-class communities. The film portrays the struggles of ordinary people who attempt to survive and improve their economic situation through creative yet risky efforts. Through the characters and storyline, the film highlights several social issues that are relevant to contemporary society. As a result, the film does not merely function as entertainment but also as a representation of social realities that exist within Indonesian society.

To understand how meaning is constructed within film narratives, semiotic analysis provides an appropriate analytical framework. Semiotics examines how signs and symbols produce meaning in communication processes. By analyzing visual elements, dialogue, and narrative structures within the film, researchers can interpret the social messages embedded in cinematic texts. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the representation of social problems in the film *Agak Laen* in order to reveal the meanings conveyed through its visual and narrative elements.

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the representation of social issues in the film *Agak Laen*. Qualitative research is used because the study focuses on interpreting meanings contained in visual and narrative elements within the film. According to Sugiyono, qualitative research aims to understand social phenomena from the perspective of the participants or objects being studied through descriptive analysis of words and meanings rather than numerical data (Sugiyono, 2018).

In this research, the qualitative approach is applied to interpret signs and symbols that appear in selected scenes of the film. The analysis is conducted using a semiotic framework to reveal how meanings related to social issues are constructed and represented through cinematic elements.

### Data Source

The primary data of this research consist of scenes from the film *Agak Laen* directed by Muhadkly Acho. The film serves as the main object of analysis because it contains various narrative elements that reflect social realities in Indonesian society.

Secondary data are obtained from books, journal articles, and other academic references related to film studies, social issues, and semiotic theory. These sources are used to support the interpretation of the data and provide theoretical foundations for the analysis.

### Data Collection Technique

Data were collected using several techniques. First, observation was conducted by repeatedly watching the film to identify scenes that contain representations of social issues. Second, documentation was used to record important scenes, dialogues, and visual elements relevant to the research focus. These elements include camera angles, character expressions, costumes, settings, and dialogues that function as signs within the narrative structure.

Through these techniques, the researcher was able to select specific scenes that represent social problems such as poverty, inequality, moral conflict, and crime.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

The data in this research were analyzed using semiotic analysis based on the theory proposed by Roland Barthes. According to Barthes, meaning in cultural texts operates at three levels: denotation, connotation, and myth (Barthes, 1977). (1) Denotation refers to the literal or surface meaning of a sign as it appears in the visual image or dialogue. (2) Connotation refers to the implied meaning associated with cultural and emotional interpretations of the sign. (3) Myth refers to deeper ideological meanings that reflect broader cultural beliefs and social values within society.

Through these three levels of analysis, the researcher interprets how visual and narrative elements in the film construct representations of social issues. The analysis process involves identifying signs within selected scenes, interpreting their meanings, and connecting them to broader social contexts.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Representation of Poverty**

One of the most prominent social issues found in the film *Agak Laen* is poverty. This issue is reflected in the daily lives of the main characters who struggle economically and attempt to improve their financial situation through managing a haunted house attraction at a night market. The characters' economic difficulties become the main motivation behind their actions throughout the film.

At the denotative level, several scenes depict the characters working in a modest environment with limited facilities. The night market setting, the simple design of the haunted house attraction, and the characters' casual clothing all indicate their modest economic conditions. In addition, their dialogues frequently revolve around financial concerns, such as the need to earn money and the difficulties of maintaining their business.

At the connotative level, these visual elements symbolize the economic struggles experienced by many individuals within lower socioeconomic groups. The night market itself represents the informal economic sector, where individuals often rely on creativity and improvisation to generate income. The characters' efforts to attract visitors demonstrate their determination to survive despite limited resources.

At the myth level, the film constructs a broader social meaning related to the persistent struggle faced by individuals from disadvantaged economic backgrounds. The narrative reflects the belief that economic survival often requires perseverance and risk-taking. As explained by Soerjono Soekanto, poverty can emerge when social structures fail to provide equal access to economic opportunities for all members of society (Soekanto, 2012). Through this representation, the film indirectly highlights the structural challenges that contribute to economic inequality.

### **Representation of Social Inequality**

Another social issue identified in the film is social inequality. This issue appears through the interactions between characters and the social expectations placed upon them. Differences in economic status influence how characters perceive themselves and how they are treated by others.

At the denotative level, several scenes portray conversations in which characters express concerns about their economic situation and their inability to meet societal expectations. These dialogues illustrate the pressure experienced by individuals who struggle to achieve financial stability.

At the connotative level, the characters' expressions of frustration and anxiety represent the psychological effects of social inequality. Their concerns about success and economic security reflect the broader societal belief that personal worth is often measured through financial achievement.

