

**Old vs New Money in Baz Luhrmann's The Great Gatsby (2013) and
Indonesian Social Class: A Marxist Film Analysis**

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Abstract

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The representation of wealth and how it is inherited often determines a person's position in the social structure. The difference between old wealth and new wealth reflects different lifestyles, values, and forms of social recognition. This study aims to analyze Baz Luhrmann's 2013 film adaptation of *The Great Gatsby*, how the film depicts class and social inequality, and reflect on its relevance to contemporary Indonesian society. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the analysis focuses on cinematic elements such as setting, characters, and visual symbols that represent the contrast between "old money" and "new money." Guided by Marxist theory, this study explores how the film depicts class struggle, capitalism, and the illusion of social mobility. The results of the study reveal two key findings. First, the film affirms that new wealth does not automatically confer cultural legitimacy, as the social structure remains controlled by established groups. Second, this representation is relevant to the Indonesian context, where differences in lifestyle, access, and privilege between "old money" and "new money" are still strongly visible in urban social life. However, this study has limitations because it only examines one film and does not use empirical data from Indonesian society. Overall, *The Great Gatsby* criticizes capitalist inequality and illustrates how class divisions persist over time, both in 1920s America and in Indonesia today.

Kata Kunci:

The Great Gatsby,
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Abstrak

Representasi kekayaan dan cara ia diwariskan sering kali menentukan posisi seseorang dalam struktur sosial. Perbedaan antara kekayaan lama dan kekayaan baru mencerminkan gaya hidup, nilai, dan bentuk pengakuan sosial yang berbeda. Studi ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis adaptasi film Baz Luhrmann tahun 2013 dari *The Great Gatsby*, cara film tersebut menggambarkan kelas dan ketidaksetaraan sosial, serta merefleksikan

relevansinya bagi masyarakat Indonesia kontemporer. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, analisis berfokus pada elemen sinematik seperti latar belakang, karakter, dan simbol visual yang mewakili kontras antara “old money” dan “new money.” Dipandu oleh teori Marxist, studi ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana film tersebut menggambarkan perjuangan kelas, kapitalisme, dan ilusi mobilitas sosial. Hasil kajian menunjukkan dua temuan kunci. Pertama, film ini menegaskan bahwa kekayaan baru tidak otomatis memberikan legitimasi budaya, karena struktur sosial tetap dikendalikan oleh kelompok yang sudah mapan. Kedua, representasi tersebut relevan bagi konteks Indonesia, di mana perbedaan gaya hidup, akses, dan privilese antara “old money” dan “new money” masih kuat terlihat dalam kehidupan sosial perkotaan. Namun, penelitian ini memiliki keterbatasan karena hanya mengkaji satu film dan tidak menggunakan data empiris dari masyarakat Indonesia. Secara keseluruhan, *The Great Gatsby* memberikan kritik terhadap ketidaksetaraan kapitalis dan menggambarkan bagaimana pembagian kelas tetap bertahan dari waktu ke waktu, baik di Amerika pada era 1920-an maupun di Indonesia masa kini.

INTRODUCTION

The concepts of “old money” and “new money” are used to describe differences in wealth, lifestyle, and social status (Khalid, 2023). Old money refers to those whose wealth is inherited and ingrained in their social environment, while new money refers to those who have acquired wealth in their own generation through new ventures. This difference is not only material, but also in the way of dressing, housing, social relationships, lifestyle, and recognition from the environment. According to Salas-Rajo et al., (2022), it was found that inheritance is not only money that is passed down, but also structural power in defining social status. It is a difference that then causes conflict in the social class structure and life opportunities. As noted by Jiayuan (2024), examining class conflicts between “old money” and “new money” reveals how upper-class dominance is maintained through social recognition and inherited privilege, forming enduring cultural hierarchies that separate one group from another. In the same vein, Khan et al. (2024) emphasize that the “old money” class, symbolized by Tom and Daisy, embodies cultural and economic hegemony, while Gatsby’s “new money”

represents performative aspiration within a capitalist system that denies true social mobility.

