

Civil Resistance against Totalitarian Regime in the Movie *Truth and Treason*: A Semiotic Analysis

Akbar Adiwinata^{1*}, Syamsurrijal², Abdul Muhid³

*Corresponding author email: 24040220001@universitasbumigora.ac.id

Article History

Manuscript submitted:
09 April 2026
Manuscript revised:
25 Mei 2026
Accepted for publication:
18 Juni 2026

Keywords

Civil Resistance,
Totalitarian Regime,
Roland Barthes' Semiotic,
Movie

Abstract

A totalitarian regime is a system of power that seeks to control various aspects of people's lives through propaganda, discrimination, and restrictions on individual freedoms. This condition often gives rise to various forms of civil resistance in response to oppressive practices carried out by the state. This study aims to identify the representation of civil resistance against a totalitarian regime in the movie *Truth and Treason* through Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. This study uses a qualitative method with semiotic analysis techniques that focus on three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth. The results show that civil resistance is represented through three main forms: (1) rejection of national identity, (2) rejection of discrimination, and rejection of restrictions on freedom of expression. This study concludes that civil resistance is not always manifested through physical action or direct confrontation, but can also be represented through symbolic and non-violent actions that convey the meaning of rejecting injustice. As the results, the movie *Truth and Treason* demonstrates that moral courage, human solidarity, and freedom of thought can be effective forms of resistance in the face of the domination of totalitarian regimes.

Copyright © 2025, The Author(s).
This is an open access article under the BY-NC-ND license



Contents

Abstract	351
Introduction	352
Methods.....	356
Results and Discussions.....	357
Conclusion.....	362
Reference	363

¹ Department of English Literature, Postgraduate Program, Bumigora University, Mataram, Indonesia

² Department of English Literature, Postgraduate Program, Bumigora University, Mataram, Indonesia

³ Department of English Literature, Postgraduate Program, Bumigora University, Mataram, Indonesia



Introduction

Totalitarian regime has emerged as systems of political control where the ruler seeks to dominate every aspect of public and private life. Totalitarianism is characterized by centralized authority, suppression of dissent, and the manipulation of truth through propaganda and ideological doctrine (Arendt, 1962). Based on the history, one of the most notorious examples of totalitarian rule was the regime of Nazi led by Adolf Hitler in Germany from 1933 to 1945, which employed propaganda, censorship, and mass surveillance to control its citizens and eliminate opposition (Stackelberg & Winkle, 2002). Under Hitler's power, Nazi constructed an ideology of racial purity and national superiority that justified violence, persecution, and war. The rigid control over media, language, and education transformed society into an instrument of ideological obedience, leaving little room for individual freedom or moral resistance (Wardani, 2015). In such systems if there is a disobedience towards the established rules, it is considered as a deliberate and not reconciled with the authorities in power.

A similar pattern, though in different historical and cultural contexts, can be observed in Indonesia's political experience under authoritarian rule. During the New Order (*Orde Baru*) regime led by President Suharto from 1966 to 1998, the state exercised strict control over political expression, mass media, and public discourse in the name of national stability and development (Adiprasetyo, 2025). Acts of civil resistance then emerged from students, intellectuals, and human rights activists who questioned the legitimacy of power and demanded transparency, democracy, and justice (Mietzner, 2020). Both the Nazi regime in Germany and the authoritarian era in Indonesia reveal how totalitarian power seeks to control its society through various forms of ideological, political and social. The primary goal of such control was to ensure the stability and continuity of the ruling authority by shaping citizens' beliefs, behaviors, and perceptions in alignment with state ideology. This restriction of freedom then became the root of the resistance acts against dehumanizing control which in the political, social and ethical realms is known as civil resistance (Randle, 1993).

Civil resistance, often referred to civil disobedience, is commonly associated with non-violent forms of protest (Mathis & Allen, 2021). According to Bayat (2010), instead of utilizing physical confrontations, civil resistance employs demonstrations, boycotts, hunger strikes, and long marches as the most effective strategies for achieving specific political or social goals in order to reject injustice. For minority, civil resistance serves as a means for ordinary people or the general public to fight for rights, freedom, and justice without resorting to violence (Bartkowski, 2013). Those who engage in civil resistance employ various tactics such as strikes, boycotts, mass demonstrations, and other forms of collective action to promote broader social, political, and economic change. Across the world, civil resistance is known by different terms such as, nonviolent resistance, direct action, people power, political defiance, and citizen mobilization (Merriman & Yousefi, 2021). However, regardless of the terminology used, the fundamental driving forces behind popular resistance remain essentially the same.

