Millennials' Perceptions of the Belis Tradition in East Nusa Tenggara: A Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of Conversations on X (Twitter)

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the perceptions of the millennial generation of the belis tradition in Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) on social media, particularly Twitter. Belis is a traditional dowry practice in East Nusa Tenggara, deeply rooted in cultural significance as a symbol of respect, social recognition, and the familial alliance between the bride and groom's families. The belis tradition has recently faced scrutiny from the millennials, who question its relevance in the modern era. This research employs qualitative analysis, drawing on primary data from tweets featuring the hashtag #TradisiBelisNTT. These tweets were examined through Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) following the six stages as outlined by Willig (2008): (1) Discursive Construction, (2) Discourse, (3) Action Orientation, (4) Positioning, (5) Practice, (6) Subjectivity. The findings suggest that belis is frequently perceived as an economic burden for men, hindering financial equality in marriage and prompting individuals to seek alternatives arrangements. The discourse as expressed in X reveals intricate power dynamics, as the millennial challenges traditional cultural norms and calls for reform in more inclusive and equitable cultural practices. The findings highlight the tension between preserving heritage and advocating for change, offering insights into how digital spaces facilitate dialogue on cultural reform.

A. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, as an archipelagic nation rich in diverse ethnicities, cultures, races, and communities, encompasses a variety of customary laws that govern its social life. Each region in Indonesia has distinct customs and traditions passed down through generations, forming its own customary laws. These customary laws provide guidelines for local communities to adhere to established norms. One significant aspect of customary law is marriage, which represents a union of love between a husband and wife. Marriage encompasses various meanings and interpretations, and according Undang-Undang No. 1 Tahun 1974, marriage is a spiritual and physical bond between a man and a woman as husband and wife, aimed at establishing a harmonious and eternal family based on the belief in One God.

Within this broader legal and cultural framework, the practice of *belis* in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) exemplifies the intricate interplay between customary traditions and marital practices. *Belis*, often conceptualized as bridewealth or dowry, constitutes a customary obligation wherein the groom's family provides material compensation to the bride's family as a prerequisite for the marriage's legitimacy (Arndt, 2009:48). Beyond its material dimension, *belis* carries profound social, economic, and cultural implications, symbolizing respect, gratitude, and the groom's commitment to the bride's family. As emphasized by Fransiska (2018:101), *belis* represents a fundamental right of the bride and an essential duty of the groom prior to the marriage ceremony. Unlike other regions, the practice in NTT entails that *belis* is given not directly to the bride but to her parents, in accordance with the region's matrimonial customs (Finensia, 2019).

Moreover, *belis* serves as a cultural marker reflecting the social status of the groom and the transfer of the bride from her paternal lineage to that of her husband. Janah (2019) notes that *belis* is not merely a symbol of respect for women but also an indicator of the groom's social and economic standing. This tradition, deeply entrenched in the cultural heritage of NTT, signifies respect and commitment, demonstrating the groom's sincerity in marrying the woman he loves and honoring her family.

Furthermore, as Aman (2010:2) elucidates, *belis* functions as a cultural mechanism for transferring the bride from her paternal lineage to that of her husband, marking a pivotal shift in her social identity. This process signifies that the bride not only changes her clan affiliation but also physically and symbolically leaves her natal family to join her husband's household. Accordingly, the groom is obliged to provide *belis* as compensation for the parents' efforts in raising their daughter and as an expression of respect toward the bride and her family. In the context of Flores, this practice is closely linked to the patrilineal descent system, which determines lineage and inheritance through the male line (Rodliyah, 2017:93). As described by Koentjaraningrat (in Hukum Adat Indonesia, 2014:87), the principle of patrilineality defines kinship exclusively through the male line, thereby including all relatives from the father's side while excluding those from the mother's side.

While *belis* has traditionally been regarded as a symbol of honor, familial commitment, and social integration, its contemporary application has begun to generate debate among younger generations. Many have started to question the continued relevance of the practice, especially when it imposes significant economic demands on the groom's family. This evolving perception highlights an emerging tension between adherence to ancestral customs and the shifting values of modern society particularly among the youth thus reinforcing the importance of critically examining *belis* as both a cultural tradition and a contested social practice in the present day.

Belis is an obligation that the groom must fulfill when proposing to a woman. In NTT culture, *belis* is not only monetary but can also include valuable items such as gold, silver, livestock like cattle, buffalo, or horses, woven cloth, and even land (Ningrum 2016:2). The amount of *belis* is often determined by the bride's social status, education, and family background. The higher the social status and education of a woman, the higher the *belis* that must be paid by the groom (Evarista 2015).