Social classes arise due to divisions within society based on factors such as wealth, ownership of the means of production, access to education, and social status. In capitalist societies, these classes greatly influence life opportunities, social mobility, and interpersonal relationships. Marx's theory shows that conflict between classes is not just a matter of morality, but rather part of the economic structure that determines who works and who enjoys the results. As mentioned in the study "The Implications of Economic Change in Indonesia for Social Class Formation" (Booth, 2021), historical economic changes in Indonesia have influenced how social classes are formed, including in terms of access to education and wealth inequality. Social class is seen as an immersive setting where people are socialized to adopt specific self-perceptions and ways to interact with others. Therefore, in lower-class environments, where resources and opportunities are less, people develop conceptions of the self that focus on interdependence, social connection, and blending. In upper-class environments, where opportunities and resources are more abundant, people develop conceptions of the self that focus on independence, freedom of choice, and standing out from the crowd (Kraus, et al., 2013).

Film as a cultural medium has the power to visualize and manifest concepts of class, conflict, and ideology. Films also have various functions and purposes, ranging from a means of expression and creativity, a vehicle for conveying ideas (film as art), selling by raising certain themes (film as business), a means of communication (film as a propaganda tool), and, of course, a combination of all three. Film, as a medium of expression, has a style that is identical to the style of its presentation to the audience (Prasetya, 2022). Just like social media, films become a medium where status symbols, representations of power, and class differences are visualized through settings, dialogue, clothing, parties, decorations, and story narratives. One film that prioritizes presentation over content and visual appearance is *The Great Gatsby*.

The Great Gatsby is a film adapted from the novel of the same title by F. Scott Fitzgerald. This film not only raises the famous theme of the American dream, but also the exploitation experienced by the proletariat and how the bourgeoisie manipulates the authorities for their own interests (Mulghani et al., 2023). The film shows that material wealth alone is not enough; social background, status symbols, networks, and public perception also determine the extent to which a person can be accepted in elite social circles. This depiction of conflict provides an opportunity to see how previous research has addressed the theme of class, as well as what has not yet been explored.

Scholarly discussions on The Great Gatsby frequently employ Marxist criticism to explore class conflict, materialism, and the illusion of the American Dream, all of which reflect capitalist ideology. (Zhou, 2023), through the lens of Western Marxism and Georg Lukács's realism, argues that Fitzgerald's portrayal of the "Jazz Age" exposes the corruption of values and the commodification of human relations within capitalist society, revealing the inevitable disillusionment of the American Dream. Similarly, Berglind (2022), interprets the novel as a critique of capitalist superstructures that maintain class inequality, demonstrating how the upper class manipulates ideology and culture to sustain dominance, while characters like Gatsby become victims of these illusions. Djohar (2013), drawing from Antonio Gramsci's hegemony theory within Marxist cultural studies, highlights how the old aristocracy (represented by Tom Buchanan) exercises symbolic and cultural power over the nouveau riche (Gatsby), showing that domination is sustained not only through wealth but through cultural legitimacy. Furthermore, Hendriwani (2020) Marx's theory of social class explains that society is divided between the bourgeoisie, who control production, and the proletariat, who sell their labor, an opposition that forms the basis of capitalist exploitation. This concept clarifies that the "old money" and "new money" divide in The Great Gatsby (2013) reflects a deeper class struggle driven by capitalist ideology. Thus, Fitzgerald's work portrays a microcosm of capitalism where wealth and ideology sustain inequality, a reality still visible in modern Indonesian society. Ismail et al. (2012) explain Marx's concept of class struggle, where the bourgeoisie controls

production, and the proletariat sells labor, creating an inevitable social antagonism that drives historical change. Collectively, these studies reveal that *The Great Gatsby* (2013) mirrors capitalist class struggle between “old money” and “new money” that continues to reflect social inequality in modern societies, including Indonesia.

