

Gender, Cultural Locality, and Power Legitimacy in The Javanese Cultural Films

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to find out how gender and cultural locality are articulated in Javanese cultural films, such as Natalan and Tilik which were produced using special funds from the government of Special Region of Yogayakarta (DIY). This research also sees how gender and local culture is presented as a medium to legitimize the power of the state apparatus. This study can be used to see how the ideology works behind the preservation effort of local culture. This research uses a qualitative approach and Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) method. The findings of this study are, the cultural locality is interpreted in an essentialist way. Local and global conversations in the film are presented in a contradictory and dichotomous manner. Furthermore, women who still uphold local cultural values are portrayed as positive figures, and those who leave local culture are portrayed as negative figures. The various narratives of cultural locality that are built in these films are closely related to the ideology of state apparatus as stated in the various regional regulations rolled out by the DIY government. The films become a medium for the state apparatus hegemony to discipline, standardize, and control cultural production through images and texts.

Keywords: Cultural locality, Gender, State apparatus, Power legitimacy

1. INTRODUCTION

Films are often used as soft power by rulers to persuade others to comply with their wishes without using coercion and threats. In practice, soft power is based on various instruments, such as cultural values, ideological dialogue, and various appeals regarding the importance of human values (Nye, 2004). The utilization of film as a medium to promote the values and ideologies that must be embraced by society is also carried out by the government of Special Region of Yogyakarta (DIY). It is specifically outlined in the Special Regional Regulation (*Perdais*) of DIY No. 3 of 2017 which regulates the maintenance and development of culture.

For this reason, the DIY government encourages filmmakers to produce films with local cultural themes. As a province located on the island of Java, the DIY government states that Yogyakarta cultural values are Javanese cultural values as outlined in *Perdais* No. 4 of 2011. To produce the films, the DIY government provides grant funds sourced from the Yogyakarta Privileges Fund (*Danais*). The DIY government outlines films produced through *Danais* to be able to reveal the real things in the society, at the same time showing a high and noble culture (*adiluhung*) which is considered a hallmark of Yogyakarta (Damarjati, 2020). Among the films produced by *Danais* are the films Natalan (2015) and Tilik (2018) which will be the subject of this study. As films that pass the selection of *Danais* funding, the two films are considered capable of representing Yogyakarta's local cultural values as outlined in *Perdais* No. 13 of 2017, one of them is related to collective relations.

However, as a film that carries the majesty of the local culture, *Natalan* and *Tilik* seem to provide a normative, static, and deep-rooted depiction of culture in people's lives. This essentialist perspective can be seen from the narrative framing of traditional women who still uphold local cultural values are portrayed as positive figures. Conversely, those who live a modern life and abandon local cultural values are portrayed as negative. Apart from providing an overview of locality, these films also depicted other interesting images related to the subject of gender, especially the portrayal of women as more active and superior figures than men. This depiction is different from the gender perspective which often places women as inferior subjects and also the position of women in feudal Javanese culture. In addition, the depiction of women subjects in the films is also different from the representation of women in the media, which often

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positions women as objects. These depictions are an interesting phenomenon to analyze, because both films seem to be a space where cultural locality is constructed and defined which is embedded in women subjects.

2. OBJECTIVES

Based on these various backgrounds, the purpose of this study was to find out how gender and cultural locality are articulated in Javanese cultural films produced by the government of DIY. Futhermore, it also sees, how it become a medium of legitimizing power of the state apparatus by utilizing the issue of preserving local culture. This research can be a medium for looking at the ideology that works behind cultural preservation efforts, especially those framed through films.

3. THEORITICAL REVIEW

Within the sociological tradition, the term local and its derivatives locality, and localism, have generally been associated with the notion of a particular bounded space with its set of close-knit social relationships based upon strong kinship ties and length of residence. There is usually the assumption of a stable homogeneous and integrated cultural identity which is both enduring and unique (Featherstone, 2000). This understanding often leads to the thought that cultural locality is something that must be preserved to maintain its purity. As a result, everything that comes from outside is suspected to be a problem that will erode the purity of local cultures. This can be seen in the film Tilik and Natalan, which depicted *adiluhung* local values amidst the strong currents of globalization and modernization, an attempt to revive and preserve local culture.

