PROCEEDINGS
International Conference on Literature
Himpunan Sarjana-Kesusastraan Indonesia (HISKI)
E-ISSN 2988-4357

Social class representation in the novel *Noto* and film *Bumi Manusia*: Perspectives on feudalism and colonialism

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Abstract: *Studies of social class in Indonesian literature often focus on individual works, limiting comparative understanding of class inequality across different systems of power. This study aims to analyze the representation of social class in the novel Noto: Tragedy, Love, and the Return of the Prince and the film Bumi Manusia by comparing Javanese feudalism and Dutch colonialism in the Dutch East Indies. It employs a qualitative descriptive method with a Sociological Comparative Literature approach and Julia Kristeva's intertextuality perspective. The data consist exclusively of character dialogues in the novel and film that represent social class. Data were collected through reading-and-note-taking techniques for the novel and viewing-and-note-taking techniques for the film. The data were then analyzed interpretively and comparatively through three categories: opposition, transposition, and transformation. The findings show that Noto represents social stratification through noble descent, customary titles, and traditional authority, while Bumi Manusia depicts it through racial classification, legal inequality, and control over economic resources. Both works portray social inequality and group dominance but differ in the foundations and mechanisms that sustain class hierarchies. This study concludes that changing times do not automatically eliminate social hierarchies but transform the forms and foundations through which they are maintained.*

Keywords: *Social class, intertextuality, Sociological Comparative Literature, feudalism, colonialism.*

INTRODUCTION

Social class is one of the important issues in people's lives because it is related to the division of positions, access to resources, power, and patterns of intergroup relationships (Nuraini, 2026). Class structures are not formed separately from social and historical conditions, but develop through systems that regulate the position of individuals in society (Ikomah, 2025). In the Indonesian context, feudalism and colonialism are two systems that also form social hierarchies with different characteristics. Feudalism builds social relations based on status, descent, and position in society (Marwati et al., 2021), while colonialism forms stratification based on race, descent, legal status, and access to education and resources (Alfain & Syaikhu, 2025). These differences show that social class is not only related to the height and low of a person's position, but also to the system that forms and maintains social hierarchy. The representation of social class in literary works and films is important to understand how social structures are constructed through different historical and cultural contexts (Sugiatai et al., 2025).

Literary works are closely related to social reality because they present human experience in the context of a particular society (Crystovani & Ahmadi 2025). Through characters, dialogues, narratives, conflicts, and relationships between characters,

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How to cite (APA 7th): Safitri, R. N. & Hasanah, D. U. (2026). Social class representation in the novel *Noto* and film *Bumi Manusia*: Perspectives on feudalism and colonialism. *Proceedings 35th KIK, 35*, 153-166.
https://doi.org/10.68634/kik.v35i.187

literary works can represent class divisions and the social consequences they cause. Films have similar abilities through a combination of narrative and audiovisual elements, such as characters, dialogues, settings, costumes, expressions, and spatial visualization. Thus, the comparison of novels and films is not only related to the similarities and differences in story elements, but can also be used to understand how social problems are constructed through different historical mediums and contexts (Febriyansah & Witriani, 2022).

The novel *Noto: Tragedy, Love, and the Return of the Prince* by Prijono Hardjowirogo is one of the relevant objects to examine the representation of social class in Javanese society. The novel presents social relations that show the hierarchy of position, status, and social legitimacy between the characters. The problem that needs to be considered is not only the difference in the position of the characters, but how the social order forms the basis for the recognition of this position. Meanwhile, the film *Bumi Manusia* by Hanung Bramantyo presents the people of the Dutch East Indies with a social structure related to race, descent, legal status, education, and colonial power. Minke's position as an educated native shows that education does not necessarily erase the social boundaries formed by the colonial system (Afandi & Juanda, 2025). Both works present a social hierarchy, but show the basis for the formation of different classes.

