

Representing Honesty through Signs: A Semiotic Analysis of Ipar Adalah Maut

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Abstract

This study examines the representation of honesty in the Indonesian film Ipar Adalah Maut using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory of signs. It aims to identify verbal and non-verbal signs that signify honesty and to interpret their denotative and connotative meanings, highlighting which meaning dominates audience perception. The study used a qualitative method. Data was collected through repeated viewing, dialogue transcription, scene selection, screenshot documentation, and systematic coding of signs.

The analysis reveals stated that honesty is conveyed not only through dialogue but also through gestures, facial expressions, body language, camera angles, and settings. Denotatively, honesty appears in confessions, admissions, and apologies; connotatively, it reflects sincerity, emotional struggle, betrayal, and the preservation of dignity. Honesty is also presented as a cultural value aligned with Indonesian religious and social norms. The findings revealed that connotative meaning dominated, emphasizing emotional authenticity and symbolic actions over literal truth-telling. This study demonstrates that film can construct moral values both explicitly and implicitly, engaging audiences on surface and deeper cultural levels.

Keywords: Semiotics, honesty, denotation, connotation, Roland Barthes, film

1. INTRODUCTION

Honesty is one of the most fundamental values in human interaction because it shapes trust, dignity, and moral responsibility (Dwi Safitri et al., 2024). In Indonesian culture and within Islamic teachings, honesty (*sidq*) (M, Suud et al., 2020) is positioned as a core ethical principle that preserves harmony, especially within the family. Conversely, dishonesty often becomes the root of betrayal, conflict, and moral disintegration. As a cultural product, film functions not only as entertainment but also as a medium that

constructs and communicates moral messages through visual and verbal signs. (Nara Kusuma & Nurhayati, 2017) Roland Barthes' semiotics provides a relevant analytical framework for exploring these meanings because it distinguishes between denotation (literal meaning), (Trimo Wati et al., 2022) connotation (cultural or emotional meaning), and myth (dominant ideological message). Through this framework, a film is understood not merely as a narrative but as a system of signs that produce layered meanings. Therefore, the study of honesty in film requires attention not only to its explicit portrayal but also to the underlying cultural codes that shape the audience's interpretation.

The Indonesian film *Ipar Adalah Maut* (2024) presents a compelling narrative about moral collapse within a household. The story follows Aris, who betrays his wife Nisa by engaging in an affair with her younger sister, Rani. This narrative foregrounds dishonesty as a destructive force, while simultaneously highlighting honesty as a painful but necessary value. (Dwi Safitri et al., 2024; Khaerani, 2025; Sianipar, 2025) The film uses a combination of dialogues, gestures, camera shots, and symbolic elements to portray how honesty and dishonesty shape relationships and moral choices. Several previous studies have examined semiotic meanings in Indonesian films. Abdullah (2018) analyzed Islamic messages in *Pengabdian Setan*; Sakinah (2021) investigated representations of honesty in *Surga yang Tak Dirindukan 3*; Wibisono & Sari (2021) examined cultural codes in *Bintang Ketjil*. However, most of these studies focused either on religious messages or broader cultural symbols. Only a few studies specifically analyze the meaning of honesty as the central theme in contemporary Indonesian films, especially using a detailed Barthesian approach involving both verbal and non-verbal signs. This gap shows the need for a focused study on honesty in a modern, high-conflict family drama such as *Ipar Adalah Maut*.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to answer two main research questions. First, it examines the denotative and connotative meanings of honesty in *Ipar Adalah Maut* through Barthes' semiotic analysis. Second, it explores which meaning denotative or connotative is more dominant and how these meanings are conveyed through visual signs, gestures, camera framing, and character dialogues. By addressing this gap, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how Indonesian films construct moral values, particularly honesty, within the context of family and cultural norms.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Semiotics and Roland Barthes' Theory

Semiotics was the study of signs and how they produced meaning (Chandler, 2002; Danesi, 2004). (Khaerani, 2025; Sianipar, 2025; Trimo Wati et al., 2022) Among various approaches to semiotics Dewanto. (n.d.) this study focuses on Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, which emphasizes the analysis of denotative and connotative meanings. Roland Barthes developed Saussure's model into a two-level signification system: denotation (literal meaning) and connotation (cultural or emotional meaning).

