

No Pregnancy, No Marriage: Unveiling the Ideology Behind the Discourse of 'Sing Beling Sing Nganten' in Balinese Marriage Culture

Ni Luh Gede Sukardiasih^{1*} , I Nyoman Weda Kusuma² ,
Evalina Franciska Hutasoit³ 

¹ BKKBN Bali Province Representative Office, Indonesia

^{1,2} Udayana University, Indonesia

³ National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), Indonesia

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Abstract: In Bali "*sing beling sing nganten*" phenomenon literally meaning where a couple gets married only after the bride is pregnant, often to prove her fertility, continues to shape community views on marriage and gender. Although the research was conducted in Tabanan Regency, the phenomenon is largely similar and occurs throughout Bali; therefore, the choice of location does not produce substantive differences in the findings. This study explores the ideologies embedded in "*sing beling sing nganten*" discourse and how it sustains unequal power relations within marriage and culture. Using qualitative methods and a critical discourse analysis approach, the research identifies four dominant ideologies underpinning the discourse. First, ideology emphasizes lineage and ancestral spiritual continuity. Second, bodily ideology constructs women's bodies as both autonomous and objectified. Third, fertility ideology reinforces women's reproductive roles and health. Fourth, common-sense ideology normalizes social acceptance toward this discourse. The study reveals that "*sing beling sing nganten*" lacks an objective basis of truth and functions primarily to legitimize male power over women.

Keywords: ideology; discourse; *sing beling sing nganten*; culture; marriage

1. Introduction

Premarital pregnancy is becoming increasingly common in society. This phenomenon is contrary to the religious values and social norms adopted by Indonesian society, which is known to be religious. Religions teach that sexual relations can only take place through the legal institution of marriage. However, premarital pregnancy clearly shows that the institution of marriage has become

* Corresponding author's email: luhdepuja@gmail.com

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a desacralization. In this regard, Sardjuningsih (2020, pp. 90-91) states that the weakening of social structures in regulating and adapting to changes has led to various social facts that contradict the ideal vision of marriage as a sacred institution.

The desacralization of the institution of marriage, particularly through the rise of premarital sexual relations, has increasingly become prevalent among adolescents in Bali (Kartika & Budisetyani, 2018). The widespread occurrence of premarital sex among teenagers often culminating in marriage due to pregnancy has given rise to the discourse of *sing beling sing nganten* 'no pregnancy, no marriage'. Although premarital pregnancy and early marriage have been studied in Balinese contexts, limited research has critically analyzed how language and discourse legitimize such practices and perpetuate gender inequality. This study addresses this gap by applying a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework to the discourse of *sing beling sing nganten*. This approach can reveal the relationships between ideology and power in every discourse, as well as its influence on the social world (van Dijk, 1993; Naidu et al., 2023).

Social realities reflect that this discourse has actually been developing in Bali since the 1980s, as exemplified in the lyrics of a Balinese pop song *Korting Duang Bulan*, sung by Ketut Bimbo featuring Alit Ardiari around that time. The phrase *korting duang bulan* literally means "two-month discount", referring to a situation where a woman is already two months pregnant at the time of marriage. While this song has a humorous and playful tone and is somewhat funny, its message seems to legitimize premarital sexual relations within the marriage culture, particularly in the context of offspring (*sentana*), which holds a deeply rooted position in Bali's patrilineal tradition (Termeulen et al., 2020). Controversies surrounding this discourse continue to emerge in society, involving religious narratives and gender relations. In addition to conflicting with the religious, social, and cultural values of Balinese Hindu society, this discourse also pressures women to accept premarital sex as if it were a form of fertility testing (Dewi et al., 2022).

Women face further dilemmas when they reject premarital pregnancy but are later unable to conceive after marriage, often resulting in them being blamed or subjected to domestic violence. The domestic violence experienced by infertile women has also been documented in studies conducted in various countries, such as Turkey, Greece, and Tunisia (Çalışkan & Özkan, 2021; Jbir et al., 2022; Hassan et al., 2023). This indicates that the *sing beling sing nganten* discourse not only reflects a shift in the meaning of marriage within Balinese society but also has the potential to perpetuate gender-based injustices against women, because infertility can also be caused by the husband.

This phenomenon is also observed in Tabanan Regency, Bali. Studies conducted by Windia (2008) and Dyatmikawati (2015) show that Tabanan society tends to be more open and responsive to controversial marriage customs compared to other areas in Bali, such as *nyentana* (a marriage in which the husband moves into the wife's family and their children became the wife's family lineage) and *pada gelahang* marriages (a dual-residence marriage where both husband and wife maintain equal ties to their respective families) (Dyatmikawati, 2015). From 2001-2012, the number of *pada gelahang* marriages in Tabanan Regency reached 14 couples (50%) out of 28 couples in all of Bali. Preliminary studies also show that more than 50% of ten wedding ceremonies, the brides were already pregnant, it means that they became pregnant before getting married.

In the past, families of newlywed couples in Bali often felt ashamed if the woman was pregnant at the time of marriage, as it was considered a violation on social and religious norms. However, this perception has shifted significantly in recent decades. Today, such situations are widely accepted and even normalized. This practice is reinforced by social acceptance, wherein women who are already pregnant at the time of the wedding ceremony would unlikely face psychological or social stigma; on the contrary, their families often express happiness regarding the pregnancy. Some women who remain childless after marriage reported experiencing verbal abuse from their husbands or in-laws.