Socially, *belis* functions to strengthen the relationship between the two families uniting through marriage. It is seen as compensation to the bride's family for their sacrifice in raising and educating their daughter. Additionally, *belis* also serves to demonstrate the groom's sincerity and financial capability to support the future family. This tradition reflects respect for women, where the giving of *belis* signifies that the woman is valued and honored by the groom (Neonnub 2016: 112-113).

With the passage of time, the *belis* tradition faces various challenges. The millennial generation, characterized by more critical and open-minded attitudes toward change, is beginning to question the relevance and practice of this tradition. According to Yuswohady in the article "Millennial Trends" (2016), the Millennial Generation refers to those born from the early 1980s to the 2000s. The term "Millennial Generation" is derived from their coming of age at the turn of the millennium, during

which digital technology began to permeate various aspects of life (Hidayatullah, 2024).

This generation is widely recognized for its use of instant communication technologies such as email, SMS, instant messaging, and social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter (X), and Instagram. Consequently, Millennials are a generation that has evolved in the era of internet proliferation. From an age perspective, Millennials are currently between 15–34 years old (Hidayatullah, 2024). Millennials are known for their use of instant communication technologies such as social media and for utilizing these platforms to access and share information.

Media plays a role in stimulating thoughts, feelings, and attention, as well as influencing the acceptance or rejection of information (Hermawan 2022). According to Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, social media comprises a group of internet-based applications built on the ideology and technology of Web 2.0 (Devi Novita Arlianti et al. 2020). One social media platform frequently used as an effective communication tool among Millennials is Twitter.

According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021, as cited from the databook.co.cid website, Twitter users in 2021 were predominantly from the 35-44 age group, constituting 28.4%, followed by the 25-34 age group at 26.6%, and the 18- 24 age group at 25.2%. Twitter, as a social media platform, provides a space for Millennials to explore and discuss various issues related to tradition and culture in a more open and interactive manner. Through tweets and threads, Twitter offers a platform where users can share experiences, viewpoints, and critiques regarding different traditions.

On Twitter, there is a variety of content discussing pressing social issues, including the *belis* tradition. Searching for the keyword "tradisi *belis* NTT" yields thousands of related tweets. The Millennial generation, known for its critical and change-oriented perspectives, frequently uses this platform to express their views on the relevance and implementation of the *belis* tradition in contemporary times. Tweets about *belis* often include diverse perspectives, ranging from explanations of the cultural values and historical context of the tradition to criticisms of its financial burdens and social impacts. This generates social discourse and creates two opposing camps: those who support the continuation of the *belis* tradition and those who oppose it, seeking reform. Both individuals and groups use their discourses to support or challenge contemporary practices of *belis* through alternative narratives. Discussions about *belis* often spark debates on whether the tradition should be updated or preserved.

Based on the preceding discussion, it is evident that *belis* is a cultural practice inherited from the ancestors of NTT society, carrying meanings and functions that have been upheld since ancient times. However, with the evolution of societal norms, this tradition appears to be experiencing shifts in meaning, leading to both support and opposition, particularly in social media forums. This study will examine these issues using Michael Foucault's critical discourse analysis.

Foucauldian discourse analysis is an analytical approach that, when it is applied to media text, can reveal how language functions as a social tool to construct discourse for specific purposes, including the exercise of power (Eriyanto, 2005). In this context, power is not understood as something possessed or monopolized by individuals; rather it circulates through discourse and is

embedded within knowledge and social practices. From Foucault's perspective, discourse constitutes a system of statements that define, regulate and understand a particular topic (Wisnu, 2021. Discourse is therefore not merely about language or ideas, but about the formation of social realities, norms, and power relations. What is accepted as "truth" in any given historical period is shaped by discursive formations that serve the interests of dominant power structures.

In this study, Foucault's conceptualization of discourse is particularly relevant for analyzing how the *belis* tradition is represented, justified, or contested through digital discourse, especially on Twitter (now X). As a dynamic discursive space, X (Twitter) enables diverse voices including those of younger generations to engage in the construction, negotiation, and critique of cultural norms. By analyzing the discourse surrounding *belis* on Twitter using Foucault's theoretical lens, this study aims to uncover how power and knowledge are produced and contested through digital conversations.

Belis is not only represented but also actively reconstructed through competing discourses that shape its meaning within contemporary society. Examining Twitter (now X) as a discursive space offers an opportunity to analyze how narratives around *belis* are produced, negotiated, and contested, revealing the interplay between tradition and evolving socio-cultural perspectives.

Foucault theorizes discourse as a mechanism through which power circulates, shaping knowledge and socially accepted perspectives (Karlberg, 2015). Rather than a mere collection of words or propositions, discourse actively constructs meaning, producing ideas, concepts, and social effects (Eriyanto, 2005). Within this analytical framework, subjects refer to individuals or groups engaging in discussions on X (Twitter) about the *belis* tradition. Their participation in the discussion of *belis* reflects their positions within the social structure and how their identities are constructed and framed by existing narratives. Power, in Foucault's perspective, is not something possessed by individuals but rather a force that is diffused and operates through discourse, reinforcing societal norms and shaping perceptions..