Williams (in Kellner, 2001: 395) emphasized the importance of seeing culture and society in one frame, as well as eliminating the division between high culture (*adiluhung*) and low culture. Williams interpreted culture as a whole way of life that includes feelings, values, practices, and artefacts. The emergence of *adiluhung* cultural thoughts shows that culture is not interpreted as an aesthetic or humanist issue, but rather is political (Fiske, 1997: 115). Culture is also not an expression of society or an autonomous realm of aesthetics but rather a set of representational practices that are contested and tied to social construction (Storey, 1996).

In the Javanese cultural film produced by the DIY government, the portrayal of *adiluhung* culture is articulated through the lives of gender subjects, both modern and traditional subjects. This shows that gender are an inseparable part of cultural issues. Barker (2004: 73) stated, the notion of gender can be understood to be referring to the cultural assumptions and practices that govern the social construction of men, women and their social relations. Barker also explained that gender construction has an impact on cultural regulations that consider certain behaviors socially appropriate only for certain genders.

Cultural rules in the context of gender as described by Barker are found in many life systems based on the majesty of local culture. Hermawati (2020: 101) stated that *adat* (custom) is one of factors that shape Balinese women's normative femininity which requires them to obey and accept existing rules. They will even be considered as imperfect women when they are unable to follow the applicable customary rules. The results of this study prove that gender articulation in the context of cultural locality is very likely to occur.

The preserving of cultural values as narrated in the films above is problematic because both of them seem to place gender identity and cultural locality in a fixed manner. This contributes to an essentialist understanding of cultural locality and even suggests that there are forces that seek to discipline, standardize, and control cultural production. Whereas locality is actually a symbolic space that is neither static nor dialectical. Locality is dynamic, interpretable, inventable and manipulable (Chetan Batt in Baso, 2002). Baso (2002) said that locality is fluid and not an eternal identity. Locality is a social construction that is produced and reproduced.

The various narratives of cultural locality and gender identity in the film are inseparable from the existence of film as a product of culture and social practices. Turner (1999: 47-49) stated that film is not merely a work of art. The film is a product of culture and social practice, which functions as a medium for producing and reproducing cultural meaning. Film is a social text that represents cultural interaction in the society where the film is produced and consumed. As a social text, film is not interpreted as a form of artistic expression for its creators. Film is a product

that is produced through a complex and dynamic interaction of various supporting elements in the process of production, distribution, and exhibition (Irawanto, 1999: 13). In addition, according to Commolli and Narboni (in Kauvaros, 2008: 377) stated that film is an ideological product of the system and it is determined by the ideology which produces it.

Various studies related to Javanese cultural representation in films have been carried out. This research tends to focus on depicting Javanese culture as a good culture supported by characters that still maintain local values (Wuwung et al, 2021; Tazakka et al, 2020) and emphasizes that the preservation of Javanese culture is important as a medium for character education (Ismail and Simatupang, 2015). Other studies have focused on the issue of how the Javanese culture constructs the position of the female subject. Study by Putri and Nurhajati (2020) explained that Javanese culture creates a social class gap between men and women. A different depiction can be seen from a study conducted by Mayanti and Haryono (2023) which stated that in the film entitled *Bumi Manusia*, Javanese women are portrayed as strong figures which is different from the depiction of feudal Javanese women.

Apart from being related to the representation of cultural locality in film, a number of studies have tried to redefine the meaning of cultural locality which is often seen in an essentialist way. Setiawan (2011) in his research stated that locality can no longer be understood as a whole that is continuously maintained. Research that looks at locality issues from the perspective of cultural studies underscores that village communities and localities cannot be described from the perspective of essentialism and normative justice. Villagers and local communities will continue to move due to the influx of modern culture through various media platforms. Anderson-Levitt's (2012) also stated that the relationship between global and local culture cannot be seen in an essentialist manner as a pattern of behavior that is specifically owned by a nation or group.

The various studies above are more focused on how Javanese culture positions women as subjects and the importance of Javanese culture in shaping Javanese identity and character, as well as how cultural locality is understood in an essentialist way. Meanwhile, this research looks more at how gender issues in the frame of cultural locality are articulated as well as looking at the ideology that works behind the articulated discourse. This is important considering that the practice of articulation is closely related to political practice which focuses on hegemonic processes by the dominant class (Laclau, 1977). This research is expected to provide a different perspective in viewing cultural phenomena which may not be an independent process that occurs as a result of one cause but it is constructed by dialogical relationships in a structure built by a certain framework.

4. METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach and Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) method developed by Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak. Like other critical discourse analysis, DHA also tries to see the relationship between ideology and power. Ideology is considered as an important means to build and maintain power through discourse. The aim of DHA is to 'demystify' the hegemony of specific discourses by deciphering the ideologies that establish, perpetuate or fight dominance. Specifically, DHA critically analyses the language use of those in power who have the means and opportunities to improve conditions (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009).

Primary data in this study are in the form of film texts both in Natalan and Tilik film, while secondary data are the discourse of cultural locality and gender subjects obtained from various media, such as books, journals, articles, and legal documents related to this research. The stages in this study include; first, data categorization by investigating the problems in the two films studied. The second stage is data analysis. The data that has been obtained is then analyzed according to the three principles of DHA analysis. First, determine specific content or topics related to locality discourse and gender subjects. Second, conduct a discursive strategy review. The third stage of analysis is to analyze the linguistic meanings presented in the depiction of locality and gender in the film. After analyzing these three ways, the next step is analyzing the issues behind the description of the cultural locality that is the object of research. To see this, the researcher refers to various literature studies and is based on theories as well as various DIY regional regulations. The final stage is to conclude and identify various issues related to cultural locality and gender subjects that are depicted in films produced through *Danais* Yogyakarta.

5. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

5.1. Natalan and Tilik Film as Medium of Javanese Culture Preservation

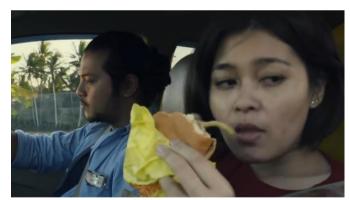
Natalan (2015) is a short film directed by Sidharta Tata. The dialogues used in the film are dominated by Javanese language. The film, which aired on Kebon Studio Film's YouTube channel, was one of the nominees for the best short film at the 2015 Indonesian Film Festival (Wahyuni, 2015). This film provides an interesting depiction of the local culture that is still maintained by the Javanese people. The film Natalan depicts the tradition of being together in a extended family when religious holidays. Visiting family at Christmas is a central theme in Natalan's film.

Meanwhile, film Tilik (2018) is a 32-minute short film directed by Wahyu Agung Prasetyo which is narrated in the Javanese language. Tilik is a Javanese word that means to visit. The film, published on the Ravacana Film YouTube channel, won the 2018 Maya award in the best short film category (Putri, 2020). Film Tilik provides an interesting depiction of local culture, particularly regarding to collective relations. The film, which is shown on the YouTube channel Ravacana Film, depicts the life of rural communities in Yogyakarta who still uphold the culture of mutual cooperation, togetherness, tolerance and compassion, all of which are considered to be Yogyakarta characteristics.

5.2. Gender Subject in the Frame of Cultural Locality

The positioning of women subjects as good and bad figures is often based on benchmarks of local cultural values and norms prevailing in the society. This condition is inseparable from cultural regulations that still uphold the majesty of local culture which tends to be understood in an essentialistic way. In the film Natalan, for example, women who still uphold local cultural values are portrayed as positive figures, whereas those who leave local culture are portrayed as negative figures. The positioning is depicted dichotomously in a modern and traditional context that is shown through the lives of the story's characters.

Dinda, who is portrayed as a modern figure, is narrated as having abandoned local cultural values. The modernity of Dinda's life is articulated through various symbols, both verbal and visual, such as the clothes, the style of speech, the moda of communication and transportation used, and the food consumed. With the medium close-up technique, it is depicted, Dinda was eating a burger which incidentally is not traditional Javanese food, especially Yogyakarta, as shown in the scene below (picture 1).



Picture 1: Dinda was eating a burger on her way to her hometown. Source: [Film Natalan, 17:21, 2015]

As a modern figure, Dinda is presented to be individualistic and prefers to busy herself with her gadgets. This depiction characterizes the loss of social collective values which are an important agenda of preserving local culture, as echoed by the DIY government through *Perdais* no 13 of 2017. In a number of dialogues and scenes it is shown that Dinda always dominates all decisions. Apart from that, Dinda is always shown to speak in a higher tone than her husband, Resnu and at the same time seem to have more power to rule (picture 2), an unusual character portrayal in Javanese culture.