In Indonesia, civil resistance is known by different terms such as, nonviolent resistance, direct action, people power, political defiance, and citizen mobilization (Nyman, 2006). They had been recorded since 1966 during President Soekarno's regime. Erlina (2020) explained in her writing that civil resistance in Indonesia was shown by the Indonesian student action front, known as KAMI (*Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Indonesia*), submitted three major demands to the government, particularly to the President of Indonesia at that time. This event became famously known as TRITURA, an

acronym for *Tiga Tuntutan Rakyat* (Three Demands of the People). The demands were expressed through a mass demonstration in front of DPR (The House of Representative) building on 12th January, 1966. The date later recognized as the birth of the New Order era (*Orde Baru*). The demands included: (1) the dissolution of PKI (Indonesian Communist Party), (2) the reformation of the *Dwikora* Cabinet by removing individuals involved in the G30-S (30th September Movement), and (3) the reduction of prices to improve the people's economic condition.

The terminology of civil resistance has also become associated with the actions of prominent figures in other countries, one of which is Germany. According to Derbent (2021) in the book of *The German Communist Resistance*, civil resistance in Germany took multiple organized and individual forms, enacted by actors whose moral courage has become central to the historical literature on anti-totalitarian action. In *When Truth Was Treason: German Youth Against Hitler* written by Holmes and Keele (1995), one of the German civil who represented himself as anti-totalitarian regime was Helmuth Hubener. A teenager with seventeen-year-old youth, represented civil resistance by covertly listening to foreign broadcasts which were banned at that time because almost every news channel broadcasted about the cruelty and lies of Nazi as the ruling government.

Taking the news as a fact, Helmuth Hubener distributed anti-Nazi leaflets that contained internal and external reportage, and attempting to inform fellow citizens against the regime. For his act of resistance, he was arrested and executed because he was considered as a traitor to the nation and state. Helmuth Hubener embodied one of the most remarkable forms of resistance during the Nazi regime in Germany. His story and the social environment associated with him then is adapted into a movie titled *Truth and Treason* that brings renewed attention to moral bravery and the significance of youth-led civil resistance against totalitarianism.

Truth and Treason the movie serves not only as a representation of historical totalitarianism but also as a cinematic reflection of ongoing political and social conflicts. *Truth and Treason* the movie portrays the phenomenon of civil resistance as the central force challenging the power of a totalitarian regime. The movie depicts how acts of moral and political resistance arise within a society facing authoritarian ruler that imposed limits on the society and discriminated the Jewish community. In the movie, civil resistance is represented through the courage of individuals and collective refusal who seek to expose the injustice that is carried out by Nazi during Adolf Hitler's political reign.

The resistance that carried out by the civil is a non-violent resistance which emphasizes conscience, moral responsibility, and the pursuit of truth as forms of defiance against oppressive authority. Through cinematography and narrative, *Truth and Treason* the movie illustrates how civil resistance becomes a powerful instrument to reclaim freedom and human dignity in the face of totalitarian control, making it a profound reflection about the struggle of civil resistance to against authority power in Germany historical era. As such the term of resistance serves as a form of expressive attitude demonstrated by society toward a group or authority perceived as a threat to their existence (Lilja, 2022), *Truth and Treason* the movie presents the values of civil resistance which are depicted through both the main character and the surrounding society, particularly in relation to the opposition against a totalitarian regime.

Specifically, the movie portrays the theme of defiance against oppressive authority and highlights various issues of injustice that became subjects of public debate during Germany's socio-political climate at that time. According to this research background, the researcher is interested in identifying and describing the representation of civil resistance against totalitarian regime during the Nazi era in Germany as depicted in the movie *Truth and Treason*. To uncover and describe the representation of civil resistance in the movie, the researcher employs Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. The theory

focuses on three main pillars of analysis: denotative meaning, connotative meaning, and myth (Wulandari, 2022).

According to Roland Barthes in *Elements of Semiology* (1997), the first system of meaning, denotation, is concerned with the literal meaning, while the second system, connotation, emphasizes additional layers of meaning and deeper interpretations related to the objects or signs presented in the movie. Semiotics, as proposed by Roland Barthes, provides a critical framework for analyzing such representations. Barthes' approach on semiotic helps to decode how movie, as systems of signs, convey ideological messages through scenes (consist of image and language) that are an integral part of the movie which represent symbols (Utami et al., 2025). By analyzing *Truth and Treason* the movie using Barthes' semiotics, it enables the researcher to interpret visual and verbal signs that signify civil resistance against the power of the totalitarian regime contained in the movie.

Roland Barthes' semiotic theory offers a relevant framework because it is capable of interpreting signs at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth, allowing the representation of civil resistance in the movie to be understood not merely as a sequence of events, but also as a construction of ideological meaning. Barthes argues that signs do not stop at their literal meanings, rather they develop into cultural and ideological meanings shaped by social context. Therefore, Barthes' theory provides broader interpretive space to examine how movie constructs the ideology of civil resistance as a form of ethical and political struggle. Compared to Ferdinand de Saussure, Barthes' approach is considered more appropriate for this study because Saussure primarily focuses on the basic structure of signs through the relationship between the signifier and the signified. Saussure's model is highly important for understanding how signs function linguistically, but it tends to remain limited to structural relationships and gives less attention to the dimensions of ideology, culture, and power that emerge from those signs. If this study applied Saussure's framework, the analysis would most likely stop at the identification of symbols without exploring their deeper ideological significance.