On Twitter (X), power manifests through the formation, dissemination, and preservation of discourses about *belis,* as well as the knowledge produced through these interactions. These discussions, which in turn shape societal perspectives and influence actions related to the *belis* tradition. This study focuses on analyzing the representation of the *belis* tradition on Twitter (X) and the Millennial generation's views on this tradition. By using Foucault's discourse analysis approach, the study aims to uncover how power and knowledge are constructed, maintained, or contested within the discourse circulating on this social media platform. Specifically, the study explores how tweets and threads on X (Twitter) reflect the dynamics of power and social change.

B. METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach utilizing Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) to examine how the tradition of *belis* was represented on X (Twitter) and how millennials expressed their perspectives on this tradition. The qualitative method was chosen to analyze how concepts were constructed online through 'tweets,' aligning with the broader aim of

qualitative research, which explored how individuals understand, experience, interpret, and construct the social world (Bhatsara, 2013). As an interpretive approach, qualitative research was interpretive and grounded in individuals' lived experiences, providing insights into evolving discourse surrounded *belis* (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013).

The primary data for this research consisted of tweets and threads on X (Twitter) discussing the tradition of *belis* in Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT). Hashtags served as a key categorization tool in identifying relevant discourse, with #Tradisi*Belis*NTT functioning as a primary marker for discussions surrounding *belis*.. A total of 300 tweets were gathered through keyword searches, with #Tradisi*Belis*NTT filtering conversations directly engaging with cultural perspectives on the practice. However, only a selection of tweets underwent further analysis. The selection process prioritized tweets based on engagement metrics such as popularity, number of retweets and comments as well as their relevance to the study's focus on millennial perspectives and discursive constructions of *belis.*

Once the tweets were collected, they were analyzed using Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA). Paltridge (2012) describes discourse analysis as the examination of language trends within their social and cultural contexts, emphasizing that discourse extends beyond linguistic structures to reveal underlying ideas and beliefs. As a broad qualitative research approach, discourse analysis encompasses various interpretations, particularly within psychology (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008). FDA was chosen for this study due to its emphasis on the relationship between discourse and power, as well as its recognition of discourse as a subjective construct influencing how individuals think and feel (Willig, 2008). Several researchers propose different guidelines for conducting FDA, and Willig (2008) outlines six distinct stages in its analytical process:

1. Discursive Construction: The means by which discursive object are constructed.
2. Discourse: The difference between the construction and their relevance within wider discourses.
3. Action Orientation: The functions and gains generated though constructing the object in the specified way.
4. Positioning: Subjects position
5. Practice: The ways in which constructions and subject positions can open or close down action opportunities.
6. Subjectivity: The consequences of adopting a subject position and the way that this influences subjective experience.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Twitter serves as a dynamic discursive space where cultural traditions, like *belis*, are not only preserved but also questioned, reinterpreted, and at times, openly challenged. Within Foucault's framework, social media platforms such as Twitter are not neutral areas. They are sites where power and knowledge are continuously negotiated. On X, individuals, especially younger generations, can voice their subjective experiences, share frustrations, and question

long-standing customary norms that may no longer align with their current realities.

Through features like retweets, replies, and trending hashtags, conversations about *belis* evolve into collective discourses that transcend personal stories. These digital narratives can reaffirm cultural pride, but they can also highlight the economic strain and perceived gender inequalities embedded in the tradition. Twitter, therefore, becomes more than a tool for communication; it becomes a digital stage where opposing views about *belis* coexist, interact, and at times, clash.

Importantly, Twitter gives space for identity negotiations. For example, a man unable to afford *belis* payments may find solace and solidarity online, while a woman may openly critique her role as an object within customary exchanges. These expressions are not isolated acts of dissent; they are part of a broader process of subject formation, where individuals reshape how they see themselves and how they are seen by others through discourse. In the context of the *belis* tradition in East Nusa Tenggara, Twitter functions as a space where the younger generation expresses critique, resistance, and even defense of inherited customary values. Through algorithms, trending topics, and the mechanism of retweets, these opinions spread rapidly and construct new knowledge structures that reveal how power operates in subtle, often invisible ways. Within Foucault's framework, Twitter can be understood as a space of discursive practice where power is not merely repressive but also productive, giving rise to new forms of knowledge and social subjectivities.

Stage 1 and 2: Twitter and the Construction of Belis on Twitter (X)

The first stage of the analysis consists of identifying the way discursive objects is being constructed throughout the texts (Willig, 2008). Discursive construction is the process by which a discursive object, in this case, the tradition of *belis,* is shaped through language and narratives in social communication. On social media platforms like Twitter, the discursive construction of *belis* emerges from various users' perspectives on the relevance, impact, and meaning of the tradition in a modern context.