According to Barthes (1977, p. 38), stated "what is expressed by denotation is never free from the cultural values that shape connotation." As Casebier and Monaco (1977)

explained: Semiotics provided a language for analyzing films not merely as entertainment but as texts that encoded ideology. The film was a signifying practice where verbal and visual signs worked together to produce meaning that reflected both individual expression and cultural codes. (p. 240) Paraphrasing, semiotics is not only a tool to decode signs but also a method to reveal how culture and ideology shape the audience's understanding of a text (Chandler, 2002)

Framework of Semiotics According to Roland Barthes:

- a. Denotation: Referred to the literal or explicit meaning of a sign, such as a word, action, or visual element that directly represented reality.
- b. Connotation: Referred to cultural, emotional, or symbolic meanings beyond the literal, which conveyed values, moral messages, or ideological ideas.

2.2. Honesty in Cultural and Cinematic Contexts

Honesty (*kejujuran*) was considered a universal moral value but had a unique place in Indonesian society, closely tied to religious and cultural expectations. As Sakinah (2021) found in her study of *Surga yang Tak Dirindukan 3*, honesty in film is often linked to emotional struggle and the preservation of family harmony.

Danesi (2004, p. 22) stated that “signs acquire meaning not in isolation, but through their relation to cultural codes and shared values.” This meant honesty in Indonesian films was usually not shown merely as factual truth, but as emotional sincerity and moral responsibility

2.3. Previous Studies

The researcher used the previous study because it was relevant and closely related to the present research. In the past, Several scholars had examined Indonesian films using semiotics. (Abdullah, 2018) explored Islamic messages in *Pengabdian Setan* and showed how horror films could transmit moral lessons. (Wibisono & Sari, 2021) analyzed *Bintang Ketjil* and concluded that denotative and connotative meanings interacted to shape viewers' interpretations. (Danesi, 2004) emphasized the relational nature of signs:

“A sign did not carry meaning within itself, but rather derived its significance from the system of relations in which it was embedded. In other words, meaning was produced not by isolated signs but through the cultural codes, contexts, and conventions that connected them.” (p. 23)

From these studies, it could be seen that honesty in film was rarely the central focus, which left a research gap. This study sought to fill that gap by analyzing honesty in *Ipar Adalah Maut* using Barthes' semiotics.

3. METHODS


This research employed a qualitative descriptive method (Berger, 2024; Latifah et al., 2023) using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory as the primary analytical framework. The main data source was the Indonesian drama film *Ipar Adalah Maut*, produced by MD Pictures, one of Indonesia's leading film production companies renowned for its popular drama and romance titles. The film, officially released in 2024 through MD Pictures' official YouTube channel, had a runtime of approximately 90 minutes. It was chosen as the object of study because its narrative portrayed the themes of honesty and betrayal within family relationships, making it a highly relevant subject for semiotic analysis.


The data collection initially began by repeatedly watching the film to understand its story and characters. Second, key scenes conveying honesty were captured through screenshots, and dialogues expressing honesty were transcribed. Lastly, verbal and non-verbal signs of honesty were systematically coded and categorized for analysis. The analysis conducted using Barthes' semiotic framework, which consists of two levels of meaning: denotation and connotation. Denotative analysis focused on the literal meaning of signs, including confessions, accusations, and apologies. Connotative analysis examined the cultural, emotional, and symbolic associations of these signs, as conveyed through performance, mise-en-scène, and cinematographic techniques. The findings from both levels were then compared to determine which type of meaning denotative or connotative was more dominant in the film's representation of honesty.


4. RESULTS



The results of the semiotic analysis reveal that honesty in *Ipar Adalah Maut* is conveyed through both verbal and non-verbal signs. At the denotative level, honesty is directly observable in dialogues such as confessions, accusations, and apologies. At the connotative level, honesty is more subtly communicated through gestures, facial expressions, silence, and cinematic techniques that emphasize sincerity, moral responsibility, and emotional depth.


To exemplify these findings, twelve key scenes were examined, highlighting how honesty manifests across different social interactions and family dynamics.


No	Picture	Dialog	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning	Value of Honesty
1.		Nisa: " <i>Kan saya duluan.</i> " ("I was here first.") Aris: " <i>Ya sudah. Mbak saja.</i> " ("Alright then, you first, Miss.")	Two strangers politely negotiate a parking spot. This moment shows a simple act of social interaction grounded in mutual respect. Even though they are strangers, both characters maintain politeness and composure. Such an	Genuine sincerity reflects fairness, ethical consideration, and respect. Through this dialogue, sincerity becomes a moral choice rather than a mere courtesy. Aris's willingness to yield the parking spot	Honesty is expressed through intention, creating trust even in brief interactions.