Meanwhile, Charles Sanders Peirce's theory does offer a more complex classification of signs through icons, indexes, and symbols. However, Peirce's primary focus lies in the process of semiosis and the logical representation of signs rather than in uncovering cultural myths or dominant ideologies hidden beneath them. As a result, although Peirce's framework is valuable for categorizing signs, it is less effective for critically analyzing how signs operate within broader socio-political structures. Based on these considerations, Roland Barthes' semiotic theory is selected because it is the most capable of revealing the representation of civil resistance in *Truth and Treason* in a deeper and more comprehensive way, particularly in examining the relationship between signs, cultural meanings, and ideology. In contrast to Saussure's structural-linguistic orientation and Peirce's emphasis on sign classification, Barthes offers a more critical approach to the production of meaning within socio-political contexts. Therefore, the use of Barthes' theory in this research is not only methodologically relevant but also strategically significant for explaining how the movie represents civil resistance as a symbol of moral struggle against a totalitarian regime.

In summary, this study seeks to reveal the underlying semiotic structures through which *Truth and Treason* representing civil resistance against totalitarian power. By employing Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, the research will decode the signs, symbols, and myths that construct the ideological narrative of resistance within the movie. This analysis will not only contribute to study the semiotic of movie but also enrich the discourse on human freedom and moral defiance in the face of political oppression.

Literature Review

Roland Barthes adopts Saussure's concept of the signifier and signified (*signifiant-signifié*) as the foundation of his semiotic theory. Barthes (1997) introduces the notion of the order of signification, which refers to a two-level process of meaning construction. The first order of signification concerns the relationship between the signifier as the form of expression and the signified as the conceptual content. At this primary level, meaning is produced through what is directly represented by a sign. In literary work such as movie, this includes visible actions, spoken language, settings, and cinematic techniques that present the surface narrative of events. In Barthes's semiology framework, denotation constitutes the initial stage of the signifying system, where meaning appears direct and descriptive. This is followed by connotation as the second stage, in which signs are connected to cultural values, emotions, and ideological assumptions. The final stage is myth, which functions to naturalize particular worldviews so that they seem universal and unquestionable.

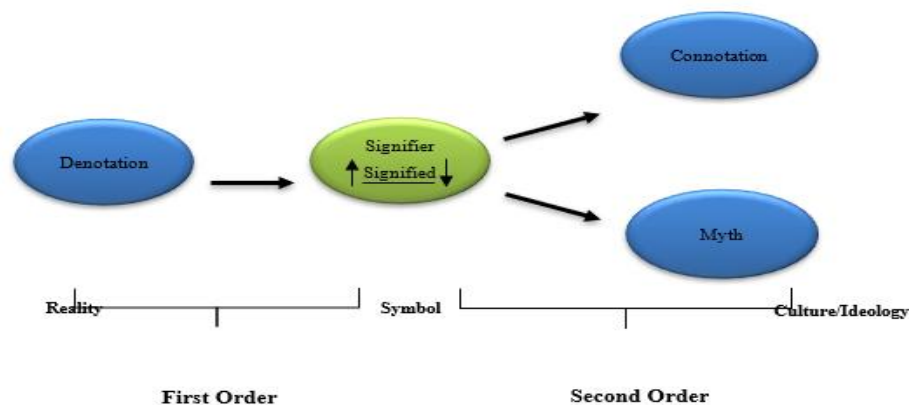


Figure 1. Sign order of Roland Barthes

The figure illustrates Roland Barthes's theory of the two orders of signification, which explains how meaning is constructed through signs at different levels. Barthes expands Saussure's model of signifier and signified by showing that signs do not stop at literal meaning, but continue into cultural and ideological interpretation. The diagram is divided into two main stages: the first order of signification (denotation) and the second order of signification (connotation and myth). At the first order of signification, meaning operates at the level of reality. This stage is called 'denotation'. Here, a sign is formed through the relationship between the 'signifier' and the 'signified'. The signifier refers to the physical form of a sign, such as an image, sound, gesture, costume, dialogue, or camera shot in a movie. The signified refers to the conceptual meaning produced in the mind of the viewer. When the signifier and signified are combined, they create a sign with a literal and descriptive meaning. In movie analysis, denotation explains what is directly shown on the screen, such as characters, actions, settings, and events. In *Truth and Treason*, for example, denotation involves identifying scenes of surveillance, uniforms, speeches, arrests, or acts of defiance as they appear explicitly in the narrative.