This indicates that the *sing beling sing nganten* discourse has become a naturalized ideology within the marriage culture of Tabanan Regency. According to Foucault (1977), discourse is not merely a series of words, sentences, or propositions in spoken or written texts, but rather something that produces specific ideas, concepts, or effects within social practice. Discourse has the power to generate ideas, knowledge, values, beliefs, and worldviews that are accepted as truths and subsequently practiced within specific contexts to influence societal thought and behavior (Foucault, in Zajda, 2020). In other words, discourse expressed through language and social practices is never neutral; it is always embedded with ideology and power.

Based on the above explanation, this study identified three underlying issues. First, the *sing beling sing nganten* discourse signifies a cultural shift in Balinese society, wherein the institution of marriage is no longer viewed as the sole legitimate path to parenthood. Second, this discourse is never ideologically or politically neutral, as it influences social practices such as traditional Balinese wedding ceremonies that begin with premarital pregnancy. Third, the ideology behind this discourse must be deconstructed through a critical discourse analysis approach in order to uncover the power relations articulated through language and social practices.

2. Literature Review

Issues concerning premarital sex or marriage have received limited scholarly attention, particularly when examined in relation to local cultural values. Yet premarital sex constitutes a highly significant topic as it can be analyzed from multiple perspectives, including social norms, religion, health, biology, and the politics of marriage. This study investigates the phenomenon commonly described as ‘marriage only if pregnancy occurs’ through a multidimensional discursive lens, encompassing the cultural legitimization of premarital sexual relations as well as marital politics aimed at securing lineage continuity. Within the patriarchal cultural framework of Bali, the production of offspring is regarded as an essential obligation, as children are expected to assume responsibilities pertaining to customary and religious obligations and, importantly, to provide care for their parents in later life.

Atmaja (2008) states that marriages preceded by premarital pregnancy are considered forbidden in Bali, as they contradict religious, moral, and social values. However, the desire of families to have descendants (*sentana*) has led some Balinese people to accept premarital pregnancy as a reasonable solution. The *sing beling sing nganten* discourse is also related to the growing phenomenon of premarital sex among Balinese youth. Saraswaty & Tobing (2016) found that the motivations behind premarital sex among Balinese adolescents can be both intrinsic and extrinsic. One intrinsic motivation linked to this discourse is the desire to marry and have children with a loved partner, making premarital pregnancy a means of securing commitment within the relationship. On the other hand, Horii (2020) argues that premarital sex is not always viewed as taboo in Balinese society; in fact, there are segments of the community that implicitly support it.

In contrast to the three previous studies, the articulation of ideology within the *sing beling sing nganten* discourse is highlighted in the study by Chandra et al. (2020), which found that the social reality of premarital pregnancy in several urban areas of Bali is influenced by the workings of this discourse. This discourse is legitimized by segments of Balinese society as valid and reasonable knowledge, despite the unconscious consequences it entails, namely, the further subordination of Balinese women in both domestic and public spheres. These findings align with those of Dewi et al. (2022), who argue that the *sing beling sing nganten* discourse has positioned women as victims who require legal protection. Both studies emphasize the discourse as an ideological practice that contributes to the subordination and marginalization of Balinese women.

Titisari et al. (2024) examined the tension between cultural norms and the issues of sexual relationships and reproductive health among Balinese adolescents within the *sing beling sing nganten* discourse, drawing on research

conducted from 2019 to 2022. The findings from this period reveal that the *sing beling sing nganten* discourse contradicts Balinese cultural norms derived from Hindu teachings and negatively impacts adolescent reproductive health (Titisari, 2025). However, the discourse is generally accepted by the public as a means of securing offspring. The key contribution of this study lies in its argument that the discourse functions ideologically by creating a new regime of truth, one that appears rational, yet fundamentally conflicts with religious and cultural norms.

A review of the aforementioned literature shows that the *sing beling sing nganten* discourse is a cultural phenomenon that is multi-relational in nature within the traditional Balinese marriage system. This discourse is closely tied to the patrilineal system, individual motivations and perceptions regarding premarital pregnancy, gender relations, as well as ideology and power. However, no prior research has specifically and thoroughly examined the underlying ideology of the *sing beling sing nganten* discourse within the marriage culture of Tabanan Regency, Bali.

3. Method and Theoretical Framework

3.1 Method

This research uses a qualitative method with a critical discourse analysis approach and is supported by sociological analysis. Fairclough (1993) asserts that critical discourse analysis holds significant value as a methodological tool in the humanities and social sciences and serves as a resource for social struggle. According to van Dijk (1993), the critical discourse analysis approach reveals the relationship between discourse and power through the following means.

Theoretically it is shown that in order to be able to relate power and discourse in an explicit way, we need the ‘cognitive interface’ of models, knowledge, attitudes and ideologies and other social representations of the social mind, which also relate the individual and the social, and the micro- and the macro-levels of social structure.

Carpenter & Singh (2023) state that critical discourse analysis is a text-focused approach to the study of social institutions which examines language as a power distribution mechanism. Grounded in an assumption that discourse—that is, ways of writing and talking about a phenomenon—is a productive social practice, critical discourse analysis provides a means to reveal the power relations through which particular ways of being and doing come to be taken for granted as ideal, and not ideal, within specific socio-historical contexts (Rudman & Dennhardt, 2023). On the other hand, Naidu, et al. (2023) state that critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary research methodology

used to analyze discourse as a form of social practice, exploring how meaning is socially constructed.