The discursive objects examined in this analysis are tweets tagged with related hashtags such as #Tradisi*Belis*NTT. The second phase of discourse by Willig (2008) pertains to locating various discursive constructions within a broader discourse. In other words, discourse represents patterns of thought and discussion that emerge from these constructions, reflecting how these views are relevant within a wider social and cultural context.

Many tweets depict *belis* as a significant economic burden on men and their families. This viewpoint is frequently expressed through language criticizing the high costs associated with fulfilling the *belis* tradition. For example:

Pictures 1: One of the tweets about Belis on X

@toiletkos: "*Belis atau mas kawin untuk menikahi gadis Sumba-NTT. Kalau ekonomi ente lemah lembut mending mundur teratur dan katakan semoha kita ketemu lagi di kehidupan berikutnya di negara lain.*" Trans: (*Belis* or dowry for marrying a girl from Sumba - NTT. If your finances are weak, it's better to step back and say 'I hope we meet again in another life in another country).

@stewar01: "*Itu kerbau ada berapa ekor? Semoga habis nikah sonde jadi pengangguran*" (How many buffaloes are there? Hopefully, after marriage, they won't end up unemployed).

The tweet from @toiletkos highlights the significant financial burden of *belis*, implying that marriage is realistically attainable only for those with sufficient economic resources. It suggests that the tradition may serve as a barrier for couples facing financial hardship. Similarly, @stewar01 critiques the economic impact of *belis*, expressing concern that after the substantial expenditure on dowry, couples may struggle with financial stability. Together, these narratives emphasize that *belis* is not only a considerable upfront cost but may also have lasting effects on a family's economic well-being.

Pictures 2: One of the tweets about Belis on X

@MS_NOBODy_REAL "*Anggota TNI Ditemukan Gantung Diri, Diduga Tertekan soal Mahar 250jt*" (TNI Member Found Dead by Suicide, Allegedly Due to Pressure Over IDR 250 Million Dowry).

Another example of *belis* being framed as an economic burden appears in a social media post narrating the tragic case of a military officer in East Nusa Tenggara who reportedly died by suicide due to the pressure of a 250 million rupiah bride price. The post includes two photos: one depicting a woman

framed as the party "demanding" the bride price and another showing the man in military uniform, constructed as a victim of traditional expectations. From a Foucauldian perspective, this post functions as a discursive field where power operates through social norms regulating gender roles, economic responsibility, and marital practices. Historically regarded as a symbol of respect for women and their families, *belis* is reconstructed in this discourse as a repressive mechanism that enforces financial obligations on men, reinforcing economic pressures within marriage.

This discourse results in a process of subjectivation, in which the male subject is shaped as someone trapped within cultural obligations that exceed his economic capacity, thus leading to identity crises and even a loss of agency over his own life. The post, which garnered millions of views, reveals a strong affective resonance from the public, positioning *belis* not only as an outdated tradition but also as a power structure with potentially fatal consequences. This discourse reflects what Foucault terms resistance to *regimes of truth* the systems through which truth is produced and legitimized within society.

Through a combination of visual and textual elements particularly the narrative "the girl asked for 250 million" juxtaposed with the man's tragedy this tweet produces a form of counter-discourse that blames traditional systems and, more broadly, challenges gender constructions that impose economic roles on men. In this framing, the woman is positioned as a representation of a demanding cultural system, while the man symbolizes the suffering imposed by such pressures. This discourse not only exposes imbalances in power relations but also shapes collective moral judgment and emotional responses that normalize resistance to the practice of *belis*, especially among younger generations living under more complex and precarious economic conditions.

Pictures 3: Selected Comments from the Tweet Thread

Public reaction to this post was substantial, generating approximately 2,500 comments and 28,000 retweets, which amplified the discourse across digital spaces. The widespread engagement reflects tensions between cultural traditions and contemporary economic realities, with many responses framing *belis* as an outdated financial

burden. This narrative has fueled critical discussions about customs and the economic pressures tied to traditional marriage. Among the responses, users voiced opposition to *belis*, questioning its relevance in modern society.