Picture 2: While preening, Linda ordered Resnu to clean her face and change his clothes. Source: [Film Natalan, 20:19, 2015]

The positioning of female subjects in films is different from gender relations in a patriarchal system that places women as subordinate and marginalized figures. In particular, this is also different from the position of the female subject in the palace-based feudal Javanese culture. Ida (2001:22) explained that the construction of womanhood in Indonesia is adapted from Javanese cultural values which are influenced by the traditions of the palaces in Java, both Yogyakarta and Surakarta, which position women as loyal figures to their husbands. The portrayal of Dinda's character, which tends to be different from the dominant stereotypes, is inseparable from the workings of the film which shapes and represents reality based on its cultural codes, conventions, and ideology (Turner, 1999:152).

Dinda's depiction seems deliberately constructed to give an image that modernity contributes to the formation of women subject characters. Modernity and global culture are shown as if they are eroding local values, which is embedded in Dinda's figure. This analysis is reinforced by the framing of Resnu's mother as a traditional figure who is still loyal to maintaining local cultural values. The framing is narrated through a number of texts in both verbal and visual language, such as the kebaya (Javanese traditional clothes), the traditional modas of transportation, the traditional food consumed, the house and its furniture, and communication tools used.

In addition, she is also visualized as a a symbol of the goodness of the social collectivity who has a gentle, obedient, and patient attitude. The gentleness and patience of Resnu's mother are highlighted in several scenes, especially when she receives a call from her son, Resnu regarding cancellation to celebrate Christmas together. Resnu's mother, who actually had cooked various dishes and dressed up to welcome her son and daughter-in-law, only answered "*Yo wis ora opo-opo. Lagian aku yo durung nyepake opo-opo. Sugeng Natal nggo kabeh*" (Yes, it's okay. I haven't even prepared anything yet. Merry Christmas to everyone). In the dialogue, the disappointment of Resnu's mother at the sudden cancellation was not depicted by anger towards her son. This attitude is a representation of Javanese (Yogyakarta) women who are known to be patient and willing to accept various circumstances. The depiction of this attitude shows that the film Natalan (2015) positions Resnu's mother as a figure who embedded local cultural values.

The framing of the bad impact of modernity on local culture attached to Dinda's character is problematic when on the other hand it is not reflected in the male figure. In this film, Resnu, who also lives in modern culture, is shown as someone who still maintains local cultural values. This is articulated in several impressions, such as the traditional food and drink consumed, the choice of places to eat which tend to be traditional stalls, and the style of language used especially when communicating with his mother. Using the medium-close up technique (picture 3), Resnu is shown eating Dinda's leftovers at a simple food stall. This scene also shows Resnu who still wants to eat chicken feet which are usually consumed by traditional Javanese people due to certain myths. These various scenes emphasize that the filmmakers deliberately frame Resnu's character as a good figure and still uphold local culture, unlike Dinda, who has leaved local cultural values. Resnu is also described as a patient and polite figure, an attitude that is fundamental in Javanese culture.



Picture 3: Resnu is consuming food left by his wife, Dinda, at a food stall. Source: [Film Natalan, 15:35, 2015]

The accusation that modernity is eroding local values also occurs in the film Tilik (2018). Dian, who is depicted as no longer maintaining social collectivity values, is considered a bad figure. The character seems to be deliberately narrated as a result of Dian's modern life. Bu Tejo, a village woman who is the central character in the film is positioned as a dominating subject which places Dian as a bad moral figure. These depictions appear in various forms in most texts and scenes, such as language, visual images, film plots, and characters. This discrimination and exclusion even colors all dialogues and scenes from the beginning to the end of the film. Apart from that, the various dialogues and scenes depict the character of Bu Tejo who also provokes other women that Dian is a 'bad girl', as shown in the following dialogue:

"Dian iki gaweane opo ya? Kok jarene ono sing tahu ngomong yen gawehane Dian ora genah..... Nek Dian penggaweane genah, rak mungkin nduwe bondo koyo ngono kuwe (What did Dian do? It is said that Dian's work is questionable.....if her work is normal, it's impossible to have something like that). "Aku iki mung jaga-jaga nek Dian iku sajane wong wedok ora genah, nggodanggodani bojo-bojone dewek" (I'm just being wary because Dian is actually a naughty girl who can seduce our husbands).