The Great Gatsby through a Marxist perspective. Thalib (2021) emphasizes hedonism in the 2013 film through luxury and materialism as symbols of the bourgeoisie. Syahika et al. (2024) examine class conflict in the novel *The Great Gatsby* using a structuralist approach, while Subekti et al. (2022) highlight dissatisfaction despite material wealth in the novel of *The Great Gatsby*. Another study, like Mulghani et al. (2023) points out how the lower class in the novel of *The Great Gatsby* is disadvantaged in social relations, and Mizrak (2025) compares *The Great Gatsby* Novel with *Death of a Salesman* Novel, showing the alienating effects of the American Dream. Zhou (2023) applies Lukács’ Western Marxism to reveal commodification in society in the novel of *The Great Gatsby*, and Kobis (2019) compares *The Great Gatsby* Novel with *Winter Dreams* Novel to underline Fitzgerald’s recurring theme of class struggle. Depci (2018) emphasizes class differences in *The Great Gatsby* Novel, but does not specifically highlight the conflict between old money and new money, while Imran (2019) compares *Gatsby* from the Novel with *Heathcliff* to examine the role of economics in social status change, but does not discuss social conflict within American society itself between old money and new money, and Hisa et al. (2021) examines social status and individual identity in *The Great Gatsby* Novel, but focuses on moral and class crises in general without delving into the specific differences between old money and new money. However, most of these studies have not examined the view of its film and its relation to Indonesian culture, leaving a gap in understanding how the film portrays class and social inequality, and to reflect on its relevance to contemporary Indonesian society.

This study aims to examine how the film portrays class tensions and social inequality. Furthermore, this study seeks to reflect on the relevance of the representation of social class in the film to contemporary Indonesian society, particularly in relation to current social and economic disparities.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the 2013 film *The Great Gatsby*, directed by Baz Luhrmann. The Data were collected from the film itself, including scenes, character behavior, settings, and symbols representing social class distinctions between “old money” and “new money.” Additional data were obtained from related journals, articles, and previous studies that discuss Marxist theory and social class issues.

The qualitative approach was chosen because it allowed the researchers to understand the meanings and representations in the film. This descriptive approach focused on describing how class conflict and social inequality were portrayed through visual and narrative elements, rather than “conducting a numerical analysis.

There were several steps taken in conducting the analysis. First, the researchers watched the film several times to identify scenes and dialogue relevant to the concepts of “old money” and “new money.” Then, they classified the data based on Marxist theoretical concepts, such as class struggle, capitalism, and social inequality. Finally, the findings were interpreted to explain how the film reflected the tension between different social classes and their relation to the contemporary Indonesian social context.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. The analysis of Baz Luhrmann’s 2013 film adaptation of *The Great Gatsby*

An analysis of Baz Luhrmann’s 2013 film adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* highlights a vivid portrayal of the social differences between old money and new money. The film uses various cinematic elements such as characters, settings, and symbolic motifs to illustrate how inherited wealth and established social status (old money) differ significantly from wealth acquired through entrepreneurial endeavors

(new money). These differences go beyond mere financial aspects and encompass lifestyle, social behavior, housing, and public perception.

The film emphasizes that even though new money achieves financial success, it struggles to gain full acceptance in elite circles dominated by old money, which is rooted in tradition and cultural power. Lavish parties and materialistic displays become symbols of hedonism and consumerism, depicting bourgeois lifestyles and the mechanisms of social exclusion that operate in capitalist society. Furthermore, the film reflects the exploitation and inequality faced by the lower classes, mirroring the Marxist idea that economic power shapes social relations and controls opportunities. This narrative has contemporary relevance, as the film's themes align with the class conflicts that still exist in Indonesian society today.