These differences in socio-historical contexts are the main issues underlying this research. In *Noto*, the representation of social class is studied through the Javanese social order influenced by feudalism, while in *Bumi Manusia*, the construction of social class is studied through the stratification of colonial society. A comparison of the two is necessary to understand how status, economic conditions, access to education, and authority are represented in different social systems. This study does not place feudalism and colonialism as identical systems, but examines how they form the basis of social hierarchy legitimacy and intergroup relations in each work.

This study uses a sociological comparative literary perspective to bring together the two works based on their socio-historical context. The framework is strengthened by the intertextuality of Julia Kristeva (1980) to read the relationship between texts and the transformation of social discourse. Intertextuality in this study is not interpreted as a direct adaptation relationship between *Noto's novel* and the film *Bumi Manusia*, but as a framework for comparative reading of the representation of social class and social discourse present in both works. The analysis is directed at three aspects, namely transposition, transformation, and opposition. Transposition is used to examine the placement of social status systems in different contexts, transformations to examine changes in social class constructions, and opposition to identify contradictions in the representation of hierarchy and authority.

Several previous studies have examined social class representation in literature and film. Prasetya (2022) found that social class in *Gundala* is represented through education, wealth, position, occupation, and living environment. Similarly, Rahmawati et al. (2024) found that social class in *48 Hours for Beauty* is reflected in poverty, luxury, and economic conditions. Both studies examine social class representation, but focus on individual films, whereas this study compares the novel *Noto* and the film *Bumi Manusia* in the contexts of feudalism and colonialism. Nuraeni et al. (2025) examined social class in *Dan Bidadari Surga Pun Cenviuru* through character positions and living environments. Meanwhile, Tsabita et al. (2025) compared *KKN di Desa Penari* in thread,

novel, and film forms, showing that different media affect plot, characters, and settings. Unlike Tsabita et al., who examined the same story across media, this study compares two works without a direct adaptation relationship. Yahya et al. (2025) compared the novel and film *5 Cm*, focusing on plot, characters, characterization, and setting. In contrast, this study focuses on social class in feudal and colonial contexts.

Crystovani and Ahmadi (2025) compared social realities in the novels *Sisi Tergelap Surga* by Brian Khrisna and *Tambang di Jalan* by Shahnon Ahmad. Unlike their study of two novels, this research compares different media and socio-historical contexts. Rahmat et al. (2025) examined social stratification, discrimination, and inequality in the film *Bumi Manusia*, while Hatibie (2024) analyzed class conflict in the novel based on character status and position. Both studies address social hierarchy, but focus on a single work. This research compares the film *Bumi Manusia* and the novel *Noto* through sociological comparative literature and Julia Kristeva's intertextuality to examine social class in colonial and feudal systems.

Based on the previous research, the study of social class has been carried out through research on one work, comparison of social realities, and comparison of works across mediums. However, these studies have different focuses, ranging from the identification of social class markers to changes in story elements in adaptation. Based on the sources that have been reviewed, no research has been found that specifically brings together the novel *Noto: Tragedy, Love, and the Return of the Prince* and the film *Bumi Manusia* to compare the representation of social class in the context of feudalism and colonialism. The gap in this research lies in the selection of the two objects, the comparison of the socio-historical context, and the use of the framework of transposition, transformation, and opposition analysis to read the construction of social class.

The novelty of this research lies in the comparison of two works of different mediums that do not have a direct adaptation relationship, by placing feudalism of the Javanese society and Dutch East Indies colonialism as the context of social class formation. This research not only identifies similarities and differences in social class representation, but also examines how the basis of hierarchy legitimacy and authority is constructed in each work. Through the perspective of comparative sociological literature and Julia Kristeva's intertextuality, this study aims to analyze and compare the representation of social class in the novel *Noto: Tragedy, Love, and the Return of the Prince* by Prijono Hardjowirogo and the film *Bumi Manusia* by Hanung Bramantyo. The results of the study are expected to expand the comparative study of the representation of social class in literature and film based on differences in socio-historical contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sociological Comparative Literature

Comparative literature is a study that brings together two or more works to see certain similarities, differences, relationships, and characteristics contained in them. Bassnett (1993) explains comparative literature as a field of study that develops beyond national, cultural, linguistic, and work boundaries. Comparative literature also allows works to be studied through cross-disciplinary relationships so that a problem in a work can be understood by considering the social and cultural context behind it (Prayoga, 2025).