The diagram shows that the sign produced at the first level does not end the process of meaning. Instead, it becomes the basis for the second order of signification, which operates at the level of culture. In this stage, the sign from the first order functions again as a signifier. This is indicated in the image by the movement from the sign toward connotation and myth. The arrow labeled form leads to connotation, while the arrow labeled content leads to myth. This indicates that meaning is no longer

neutral, but culturally and ideologically shaped. Connotation refers to the associative, emotional, and cultural meanings attached to a sign. These meanings are not explicit or fixed, but depend on social experience, ideology, and historical context. For instance, a soldier's uniform in *Truth and Treason* does not only denote a member of the state apparatus, but connotes authority, nationalism, surveillance, and domination within a totalitarian system. Thus, connotation allows the researcher to interpret how signs communicate power and social values beyond what is literally shown.

When connotative meanings become naturalized and widely accepted in society, they develop into myth. In Barthes's theory, myth is not a traditional story, but an ideological system that transforms cultural meanings into something that appears normal, universal, and unquestionable. Myth works to justify and legitimize dominant values. In the context of a totalitarian regime, myth may construct obedience as loyalty, resistance as treason, and authority as moral necessity. The diagram shows myth as the deeper ideological layer of meaning that arises from the cultural processing of signs. Therefore, the image demonstrates that semiotics is not only about identifying objects in a text, but about uncovering how meaning moves from reality to culture, from description to ideology, and from what is shown to what is believed.

Methods

This research adopts a qualitative research design employing Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis method. According to (Taylor et al., 2016) as cited in (Tanvir, 2025), qualitative research is methodological approach focused on exploring and understanding human experiences, behaviors, social contexts, and cultural phenomena through non-numerical data. Robert K. Yin in his book *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*, the main objective of qualitative research is to explain a phenomenon in depth through intensive and comprehensive data collection.

This qualitative design emphasizes an in-depth interpretative reading of signs and symbols that represent totalitarian power and civil resistance in the movie *Truth and Treason*. The research is categorized as visual and textual analysis with a primary focus on semiotic studies. Visual analysis is conducted to examine and interpret visual elements, such as cinematic expressions and symbolic representations, while textual analysis is conducted by analyzing language and dialogue of each character in the movie. These signs are analyzed through two levels of meaning proposed by Roland Barthes, namely denotation and connotation, and are further developed to reveal myths that construct ideological meanings related to totalitarianism and civil resistance (Jadou & Ghabra, 2021). Through this design, the study seeks to uncover how the movie articulates resistance by the civil against authoritarian domination through its narrative and visual structure.

To ensure a comprehensive and structured analysis, the researcher employed several sequential stages:

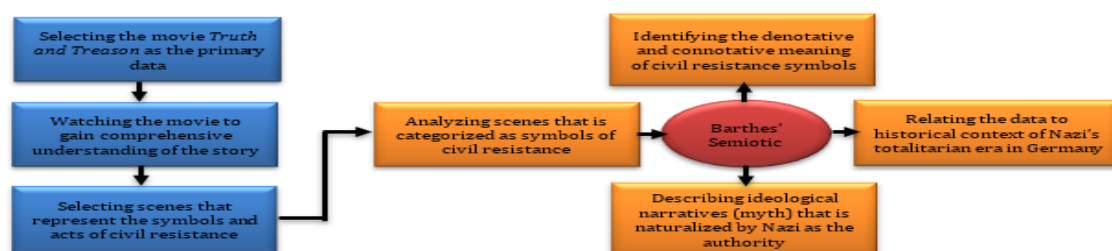


Figure 2. Methods and techniques of analysis

In this study, the researcher applies Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis as the main research method because the study is grounded in a critical research paradigm. Through this method, the researcher is able to explore the connotative level (implicit meaning) behind the denotative level (literal meaning) in order to uncover myths that construct ideological messages related to totalitarianism and civil resistance. Barthes' semiotic framework enables the analysis of how cinematic signs function not only as narrative elements but also as vehicles of power and domination within the film *Truth and Treason* (Utami et al., 2025). Accordingly, this study adopts a qualitative approach grounded in a critical paradigm. The paradigm is selected because the research endeavors to dismantle hidden meanings reflected through the representation of totalitarian power and civil resistance in *Truth and Treason*. By employing Roland Barthes' semiotics, the study interprets how visual signs, dialogues, and narrative structures construct myths that legitimize or challenge authoritarian control within the cinematic discourse.