At the myth level, the film conveys the idea that social status and financial success are deeply embedded within cultural expectations. Individuals who lack economic resources often face social pressure and feelings of inadequacy. According to Alex Sobur, media representations frequently reflect existing social structures and cultural values, shaping how audiences understand social realities (Sobur, 2003).

### **Representation of Moral Dilemma**

The narrative of the film also highlights the presence of moral dilemmas experienced by the characters when an unexpected incident occurs in the haunted house attraction. This moment becomes a critical turning point in the storyline and introduces a complex ethical conflict.

At the denotative level, the film shows the characters reacting with shock and panic after discovering that a visitor has died inside the attraction. The characters then gather to discuss possible ways to deal with the situation.

At the connotative level, the tension displayed through the characters' facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice emphasizes their fear and uncertainty. The dark atmosphere and dramatic reactions strengthen the sense of anxiety and confusion experienced by the characters.

At the myth level, the situation reflects a broader social belief that individuals may compromise their moral values when faced with extreme pressure. The characters' decision-making process illustrates how fear of legal consequences can influence ethical judgment.

### **Representation of Crime**

Crime is another important theme represented in the film. The characters' decision to hide the incident involving the deceased visitor introduces elements of secrecy and illegal behavior within the narrative.

At the denotative level, the film presents scenes where the characters discuss strategies to avoid being blamed for the incident. Their actions include attempting to conceal the situation and prevent others from discovering what happened.

At the connotative level, these actions symbolize the fear of authority and the consequences of legal punishment. The characters' behavior reflects their desperation to protect themselves from potential legal repercussions.

At the myth level, the film highlights the social perception that individuals may resort to illegal actions when they feel trapped or powerless. This representation illustrates how social pressure and fear can influence individuals to violate moral and legal norms.

### **Representation of Friendship and Solidarity**

In addition to portraying social problems, the film also emphasizes the importance of friendship and solidarity among the main characters. Despite the difficult situations they face, the characters consistently support each other and attempt to resolve their problems together.

At the denotative level, the film depicts the four main characters discussing their problems collectively and making decisions as a group. Their interactions often involve humor and cooperation, which strengthens their sense of unity.

At the connotative level, these interactions symbolize the value of solidarity among individuals who share similar struggles. The characters rely on each other emotionally and practically in order to overcome challenges.

At the myth level, the film promotes the cultural belief that friendship and mutual support are essential values in facing social difficulties. This representation reinforces the idea that collective solidarity can help individuals endure hardship.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study reveal that the film *Agak Laen* represents several social issues that are closely related to the realities experienced by many individuals in contemporary society. Through the use of visual elements, narrative structure, and character interactions, the film portrays themes such as poverty, social inequality, moral dilemmas, crime, and solidarity among individuals. These issues are constructed through various cinematic signs that can be interpreted using semiotic analysis.

From the perspective of semiotics, films can be understood as systems of signs that communicate meaning through images, dialogue, gestures, and other symbolic elements. According to Roland Barthes, meaning in media texts operates at three levels: denotation, connotation, and myth. At the denotative level, meaning refers to the literal representation of events or objects within the film. At the connotative level, meaning is shaped by cultural and emotional associations attached to those signs. At the mythological level, the signs contribute to broader ideological meanings that reflect cultural beliefs and social values (Barthes, 1977).

Applying this framework to the film *Agak Laen* reveals that the narrative does not merely present humorous or entertaining scenes but also communicates deeper social messages. For instance, the depiction of the characters working at a night market haunted house attraction reflects the economic struggles faced by individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. While the denotative meaning simply shows characters operating a small business, the connotative meaning highlights the reality that many individuals rely on informal economic sectors for survival. At the mythological level, this representation reinforces the social belief that economic success requires persistence and creativity, particularly for those with limited resources.

The representation of poverty in the film also illustrates how economic difficulties influence the decisions and behaviors of individuals. The characters' motivation to improve their financial situation becomes the driving force behind many events in the narrative. In this sense, the film reflects the sociological understanding of poverty as a structural problem that affects individuals' opportunities and life choices. According to Soerjono Soekanto, social problems such as poverty often arise due to imbalances within social structures that limit individuals' access to resources and opportunities (Soekanto, 2012). The film indirectly portrays these structural limitations by presenting characters who must struggle within an uncertain economic environment.

Another significant issue highlighted in the film is social inequality. The characters frequently experience social pressure related to financial success and social status. These pressures reflect broader cultural expectations in which economic achievement is often associated with personal worth and social recognition. Through the interactions among characters, the film demonstrates how individuals from lower economic backgrounds may experience feelings of insecurity and frustration when confronted with societal expectations. Such portrayals emphasize the psychological impact of social inequality and illustrate how economic disparities influence social relationships.