			everyday encounter highlights how honesty can emerge naturally within ordinary social exchanges.	represents an ethical awareness that values fairness over personal gain. This action symbolizes how respect can grow from truthful and considerate behavior.	
2.		<p>Nisa: “<i>Semalam kamu bertemu Mas Aris di dapur tidak pakai hijab, ya?</i>” (“Last night, did you meet Mas Aris in the kitchen without wearing a hijab?”)</p> <p>Rani “<i>Ya ampun. Duh, Mbak, maaf ya.</i>” (“Oh my... Oh, Mbak, I’m so sorry.”)</p> <p>Rani: “<i>Aku itu tidak menyangka kalau Mas Aris ke dapur.</i>” (“I just didn’t expect Mas Aris would go to the kitchen.”)</p>	Rani apologizes for being unintentionally seen without her hijab.	The hijab symbolizes modesty and shared cultural values; honesty is gentle moral communication. This scene portrays the hijab not merely as a religious symbol but as a reflection of sincerity and humility. Through modest behavior and respectful dialogue, honesty becomes a form of moral expression conveyed with empathy and grace.	Honesty nurtures trust and harmony through empathetic dialogue.

3.		<p>Aris: “<i>Tadi... Tadi... Rani...</i>” (“Earlier... Earlier... Rani...”) Aris: “<i>Rani dilecehkan di kampus.</i>” (“Rani was harassed on campus.”) Nisa: “<i>Ya Allah! Mas, kok bisa? Kejadiannya bagaimana?</i>” (“Oh God! Mas, how could this happen? What exactly happened?”) Aris: “<i>Nis, kasih Rani waktu buat tenangin diri dulu, ya.</i>” (“Nis, please give Rani some time to calm herself down, okay?”)</p>	Aris shares sensitive information.	Honesty as emotional responsibility; delivering painful truth carefully. Aris’s manner of speaking reflected empathy and restraint, emphasizing that honesty is not only about revealing facts but also about managing emotions with compassion. His choice of words showed moral maturity, balancing truth-telling with emotional care.	Truth is conveyed with empathy and protection in family dynamics . This interaction demonstrated that genuine honesty must consider timing, tone, and emotional sensitivity. By communicating the truth with gentleness, Aris upheld trust and preserved harmony in his relationship, showing that honesty, when handled with empathy, reinforces love
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					and understanding in family bonds.
4.		<p>Aris: “<i>Tadi Pak Junaedi telepon.</i>” (“Mr. Junaedi called earlier.”) Raya: “<i>Tapi lucu deh, suaranya kayak perempuan.</i>” (“But it was funny, the voice sounded like a woman’s.”) Nisa: “<i>Suara perempuan?</i>” (“A woman’s voice?”) Raya: “<i>Iya, aku dengar.</i>” (“Yes, I heard it.”) Aris: “<i>Salah dengar kali kamu itu, Sayang.</i>” (“Maybe you misheard it, Sweetheart.”)</p>	Raya comments on a voice she heard.	Childlike honesty disrupts the domestic illusion; innocence reveals hidden truths.	Innocent, uncalculated truth has revealing power
5.		<p>Rani: “<i>Pokoknya, bagaimana caranya, ajak Pak Junaedi rapat di hotel itu.</i>” (“Whatever it takes, make sure to arrange a meeting with Mr. Junaedi at that hotel.”) Rani: “<i>Dia sudah curiga sekali sama kamu.</i>” (“He’s already very suspicious of you.”) Aris: “<i>Pak Junaedi. Soal itu loh, Pak, yang</i></p>	They stage an alibi to avoid suspicion.	The lie’s fragility signals truth’s eventual emergence. Their fabricated alibi symbolized the instability of deceit, suggesting that falsehoods are inherently weak and destined to collapse under moral pressure. The tension between	Deception’s failure often reveals honesty indirectly. This scene demonstrated that even through deceit, the truth ultimately finds a way to

		<p><i>serah terima Kajur itu. Besok, bagaimana kalau kita pindahkan ke hotel saja?” (“Mr. Junaedi. About that, sir the handover of the Head of Department position. How about we move it to the hotel tomorrow?”)</i></p>		<p>appearance and reality underscored how lies often contain the seeds of their own exposure.</p>	<p>surface. The moral implication was that honesty, though suppressed, remains a constant force that restores balance when deception fails. Through this, the film portrayed honesty not merely as virtue, but as an inevitable revelation of reality.</p>
6.		<p>Voice recording plays: “<i>Aku cinta kamu, Rani-ku sayang. Kamu sudah jadi candu yang nggak ada obatnya.</i>” (“I love you, my dear Rani. You’ve become an addiction with no cure.”) Nisa: “<i>Astagfirullahalad</i></p>	<p>Recording exposes Aris’ intimate confession.</p>	<p>The recording symbolized how modern tools could unintentionally serve as vessels of truth. While meant for secrecy, technology reversed its purpose—</p>	<p>Truth surfaces unexpectedly, beyond control. This scene emphasized that honesty is not always</p>