Results and Discussions

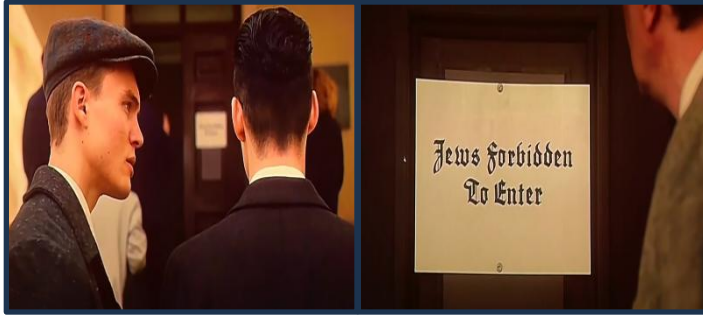
To discover and identify the meaning of symbols representing the resistance against a totalitarian regime, the researcher selected several scenes, along with their time and duration, that convey symbols and messages related to civil resistance. This study analyzes symbols of civil resistance against a totalitarian regime using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. The analysis is conducted by taking scenes representing civil resistance in the movie *Truth and Treason*, then identifying the denotative (literal) and connotative (symbolic) meanings of the visual elements. Other elements such as history, culture, and background stories are examined to understand the myths or ideological messages conveyed. The main focus of this research is to uncover how visual and symbolic elements construct a cultural narrative and convey a message of resistance against Nazi authority to the audience.

The following presents research data in the form of several scenes from the movie of *Truth and Treason* that contain meaning and symbolism of civil resistance against a totalitarian regime. Each scene is accompanied by dialogue that represents the actions, attitudes, and values of resistance demonstrated by the characters. The data was then analyzed using Roland Barthes's semiotics to uncover the denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings contained within.

Tabel 1. Data of civil resistance against totalitarian regime in *Truth and Treason*

The Movie of <i>Truth and Treason</i>		Dialogue	
		Rolf	: <i>You boys are more than late.</i>
		Karl	: <i>More than late? I knew we were late, but not more than late.</i>
		Rolf	: <i>Where's your uniform, Karl?</i>
Picture 1. Scene minutes 02.53-03.20		Karl	: <i>It's at the cleaners, Rolf.</i>
		Rolf	: <i>Like last week? Note that!</i>

Picture 1. Scene minutes 02.53-03.20



Picture 2. Scene minutes 20.48-21.37

Karl : *Ignore it! We're going in! What's he going to do?*

Salomon : *No, you go on. Do you want to get turned in? Don't be an idiot!*

Helmuth : *Salomon.*

Salomon : *Go!*



Picture 3. Scene minutes 29.56-30.10

Helmuth : *(Typing)... how many more of your neighbors will be arrested on the street in broad daylight without warrant, never to be seen again? How long will you tolerate the brazen disregard for the truth? How long will you...*

1. Resistance to the rule of showing nationalism and national identity (Picture 1. Scene 02.53 - 03.20)

Tabel 2. Meaning of scene minutes 20.48 - 21.37

Denotative meaning	: Karl and Salomon are wearing dark formal clothes while standing in the area of a church building that serves as a place of worship. Salomon is dressed in a black suit, a tie, and round glasses. Similarly, Karl wears formal attire with an additional accessory in the form of a hat. At the beginning of the scene, the characters walk toward the churchyard with cheerful expressions while sharing stories about each other's achievements. Before entering the church, they stop and observe the surrounding situation carefully. The atmosphere then changes as feelings of confusion and concern appear on their faces after they notice a sign attached to the church door displaying the message "Jews Forbidden To Enter." The prohibition notice is written in black classical-style lettering on a white sheet of paper, making it highly visible to anyone approaching the church.
Connotative meaning	: Helmuth and Karl represent an act of resistance by maintaining their friendship with Salomon, who is a Jewish descent. Their attitude carries a meaning of rejecting the social construction imposed by the ruling regime. Helmuth and Karl demonstrate their unwillingness to accept the discriminatory values promoted by those in power. Their actions suggest that personal relationships and human solidarity are more meaningful than ideological divisions created by the state. The symbolism of resistance becomes even more evident when Helmuth and Karl still invite Salomon to enter the church despite the prohibition notice displayed at the entrance. By

ignoring the restriction, they openly challenge a rule designed to exclude and marginalize Jewish individuals.

At the level of *myth* in Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, this scene reproduces the myth of uniformity and discipline as essential foundations of national stability. The uniform is no longer understood merely as a piece of clothing, rather it functions as a symbol of morality, patriotism, and ideological commitment. The myth constructed in this scene suggests that obedience to regulations, particularly the requirement to wear a uniform, automatically reflects an individual's moral character and loyalty to the state. In other words, the totalitarian regime naturalizes the idea that personal identity and political allegiance are expressed through a collective form of uniformity determined by the state and represented through a national uniform.