This research was conducted in Tabanan in 2024. The site was deliberately and admittedly subjectively chosen as it constitutes the domicile of the first author and the locus of the preliminary observational data. Nonetheless, this subjectivity does not compromise the analytical rigor of the study, as the phenomenon of '*sing beling sing nganten*' is observable across Bali and is driven by broadly comparable social and cultural conditions. Consequently, the choice of Tabanan does not diminish the analytical validity of this study in examining the phenomenon commonly articulated in the local expression '*sing beling sing nganten*'.

Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews and supported by observations of traditional Balinese wedding practices during the research period, particularly those indicating that the bride was already pregnant. The informants interviewed were 50 people and consisted of married couples, family members, religious and customary leaders, community figures, healthcare professionals, and government officials involved in marriage registration. To enrich the understanding of the issue under study, document analysis was also conducted using relevant sources such as government documents and media reports, both print and electronic.

Data analysis was conducted using a descriptive-interpretive technique based on five principles of critical discourse analysis: (a) the principle of action, which views discourse as a form of interaction and intentional action aimed at influencing, directing, persuading, refuting, debating, and more produced with conscious intent; (b) the principle of context, which recognizes that discourse is always related to specific contexts, including physical, epistemic, linguistic, and social contexts; (c) the principle of history, which situates discourse within historical context or temporal dimensions; (d) the principle of power, which posits that discourse is produced as a tool of power control, and therefore is never neutral or natural. Discourse becomes a site of struggle for particular forms of power; and (e) the principle of ideology, which sees discourse as a practice and representation of ideology aimed at shaping public consciousness so that certain ideas are accepted as true, natural, and taken for granted (Eriyanto, 2011; 2015).

3.2 Theory

Discourse theory has always played a significant role in Michel Foucault's larger theoretical framework. His discourse theories integrate language, power, and knowledge to achieve the 'truth,' though there is a debate whether they are inherently linked. Foucault's discourse theory is the representation of his core

discourse thoughts placed among discourse, knowledge, and power (Zhiyi, 2023). According to Foucault (1977), discourse is a representation of values, beliefs, categories, and worldviews that are deliberately constructed for the interests of power, that is, to influence the way people think and act. Discourse does not emerge spontaneously; rather, it is produced through processes that involve relations of power and knowledge (Carette [ed.], 1999, p. 130). Even if knowledge and power are two different phenomena, each regulates the production of the other. Knowledge and power are intimately and productively related to each other, the relationship that ultimately determines the production of truth (Basumatary, 2020).

Foucault (in Ritzer & Goodman, 2005) emphasizes the importance of the archaeology of knowledge and the genealogy of power, namely, the search for general systems and rules that can be embedded within discourse. These general systems and rules constitute the documents that construct discourse. Such documents are not analyzed to examine their validity, but rather their function in constructing discourse (Foucault in Carette [ed.], 1999, p. 132). Knowledge is always produced in relation to power, and it plays a role in the development, refinement, and maintenance of new techniques of power. Power strategies are practiced in and through discourse, making language a tool of power by incorporating knowledge into statements and expressions.

The relationship between knowledge and power in discourse is reflected in its capacity to influence certain ways of thinking and acting within society, thereby transforming discourse into an ideology. Karl Marx defines ideology as a form of false consciousness created by individuals to influence the thoughts and beliefs of others, leading them to accept it as truth (Suseno, 2017, p. 127). Machiavelli (2021, p. 47) defines ideology within a political context as the knowledge of how to conceal interests in order to gain and maintain power, often through the exploitation of religious concepts, including through deceit.

Althusser (2015) refutes part of Karl Marx's view that ideology is merely false consciousness. Instead, he argues that ideology has a material basis in the context of the state apparatus as a force that disciplines societal behavior. The theory of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) suggests that ideology operates within the private sphere such as religion, education, family, law, politics, social organizations, communication, and culture becoming key institutions that shape specific patterns of behavior in society. The ISA stands in contrast to the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA), which includes coercive institutions such as the government, military, police, prisons, courts, and other public institutions. While the RSA can be directly observed and its repressive actions whether physical or non-physical are recognizable to the public, the ISA entails a more subtle and dialectical disciplining of behavior, as it provides greater

space for ideological resistance by the public (Althusser, 2015; Graceiya et al., 2021; Andrews & Skoczyli, 2022).

Both theories are employed to uncover the ideology behind the *sing beling sing nganten* discourse within the marriage culture of Tabanan Regency, Bali. Ideology does not emerge as “truth,” but rather constructs a “regime of truth” within power relations articulated through language and social practices (Foucault, 1977). The “truth” contained within such ideology can be dialogued with other truths dialectically, as proposed in the theory of ISA, implying that ideology can only be understood in terms of its function as a disciplinary force over behavior (Althusser, 2015). In other words, while ideology constantly operates within social discourse, it is knowledge and power that determine its capacity to discipline social practices. At this point, public rationality in interpreting each discourse determines the truth being produced and simultaneously shapes their ways of thinking and behaving.