1. The Exterior, Space, and Architecture of the Gatsby's House as a Marker of Class



Figure 1. Gatsby's Mansion

Gatsby's mansion is depicted as a vast, luxurious building, adorned with features such as a large garden, fountains, and dramatic lighting. From the outside alone, viewers can see that this house was built to attract attention. Its architecture does not follow the style of old wealthy family homes, but rather resembles a palace deliberately designed to look grand. This shows that Gatsby uses the space and shape of his house to prove that he has been successful. The house is not just a place to live, but a symbol of the identity he wants to build as part of the elite group.



Figure 2. Tom and Daisy Buchanan's Mansion

Upon closer inspection, this house reveals a clear distinction between new money and old money. Old money families such as Tom and Daisy tend to have homes that are simpler in appearance, yet still exude a sense of understated elegance and grace. This more subdued design reflects the confidence of the old class, who do not feel the need to flaunt their wealth. In contrast, Gatsby, who comes from a lower-class background, has to build a super-magnificent house to cover up his weakness as someone who was not born into a wealthy family. This shows that physical space can be a way for someone to cover up their social awkwardness and try to fit in with the upper class.

From a Marxist perspective, Gatsby's mansion illustrates how capitalism makes people feel they must constantly display their material achievements in order to be valued. The house was built not for comfort, but to create an image. It became a stage, a place where Gatsby hoped that people from the upper class would see him as one of their own. However, even though his house was large and beautiful, it was not enough to erase the perception that he was not part of old money. This shows how social class is determined not only by wealth, but also by family history, culture, and how a person is viewed by society.

Gatsby wants to enter the world inhabited by Daisy, and his house is his "main weapon" to achieve this. But the architecture of the house also shows how far the social distance is between him and the class he wants to enter. The seemingly magnificent house actually emphasizes that Gatsby is still struggling to prove his position, while the old class does not need to do anything to maintain their status.

Thus, this mansion is not only a symbol of success but also a symbol of the anxiety and uncertainty Gatsby experiences in pursuing social recognition.

2. Social Interaction as a Marker of Class Difference



Figure 3. Party in Gatsby's Mansion

The party scene at Gatsby's house shows how class differences can be seen in the way people behave, speak, and interact. Those from the new money group appear very enthusiastic and eager to attract attention. Their clothes are more flashy, their speech is louder and more expressive, and their movements show that they want to be considered important by the other guests. This attitude arises because they feel they have to prove that their newly acquired wealth is enough to make them accepted by the elite. Meanwhile, old money figures such as Tom and Daisy display a much more relaxed and calm attitude. They don't need to dress up excessively or act excited because they have long-held recognized social positions. The way they sit, speak, and view the party atmosphere shows that they feel they have a higher status than other guests. They attend the party but maintain an emotional distance, as if to emphasize that their world is different.

From a Marxist perspective, these differences in interaction show that parties that appear free and open do not truly eliminate class boundaries. Even though people are in the same space, invisible social rules still apply. New money tries to attract attention to gain recognition, while old money maintains its inherited authority. This scene shows that social class is not just about money, but also about how a person was raised and how they feel they deserve to be placed in the social hierarchy.

3. Gender and Class in the Relationship Between Gatsby and Daisy



Figure 4. Gatsby and Daisy's intimate dance at the party

The scene where Gatsby and Daisy dance provides an interesting insight into how class and gender are intertwined. Daisy, as a woman from an old wealthy family, was raised to be gentle, graceful, and appear perfect in public. She was not only an individual, but also a symbol of her family. Every action and choice she makes is influenced by the expectations of her social class. Therefore, even though she has feelings for Gatsby, she remains bound by the standards of old money, which emphasize stability, family honor, and maintaining reputation.

On the other hand, Gatsby tried to approach Daisy not only because of love but also because he saw Daisy as part of the world he wanted to achieve. Daisy symbolized the social status that he had never had. In this context, their relationship shows that upper-class women are often positioned as social “gateways,” where men like Gatsby must be accepted by these women in order to enter upper-class circles. This means that their romantic relationship is not purely a personal matter; there are elements of class and symbolism that influence the relationship.