@RachmanWiby argued, "*Keduanya korban sih menurut gue, korban dari kewajiban ngada-ngada bernama 'adat/budaya' sudah saatnya meninggalkan budaya yang menyulitkan dan ga berfaedah gini, menikalah karena sepakat dan mampu* (Both are victims, in my opinion, victims of arbitrary obligations called 'custom/culture.' It is time to abandon cultures that are burdensome and meaningless; marry because of mutual agreement and capability)," emphasizing resistance against traditional structures perceived as restrictive. Similarly, @okedhon challenged the practice's financial imbalance, asking, "*Normalisasikan nikah dengan kesepakatan bersama karena yang hidup enak setelah menikah ya kedua belah pihak. Perkara kesepakatannya salah satu pihak bakal kasih lebih banyak, tapi proses diskusinya mesti benar. Kenapa dah banyak kalangan membebankan modal pernikahan ke satu pihak doang?* (Normalize marriage as a mutual agreement, because both parties are the ones who will share the life that follows. Even if one side ends up contributing more, the decision-making process must be grounded in fair and respectful dialogue. Why do many people place the entire financial burden of marriage on one party only?") Together, these responses highlight an emerging discourse that seeks to redefine financial responsibility within cultural traditions.

Meanwhile, comments from other accounts reveal a more emotional yet incisive critique. For example, @caacluu wrote, "*Buat cowo-cowo stop ya anjir, maksain mahar kalian. Kalo mati macam abang ni, pihak cewe juga paling sebulan dapat gebetan baru*. (Guys, stop forcing the dowry already. If a guy dies like this brother, the woman will find a new partner within a month.)" This expression underscores frustration with a social system that drives men into extreme financial pressure, even to the point of sacrificing their lives, while women are perceived to retain options and mobility following such tragedies. Collectively, these comments reflect the emergence of a counter-discourse against the tradition of *belis* as a form of symbolic power that has become a source of suffering within contemporary gender relations. In Foucauldian terms, these comments can be read as forms of resistance against regimes of social truths that have been passively accepted and efforts to renegotiate cultural practices through alternative narratives in the digital public sphere.

Traditionally, the NTT community prepares dowry items such as elephant ivory, jewelry, and woven gold cloth for marriage ceremonies (Rodliyah, 2017). *Belis* can also be incurred as debt, passing financial responsibility to future generations if left unsettled. The financial burden of *belis* remains significant, as reflected in the discourse analyzed in the tweets.

Pictures 3: Selected Comments from the Tweet Thread
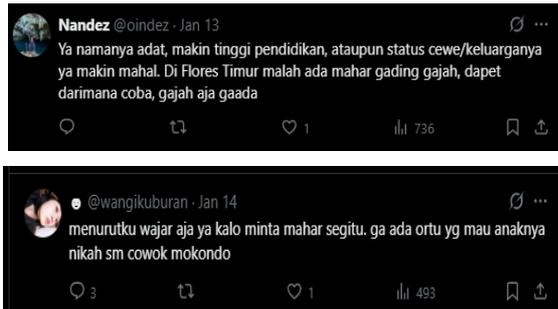
The pro-*belis* discourse frames this tradition as more than a customary obligation; it is seen as a way to honor women and their families while symbolizing a man's commitment to marriage (Rodliyah, 2017). Advocates emphasize its cultural significance, with some asserting that *belis* reflects a woman's education, social status, and familial prestige. This perspective is echoed in user @oindez's comment: "*Ya namanya adat, makin tinggi pendidikan, ataupun status cewek/keluarganya ya makin mahal. Di Flores Timur malah ada mahar gading gajah, dapat darimana coba gading gajah.* {Well, it's a tradition. The higher the education or social status of the woman and her family, the higher the *belis*. In East Flores, they even require elephant tusks as a dowry, where would you even get that from?}" However, support for *belis* is not monolithic. Some voices within the pro-tradition discourse propose a more flexible approach, recognizing the importance of negotiation. User @rizki_atp, for instance, suggests that *belis* should be a mutual agreement rather than an imposed expectation: "*Mahar/belis adalah bentuk penghargaan atau penghormatan keluarga laki-laki kepada keluarga perempuan. Jumlahnya haruslah merupakan kesepakatan kedua pihak, meskipun memang ditentukan oleh keluarga pihak perempuan. Komunikasi adalah kunci. Sudah saatnya ada lembaga adat.* (The dowry/*belis* is a form of respect or honor from the groom's family to the bride's family. The amount should be a mutual agreement; communication is key.)" This view presents *belis* as a negotiable tradition rather than an inflexible obligation. Through a Foucauldian lens, such perspectives illustrate how individuals within power structures actively engage in discourse, resisting rigid norms by renegotiating cultural practices rather than passively accepting them.

Foucault posits that discourse not only reflects social reality but also plays a role in shaping and reinforcing social norms (Eriyanto, 2012). In this study, the discourse surrounding *belis* reveals two competing narratives. The dominant discourse views *belis* as a cultural cornerstone, essential to preserving ancestral values and social hierarchy. By framing *belis* as an expression of honor, proponents reinforce social norms that uphold tradition and maintain existing power structures. In contrast, counter-discourse critiques *belis* as an economic burden, arguing that it no longer aligns with contemporary financial realities. This tension reflects broader cultural shifts, where tradition and modernity collide, influencing how society perceives *belis*.