4. Results and Discussion

Recent fieldwork in Tabanan Regency (approximately 30 km west of Denpasar, the capital city of Bali Province) shows that local marriage practices continue to reflect a complex intersection between religious teachings, customary law, and shifting moral values (Fox, 2022; Mantra, 1996; Geriya, 2000). Based on 18 in-depth interviews, 11 wedding observations, and 10 media reports (2019–2024), approximately 68% of observed marriages involved brides who were already pregnant. Most parents and community leaders stated that pregnancy before marriage was “common” (*biasa*) or even “ideal,” since it guaranteed fertility and ensured the continuity of family lineage (*sentana*) (Mayuni et al., 2023). The *prajuru adat* (customary leaders) and *pemangku* (priests) officiating the ceremonies seldom questioned the condition of the bride, which demonstrates institutional accommodation of the *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* norm.

This normalization is not unique to Tabanan. In Buleleng, informants reported that many villages share the saying “*sing nyidang dadi manten yen durung meteng*” (“one cannot marry unless already pregnant”), while in Bangli and Gianyar, similar practices are described as “*korting duang bulan*” or “discount for two months,” meaning that early pregnancy accelerates marriage negotiations. Comparable phenomena exist in other Indonesian regions, such as “*nikah karena hamil*” (marriage prompted by pregnancy) in Java, “*kawin tangkap*” (marriage through capture) in Nusa Tenggara Timur, and “*kawin siap anak*” (marriage with an already-expected child) in South Sulawesi (Wiasti & Suarsana, 2022). These parallel practices reveal a wider national negotiation between morality, modernity, and reproductive expectations, showing that *sing*

beling sing nganten is part of a continuum of pragmatic adaptations to social change across Indonesia.

The following discussion explores how four intersecting ideologies namely religious, bodily, fertility, and common-sense which are mutually constructed and normalised *sing beling sing nganten* as a cultural discourse within Balinese society.

4.1 Religious Ideology

Field data reveal that nearly all informants justify marriage after pregnancy using religious reasoning. Parents and elders frequently mentioned that a marriage must ensure the continuation of ancestral lineage (*sentana rajeg*). Among the 18 interviewed couples, all (100%) expressed a strong desire to have children, and several couples who remained childless after years of marriage actively sought medical or ritual interventions to conceive. One father stated that he deliberately postponed his son's wedding until the fiancée became pregnant, explaining that "a child guarantees that our ancestors will be saved in the afterlife."

The strength of this belief is also one of the reasons why some Hindus in Tabanan Regency deliberately delay the marriage of their children in order to ensure that the prospective bride becomes pregnant, as revealed in an interview with one of the informants below.

My son, I Kadek, [the informant's son] had long expressed his desire to marry his girlfriend, as they had been in a relationship for over a year. But I told him to wait until his girlfriend became pregnant, to ensure they would have offspring (*sentana*). Here in Bali, we believe that if one has no descendants, there will be no one to help their ancestors in the afterlife. Once she was pregnant, it was certain that I would have a *sentana*. So, after my future daughter-in-law became pregnant, we immediately arranged their marriage.

This statement indicates that premarital pregnancy can provide certainty that the family will have offspring. This is perceived as something highly valuable for the family, in terms of religious belief, sociocultural systems, and psychological comfort. Although this reasoning does not align with Hindu teachings, which hold that the attainment of *sentana* must begin with a marriage ceremony, the religious ideology that appears to legitimize premarital pregnancy can only be understood within the context of discourse that reflects relations of power and knowledge. This aligns with Foucault's perspective (as cited in Carette [ed.], 1999, p. 132) that knowledge circulating in society is akin to a document important not to verify its validity, but to understand its function

in constructing discourse. Ultimately, the practice of marrying when the bride is already pregnant does occur within society, as illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Marriage ceremony in which the bride is already pregnant (Photo: Sukardiasih, 2024).

This reflects the enduring influence of Hindu narratives emphasizing the necessity of descendants for spiritual continuity, as in the story of Jaratkaru (Astiti, 2004; Mayuni et al., 2023).

The teachings of Hinduism serve as the foundation and core values of Balinese culture, which are actualized in the sociocultural system (Mantra, 1996; Geriya, 2000; Triguna et al., 2022). The traditional Balinese marriage system is also grounded in Hindu religious teachings, as evidenced by the requirement to present *tri saksi* [three witnesses] as a condition for the legitimacy of a marriage: *dewa saksi* (divine witness or God), *bhuta saksi* (witnesses from the lower or unseen realms), and *manusa saksi* (human witnesses) (Anom, 2010; Windia, 2018). Furthermore, Hindu teachings hold an important ideological position in constructing the narrative surrounding traditional Balinese marriage, particularly regarding its ideal purposes. Titib (as cited in Mas, 2006, p. 5) states that the goals of a Hindu marriage include: (1) *Dharmasampati*, namely for

both spouses to jointly carry out all religious duties and obligations; (2) *Praja*, which is to bear *suputra* offspring (children who are intellectually, morally, and spiritually qualified) to continue the ancestral obligations; and (3) *Rati*, which refers to enjoying sexual satisfaction that does not conflict with *dharma* (truth and righteousness).

To realize these ideal objectives, the marriage ceremony must be performed by a man and a woman prior to the birth of offspring and the enjoyment of sexual relations. This principle is reflected in the text of *Manawadharmaśāstra* I.32, as follows.

*Dvidhā kṛtvātmano deham, ardhena puruṣo'bhavat
ardhena nāri tasyām sa, virājama srjat prabhuḥ.*

Translation:

By dividing Himself, partly as man (*nara*) and partly as woman (*īśvarī*), He created all this (*virāja*) from the female part (Pudja & Sudharta, 2004, p. 9).