Through this process, the state shapes a collective understanding that patriotism and nationalism must be demonstrated through standardized visual symbols. When all adolescents are required to wear the same clothing, the state creates an image of unity and loyalty that leaves little room for individual differences. Within this context, the uniform ceases to function solely as an organizational attribute and instead becomes an ideological instrument used to infuse extreme nationalism in the younger generation. Furthermore, the regime promotes the belief that love for the country requires complete submission to the existing political system and its ideology. As a result, loyalty to the state is positioned as a moral obligation that must be publicly displayed through one's appearance.

The mandatory use of uniforms also gives rise to the myth that the involvement of adolescents in semi-military organizations is both natural and necessary for the interests of the state. Within a totalitarian system, the state seeks not only to regulate the actions of its citizens but also to shape their ways of thinking and social identities from an early age. Through uniform regulations, young people are encouraged to accept the idea that service to the nation should be performed through military organization without questioning personal preferences or individual choices.

This condition reflects a form of ideological imposition, as the state places national loyalty above individual freedom. As a consequence, adolescents are not given complete freedom to decide whether they wish to participate in organizations with military-oriented objectives. Instead, social and political pressures encourage them to comply with state expectations in order to be recognized as patriotic citizens. In this context, the uniform functions as a symbol of state control over both the body and the identity of individuals. It serves as a visible marker through which the regime regulates behavior, reinforces conformity, and promotes ideological commitment.

Furthermore, the state constructs the myth that uniformity represents national strength and social cohesion. However, behind this appearance of unity lies the suppression of individual freedom and personal identity. When all adolescents are required to wear the same symbols and attributes, their personal identities are gradually replaced by a collective identity defined by the state. This myth ultimately demonstrates that nationalism within a totalitarian regime is not primarily cultivated through voluntary awareness or genuine civic commitment. Rather, it is produced through social pressure, strict discipline, and symbolic obligations that citizens are expected to obey.

2. Resistance to the discrimination against certain social community (Picture 2. Scene 20.48 - 21.37)

Tabel 3. Meaning of scene minutes 20.48 - 21.37

Denotative meaning	: Karl and Salomon are wearing dark formal clothes while standing in the area of a church building that serves as a place of worship. Salomon is dressed in a black suit, a tie, and round glasses. Similarly, Karl wears formal attire with an additional accessory in the form of a hat. At the beginning of the scene, the characters walk toward the churchyard with cheerful expressions while sharing stories about each other's achievements. Before entering the church, they stop and observe the surrounding situation carefully. The atmosphere then changes as feelings of confusion and concern appear on their faces after they notice a sign attached to the church door displaying the message "Jews Forbidden To Enter." The prohibition notice is written in black classical-style lettering on a white sheet of paper, making it highly visible to anyone approaching the church.
Connotative meaning	: Helmuth and Karl represent an act of resistance by maintaining their friendship with Salomon, who is a Jewish descent. Their attitude carries a meaning of rejecting the social construction imposed by the ruling regime. Helmuth and Karl demonstrate their unwillingness to accept the discriminatory values promoted by those in power. Their actions suggest that personal relationships and human solidarity are more meaningful than ideological divisions created by the state. The symbolism of resistance becomes even more evident when Helmuth and Karl still invite Salomon to enter the church despite the prohibition notice displayed at the entrance. By ignoring the restriction, they openly challenge a rule designed to exclude and marginalize Jewish individuals.

At the *myth* level in Roland Barthes' semiotics, the scene from 20:48 to 21:37 in the movie *Truth and Treason* represents an ideological view regarding the relationship between state power, social discrimination, and the position of minority groups in a totalitarian government system. The prohibition against Jewish groups displayed through a sign "Jews Forbidden To Enter" is not only interpreted as an ordinary rule, but develops into a social myth that the state has full authority to determine who is deemed worthy of acceptance and who must be excluded from social life. In this context, the government is no longer seen as an institution that protects all citizens equally, but rather as a tool of power that actually strengthens discrimination against certain groups based on race, religion, and cultural background.

This scene builds the myth that totalitarian governments tend to create stereotype towards minority groups in maintaining their dominance. The Jewish group in the movie is represented and positioned differently from the majority, thus deeming their presence inappropriate in certain private and social spaces. Through the discriminatory action, the state indirectly creates a social construction that divides society into categories of "superior groups" and "inferior groups."

This separation then gives rise to the view that some groups are more deserving of protection, freedom, and social access than others. As a result, society does not receive equal rights because the system of power creates a social hierarchy based on certain identities. The majority group, or groups deemed "pure" by state ideology, holds a higher position, while the Jewish group is treated as a "subordinate group" subject to discriminatory regulations. Thus, the myth that emerges is the belief that social inequality is considered normal in order to maintain the stability and identity of the state according to the ruling regime.

Furthermore, this scene demonstrates how a system of discrimination can give rise to extreme ideologies such as "chauvinism" and "ethnocentrism". Totalitarian governments foster the belief that certain national identities are superior to others, thus encouraging excessive loyalty to the state. Chauvinism emerges through the assumption that only certain groups deserve to be considered "pure" members of the nation, while others are positioned as social threats.