In this study, comparative literature is used through the perspective of *sociological comparative literature*. This perspective is used to compare social problems represented in two works with different socio-historical backgrounds. Comparative sociology in this study is directed at the comparison of social class representations in the novel *Noto: Tragedy, Love, and the Return of the Prince* by Prijono Hardjowirogo and the film *Bumi Manusia* by Hanung Bramantyo. Comparative sociology places social phenomena in two works side by side so that the comparison can be known (Saputra & Faridi, 2026).

In this study, a comparison was made of two historical social contexts. *Noto* is placed in the context of Javanese society which has a hierarchical social structure and is related to feudalism. Meanwhile, *Bumi Manusia* is placed in the context of the Dutch East Indies society who experienced social stratification in the colonial system. The two contexts are compared to see how differences in the social environment affect the representation of social class in each work.

Intertextual Julia Kristeva

The concept of intertextuality was introduced by Julia Kristeva with the idea that texts do not stand separately, but have relationships with other texts and the contexts that shape them. Kristeva (1980) explained that text is a meeting space for various meanings that absorb and transform other texts. Therefore, the meaning of works can be done by paying attention to the relationships between texts and the social and historical context behind them. In the study of literature and film, the perspective of intertextuality can also help explain how meaning changes when present in different mediums.

In this study, intertextuality is used as a perspective to read the relationship of meaning between *Noto'*s novel and the film *Bumi Manusia*, especially in the representation of social class. The analysis is directed at three operational categories, namely transposition, transformation, and opposition. Opposition is used to examine the contradictions in the character's attitudes towards authority and social hierarchy. Transposition is used to examine the transfer of representations of social status in the context of different social systems. Transformation is used to identify changes in the form of social class representation (Rokhmah & Wardani, 2023). The three categories are used as research analysis tools, not as standard stages directly formulated by Kristeva

Through a combination of comparative literary sociology perspectives and intertextuality, this study examines the representation of social class in both works by considering the form of the text and its historical social context. The comparative literary sociology approach helps to explain the relationship between class representations, while intertextuality is used to read the relationship of meaning, change of representation, and contradiction found in the two works. This research is expected to expand the understanding of social class representation in literary works and films that present different historical contexts.

Feudalism

Javanese feudalism is related to a social structure that is hierarchical and places individuals based on position, status, descent, and relationships with the center of

power (Siswanto et al., 2025). In the development of Javanese history, the existence of the kingdom and elite groups forms a social structure that distinguishes the position between the aristocratic group and ordinary society. These differences in position can affect social relationships, interaction patterns, and opportunities for a person to obtain a certain position in society (Ricklefs, 2008). The social structure of Javanese society is also related to the concept of position and legitimacy. A person's status is not only related to economic circumstances, but can be influenced by ancestry, title, relationship with the royal environment, and social position.

In literary works, the Javanese feudal context can be represented through the relationship between nobles and people, status differences, the use of titles, family backgrounds, interaction patterns, and the position of characters in the social environment (Fairuz, 2025). In this study, Javanese feudal is placed as a historical social context, not as the main theory. The context is used to understand the representation of social class in the novel *Noto: Tragedy, Love, and the Return of the Prince*. The analysis is directed at social status, economic conditions, access to education, and the authority of the characters by considering the social structure of Javanese society as the setting of the work.

The feudal context in *Noto* is important because the work presents figures with different social backgrounds and positions. The difference between figures from the people and figures related to the aristocratic environment can be a space to see how status, descent, and social status are represented. These differences are then analyzed as part of the construction of social class in the work. The concept of Javanese feudal is used to provide an understanding of the social environment behind class representation in *Noto*. The focus of the research remains on social class, while feudalism serves to explain the social context that allows for differences in status, position, and authority between figures.