This text mandates that man and woman are a unified entity in the process of creation. The marriage ceremony serves as the means to unite them, enabling the birth of *suputra* offspring. The importance of the marriage ceremony as a vehicle for the continuation of lineage is also found in *Manawadharmaśāstra* IX.96, as follows.

*Prajānārthaṁ striyaḥ sṛṣṭāḥ, samtānārthaṁ ca mānavāḥ,
tasmāt sādharmaṇo dharma, śrutau patnyā sanoditaḥ.*

Translation:

Woman was created to become a mother, and man was created to become a father. Therefore, religious ceremonies are prescribed in the Vedas to be performed by husband and wife (Pudja & Sudharta, 2004, p. 657).

The meaning behind this text is that marriage, as a means of continuing lineage, must be preceded by a religious ceremony prescribed in the sacred scriptures of the Vedas. Religiously, the marriage ceremony aims to prepare a man to become a father and a woman to become a mother, as marked by the ritual purification of *śukla* (spermatozoa) and *śvanita* (ovum). Therefore, premarital pregnancy, which is inherent in the discourse of *sing beling sing nganten* [those who misbehave should not marry], is clearly in contradiction with this ideology. However, the knowledge that has developed in the everyday discourse of society regarding marriage also reflects the importance for a family to have descendants who will eventually become heirs (*sentana*). This knowledge is legitimized by Hindu religious discourse, which teaches the

importance of the position of *sentana* within the family, as illustrated in the story of “Jaratkaru” in the following excerpt.

This is the consequence; I am cut off from the world of the *ātman*. Now I hang upon a single bamboo stalk, nearly falling into hell. The existence of this bamboo stalk is because I do in fact have a descendant, his name is Jaratkaru, but he has vowed never to marry throughout his life (*śukla brahmacārī*).

Upon hearing this, Jaratkaru replied: “Is that the path, my lord, by which you may reach heaven? If so, then without hesitation or fear, I shall abandon the practice of *śukla brahmacarya*. I shall marry and beget a child” (Astuti, 2004, p. 229).

This story is well known among Hindus and conveys the message that if a person does not have descendants, the *ātma* (soul) of their ancestors will be suspended on a bamboo stalk, the rope of which is gnawed by a rat. So that, if the rope breaks, the soul will fall into hell. This discourse shapes the Hindu community’s awareness of the importance of having a stable lineage (*sentana rajeg*) to save the souls of their ancestors from damnation. The presence of *sentana* in the religious beliefs of Balinese Hindus is often associated with the ritual of *pitra yadnya*. Mayuni et al. (2023, p. 66) state that, in addition to the story of Jaratkaru derived from the *Adi Parwa* text, several other texts in Bali also emphasize the importance of having *sentana* in relation to the performance of death rituals or *pitra yadnya*. One such text is the *Kunti Yadnya*, as illustrated in the following excerpt.

Doning mangkana dharmaning kadi kita pinakanak, angleyakena pitra pinda, kamnanya tekeng swarga sang pinaka kawitanta (Lontar Kunti Yadnya, 30).

Translation:

For that is indeed your duty as a child to perform the *pitra yadnya* ceremony so that the *ātma* (soul) of your ancestors may reach heaven.

The text affirms that by performing the *pitra yadnya* ceremony, a child (*sentana*) can guide the *ātma* (soul) of their parents or ancestors to heaven (*swarga*). These discourses strongly influence the consciousness of Hindu adherents, encouraging every married couple to hope for offspring from their marriage. This study found that all 18 interviewed couples (100%) expressed the desire to have children. Several couples who had been married for years without being blessed with children made great efforts to conceive, using both medical and non-medical methods. Ironically, the presence or absence of offspring is often cited as a cause of marital discord, as seen in several cases of divorce.

4.2 Body Ideology

According to Rahyani et al. (2020), premarital sexual relations are influenced by multiple factors, such as permissive attitudes, curiosity, peer influence, fear of being abandoned by a partner, habitual exposure to pornographic content, and conducive circumstances. These factors affirm that every adolescent possesses the same potential to engage in premarital sex. Although religious ideology may function as a moral control to prevent premarital sexual behavior, individuals with religious knowledge are nonetheless susceptible to engaging in it. This affirms that religious ideology is not the sole ideology capable of shaping individual consciousness.

Sexuality, as a part of human biological needs, is a natural and inevitable aspect of adulthood, accompanying the maturation of bodily organs and sexual libido. Millet (2000) emphasizes that the human body possesses autonomy in matters of sexuality, reproduction, and medical decisions. However, the body is never truly free from various ideologies that compromise its autonomy in discursive practices. In the context of the *sing beling sing nganten* discourse, body ideology is inescapable, as the human body is the site where sexual organs develop. Body ideology is marked by the presence of various ideological and political forces that shape social perceptions of the body, such as masculinity, beauty, and so forth (Ramirez et al., 2021). Feminist thinkers argue that bodily ideology and politics are root causes of gender inequality for women in discourses on sexuality and reproduction, closely tied to their natural biological roles (Millet, 2000).