This view is then reinforced the development of ethnocentric ideologies, which utilize a perspective that places the culture and identity of the majority group as the primary standard in social life. These ideologies ultimately create divisions within society. Individuals no longer view fellow human beings based on their humanity, but rather on their racial, religious, and social group identities. As a result, social separatism emerges, limiting interaction between groups and reinforcing social distance within society. Furthermore, individualism develops as society prioritizes the security of its own group over broader social solidarity

3. Resistance to the restraint in expressing opinions (Picture 3. Scene 29.56 - 30.10)

Tabel 4. Meaning of scene minutes 29.56 – 30.10

Denotative meaning	: Helmuth Hubener is seen in his room, amidst a quiet atmosphere. He sits in his study chair with a typewriter placed on the table. Besides the typewriter, several rectangular sheets of red paper are also visible, prepared as writing media. Helmuth then inserts the paper into the typewriter, indicating that writing is the central activity of the scene. this scene depicts Helmuth typing a narrative or text addressed to the German people. The text serves as a message urging the public to open their eyes and minds to the various forms of control, propaganda, and lies perpetrated by the Nazi regime and Adolf Hitler during their reign.
Connotative meaning	: The scene demonstrates that writing served as a means to convey opinions, criticism, and public concerns about the oppressive government. Helmuth's act of writing can be interpreted as an alternative form of resistance when people's voices could not be expressed directly. The typewriter Helmuth uses in this scene carries the connotation of representing the voices of the people silenced by the regime. Furthermore, the use of red paper in this scene also has a specific connotative meaning. The colour red is often associated with strong emotions, such as anger, courage, warning, and fighting spirit.

In the scene in the movie *Truth and Treason* from minutes 29.56 to 30.10, Helmuth's activity of typing a message on a piece of red paper not only represents the act of writing or conveying criticism of

the government, but also constructs a myth about the relationship between the state, power, and the people's right to express opinions. Through this scene, the movie shows how the simple act of writing can become a symbol of resistance against a political system that rejects the existence of alternative voices outside the will of the ruler.

The myth constructed in this scene shows that totalitarian regimes strive to create the belief that the leader is the higher and singular representative of the will of the entire people. In this view, the state and the leader are positioned as an inseparable entity. As a result, every policy issued by the government is considered a reflection of the interests of society as a whole. When someone expresses criticism, offer suggestions, or expresses a different opinion, these actions are not seen as part of the democratic process, but rather as a form of defiance against the state. In other words, criticism of the government is constructed as if it were the same as acting against the interests of the nation.

The Nazi regime attempt to eliminate the legitimacy of civil society. The state fosters the belief that only the government know what is best for the people, while public opinion is deemed unnecessary. Under these conditions, the space for dialogue between the government and citizens is closed, as truth is determined solely by those in power. Therefore, Helmuth's actions in writing and disseminating alternative information in the movie can be understood as an attempt to challenge this myth by presenting a different perspective from the official state narrative.

Furthermore, this scene also represents the myth that the state operated flawlessly and had no structural problems. The Nazi government consistently projects the image that all policies implemented are correct, successful, and in the interests of the people. Propaganda disseminated through various media created the impression that there were no errors in the government system, no oppression of the people, and no policies worthy of question. Within this ideological construct, criticism was deemed unnecessary because the state was assumed to function perfectly. As a result, the public was encouraged to accept every government decision without questioning its impact or consequences.

Conclusion

This study examines the representation of civil resistance against a totalitarian regime in the movie *Truth and Treason* through Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, which includes denotation, connotation, and myth. The analysis reveals that civil resistance in the movie is represented through various symbolic actions carried out by ordinary individuals who oppose oppressive state power without resorting to violence. Through a semiotic interpretation of selected scenes, this study shows that resistance is not limited to physical confrontation or open rebellion. Instead, resistance can emerge through everyday actions, attitudes, and decisions that challenge the dominant ideology imposed by authoritarian authorities.

The findings reveal three main forms of civil resistance represented in the movie. First, resistance emerges through the rejection of state-imposed collective identity, symbolized by Karl's refusal to wear the Hitler Youth uniform. This action signals opposition to ideological conformity and the state's attempts to regulate personal identity through symbols of nationalism and loyalty. Second, resistance is represented through maintaining friendship and solidarity with Salomon, a Jewish teenager who experiences institutional discrimination. By continuing to interact with and support Salomon despite discriminatory regulations, the characters challenge the social divisions constructed by the Nazi regime and affirm the values of equality and humanity. Third, resistance is expressed through Helmuth Hubener's actions in writing and disseminating alternative information. In a political environment where public opinion is suppressed and truth is monopolized by the state, writing becomes a symbolic form

of resistance that seeks to restore critical consciousness and provide alternative perspectives to official propaganda.