Economic concerns surrounding *belis* also influence individual life choices, as illustrated in the following tweet: @katolikG writes, of *belis* costs on life choices appears in a tweet from @katolikG: "*Wah, SVD panen. Semoga bukan karena harga belis mahal.* (Wow, SVD is harvesting. I hope it's not because of the expensive *belis*)." conveys irony, suggesting that high dowry costs may drive individuals to alternative paths, such as entering religious vocations. This critique aligns with the broader discourse portraying economically burdensome traditions as factors that shape major life decisions.

This tweet sparked significant engagement, accumulating 274 likes, 22,000 views, and 39 comments. Among the responses, user @anti_tesis reflects on the dilemma posed by *belis*: "*Nggak tahu mesti senang apa miris sih kalau gini. Senang pekerja anggur nambah, miris harga belis mahal. Jadi romo jadi pilihan kedua.* (I don't know whether to be happy or dismayed. Happy for the wine workers, dismayed by the high *belis* costs. So becoming a priest is the second option.)" this comment reveals ambivalence, highlighting how financial constraints influence personal choices and reinforcing the dynamic between traditional expectations and economic realities.

Criticism of *belis* as an economic burden frequently appears in social media discourse, often using metaphor to underscore its financial strain. User @anggunglars remarks, "*(kata sepupu, belisnya gading gajah. Makanya banyak yang memilih jadi romo.* (According to my cousin, the *belis* is elephant ivory. That's why many choose to become priests)" while @Gerronim adds"*Ini karena belis cewek mahal min, mana belisnya harus ada gading gajah. Flores mana punya gajah, Komodo iya.* (*Belis* for women is expensive, and it must include elephant ivory. Flores doesn't have elephants, only Komodo dragons)" here, "elephant ivory" functions as a metaphor for exorbitant dowry costs, illustrating how *belis* remains a significant financial obstacle for many young men in Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT). These perspectives reveal how economic expectations tied to marriage traditions intersect with broader social norms, shaping alternative life paths for those unable to meet cultural demands.

The discourse on *belis* on Twitter (now X) critiques its disproportionate economic burden, especially for individuals with limited financial resources. This discussion attempts to shift existing social norms by portraying *belis* as an outdated practice that no longer aligns with contemporary financial realities. The evolving conversation reflects the tension between tradition and modernity, where economic challenges drive reconsideration of long-standing customs.

Burr (1995) argues that truth is not simply a product of objective reality but is shaped through social interactions. Social constructionism offers a framework for interpreting the discourse surrounding *belis*, illustrating how knowledge is produced through collective negotiation. In this context, Twitter functions as a site of social exchange where individuals articulate perspectives on the

economic burden of *belis*, using language to construct and contest cultural meanings.

Stage 3: Implications and Outcomes of the Construction

The third stage of analysis identified by Willig as the action orientation phase involves determining what is gained from constructing, the discursive object in a particular way and the function of such constructions (Willig, 2008). Discourse is a form of social practice that both structures and is structured by other social practices. Discourse not only contributes to the formation and reformation of social structures but also reflects these processes (Jorgensen & Philips, 2007).

Foucault views discourse as a set of statements that not only convey information but also shape and reproduce power within society. Discourse plays a critical role in forming knowledge and social reality through practices of power (Eriyanto, 2012). A key finding in this research is how power and knowledge concerning the tradition of *belis* are shaped through economic discourse.

From an economic perspective, *belis* is often seen as a significant burden for the groom and his family. This construction indicates that *belis*, which include various forms of dowry such as money, animals, and other valuable items, can be a barrier for couples wishing to marry. Evarista (2015) in her research reveals that the agreement on the dowry required today often depends on the educational level of the bride. The higher the education of the bride, the greater the dowry. For instance, a bride with a bachelor's degree has a dowry value ranging from Rp 50 million to Rp 150 million, with the price increasing or decreasing based on the bride's educational background. This aligns with the counter-tweets that appear on Twitter, where many users highlight the financial burden of *belis*. High dowry costs not only burden the groom and his family but can also hinder couples wishing to marry, especially those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Foucault, in his statements, suggests that power does not always operate through repression and suppression, but primarily through normalization and regulation. Power works not negatively and repressively, but positively and productively (Agustin, 2009). The economic implications of *belis* here indicate that it creates significant financial pressure, which can lead to economic inequalities in marriage. Additionally, this financial burden is often unforeseen and can add to the uncertainty and stress in planning a wedding. In many cases, high dowry costs can lead to delays or even cancellations of marriages, and push individuals to seek alternative paths, such as choosing to become a religious worker to avoid the financial burden of *belis.* Socially and culturally, the tradition of *belis* exhibits complex power dynamics.