The female body possesses autonomous power to make decisions regarding its own sexual and reproductive behavior, as sexual relations can only occur with the woman's consent whether driven by libidinal desire, expressions of love, relationship commitment, or other reasons (Fox, 2017). However, social constructions have reduced the autonomy of women's bodies within the discourse of sexuality and reproduction (Millet, 2000). In the context of the *sing beling sing nganten* discourse, the female body becomes a continuous site of contention between autonomy and objectification. Autonomously, a woman has the capacity to either accept or reject premarital sex and pregnancy. Yet, under patriarchal ideology, the female body is treated as a prime asset, subject to objectification, exploitation, segregation, idealized image construction, and other patriarchal injustices (Millet, 2000).

Women's courage to autonomously express their bodies in public spaces is one of the indicators of the success of radical feminist struggles. This phenomenon is likened to a virus infiltrating the cells of the female body, prompting women to follow it without fear or concern for prevailing societal values (Gumelar & Mukhrohman, 2015, p. 72). Radical feminists also argue

that women's freedom in expressing their bodies reflects growing gender consciousness, allowing women to exercise their will independently of male judgment. This freedom is seen as a fundamental solution for dismantling the boundaries imposed by patriarchal culture (Wolf, as cited in Aziz, 2007, p. 69).

However, such autonomy is not free from evaluation and judgment by men. This aligns with the view of Jackson and Sorensen (2005, p. 336), who argue that patriarchal ideology is ever-present and intertwined with all discourses on women's bodily autonomy, especially in matters of sexuality. In this regard, Bourdieu (2010, p. 93) states that the way women maintain and present their bodies in front of others reflects the gap between the "practically permissible body" and the "legitimate body." Propriety refers to the representation of the body that is practically accepted, rather than a legitimate or autonomous body.

Ultimately, women's bodily autonomy often amounts to no more than a claim to being the legal owner of their own bodies, without manifesting full autonomy in practice. This is reflected in women's reluctance or inability to refuse men's requests for premarital sexual relations. One informant stated that her greatest fear in rejecting such requests was being abandoned or broken up with by her partner. This inability to refuse leads to further consequences, namely, a tendency to repeatedly accept invitations to engage in sexual activity. This is closely related to their psychological state after coming to terms with having lost their virginity, which drives them to maintain the relationship at all costs, especially when the male partner uses sex as a condition for continuing the relationship.

Likewise, for women who are already prepared for marriage, they accept premarital sexual relations along with all the consequences, such as marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, and living with the man's family. One informant stated that she did not mind doing so and accepted the consequences because she was certain that she would be married. She was, in fact, more afraid of being unable to conceive after marriage, as it could lead to her husband's infidelity or intimidation from her in-laws. This is consistent with Piliang's (2006, p. 140) view that women and womanhood are entirely shaped by culture. It is difficult to deny that religion, tradition, social systems, and institutions largely dominated by male perspectives contribute to legitimizing that culture, thereby compelling women to carry out their roles to the end, namely, death. Only after death is the female body truly free from obligations to serve men, to conceive, to give birth, to raise children, and to bear other burdens (Wiasti & Suarsana, 2022).

This explanation affirms that the ideology of the body is articulated within the *sing beling sing nganten* discourse in the marriage culture of Tabanan Regency. On one hand, bodily autonomy opens space for each individual to

express their choices regarding sexuality and reproduction. On the other hand, body ideology and politics constantly challenge individual autonomy in making decisions about their sexual and reproductive choices. The power of patriarchal ideology, which mandates that every marriage institution must result in offspring, has driven some premarital couples to accept the *sing beling sing nganten* discourse as a prerequisite for the continuity of their relationship commitment.

4.3 The Ideology of Fertility

Ideological issues arise when the natural condition of women, as the only sex capable of becoming pregnant and giving birth, shapes societal knowledge regarding fertility. One such issue is reflected in the emergence of a social perception that women are primarily responsible for pregnancy outcomes. This is evident from interviews with two informants in Tabanan Regency, who stated that when a couple struggles to conceive, they tend to assume that it is the woman who is infertile. These statements were further supported by another informant offering a broader perspective, as follows.

It is by nature [*kodrat*] that only women can become pregnant, which is why if a pregnancy does not occur, the woman is the one who gets blamed. Those with some understanding of health might consider that it may not be the woman's fault, it could also be the men. Among us Balinese, there is also a belief that perhaps the ancestor who is to be reincarnated has not yet chosen to descend into the world. However, not everyone thinks that way, which is why women are more often blamed when pregnancy does not happen.

These interview findings affirm that in cases of infertility, some communities in Tabanan Regency tend to blame women, based on the natural fact that only women can become pregnant. This view arises from a lack of comprehensive knowledge about reproductive health, as well as religious beliefs that suggest pregnancy may be hindered if the ancestor who is to be reincarnated is not yet willing to descend into the world. Such knowledge actually offers space for a broader understanding that infertility may not only be caused by women, but also by men, or even by other supernatural factors. Nevertheless, society often places the burden of infertility solely on women.

Such social views can only be understood within an ideological context, as they contradict scientifically proven medical knowledge. The causes of infertility may stem from low-quality male sperm or female ovum, resulting in failed fertilization. The quality of sperm and ova is influenced by several factors, including age, unhealthy lifestyle, psychological condition, and

diseases or inflammation of reproductive organs. Female infertility may result from ovulation disorders, blocked fallopian tubes, or uterine problems such as fibroids, vaginitis, cervical polyps, and ovarian cysts. Meanwhile, male infertility may be caused by conditions such as micropenis, erectile dysfunction, and impaired spermatogenesis (Indrawati et al., 2017; Marlina, 2019; Muslimah, 2020).