Colonialism

Colonialism in the Dutch East Indies formed a social structure characterized by distinctions based on race, legal status, origin, economic position, education, and access to power (Sobih, 2025). The colonial system produced different social positions between community groups, creating an unequal pattern of relationships (Tasnir et al., 2025). Class polarization in colonial society can be understood through the difference in position between groups that have greater access to social resources and groups that have limited access. Education can be one of the means that affects a person's opportunities to acquire certain knowledge and social status (Munawarah, 2023).

Colonial structures also form social relations based on differences in race and legal status (Setyadid et al., 2025). These differences can affect a person's social recognition, opportunities, and authority in society. The representation of class in works set in colonial settings can show the relationship between social status, economic conditions, education, and authority with colonial structures. In this study, colonialism is placed as a historical social context. This context is used to understand the representation of social class in the film *Bumi Manusia* by Hanung Bramantyo. The analysis is directed at how social status, economic conditions, access to education, and authority of figures are represented in the Dutch East Indies society.

As a film, *Bumi Manusia* conveys the representation of social class through verbal and audiovisual elements. Dialogue can show the position and social relationship between characters and strengthen the portrayal of the social status and conditions of the characters. The representation of social class in the film is not only seen based on the content of the dialogue, but also through the way audiovisual elements build social meaning. The context of colonialism then becomes the basis for comparing the representation of social class in *Bumi Manusia* with the representation of social class in the novel *Noto.* The comparison is directed to see how social class is formed in two different historical social contexts, namely Javanese feudalism and Dutch East Indies colonialism.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a *sociological comparative literature approach (Sociological Comparative Literature*) and Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality. The sociological comparative literary approach is used to compare the representation of social class in the novel *Noto: Tragedy, Love, and the Return of the Prince* by Prijono Hardjowirogo and the film *Bumi Manusia* directed by Hanung Bramantyo. The way this approach works includes three stages, namely identifying the representation of social class in each work, connecting it with the socio-historical context in the form of Javanese feudalism and Dutch colonialism, and comparing their similarities and differences. The research data is in the form of narratives and dialogues between figures related to social class.

Data were collected through the read-note technique in the novel and the screenplay technique for the film. The data analysis refers to the six steps of Creswell (2015), namely preparing the data, reading all the data, encoding, developing descriptions and themes, presenting the results in a comparative narrative, and interpreting the findings. The results of the comparison were then analyzed using Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality through the concepts of transposition, transformation, and opposition to explain the changes and differences in the representation of social class in the two works based on their socio-historical context. The validity of the data was carried out through perseverance of observation by examining the data repeatedly.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Literary works often depict people's lives, including differences in position and relationships between groups. These depictions can be seen through the characters, dialogues, and events contained in the work. *Noto's novels: Tragedy, Love, and the Return of the Prince* and the film *Bumi Manusia* both depict the lives of people with different social conditions. The film *Bumi Manusia* depicts the life of the people of the Dutch East Indies in the period from 1898 to 1918, while *Noto's novel* depicts the life of the Javanese people around 1965. This difference in historical background is the basis for seeing how social classes are displayed and dialogue with each other in the two works. In this study, the discussion of social class is focused on the process of opposition (conflict of class attitudes), transposition (the transfer of the class system), and transformation (change

in class form). The results of the research on these two cross-media works are then presented and grouped into the following two main points of analysis.

Table 1.1 Intertextual Analysis of Social Class in *Noto*'s Novel and Bumi *Manusia Film*

Yes	Indicator	Social Class in the Human *Earth Film* (Background 1898 - 1918)	Social Class in *Noto*'s Novel (Background in 1965)
1	Opposition (Class Attitude)	The lower class is depicted through a critical attitude and resistance to educational inequality and the injustice of colonial law.	The lower class is depicted through an attitude of obedience to moral values, pesantren education, and the king's orders.
2	Transposition (Class System Transfer)	Social class is depicted in the structure of Dutch colonial society which is characterized by legal rules and social classifications.	Social class was able to be represented through the traditional order and the Javanese feudalism system centered on the palace environment.
3	Transformation (Transformation of Class Form)	Social class distinctions are shown through racial stratification and land tenure.	Social class distinctions are shown through hereditary or nobility status and ownership of personal assets.