The moral dilemma faced by the characters after the unexpected death of a visitor also provides an important insight into human behavior when confronted with fear and uncertainty. The characters must decide whether to report the incident or attempt to hide it in order to avoid legal consequences. This situation creates a conflict between moral values and self-preservation. The film illustrates how individuals may struggle to make ethical decisions when they feel threatened by potential punishment. The tension presented in these scenes highlights the complexity of moral judgment in situations involving risk and responsibility.

In addition to portraying social problems, the film also emphasizes the importance of solidarity and friendship among the main characters. Despite the difficult circumstances they encounter, the characters consistently rely on each other for support and guidance. Their collective decision-making and mutual assistance demonstrate the value of cooperation when facing adversity. This representation reflects a cultural belief that social relationships and solidarity play an important role in helping individuals overcome challenges. Through humor and camaraderie, the film conveys the idea that shared experiences can strengthen bonds among individuals who face similar struggles.

Furthermore, the combination of horror and comedy elements in the film contributes to the effectiveness of its social commentary. Humor allows the film to present serious issues in a manner that is accessible and engaging for audiences. By blending comedic situations with moments of tension, the narrative encourages viewers to reflect on the underlying social issues

while still enjoying the entertainment aspect of the story. This strategy demonstrates how films can function simultaneously as entertainment and as a medium for social reflection.

Overall, the discussion indicates that *Agak Laen* functions not only as a horror-comedy film but also as a cultural text that reflects social realities in contemporary Indonesian society. Through the use of symbolic representation and narrative storytelling, the film communicates messages about economic struggle, social inequality, moral conflict, and the importance of solidarity. By applying semiotic analysis, this study reveals how these meanings are constructed through cinematic signs and how they contribute to broader interpretations of social issues.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the film *Agak Laen* represents various social issues through visual and narrative elements that function as meaningful signs within the cinematic text. By applying the semiotic framework proposed by Roland Barthes, the analysis reveals that the film constructs meaning at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth. The findings show that the film portrays several social problems, including poverty, social inequality, moral dilemmas, crime, and solidarity among individuals. These issues are depicted through the experiences and interactions of the main characters, particularly in their efforts to survive economically and cope with unexpected challenges. Although presented within a horror-comedy genre, the film implicitly reflects social realities experienced by many members of society and highlights how individuals respond to economic pressures, social expectations, and ethical conflicts. Therefore, *Agak Laen* can be understood not only as a form of entertainment but also as a cultural text that communicates social messages and encourages audiences to reflect on the complexities of social life.

## REFERENCES

- Aiko, R. (2024). Men delay marriage due to shock with wedding costs. *Kompasiana*. <https://www.kompasiana.com/erika37118/673fe42fed641530e850cdf6/pria-tunda-menikah-karena-shock-dengan-biaya-nikah>
- Amania, D. (2024). Indra Jegel profile: Biodata, partner, interesting facts, and early career photos. *Inilah.com*. <https://www.inilah.com/profil-indra-jegel>
- Budiasa, M. (2015). Infidelity scandal of state officials (between power and domination). *Kompasiana*. <https://www.kompasiana.com/meistra/5518a7e981331127699de8fb/skandal-perselingkuhan-para-pekerja-negara-antara-kuasa-dan-dominasion>
- Chandra, E. (2024). List of agencies most reported for gratification cases, highest ministry. *GoodStats*. <https://goodstats.id/article/daftar-instansi-paling-banyak-dilaporkan-atas-kasus-gratifikasi-kementerian-tertinggi-vRhiV>
- Danesi, M. (2010). *Messages, signs, and meanings: A basic textbook in semiotics and communication theory*. Jalasutra.
- Darmawati, B., Wati, L., & Irianti, E. (2024). Analysis of glamorous culture in wedding receptions at Taman Royal, Tangerang City. *Jurnal Ilmiah Wahana Pendidikan*. <https://jurnal.peneliti.net/index.php/IIWP>
- DeVito, J. A. (2018). *Interpersonal communication*. Karisma Publishing.
- DeFleur, M. L. (1985). *Understanding mass communication* (2nd ed.). Houghton Mifflin.
- Diananto, W. (2024). Box office report: Number of viewers for *Ipar Adalah Maut* reaches 4.63 million. *Liputan6*. <https://www.liputan6.com/showbiz/read/5647521>
- Effendy, O. U. (2003). *Dimensi-dimensi komunikasi*. Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Erikania, J. (2015). Can someone die of fear? *National Geographic Indonesia*. <https://nationalgeographic.grid.id/read/13302133>
- Eriyanto. (2011). *Metodologi penelitian komunikasi*. Prenada Media Group.