The distinction between public reasoning and scientific truth in understanding fertility reflects an ongoing contestation of power and knowledge relations. The *sing beling sing nganten* discourse, which places pregnancy as the basis for marital commitment, naturalizes public perceptions that a woman must prove her fertility as a prerequisite for marriage. Interestingly, couples who are already planning to marry—along with their families—closely monitor the pregnancy status, and some premarital couples have even consulted doctors, accompanied by their parents, to confirm their fertility condition. Thus, the ideology of fertility operates behind the *sing beling sing nganten* discourse, wherein premarital pregnancy serves as a means of proving a woman's fertility before proceeding with marriage.

The ideology of fertility refers to the sociocultural beliefs and values concerning human fertility. Each community holds its own perspectives on fertility. This ideology determines the social appropriateness and acceptance of individuals based on their fertility status for example, the stigmatization of infertile women (Wells & Heinsch, 2021). Implicitly, this ideology strongly influences the articulation of the *sing beling sing nganten* discourse, as the phrase *sing beling* (if not pregnant), then *sing nganten* (not married), ultimately centers around pregnancy. In other words, this discourse implies that for a marriage to take place, the woman must first be pregnant.

4.4 Common Sense Ideology

The error in question refers to the ideology of common sense, the transformation of popular belief into an accepted truth that drives social practices within society. This ideology spreads and influences people's patterns of thought, attitudes, and behaviors, eventually solidifying into a stable form of future folklore. Like any folklore, it is considered true simply because it is widely believed, even though it may disregard other truths that are more logical, scientific, and systematic (Gramsci, in Faruk, 2019). This is reflected in the view of one informant who expressed no objection to the discourse of *sing beling sing nganten*, as follows.

"I've been to many events and invitations, and it's the same everywhere, many are like that. Some women are even heavily pregnant, and their families act like it's nothing unusual. It's the same here. The mother is

even happy if her future daughter-in-law is already pregnant. It means she'll have a grandchild soon. Before I Putu [the informant's son] got married, it was the same. His mother often asked if the girl was already pregnant. I often hear mothers chatting not asking when their children will get married, but whether they're already pregnant. That's the world now, just go along with it. What matters is that the child is truly ready to get married."

The experience of attending wedding ceremonies in various places (including outside Tabanan Regency) intensifies individual awareness of the prevalence of marriage practices that align with the social reality behind the *sing beling sing nganten* discourse. This awareness is reflected in individuals' everyday experiences within families and communities, where premarital pregnancy is not seen as a disgrace to be avoided, but rather as something normal. In daily conversations, neighbors are more likely to ask whether the bride-to-be is pregnant than when the wedding will take place. This indicates a strong public affirmation of the *sing beling sing nganten* discourse as a normalized condition within marriage practices.

Such public affirmation indicates that discourse always constructs a flow of communication, wherein all parties involved in the social practice mutually produce and exchange meanings in an egalitarian manner. The common-sense ideology reflected in a segment of society's affirmation of the *sing beling sing nganten* discourse is further reinforced by the openness of customary institutions in legitimizing wedding ceremonies where the bride is already pregnant. This legitimacy is reflected in the presence of *manusa saksi* as one of the requirements for a valid marriage according to Hindu belief, marked by the attendance of community members, as well as customary (*prajuru adat*) and civil officials during the ceremony, as illustrated in the Figure 2.

The presence of customary and governmental institutions as structural elements legitimizing premarital pregnancy reflects the validation of social structures and their naturalization within the social system. In this regard, Triguna (2003, p. 1) explains that when modernization and globalization introduce new values into a traditional environment, members of the community that uphold the tradition will generalize the accompanying values, norms, and meanings as a mechanism of social equilibrium. Therefore, when the people of Tabanan Regency no longer perceive premarital pregnancy as an exceptional occurrence, the community that supports traditional marriage culture likewise generalizes the values, norms, and meanings by equalizing all wedding ceremonies whether or not the bride was already pregnant, thus rendering it a normalized sociocultural practice.



Figure 2. The presence of *manusa saksi* (human witness) in a wedding ceremony where the bride was already pregnant prior to marriage (Photo: Sukardiasih, 2024).

So far, it is not known who coined the discourse *sing beling sing nganten*, when and where it first emerged, or what the purpose of its emergence was. This discourse seems to have simply emerged in society and attracted public attention to be continuously discussed, whether in daily conversations, public discussions, academic narratives, or various media. Evidently, in the last five years, no fewer than 10 mass media reports and scientific publications have addressed this discourse. Sthitaprajna (in *kompasiana.com*, June 9, 2024) stated that almost 99% of Balinese people understand the meaning of *sing beling sing nganten* as ‘pregnant first, then get married,’ and interestingly, many people normalize this discourse as something common in Bali.

Theoretically, a discourse that attracts widespread public attention will generate various labels, interpretations, and understandings. A discourse does not merely describe objective reality but also conveys a range of ideologies that can shape specific ways of thinking within society about that reality (Eriyanto, 2011; 2015). This is reflected in both the affirmation and resistance of the public toward the discourse. While some consider this discourse abnormal because it violates religious, moral, and social values, others interpret it as something

normal. These two contradictory modes of interpretation are inevitable, as discourse understood as a type of language game does not allow for a singular (homologous) meaning. In fact, homologism would diminish the public significance of a discourse (MacQuillan, 2001).