In addition to these accusations, Dian's beautiful figure and attractiveness to many men were also judged because of the influence of the implants (*susuk*) she used. Susuk itself in Javanese culture is often associated with the goal of attracting other people in a negative context, as explained by Wulandari (2013) regarding the use of implants in women who work as tayub dancers. Bu Tejo and other women have one voice in moral language which seems to represent women who still maintain Javanese moral values.

In the film, Dian is depicted as a cosmopolitan figure whose morals do not conform to the social norms adhered to by Bu Tejo and other village women. To support the portrayal of bad morals, the filmmaker shows Dian in a miniskirt, different from other village women who wear headscarves (*jilbab*) as shown in picture 4. It becomes problematic when, on the other hand, Dian is depicted as independent, working in the city, and is considered beautiful – a depiction that is different from most of the women in the film – as if she represents the vulnerability of the moral character. Even self-reliance behavior, which is actually a signifier of one's good character, in the film Tilk seems to be questioned. This can be seen from the framing of the story, where registration of self-reliance behavior is not a sign of a good woman in the rural social context. The filmmaker positions Dian as an object of gossip, discrimination and marginalization simply because she is different from village women in general and tries to negotiate with an essentialist culture perspective.



Picture 4: Dian is shown wearing a miniskirt, while other village women figures are shown wearing jilbab. Source: [Film Tilik, 01:22 and 29:49, 2018]

The framing of the issue of moral vulnerability in the film Tilik is problematic, not only because it is related to essentialist cultural practices. The film frames the issue of moral vulnerability as if it only embedded in female subjects. This formation can be seen from the domination of women as story characters who are positioned as both subjects and objects of gossip and others practices related to morality. Film Tilik constructs ideal female figures, especially Javanese women from a patriarchal perspective. The idea of patriarchy itself according to Barker (2004: 142) is a social order marked by the repetition and systematic domination of men over women who are subordinated in various social institutions and practices. This is evidenced by the depiction of the figure of Dian who has self-reliance behavior and wide relations and also hardworking, which is narrated as a bad character in the film.

The various articulations of gender subjects within the frame of cultural locality shown in the Danais film above can be underlined that the positioning of gender subjects is always intertwined with cultural issues, their meanings, as well as efforts to preserve them. These various articulations also show that films Natalan and Tilik provide an illustration of efforts to preserve culture carried out by excluding globalization and modernization. Global and local are placed opposite each other, and it is problematic because actually the original Indonesian culture itself has long been mixed with various other cultures, such as Indian (Hindu), Arabic (Islamic), and Chinese. Lombart (2005) asserted that the entire mixture of these cultures forms the foundation of the archipelago's culture as it is known today. Thus the construction of cultural locality is actually a blend of local and global cultural elements through continuous interaction between them (Long, 1996). Therefore, talk about cultural locality cannot be based solely on thoughts that glorify the purity of local culture which is not necessarily relevant to human life and cultural identity today.

5.3. Cultural Locality in the Vortex of Power

The depiction of the global and local in Natalan and Tilik which are framed in opposing positions shows the essentialism of the perspective of interested parties towards cultural issues. The filmmakers seem to have one voice in interpreting culture that only the *adiluhung* culture is considered as culture. The essentialism of the filmmakers' perspective can be seen from the construction of the film narrative, which is not much different from the expectations of the DIY government as a funder. The DIY government outlines that films produced through Danais Yogyakarta are able to reveal real things in society while showing the *adiluhung* culture that is considered a characteristic of Yogyakarta (Damarjati, 2020).

The policy regarding the content of films produced using Danais funds is in line with the perspective of DIY government as stipulated in the *Perdais* No. 13 of 2017. DIY government described Yogyakarta culture as noble and basic values resulting from creativity and taste which manifests itself in initiative and creation as the identity of the

people of Yogyakarta. While 'cultural values' are explained as a series of good and bad value criteria that are believed by a group of people embodied in DIY's cultural values. Through film, the dominant party, in this case the DIY government, seems to perpetuate their perspective on the cultural value system which is essentialist and does not provide space for negotiation to interpret the meaning of culture. This is inseparable from the power of DIY government in cultural affairs, as confirmed in the *Perdais* No. 1 of 2013. It is stated that the policy for implementing cultural authority is organized to protect, develop and utilize the results of creativity, taste, initiative, and creation in the form of values, knowledge, norms, customs, objects, art, and noble traditions rooted in DIY society.