This dance scene is actually full of contradictions. On the one hand, the atmosphere seems romantic, intimate, and as if nothing separates them. But on the other hand, the audience can see that class differences still exist and are not easily eliminated. Daisy appears emotionally close but remains socially distant because she is bound by her family's rules. This shows that in a capitalist society, even romantic relationships are influenced by class structure and gender roles. Women from the upper class are burdened with the responsibility of maintaining the family's honor, while men from the lower class or the new class must fight harder

to be recognized. This scene shows how powerful the social system is in regulating a person's personal choices.

B. The Relevance of Social Class in The Great Gatsby to Current Conditions in Indonesia

Social class in the film *The Great Gatsby* is still very relevant to current social conditions in Indonesia. Just as there is a difference between old money and new money in the film, Indonesian society also exhibits a similar economic class division. Old money can be defined as a group that comes from families that have been wealthy and influential for a long time. They have inherited wealth, access to education, strong social networks, generally live in exclusive neighborhoods, attend elite institutions, and socialize in closed social circles. Meanwhile, new money is identified as entrepreneurs, celebrities, or public figures who have acquired wealth quickly through business, social media, or digital innovation. They are often characterized by shopping at premium boutiques, joining private clubs, driving expensive cars, and holding glamorous weddings.

Although both are wealthy, the difference between old money and new money in Indonesia is often seen in lifestyle, taste, manner of speaking, and social environment. Old money tends to appear more elegant and maintain an image of “traditional upper class,” while new money emphasizes luxury and consumptive styles that are visible on social media. This phenomenon can be observed in the culture of flaunting wealth (flexing) on social media, which often sparks public debate about social and economic inequality. These class differences are particularly evident in urban areas such as Jakarta, where skyscrapers and luxury malls stand side by side with old, high-walled housing complexes that symbolize hereditary privilege. Social events, property ownership, and exclusive memberships have become arenas for the ongoing struggle for status and social recognition. In addition, disparities in education and political connections exacerbate class differences, confirming that social mobility in Indonesia is still limited and highly competitive.

From a Marxist perspective, this difference shows that economic power in Indonesia remains concentrated in the hands of certain groups. Social acceptance of the new money crowd is still limited, similar to Gatsby's fate, who was still viewed as a "newcomer" by the elite. The social structure inherited from the colonial and feudal periods also means that social status often depends on family background rather than individual achievement.

The public's response to these class differences varies. Some admire the lifestyle of the upper class and aspire to it, while others criticize it as a form of social inequality. This phenomenon is also reflected in the emergence of social movements calling for economic justice and equal access to education. Thus, *The Great Gatsby* is not only a reflection of Western capitalist society, but also a mirror of the social reality in Indonesia, which is still shaped by the gap between old economic power and new wealth.

Thus, the film's depiction of the fragility of social acceptance and the performative nature of class status becomes a valuable lens for understanding Indonesian social reality. The tension between old money and new money in Indonesia is not only economic in nature. This makes Baz Luhrmann's film a powerful analytical tool for understanding global capitalist stratification as well as local expressions of social class conflict.

The research by Depci (2018) highlights class differences in *The Great Gatsby* but does not specifically focus on the conflict between old money and new money, leaving a gap in the literature regarding the detailed clash between these two factions. Our study addresses this by closely analyzing how Baz Luhrmann's film visually and narratively represents this conflict through characters, settings, and symbols, emphasizing the tension between the entrenched old money elite and the ambitious new money class. This detailed focus enriches the understanding of class struggle in the film beyond the more general discussions of class differences.

Similarly, Ali (2019) compares *Gatsby* with *Heathcliff* to examine how economic factors influence social status changes, but this study does not explore the internal social conflict between old money and new money within American society itself. Our research complements and extends this analysis by shifting the

lens specifically to the social and cultural contestations between these two groups as depicted in the film. Furthermore, we connect these themes to contemporary Indonesian society, illustrating how inherited wealth and new wealth create parallel social divisions there as well.