Discussion

The results of the reading of dialogue and narrative in both works show that social class is represented through a system that regulates the position and relationship between social groups. Through the perspective of Julia Kristeva's intertextuality, both works can be studied by paying attention to the relationship between texts and the social context behind them. The analysis focuses on three aspects, namely opposition, transposition, and transformation to identify changes in the representation of social class in the context of Javanese feudalism and Dutch colonialism.

Opposition (Opposition to Authority in Power)

The opposition in the analysis of the two works is related to the differences in the attitudes of the characters towards the authorities that govern their social lives. These differences can be seen through the way power is exercised and the character's response to the position of the higher parties. In *Noto*'s novel, power is represented through the authority of the palace supported by the traditional order, while the film *Bumi Manusia* depicts colonial power through a discriminatory legal system. In *Noto* 's novel set in Javanese society around 1965, the position of the nobility is depicted as having an influence on social relations and the implementation of orders. This authority can be seen in the following excerpts:

Data: *"God God, that seems to be the meaning!" ... "Call, Prince Rangga, right now," he ordered his maid who was filling his teacup." (Noto, 2014: 279)*

The quote shows the authority of the Sultan in giving orders to his subordinates. The use of the word *dictating* emphasizes the hierarchical relationship between the party who has a high position and the party who carries out the order. In this situation, the assistant is placed as the party in charge of carrying out the will of his superior. This shows that social position affects the division of authority and interaction patterns in the palace environment. In contrast to this picture, the film *Bumi Manusia* presents

criticism of the colonial authorities who are considered not to provide equal justice. This critical attitude can be seen in the following dialogue:

Data:*"The Europeans made the law, they also played with it, and the natives were just spectators."* (Human Earth, 2019: 111:27–111:30)

The dialogue contains criticism of the implementation of colonial law that was seen as beneficial to Europeans and placed the natives in a weak position. The statement shows a rejection of the legal system that is considered unfair. If *Noto* 's novel depicts authority through traditional social structures, the film *Bumi Manusia* displays a critical response to colonial power.



Picture 1. Social class shifts within the opposition

Through an intertextual perspective, the opposition to power in both works shows different views on social class. In the film *Human Earth,* opposition is shown through open resistance to the injustices of colonial laws that discriminate against society based on race. Meanwhile, in *Noto*'s novels the opposition tends to be limited by the values of moral obedience and respect for the power of the palace. This difference shows that colonial power gave rise to open resistance, while feudal power maintained its position through cultural values and traditions that encouraged the obedience of the people.

Transposition (Status System Space Transfer)

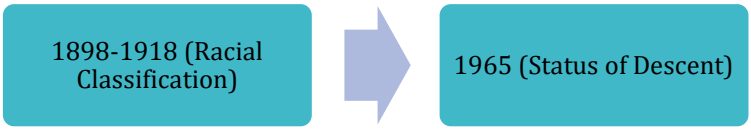
Transposition in this study is used to examine the transfer of social class representations into different social contexts. The comparison of *Noto'*s novel and the film *Bumi Manusia* is directed at the way social status is displayed in the feudal society of Java and the colonial society of the Dutch East Indies. In the film *Bumi Manusia*, social status is depicted through racial distinctions that limit one's recognition in colonial society. Identity as an indigenous remains the basis of distinction even if one masters the language and customs of Europeans. Different representations of social status are found in *Noto*'s novel. In this work, social status is displayed through the title of nobility and respect for figures of high status. This can be seen in the following excerpt:

Data:*"This is a blessing. Kanjeng Gusti Prince! Thank you for coming to my hut."* (Noto, 2014: 318)