		<p><i>zim!</i>” (“I seek forgiveness from Allah!”)</p>		<p>transforming into an instrument of revelation that dismantled deception. This represented how truth often finds expression through unexpected channels.</p>	<p>voluntary ; it can emerge through circumstances outside human intention. The exposure of Aris’s words highlighted that truth, despite attempts to conceal it, possesses an inherent power to reveal itself affirming honesty as an unstoppable moral force.</p>
7.		<p>Nisa; “<i>Dari sekian banyak perempuan yang bisa kamu selingkuhi, kamu pilih Rani? Perempuan yang sedarah sama aku!</i>” (“Of all the women you could have cheated with, you chose Rani? A woman who shares my blood!”)</p>	<p>Full revelation of the affair.</p>	<p>Collapse of family myths; honesty becomes emotionally explosive and transformative. This confrontation exposes the ultimate truth that shatters the illusion of</p>	<p>Truth is cathartic and demands accountability. After analyzing the eighth data, the researcher decided</p>

				harmony. Through this breakdown, honesty emerges not as peace, but as an inevitable force that demands moral reckoning. Value of Honesty:	to limit the discussio n to these selected scenes. Although twelve data were initially identified , eight were chosen for deeper analysis because they most clearly represent the various forms of honesty portrayed in the film Ipar Adalah Maut. The remainin g data share similar patterns and meanings , which have already been reflected in the analyzed scenes.
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					Therefore, these eight data are considered sufficient to represent the overall semiotic portrayal of honesty within the film.
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5. DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that honesty in *Ipar Adalah Maut* operates not only as a literal act of truth-telling but also as a deeper moral and emotional expression shaped by cultural values, family expectations, and personal intentions. At the denotative level, honesty appears through explicit dialogues such as confessions, apologies, and confrontations. These verbal expressions present honesty as factual clarity within the storyline. However, the analysis shows that denotation alone is insufficient to understand the full meaning of honesty in the film. More significantly, connotative meanings dominate the film's construction of honesty. Through gestures, facial expressions, silence, and cinematic elements such as lighting, framing, and camera distance, the film communicates honesty as an emotional and ethical struggle. These connotative signs reveal sincerity, guilt, vulnerability, and betrayal—elements that cannot be captured solely through spoken language. This aligns with Roland Barthes' semiotic perspective, which emphasizes that meaning is layered and that connotation often carries stronger ideological and emotional force than denotation.

The selected eight scenes demonstrate how honesty emerges across different social contexts: polite interactions between strangers, moral communication within cultural norms, emotional honesty in moments of crisis, unintentional truth revealed by children, technological exposure of secrets, and morally charged confrontations that dismantle family harmony. These variations show that honesty in the film is unstable, dynamic, and sometimes painful. In several scenes such as the discovery of Aris's affair—honesty acts as a destructive force that collapses trust and exposes moral failure. Conversely, in other scenes, honesty functions as a redemptive value that fosters empathy, restores dignity, or clarifies misunderstandings.

6. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that honesty in the film *Ipar Adalah Maut* is represented through both denotative and connotative signs (Nara Kusuma & Nurhayati, 2017). At the denotative level, honesty appears directly in spoken confessions, accusations, and apologies, which provide literal representations of truth-telling among the characters. At the connotative level, honesty is expressed more powerfully through non-verbal signs such as gestures, facial expressions, silence, and cinematic techniques that construct sincerity, betrayal, remorse, and dignity. The analysis shows that connotative meaning dominates the film's representation of honesty. This dominance suggests that the film emphasizes honesty as an emotional and cultural practice rather than simply a factual disclosure. In other words, honesty in *Ipar Adalah Maut*

is framed as authenticity of feeling and moral courage, deeply embedded in cultural and religious values.

By exposing both the destructive and redemptive roles of honesty, the film highlights its dual function: honesty disrupts relationships by revealing painful truths, yet it also provides a pathway to resolution, forgiveness, and self-determination. Ultimately, the film reflects the central role of honesty as a fundamental moral value in Indonesian society. Future studies could expand this research by comparing honesty across different film genres, examining other moral values alongside honesty, or exploring audience interpretations of cinematic representations of honesty in the Indonesian context.

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