Hisa et al. (2021) explore social status and individual identity in *The Great Gatsby*, focusing broadly on moral and class crises. However, their study stops short of dissecting the nuanced differences and tensions specifically between old money and new money classes. Our study fills this gap by explicitly examining these distinctions, showing how the film dramatizes the social exclusion of new money figures like Gatsby, who, despite wealth, struggle to attain genuine acceptance and identity within the elite due to entrenched social barriers. This targeted approach provides a richer understanding of identity formation within class structures.

Mizrak (2025) offers an insightful Marxist comparison of *The Great Gatsby* with *Death of a Salesman*, discussing themes of false consciousness and alienation in capitalist societies. While Mizrak's study reveals the illusion of equality in capitalist dreams, our research builds upon this by applying Marxist theory to the specific visualization of old money-new money class conflict in film and how it resonates with societal inequalities in Indonesia. Our study goes further by mapping these cinematic themes onto real socio-economic dynamics, revealing the persistence of inherited privilege and limited social mobility.

The focus on Indonesia is a critical and unique contribution of our study. Indonesia's social stratification features a clear dualism akin to the old money and new money division seen in *The Great Gatsby*. Elite families with longstanding wealth hold significant power, not only economically but also politically and socially, perpetuating their influence through exclusive education, social networks, and control over resources. Meanwhile, the rise of entrepreneurs, celebrities, and digital innovators who represent the new money in Indonesia has introduced a new dynamic of wealth accumulation and social competition.

However, similar to Gatsby's experience, this new money class in Indonesia often struggles for full acceptance within elite social circles. The performative nature of wealth, conspicuous consumption, and active presence on social media

characterize their efforts to claim status and legitimacy. This tension is exacerbated by Indonesia's colonial and feudal legacies, which have left inherited social structures deeply entrenched, limiting social mobility despite economic changes.

Moreover, Indonesia's urban landscapes visually embody this divide, where modern skyscrapers and luxury residential enclaves coexist alongside older, established neighborhoods that symbolize historical privilege. These spatial and cultural distinctions reinforce social boundaries and class identities, making the old money-new money conflict a lived reality rather than a mere theoretical concept. Public debate and social movements about economic inequality and access to education further illustrate the social consequences of these class dynamics.

Ultimately, by situating the old money-new money conflict within both an iconic Western narrative and contemporary Indonesian society, our study reveals the persistence and global resonance of class struggles under capitalism. This comparative approach broadens the relevance of *The Great Gatsby* beyond its American context, offering valuable insights into how inherited wealth and emergent fortunes continue to shape social identities, access to power, and cultural validation in diverse contexts.

In summary, while prior studies have advanced our understanding of class and identity in *The Great Gatsby*, our research uniquely bridges film analysis, Marxist theory, and Indonesian socio-economic realities. This comprehensive focus not only fills the gap left by previous researchers but also illuminates contemporary class tensions that remain central to understanding inequality in both global and local contexts.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of *The Great Gatsby* reveals two key findings. First, the film shows that spatial form and modes of interaction are used to maintain distance between established groups and the newly wealthy, so that wealth does not automatically confer equal social status. Second, the film also shows that the role of women helps determine class boundaries, as they are often used as symbols of stability and "suitability" in elite families. When compared to conditions in

Indonesia, this study finds that similar patterns of class differentiation are still visible in our social life, especially in how the status of old families continues to have an advantage in social circles, access, and social acceptance, regardless of the emergence of new wealthy groups.

This study has limitations because it only analyzes one film and does not use direct empirical data about Indonesian society. Therefore, future research can expand the object of study by comparing several films, series, or other popular media that depict class dynamics. Further research could also add field data or social studies to see how the relationship between old wealth and new wealth actually works in the context of Indonesia today. With a broader approach, further research could provide a more complete picture of how social classes continue to persist and change amid modern economic development.

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