The mention of the title "*Kanjeng Gusti Pangeran*" shows respect for the position of the nobility. Meanwhile, the expression "my hut" gives an idea of the place where the person who welcomes him lives. Both expressions show the difference in social position between noble figures and ordinary people. In this context, traditional titles and positions are important elements in forming social relationships. In the film *Bumi Manusia*, social status is depicted through racial distinctions that limit one's recognition in colonial society. Identity as an indigenous remains the basis of distinction even if one masters the language and customs of Europeans. This can be seen in the following dialogue:

Data four: *"Do you think that by wearing European clothes, together with Europeans, you can speak Dutch, and then you become a European? No! You are still a monkey!"*
(Human Earth, 42:03–42:41)

The dialogue shows that the use of European clothing, Dutch language skills, and association with Europeans do not automatically change Minke's social identity. He is still positioned as an indigenous based on the classification of colonial society. Thus, the social status in the film is not only related to individual abilities, but also to the racial identity inherent in him.



Picture 2. Social class shift in transposition

The transposition of social status space in both works shows the basic differences in the determination of social class. In the film *Bumi Manusia*, social class is determined by race in the colonial system. Even if a person has western education and language skills, it does not necessarily eliminate racial discrimination. Meanwhile, in *Noto*'s novel social status is determined by inherited Javanese ancestry, noble titles, and customs. This intertextual comparison shows that a person's position in the colonial system is determined by race, whereas in the Javanese feudal system it is determined by family origin and lineage.

Transformation (Change in the Shape of Economic Structure)

The transformation in this analysis is directed at changing the form of social class representation related to the ownership and control of economic resources. Both works show that economic aspects play a role in shaping relationships between characters, but they are manifested through different social situations. Economic representation in *Noto*'s novel is shown through the issue of home ownership and the authority to determine the use of housing. This can be seen in the following excerpts:

Data:*"We've already accommodated thirty people here! We can't accommodate more than that! This is my house. You don't have the right to allow others to stay here without my consent!"* (Noto, 2014: 24)

The quote suggests that the ownership of a house gives the character the right to determine who can live in the place. The statement "this is my house" affirms control over private property, while the prohibition of granting permissions without consent shows the authority that arises from that ownership. In this context, the house is not just a place to live, but also a resource that influences the relationships and decision-making between the characters. In the film *Bumi Manusia*, the difference in economic class is depicted through plantation land ownership and labor. This can be seen in the following dialogue:

Data: *"The house you saw earlier is the house of the farmer's children who work here, on my farm."*
"This all belongs to your field, Annelies?"

"Yes, 180 hectares, with 500 workers."
(Human Earth, 2019: 23:10–23:34)

The dialogue shows the mastery of economic resources on a large scale through land ownership and the involvement of many workers. The mention of land area and the number of workers shows the difference in position between plantation owners and the groups working in them. The ownership of production assets is an important marker in the economic relations depicted in the film.



Picture 3. Social class change in transformation

The transformation of economic forms in both works shows a change in the form of wealth control. In the film *Bumi Manusia*, economic class can be seen from the ownership of large plantation land and the use of labor, but this ownership remains vulnerable to colonial law interference. Meanwhile, in *Noto*'s novel, wealth is depicted through the ownership of private property, such as a house that is part of family life. This comparison shows that the change of times does not eliminate economic class differences, but changes the form of wealth control from large-scale plantation land to private property ownership.

CONCLUSION

This study compares the representation of social class inequality in the novel Noto: Tragedy, Love, and the Return of the Prince and the film Bumi Manusia through three aspects: opposition, transposition, and transformation. Bumi Manusia depicts resistance to colonial injustice, with social status determined by race and economic inequality reflected in plantation ownership and labor. In contrast, Noto emphasizes obedience to traditional and palace authority, with social status based on Javanese lineage and economic inequality reflected in private property ownership. Through Julia Kristeva's intertextuality, the comparison reveals how historical contexts shape the representation of social hierarchy, shifting its basis from racial dominance under colonialism to lineage under feudalism.

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