Stages 4 and 5: Positioning and Practices in the Construction of Belis on Twitter

In Foucauldian discourse analysis, the stages of positioning and practices play crucial roles in understanding how constructions of discursive objects like *belis* on Twitter affect individuals and groups in society (Willig, 2008). The fourth stage, positioning, focuses on how subjects are situated within the network of meanings formed through discourses of *belis*. The construction of *belis* on Twitter positions various subjects in roles that reflect existing power dynamics and social norms. For instance, the groom is often positioned as the party who must bear the substantial financial burden. This position reinforces the traditional role of men as the primary financial supporters of the family, who must demonstrate their economic capability to meet the dowry demands. This construction also creates financial and social pressure on men, who are expected to fulfill these expectations despite potential economic difficulties. On the other hand, the bride is positioned as the recipient of honor and a symbol of social status through the *belis.* This position reflects the high value placed on women within the social structure but also leads to criticism of the objectification of women as commodities traded in the context of marriage. This construction underscores gender injustice and reinforces traditional norms that position women in passive roles, dependent on men to demonstrate their financial commitment. Rodliyah (2017) in her research reveals that some people believe that after paying the *belis,* the woman becomes completely the property of the man. In extreme cases, women who have been given *belis* are considered like diamond slaves (Rodliyah, 2017:167). This is consistent with the tweet posted by

@maya_kupang: "*Belis salah satu pemicu KDRT di NTT* (*Belis* is one of the triggers for domestic violence in NTT)"

The above tweet illustrates concerns that the tradition of *belis*, besides placing women in passive positions and as objects of ownership, can also increase the risk of domestic violence (DV). In some cases, after the dowry is paid, women may be considered the property of the man, leading to controlling and oppressive behavior by the husband. This perspective shows how a tradition initially intended as an honor and respect can transform into a tool for enforcing power and control, negatively impacting women's well-being and rights.

The fifth stage, practices, involves analyzing how these constructions and subject positions can either open up or close off opportunities for action. In the context of the construction of *belis* on Twitter, the various subject positions that emerge affect individual actions and decisions, as well as broader social practices. The position of the groom as the bearer of financial burdens may open opportunities to question and challenge traditional norms. Criticism of *belis* as an economic burden provides space for millennials to explore alternative approaches to marriage, such as seeking more inclusive and equitable ways to negotiate dowries or even rejecting the tradition of *belis* entirely. This indicates potential changes in marriage practices that are more aligned with modern economic and social contexts. The position of the bride as a recipient of honor and a symbol of social status can also open opportunities to reassess women's roles and values in society. Criticism of the objectification of women in the *belis* tradition encourages discussions and efforts to enhance gender equality and recognize women as individuals with intrinsic value beyond the context of dowry.

Stages 6 : Subjectivity

The concluding stage of the analysis is the exploration of the relationship between discourse and subjectivity (Willig, 2008). Willig deems that discourse

creates certain "ways of seeing and ways of being" in the world and so informs our social as well as psychological realities. This stage involves examining how subject positions can impact on the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of individuals. The analysis reveals that specific discourses utilized on Twitter possess the power to create problematic subjectivities regarding the tradition of *belis*. On Twitter, users engaged in discussions about *belis* frequently express personal viewpoints that reflect how they perceive and experience this tradition. Subjectivity here pertains to how individuals respond to and interpret *belis* within their personal and social contexts. For example, users who criticize *belis* as a heavy economic burden may experience feelings of injustice or frustration due to the financial pressures imposed by this tradition. Their subjective experiences may include economic stress, as well as difficulties in planning their future marriages or family lives.

The discourse surrounding *belis* on Twitter also serves as an arena where individuals negotiate and question their social identities. For instance, criticisms of *belis* that link financial burdens with life decisions, such as choosing to become a clergy member or pursuing alternative lifestyles, demonstrate how an individual's social identity can be influenced by cultural norms and economic pressures. Comments like "becoming a clergy member as a second choice" suggest that individuals may feel compelled to choose different life paths in response to the high costs of *belis*. This reflects how their identities as prospective brides or family members can be affected by the evolving social discourse around *belis.*

Overall, the discourse about *belis* depicted in tweets frequently involves strong critiques of financial burdens, gender injustices, barriers to social progress, and the negative emotional impacts of this tradition. Tweets on Twitter not only voice dissatisfaction with *belis* but also foster broader discussions about the need for change and reform in cultural practices deemed problematic. Personal experiences often become a focal point, with many users sharing stories about how *belis* impacts their lives. For instance, some tweets express frustration about the financial burden of *belis* and its effects on their future plans. Criticisms of *belis* often emerge from communities that view this tradition as an outdated practice hindering social or economic progress.