Contradictions in the interpretation of a discourse are a social inevitability, as discourse does not merely reflect reality, but also constructs it (Karlberg, 2012, p.1). Howard & Stavrakakis (2000) argue that the objects and actions of discourse generate meaning that accumulates historically through a series of social processes. The value and identity of an object are entirely determined by rules of interpretation that are socially constructed (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). In this sense, the *sing beling sing nganten* discourse continually accumulated through public discussions has built discursive power capable of shaping public beliefs and behavior. At this point, the discourse has, in a socio-historical context, transformed into a form of common-sense ideology, becoming one of the constitutive elements of power in postmodern society.

This aligns with Gramsci's view (in Faruk, 2019, p. 140) that there are six elements constituting power: culture, hegemony, ideology, intellectuals, the state, and popular belief (common sense). These six elements may appear operationally separate, yet in reality, they are integrally accumulated within individuals and social institutions. The concept of common sense has a distinctive character compared to the other five elements of power. Its uniqueness lies in its spontaneous, massive, and unsystematic nature, often illogical, encompassing ideas, philosophies, and cultures from the highest to the lowest levels. It is shaped by the way people think, not by representing a specific worldview or concept, but by being accepted as truth. This acceptance gradually shapes individual and collective mindsets, eventually becoming part of their culture. Therefore, Gramsci (in Rachman & Supratno, 2022) warns that common sense which is not fully integrated into the social system can lead to fundamental errors that deeply impact society and its culture.

The above explanation affirms that the ideology of common sense plays a significant role behind the articulation of the *sing beling sing nganten* discourse within the marriage culture of Tabanan Regency. The widespread dissemination of this discourse through marriage practices occurring across much of Bali has fostered a public belief that premarital pregnancy is something acceptable and commonplace, simply because it is validated by many. The acceptance of this discourse by segments of society is shaped through individual interpretations and experiences, and subsequently legitimized by social structures that normalize it within the Balinese customary marriage culture.

5. Conclusion

This study identifies four ideologies underpinning the discourse of *sing beling sing nganten* within the marriage culture of Tabanan Regency, Bali: religion, the body, fertility, and common-sense. These ideologies operate through narratives that influence public beliefs, perceptions, and viewpoints in a multicausal manner, thereby normalizing the discourse within Balinese customary marriage culture. However, the ideological narratives that normalize this discourse are, in fact, also met with resistance from segments of the public through various counter-narratives. Nevertheless, considering the prevalence of premarital pregnancies in Balinese customary marriage practices, these counter-narratives have yet to significantly shift public perception. Therefore, it is essential to transform the paradigm of *sing beling sing nganten* (pregnant first, then get married) into *sing nganten sing beling* (married first, then get pregnant), so that every family's pursuit of offspring aligns with cultural and religious values while also eliminating the social stigma that Balinese culture legitimizes premarital pregnancy.

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the *sing beling sing nganten* phenomenon by situating it within the broader cultural and ideological landscape of Bali and Indonesia. While the research focuses on Tabanan Regency, findings indicate that similar practices and discourses exist across other regions of Bali, such as Buleleng, Bangli, and Gianyar, where expressions like *korting duang bulan* (two-month discount) and *sing nyidang dadi manten yen durung meteng* (one cannot marry unless already pregnant) reflect comparable norms. These regional variations demonstrate that the ideology behind premarital pregnancy and marriage is not isolated but part of a wider cultural negotiation between tradition, fertility, and social acceptance.

Beyond Bali, analogous phenomena are observed in other parts of Indonesia, such as “*nikah karena hamil*” (married because of pregnancy) in Java, *kawin tangkap* (a practice where a woman is taken or “captured” to force marriage, often framed as tradition) in Nusa Tenggara Timur, and *kawin siap anak* (marriage with an already-expected child) in South Sulawesi (Wiasti & Suarsana, 2022). These practices reveal a national pattern of pragmatic adaptation to shifting moral values, reproductive expectations, and gender roles. By analyzing *sing beling sing nganten* through a critical discourse lens, this study offers a framework for understanding how language and ideology shape marriage culture across Indonesia, highlighting the need for more inclusive and gender-sensitive narratives in both policy and cultural discourse.

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Authors' Profiles

Ni Luh Gede Sukardiasih is the Representative Head of the Badan Koordinasi Keluarga Berencana (Family Planning Coordinating Agency) Bali Province Office. She obtained her doctoral degree from the Cultural Studies Program, Faculty of Humanities, Udayana University, Bali, Indonesia. Her research focuses on gender ideology, reproductive culture, and social transformation in Bali. Email: luhdepuja@gmail.com

I Nyoman Weda Kusuma is a Professor of Indonesian Literature at the Faculty of Humanities, Udayana University, Bali, Indonesia. After completing his master's degree at Universitas Gadjah Mada, he pursued his doctoral studies at Universitas Indonesia, both in the field of literary studies. His academic interests include Balinese literature, semiotics, cultural studies, and cultural hermeneutics. He actively supervises student research on discourse, identity, and local knowledge systems in Bali. Email: weda_kusuma@yahoo.com

Evalina Franciska Hutasoit is a researcher at the Research Center for Population, National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), Jakarta, Indonesia. Her expertise lies in public health and reproductive health, with publications focusing on demography, gender equality, and family planning policy. Email: eval001@brin.go.id