- Faizah, N., & Tjahjani, J. (2021). Indigenous resistance to colonial orientalist views in the film *Bumi Manusia* (2019). *Metahumaniora*, 11(3), 282–294. <https://doi.org/10.24198/metahumaniora.v11i3.35771>
- Fiske, J. (2018). *Pengantar ilmu komunikasi*. Raja Grafindo Persada.
- Hoed, B. H. (2008). *Semiotik dan dinamika sosial budaya*. FIB UI.
- Ida, R. (2014). *Metode penelitian studi media dan kajian budaya*. Prenada Media Group.
- Indriantoro, N., & Supomo, B. (2013). *Metodologi penelitian bisnis untuk akuntansi dan manajemen*. BPFE.
- Intania, A., Wafaa, A. S., Murwanto, S. S., Naufal, N., Nabiila, M., Taufiqurahman, Y., Aprillio, D. K., Nugraha, D. S., & Gunawan, T. A. (2024). Legal considerations in murder cases by mutilation. *Causa: Journal of Law and Citizenship*, 3. <https://ejournal.warunayama.org/index.php/causa/article/view/2749>
- Khafid, S. (2019). Film *Dua Garis Biru* reaches 2 million viewers in 15 days. *Tirto.id*. <https://tirto.id/film-dua-garis-biru-tembus-2-juta-penonton>
- Khomsahrial, R. (2016). *Komunikasi massa*. PT Grasindo.
- Kriyantono, R. (2017). *Teori public relations perspektif barat dan lokal*. Kencana.
- Lustyantie, N. (2012). Pendekatan model semiotika Roland Barthes dalam karya sastra Prancis. FIB UI.
- Maradona, T. B. (2021). Criminal acts of gratification in Indonesia reviewed from the aspect of legal culture. *Journal of Law and Economic Development*, 9(1), 26–36. <https://doi.org/10.20961/hpe.v9i1.52526>
- Marvela. (2023). Film *Agak Laen* producer Ernest Prakasa asks this to the players. *Tempo*. <https://seleb.tempo.co/read/1809017>
- Mayasari, R. D. (2022). Complete profile and biodata of Bene Dion. *MalangTerkini*. <https://malangterkini.pikiran-rakyat.com>
- Moleong, L. J. (2016). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif*. Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Momole, M. G. (2024). The film *Agak Laen* synopsis. *Tempo*. <https://seleb.tempo.co/read/1829726>
- Muljono, A. P., & Azeharie, S. (2023). Representation of social class in the film *Cinta Laki-Laki Biasa*. *Koneksi*, 7(2), 345–354. <https://doi.org/10.24912/kn.v7i2.21387>
- Muzakkir, & Yunanda, R. (2021). Poor family parents' strategies in improving children's education. *Jurnal Sosiologi Dialektika Sosial*, 7.
- Oktaviani, A., & Harini, Y. N. A. (2024). Representation of social criticism in the film *Sri Asih*. *UPI Journal*.
- Patmawati, P. (2021). Representation of social inequality in the film *Parasite* (Roland Barthes semiotic analysis). *Mitzal: Journal of Government and Communication Science*, 5(2). <https://doi.org/10.35329/mitzal.v5i2.1896>
- Prasetya, B., & Arif, A. (2019). *Analisis semiotika film dan komunikasi*. Intrans Publishing.
- Rijali, A. (2018). *Qualitative data analysis*. UIN Antasari.
- Ruslan, R. (2013). *Metode penelitian komunikasi dan public relations*. Raja Grafindo Persada.
- Shaleha, R. R. A., & Kurniasih, I. (2021). Infidelity: A scientific exploration of infidelity. *Buletin Psikologi*, 29(2), 218–233. <https://doi.org/10.22146/buletinpsychologi.55278>
- Sobur, A. (2003). *Semiotika komunikasi*. Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Soekanto, S. (2012). *Sosiologi suatu pengantar*. Raja Grafindo Persada.
- Sugiyono. (2018). *Metode penelitian kualitatif*. Alfabeta.
- Trisnawati, D., & Khoirunurrofik, K. (2019). Inter-provincial spatial linkages of crime patterns in Indonesia. *Indonesian Journal of Geography*, 51(2), 106–116. <https://doi.org/10.22146/ijg.34026>
- Tutesa, & Wisman, Y. (2020). Social problems in society. *Journal of Social Science Education*.
- Vera, N. (2014). *Semiotika dalam riset komunikasi*. Ghalia Indonesia.
- Wibowo, I. S. W. (2013). *Semiotika komunikasi*. Mitra Wacana Media.