Belis, a longstanding cultural tradition in marriage, faces increasing scrutiny in the context of modernity and globalization, both of which introduce economic and social challenges that reshape cultural norms. As financial pressures mount and social expectations evolve, *belis,* once revered as a symbol of respect and cultural integrity, is increasingly framed as an economic burden that conflicts with the financial realities faced by many individuals. From a Foucauldian perspective, this shift reflects how discourse functions as a site of power, shaping collective understanding and influencing actions within society.

Millennial perspectives on *belis* reveal a noticeable ideological divide, manifesting in competing discourses on social media. Twitter (now X) serves as a discursive space where dominant and counter-discourses negotiate the meaning and legitimacy of *belis* within contemporary society. The dominant discourse, upheld by those advocating for cultural preservation, reinforces *belis* as an essential marker of ancestral identity, social prestige, and respect toward women and their families. These narratives often situate *belis* within a framework of tradition, framing it as an expression of commitment and honor rather than a transactional burden.

In contrast, the counter discourse emerges from users particularly women, younger generations, and feminist-oriented accounts who criticize *belis* as a patriarchal practice that commodifies women and imposes unequal financial burdens on men and their families. These counter-voices reframe *belis* as outdated, financially oppressive, and incompatible with modern values of equality and autonomy. The conflict between these two discursive positions is especially visible in tweet threads where cultural pride clashes with feminist critique. While the dominant discourse seeks to preserve traditional norms, the counter-discourse challenges them, often proposing the need to either reform or abandon the practice altogether.

In the Foucauldian framework, discourse is not merely a reflection of reality but a productive force that shapes social structures and power relations. Within the discourse of *belis*, the dominant narrative is often upheld by cultural authorities both explicitly (traditional elders, male leaders, or users representing ethnic identities) and implicitly (the general public who normalize the tradition). This dominant discourse frames *belis* as a symbol of respect toward women, a means of uniting families, and a sacred tradition that must be preserved. However, as Foucault suggests, these seemingly benign meanings often veil embedded power relations. By idealizing women as honorable, this narrative subtly maintains patriarchal control, casting women as passive subjects whose roles are confined within lineage systems. This is in line with Koentjaraningrat (2014) and Rodliyah (2017), who argue that patrilineal descent systems marginalize the maternal line and uphold male dominance.

In contrast, counter-discourses emerge primarily from younger generations especially women, feminists, and digital activists who use Twitter as a space to deconstruct the traditional narrative of *belis*. These counter-narratives highlight how *belis* functions as an economic burden, delays marriage, and objectifies women within transactional exchanges. Instead of passively accepting tradition, these voices question the relevance and fairness of *belis* in contemporary contexts. In Foucauldian terms, this resistance is not merely oppositional but productive, creating new ways of seeing and understanding the social roles of women and marriage. Twitter, as a decentralized digital space, enables these counter-discourses to challenge the dominant narrative, creating a discursive battlefield where meanings are continuously negotiated and power is redistributed.

D. CONCLUSIONS

*B*elis, a significant cultural tradition in marriage, now faces substantial challenges amidst modernity and globalization. Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the *belis* tradition, long regarded as a symbol of respect and cultural integrity in marriage, now faces significant challenges amid modernity and globalization. This deeply rooted tradition is increasingly viewed as a financial

burden, especially by the millennial generation who navigate economic realities very different from those of previous generations. This creates a clear tension between the desire to preserve cultural heritage and the practical necessity of adapting to dynamic and often stressful socio-economic conditions.

This study highlights the crucial role of social media, particularly Twitter, as a discursive space where diverse and often conflicting views on *belis* converge. On one side, a dominant discourse upholds *belis* as an essential cultural inheritance and social responsibility. On the other, a counter-discourse emerges, critiquing *belis* as a practice that perpetuates social inequality and restricts individual freedom. This counter-discourse goes beyond mere economic critique; it expresses new subjectivities that resist the cultural power structures that have long dictated and constrained life choices.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that *belis* functions not just as a cultural practice but also as a mechanism reinforcing social stratification based on economic capacity. The financial burden disproportionately affects those from economically vulnerable backgrounds, thereby deepening social divides and limiting equal access to marriage opportunities. This underscores how even sacred traditions are entangled within invisible power dynamics that operate in society.

From a Foucauldian perspective, the resistance and criticism toward *belis* expressed on social media represent meaningful acts of power contestation. Power is never absolute; it is continuously challenged through discourse and social practices that reshape individual identities and social positions. Millennials, living in an era of global information flows and economic uncertainty, tend to evaluate traditions through pragmatic lenses that prioritize personal well-being, financial independence, and mental health. This shift marks a transformation in the logic of subjectivation, where individuals increasingly prioritize personal freedom and quality of life as the basis for decision-making.

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