The essentialist perspective on culture and the authority of the DIY government in regulating cultural issues cannot be separated from the involvement of Yogyakarta Palace. Based on the article 3 of *Perdais* No 1 of 2013, it is explained that the regulation of authority in terms of privileges aims to institutionalize the roles and responsibilities of the Sultanate and the Duchy in protecting and developing Yogyakarta culture as the nation's cultural heritage. The power owned by the Yogyakarta palace in maintaining cultural purity is strengthened by *Perdais* No. 13 of 2017. It is stated that the actualization of *adiluhung* culture is based on cultural values and norms carried out and developed by the Sultanate and Duchy in Yogyakarta. The involvement of the Sultanate and the Duchy in Yogyakarta in defining *adiluhung* culture shows that there is a power trying to discipline, standardize, and control cultural production.

The Yogyakarta Palace, which is not a direct part of Indonesia's post-independence bureaucratic system (DPAD jogjaprov, 2011), tends to exert its influence through the cultural realm. These various *Perdais* give broad powers to the Yogyakarta Palace to define as well as carry out cultural preservation efforts based on practices prevailing in the palace environment. Cultural essentialism seems to be narrated as a tool to perpetuate power. Finally, the Danais film, which incidentally is sourced from Yogayakarta privilege funds, became part of the production of privilege discourses constructed by the palace elite, not privileged discourses produced by the Yogyakarta public. Nugroho (2021) said the power and politics in Java often play at the level of claims or recognition, such as in the name of culture which is used to perpetuate the interests and hegemony of the authorities. Structures and hierarchies in the palace that show the legitimacy of the palace in the eyes of the people, were created not only through the royal system but also by producing discourses and myths so that the people voluntarily accepted the power of the palace.

Finally, the cultural message of '*adiluhung*' that is articulated on the gender subject and cultural locality in Danais' films becomes the Yogyakarta Palace's hegemonic medium through images and text. The policy of interpreting and preserving culture through film is one way to legitimize the power of the Yogyakarta palace amidst the strong currents of globalization. Arjun Appadurai (1996: 182) said that locality is a social construction that is produced and reproduced. Even Bhatt (in Baso, 2002: 44) asserts that locality is an imaginary space, a symbolic space that is interpreted, produced, and contested in various social and power relations. The cultural locality becomes a space that is built based on the interests of the dominant party.

6. CONCLUSION

From the various explanations above, it can be concluded that films Natalan and Tilik provide an overview of the essentialist perspective of cultural locality. Based on the analysis results, it can be considered that there are two important points that can be drawn as conclusions. First, the preservation of local culture in both films is built through various narratives, such as patriarchal ideology and local-global issues that are deliberately presented dichotomously. Modernity and global culture are shown as if they are eroding local values. Various positionings of women that tend to be displayed negatively also prove that the films are intertwined with patriarchal hegemony that plays behind the discourse of cultural locality. The films become a medium for the pacification of female subjects in disguised ways. This is framed through various narratives that establish the destruction of local traditions and culture on female subjects.

Second, the cultural film has become a soft power to legitimize the existence of the Yogyakarta palace as a center of power amidst the strong currents of globalization. The framing of the negative impact of modernity on local culture embedded in women's bodies, is presented from the perspective of the Yogyakarta palace. Women, both narrated as guardians and destroyers of culture, are positioned as messengers to invite the public to maintain and perpetuate the values and norms adopted by the Yogyakarta Palace. In addition, the portrayal of the loss of local cultural values that are only embedded in women shows the alignment of the DIY government and the Yogyakarta palace toward patriarchal ideology.

7. COMPETING INTEREST STATEMENT

This article is free from any conflict of interest regarding the data collection, analysis, and the publication process itself. Either replicate or modify the previous sentence for this part.

8. AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

The first author is the corresponding author, while the second and third authors contribute to compiling the research design, building the conceptual framework, analyzing the data, interpreting the data, and concluding the findings.

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50 Z. Mahmudah et al.

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