At the myth level, this analysis reveals how the movie critiques several ideological constructs promoted by totalitarian regimes. These include the myth that loyalty to the state must be demonstrated through uniformity, the myth that discrimination against minority groups is necessary for social stability, and the myth that the government has the higher authority to define truth and determine what is best for society. Through the actions of its characters, the movie of *Truth and Treason* challenges these myths and presents resistance as a moral response to injustice, oppression, and the abuse of political power.

Therefore, this study concludes that civil resistance should not be understood solely as organized protests, mass demonstrations, or acts of physical resistance. Resistance can also be found in symbolic and nonviolent acts that communicate disagreement with oppressive systems. The movie *Truth and Treason* illustrates that seemingly simple actions, such as rejecting imposed identities, maintaining solidarity with marginalized groups, and expressing alternative perspectives, can serve as meaningful forms of resistance against totalitarian domination. Through Roland Barthes's semiotic perspective, these actions are revealed not simply as narrative events but as symbols carrying broader ideological meanings about freedom, human dignity, and the struggle against authoritarian control. Consequently, the movie reinforces the idea that civil resistance is fundamentally rooted in moral courage and individual agency, demonstrating that even ordinary citizens can challenge oppressive power through symbolic acts that stand for truth, justice, and humanity.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank all parties who provided support, guidance, and valuable feedback during the completion of this study. Appreciation is also extended to those who contributed to the research process and helped improve the quality of this article.

References

- Adiprasetyo, J. (2025). Genealogy of Indonesian Developmental Journalism: The Pancasila Press During Authoritarian New Order (1966–1998). *Media History*, 31(3), 327–246. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688804.2025.2502615>
- Arendt, H. (1962). *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: The World Publishing Company.
- Barthes, R. (1997). *Elements of Semiology (translated by Annette Lavers & Collin Smith)*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Bartkowski, M. J. (2013). *Recovering Nonviolent History: Civil Resistance in Liberation Struggles*. USA: Lynne Rienner Publisher.
- Bayat, A. (2010). *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Derbent, T. (2021). *The German Communist Resistance 1933-1945*. Paris: Foreign Language Press.
- Erlina, T. (2020). Peranan Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Indonesia dan Kesatuan Aksi Pelajar Indonesia dalam Proses Peralihan Kepemimpinan Nasional Tahun 1965-1968. *Jurnal Wahana Pendidikan*, 7(2), 95-102. <http://dx.doi.org/10.25157/wa.v7i1.3253>
- Holmes, B. R. & Keele, A. F. (1995). *When Truth Was Treason: German Youth Against Hitler*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

- Jadou, S. H. & Ghabra, I. M. M. A. Barthes' Semiotic Theory and Interpretation of Signs. *International Journal of Research in Social Science & Humanities*, 11(3), 470-482. <http://doi.org/10.37648/ijrssh.v11i03.027>
- Lilja, M. (2022). The Definition of Resistance. *Journal of Political Power*, 15(3), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2158379X.2022.2061127>
- Mathis, D. & Allen, G. (2021). *Chronicling Civil Resistance*. USA: ICNC Press.
- Merriman, H. & Yousefi, N. B. (2021). *Glossary of Civil Resistance: A Resource for Study and Translation Key Terms*. USA: ICNC Press.
- Mietzner, M. (2020). Sources of Resistance to Democratic Decline: Indonesian Civil Society and Its Trials. *Democratic Regressions in Asia*, 28(1), 161-178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1796649>
- Nyman, M. (2006). *Democratising Indonesia: The Challenges of Civil Society in the Era of Reformasi*. United Kingdom: Thor Publishing.
- Randle, M. (1993). *Civil Resistance*. United Kingdom: Bradford University Press.
- Stackelberg, R. & Winkle, S. A. (2002). *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook: An Anthology of Texts*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Taylor, S. J., Bodgan, R., & DeVault, M. L. *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource (4th Edition)*. New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.
- Utami, A. M., Samanik, S., & Wahyuningsih, Y. (2025). Semiotic Analysis of Denotation and Connotation in the Movie "The Boy In The Striped Pajamas" Using Roland Barthes' Framework. *British: Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris*, 14(1), 36-49. <http://dx.doi.org/10.31314/british.14.1.%25p.2025>
- Wardani, A. K. (2015). Adolf Hitler: Sebuah Analisis Tipe Kepemimpinan. *Moderat: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pemerintahan*, 1(4), 1-8. <http://dx.doi.org/10.25147/moderat.v1i4.2849>
- Wulandari, P. (2022). *Analysis of Denotation, Conotation, and Myth in the Gentlemen Movie*. Thesis. Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim. Malang.
- Yin, R. K. (2016). *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish (2nd edition)*. New York & London: The Guilford Press.